

JENNIFER FREDETTE

# CONSTRUCTING MUSLIMS IN FRANCE

Discourse, Public Identity, and the  
Politics of Citizenship



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AND THE POLITICS OF CITIZENSHIP

JENNIFER FREDETTE



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*To Matthew, my favorite*



# Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Abbreviations	xiii
1 Introduction: <i>Why Do We Ask Whether Muslims Can Be French?</i>	1
2 Elusive Citizenship: <i>The Consequences of an Undesirable Public Identity</i>	23
3 Claiming Membership: <i>French Muslim Identities, Political Goals, and Repertoires of Contention</i>	47
4 Education: <i>The (Undelivered?) Promise of Republican Equality</i>	78
5 Employment: <i>The Muslim Experience in (and out of) the Workplace</i>	103
6 Housing: <i>The Banlieues as a Geographic and Socially Constructed Place</i>	126
7 The Contentious Concept of Frenchness: <i>French Muslims Embracing, Reimagining, but Not Rejecting the Republican Triad</i>	151
Appendix: <i>Sample Questionnaire</i>	175
Notes	183
References	193
Index	207



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# Abbreviations

- ACFTOGL:** Association Culturelle Franco-Tunisienne d'Oullins et du Grand Lyon (Cultural Franco-Tunisian Association of Oullins and Greater Lyon)
- AGRIF:** Alliance Générale contre le Racisme et pour le Respect de l'Identité Française et Chrétienne (General Alliance against Racism and for the Respect of French and Christian Identity)
- ANRU:** Agence Nationale pour la Renovation Urbaine (National Agency for Urban Renewal)
- CCIF:** Collectif contre l'Islamophobie en France (Collective against Islamophobia in France)
- CERN:** Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (European Council for Nuclear Research)
- CFCM:** Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (French Council of the Muslim Religion)
- CGT:** Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labor)
- CNCDH:** Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme (National Consulting Committee for Human Rights)
- CNRS:** Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (National Center for Scientific Research)
- CPE:** Contrat de Première Embauche (First Employment Contract)
- CROUS:** Centre Regional des Oeuvres Universitaires et Scolaires (Regional Center for Student Welfare)
- CSA:** Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiotvisuel (High Council for Broadcasting)
- CSU:** California State University

- EDVIGE:** Exploitation Documentaire et Valorisation de l'Information Générale (General Information Database)
- EDVIRSP:** Exploitation Documentaire et Valorisation de l'Information Relative à la Sécurité Publique (Public Safety Database)
- EMF:** Étudiants Musulmans de France (Muslim Students of France)
- ENA:** École Nationale d'Administration (National School of Administration)
- FN:** Front National (National Front)
- GIA:** Groupe Islamique Armé (Armed Islamic Group)
- Greta:** *Groupement d'établissements* (a group of public schools that provides adult continuing education)
- HALDE:** Haut Autorité de Lutte contre les Discriminations et pour l'Égalité (High Authority against Discrimination and for Equality)
- HLM:** *Habitation à loyer modéré* (low-rent housing)
- INSEE:** Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies)
- JMF:** Jeunes Musulmans de France (Young Muslims of France)
- LICRA:** Ligue Internationale contre le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme (International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism)
- MPF:** Mouvement pour la France (Movement for France)
- MRAP:** Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les Peuples (Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples)
- NASA:** National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- NGO:** nongovernmental organization
- NPNS:** Ni Putes ni Soumises (Neither Whores nor Submissives; sometimes translated as Neither Whores nor Doormats or Neither Sluts nor Slaves)
- PCF:** Parti Communiste Français (French Communist Party)
- PMF:** Parti des Musulmans de France (Muslim Party of France)
- PS:** Parti Socialiste (Socialist Party)
- RG:** Renseignements Généraux (General Information), now Direction Centrale du Renseignement Intérieur (Central Directorate of Domestic Intelligence)
- UJM:** Union des Jeunes Musulmans (Union of Young Muslims)
- UMP:** Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (Union for a Popular Movement)
- UOIF:** Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (Union of Islamic Organizations of France)

## Introduction

*Why Do We Ask Whether Muslims Can Be French?*

Who are France's Muslims, what do they want, and why is their Frenchness such a contentious subject? This book examines how the public identity of French Muslims is constructed in France and the implications this has for this relatively new and diverse population. Elite public discourse commonly (though not universally) questions whether Muslims can be good French citizens. In comparing this elite discursive frame with the discourse of French Muslims themselves, we see that it does not adequately reflect the political diversity and complicated identity politics of this population. French Muslims must respond to this common elite frame while attempting to project their own public identity, which is a difficult task for those who do not have the same access to mass media. While some might argue that rights, a familiar tool for fighting political inequality, could be an important equalizer in such a context, this book shows that they are ineffective at addressing social inequality, particularly in the form of unfavorable discursive frames and public disrespect.

To understand the power of discursive framing—how the way we present a story influences how others will respond to it and how the unequal status of storytellers may affect which story is repeated and heard more frequently—it helps to consider an example. Thus, we begin with the “jeer heard round the world.”

In October 2008, the speculative, early days of the recession of the late 2000s gave way to a grim realization of the magnitude of the financial crisis. Europe began to feel the aftershocks of American meltdowns, such as that of AIG, which had been a staple in France for fifty-five years.<sup>1</sup> The French looked to America with deeply mixed feelings of frustration and hope, newspapers

crowded with stories about American financial blunders and the French-favored American presidential candidate, Barack Obama. Then came two minutes of heckling in a soccer stadium that brought the attention of the media and politicians back to France and its own affairs. It even attracted media attention from abroad. Anxiety over the financial crisis and fascination with Obama were put on hold as French politicians agonized: *France had failed to integrate its immigrants.*

But had it?

On October 15, 2008, France hosted a friendly soccer match in the Stade de France between the French and Tunisian national teams. Both teams included men of color and Muslims (Tunisia is a primarily Muslim country), and one of the French players even had a Tunisian father. Before the event started, the sports announcers took a moment to note how the two teams were filing in together, in lines composed of alternating French and Tunisian players, to symbolize that this was a friendly game and not a competitive match (TF1 Productions 2008). The symbolism seemed to serve as an additional reminder, however. As one of the sports announcers stated, “You only play for one color—the color of your jersey. This is a perfect illustration of that” (TF1 Productions 2008).

As with many professional sports, race has been a contentious issue in soccer. The story of race and soccer in France, however, speaks to the unique context of that nation. The combination of France’s proud tradition of difference-blind republican equality with contemporary social conflict regarding increased racial and religious diversity creates uncertainty, disagreement, and sometimes open hostility—all of which make their way onto the pitch.

Not everyone agreed with the sports announcers that the only colors of any importance in this match were those of the red and blue shirts. Before the game commenced, two French women of Tunisian origin, Amina and Lââm, walked to the center of the field to sing the Tunisian and French national anthems, respectively. Televised footage of Amina singing “Humat al-Hima” displays the players of both teams lined up together, as well as excited fans of the Tunisian team singing along. But when Amina finished and Lââm stepped forward to sing “La Marsellaise,” the stadium erupted into two solid minutes of boos and whistling—not whistling along with the anthem, but whistling loudly to drown it out, as a form of jeering. In the French broadcast, Lââm can hardly be heard above the cries from the stands, and in home recordings taken from the vantage point of the fans, found all over YouTube and DailyMotion, her amplified voice is inaudible. Images of the fans all but disappear in the official broadcast as the cameras focus on the upstaged Lââm and the players, some singing along, others not.

Among those not singing was Hatem Ben Arfa, the gifted French player with a Tunisian father. Perhaps he just did not feel like singing. Perhaps he was uncomfortably aware that some of the boos, it has been said, were directed at him for “betraying” Tunisia for France, a country that many young people with an immigrant background believe does not care about its citizens of North

African, African, and Arabic heritage—let alone those citizens who claim an affinity with Islam (Delaporte 2008).

A second explanation for the booing is again related to feelings of dissatisfaction with France, but unlike the “failed integration” explanation, it suggests that the booing was not unambiguously anti-French. As several interview respondents (young Muslim men and women with a family history of immigration, as well as a middle-aged French woman who converted to Islam years ago and now runs a Franco-Tunisian cultural organization that sometimes cooperates with the state to run youth-oriented community events) explained, these cries were of French youths, proud of being French, proud of France, and profoundly frustrated at being continually rejected by the country they claim as their own. In this interpretation, these cries had little to do with Tunisia and much to do with France. The Tunisian match, like the previous whistling episodes during the France–Algeria match in 2001 and the France–Morocco match in 2007, provided an opportunity for these youths to make a scene and acknowledge that French officials and society think of them only as immigrants, always immigrants, and never as completely French (R. Schneider 2008). As two Muslim respondents, a French man and woman with Algerian parents, explained when asked why fans would whistle at the anthem:

**Man:** It is because someone has been telling you for a long time, “Yeah, you are French, but, well . . . not completely. Not completely.”

**Woman:** “Not like the others.”

**Man:** Yes, “Not like the others.” So . . . it is not good [to have booed]; it is an insult. But so often these people are insulted, every day, for what they are, and . . . this is the only way to show it. It is stupid, yes, but it is the only way to show it! I do not necessarily agree, but it is a way to say . . .

**Woman:** There is a problem.

**Man:** Yes, there is a problem. It means . . . when things are going well. . . . You know, when we won the World Cup in 1998: “Zidane!”<sup>2</sup> We all believed in the Black-Blanc-Beur France.<sup>3</sup> And me, even back then, I did not believe it. I was seven years old, and I did not believe it. I said, “Ah, this is crap. I live in forty square meters.<sup>4</sup> *Equality?* Tomorrow, nothing will have changed!” And the people . . . still had difficulty finding a job, because if you are named Rachida or Mohammed or you are black, it continues.

According to this alternative explanation, the youths were angry with France for *rejecting* them—for not including them in the nation they want to call their own. It is not so clear that these youths reject France completely when their anger stems from a desire to be accepted as fully French. Like flags, national anthems are laden with complex symbolism. They speak to the unity of a people, and yet national anthems and the politics surrounding them may

divide as much as they unify. In this case, “La Marseillaise” was mobilized by disaffected French youths to question, ironically, that supposed national unity.

In addition to these two explanations for the whistling and booing, there exists a third: as one thirty-eight-year-old, white soccer fan stated, “I always boo *La Marseillaise*, just for the fun of watching the tight-asses wig out. . . . It is harmless, but effective. Just look at the reaction today. You would have thought the economic crisis had gone away!” (Crumley 2008). Whistling to reject France, whistling to express anger over being rejected by France, whistling for the hell of it: in all likelihood, all three of these motives were in play on that day in October.

This incident sparked a political uproar. The swift and indignant reaction, however, did not register the sometimes subtle but important variation among these “different whistles.” The interpretation of politicians was largely consistent across parties: this whistling incident was a sign that France’s immigrants and their descendants have failed to integrate into France. They remain disrespectful of the nation and must be corrected. The French president at that time, Nicolas Sarkozy, described the event as “scandalous” and “intolerable” and demanded that in the future, all matches be immediately stopped if the anthem is heckled (R. Schneider 2008). Prime Minister François Fillon went further, expressing dissatisfaction that the match in question had not been stopped then and there (R. Schneider 2008). Minister of Health, Youth, and Sports Roselyne Bachelot said that all friendly matches with Tunisia would be henceforth canceled and that “all members of government will immediately leave the stadium when our national anthem is booed”—something that French President Jacques Chirac came close to doing in 2002, when Corsican fans at a France–Corsica game booed the anthem (R. Schneider 2008). During that incident, Chirac left his seat, marched over to Claude Simonet (who at the time was the president of the French soccer federation), and demanded an apology, delaying the game for twenty minutes (“Chirac furious as fans boo anthem” 2002). Bernard Laporte, a second secretary of state for sports, went as far as to suggest that soccer matches against North African countries should no longer be held in Paris. “We are not going to continually give a stick to then be beaten with it,” he said. “We do not want to relive any more matches like Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia in the Stade de France” (Guiral 2008; R. Schneider 2008).

In a comment that focuses both on the perceived *lack of respect* and *outsider status* of the young fans at the game, Frédéric Lefebvre, a spokesperson for Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP [Union for a Popular Movement]), the center-right party of former President Sarkozy, stated, “When one is adopted by a country, one respects the national anthem” (“Marseillaise sifflée avant France–Tunisie” 2008). This comment perhaps best encapsulates the concerns of Muslim activists, who would note that many of these fans had not been “adopted” by France but were French from birth, the descendants of Tunisian parents or even a Tunisian and a French parent. And what about those French fans who participated in the whistling even though they had no affiliation with

a religious or racial minority? Are immigrants and the children of immigrants really the only ones causing a scene at soccer matches, the only ones outwardly manifesting disrespect toward national icons?

This story is about more than a disrespected anthem. It points to a broader contemporary political pattern in France that has yet to be highlighted. For all the studies that have been conducted on Muslims in France (one wonders whether there is another population so scrutinized), few examine the interaction between Muslims in France and France's elites. Many studies, for example, explore the religious views or interests of Muslims (Pedersen 1999; Shadid and van Koningsveld 1995), or the state's response to Muslims (Bowen 2007; Fetzer and Soper 2005; Geisser and Zemouri 2007; Klausen 2005; Laurence and Vaïsse 2006; Lewis and Schnapper 1994; Shadid and van Koningsveld 1991, 1996). Yet such studies leave three questions unanswered.

First, what about Muslims as more than a religious people? As individuals, Muslims in France are diverse. Some are leftist, some are rightist, and some are centrist. Some are poor and live in modest housing or even crumbling ghettos, while some are successful business or political leaders. Some are respected academics; some are school dropouts. Some practice their religion a great deal; some practice only during special holy days; and some claim only a cultural affiliation with Islam. Yet for all their differences, Muslims in France still share the social situation of being a particularly new and feared religious minority in a strongly secular country with a history of colonial domination over the Muslim and Arab world—not to mention that for many there is a family experience of immigration. The glut of studies about the religiosity of Muslims cannot change the fact that there is much less knowledge about Muslims as a social group in France. We should not assume that all Muslim political claims are religious ones or even religiously motivated.

Second, how have French elites and Muslims in France shaped each other's view of what it means to be Muslim and to be French? This question pervades discussion about Muslims in France. Are they French or not? Do they see themselves as French? Can they be made French if they are not already "French enough"? A state-society analysis that examines how French elites have framed the debates surrounding Muslims in France *and* how Muslims themselves respond to such frames is necessary to fully understand the social and political struggles of Muslims in France, as well as competing definitions of "Frenchness."

Once we appreciate the diversity of the Muslim population in France, it becomes clear that there is no one "French Muslim identity." And yet French elites frequently speak as if there were one, and depict this fictitious identity as a threat to the nation. This points to an important aspect of elite power: the power to create identities and to judge those identities as deserving or undeserving of citizenship. It is what Ange-Marie Hancock (2004) refers to as the creation of a "public identity," and it can be done only by agents with the power



to project their discourse into all aspects of public life. Kathleen Moore (2010) has also used this concept to describe how the United States has created a Muslim “public identity” since 9/11. Activists (Muslim and otherwise) sometimes work to change the perception of these “public identities,” and this is often one goal of the politics of recognition. Yet it is elites, with their prestige and discursive reach, who remain the creators of public identities par excellence.

When elites criticize this Muslim identity, they simultaneously reinscribe the borders of another identity—the “good French citizen” who merits rights and who is threatened by this outsider. Of course, this model of the “good French citizen,” supposedly neutral and available to all who choose to enact it, is just as incomplete a depiction of the non-Muslims in France as the elite depiction of Muslim identity is of France’s Muslim population. The ideal model of French citizenship excludes more than just Muslims, and this demonstrates another important aspect of the power to create and identify public identities: at this point in time, French elites have chosen to direct the exclusionary power of this norm of French citizenship against Muslims, and they have the ability to make this suspicion politically salient and widespread. It is the elite version of William Felstiner, Richard Abel, and Austin Sarat’s (1981) “naming, blaming and claiming,” and it unavoidably influences the terrain on which French Muslims must struggle for equality. French elites often name nebulous social unrest “integration problems” or, more recently, “national identity problems,” then blame Muslims for them and make demands for various changes in Muslims’ behavior to remedy the situation. For example, during a debate about France’s national identity, Assemblywoman Nadine Morano infamously urged Muslims to look and sound more French by abandoning slang and ball caps (Leveque, Balmer, and Trevelyan 2009). France’s national identity is threatened; Muslims are the ones threatening it; and the solution is for Muslims to act more French. Morano’s comments were denounced as racist by politicians on the left, but as I argue, such arguments are not exceptional *or* limited to the center-right or right (Leveque, Balmer, and Trevelyan 2009).

Muslims in France must respond to this elite claim of undeserving citizenship, even if they disdain it, and attempt to create their own narratives about what it is to be French and Muslim. Yet French Muslims face multiple challenges in trying to create such political counternarratives. While French Muslims share the experience of elite scorn and daily social indignities, their responses to these social and political pressures vary widely, underscoring multiple understandings about French citizenship, the nature of equality, and the place of religion in one’s life. This diversity does not facilitate the construction of a unified counternarrative that could call into question elite claims that Muslims make poor French citizens. Furthermore, elite challenges to Muslim citizenship are primarily *discursive*, and where laws have a disparate impact on Muslims (such as laws banning prayer in the street, which primarily affect Muslims because of a shortage of Islamic prayer rooms and mosques in France), they are facially neutral and do not single out Muslims in their text. It can therefore be difficult

for Muslims to accuse elites who challenge the quality of their citizenship of any sort of rights violation, depriving them of a strategy that frequently has been the backbone of political counternarratives made by disfavored groups.

Third, given the diversity of France's Muslims, why does elite French discourse commonly depict Muslims as a homogeneous group? Why do these monolithic depictions persist despite the small but growing number of Muslims among France's elites? What is it about the organization of the French elite that hinders its receptivity to Muslims' claims? France is home to many Muslims who are active and deeply invested in the social and political life of their country, but French elite discourse on Muslims continues to be framed primarily in terms of failed integration. The reasons behind this cannot be reduced solely to "xenophobia" or "political expediency," and studying Muslims alone cannot explain the various and often more subtle factors that contribute to this myopia among French elites.

The centralized and elitist nature of French politics, in tandem with a legal system and rights culture that are not strong tools for oppositional political claims, explains some of this. When the British parliamentarian Jack Straw expressed discomfort with the *niqab* in 2006,<sup>5</sup> several British Muslim rights associations immediately came forth to criticize his comment as discrimination, and Straw later apologized for his statement ("Straw's veil comments spark anger" 2006; "Jack Straw apologizes for his anti-niqab comments at ENGAGE hustings in Blackburn" 2010). Meanwhile, the entire French National Assembly engaged in a heated debate in 2010 critiquing the *niqab* as (among other things) backward, uncivilized, extremist, and uniformly misogynist. There was no outpouring of rights-based criticism from French Muslim associations as there had been in Britain. Rather than rejecting this debate outright as discriminatory, reactionary, or sensationalist, some French Muslim associations and prominent French Muslims participated in it. Later, when the center-right UMP, France's ruling party, suggested an even wider debate about the compatibility of Islam with France, a highly placed French Muslim registered strong dissent: President Sarkozy's adviser on racial and religious diversity, Abderahmane Dahmane, described the debate as discriminatory; complained that Muslims face the same kind of treatment today that Jews faced during World War II; and called on all Muslims to end their UMP membership. This move was unusual for France's elite Muslims, and Dahmane was promptly fired ("France's Sarkozy sacks diversity head Dahmane" 2011). Understanding why French Muslims struggle to challenge this discourse requires familiarity with the institutional and cultural aspects of France that make elite discourse insular and that weaken rights as a tool for oppositional politics.

When we consider these three questions that ask us to look more closely at the *interaction* between French Muslims and French elites, we see the widespread political pattern that pervades all discussion of Muslims in France and strongly affects the lives of those Muslims: the elite story of "failed integration" that has prevailed in political, media, and intellectual discourse in France since

the 1980s has made it difficult for French Muslims to project their own diverse political claims, even though these claims are made in ways that suggest Muslims have indeed adopted French norms and values.

This book investigates the three hot-button political issues commonly associated with Muslims in France—education, employment, and housing—and compares how French elites discuss these issues with the discussions of Muslims themselves. In each case, the pattern is clear: elite discourse focuses on how Muslims are failing to integrate into French norms, values, institutions, and society, while Muslims focus on a variety of issues when addressing challenges they face due to their particular situation as a social group in France today. Related to this, elite discourse typically depicts Muslims as a homogeneous group concerned primarily with religion, while Muslims present themselves as proud citizens with multiple, but not competing memberships and articulate a wide range of political goals.

In short, to better understand the situation of Muslims in France, we need to know more not just about Muslims but also about France. And as the story in France goes, “There is a problem.”

## Who Are France’s Muslims?

Chapter 3 discusses this question at length, providing an overview of important changes in this population since the most recent, major migration trend of Muslims to France following World War II. But first it is important to provide a basic introduction to this population and to present an important concept that arises repeatedly in discussions about Muslims in France: intersectionality.

As with all religions that have spread across the globe, Islam is not uniformly practiced.<sup>6</sup> While most Americans may be familiar with a difference between the Sunni and Shia branches of Islam, there are several more, not to mention different schools of thought for how to interpret the Qur’an and other holy texts. We should not, therefore, expect all Muslims to have the same beliefs, opinions, or identities, let alone political orientations.

This is particularly true in France, where the question of labeling someone a “Muslim” is actually quite tricky. It is not enough to say that Muslims in France are those who “practice Islam.” As Nancy Venel (2005, p. 96) points out, there are people in France who self-identify as Muslim who do not “practice” Islam, in the sense that they rarely attend religious services in a mosque or may in fact be atheist but still attest to a “cultural or affective relationship toward Islam.” Is “being Muslim” in France a religious or cultural affiliation? It depends on who you ask. The same is true for the question about what it means to be Muslim in France.

Interestingly, throughout the interviews with Muslims in this book, a common refrain appeared in otherwise diverse discussions about what it means to be Muslim and French. Muslim interviewees consistently acknowledged that the experience of “being Muslim” in France is not an isolated one. In other words, they acknowledged that a multiplicity of affiliations and backgrounds

shapes one's social experience. For example, Muslim women spoke about the difficulties they faced specifically as Muslims *who are women*: some have found that the intersection of their gender and religion put their clothing choices under legal and political scrutiny. Muslims of color spoke about the experience of being Muslims *who are not white*: Muslims of African descent sometimes wondered whether the unequal treatment they received was because they were Muslim or because they were black. Class and immigration history also shape the experience of some Muslims in France.

To better understand these crosscutting identities and affiliations, it is helpful to think about the concept of *intersectionality*.<sup>7</sup> According to Laurel Weldon (2006, p. 239), intersectionality refers to the notion that “certain aspects of social inequality, certain problems and injustices, will not be visible as long as we focus on gender, race and class separately.” In focusing on Muslims as they describe themselves, as opposed to examining Islamic institutions and religious leaders or asking Muslims to speak solely to their religious lives, this book strives to situate French Muslims as a social group in France. As long as we focus on Muslims as religious believers alone, we will not be able to fully understand certain aspects of social injustice that they face, as these issues often intersect with other structural inequalities.

The significance of intersectionality is evident throughout the book, but it is perhaps clearest when considering the social assumptions and value statements made in response to events that raise questions about gender and religion. As Chapters 4 and 6 show in particular, assumptions about women's submission and men's violence and sexual predation sometimes frame the public debate about the presence of Islam in France. But even these discussions are complicated by other social categories, as they sometimes involve references to immigration or perceived African familial norms.

Thus, in examining Muslims in France, this book often takes stock of how various nonreligious affiliations, identities, and backgrounds influence the experience of being Muslim in France. Gender is an important part of this story, but it is not the central focus. Readers interested in focusing more exclusively on the nexus between Muslims in France and gender will appreciate the works of Caitlin Killian (2006, 2007), Tricia Danielle Keaton (2006), and Catherine Raissiguier (2010). Readers interested in concentrating on the nexus between Muslims and immigration and race in France will appreciate the works of Susan Terrio (2009), Richard Fogarty (2008), and (although Muslims are not the main focus of her book) Elisa Camiscioli (2009).

## Why These Cases?

Education, employment, and housing are important policy areas in France. They are especially fraught issues for Muslims, who experience discrimination in each of these three arenas. As Chapter 4 illustrates, Muslim students, along with the children of immigrants (and there is considerable overlap here), are informally

discouraged from pursuing higher education and often nudged in the direction of inferior universities that do little to improve one's employment opportunities. Chapter 5 explores some of these employment problems in more depth, examining how Muslims experience discrimination in hiring, hostility at the office, and even illegal surveillance at work. Chapter 6 examines the geographic isolation of many of France's Muslims in the *banlieues*, an inheritance of policy decisions made in a climate of dramatically increased immigration and economic stagnation. Persistent tension with the police also exacerbates the marginalization of Muslims (along with Arabs, blacks, and immigrants and their children) who speak about feeling unwelcome in their own neighborhoods. I argue that the separation, exclusion, and hierarchies that Muslims encounter in education, housing, and employment are due in part to the nature of elite discourse about Muslims in France, which often perpetuates an image of Muslims as problematic, "unintegrated citizens" who should be viewed with suspicion. Stated differently, elite discourse contributes to hardships for Muslims in France.

Consider, for example, how elite discourse (and even academic research) on Muslims focuses on narrow issues that are only part of these more general policy areas, such as the hijab in public schools or accommodations for prayer in the workplace.<sup>8</sup> Such a narrow focus perpetuates the image of Muslims as solely interested in religious affairs. Not all Muslims are interested in religious accommodations or see that as their main political priority. Not all Muslims organize for political purposes related to their religion. To complicate the matter further, some Muslims are interested in religious accommodations for the sake of redefining French citizenship and the republican model in a postcolonial world. This diversity of opinions and political repertoires is lost when investigation into the opinion and mobilization of Muslims focuses narrowly on religious issues.

Similarly, French elites often focus on the subject of criminality when discussing housing and Muslims, especially in the suburbs of France.<sup>9</sup> This creates the false perception that criminality is the only issue of importance when one talks about Muslims and housing. This book instead examines the broader issue of housing in general. While criminality may dominate elite discussion about Muslims and housing, the discussions that Muslims are having about housing, as seen in Chapter 6, are quite varied.

In looking at these three broad policy areas that include the narrow issues that elites focus on when discussing Muslims, this book puts elite discussion into the broader French context. It also highlights where elite discourse does not align with Muslims' discussions and what it may omit. These omissions are informative, as they underscore elite French assumptions about the nature of Muslim citizenship in France.

## Epistemology and Methodology

The research presented here was driven by a set of very specific ways of knowing and learning, as well as by a particular way of understanding concepts such as

power and social status. The epistemological stances taken here, as well as the methods used, reflect a growing movement in the study of politics away from positivism and toward more “interpretivist” methods that question the possibility of objectivism in the study of something as constructed as social behavior (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006). This study strives for accuracy by triangulating its research methods. Some methods are more attuned to certain kinds of questions (a survey, for example, is a poor method for exploring an individual’s life story), but more importantly, we can be more sure about the validity of a “data point” when it is observed using more than one tool. What follows is a brief outline of the epistemology and methodology that informed this study.

### *Epistemology*

The epistemology and methods articulated here were chosen for their aptitude for answering the kinds of questions this book asks. Much of this book examines the meaning making of Muslims and French elites. What does Frenchness mean? What makes someone a good French citizen? Are Muslims somehow different from non-Muslims? The answers to these questions reflect ideas, values and beliefs that are not universal but, rather, generated in a specific place geographically, culturally, politically, and historically. Because of this, my research on how French elites and Muslims answer these questions required an “experience-near perspective” (“What is interpretive research?” 2009). For example, the simple act of residing in France provided moments where I could observe responses to these questions. Posters in subways, interactions with people on the street, unexpected conversations with strangers, walks through different neighborhoods where the socioeconomics differed dramatically; these “experience-near” observations all suggested to me how people in France answer these questions. These “data points” were never planned, but were sometimes just as illuminating as scheduled interviews.

This sort of approach to knowledge and learning, the kind that sees everyday experiences as potential fonts of information about social constructions (like social hierarchy and values), reflects what Lisa Wedeen (2010) and others have called an “ethnographic sensibility” (Pader 2006; Schatz 2009; Schatzberg 2009). Borrowing from anthropology, particularly from Geertz (1973), an ethnographic sensibility encourages “immersion in the place and lives of people under study” (Wedeen 2010, p. 257). Given the questions this book asks and the difficulty of understanding responses to these questions outside a French context, the ethnographic approach to knowledge and learning was the most appropriate. This approach begat a number of ontological assumptions and methodological choices that shaped this project.

As Michael Schatzberg (2009, pp. 183–184) states, “One of the great advantages of an ethnographic sensibility is an awareness of how culture and context shape the perceptions of individuals as well as their orientations toward politics and political life.” Indeed, as Wedeen (2010, p. 260) adds, an ethnographic

sensibility sees knowledge as “historically situated and entangled in power relationships.” This sensitivity not just to power but also to the context in which it is defined informs this study’s approach to social status and even citizenship. For example, Muslims are not always marginalized and treated as outsiders. Several of the Muslim women interviewed here discussed how they were perceived as “integrated” by peers and coworkers when they did not wear the hijab, a status that disappeared the moment they put the garment on their head. This tells us less about the hijab than it does about a specific and highly politicized debate in France concerning French values and perceptions of Islam. The hijab is coded by French elites as synonymous with sexual oppression, and in the current French context where sexual liberality is identified as a normative ideal, the hijab is often stigmatized as a sign of ignorance or deviance.

Similarly, citizenship is not understood in this book to be a blanket status that is uniformly recognized across individuals bearing a French passport. While it is a legal reality, citizenship is also a nationally defined normative ideal, and an individual who does not fit that norm may find his or her standing as a citizen undercut in informal ways that are not easily remedied by formal rights protections. It would be difficult, for instance, to understand the hijab example without considering the emphasis placed on sexual liberality as a normative behavior of good citizens (and the assumption that Muslim women must be sexually repressed).

These ontological stances reflect Steven Lukes’s (2004) “three dimensional approach” to understanding power. While there is much disagreement about Lukes’s thesis about the “power to mislead” and whether it depicts subjugated peoples as dupes or fools, he draws our attention to power as a social construct that affects not just how we act, but also how we think. Michael McCann (2007, p. 25) similarly describes power as “embedded in social constructions that shape hierarchies and dominance.” In this book, we see that a predominant kind of elite discourse sets the agenda for the discussion of Muslims in France in a way that tends to exclude and marginalize them as un-French. French Muslims, typically outside the institutions that would enable them to challenge this discourse and provide a counternarrative, are compelled to respond to this elite frame that questions their citizenship. In addition to being unable to speak over or reject this elite frame, French Muslims are such a diverse population that they would struggle to propose a counternarrative even if they had the same access to powerful platforms of public discourse. Thus, French Muslims are locked in a discussion about the quality of their citizenship, perpetuating an elite discursive agenda they condemn.

In addition to the power of discursive agenda setting, we must consider the power of ideology and the role it plays in this book. While a minority of French elites consciously question Muslim citizenship to attack Muslims, most elites who participate in this discourse do so in a way that is not self-consciously or transparently motivated by a desire to marginalize Muslims. Instead, their actions are filtered through their understandings of the norms of good citizenship.



Specifically, while all elites are influenced by republicanism in France, some understand it to require an “abstract, difference-blind” citizenship that they see as unable to coexist with Islamic practices and habits. They may privilege this version of republicanism out of a conviction of its truth, or an instrumental attempt to advance political goals, or perhaps some combination of the two. This is not true for all French elites. As Chapter 7 shows, there are elites who offer criticisms of this view and some who even present more multicultural alternatives. Nevertheless, it is a very common elite discourse, as many examples from prominent figures and analysis of legislative and news media texts show. It is too simplistic to call these elites who participate in this discourse blinded ideologues or pure instrumentalists. Instead, we should appreciate how powerful ideas shape the terrain on which the politics of citizenship are contested.

This is what makes discourse so powerful. Explaining the situation of Muslims in France today is not as simple as saying, “French elites do not allow French Muslims to sit at the political table.” Even when Muslims are invited into conversations about French citizenship (and they sometimes are), those conversations typically take place in the language of this abstract, difference-blind articulation of republicanism. This necessarily affects the kinds of claims Muslims can make and how they will be received.

Just as we see Muslims marginalized for not matching a normative ideal of citizenship, we also sometimes see Muslims opt not to mobilize for rights claims. Sometimes they anticipate the backlash they will experience, and other times they do not see the usefulness of formal rights when it is informal, social stigmatization that troubles them most. Whatever the reason, power is operating in subtle ways, influencing not just values and beliefs, but also the rules of the game in the fight for equality.

### *Methodology and Methods*

This book does not argue that French elites have “caused” Muslims’ social marginalization (although I do maintain that some elite discourse can indirectly contribute to and foster it). Nor does this book present in equal detail the various ways French elites define republican citizenship. That said, there can be cautious analysis without causality, and it can be instructive to examine one articulation of a larger social construct in depth. In the case of this book, what is the benefit of a research question that does not revolve around a causal argument with a clear relationship between dependent and independent variables? And what is the benefit of examining in detail one portion of elite discourse? And finally, how can all this be done in a rigorous fashion if the usual signposts of positivist argumentation are not available?

As a constructivist analysis of meaning production, this book illuminates how powerful ideas shape the terrain on which political standing, public identities, and legal equality are contested. To do this, the book highlights an abstract, difference-blind articulation of republicanism that is predominant in



elite discourse. It traces how this vision of republicanism constructs the public identity of “French Muslims” as unfit citizens and examines how French Muslims, largely outside the channels that influence public discourse, struggle to change the terms of the debate and project their own, alternative public identity. This has implications for equality, but not in a linear, unidirectional way.

The data analyzed here are largely discursive and therefore highly open to interpretation. Methodological triangulation, however, strengthens the credibility of the analysis. Specifically, I assess how elite discourse depicts Muslims by using frame analysis (Goffman 1974) and content analysis of newspapers and political debates, as well as close readings of elite texts through a critical theory lens. While the analysis demonstrates the predominance of the “unfit citizen” frame, it is important to note that it is not the only trend in elite discourse on Muslims. Chapter 7, in fact, considers elite discourse alternatives to this frame. That said, the book self-consciously focuses on elite discourse that uses the “unfit citizen” frame not just because analyses of legislative reports and news articles (presented in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 and in Figure 2.3 in the next chapter) point to its prevalence but also because French Muslims constantly struggle with it when generating their own political claims and proposing alternative public identities.

Multiple methods are similarly used to substantiate claims about the diversity of Muslim politics. This includes content analysis of activist literature, interviews, and participant observation in organizational meetings and social gatherings. The interviews were semi-structured and included more than fifty respondents, mainly Muslim activists but also a few political and business elites (including some Muslim elites).<sup>10</sup> Most of the interviews were with members of social or political activist organizations, though a few were with non-activists who did not take part in such groups. Interviews ranged from an hour to four hours and took place in and around the cities of Bordeaux, Paris, and Lyon. Activists and associations were chosen for one of three reasons: they are prominent in France, as established by the existing literature on Muslims in France; they were randomly selected from the *L'annuaire Musulman*,<sup>11</sup> a thorough online French “telephone book” for Muslim associations in France; or they were recommended to me by other activists, non-activist Muslims, and scholars of Islam in France.

Triangulation or “mixed methods” can do more than enhance the rigor of discourse analysis, however. It can help ground stories of individual experiences in larger social patterns. For example, it is one thing to note that Muslim interviewees frequently complain about discrimination in the job market. They believe that there is a kind of social bias that stigmatizes Muslims specifically for their religion. Yet it is another thing to substantiate whether there is employment inequality between Muslims and non-Muslims. Statistics retrieved from France’s Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (INSEE [National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies] 2009) and a large-n survey conducted by Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj (2005) suggest

that the interviewees are correct to perceive a bias against Muslims (see Chapter 5). In this way, the book probes how daily, subtle social slights and indignities may play a role in shaping material inequalities.

One of the challenges of the ethnographic researcher is to substantiate what he or she claims to have seen while “in the field.” Muslims interviewed for this study said on more than one occasion that they can “just feel” the hostility some people harbor toward them as Muslims and that this feeling is not an easy thing to quantify or present objectively to others. In this book, I try to get at some of the less tangible “feelings” of France with images. For example, saying “statistics show that religious attendance has greatly declined in France” is not the same as analyzing a cartoon image of a young man vomiting out religious symbols with the slogan, “Down with all religions” (a sticker produced by the Anarchist Federation and displayed in public places). It is not just that fewer people attend religious services in France. Public denunciations of religion, articulated with a tone of disgust, are not rare there.<sup>12</sup> Images play an important role in this book, serving as a recorded history of my experience of daily life in France in 2008. Their presentation here allows the reader to decide for himself or herself whether my analysis of the significance of the images is correct. In this way, the reader, who “replicates my measurements” and checks for reliability when he or she analyzes the images presented here, is invited to participate in the triangulation process.

## Outline of the Book

Chapter 2 interrogates the nature of citizenship and examines why French Muslims see their citizenship routinely questioned. Part of this has to do with the nature of citizenship as a normative, political identity. Defining the nation through the exclusion of an “other within” has been a hallmark of all forms of citizenship based on social contract, whether they are liberal or republican.<sup>13</sup> This plays out in different ways in different contexts. In France, uncertainty about the membership status of Muslims is a product of (1) contemporary fear generated by elite stereotypes of Muslims; and (2) timeless philosophical concerns rooted in French norms of citizenship. America took the path of race-consciousness and multiculturalism; France’s revolutionary ideals set it on the road to difference-blind equality and the celebration of a shared, national culture. It is far too easy to say the French are just racist or just Islamophobic—easy and inaccurate.

After exploring the philosophical underpinnings of citizenship, Chapter 2 introduces *France’s elite triad of discourse shapers*: politicians, the media, and intellectuals. These are the power players who shape French politics and debate. The chapter considers how the organization of the French elite contributes to intellectual insularity and then examines two instances of that elite insularity that are central to this book: today’s elite norm of the ideal French citizen and the elite depiction of Muslims as failing to obtain the ideal.

Chapter 3 introduces the reader to France’s Muslim population. It summarizes the recent history of Muslim immigration to France and the changes the

population has gone through since the 1950s, including changes in how Muslims see the place of their religion in their lives. These changes produce tension between Muslims who articulate French citizenship differently. The schism is widest between those French Muslims who articulate a traditional, difference-blind view of French citizenship and those French Muslims who embrace the long-held civic values of freedom, equality, and fraternity while arguing that this triad is in fact compatible with greater political and social recognition of difference. The chapter then examines the diverse political goals and strategies of France's Muslims and interrogates why rights claims sometimes prove to be ineffective tools for oppositional projects of social inclusion in France today.

Chapters 4–6 compare elites' and Muslims' discussion of Muslims in France on the three key issues of education, employment, and housing. It is in comparing these discourses that the striking homogeneity and shallowness of the elite discourse becomes most clear. The narrow subjects discussed among politicians, the media, and intellectuals (such as the hijab or violence in the *banlieues*) certainly are not absent from the discussions that French Muslims have on these three issues, but they are nowhere near reflective of the diversity of concerns and hopes Muslims express when discussing education, employment, and housing.

Chapter 4 explores the issue of Muslims and education. While education is a large issue encompassing many subjects, when French elites discuss Muslims and education, they almost always consider the hijab. The hijab has crowded out all other discussion about Muslims and education among French elites. Meanwhile, Muslims themselves have a host of additional concerns beyond the hijab: dwindling school diversity (not just of religion and race but also of class), inept or discriminatory school counselors, the tendency to send young Muslims and children of immigrants to technical schools regardless of the students' interests, the limitations of French universities compared with *grandes écoles* and the lasting effects this can have on graduates, an inadequate system of teacher evaluation, not enough internships, the lack of halal meat, and discrimination in school. Most of these issues do not necessarily have to do with religion. Interestingly, when French Muslims discuss discrimination in schools, they often recognize the intersectionality of their discrimination experience: Is a French Muslim being treated poorly because he is a Muslim or a child of immigrants? Because she is a girl or has dark skin? Because he or she is from a working-class family? Or is the discrimination fueled by some subtle combination of these factors?

Chapter 5 explains how elite discourse on Muslims and employment includes not only similar tropes of violence and laziness, but also a pattern of neglect. Muslims are either ignored completely when discussing employment, blamed for being lazy welfare moochers, or depicted as dangerous employees who infiltrate French businesses to carry out terrorist plots. French Muslims, meanwhile, do not all agree on employment issues. While some French Muslims are concerned with unemployment (which is justifiable, given the higher rate of unemployment they face compared with the rest of the French population),

other Muslims argue that there are enough jobs to go around and the unemployed are not looking hard enough. A common concern among Muslims that connects back to the issue of housing is the geographic isolation of certain housing developments from places of employment. Some French Muslims can attest to workplace discrimination, while others (particularly those who work outside the public service sector) say they have never experienced discrimination at work. It was common even among those who had not experienced workplace discrimination, however, to share tales of how their coworkers were generally ignorant about Islam and Muslims.

Chapter 6 illustrates how elite discourse about Muslims and housing revolves around tales of dangerous, violent male youths living in the *banlieues*, who are depicted as uneducated gang-rapers. This elite discourse also centers on the helpless young Muslim woman who is a victim of her oppressive male counterparts. Muslims themselves, meanwhile, acknowledge the existence of these problems but (along with French criminologists) deny that the problems are increasing, are limited to the *banlieues* and Muslims, or are as widespread as French elites make them out to be. Furthermore, French Muslims express a host of different concerns that are rarely addressed when elites discuss Muslims and housing: poor municipal planning that generates unemployment and social marginalization; isolated immigrants (especially immigrant mothers); discrimination on the housing market; inadequate government housing; and routine discrimination, abuse, or hostility from police in one's own neighborhood.

Chapter 7 concludes with a discussion about how the relationship between citizenship and difference is being renegotiated in France today. French elites are splitting along four views of citizenship and difference, the first three of which shut out Muslims: a racial or ethnic view, a "single shared culture" view, a difference-blind abstract republicanism, and a critical republicanism. Many traditional supporters of the left—immigrants, their children, and minorities—are increasingly disenchanted with the "abstract" policies that they see as targeting them and blaming them for all of France's woes. As parts of the divided French left move away from these allies, we see the left struggling more than ever to find a unified voice and purpose in elections. Early on in his presidency, Nicolas Sarkozy claimed to have taken up the torch of speaking for a diverse France, appointing racial and religious minorities to political posts (though not always treating them well) and speaking candidly about religion. While Sarkozy's center-right UMP has indeed won some Muslim adherents, most French citizens of African and Turkish descent (60 percent of whom are Muslim) remain firmly leftist—more so than the rest of the French (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 52).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the Sarkozy administration eventually soured on this diversity project, and its efforts to use a sort of politics of recognition perversely culminated in the multiplication of formal political debates that questioned the Frenchness of Muslims and the compatibility of Islam with France. Meanwhile on the left, while Socialist President François Hollande stated in 2013 that "France knows that Islam and democracy are compatible," Interior

Minister Manuel Valls caused consternation among his colleagues by saying that it was “necessary to show” that Islam is compatible with democracy (Tronche 2013). Today, the number of independents among French citizens of African and Turkish descent is growing, especially among young voters, which may reflect this increasing political disconnect (Brouard and Tiberj 2005).

All the while, French Muslims are exploring the meaning of citizenship. Some French Muslims are challenging the dominant articulation of French citizenship as difference-blind. For these French Muslims, who often are young French people who were not adults in the 1980s, *laïcité* means the freedom to practice one’s religion as long as one does not actively proselytize.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, these Muslims do not perceive sartorial gestures alone (such as the hijab) as active proselytizing. For them, equality means exposing the hypocrisy of a fabricated “public–private” divide that promises public equality but delivers public and private indifference and scorn. In their view, fraternity means not toleration but respect—the kind of solidarity that is bred from intimate familiarity, not neutral abstractions. These Muslims tend to embrace the multiplicity of identity. They recognize their various affiliations, such as “French” and “Muslim,” in a nonhierarchical way and insist on the compatibility of these affiliations.

This is a book about national identity, but only partially. Speaking about “identity” on its own, as a rarefied, objective thing, is problematic. Identity is always multiple and contested, the object of debates and disagreement. Try, for example, to definitively describe American identity while avoiding essentializing Americans. Thus, the examination of national identity in this book is grounded in a discussion about how it influences the “*standing*” (Shklar 1991; emphasis added) of Muslims as citizens of France. This book ultimately is about citizenship as a normative ideal and the ways in which this ideal can be mobilized to question whether certain groups deserve to be members of the nation or not.

French elites today ask, Do Muslims deserve French citizenship? Can they be made French? How would that happen? While these might seem like decidedly contemporary questions—the product of twentieth-century immigration, combined with concerns about political Islam and the challenges of securing social harmony in an increasingly diverse nation—they are not without precedent. One particularly famous debate that examined how an “other within” might be further integrated into the nation took place about one hundred fifty years ago. As Western Europe struggled with the tension between its relatively newfound human rights ideals and long-standing social, political, and legal discrimination against Jews, Bruno Bauer wrote an essay suggesting a path forward. His essay, titled “The Jewish Question,”<sup>16</sup> theorized in a liberal fashion about what to do with the “other within” who resists assimilation but whom the state cannot legitimately punish or discriminate against because of the liberal

state's commitment to equality. Bauer sought to eliminate the inequality that Jews faced in Prussia (and throughout Europe) by granting them all of the formal rights of a full citizen. In return, Jewish people needed to sequester their religion in the private sphere and remain neutral, secular individuals in the public sphere. The result was a sort of Faustian bargain: a partial surrendering of the spiritual for greater enjoyment of the secular. The extension of rights, and the sacrifice of a degree of public religious exercise to earn that privilege, was seen as the key to integration and equality.

The key to understanding Bauer's argument is to recognize how he splits human experience into two different arenas: the public (or political) and the private (or social). This division, of course, is not unique to Bauer, and his thesis gestures back to John Locke's liberal public/private divide in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, from a century before.

Karl Marx not only disagreed with Bauer; he also fundamentally questioned the existence of a barrier between political and private life. His essay, "On 'The Jewish Question'" (1843) is a response to Bauer's essay (see Tucker 1978). Marx's essay is not without problems, particularly in how it employs "the Jew" as a metaphor for capitalism that is associated with derogatory stereotypes. That said, the essay is still one of the most insightful criticisms of the limitations of rights and of the notion that increased legal equality is the key to eliminating social and political inequality.<sup>17</sup> Why is Marx's essay relevant to the debate about Muslims in France today?

Marx declares that "*political emancipation* itself is not *human* emancipation" (Tucker 1978, p. 40). His concern with "human emancipation" relates to his ontological beliefs about the nature of labor and society: it is possible for a man to be politically emancipated by virtue of political rights and yet still be a slave to capitalism. This slavery has to do with the way capitalism alienates individuals from one another (and their labor). In contrast to liberalism's focus on absolute authority and how it limits political freedom, Marx describes how economic unfreedom originates from the alienation of individuals from their labor and other humans. In this sense, Marx complains that political emancipation, guaranteed by rights, does nothing to secure social emancipation—that is, our freedom from material inequality and its attendant miseries. In fact, it may even hinder social emancipation, distracting people from the true misery they face in society.

In short, Marx had two doubts about the liberals' secular bargain. First, he doubted that the inequalities that pervade private life, especially those inequalities based on religious bias, can ever be kept from influencing public, secular life. Second, he doubted that the current secular world, with its politically sanctioned capitalist inequalities, is worth giving anything up for in the first place. Marx did not disagree with Bauer's answer to the "Jewish question" as much as he felt that the incorrect question was being asked. For Marx, the significant question was not "How do we achieve equality for a people that society finds repugnant?" Instead, it was "What is it about our society and political system

that enables this kind of repugnance?” For Marx, the answer was the alienating power of capitalism.

Interestingly, while Bauer articulates a liberal social contract view of rights—citizens give up a limited number of rights for protection from the government, whose legitimacy relies on its ability to defend the remaining individual rights citizens have not relinquished—we find a similar “public/private divide” within republican social contract theory. In republicanism, the legitimacy of government comes not from how well it protects individual rights but from how well citizens set aside their own personal interests when pursuing political activities, thereby seeking out those policies that best serve the good of all (Cole 2008; Déloye 2007; Woll 2009 [a similar idea is present in “French statism” according to Suleiman 1974]). The “common good,” for a republican like Rousseau, is *not* the sum of everyone’s personal interests; it is the voice of all citizens speaking together *as citizens of the nation*, without consideration of other, particular (that is, not shared by everyone, not universal) identities and affiliations (such as religion, or as nineteenth-century thinkers would add, race and gender).<sup>18</sup> To bring such particular concerns into politics would make it impossible to generate a sense of what is needed for the well-being of the nation as a whole, and therefore they must be left in the private sphere—that is, outside politics.

While there are different variants of republicanism and theories about what it entails in regard to difference, many French elites today articulate a difference-blind, abstract republicanism that is critical of pluralism and sees multiculturalism as a threat to national unity and the common good. Thus, when defining key components of republicanism, Ariane Chebel d’Appolonia (2009, p. 269) includes the “rejection of any form of communitarianism” (here meant to imply something akin to “identity politics”) and “secularism.”

There are two parallels between Marx’s essay and the situation of Muslims in France today.<sup>19</sup> First, Marx identifies the condition of nineteenth-century European Jews as one in which political equality will coincide with, if not reinforce, social inequality. Even if we do not accept his diagnosis of capitalist alienation, Marx’s description captures the condition of French Muslims today. Just as Bauer would have hoped, France gave formal, legal equality to religious minorities long ago. But the political equality guaranteed by rights has not generated social equality. The public identity of Muslims in France is an object of criticism and occasional disrespect. Furthermore, relative social powerlessness can reduce the perceived usefulness of formal rights, as it may be difficult for French Muslims to claim these rights when faced with the material realities of social inequality: poverty, poor education, geographic marginalization, and social hostility. Second, once we recognize how formal equality may coexist with social inequality, we are brought back to the central question that animates Marx’s “On ‘The Jewish Question’”: What is it about our society and political system that inspires us to question a group’s citizenship? French elites frequently ask, “Are Muslims French enough? Are they deserving citizens? Can



they be made French?" This book asks instead, "Why is this question being posed? What is its effect on France's Muslims? And how do they respond?"

The main complaint among most Muslims interviewed for my study concerns this elite discourse that challenges their standing as citizens, inviting informal daily indignities, ridicule, and scorn. To use Judith Shklar's (1989, p. 438) language, it is a lack of "public respect," which amounts to "the reduction of standing and demotion to second-class citizenship." Some (not all, but many) French elites engage in a kind of discourse that stigmatizes Muslims as the "inassimilable other" threatening French national identity, "too particular" ever to become part of the universal model of republican citizenship. The most extreme variants of this discourse depict contemporary France as a sort of Miltonian "paradise lost" or otherwise threatened by these Muslim "outsiders." In the words of Deputy Jean-Claude Guibal of the UMP, quoting the French intellectual Alain Finkielkraut, France, faced with a new diversity of ideas and people, is in a process of "decivilization," undoing its way of life, social cohesion, and intellectual, moral, and Judeo-Christian traditions (Assemblée Nationale 2010, p. 5395).

This is partly why many of the claims Muslims make are not rights claims *per se*. They are more typically *demands for neutrality* that would keep talk of religion out of politics altogether or *demands for recognition* that seek to compensate for the weak protection provided by the empty abstraction of formal rights. Formal rights do not compensate for the daily indignities of being seen as an undeserving citizen, in the same way that having the right to employment does not necessarily put food on the table. This critique is well known in the field of public law (Tushnet 1984). Less well known, however, is the way different national contexts can shape discussions about rights.

French Muslims' emphasis on political claims for neutrality and recognition, as opposed to rights claims, reflects a very French sensibility about citizenship and rights. Contrary to Doris Marie Provine's (1996) finding that the French have a low level of rights consciousness, the Muslims interviewed here discussed their rights at length. But the discussion was about what they deserved *given their equal rights*. They all saw themselves as rights-bearing citizens already. They sometimes identified legal inequality as a problem, but they more frequently attacked the way French elites represent Muslims. In short, the claims of French Muslims were typically grounded in a sense of national belonging that is not sufficiently recognized by others. And this sense of national belonging among Muslims is often justified by referencing the rights they already have as citizens of France.

So we see that rights matter, but not in the way we are accustomed to seeing in the United States. French Muslims are not demanding recognition for the purpose of obtaining rights; rather, they are demanding recognition to obtain the social equality they feel they deserve given their self-perception as rights-bearing French citizens. Marx criticized liberal rights for engendering complacency: people settle for political equality and fail to address social



inequality and the system that drives it. In the French context, we can clearly see where rights fail to address social inequality. We also see, however, instances where rights may be a mere sideshow: the moral and political justification for *non-rights* claims for social equality. There are exceptions to this, and legal mobilization and the judicialization of politics is on the rise in France (due, in part, to the influence of Europe). But this remains an important facet of French rights culture. Rights are less oppositional in the sense that they are used as evidence of one's membership in a social order instead of being used as a weapon intended to attack that social order as illegitimate.

To return to the central questions from the beginning of this chapter: Who are France's Muslims, what do they want, and why is their Frenchness such a contentious subject? When the question is posed in this way, as opposed to asking "Can Muslims be French?" we must think more carefully about why a Muslim or Arab French soccer fan might jeer when "La Marseillaise" is played.

## 2

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# Elusive Citizenship

## *The Consequences of an Undesirable Public Identity*

When I wore the *foulard*, I had a group of little girls. . . . From time to time—it was the summer—I took the little girls from their apartment building in the housing project to the park. So we took the bus, and the people who participated left, and there was a woman who had a stroller. We got in the bus, and I helped take the stroller, and as I climbed on the bus, the driver closed the doors on me. Because I was wearing the *foulard*. The baby just missed being squashed. But it was done on purpose. He did not excuse himself. I entered with the stroller, and I discussed it with him. “Can you apologize, sir?” And finally he said, “I am in a big rush.” He spoke very roughly to me. . . . I did not see that the kids from the housing project . . . were not far away from the bus. They saw what had happened. They all came, and they took the bus apart.

*What does that mean?*

They threw rocks, tried to break the windows because they saw this scene of injustice. I did not know that [the kids] were following the bus. . . . [T]hey know that we are in an Islamophobic context, and they get fed up. They intervened to reestablish justice. So what [the driver] saw from a distance as an act of violence was for them an act of justice.

**T**his story comes from a member of *Étudiants Musulmans de France* (EMF [Muslim Students of France]). She is a young French woman who is Muslim and the child of Algerian immigrants. Her story illustrates the kind of daily

hostility many Muslims experience in France. This hostility is in part a product of an omnipresent elite discourse that condemns Muslims as unfit citizens. Yet many French Muslims themselves do not doubt their French identity.<sup>1</sup>

As this young woman notes, the bus doors were closed on her because of her *foulard*, an external sign of her belief in Islam.<sup>2</sup> While her story recognizes the violence of the children's response, it also complicates that interpretation by explaining that for the children, vandalizing the bus was a reaction to what they perceived as an act of injustice. The interviewee herself connects what she perceives to be the driver's Islamophobia (which for her connotes fear and intense dislike of Islam and Muslims) to injustice.

But what kind of injustice took place? The interviewee was not denied rights by a government official. Nor was she told she could not enter the bus. How are we to understand the "injustice" present in this story?

Muslims, perceived by some in France as frighteningly or undesirably "different," routinely encounter social indignities of varying magnitude. This sometimes amounts to acts of violence (hitting, shoving, grabbing, threats) that could conceivably implicate courts as an arbiter in a civil or criminal dispute. More typically, the slights are subtle, and their informality and openness to interpretation make legal involvement unlikely.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the different ways in which citizenship may be openly or subtly undermined or questioned and the likelihood that courts will be called on to respond to these moments of exclusion. As it shows, an *erasure of rights* by lawmakers is a major event that will be recognized and challenged by many. Even lawmakers may challenge this erasure of rights, such as when leftist parliamentarians asked that the bill that would ban the *niqab* (the full face veil) and all face coverings in public spaces be sent to the Constitutional Court for review.<sup>3</sup> Legally addressing a *rights violation*, however, can be difficult, as the violation may not be taking place on the national stage, or may even be anomalous. Thus, the courts, along with activists and allies who would help fight the violation, may be unaware of it until they are activated by the injured party. Finally, activating courts to remedy *social indignities* is even more difficult, as the incidents are frequent and subtle, making them burdensome to pursue legally and challenging to prove. There may be a paper trail if someone's rental application has been illegally turned down in violation of the right to equal housing, but a spoken insult or yanked hijab leaves little evidence.

As one might expect, few Muslim interviewees sought legal assistance in response to social indignities. Such a response was perceived as impractical and ineffective. A few respondents even laughed when asked whether they would try to address an incident of social discrimination in court or through mediation. This is exemplified in an exchange with two members of EMF (described in more detail in Chapter 6), who reacted strongly when asked whether the reason that they did not go to court for social indignities is that they did not regularly think about rights.


	Commonly Recognized Ways of Undercutting Citizenship		
	Social indignities (by private entities)	Violation of rights (by government officials or private entities)	Erasure of rights (by lawmakers)
Likelihood of courts being activated	 Less likely <span style="float: right;">More likely</span>		
How are courts activated in this kind of dispute?	By the affected citizen, but rarely	By the affected citizen	By politicians or the affected citizens
How many are affected?	Perhaps many, but often in an isolated manner	One or more may be affected	Affects many individuals at once
How public is it?	Varies. May go largely unnoticed	Varies	Highly public
Examples	Slurs, insults, avoidance	Rental discrimination	Arguably the 2004 law banning the hijab in public schools

FIGURE 2.1 Likelihood of courts being activated when citizenship is undercut.

**Student:** We are *always* talking about justice. (Laughs) But it is more about social things. Court, that is for penal things.

**Engineer:** For serious violence.

Notably, one way in which citizenship can be undercut that is central to this book is not displayed in Figure 2.1: through *elite discursive attacks* on one's standing as a citizen. This method of undercutting a group's citizenship can be just as subtle and pervasive as social slights, but it reaches a far wider audience. Even fewer Muslim interviewees sought to challenge elite discursive attacks on Muslim citizenship in court. One activist organization sued a magazine, but the more typical response was to try to engage politicians in conversation to end stereotypes—the kind of discussion that cannot happen in a courtroom. French Muslims find it understandably difficult to challenge these discursive attacks.

In this study, I argue that the standing of Muslims as citizens of France is primarily undercut by elite discourse. If we looked at laws on the books in France, we would find them facially neutral toward Muslims (although this is

arguable concerning laws that regulate Muslim women's dress). But we should hesitate before saying that French Muslims are not confronted with "legal exclusion." As sociolegal scholars remind us, law is not merely the rules we find "on the books." The law and society tradition conceives of law and rights as social practices. They are embedded in, and reflect, social hierarchy and dominant norms. Thus, while it is common to distinguish racial homogeneity in American schools as arising from either *de jure* segregation (segregation mandated by law) or *de facto* segregation (segregation that occurs without having been ordained by law), sociolegal scholars would argue that both reflect a law-like racial hierarchy that establishes expectations and governs social behavior. Thus, when I say that French Muslims' citizenship is undercut by elite discourse, I want to be clear about the facial neutrality of the law in France while acknowledging that this facial neutrality may sometimes mask differential treatment in practice.

These discursive attacks on Muslim citizenship, whether in the form of a bad joke, a direct criticism, or a parliamentary debate premised on the need to address Muslim integration problems, fosters a pervasive climate of prejudice. This exposes Muslims to routine indignities and may be seen as a justification for material disadvantages. In France today, Muslims encounter discouragement from school instructors and discrimination in employment and housing. At the same time, the formal promise of legal equality leads many non-Muslims to scorn Muslims for not "making it" when they supposedly have all the resources they need to be good citizens. For Muslims, formal rights all too often become empty abstractions that cannot easily offset the social stigma they regularly encounter. The ineffectiveness of formal rights claims for addressing social indignities and elite discursive challenges to Muslim citizenship exaggerates the difficulty Muslim activists face in creating a counternarrative.

How is it that the citizenship of a group of people can be so vigorously questioned when those people bear legal and social artifacts of national membership, such as a passport and language fluency? How is it that supposedly equal citizens can be treated so unequally? The answers to these questions concern law and society, political theory, and comparative politics scholars, as well as anyone interested in issues of minority rights and equality.

Answering these questions requires familiarity with the philosophical underpinnings of citizenship. What opportunities does citizenship create, how is it granted and denied, and what might the denial of citizenship foreclose? How do these general principles play out in the specific context of today's France, with its own particular citizenship tradition and contemporary political and social struggles? In this chapter, the concept of citizenship is examined, showing that it is neither a fixed nor unitary status. When an individual is branded an "undeserving citizen," the perils of being "politically equal and socially scorned" become clear: the erasure of rights by officials, the violation of rights in society, pervasive social stigmatization, and material inequality. The chapter then moves away from abstractions to show how these ideas take form in the current French context.

## How Should We Understand Citizenship?

The subject of citizenship has long fascinated political scientists. Judith Shklar (1991), David Engel (1984), and Judith Failer (2002) argue that multiple, different meanings of the term exist. Citizenship can refer to a legal status; the engaged political life of civic action; or an always qualified status that reflects one's standing in society, politics, and before the law (Failer 2002, p. 3). This study is most concerned with this issue of standing. Shklar (1989, p. 387) argues that political rights, such as the right to vote, are not enough to secure one full citizenship. There are key social rights that are "a primary source of public respect," and without them a person with the full gamut of political rights may find that his standing as a citizen is still somehow reduced (Shklar 1989, p. 387). In the American context Shklar is studying, the right to earn, to work and to earn money, is not a political right, but a social right—and an elusive one for marginalized communities. "Paid labor separated the free man from the slave" in American history, and the modern inheritance of this divide is the denigration of the unemployed (Shklar 1989, p. 387). Thus, it is possible for a politically equal citizen with the right to vote, but no job, to be seen as a second-class citizen who is undeserving of public respect.

Similarly, Engel (1984) argues that the extent to which one's membership in a community is recognized depends on whether one exhibits the markers of good citizenship that are appropriate to a given context. For example, in the community Engel studied, using the courts to settle contract disputes was seen as normal, but using the courts to settle torts was seen as irresponsible and selfish. Thus, litigious behavior was not criticized unless it matched community perceptions of "undesirable" behavior, thereby marking someone as an "outsider."

Scholars have examined how rights discourse may be used as a tool to claim membership, or increase standing. For example, Carl Stychin (1998, 2003) highlights how rights discourse shapes national identities (and sexual identities). Engel and Frank Munger (2003, p. 3) draw attention to the way in which civil rights can be used to demand inclusion by those individuals who are on the margins of citizenship. Stuart Scheingold (2004) famously argues that rights can be used with varying degrees of success to challenge social hierarchies. But these efforts face many challenges. Changing one's standing as a citizen requires upending dominant norms and accepted hierarchies.

Shane Phelan (2001, p. 11) reminds us that the common association of citizenship with democratic equality is a modern and curious one: "From the Roman Empire to modern times, citizenship was not clearly distinct from subjecthood." When citizenship was reinterpreted by liberals and republicans to mean equal membership on the basis of the most inclusive characteristic possible—humanity—new methods of boundary drawing and exclusion were developed. "The stronger the presumed bond between citizens, the greater the need for exclusion to maintain cohesion and ways of life" (Phelan 2001, p. 12).

Phelan thus identifies the paradox that lives at the heart of modern citizenship: this supposedly democratic project of inclusion is carried out through the process of exclusion. When political leaders and powerful agents in society create narratives about the commonalities that bring the citizens of a nation together as an equal and equally rights-bearing people, they necessarily create misfits. Ultimately, Phelan (2001, p. 11) argues that discourse about the commonality of citizens, meant (genuinely or not) to strengthen equal rights for an equal people, provides a way to define who is “unfit for membership.”

Feminists and critical race theorists articulate a similar complaint about the role of social contract theory in citizenship. Carol Pateman (1988) argues that the social contract does not make all citizens equal. Rather, it negotiates freedom and equality between men while assuming that women are subject to men’s rule. For Pateman, all social contract theory hinges on the prior, or “original,” contract that makes men equal not in their humanity but in their dominion over women (Pateman 1988, p. 2). Extending this line of reasoning, Charles Mills (1997, p. 11) argues that whites have long benefited from a “racial contract,” in which whites enjoy a higher standing than people of color. In Pateman’s and Mills’s work, the contract theory that is supposed to guarantee equality between citizens is shown to establish legal and social justifications for gender and racial marginalization.

Social contract theorists counter that the social contract can be salvaged; it just needs to be radically revised for greater inclusivity. The liberal theorist John Rawls (1999) and republican theorist Philip Pettit (1997) have engaged in just such projects, which challenge the assumptions of their predecessors with the concepts, respectively, of reflective equilibrium and non-domination. These two concepts are intended to help people see past the social, legal, and political constraints that blind them to inequality and thereby perpetuate exclusion. Feminists and critical race scholars, however, are likely to circle back to Phelan’s critique: even when America expanded “We the people” to include “all” citizens regardless of race and gender, some citizens were still deemed more fit than others. For example, even though African Americans have all of the legal rights of whites today, the factually inaccurate trope of the welfare queen became a successful act of political rhetoric precisely because it relied on (and strengthened) long-standing assumptions among bigoted whites about the lazy, conniving, and overly fecund nature of black women (Hancock 2004). These women were citizens, but not deserving citizens. They were unfit citizens and did not merit social assistance. Legal equality did not alter that assessment.

Bringing the social contract critiques of queer, feminist, and critical race theorists together, we see that the methods of political inclusion that we have long used in democracies are accomplished through the process of exclusion. Inclusion and exclusion have been two sides of the same coin of defining a nation and its citizenry. If people are not legally excluded, they will be excluded in subtler ways. And while the labels “unfit” and “undeserving” may be more

subtle than an outright denial of citizenship, the consequences of such attacks on a citizen's standing can be significant.

This book demonstrates that when elites create the political identity of citizenship, they hold up a positive ideal *and* identify dangerous aberrations that exist within the citizenry. For example, the imprisonment of peaceful Americans with Japanese ancestry during World War II illustrates how contemporary political fears aligned with a race-based definition of citizenship, creating an "other within" whom political leaders could punish with impunity.

In this book, we see that Muslims in France rarely find official law pitted against them *qua* Muslims. Instead, many French elites relentlessly question the Frenchness of Muslims in speeches, parliamentary debates, and writing. This book examines the power of elites to *discursively* shape the definition of deserving and undeserving citizens in a way that feeds on, but also enables, social indignities.

How is this possible? How do French elites define the ideal citizen? And why do they define Muslims as unfit for French citizenship? To answer these questions, we need to know more about French citizenship as a long-standing ideal, and as a contemporary articulation that responds to present-day concerns and anxieties.

## Today's Elite Construction of France and the Deserving French Citizen

It is important to recognize that dominant groups in every collective create distorted images of "other" groups that justify exclusion and domination, although the degrees and specific terms of this pattern vary in different contexts. This exploration of the common elite construction of Muslims and the good French citizen is just one example of a wider pattern. The rest of this chapter investigates the particular local twists, turns, and effects of this predominant, exclusionary elite discourse. Characteristics of the "deserving citizen" vary from country to country, from era to era. While there may be some enduring themes (such as self-reliance in the American citizen), their articulations are often temporally and spatially contingent. For example, today's articulation of American self-reliance that is mobilized to criticize single mothers of color makes sense only in the contemporary context of increased social welfare, national debt, and backlash against the Civil Rights Movement (Dudas 2008). Understanding how one becomes a "deserving" citizen, then, requires familiarity with both enduring principles and the contemporary context in which that particular sociolegal identity is established.

The creation of "deserving citizen" narratives becomes particularly salient during struggles with immigration and cultural diversity. In this context, the we/us othering is an effective political scapegoat that also offers "easy" answers in times of political and social change and uncertainty. This is important in the context of France, a nation that is experiencing, as the news outlets like to flashily put it, "an identity crisis" ("France tackles national identity crisis" 2009;



“French identity crisis” 2009; Kirby 2009; Lichfield 2009a; Samuel 2007). While this may be an exaggeration, French politicians are certainly responding as if it were a legitimate crisis. In 2009 and 2010, French politicians engaged in the lengthy and at times polemical “French identity debates” in an attempt to better define what makes a person French and what French values are. Those debates, notably, included several discussions about the compatibility of Islam and the republic. Consider also how booing at “La Marseillaise” was depicted by French elites as a sign of the decline of French values and identity.

Why the “identity crisis”—or, at least, the soul searching? It would be simplistic to identify only one reason for France’s “identity crisis” and outside the scope of this book to do more. What is important to this inquiry, however, is the way in which French elites have shaped a deserving citizen narrative as part of this “identity crisis.” In this chapter, I argue that elite constructions of the “deserving citizen” in France today are defined, in part, in opposition to Muslims. Muslims are described as *undeserving citizens*, which opens them up to social, political, and (albeit more rarely) legal marginalization. This elite discourse does even more than that, however. It all but erases France’s colonial past and the abuses it brought on Muslims and the Arab world. It is also intended to reassure the “deserving” French and alleviate the pessimism engendered by France’s prolonged labor slump; its challenges in handling immigration; its continued gender and racial inequalities, even as the nation becomes more diverse; and its decline on the world’s political stage. The deserving citizen narrative tells us that the French republican tradition is alive and well and that those who struggle in the nation need only match the republican ideal more closely. It is their fault that they struggle, especially when the path to integration is so clearly laid out.

Who, then, are these elites, and what is the deserving citizen narrative they have created?

## *The Makeup of the Powerful French Elite*

### **Politicians**

Politicians in France, for the most part, are white and Catholic or not religiously affiliated (see Figure 2.2). In 2008, “one black member represent[ed] continental France in the National Assembly among 555 members; no continental French senators out of some 300; only a handful of mayors out of some 36,000, and none from the poor Paris suburbs” (Kimmelman 2008).

Many scholars have studied the formation of political and administrative elites in France. Ezra Suleiman examines how the *grandes écoles*, prestigious institutions of higher education that are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, provide a formal, institutionalized avenue to power in France. Success, he argues, depends on whether one attends such a school (Suleiman 1978, p. 4). Peter Gumbel (2013, preface, para. 6) goes as far as to describe a *grande école* degree as “a de-facto guarantee of professional success and security, and a fast track to the pinnacle of French society.” Cornelia Woll (2009, p. 229) points out



FIGURE 2.2 The faces of French politicians. To celebrate the school's sixtieth anniversary, Sciences Po Bordeaux helped photographer François Ducasse (2008) publish *Les visages de la République*, a book of photographs of French politicians. The “faces of the republic” on the book’s cover include not one person of color. (Courtesy of Le Bord de l’Eau Éditions. Photograph by the author.)

that a *grande école* education tends to generate elite insularity, because outsiders are viewed with suspicion. As Michalina Vaughan (1981, p. 101) describes it, the *grande écoles* “justify the position of this elite by guaranteeing its calibre.” Thus, while the system of elite production was designed to be meritocratic, “merit” is “recognized and legitimated only when it is certified by a restricted number of institutions” (Suleiman 1978, p. 4).<sup>4</sup>

Luc Rouban (2012, p. 480) quantifies the elitism of French politics by examining the educational background of those who have worked closely with more than three decades of French presidents. Some 80.4 percent of the presidential

entourage of Valérie Giscard d'Estaing consisted of former students of at least one *grande école*.<sup>5</sup> The figures were 40.8 percent and 58 percent, respectively, during François Mitterrand's two presidential terms; 53.1 percent during Jacques Chirac's presidency; and 69.6 during Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency, which may seem ironic given his criticism of elitism of French politics and business. The story is similar for those working with French prime ministers. Under François Fillon's government (2007–2012), 67.3 percent of the entourage attended at least one *grande école*, with most coming from either the École Nationale d'Administration (ENA [National School of Administration]) or Sciences Po Paris (37.6 percent and 40.6 percent, respectively) (Rouban, p. 481).<sup>6</sup> Political leaders in France are not only products of elite education; they are frequently products of the *same* elite education.

The claim that French politics is elite-driven and highly centralized is no news to scholars of France, who have long noted the elitism of France as a strong unitary state (Cole 2008; Crozier 1964; Jenkins 2000; Tocqueville 1983). Given the elite and closed nature of politics—politicians tend to come from the best schools to which it is difficult to gain entry—it is not surprising that immigrants and those with an immigrant background find it difficult to break into French politics.

### The Media

The media in France is highly centralized, as well. As Laurent Mucchielli (2005, p. 25) notes, there is a sort of “Paris-centrism” among journalists, “which leads them to believe that the Parisian region constitutes a sort of representative sample of all of French society.” This, of course, could not be further from the truth. The editor-in-chief at Oumma.com, a well-known French news website composed primarily by French Muslims but intended for an all-France audience (some of France's top non-Muslim thinkers contribute to Oumma.com), explained this phenomenon further: “The media is all concentrated in Paris. The problem of political correctness, I think that touches lots of countries. Except in France, it is rather particular because in other places, there is media in each state, in each city. But in France, it is all concentrated in Paris. There are three, four papers; three, four newscasts; there are the same journalists you see everywhere; it is a little group that sticks together and shares information, jobs, etc.” When the editor-in-chief talks about “political correctness,” he is not referring to the progressive-minded self-censoring that we think of in the United States. “Political correctness,” for the French, often refers to saying that which is correct according to the dominant political views of the day. The editor-in-chief's critique, then, is that the centralized nature of French media produces uniformity of thought. Since few Muslims are currently successful in French media, this means Muslims are not speaking for themselves or creating their own images in France. It was only in 2006 that France saw its first nonwhite presenter of a prime-time news program: Harry Roselmack, a black man. Diversity is slow to come to the media in France.

## Intellectuals

Finally, there are the French intellectuals. They are accomplished people, renowned for their intelligence. Their work is published, and they routinely appear on evening panel programs. French intellectuals are involved in political life and have an influence and prestige that is difficult for Americans to understand, having little familiarity with such figures. A well-known historical example of the French intellectual's power is the involvement of Émile Zola, Anatole France, and Octave Mirbeau (all three authors) in the ardent defense of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer falsely accused of treason in the 1890s (Kauppi 2000). Zola's famous 1898 letter to the president, "J'accuse," condemning state anti-Semitism, was published as front-page news (Kauppi 2000).

The intellectual, then, is a prominent French figure and one that can have great authority. As Niilo Kauppi (2000, pp. 17–18) describes, "During the Dreyfus affair, instead of merely being a member of an intellectual profession, the intellectual became the privileged defender of Republican virtues. . . . a Romantic hero, a self-appointed watchdog of public virtue, who operates in the timeless realm of justice." The intellectual has a moral mission, justice. Importantly, that justice is understood in terms of republican virtues.

## There Is Power in a Unified Discourse

These three elite groups regularly share ideas with one another. As John Bowen (2007, p. 3) states, "French politicians, writers about public affairs, television 'talking heads,' and philosophers are much more likely to read one another's work, be related to one another, or indeed be the same person than is the case in most other countries." This insularity helps produce what he and many others call "la pensée unique, a single way of thinking."

The editor-in-chief of Oumma.com expressed a similar sentiment when he discussed the closeness of political and media elites, and of their thinking: "As soon as someone has media or political power in France, they attach themselves to it. In France, it is a class—it is called *la classe politico-media*. That is the people who are from the same social strata, who went to the same schools. It is a true ghetto,<sup>7</sup> a politico-media ghetto. In general, all that comes from the outside, that is not similar, is not welcomed."

An example helps illustrate the closeness of these networks. Caroline Fourst's book *The Obscurantist Temptation* criticizes Islam as a backward religion that fundamentally opposes the values of the French Republic. *The Obscurantist Temptation* won the French National Assembly's award for Best Book on Politics in 2006 (Scott 2007). Politicians give prizes, literally, to those who share in this elite discourse.

In addition, those Muslims who are part of the political elite share in elements of the dominant political discourse, some more than others. This was remarked on with bitterness by many of the respondents whose voices are included here, who accused President Sarkozy of politically convenient tokenism. Not all of the respondents were so contemptuous of President Sarkozy's move

to place religious and racial minorities in high positions in his government, and some even saw it as positive change. Those suspicious of difference-blind republicanism, however, remained circumspect in their evaluation of the politics of these highly placed minorities.

### *Today's Elite Category of the Deserving French Citizen*

If we accept that there is a difference between being a citizen and being a *deserving citizen*, it becomes important to understand what these influential voices of French social and political norms—politicians, the media, and intellectuals—think about French citizenship. How do they define the deserving citizen? I outline the definition here and then explain in the final section of this chapter how French elites mobilize it to depict Muslims as undeserving.

In France, as we are frequently told, the deserving citizen embraces the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. For those with even the vaguest sense of French history, this is recognizable as the perennial discourse of French citizenship that has remained dominant since the revolution, except during the period of Vichy government, which valued “Work, Family, and Fatherland.”

Liberty, equality, and fraternity, just like any other big ideas, do not have fixed meanings. Their articulation by elites in today's French political context produces a set of characteristics that mark someone as a deserving French citizen. Joan Wallach Scott, the feminist theorist and France expert, identifies five characteristics that disqualify one from being seen as fully “French”: anything short of complete liberality in sexual relations; any reference to or sign of religion in not just political but also social affairs; cultural pluralism; anything short of abstract individualism; and ancestral origins beyond the countries of Europe (Scott 2007, pp. 5, 11, 88, 125, 172–173). Apart from the last of these five characteristics, which has nothing to do with personal choice, these characteristics are all defended as “French” because they are seen as contemporary articulations of the French values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Those who do not bear the five characteristics are seen as rejecting France's national values triad. How does this work?

First, in this context, liberty is understood to encompass a certain kind of sexual behavior, and all other behavior is thought to be less than free or even dangerous to the freedom of others. Second, the dominant discourse on equality in France is difference-blind: respect is based not on the acknowledgment and well-mannered discussion of difference but, rather, on the equality of the abstract “French citizen.” Following from this, those who fail to be “abstract individuals”—those who identify with their religion or particular culture in the public sphere—are seen as failing to be French and as challenging the notion of equality. Their particularism is seen as a danger to national unity. Third, the value of fraternity today is commonly thought of as inseparable from *mixité*, the idea that those with differences should mix together so that the differences become immaterial. While this could mean the mixing of social classes and

people of different races or ethnicities—and elites sometimes do reference the importance of reaching across these divides—it often is referred to as the mixing of the genders. In this way, it discredits those who for religious reasons (or any other reason) value notions of sexual difference or segregation, such as reserving a public pool for a short time each week for same-sex swimming (a contentious issue in France).

## How Muslims Fall Short of the Deserving Citizen Category

The elite *pensée unique* is that Muslims have failed to integrate fully into France. They may no longer be immigrants, but they are not yet French, and it is unclear whether they will ever manage to be. Where there is debate on this question, it mostly concerns whether it was the Muslims who failed (typically rightist and extreme right explanations) or France that failed the poor and marginalized, which includes Muslims (typically centrist and leftist explanations). The presumption of failed or incomplete integration, however, is common and found on all sides of the political spectrum.

There are dissenting voices that work to delegitimize this dominant discourse. They include scholars such as Sylvain Brouard, Didier and Eric Fassin, Françoise Gaspard, Farhad Khosrokhavar, Cécile Laborde, Laurent Mucchielli, Olivier Roy, and Vincent Tiberj. Furthermore, there are individuals one might describe as “allies” who work together with Muslims to fight discrimination. For example, the antiracism association SOS Racisme has taken complaints about the desecration of Muslim graves to court (“Huit tombes ont été profanées” 2009). Another example is that of lawyers: a couple of well-established, secular lawyers with no interest in defending Islam (Jean-Michel Pollono and Gilles Devers) have courted the media and public attention in their fight to defend the right of their clients to wear the *niqab*, based on their agreement with their clients’ reading of the French Constitution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

There are also politicians who warn about the dangers of this constant questioning of Muslim “Frenchness.” Robert Badinter, former minister of justice and husband of the feminist intellectual Élisabeth Badinter, complained bitterly on French radio that continued questioning of the “Frenchness” of Muslims serves only the extreme right (FranceInter 2011). Similarly, National Assembly Representatives Jean-Marc Ayrault, Noël Mamère, Jean Glavany, Michèle Delaunay, and François de Rugy complained during the debates about the *niqab* that such political conversations stigmatize the Muslim population and risk doing more harm than good. Danièle Hoffman-Rispal also insisted that many Muslims are proud of their French identity. But it is important to recognize that these comments were in the minority during that debate and entirely absent outside the political left.

As the following examples show, while certainly not all French elites question the citizenship of Muslims, such suspicion is nevertheless predominant in elite

discourse, along with a tendency to disregard the wide diversity among Muslims in France, as well as the diversity of their political and (albeit few) legal claims.

### *According to Politicians*

While serving as the minister of the interior, Nicolas Sarkozy participated in a televised debate with Tariq Ramadan, a theologian and well-known though contentious face of “European Islam,” and Jean-Marie Le Pen, the former leader of the French extreme-right nationalist party Front National. The debate focused significantly on the subject of France’s Muslims. Sarkozy began his opening remarks with the statement—or, rather, apology—“Let us recognize the failures of French integration” (Ceaux and Jakubyszyn 2003). These strong words lead one to believe that France’s Muslims have not been integrated. The placement of the blame is unclear in Sarkozy’s pithy opening statement, but the conclusion of “failed integration” is understood.

Sarkozy is not alone. French politicians regularly depict Muslims as integration failures and outsiders. This statement is based on an analysis of depictions of Muslims in all legislative reports that made any mention of “Muslims” during the Twelfth Legislature of the French National Assembly (2002–2007).<sup>8</sup> In that time frame, there were forty-three relevant reports. Six of them were eliminated from the sample because they were from the debates that centered on *laïcité* and religious symbols and clothing in public schools in 2003. Those debates discussed Muslims and the hijab so extensively that including those data in the analysis would have skewed the results to the point of rendering them meaningless. (In the other thirty-seven debates, Muslims were mentioned between one and eight times. The six “outlier” debates mentioned Muslims at least forty and sometimes more than a hundred times.) In the final sample, a total of eighty-one references were made to Muslims (see Table 2.1).

It is telling that outside the 2003 discussion of the hijab, which mentioned Muslims several hundred times, Muslims were mentioned only eighty-one times in the reports of the National Assembly. This suggests that the Twelfth Legislature was primarily concerned with Muslims as a problem of integration, a central theme of the *laïcité* debates of 2003.

The data also reveal a view of Muslims as outside France geographically and historically. The majority of references are to Muslims living outside metropolitan France, either in overseas territories or in foreign countries. Another frequent reference was to Muslims as *harkis*. This term, which among some people has taken on the derogatory meaning of “collaborator” or “traitor,” was initially used to refer to those Muslim Algerians who supported France during the French-Algerian War. *Harkis* are not irrelevant to French politics, but as a subset of Algerian Muslims from a very specific generation, they represent a small group among the now three to four generations of Muslims who live in France.

Finally, the nature of the National Assembly’s discussion suggests that Muslims are primarily interested in religious matters—something this book refutes.



TABLE 2.1 REFERENCES TO MUSLIMS IN THE LEGISLATIVE REPORTS OF THE FRENCH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S TWELFTH LEGISLATURE

<i>Context in which Muslims are referenced</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Discrimination against Muslims	4
Illegal Muslim activity	2
Muslims outside the <i>métropole</i>	14
<i>Harkis</i>	7
Religious obligations of Muslims	5
Muslim terrorism/extremism/fanaticism	5
The "veil" (hijab)	3
Muslims as functionaries	2
Muslim activists	5
Muslim chaplains	10
Muslim burial/cemetery considerations	2
Muslim requests of government	3
"Muslim religion" (Islam)	6
French Council of the Muslim Faith	3
Immigrant Algerian workers	2
Muslim soldiers who died for France in the world wars	3
Muslims on the National Consulting Committee on Human Rights	1
Muslims as the opposite of universal	1
Muslims as intolerant	1
Muslim involvement in social security bureaus	1
The Muslim invasion of the 1000s	1
TOTAL	81

Of the three requests made of government that were mentioned in the Assembly, all were religious: they were requests for prayer space, for religious pool accommodations, and for the ability of Muslim soldiers to practice their religion on equal terms with non-Muslim soldiers. In addition to this are five references to the religious obligations of Muslims, ten mentions of Muslim chaplains in the army and prisons, three mentions of the hijab as a religious item (without any discussion of its complex secular uses in France today), and five mentions of "extreme religiosity" (Muslim terrorism, extremism, fundamentalism, and fanaticism). Six of the references to "Muslims" were in fact placeholders for religion itself—that is, "Islam." These were references to "the religion of Muslims," a common but peculiar phrase that assumes a clear relationship between being a Muslim and following Islam. As I explain in Chapter 3, Muslim identity in France is much more complicated, and the monolithic reading by the National Assembly of "Islam as Muslims and Muslims as Islam" is problematic.

### *According to the Media*

The French media's interest in Muslims has escalated in the past twenty years. This is demonstrated in an increase in the mention of Muslims (*musulman*) in the headline or lead paragraph of articles in *Le Monde* since 1990 (see Figure 2.3).<sup>9</sup>



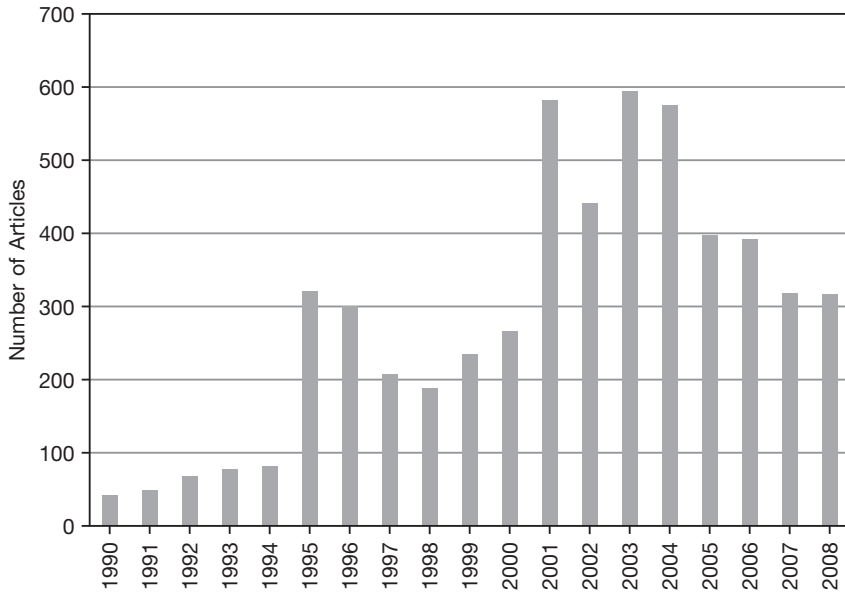


FIGURE 2.3 Change in the frequency of news articles about Muslims in France, 1990–2008, as reflected by the mention of Muslims in the headline and lead paragraph of articles in *Le Monde*.

In 1990, fewer than fifty articles mentioned the word “Muslim” in this way. That number rocketed up to 322 in 1995—due in part to the bombing campaign carried out that year in Paris and Lyon by members of the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA [Armed Islamic Group]), who sought to advance their efforts in the Algerian Civil War on French soil. This media attention waned by 42 percent by 1998 and then increased gradually until a sudden twofold increase in 2001—the year of the 9/11 attacks. Coverage of Muslims decreased by 25 percent during 2002, and then shot up again in 2003. This was the year that the most recent political debate over the hijab took place. At that time, the question was whether young women should be allowed to wear the hijab in public schools. The eventual answer, codified in 2004 with the Law on Secularity and Conspicuous Religious Symbols in Schools, was no. While coverage of Muslims in *Le Monde* in 2007 and 2008 was roughly half of what it was during the height of the *affaire du foulard*, or hijab debates, those numbers from 2007 and 2008 are still a sevenfold increase from the coverage of Muslims in the early 1990s.

Why is this the case? The spikes in media attention are event-oriented: they center on dramatic and important political events, such as the GIA bombings, 9/11, or the most recent political debates about the hijab. One could perhaps argue that these event-oriented spikes are simple outliers that do not accurately represent the overall attention paid to Muslims in France and that the attention

decreases when these dramatic events disappear from the front page. Yet the frequency of news articles about Muslims in *Le Monde* never completely returns to where it was before any one of these dramatic events. Rather than events in isolation that lead to momentary spikes in media attention, these three focusing events—the GIA bombings, 9/11, and the most recent *affaire du foulard*—are watershed events that now shape how Muslims are depicted in France.<sup>10</sup> Virtually ignored by the media in the early 1990s, Muslims “became news”—that is, are seen as newsworthy—more and more with each of these events.

Unfortunately for Muslims, “becoming news” has meant “becoming a problem.” In each of these events, Muslims are associated with violence, extreme religiosity, and disrespect for France’s secularism. I do not mean to suggest that these three events have been the most important focusing events for the discussion of Muslims in France. There are other important focusing events, and some are discussed in Chapter 6. But while these three events may merely be the most obvious drivers of media attention concerning Muslims since 1990, they reflect the French media’s tendency to question Muslim citizenship.

Let us look at more qualitative measures: How are Muslims depicted in the media? Table 2.2 summarizes the analysis of a random sample of articles in *Le Monde* between 1990 and 2008 with “Muslim” (*musulman*) in the headline and lead paragraph.<sup>11</sup> The sample was limited to articles concerning “France” and mentioning Muslims at least three times, and it excluded opinion and editorial articles. This sample was analyzed for how the articles depicted Muslims in France. The overall pattern that is instantly recognizable is a frame of “integration”: Have Muslims integrated into France or not? While roughly 41 percent of mentions of Muslims in the articles were neutral on this subject, 50 percent were framed by the subject of integration. In other words, half of all the media attention on Muslims in France concerned itself with whether Muslims have integrated into France. If every other reference to Muslims in the media that a French person reads presents this question, his or her understanding of Muslims in France may grow to include a vision of Muslims as somehow not completely French. Of the references to Muslims that were framed in this way, 40 percent depicted Muslims as good citizens who are integrated into France, 28 percent depicted Muslims as problematic citizens who have habits that prevent them from fully integrating into France, and 32 percent depicted Muslims as bad citizens who have not integrated into France. Thus, a total of 60 percent of all references to the integration of Muslims depicted Muslims as somehow not integrated.

The overall frame of integration itself, whether Muslims are depicted as having integrated well or poorly into France, is not neutral. It suggests that the verdict is still out as to whether Muslims can be French. It also suggests that there is something unassimilable about these people that may prevent them from being good citizens. In a nation such as France, where republicanism has meant that anyone who wants to become French need only be born on French soil (or be naturalized) and participate in France’s language, culture,

TABLE 2.2 DEPICTION OF MUSLIMS IN *LE MONDE*, 1990–2008

Depictions of Muslims <sup>a</sup>	Housing <sup>b</sup> (n = 15)	Education <sup>c</sup> (n = 27)	Employment <sup>d</sup> (n = 12)	Total <sup>e</sup> (n = 100)
Integrated/good citizens <sup>f</sup>	18 (19%)	46 (28%)	20 (32%)	105 (20%)
Neutral <sup>g</sup>	41 (42%)	60 (36%)	11 (17%)	218 (42%)
Problematic citizens <sup>h</sup>	8 (8%)	22 (13%)	7 (11%)	73 (14%)
Not integrated/bad citizens <sup>i</sup>	26 (27%)	27 (16%)	17 (27%)	84 (16%)
Discriminated against <sup>j</sup>	4 (4%)	12 (7%)	8 (13%)	44 (8%)
TOTAL	97 (100%)	167 (100%)	63 (100%)	524 (100%)

<sup>a</sup> R-generated random selection of *Le Monde* articles between 1990 and 2008 with “Muslim” (*musulman*) in the headline and lead paragraph. Limited to articles concerning “France” and with at least three mentions of “Muslim,” excluding opinion and editorial articles.

<sup>b</sup> A subset of articles cross-tabulated for “Muslim” (*musulman*) and “housing,” the latter including “housing, neighborhood, suburb, apartment” (*logement, quartier, banlieue, appartement*).

<sup>c</sup> A subset of articles cross-tabulated for “Muslim” (*musulman*) and “education,” the latter including “education, school” (*éducation, école*).

<sup>d</sup> A subset of articles cross-tabulated for “Muslim” (*musulman*) and “employment,” the latter including “employment, unemployment, and work/labor/job market” (*emploi, chômage, travail*).

<sup>e</sup> All of the articles in the random sample.

<sup>f</sup> Depictions of Muslims as “integrated” into French life and values or as “good citizens,” including the following themes: direct mentions of “integrated”; tolerant; involvement in interreligious, community, or state-society dialogue; appreciation of freedom, equality, fraternity, or *laïcité*; sacrifices for the state; social, political leaders or successful; or supportive of the 2004 law banning the hijab in public schools.

<sup>g</sup> Neutral depictions of Muslims, including neutral descriptions of Muslims themselves, of their religious activities and obligations, or of Muslim organizations.

<sup>h</sup> Depictions of Muslims as “problematic citizens” in that they are not necessarily “problem citizens” or “bad citizens” but have certain qualities that are seen as “difficult,” including the following themes: Muslims perceived as disorganized, as still requiring “integration,” as politically ineffective, as having questionable national loyalty, as being more religious than is normal, as being hostile toward non-Muslims, or as being opposed to the 2004 law banning the hijab in public schools.

<sup>i</sup> Depictions of Muslims as “not integrated” into French life and values or as “bad citizens,” including the following themes: direct mentions of failure or refusal to “integrate,” intolerant, religious extremism, colonial-era violence or disorder, or associations with violence, criminal activity, or disorder.

<sup>j</sup> Depictions of Muslims as discriminated against in French society.

and education, this seems paradoxical. Many of France’s Muslims were born in France, many speak French and only French, many have gone through the French education system, and an increasing number of French men and women from families that have long been in France and long been Christian have converted to Islam. This frame of integration not only suggests that Muslims are inherently difficult to “make French”; it also points to the limits of today’s understanding of the French ideal of republicanism: this minority group somehow eludes a norm that is meant to produce an all-inclusive view of citizenship.

### *According to Intellectuals*

French intellectuals have also criticized Muslims for poor citizenship. Five prominent intellectuals—Régis Debray, Élisabeth Badinter, Alain Finkielkraut, Elisabeth de Fontenay, and Catherine Kintzler (all philosophers, academics, or feminists)—published a letter in *Le Nouvel Observateur* urging instructors in



FIGURE 2.4 A 1989 cover of *Le Nouvel Observateur*. The names of the authors of the public letter urging teachers to prohibit their students from wearing the hijab are displayed with the headline “The Scarf Affair: ‘Teachers, Do Not Capitulate!’” (Courtesy of *Le Nouvel Observateur*.)

public schools to refuse to allow their Muslim students to wear the hijab (see Figure 2.4). This was in 1989, when there was no nationwide ban on the hijab in public schools and school administrators were told by the Conseil d’État to handle the issue with sensitivity to the context, on a case-by-case basis.<sup>12</sup> At this point in time, schools made a variety of policies attempting to adapt to students’ needs and the demands of French *laïcité*. The five intellectuals were demanding a single, hard-line solution in (they claimed) the name of French values and *laïcité*. The hijab was inherently unfree and therefore inherently un-French.

Interestingly, Gaspard and Khosrokhavar (1995, p. 25) expressed anger that these five were presenting themselves as the voice of all intellectuals in France

and complained that “these philosophers acted like the militants they are of a certain idea of the Republic, and not like intellectuals, who seek the truth.” Nevertheless, several important French intellectuals maintain that Muslims are a problematic presence in France. This group notably includes feminists such as Fourest and Badinter, who critique Islam for being misogynistic and a threat to France and its values, and Fiammetta Venner, who (along with Fourest) criticizes the term “Islamophobia” by arguing that there is no irrational fear of Islam in France and that such an idea has been created by Islamic fundamentalists who seek to manipulate well-meaning but naive leftists (Geisser 2005, p. 6).

## The Undeserving Citizen: Politically Equal and Socially Scorned

Let us now return to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: “Why do elites depict Muslims as failed or undeserving citizens?” There are Muslims who have succeeded in politics and reached elite levels in business in France, so sweeping accusations of simple “religious intolerance” or “racism” fail to explain the situation. Nor is xenophobia an adequate explanation, as the Muslim population in France is increasingly French-born, to equally French parents or even grandparents. We can begin to understand this situation, in all its complexity, by considering enduring principles of French citizenship and examining how contemporary articulations of these principles generate a false universal model for citizenship that places Muslims squarely outside the nation.

I argue along with Scott (2007) that today’s French elites define the deserving French citizen as a sexually liberal, irreligious (indifferent or hostile to religion), culturally singular, abstract individual. This supposedly universal model of deserving citizenship, however, is not as universal as it claims to be. Scott is not the only one to argue that the “universal model” of citizenship in France is informed by a hidden particular: Eléonore Lépinard and Amy Mazur (2009, p. 248) claim that “the universal abstract figure of the citizen . . . hides, since the French Revolution, a masculine persona.” Birte Siim (2000) and Laure Bereni (2007) make a similar argument about masculinity and citizenship. Ariane Chebel d’Appolonia (2009, p. 270) also discusses how the historical anxieties France had in integrating Jews and colonial subjects point to a “core ambivalence” about how “universal” republicanism truly was. Clearly, Muslims are not the only ones who struggle to fit this mold. This normative model is easiest to access if one

- has been born and grows into a sexual and gender identity that comfortably fits social norms, making experimentation easy and blameless;
- has been born into a family that already has no religion or that casually practices Catholicism, a religion whose social dominance lends it a kind of invisibility;
- has no identifiable ethnic or racial difference from a white European; or
- has experienced the kind of privilege that exempts one from the institutionalized collective miseries (gender inequality, poverty, racial

discrimination, heteronormativity) that inspire a sense of shared otherness, if not group politics.

The resulting “universal,” as Pateman and Mills (2007) would agree, actually points to a particular kind of identity: the straight, a-religious, white, financially comfortable man.

Of course, those who may not fit this mold may still believe it is universal and fight to defend its universality in the name of fighting for equality. Some female French feminists such as Élisabeth Badinter (2006), for example, maintain that gender equality can be met only when we move past gender differences and focus on rights for all abstract citizens, regardless of ascriptive or chosen characteristics. As I discuss in Chapter 3, some French Muslims uphold this abstract model, as well. It should be noted, however, that the very act of upholding the universal model of deserving French citizenship requires at least a strong education in French politics and history—something that is not accessible to all French citizens in today’s era of increasing educational stratification. Even appeals for the universal to remain universal come from a particular place.

In short, we find behind the universal model of the deserving citizen the specter of a very particular kind of French citizen. What is most important for this inquiry is the fact that elites routinely mobilize this deserving citizen model to criticize Muslims as its opposite. Muslims are typically depicted by French elites as sexually aberrant (either predatory or virginal), as so religious that Islam dominates all aspects of their lives, and as unwilling to think beyond their Muslim identity to the common good. Consider how the political, media, and intellectual depictions of Muslims presented above associate Muslims with excessive religiousness, immigrants and foreigners, violence, and sexual repression. And because of stereotypes that exist about Muslims in France, even those who vaguely identify as Muslim in a cultural sense but have a weak attachment to the religion find that they are assumed to lack these five characteristics that define the deserving French citizen, even if they have them (or, at least, the first four) in spades. Muslims, we are told, behave in ways that suggest they do not share in the French values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. They remain outsiders even though they bear the legal accoutrements of citizenship: they may be citizens, but they are undeserving citizens. Alain Boyer (2005, p. 11) uses the phrase “de facto inequality” (*inégalités de fait*) to refer to difficulties French Muslims face in spite of constitutional rights, such as the “image handicap,” which he defines as the persistent negative image of Muslims that questions their national belonging.

What does it look like when a citizen does not bear one or more of the markers of normative citizenship—that is to say, when one is willingly or unwillingly subsumed under a public identity that is politically equal yet socially scorned? I extrapolate from an example Scott (2007) provides to illustrate some of the social and legal consequences. “Doing sex the French way” is understood to be sexual liberality. Even those who do not critique the sexual activities of

others but prefer for themselves alone to abstain until marriage are seen as aberrant, as undeserving of membership in the French citizenry (Scott 2007, p. 172). As Scott describes it, “Those who do not share this value (Muslims in this case) are not only different, but inferior—less evolved, if capable at all of evolution. The ultimate proof of the inassimilability of Islam thus comes down, or adds up, to sexual incompatibility” (Scott 2007, pp. 173–174). In failing to “do sex the French way,” one is seen as not French.

Two Muslim respondents, one male and one female, spoke about the discomfort they felt when their decision to abstain from sex until marriage came up in conversation with non-Muslims. They both described the derisive reactions of others who chided them for being either a “saint” or “sexually frustrated.” As the woman explained:

I had a colleague at work who told me her adventures with this guy, that guy, a married guy, etc. During the discussion, she asked me, “So, . . . how is your sex life?” I told her that the only person I have had relations with was my ex-husband, when we were married, and since then, no. . . . It has been three years since I have had relations. “What?” she said, and she laughed. She was completely shocked. . . . That was. . . too crazy for her. Not conceivable. Not *thinkable*. She laughed and laughed. . . . [S]he was shocked.

The interviewee described with marked embarrassment how her personal sexual decisions became the object of hilarity for her coworker. Sexual freedom in this interaction was not understood to include the freedom to choose to abstain from sex. The respondent felt deprived of both respect and dignity in this conversation with her coworker. The respondent may have been enacting her right as a citizen to make her own sexual decisions, but in making the “wrong” ones, she was perceived as somehow aberrant.

The male respondent described the “outsiderness” he experienced based on personal sexual behavior in even starker terms: “If you say to someone that you do not have sex because you are Muslim, because it has got to be in marriage, you are an extraterrestrial. You are from another planet.” It does not get any more “outsider” than “ET.” The French principle of freedom, articulated today as sexual liberality, protects those who practice that behavior and censures those who do not. In being a sexual outsider, one encounters social hostility.

The consequences for failing to meet the norms of citizenship are not limited to social slights. They can even include differential legal treatment. In 2008, there was a highly *médiatisé* political uproar when the question of sexual mores became entangled in the annulment of a marriage between two Muslims.<sup>13</sup> The husband asked for an annulment because he discovered that, contrary to what his wife had told him, she was not a virgin before their wedding. Notably, the wife wanted to end the marriage, as well, and as quickly as possible (Chemmin 2008b; Vignaud 2008). The court annulled the marriage as asked, citing



a breach of contract: according to Article 180 of the French Civil Code, marriages can be annulled if it is discovered that there was a misunderstanding as to the “essential qualities” of a person (Chemin 2008b). Mistaken assessments of a spouse’s “essential qualities” that French courts have previously accepted as meriting marriage annulment include the impotence of the husband, the former prostitution work of the wife, the husband’s living under adult guardianship, and the husband’s HIV (Chemin 2008b). Arguably, the prostitution case suggests that sexual history is grounds for annulling a marriage. This may have contributed to the court’s decision in 2008.

Following the court’s decision, however, a wave of vitriolic criticism from the left and French feminists challenged the ruling. Élisabeth Badinter, of the prestigious *École Polytechnique* in Paris, claimed she was “revolted” by the ruling and declared she was “ashamed of French courts” (Chemin 2008b). The *Parti Socialiste* (PS [Socialist Party]) described the ruling as “appalling,” one that “overrides the rights of women to their bodies and to freely live, as men do, their sexuality,” and the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF [French Communist Party]) added the descriptor “scandalous” (Chemin 2008b). The feminist activist group *Ni Putes ni Soumises* (NPNS [Neither Sluts nor Slaves]) described the ruling as “regression,” an analysis that connects the discourse on the valuation of virginity with backward philosophy—in this case, the philosophy happens to belong to the Muslim husband (Chemin 2008b). The evocation of the specter of “backward Islam” is even more obvious in the reaction of Fadéla Amara, who then served as secretary of state for urban policy and is the former president and founder of NPNS (and, significantly, one of the few Muslim political elites). She described it as “a real fatwa against the emancipation of women,” adding, “I thought that we were talking about a verdict delivered in Kandahar” (Vignaud 2008).

While it is certainly worrisome for those who fight for a woman’s right to sexual freedom to see a court recognize virginity as an “essential quality” for women in marriage, it is curious that there was no similar media coverage of or elite outcry against the court for finding a history of prostitution as grounds for annulment. After all, prostitution is legal in France, as it is considered part of one’s freedom of sexual choice and behavior. The fervor that swept across France over *this* particular story of annulment—the strongly worded condemnations of the Lower Court, the headlines splashed across newspapers and magazines for weeks—suggests that the valuation of virginity, specifically coupled with Islam, poses a uniquely intolerable threat to women.

There is another side to this story that was often ignored in the media fracas: that of the woman who wanted the annulment. Ironically, in seeking to protect women’s rights, feminists and the French left called for the Appeals Court to effectively remarry this woman to the man she had sought to separate from, the man who valued her less than her virginity. Rachida Dati, who at that time was serving as the French minister of justice (the “Keeper of the Seals,” a very important cabinet position in which the holder also acts as vice-president over the entire justice system), was cautious in responding to the anger at the



court's decision. As the minister of justice, Dati was expected to speak as a figurehead of the law. As a Muslim woman who benefited from a hasty divorce proceeding when she was young, she was hesitant to see the annulment undone. Following the outrage over the Lower Court's ruling, Dati admitted that the case had "provoked a spirited social debate" and that it now "went beyond the relationship between the two people and concerns the whole of citizens in our country, notably women" (quoted in Chaffanjon 2008). Thus, she asked the Appeals Court to take the case and review it again. Dati was also careful to note, however, that "the law is there to protect. The act of annulling a marriage is also a way of protecting the person who maybe wants to undo the marriage, because I think that this young woman . . . equally wanted, without a doubt, to be divorced rather quickly" (Chaffanjon 2008).

This kind of nuanced analysis, taking into consideration both the larger social question of women's rights and the rights of the specific woman seeking the annulment, was largely absent from elite discussion. The Appeals Court concluded that virginity is not an "essential quality" of a person, and the woman and man were legally remarried in the fall of 2008. There is no denying that the man's motives are repugnant to feminist and progressive sensibilities. But in arguing he had no right to an annulment, feminists, leftists, and the court denied the particular woman in question her claim to an annulment, as well. The man's claim took precedence.

This is yet another example of the exclusivity of citizenship. Because of their association with Islam and the stereotypes of this religion as a "backward" threat to women—encouraged, admittedly, by the man's misogyny—the man and the woman were judged to be unfit citizens. As such, they did not earn the full set of rights provided to deserving citizens. This story illustrates the rare but real legal consequences of failing to conform to the normative, ideal citizen: the denial of rights and the subsuming of an individual's character to the stereotype of a larger group.

## Conclusion

Citizenship is not merely a binary legal status. There are deserving and undeserving citizens, and to be placed outside the "deserving" category is to be seen as a social problem and a burden on the state. Public respect is not owed to such people. French elites today define the deserving French citizen in a way that excludes if not all Muslims, then many. As Chapter 3 shows, French Muslims respond to this exclusion in a variety of ways. Interestingly, while some of their complaints challenge difference-blind republicanism, French Muslim activists—contrary to French elite assessments—are engaged in thoroughly French projects and politics. They are dedicated to their French identity, and their political claims frequently hinge on the French republican triad of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

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## Claiming Membership

*French Muslim Identities, Political Goals,  
and Repertoires of Contention*

It is difficult to speak about France's Muslims. One cannot entirely account for this difficulty even with carefully chosen terms such as "of immigrant origin," "practicing Muslims," "cultural Muslims," or "Arabs." Muslims in France are all of these, none of these, and more. It is important to consider the immigrant experience when discussing the situation of Muslims in France, but not all Muslims are immigrants. Not all Muslims in France are Arabs, and not all Arabs are Muslim. And what defines a Muslim, anyway? Is it the number of times a day one prays? Is it a cultural marker one inherits from parents even if one does not practice, or even if one is an atheist? Also, while there are socio-economic trends among French Muslims (however defined) that are important to consider, not all Muslims in France live in depressed suburbs, are unemployed, or feel personally marginalized. Some Muslims have even risen to the highest ranks of government and business.

This difficulty points the researcher to two important conclusions. First, one should be constantly aware of this diversity and pay careful attention to how people identify themselves. Second, if Muslims in France form such a diverse group, diverse opinions can be expected to follow.

That is precisely what was found during the research for this book. Muslims in France are diverse, define themselves in plural ways that include more than just their religion, and for the most part have integrated French values and political habits, although many Muslims would cringe at my use of the word "integrate." As one interviewee stated, "The French culture is completely *in* us—we do not need to integrate it; it is *in* us. We grew up with it . . . so it is like something you eat, and there you go. When people say, 'Are you integrated?'

I ask, ‘Integrated into what? Why do you ask me this question? Do you ask this question of a friend of mine I grew up with, played with all the time, who is named Françoise?’”

The narrow elite discourse of failed or problematic Muslim citizenship does not recognize this diversity. Nor does it provide space for the diversity of claims made by French Muslims today. Nevertheless, French Muslims are compelled to respond to this discourse, because it has social and sometimes legal consequences for them. The social stigma of the elite discourse may aggravate difficulties in employment, education, housing, and routine habits of daily life such as shopping and taking a bus. While the law does not officially treat Muslims differently from other French citizens, state actors do sometimes single out Muslims for different treatment in a variety of ways.<sup>1</sup> The French Muslim population, with its different political goals and strategies, primarily has one thing in common: disdain for the elite depiction of Muslims in France.

This chapter examines how Muslims present themselves in their own citizen engagements, which include a diverse array of political claims and goals that often extend far beyond religion. In the first section, I consider how the experience of being Muslim in France has changed since the 1950s (a notable period of Muslim immigration to France) and outline important shifts in how Muslims have presented themselves in France during this period. In the second section, I distinguish between two significant political frames for equality found among France’s Muslims today: neutrality and recognition. While both frames are used to demand equality, they differ philosophically and strategically. In the third section, I demonstrate how both of these frames reflect the shortcomings of rights claims in general and the weakness of rights as tools for oppositional politics in France in particular.

## Muslims in France to Muslims of France: Changes since the 1950s

France has long traded people, goods, and ideas with the Arab world, its primary connection to Muslims (Coller 2010). During the height of Western imperialism and colonialism, that connection strengthened and became more complex as France exploited these lands and people. It is outside the scope of this book to re-create the fullness of the relationship France has had with the Muslim and Arab world. That said, changes in the social positionality of being Muslim in France since the 1950s have contributed to changes in how Muslims define their politics, goals, and civic identities today. Therefore, it is necessary at least to understand the three significant “generational” changes that took place in the Muslim population during this period and how this is reflected in the diverse world of French Muslim political opinion.

Before continuing, two caveats are required. The terms “Muslim” and “generation” in the context of this discussion are not unproblematic. Not all groups and individuals described in this chapter would be happy being identified as “Muslim.” I am not trying to ascribe identities. Instead, I am trying to paint

a rough picture of a diverse population. It is ironic that, in making a case for Muslim diversity in France, I must sometimes apply labels where they do not fit. I hope the initial sacrifice of nuance helps establish greater clarity and ultimately a subtler interpretation of the situation.

Furthermore, the term “generation” is meant as a heuristic. Three distinct patterns can be identified in French Muslim articulations of citizenship: passivity, a race-conscious but otherwise difference-blind republican neutrality, and cultural pluralism. These patterns roughly follow what is often described as generations: those Muslims who immigrated to France between the 1950s and the 1970s; their children who became adults in the 1980s; and a younger group of French Muslims who may have been born to a French parent or to French parents and have reached adulthood in the 2000s.

While a helpful shortcut, the term “generations” can be offensive and imprecise. As a Muslim respondent bemoaned, “There are lots of people today who talk about third-, fourth-generation immigrants—like animals. It is true, because when you talk about ‘generations,’ that is terminology used for animals.” The same Muslim respondent then pointed out how the term “generation” can be used to exclude Muslims from France indefinitely: “If there can be a ‘fourth-generation immigrant,’ when does the status of ‘immigrant’ stop?” Furthermore, Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj (2005) observe that the term “generation” can be confusing and invite imprecision, as it is vague and not everyone agrees about whether immigrants are generation zero or generation one. All that said, these descriptions can still be helpful for understanding how the French Muslim population has changed over time. Some French Muslims even evoke the term themselves as a shortcut to describe political differences among Muslims.

### *The Trente Glorieuses: Muslims as Migrant Laborers*

World War II took a heavy toll on France, especially its young male population. When industry began to recover, there were not enough men to fill factory positions. During the era of economic prosperity known as the *Trente Glorieuses* (Glorious Thirty), which Jean Fourastié (2004) describes as lasting from 1946 to 1975, France looked to its former colonies—primarily in the Maghreb, a part of North Africa consisting of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia—for temporary workers. Men who came during this period largely saw themselves as just that: visitors who would send most of their money “home” and return home themselves one day. As such, they did not ask, or expect, much from France. Their civic life was marked mostly by passivity. Typically single men, these Muslims were not religious;<sup>2</sup> or they did not practice in France; or they kept their practice minimal. The few prayer rooms that existed were small, impromptu affairs that those who were sending most of their money out of the country could afford. Today, some of these people—largely men—are still in France. Their plans to go home were dashed by later French laws that required people to live in France to receive the pensions they had earned by working in France.



FIGURE 3.1 *Les hommes debouts* (“The standing men”). Gabriel-Péri Square in Lyon is known as a gathering place for older, retired immigrants from North Africa. (Photograph by the author.)

In Lyon, these older men are known to gather at a certain intersection. Referred to as *les hommes debouts* (the standing men), these retired, elderly immigrants pass their afternoons chatting next to a couple of kebab shops that serve halal meat across the street from a two-story McDonald’s (see Figure 3.1). A professor of American literature and a French Muslim immigrant of a younger cohort explained that these men were trying to re-create the informal public spaces often found in Arab countries, where people gather to talk and simply pass the time together. While some in Lyon eye these men suspiciously, wondering what sort of things these Arabs must be talking about while they huddle together all day with no better place to be, the professor, who is familiar with North African culture, pointed out that they are simply trying to bring a little bit of home to France, since they can no longer go home.

It should not be surprising that this generation of Muslims in France was not greatly involved in French politics. Immigrants often stay out of the politics of their host country (Jones-Correa 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 1990; Ramakrishnan 2005). Furthermore, these men were not always completely invested in France. Even if they intended to stay in France, some may have found it difficult to refer to the nation that colonized and brutalized their country of origin as “home.” Another reason for the lack of political involvement among North

African immigrants was the violent response they stood to receive. In 1961, at the height of the French-Algerian War, the mayor of Paris introduced a curfew for Algerian immigrants (Hargreaves 1991, p. 64). When the immigrants protested, the police responded with extreme force, “arresting many thousands of demonstrators. An unknown number of immigrants were killed, in some cases after being brutally interrogated, and scores of bodies were found floating in the Seine” (Hargreaves 1991, p. 64).

### *The 1980s: The “Beur Generation”*

Not all of the Muslims who came to France in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s were men, however. Some men came with their wives or had their wives and perhaps children join them in France later. In 1974 and 1975, France halted its long-standing labor migration policies and greatly tightened the rules governing family reunifications (Freedman 2004, p. 34). Without the same level of Muslim labor migration, Muslims in France became increasingly Muslims of France—either the children of immigrants or people who wanted to make France their permanent home.

The children of these immigrants had a very different experience of France from that of their parents. They benefited from a French education and all it had to offer. 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. Of course, as is explored later in this book, teachers and fellow students were not always consistent in recognizing the Frenchness of these children. Still, the official discourse was there, and its power to engender a sense of membership should not be underestimated.

These French citizens born in France to North African immigrants became known as *beurs*.<sup>3</sup> Some developed a style of civic engagement that adhered to republican neutrality but was sensitive to inequalities generated by racism. In the 1980s, these republican *beurs* mobilized politically for greater racial equality. In 1983, they held a now famous rally, officially known as the Marche pour l’Égalité et contre le Racisme (March for Equality and against Racism). Many came to know the rally simply as the Marche des Beurs. The march was a response to what was seen as police brutality toward Arab youths. Rather than set cars on fire as a form of street protest, which was the typical response to police brutality toward Arab youths in the early 1980s,<sup>4</sup> these youths chose to march from Marseille to Paris, along with two priests, in a peaceful protest for equality (Philippe 1993). Notably, they marched as French citizens demanding equality regardless of *race*. The perceived target of police brutality was Arabs. Their political demands for longer work visas and the right to vote for foreigners were largely met, and without elite accusations that the demands fundamentally challenged principles of French citizenship.

The march was notable for being the first example of massive organization and demonstration by the children of immigrants in France. Unlike the

demonstration of immigrants in 1961, these *beurs* were received, amicably, by the president himself (the socialist François Mitterrand). It is also important to note the organization of the event: these youths were organizing themselves along the lines of race. Religion was probably an important factor in the lives of some of these *beurs*, but it was typically not addressed here. That some of those marching might have been Muslims was not of central importance to the group. Following the march, some of the *beurs* forged a strong relationship with the Socialist Party and created political activist associations that focus on equality and fighting against discrimination: SOS Racisme and the NPNS are two such groups. These groups focus on equality without much discussion of religion. SOS Racisme focuses mainly on racial inequality, and the NPNS focuses mainly on gender inequality. The groups primarily define equality as a matter of being French first and part of a racial group or gender second—the traditional French republican ideal.

### *Are We Post-Beur? Newer Muslim Claims for a Plural Public Identity*

Today, French Muslims are more diverse than ever. In addition to the Maghreb, they may come from other countries of Africa (such as Senegal) and the Near and Middle East (especially Turkey). France's Muslims are also increasingly French natives. The number of converts to Islam in France is growing, and some French Muslims were born in France to just one immigrant parent or just one Muslim parent. Some French Muslims must look to their grandparents to find a connection to immigration, while others have none.

French Muslims today practice Islam in diverse ways, as well. Brouard and Tiberj (2005) conducted a large-scale quantitative study of Muslim religious practice in France and found that the ways in and degree to which Muslims practice their religion varies widely. As they point out, French Muslims' habits of prayer and mosque attendance, adherence to Islamic dietary and dress codes, and willingness to marry outside Islam all vary. The Muslims interviewed here embody this diversity in belief and practice, and some even demonstrate this diversity at the individual level: a Muslim, just like anyone else, may change her beliefs or religious habits through the course of her life.

Finally, and most important to this study, French Muslims today have diverse politics. While some Muslims continue to adhere to the difference-blind republican model of citizenship popularized by the *beur* movement, now, twenty years later, there are competing models. Some black youths and youths of Arab descent in France are dissatisfied that the Marche des Beurs did not achieve more. While some Muslim youths today identify themselves as Muslim and say the problem in France is Islamophobia, others identify themselves as Arab and say the problem in France is Arabophobia. It would seem that those Muslims who identify as Arab would gravitate toward *beur*-inspired antiracist associations such as SOS Racisme. Yet some Muslim youths who perceive Arabophobia and Islamophobia feel that SOS Racisme does not address all of their concerns.



Some French Muslims today, especially young Muslims, are less trustful of the French republican ideal of *laïcité*, at least as it is articulated by most French elites. They do not have the same degree of faith in the difference-blind model that the cohort (using the phrase loosely) ahead of them does. None of the Muslims interviewed for this study claimed outright distaste for the Marche des Beurs or SOS Racisme, but many young Muslim activists want something more. For these Muslims, it is possible to have what Americans would refer to as a hyphenated identity. They believe they can be French *and* . . . —that is, French *and* Muslim, in the same breath, without being a bad French citizen or a bad Muslim. These activists shape for themselves a plural public identity that merges what is traditionally understood to be “public” and “private” in France, and they want to be treated equally on the basis of their Frenchness without having to relegate their religious identity to the private sphere first. They rarely support bringing religion directly into politics, although for one group interviewed in this study, the Parti des Musulmans de France (PMF [Muslim Party of France]), that was the goal. Instead, they mostly express an interest in being able to manifest a plural identity while still being treated as an equal French citizen.

Those French Muslims who describe themselves as “French *and* Muslim” rarely stop there. “French *and* Muslim *and* a woman *and* Algerian”—the descriptions were sometimes quite lengthy. These French Muslims recognize and embrace the multiplicity of human identity. They do not categorize their affiliations hierarchically; instead, they negotiate their coexistence day by day. One interviewee described experimenting with the burqa and deciding that it was not necessary for her as a Muslim. It was, in her words, “inconvenient”—she had other habits and ways of living that were impeded by the garment. When she rejected the burqa, she did not do so because she is French first and Muslim second. Instead, she found it did not let her live her life, with all her habits and affiliations, harmoniously.

The *beurs* of the 1980s epitomized ideal French fighters for equality, largely difference-neutral and seeking to redress the problem of racism by celebrating Frenchness. These newer French Muslim activists, however, are seen as feared cultural pluralists. They are the rabble-rousers who do not agree with the sports announcer from Chapter 1, who declared, loosely paraphrased, that “you only play for one team.” The idea of hyphenated identity is new to France, and many fear that it is not possible to be “French *and* . . .” without destroying the very fabric of French citizenship: difference-blind republican neutrality. In this view, the public–private divide is the iron curtain of peacekeeping: equality is possible only when we consider one another as equal French citizens and ignore the rest. But as critics of secularism such as William Connolly (1999) note, “the rest”—our nonpublic identities—inevitably informs our public and political opinions, as well as the opinions others have of us. Connolly and even Karl Marx would tell us that pretending it is possible to separate the public from the private so neatly is secularism’s greatest conceit. French Muslims of



this younger generation (and the older Muslims who share this opinion) identify two main problems with this conceit.

First, France supposedly tolerates no place for religion in the public sphere, unlike the United States. French people are often bewildered that American politicians constantly refer to God and ask him to “save America.” But France is not without its public acknowledgments of religion. French cathedrals receive heavy public subsidies. This is justified by pointing to the “historical significance” of the buildings. They are part of France’s cultural heritage; therefore, the subsidies are secular in nature. But why do television screens in grocery stores announce the time, the weather, and which saint’s day it is? Why are national holidays aligned with Catholic holidays? Why were public school timetables arranged in such a way that students could take an afternoon a week off to attend catechism? Why do some French politicians define France as having a Christian tradition? Some French Muslims of this younger cohort interpret this inconsistency as a rejection of all things Muslim as “un-French.” In this view, *laïcité* is not neutrality but, rather, a code for “Islam is not French.”

Second, secularism seeks to engender respect for an abstract individual. Some French Muslims ask, “What about the actual, embodied individual?” It is easy to teach people how to respect an abstract person, but less easy to teach people how to respect the diverse world of embodied individuals with different identities, histories, and affiliations. Several respondents shared stories of well-meaning friends who agonized over how to feed them, because they did not know many Muslims or what they ate or drank (as if they all practiced the same way). “Is it possible to have respect in a climate of ignorance?” they asked.

### **Muslims Looking for the Way to Equality: Neutrality or Recognition?**

Despite the elite perception of Muslims as outsiders, Muslim activists certainly *act* French. I mean this in three ways: (1) they express a strong belief in the three principles of French citizenship (liberty, equality, and fraternity), although they sometimes articulate them differently from the way French elites do today; (2) they engage in citizenship activity in that they participate in political life and make claims based on their French citizenship; and (3) their citizenship activities are strikingly similar to the rest of France’s citizens, including such French “repertoires of contention” as street protests, partnerships with the state, government lobbying, artistic projects, and legal mobilization (Tarrow 2011, p. 118). That said, the messages of various groups and individuals can be quite different. Some of this variation is explained by the decision to frame equality as a matter of either neutrality or recognition.

This may at first sound like the difference Nancy Fraser (1997) identifies between socialist demands for redistribution and post-socialist demands for what she refers to as a “politics of recognition.” In some ways, it is a similar schism, but there are important differences that, when examined, highlight the particular emptiness of rights for oppositional politics and social change in France.

Fraser describes “redistribution and recognition” as two different strategies for pursuing equality. In the redistribution model, activists fight for the redistribution of goods, with the materialist assumption that economic inequality is the glue that makes social hierarchies so difficult to pry apart and destroy. Such activists might demand rights that alter property or employment relations. Activists who pursue equality through recognition, however, believe it is important to first identify nodes of social oppression and make them public. In this view, political, legal, and social discrimination is identified as the most salient barrier to equality. Recognition activists try to redefine what is meant by “the good citizen.” Such activists may demand rights that force the public to recognize and respect “groups” and difference—such as the right for gays to marry or the right of Sikhs to wear the *kirpan* (a ceremonial sword) in school. While these two models are not mutually exclusive, Fraser notes, they are often pursued separately. Ideally, she argues, identity politics would be pursued only if the group claim can be successfully mobilized for progressive redistribution (Fraser 1997, p. 12). This is not always the case, however.

French Muslims’ recognition claims are largely similar to what Fraser described. For example, some Muslims who are engaged in the politics of recognition want the right to wear the headscarf—a right that theoretically would alter what is perceived as an “acceptable public identity” in France. The neutrality model differs from the redistribution model Fraser discusses, however. The neutrality model adheres to difference-blind republicanism, and its adherents recognize certain kinds of difference (racial and national, never religious) only when they deem it absolutely necessary to discuss the nature of inequality. As such, they do not want to redistribute goods *to groups*, as to do so would be to reify the existence of a divided public. Instead, they seek the end of differential treatment based on race and ethnicity—again, not religion, which is seen as a private affiliation and never an identity, public or private. Their belief in republican meritocracy means that redistribution will happen naturally, without balkanizing identity politics, to those whose actions set them apart.<sup>5</sup> Meritocracy, they argue, breaks down when individuals are subsumed under a “group identity.” In this view, a politics of recognition is cannibalistic: it devours the individuality of those it hopes to serve and subjects them to the discrimination that comes with being branded an “other.” In short, supporters of neutrality in France (who include some French Muslims) believe a politics of recognition attacks the very equality it hopes to create.

The next section examines more closely these two different frames Muslims use to demand equality—neutrality and recognition—as they are pursued by French Muslims today. Associations examined range from elite organizations with direct access to politicians to organizations that are more removed from elites or that are even rebuked by politicians. Perhaps most important, this discussion of French Muslim activism includes organizations and individuals that identify as abstract French citizens, as well as organizations and individuals that identify as Muslim. Among all of the Muslims interviewed

here—whether they frame equality as a matter of political neutrality or the politics of recognition—there is considerable diversity in political goals and repertoires.

### *Activists Who Pursue Neutrality*

Muslims who pursue neutrality choose to belong to associations that eschew discussion of religion. For example, one respondent who has long been an activist with SOS Racisme explained that he believes in today's elite articulation of the republican model of citizenship and feels that the best way to achieve equality is to contain religion in the private sphere. There are Muslims in SOS Racisme and the NPNS, even though both organizations seek to minimize the social significance of difference—including religious difference.

Club XXIème Siècle (Twenty-First-Century Club) is an association of business leaders and politicians in France who want to see more diversity among France's elite. They focus on immigration and the "integration" of immigrants and their descendants into the republican model.<sup>6</sup> While some of its members are privately Muslim, Club XXIème Siècle rarely discusses religion. A leader of the club adamantly denied in an interview that "Muslim" could be an identity:

In France, there are no Muslims. There are immigrants and there are the children of immigrants . . . but they are not really Muslim. So when you say (*reaches over desk and gestures to the title on the interview protocol, which says, in French, "Interview with a Muslim Activist in a Diversity Organisation"* [see the Appendix]) . . . No, no . . . there obviously are Muslims. I am a Muslim. But there are not really associations—there are some Muslim associations; they exist, but their issue is Islam. And then there are the associations of the children of immigrants. . . . The thing is that while lots of people in these groups [the associations of the children of immigrants] might be of Muslim origin, or culturally Muslim, or maybe personally see themselves as really Muslim—those people, they will never talk to you about the issue of *Islam*. They will never define themselves as Muslim. They will define themselves as French. . . . Religion is a private affair.

This successful businessman saw identity as something unitary and distinctly public. Religion, in his view, cannot be an organizing principle for political action.

SOS Racisme, the NPNS, and Club XXIème Siècle only indirectly concern themselves with the fate of citizens who are Muslim. They remain focused on race, gender, and immigration, all amounting to a concept of "diversity" that focuses on ascriptive differences, not personal choices—such as the various choices one may make concerning religion. Difference, in this view, is an undesired label that one does not choose and a label that these organizations work

to eliminate. Their goal is equality, and their vision of equality includes a world in which talk about difference does not exist. It is not that these neutrality activists tolerate discrimination on the basis of religion; rather, they feel that the best remedy for it is to not allow religion to become a social category. Unlike the ascriptive attributes of race, gender, and origin, religion (they argue) can be kept in the private sphere, where it supposedly will not become an object of social discrimination. Even when it comes to race, gender, and origin, activists who pursue neutrality are somewhat reluctant to focus on these differences—they are wary about strengthening the categories they wish to eliminate but cognizant that discrimination on the basis of these unavoidably visible characteristics already exists.

### *Activists Who Pursue Recognition*

Associations of activists who pursue this strategy vary in their commitment to what could be described as a fight for recognition, but they are set apart from activists who pursue neutrality by their more open and regular discussions of religion in the public sphere. The group included in this study that most prioritized a Muslim identity and recognition politics was the PMF. Its activists not only saw religion as part of their identity (private and public); they wanted to engage in politics *as Muslims*. But what does that mean, when Muslims in France are so diverse? When asked if it is difficult to speak as “the Muslim Party of France,” the media liaison for the PMF responded:

Of course! Within the party, all of the questions that seem secondary to us—that will divide our troops and are not essential—we put to the side.

*Such as?*

Economic issues. It is an important question, but we have a hard time maintaining a clear line on it. . . . Some of our members prefer to promote the workers as opposed to the bosses. But we also have members who think that it is important to support the bosses, because they are the ones who contribute to growth. So we avoid these questions.

Given the diversity of its adherents’ political opinions, the PMF focuses on those few issues it feels its members would agree on: religious accommodations, fighting discrimination, and supporting Palestine. Even so, there are many Muslims in France who disapprove of state accommodations for religion. Other PMF views would likely divide French Muslims, as well, such as its opposition to abortion and support of “traditional marriage,” a condemnation of homosexuality.<sup>7</sup> The PMF wants what it describes as “Muslim political interests” to be represented in government, yet even the PMF recognizes its limitations as a voice for “all” Muslims of France.

Dynamique Diversité (Diversity Dynamic), meanwhile, represented the weakest politics of recognition among the groups interviewed. Now defunct, Dynamique Diversité was an organization that sought to help France diversify the workplace through open discussions about issues such as religion in the public sphere of work. Its head, a successful Muslim woman named Dounia Bouzar (one of the figures who participated in the National Assembly's burqa discussions), published the book *Allah, My Boss, and Me* (2008) about being Muslim in the workplace in France. One former representative of Dynamique Diversité, finding fault with a pure politics of neutrality, observed that religion was already being discussed in the public sphere of the workplace in the form of judgments passed on employees who were known to be Muslim. The former representative emphasized that the employer's role is not to discover whether his employee is oppressed but merely to evaluate whether she is an effective employee who works well with others.

Dynamique Diversité's "politics of recognition" was somewhat reactionary: the organization did not try to give value to religious difference. It merely tried to neutralize the tone of informal discussion about Muslims in the workplace. This is similar to groups such as SOS Racisme and Club XXIème Siècle, whose pursuit of equality emphasizes neutrality. Yet Dynamique Diversité was distinct from such neutrality activism because it aimed to achieve equality by openly discussing the experiences of Muslims in the workplace and increasing awareness of the unfairness of judging people by their religion.

*Respect Mag*, a magazine with several Muslims on its editorial board, seeks to show the less sensational side of minorities (including Muslims) through a public celebration of diversity: "Every three months, *Respect Magazine* puts a face on the diversity of French society" (Sun 2005, p. 47). Unlike Dynamique Diversité, *Respect Mag* does more than recognize difference. It seeks to put a positive value on difference—even religious difference.

Oumma.com is a comprehensive online news site that aims to establish an alternative to the Muslim identity created by French elites. It does this by diversifying its coverage of events (Muslims are discussed in a variety of contexts, never just as terrorists, criminals, or mosque attendees) and including viewpoints from Muslims and some of France's prominent non-Muslim figures. By presenting what it sees as a more complete picture of the French Muslim experience, Oumma.com also hopes to counterbalance what the contributors see as the mainstream media's stereotypes about Muslims.

Some Muslim activists pursuing a politics of recognition want to make Islam and Muslims seem "normal" in France—even "banal" (their words). Some of these activists are found in the Jeunes Musulmans de France (JMF [Young Muslims of France]) and the EMF. In fact, the EMF did not limit its services to Muslims, emphasizing its commitment to helping students generally, regardless of religion. This goal is subtly but importantly different from that of a group such as *Respect Mag*. While the activists from the JMF and the EMF want to make diversity seem so normal that it becomes unremarkable,

*Respect Mag* seeks to value diversity by highlighting difference. As one of the magazine's editors, who happened to be a Muslim, stated, "We wanted to talk about diversity, show faces that you do not see in the media."

The Union des Jeunes Musulmans (UJM [Union of Young Muslims]) declares its main goal to be spreading education about Islam. It provides language instruction in classical Arabic so one can read the Qur'an in its original language.<sup>8</sup> The UJM is related to the Centre Tawhid, a cultural center that hosts lectures and debates and maintains a full library on various aspects of Islam. Many slim volumes are explanatory—what ablutions are, why Muslims pray the way they do, and so forth—and, importantly, in French. The Centre Tawhid wants Islam to be recognized as a religion of France and seeks to value it by teaching the French about the religion.

Some French Muslim activists engage in a politics of recognition that focuses on religion as only one part of a larger dialogue of cultural exchange that they feel needs to happen in France. This is the case for the Association Culturelle Franco-Tunisienne d'Oullins et du Grand Lyon (ACFTOGL [Cultural Franco-Tunisian Association of Oullins and Greater Lyon]) and a similar Senegalese group in Lyon. These cultural groups seek to increase awareness about their culture (including but not limited to the religion of Islam), engage in cross-cultural dialogue with other groups in France, support local artistic endeavors, and promote greater connections across the community. The president of the ACFTOGL particularly wanted to give young adults opportunities to create things and, through them, find value in themselves—a theme that is not necessarily tied to religion. The Senegalese association was remarkably similar, emphasizing the importance of providing a space for people to practice and simply feel comfortable. A special reading and interpretation of the Qur'an held by the Senegalese cultural association was as much a party and friendly get-together as it was a reading.

The Muslim activists who engage in all manner of recognition politics seek to claim their religion as important to them, as something that should not be hidden, and as something that does not exist in isolation from their identity as French citizens. They frequently state that, unlike their parents or even their grandparents, they feel "no need to apologize for who they are." Interestingly, these Muslims often claim their Muslim identity in a complex way that cannot be described as a religious identity alone. Françoise Gaspard and Farhad Khosrokhavar's (1995) description of some Muslim women's choice to wear the hijab as a sign of their pluralistic cultural identity or as a way to make political commentary on French values and politics as one who does *not* refuse her French identity is an example of this kind of complex and subtle identity work.

Jeremy Hein (1993, p. 108) argues that America's model of civil rights, with its emphasis on group identity and identity politics, tends to breed "conflict and competition [rather] than coalitions and cooperation." But it is wrong to assume that the French model, with its focus on national membership, produces coalition building and cooperation across minorities. In France today, there

is tension between religious and ethnic groups. Even among French Muslims, there is bitter disagreement at times over the effectiveness of difference-blind republican equality. Those French Muslims engaged in neutrality politics, often from the *beur* generation that came into adulthood in the 1980s, critique these younger generations (and their older allies) engaged in various shades of recognition politics for their “failure” to integrate into French values or for simply being “duped” into thinking that religion can be an identity or make a political statement. Those French Muslims engaged in recognition politics point to the persistent elite discourse of failed Muslim citizenship and personal experiences with discrimination and social hostility as evidence that the neutrality model has significant limitations. Some French Muslims engaged in recognition politics even feel “sold out” by Muslims who, as they see it, have become prominent in politics by demonizing their fellow Muslims. France’s model of civil rights is not immune to the difficulties of forming coalitions across a diverse population with different political opinions and goals.

## Different Repertoires Used by Muslim Activists

French Muslim activists generally draw on six repertoires for political and social change: altering the French Muslim “public identity,” waiting it out, pursuing liberal entrepreneurialism,<sup>9</sup> using mediation, petitioning the state, and going to court. Some of these activities best suit a politics of neutrality, such as relying on the supposedly meritocratic aspects of liberal entrepreneurialism to reward those who do better work, regardless of their background. And some of the activities best suit a politics of recognition, such as the effort to forge a new public identity for Muslims by openly speaking about the Muslim experience of France.

### *Altering the Muslim “Public Identity”*

The editor-in-chief of Oumma.com explained why he and others chose to develop a news website *as Muslims*: “There is a *médiatisé* curiosity toward immigrants and the descendants of immigrants. We wanted to create a media source to be a media *actor*. That means we were not masters of our own image, so we have entered into the sphere of media to be masters of own image [and simultaneously] avoid prejudice and stereotypes, to break them, by taking control of our media image. That is what fundamentally motivated us.”

The images of blacks, Arabs, and Muslims I discuss in the following paragraphs—simple everyday images that I happened to photograph while living in France or have since seen in the news—help one to understand why Oumma.com’s editor-in-chief wants to see Muslims “taking control of [their] media image.” They are not all photos from news media; some are advertisements for products. It becomes clear when considering them why, as a minority, being in control of one’s image can be an important goal.





FIGURE 3.2 Early twentieth-century images of blacks in French advertising, juxtaposed with a famous late nineteenth-century image of a white child also in a French advertisement. (Photographs by the author.)

The photos in Figure 3.2 were taken of the same store window in Bordeaux. The window was filled with old tins advertising cookies and sweets. On the left are yellow tins and bowls bearing an old version of the logo of Banania, a chocolate drink powder that is still sold in France. It bears the figure of “the smiling black lackey” wearing a fez that connotes North Africa (Pilgrim 2000; Riggio 1976). He is saying, “*Y’a bon*” (which translates loosely as “It’s good”), a very poor articulation of the French language. Americans may see a connection here to the patronizing treatment of African Americans in the United States presented by Mrs. Butterworth or the happy, servile Toms of minstrel shows. To the right is a very different image: a white schoolboy eating a tan cookie made by the L.U. Company. In contrast to the broad, toothy grin of the Banania logo, the boy’s grin is wry and knowing. These very different images, both used to advertise food, hint at France’s historical experience with colonial mentality and its lingering presence in French imagery of blacks. While “*Y’a bon*” (presumably a quote, as it had always been set in different type from the rest of the logo) has been replaced with the superimposed grammatically correct phrase, “The good [or tasty], balanced breakfast,” the image on Banania’s packaging today has even more comically pronounced dark red lips.<sup>10</sup>

I was greeted by a similarly stereotypical image of Arabs when I opened my mailbox in Bordeaux one day. In it was a glossy advertisement for Domino’s Pizza that featured a crowd of happy young people being told by an absent narrator, “Listen to your stomach.” This sentence was completed with a quote



bubble from a scantily clad woman who appeared to be dressed and posed as a belly dancer, alongside a palm tree: “and let yourself be seduced by the undulations of my merguez.” (Merguez is a spicy, reddish sausage found in North African cuisine.) Aside from the quotation’s oblique reference to the dancer’s wriggling body, the imagery of the stereotypical Arab belly dancer who claims to want to seduce the happy, young pizza lovers is undoubtedly not how all French women of Arab origin want to be perceived. French men with Arab heritage also probably would not appreciate a second Domino’s advertisement I found on the company’s website for France, which depicted an Arab man wearing a kaffiyeh and talking on a cell phone in a spacious car upholstered in leather, holding a slice of the “Oriental” pizza. Perhaps Domino’s was trying to tap into stereotypes of Arab oil moguls, which could explain why the image’s digital file was titled “orientale\_prince.jpg.”

What about Muslim women? How are they depicted in the media? Searching through one month’s worth of articles in *Le Monde* for the phrase “Muslim women” yielded three images.<sup>11</sup> Two of the images were of the self-described feminist and leftist Ilham Moussaïd, a political candidate for the French New Anticapitalist Party (a leftist French political party founded only recently) in 2010. Her candidacy caused quite a stir, as she wears the hijab. The third image was of a Canadian permanent resident who was born in Egypt who was wearing a *niqab*; she had been ejected from a French class in Quebec when her request that men not look at her during the class proved strategically challenging, especially in the case of oral presentations. Not all Muslim women wear the hijab, and only a very small minority of Muslim women in France wear the *niqab*. However, we are not presented with images of Muslim women that reflect this diversity.

Oumma.com’s primary strategy for addressing inequality in France is to provide alternatives to these common depictions of the Muslim “public identity.” Front-page stories on the site on July 25, 2011, included “Turkey: Toward Regional Leadership Based on a Modernized Islam,” “How to Prepare for the Month of Ramadan,” and “La Fontaine and His Oriental Sources.”<sup>12</sup> Religion is clearly present in these stories, but it is not everything. These news stories associate Muslims with international relations and French literary culture.

Similarly, the ACFTOGL’s community gatherings often have the express purpose of teaching about Islam and Tunisia to substitute new images and ideas for common stereotypes. The JMF’s community sports events, held in public spaces, aim to do more than entertain neighborhood kids: they show young Muslims playing, having fun, and acting not much differently from their non-Muslim neighbors.

### *Wait It Out*

Surprisingly, a number of those activists who are most critical of the exclusions produced by today’s norm of the deserving French citizen claim that the most

important thing for Muslims to do is to “wait it out,” as opposed to engaging in rights mobilization that might cause social strife. Since these activists describe their French identity as being so central to them, and since their complaints about social and political marginalization are deeply embedded in rights discourse, it seems reasonable to expect that they would demand more protections from the state and would claim rights in court. Yet while they insist that the state needs to do more, these activists have largely given up on the state as a tool for social and political change; it is, in fact, perceived as the very agent of their marginalization. And rights claims in court, in their view, would create more conflict than change. After all, what rights would Muslims claim? Not all Muslims agree on the hijab, as one activist sagely pointed out. And what right can be mobilized to stop the UMP from convening special discussions interrogating the compatibility of Islam with French values? Or to encourage the media to depict Muslim women in all their diversity? As many Muslim activists see it, rights claims might divide Muslims in France and further estrange Muslims from the rest of French society.

According to the activists who look to the passage of time for social and political change, Muslims are French, and the rest of the French eventually will realize this as they increasingly see how “normal” French Muslims are. In this view, greater exposure to Muslims as more Muslims become established in the public eye will be the best evidence of how truly French they can be.

This argument is interesting because it depicts rights claims as inherently alienating. While these Muslim activists proudly claim their rights in conversation and point to their rights as symbols of their existing membership in France, to claim these rights in a court of law would be to draw attention to themselves as outsiders or troublemakers. The hollowness of rights in this view is somewhat similar to what David Engel (1984) observed in Sander County, Illinois, where a particular variety of American self-reliance gave rise to the sense that a real citizen should never have to ask for his rights to be respected. However, that hollowness is exacerbated in the French context, where activists not only assume they have rights as French citizens but regularly *demand* that those rights be respected as a sign of their membership—but rhetorically instead of making formal rights claims before institutional forums (such as the legislature or the courts) that could potentially give those rights a concrete meaning. This apparent paradox makes more sense when one considers that these activists have lost faith in those institutions to challenge the dominant discourse of failed Muslim citizenship. French Muslim activists who prefer to wait it out are thus left with a rights discourse but no institutional outlet that can translate discourse into action.

### *Liberal Entrepreneurialism*

Quite a few respondents expressed belief in the power of liberal entrepreneurialism to usher in social and economic equality. A representative of the PMF

praised economic liberalism, saying that it puts all people on a level playing field in the competition for jobs and material success: “It is difficult to start a business in France because of the system of loans. . . . We block entry for young creators. That is not liberal. We need to put in place systems that make it easier for young people who are not from families that are entrepreneurs, and so on, to enter into the business world. The business world, it is like a caste. You rarely get there by accident.” While this respondent believes that time will improve the employment experiences of Muslims in France, he also maintains that the liberal market can be advantageous to all French people who do not come from economically powerful families—who often include, but are not limited to, Muslims.

Dynamique Diversité and Club XXIème Siècle also defend liberal entrepreneurialism as a tool for reducing employment inequalities, for Muslims and for people with diverse backgrounds in general. The reasons for their faith in business, however, differ. Dynamique Diversité believed that, with some convincing, businesses could become more open to diversity when hiring. Dynamique Diversité’s Potential and Competence project aimed to do just that: persuade employers that the norms of hiring in France are unnecessarily limiting. As the representative noted, French businesses tend to recruit from only the top business schools, which have very little diversity. The result is a consistently homogeneous workforce composed of those who are already privileged in society. The goal of the Potential and Competence project, the representative said, was “to break this pattern a bit at the level of businesses and to construct a tool with the recruiters—human resources—to look at the potential of people and not their diploma. So aside from a diploma, what could interest a recruiter in you? Are there not things to testify to your creativity?” He described this as an “Anglo-Saxon” style of recruitment, saying, “You, the Americans, [do this] to give people a chance.”

When pressed about why he felt businesses would more readily adopt policies to promote diversity—was it really just because they cannot do worse than politicians?—the representative pointed to the logic of the liberal market. “The businesses want to do it,” he said, “and they have an interest in doing it . . . [b]ecause it is not part of their business to engage in charity. They have assumed the responsibility. The businesses, they will tell you, yes, we need to think about tomorrow.” Stated differently, diverse faces are an inevitable part of the future of France, and businesses cannot afford to ignore this. They must be concerned with correctly identifying and serving their changing clientele, or they will fail. Dynamique Diversité operated under the assumption that businesses in the liberal market would change with their surroundings, or they would wither and die. Businesses cannot afford prejudice. Whether this is actually true is a different question entirely. (Many critics of economic and political liberalism would have quite a bit to say on the subject.) What matters here is that this diversity-oriented activist group, with a number of self-identified Muslim members, looked to business and the market to solve problems of inequality.

Dynamique Diversité had less faith in politicians. When asked why the group distanced itself from politics, the representative replied:

The Socialist Party still has not done anything. [President] Chirac (*grunts in disgust*). In reality, it is not at the level of politics that things change. Where people see it, it is at the level of their job, so there you need to go to the people responsible for that—the businesses, the people who can change the everyday life of people who experience discrimination. We do not believe much in the state. There is a lot of blah blah discourse, but in 2008, we are very, very, very far behind other states.

This general dissatisfaction with the response of politicians to discrimination in employment drove members of Dynamique Diversité to seek to change the situation themselves in a way they felt was more direct: go to the employers. The representative's frustration that the Socialist Party in particular has not done anything is telling: many Muslims, children of immigrants, and citizens of color initially looked to leftist parties for assistance and support, especially during the height of the *beur* movement of the 1980s. But more than twenty years later, many Muslims seem to have lost patience with the French left. They have not all moved to the center-right, but there is marked frustration with the left for failing to act. Worse, the tendency of some on the political left to associate Islam with misogyny has alienated many Muslims.

The leader of Club XXIème Siècle who was interviewed for this study, like many of the club's members, represents a business success story. Club XXIème Siècle is made up of prominent French businesspeople from diverse backgrounds who want to help others with diverse backgrounds become successful in business. When asked what the organization's objective is, Club XXIème Siècle's leader responded:

To change the mentality, the misrepresentations. When one considers that the child of immigrants is on state assistance, maybe an Islamist, a terrorist . . .

*Does that happen often?*

Yeah, it does. So ultimately, we have a problem. And we are the solution.

Again we see a respondent's awareness of the connection that people make between immigrants and Muslims and between Muslims and terrorists. If the problem is "misrepresentations," what is the solution? Better representations. "We have decided that we will prove it by example," the respondent said. "We assembled people who can bear testimony, who have succeeded, who bring something to the country. I co-founded [Club XXIème Siècle] with Rachida Dati. Rama Yade was the vice-president. We want to change perceptions by example."

Club XXIème Siècle does more than try to alter representations, however. Enterprising and well-connected, the club holds regular dinner debates at which

the lack of diversity among the nation's elites is discussed openly—and with the nation's current elites. The club also organizes a program called “Management and Diversity” in association with Dauphine University, Paris (France's elite business school). The program aims to find new ways to assess competencies, with the hope that this will encourage employers to hire outside the typical, rather homogeneous elite schools. Like *Dynamique Diversité*, the “Management and Diversity” program sees value in and hopes to promote what it identifies as Anglo-Saxon hiring practices that allow for a more expansive evaluation of competencies. In addition, the club's “Interviews of Excellence” program gathers successful businesspeople, researchers, and lawyers from diverse backgrounds and asks them to share their success stories with students. Its organizers hope this will help students make business connections and gain confidence. At base, Club XXIème Siècle is trying to change the face of success in France.

Club XXIème Siècle has had mixed results in working with politicians. While top officials, including former President Nicolas Sarkozy, have attended the dinner debates, the club's attempt to proliferate a diversity charter failed. As a representative explained, the club “proposed it to the left and to the right in 2006. They said it was great; both [sides] said they would sign it if the other did. Neither did; it got stalled. They still have not signed it. We have a black here, an Arab there, but no organized politics of diversity.” By “a black here, an Arab there,” the respondent meant the small number of racially diverse political representatives in France today. Again, we see this common dissatisfaction with politicians (on the right and the left) for their weak commitment to diversity.

Aziz Senni is another successful businessman in France with a diverse background. A Muslim immigrant (from Morocco), Senni succeeded despite “geographic, social, and ethnic discrimination” (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 15). His autobiography is humorously entitled *The Social Elevator Is Broken, I Took the Stairs*.<sup>13</sup> Senni started a hired car service that has become massively successful, and he now preaches entrepreneurial success to youths growing up in the *banlieues*, as he did (Bâ 2008, pp. 10–11). He also began Business Angels des Cités (BAC), an investment group that funds young entrepreneurs who otherwise would never find the money to get their business projects off the ground (Bâ 2008, p. 11). The group also appoints to young businesses a “guardian angel,” an experienced businessperson in the same line of work who acts as a mentor and shares invaluable business contacts (Bâ 2008, p. 11).

Senni's form of social engagement is primarily business-oriented and religiously neutral. Yet he describes BAC's refusal to charge interest on its loans as “Islamic-compatible” and says that his Muslim culture includes the values of “work and respect, respect for oneself and for others” (Bâ 2008, p. 11).

### *Mediation*

Not all Muslims are as convinced that businesses are the answer to employment inequality. Some individuals and groups seek the assistance of mediators, the

court, or even the state. The Collectif contre l’Islamophobie en France (CCIF [Collective against Islamophobia in France]) offers legal counsel to those who have experienced discrimination; it has also used mediation to fight workplace discrimination. In France, Greta (*groupements d’établissements*) provide professional, public education for adults. The CCIF realized that some Greta schools had been applying the law on secularism of 2004 in their classrooms, forbidding adult students to wear the hijab. This was an overextension of the law, which was intended only for mandatory primary and secondary education. The CCIF did not take the Greta schools to court, however. “We were successful in getting places to stop doing this with our discussions and interventions, but three refused,” said a CCIF representative. “So we seized the HALDE [High Authority against Discrimination and for Equality], which pronounced on September 1 [2008] the other way. It said, effectively, that this was discriminatory.”<sup>14</sup> In this instance, even when mediation failed, the CCIF went to the HALDE instead of to a court—it sought out the assistance of another mediator.

Dynamique Diversité also used such mediation methods on occasion. The cosmetics company L’Oréal had hired a woman who wore the hijab, and this was causing anxiety in the workplace. The company accepted an offer by Dynamique Diversité to come to its offices, observe, and provide feedback. As a former member of the organization said, “Lots of employees said, ‘But that’s dangerous. You can’t let in a veiled woman. It’s radical Islam in our business!’—because veiled women are submissive and all that . . . but the veiled woman in question we worked with had nothing to do with the clichés.” The representative from Dynamique Diversité went on to explain that the woman had lived in France for twelve years, had been a brilliant student at a very good French business school, and was very open to other ideas and cultures—even “a bit into grunge.” Dynamique Diversité’s solution to this workplace anxiety was to gather together the managers and discuss with them what qualities are important to have in employees and what qualities are irrelevant. “It is not important to verify that she is submissive, or why she wears this. What is important to verify is whether or not she works well with others,” the respondent said. “How does she live her religion—does it create a barrier? Or is it just for her and it does not prevent anything?” Similar to the CCIF mediation discussed above, the Dynamique Diversité intervention was designed to “correct” a business climate gone awry. This was done through discussion and training. Ultimately, the association tried to impart two messages to L’Oréal: first, that one should not assume one knows what a Muslim thinks or assume what a Muslim believes her hijab represents; and second, that the company’s main concern with regard to its employees should be whether they are capable of doing their work successfully.

Another interview respondent, a student and a Muslim, said he once went to the Conseil de Prudhommes to resolve a private workplace dispute. This is a mediation mechanism specifically for workplace disputes. He chose that route, he said, because it is “better than a court, which is too time-consuming and expensive.”

### *The State*

The French—Muslim or not—are well known for their passion for the law (Bowen 2007). Thus, even while the Muslims interviewed here railed against the government for failing to listen to them and for making assumptions about them, they often expressed hopes that the government would pass laws to “fix things.” Repeal the law of 2004 banning the hijab; write strong antidiscrimination laws; legalize affirmative action policies or racial, ethnic, and religious statistics—all of these suggestions reveal a continued faith in the state to bring about greater equality and freedom in France through legislation. This mirrors a paradox that can be found throughout France, regardless of religion: while the French may sometimes be frustrated by the centralized nature of their country’s politics, they continue to expect the state to accomplish the kinds of feats only strong, centralized states can.

While many Muslims insisted that it is the state that needs to do more to defend equality in France (especially for Muslims, blacks, and Arabs), they were also skeptical about whether the state can deliver on this obligation. This becomes most obvious when discussing employment and poverty. Speaking on the subject of employment, journalists with *Respect Mag* argued that the state “should play its role of readjusting inequalities,” pointing out how “in certain zones, you see an unemployment rate that is much worse than in the rest of the country.” The editor-in-chief at Oumma.com similarly stated that “the state needs to fight against discrimination in employment.” At the same time, however, he felt that the state’s role was limited to judicial intervention and education: the state itself “cannot hire everybody.”

Two members of the EMF disagreed vehemently on the extent to which the state can successfully manage the economy, yet they still both look to the state for assistance when it comes to employment and economic equality.

### *Court*

Following the AIDS blood transfusion scandal of the 1990s in which government officials were found guilty of knowingly allowing the distribution of infected blood, French courts increasingly have been seen as a venue for rights claims and possibly even for challenging the status quo (Provine 1996). Legal mobilization is still new to France, however, and only a minority of French people see it as a solution to their problems.<sup>15</sup> Mirroring this, most respondents had little faith in the courts’ ability to resolve their disputes. The most frequent complaints were that courts are too slow, too costly, and too petty. A minority of respondents, however, did have hope in courts as a tool for social change. The CCIF kept one lawyer on its payroll (a woman who wears the hijab) who worked full time as the organization’s legal expert, evaluating and prepping cases that will go to court (see Figure 3.3). When asked which case they were proudest of, members of the CCIF cited the “Mohammed case.” After the bombings of 2005





FIGURE 3.3 Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France (CCIF) consciousness-raising poster. Among the materials that Étudiants Musulmans de France (EMF) had on hand was this poster encouraging "victims [and] witnesses of Islamophobic words or actions" to call or e-mail CCIF. Pictured are a desecrated wall and tombstones and two women in hijabs facing a closed door. (Courtesy of CCIF. Photograph by the author.)

in London, journalists went to Pakistan to find out more about terrorists training there. A French journalist found a young French man of Pakistani origin who was vacationing there and attending a madrassa to learn about the Qur'an. The journalist interviewed the man and took a photo, which then appeared in the prominent French newsmagazine *Le Point* alongside the title "The Islamists and us." The juxtaposition suggested that the man personally was an Islamist. "Afterward, when [the young man] left Pakistan and came back to France, he saw his face everywhere," the CCIF lawyer said. The organization's representatives believed the photo and caption amounted to an attack on the man's character, claiming that "if he was looking for work, he would be refused." They won the case, as well as damages and legal fees.

But the CCIF remains an outlier in its determination to use courts to challenge discrimination against Muslims.



## The Shortcomings of Liberal Rights for the Cause of Inclusion

Scholars have long questioned the usefulness of rights and courts for the cause of social change (Rosenberg 1991; Tushnet 1984). The typical, overarching criticism is that both rights and courts are hopelessly implicated in existing systems of power and inequality and therefore are inescapably supportive of the status quo. Scholars such as Stuart Scheingold (2004), Michael McCann (1994), and Patricia Williams (1991) acknowledge this limitation but maintain that rights sometimes prove influential as a discourse that shapes social consciousness, sets agendas, and puts faces and names to previously unspoken miseries. In their view, even courts sometimes can be commandeered by activists for social change, but this is unpredictable and depends on many different contextual variables (Lovell and McCann 2005). For these law and society scholars, there is no “forward march” for social change; there are only waxing and waning periods of contestation fought out on a shifting terrain that is continually altered by politics, economics, discourse, and idiosyncratic events that capture the public’s attention and crystallize debates in ways that can be favorable or unfavorable to a cause.

### *The Shortcomings of Rights in General*

Rights support the status quo in many ways, but one way in particular stands out when considering the case of Muslims in France: rights preserve social biases as supposedly private and apolitical, thereby enabling the social indignities that have the power to amount to an attack on a population’s standing as citizens. Rights, the tools we often associate with equality, may sometimes help to entrench and protect inequality. In Chapter 1, I drew connections between the situation of Jews in Europe during the mid-1800s and Muslims in France today. Marx complained that giving Jews liberal rights would not remedy what he saw as the causes of their daily miseries: capitalism and religion (Tucker 1978).<sup>16</sup> Similarly, I argue that rights cannot answer the primary challenges to Muslims’ standing as citizens: *elite discourse and social indignities*.

If the French state wrote laws that clearly attacked the rights of all Muslims, in the way that American states wrote laws precluding African Americans from voting after the Civil War, French Muslims could respond legally with a civil rights complaint. Even if a private individual violated the rights of Muslims by printing rental advertisements that read “Muslims Need Not Apply,” French Muslims could respond legally with a rights complaint. But when a politician questions how safe it is to employ Muslims in airports, or when a private citizen “accidentally” shoves a woman wearing the hijab in a grocery store aisle, it makes little sense to respond with a rights claim. Why?

As for the politician’s comment, it is merely an opinion, protected by freedom of speech. Of course, the comment functions as more than an opinion: it is an opinion stated by a person in power, with a large audience, in a climate of suspicion regarding Muslims. The comment is perfectly legal and has the power

to fan the flames of social mistrust. France does have laws that prohibit racist, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic hate speech. But the Gayssot Law of 1990 and the Pleven Law of 1972,<sup>17</sup> which target discriminatory or hate speech, are infrequently mobilized against politicians for statements that discriminate against Muslims. Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia (2009, p. 278) notes that the Gayssot Law “concerned only 29 cases,” involving any kind of discriminatory speech, between 1992 and 2000. And as for the “accidental” shove, several Muslim respondents explained that a rights-based response to such incidents would be expensive, time-consuming, and probably fruitless due to the difficult nature of proving discrimination in such an incident.

It is not just that rights are awkward tools for addressing social indignities. It is the *very nature* of liberal rights to protect the development and expression of such social indignities. Marx reminds us that there are two kinds of liberal rights: “civil rights,” which connect citizens within the state through mechanisms such as equality and the vote, and “the rights of man,” which *atomize* residents in civil society (Tucker 1978, p. 41). The rights of man, Marx argues, are fundamentally about property. All four expressions of the rights of man—the right to liberty, to equality, to security, and to property—relate back to the right to own property and be equally capable of defending it from others: “Liberty as a right of man is not founded upon the relations between man and man, but rather upon the separation of man from man. It is the right of such separation. The right of the *circumscribed* individual, withdrawn into himself” (Tucker 1978, pp. 42–43). The separation of political rights from the rights of man *protects* the inequalities that stem from money and social privilege by depicting inequality in the social sphere as apolitical and the product of individual choices made in an unfettered environment of personal liberty. With this separation of spheres, systems of social domination go unnoticed, and the inequality they produce can easily be attributed to the actions (or supposed inaction) of those who are marked as unequal. After all, they have the same political rights as everyone else. If they failed to “make it,” surely that is due to their own mistakes.

As I stated in Chapter 2, Muslims in France today do not face many official, codified legal challenges to their citizenship. Instead, the most frequent attacks on their citizenship come in the form of discursive attacks from French elites and social indignities suffered at the hands of strangers. The challenge for Muslims is not just that a right does not exist to fight this pervasive climate of prejudice and discrimination. The real challenge is the supposedly “social,” “private,” or “apolitical” nature of these subtle attacks on the standing of Muslims as citizens.

### *The Shortcomings of Rights in France Specifically*

Rights are fraught tools for social change. The traditional depiction of rights as the key to equality in the United States is largely hypocritical: rights are made meaningless when politicians, citizens, and even courts refuse to recognize

them. Derrick Bell (1980), for example, argues that the U.S. Civil Rights Movement was effective in achieving greater equality for African Americans only because powerful, dominant interests found it convenient—what Bell refers to as “interest convergence.” There is a different hollowness to rights as the key to equality in France, however. They are perhaps even more meaningless in struggles for equality in France because they are not effective tools of oppositional politics. American activists must wait for their interests in equality to converge with the interests of those in power. French activists, meanwhile, make political claims for equality *based on rights they believe they already have as citizens*, as opposed to making oppositional assertions that rights in France protect only the privileged few. More broadly, key institutional and cultural differences in the French understanding of law, rights, liberty, and legitimacy dilute the already questionable potential of rights discourse to spark social change in France.

Aude Lejeune (2011, p. 226) suggests that those doing comparative legal studies should pay particularly close attention to three characteristics in a nation: (1) its legal tradition (or what she calls “judicial culture,” the difference between civil and common law systems); (2) political order (where does political legitimacy come from); and (3) state type (strong states versus weak states). When we consider these three characteristics, which are a mixture of institution and culture, in the French context, it becomes apparent that it is the state that largely develops rights in France and the state that controls their articulation by sanctioning and co-opting select social movement groups. Without the state’s explicit blessing on a rights claim in France, it is depicted by French elites as unintelligible, provoking, and even dangerous.

The three points of comparison Lejeune highlights are certainly not the only differences between the United States and France, but they offer a strong starting point for understanding why rights are a particularly challenged tool for the cause of inclusion in France. First, while differences in the common law and civil law traditions are often exaggerated, their foundational assumptions still influence how people think about the role of the state, citizens, and the law. Speaking in broad terms, courts are more independent in common law legal systems. In Norman England, common law tended over time to diffuse power away from the central legal authority, the king (Shapiro 1981). In both the English and the American version of common law, legal experts have been instrumental in securing the autonomy of their profession through internally regulated systems of entry, examination, and promotion (Shapiro 1981). Civil law has always been more centralized, but in Revolutionary France, the legal system was also dealt an ideological blow. It had long colluded with the king, so with the destruction of the monarchy came the debasement of the legal system (Merryman 1969). The post-Revolution legal system was made subservient to the state. Legitimacy and authority came from the people, whose voice was the law made by elected officials. Therefore, legal professionals were charged with the duty of articulating and defending the law, *not* challenging or altering it through judicial review (Merryman 1969).

These lines of differentiation are blurring, especially in the post-World War II era, in which France is subject to the judicial review of the Council of Europe's European Court of Human Rights and the European Union's European Court of Justice. However, different assumptions remain about the role of law in the defense of liberty in the United States and in France. As Lejeune (2011, p. 226) puts it, "In *common law* countries, [legal] professionals have a mission to protect individuals in the face of the arbitrariness of absolute authority, while in *civil law* countries, the protection of these rights and individual liberties is guaranteed by the state." This difference in "mission" may have an effect on the number of legal professionals willing to use the law for social transformation and the readiness of citizens to try to use the law for such a project.

Second, political legitimacy in both the United States and France comes from the law, but the agents of its articulation differ. Lejeune (2011, p. 227) argues that this is a difference between common law and civil law, but it has more to do with Lockean versus Rousseauian notions of state legitimacy—or, at the very least, the difference between liberal and republican states. She explains that in the United States, law "precedes all political organization and the law belongs to the people. Political power is therefore required to respect individual rights." This is a hallmark of Lockean social contract theory: citizens agree to sacrifice the liberty they had in the state of nature for the greater security of political society, provided that law will protect them from the caprices of the state and that they do not lose more liberty than they had before taking this gamble (Locke 1980). We can expect such an understanding of law's legitimacy to create openings for citizens to use the law to question and challenge the state.

In a republic such as France, law is not pre-political. Rousseau tells us that the act of coming together to make law is the first political act that draws us out of the state of nature and into political life. In the Rousseauian tradition, creating laws is seen as the liberating establishment of a chosen world, as opposed to the accident-filled, might-makes-right state of nature (Rousseau 1987). Law is the result of political decisions made in the name of the "general will" and expressing the maximization of the public good (Rousseau 1987, p. 31). As Lejeune (2011, p. 12) points out, in France "all contestation of the law is therefore difficult because it implies a challenge to the general will." If the law is seen as a guarantor of liberty, as opposed to a tool used to protect against the state's theft of liberty, it is less likely to be seen as a tool of political and social change. Such change should be pursued in the political arena, where the general will can be found.

Third, there may be some greatly mitigated but lingering truth to Alexis de Tocqueville's (1958) description of America as a weak state with a strong society, as opposed to France as a strong state with a weak society. Arguments about France's "weak society" are largely exaggerated in regard to the Fifth Republic (Appleton 2009; Woll 2009). It is true that unions have lost some influence in France, but new interest groups—particularly women's equality,

environmental, and antiracism groups—have sprouted up and done very well in the past thirty years, garnering large membership rosters and getting citizens involved (Keeler and Hall 2001; Woll 2009). These interest groups still must contend with the French government’s desire to maintain some control over external influences. As John Keeler and Peter Hall (2001, p. 61) describe it, “The interest group universe of France is broadly ‘pluralist,’ but the French Government attempts to structure this universe more actively than its Anglo-American counterparts, using subsidies and official recognition to influence the balance of power among groups.” Cornelia Woll (2009, p. 227) offers a slightly different explanation of how the French government maintains some control over interest groups, stating that “interest group consultation only supplements bureaucratic decision-making and the central government has considerable room for manoeuvre to escape pressures put on specific policy proposals.”

Both Keeler and Hall and Woll present the French government as serving a sort of gatekeeping function vis-à-vis interest groups. Alistair Cole (2008, p. 29) provides a more cultural explanation: “Perceptions of a powerful state might matter more than any objective loss of state capacity.” While the access of citizens in France to, and potential influence over, government has greatly increased in the Fifth Republic, it matters that the French typically still look to the state as the rightful and most capable institution for solving social problems.

The following brief overview of antidiscrimination rights campaigns in France displays how non-state actors struggle to influence French government and administration. Even when activists tried to take on starring roles in moments of social change regarding discrimination, the French government upstaged them, ultimately co-opting the efforts and arguments of activists in a way that strengthened the state’s control over this issue area.

France’s earliest antidiscrimination law, the *Décret Marchandeaup*, did not invite much involvement from civil society. It “allowed individuals to press charges only if they had been named personally in a racist invective and by permitting only the state prosecutor to initiate legal proceedings in cases where a whole group was implicated” (Bird 2000, p. 408). Then, in the 1970s, members of Parliament began to propose stronger laws to target racism (Bleich 2003, p. 132). The minister of justice at the time, René Pleven, was initially unconvinced that a new law was required to fight racism, which he saw as atypical in France (Bleich 2003, p. 132). Nevertheless, in 1972, the French Parliament passed the Pleven Law outlawing racist speech and racial discrimination. Unlike the *Décret Marchandeaup*, the Pleven Law “extended the possibility of prosecution by granting civil rights associations the authority to launch criminal as well as civil proceedings against racist speech” (Bird 2000, p. 409).

One could argue that the Pleven Law moderately decentralized French antidiscrimination policy by inviting this participation by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). French NGOs certainly have made use of the law: France’s foremost antidiscrimination NGOs, the *Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l’Amitié entre les Peuples* (MRAP [Movement against Racism and for Friendship

among Peoples]), the Ligue Internationale contre le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme (LICRA [International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism]), and SOS Racisme, “devoted extensive effort to prosecuting racist speakers, including a number of very high profile cases against Jean-Marie Le Pen and other principals of the National Front” (Bird 2000, p. 409).<sup>18</sup> These NGOs have used the law to challenge discrimination, and they worked to shape the law when it was initially promulgated. Bird even describes the litigation efforts of these NGOs as creating “an arena for increasingly adversarial, group-based claims concerning democratic rights” (Bird 2000, p. 409).

Vincent-Arnaud Chappe (2011) also argues that French antidiscrimination law has not been the product of state action alone and that interaction between French NGOs and the French judicial system helped shape French antidiscrimination law. One specific example he provides is the acceptance by the French Parliament of “testing” as permissible legal evidence of discrimination. SOS Racisme used this method frequently: it would “induce an *in vivo* situation of discrimination thanks to a pair of volunteers” (Chappe 2011, para. 11). When the two volunteers, identical in every way except race or gender, received different treatment—at a club, in a hiring situation, and so on—SOS Racisme would argue that discrimination was at play. The acceptance of testing as a form of admissible evidence suggests that French NGOs have shaped the nation’s anti-discrimination law.

There are limits to how open French law is to social movements’ agitation, however. The French state is very effective at co-opting the activity of NGOs and redirecting complaints about discrimination out of the courts and into other forums. The French Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT [General Confederation of Labor]) recently attempted to achieve the legalization of undocumented workers by helping the workers apply pressure directly to their employers through strikes and sit-ins (Barron et al. 2011a, 2011b). Employers in France are not legally allowed to hire undocumented workers, yet they can choose to sponsor the residency request of employees they hire (Barron et al. 2001a, para. 3). This gatekeeping function of employers made them ideal targets for the CGT (Barron et al. 2011a, para. 2). Pierre Barron and his colleagues (2011b) describe at length how the CGT supported the undocumented workers in their strikes and sit-ins, and eventually (though not without reservations) worked with employers who wanted help to stay on the right side of the law. Furthermore, members of the CGT worked alongside, and even within, the prefectures that give immigrant workers their legal residency papers (Barron et al. 2011b, pp. 76–77).

The CGT’s ultimate goal was the creation of a new law that would regularize the residency process for immigrant workers and thereby eliminate what they saw as unfair “discretionary” practices at the level of the prefecture (Barron et al. 2011b, p. 75). Yet the CGT’s involvement with the cases of undocumented workers had the opposite effect. The CGT became recognized by the state as the sponsor of deserving immigrant workers, in the sense that

the union began “identifying and authenticating eligible claimants, while rejecting others” (Barron et al. 2011a, para. 6). Not only was the discretionary framework left intact, but the labor union was co-opted into it. Immigrants applying for residency with the help of the CGT did not have to wait in lines at the prefecture, and the CGT’s staff members sped along the legalization processes by speaking to the right mid-level bureaucrats (Barron et al. 2011a, para. 27). As Barron and his colleagues (2011b, p. 78) put it, the CGT “was suddenly located in the heart of the process of legalization.” The CGT thus became part of the system it had tried to end. As one CGT worker complained, “We’re not union activists anymore. We’ve become auxiliaries to the prefecture” (Barron et al. 2011a, para. 29).

Barron and his colleagues (2011a, para. 36) suggest that the CGT’s experience with legalizing undocumented workers may be part of a larger phenomenon known as “favor mediation,” a kind of activism that differs from “rights mediation.” In rights mediation, the goal is to create a general right; in favor mediation, individual cases are helped along with carefully applied knowledge of a bureaucracy and its officials. Barron and his colleagues (2011a, para. 36–37) point to limitations in both kinds of mediation: if a right is not widely acknowledged, rights mediation may be meaningless, and since favor mediation focuses on individual cases and discretion, it is not clear how or when it can create generalized rights protections.

In the case of the legalization of undocumented workers in France, it certainly seems that the French state is more willing to work with favor mediation than with rights mediation. And favor mediation, with its opaque discretionary nature, cannot provide the kind of visible symbols and tales that rights mediation can, thereby limiting its ability to contribute to what McCann (1994, p. 277) calls the “expansion of meaningful and realistic reform options.”

It is also worth noting that the antidiscrimination movements that have made advances in France are those that have been blessed by the political elite. The MRAP has always had strong ties with the French Communist Party, and the antidiscrimination movement of the *beurs* in the 1980s was strongly supported by the Sociality Party. Muslim antidiscrimination groups that freely speak about Islamophobia, such as the CCIF, have not been given the same limelight or assistance.

## Conclusion

French Muslims have a diversity of opinions, are engaged in citizen activities, and use very “French” methods of protest and politics. So even in the less common associations in which French Muslims prioritize a Muslim identity and act *as Muslims*, such as the PMF, it is not possible to say they are acting *solely* as Muslims. Their French identity and political habits influence and are present in their activism.



Despite this, Muslims struggle to make their claims heard. They have found politicians to be unreceptive to their claims of discrimination, and they are disappointed with the state's performance in protecting equality. Most believe courts are poor tools for social change, so while they make frequent rights claims, the claims largely remain at the level of rhetoric. French Muslims, however, definitely are not looking to pack up and move to another country. Whether it is because they believe liberal entrepreneurialism is the last bastion of the meritocracy or because they believe their actions can change the public's perception of Muslims, French Muslims remain positive that their "Frenchness" eventually will be recognized.



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## Education

### *The (Undelivered?) Promise of Republican Equality*

Regardless of one's ultimate evaluation of France's ban on the hijab (and other ostensible signs of religion) in public schools, the criticism from many Americans sometimes speaks to our ignorance of the important role education plays in French citizenship. While Americans may acknowledge the role of education in civic virtue, it was traditionally the "Republican Mother" that inculcated civic values, such as patriotism and personal discipline (Kerber 1997). Children in the United States could be educated privately or even at home and still receive the benefits of citizen formation (Kerber 1997). This is not understood to be the case in France. Part of France's *jus soli* tradition is the belief that one is not born French; one becomes French. That process of becoming French is carried out in public schools. It is there that students learn what it means to be French and how to be a good French citizen. As a representative of the NPNS explained, "Unlike in other countries, schools are a pillar of the Republic. When you underestimate schools, you underestimate the Republic. . . . The public school in France is a reflection of the Republic—it will prepare me to do well in my life."

French schools are also, significantly, an important mechanism for making all French citizens equal. Thanks to obligatory, and free, primary and secondary education for all boys and girls ever since the policies of Jules Ferry in the late 1800s, French citizens theoretically have been ensured an equal chance of success in their professional lives. As the special advisor to Rama Yade, a center-right politician and Muslim of color who was born into an elite family in Senegal and was serving as the secretary of state for human rights, explained, "School is one of the elements of the Republican tradition: free primary school,

*laïque*, and obligatory—*obligatory!*” Yves Déloye (1994, p. 16) notes that for all their historical disagreement about secular education, republicans and Catholics both agreed that primary school is a “moralizing instrument” intended to improve “civic mores” and as such is the “essential element in the formation of French national identity.” There could be no better window into the heart of French citizenship—its promise and its peril—than the subject of education.

The French education system is highly centralized, and teachers have little flexibility in the classroom. The primary and secondary curriculum is decided by the Ministry of National Education and is the same across all of France. The uniformity of French education is highlighted in the writings of the novelist Azouz Begag. A prominent French *beur* who grew up with the Algerian and Muslim cultures of his parents, Begag is known for (among other things) his semiautobiographical novels about growing up in the nexus between the culture and beliefs of his parents and those of his native France. This is the heterogeneous space of many *beurs*. Here he writes in the voice of the protagonist in his novel *Le gone du chaâba* (Shantytown Kid):

- We are all descendants of Vercingetorix!
- Yes, sir!
- Our country, France, has a surface area of . . .
- Yes, sir!
- The teacher is always right. If he says that we are all the descendants of the Gauls, then he is right, and too bad if we do not have the same mustaches where I come from. (Begag 1986, quoted and translated in Duffy 2000, pp. 9–10)

In his typical, lightly ironic tone, Begag’s protagonist notes that “the teacher is always right,” even if the lesson seems peculiar. After all, how could he, whose parents immigrated to France from Algeria in the twentieth century, be a descendant of the famous Gaulish leader who fought the Roman Empire? As Michael Dietler (1994, p. 590) notes, the concept of “*Nos ancêtres les Gaulois*” (Our ancestors, the Gauls) has appeared in many French schoolbooks since the nineteenth century and was taught throughout all of France, including in its colonies. Of course, this is historically inaccurate. The Gauls were not unique to the area that today is known as France, and the “ethnic French” of today are not truly direct descendants of the Gauls (their ancestry also includes Roman and Frankish roots).<sup>1</sup> Those who have immigrated more recently to France from non-European countries are also clearly unrelated to this Gaulish figure (Dietler 1994).

A sympathetic reading of this sort of educational inculcation is that it is meant to produce a sense of commonality and oneness, a national ethos of shared past, present, and future. This sort of reading fits with the republican model of citizenship, where public selves are largely a product of education that is intended to unfetter individuals from the sometimes unchosen ties of private

identities and affiliations. It is thought that this enables republican citizens to better communicate with one another and more readily reach agreement for the common good.

Some French Muslims bristle at “We are all French” sentiments, viewing them as an insincere attempt to placate their frustration. One respondent, a convert to Islam, explained that he was from the Antilles and of course was not a descendant of the Gauls. Not only was he black; he knew that he was the descendant of Africans France had enslaved and sent to the Antilles to labor for the republic. He refused to repeat the phrase when he was in school and was punished for it.

Other French Muslims embrace the republican view of neutral, French citizenship. Even they, however, have concerns and complaints about education in France. Of the three issue areas explored in this book, it was education that prompted the most consistent responses from interviewees. French education, so the interviewees repeatedly reported, is not delivering on its promises. They are laudable promises, but they are as yet unfulfilled. For all their diversity on political, social, and religious issues, French Muslims believe that French schools should provide the formative experiences of good French citizenship, as well as the tools necessary for young people of all backgrounds to succeed. There is disagreement about why this is not happening. But most important, French Muslim discussions of education do not end at the subject of the hijab.

**T**he hijab. This topic has dominated discussion about Muslims and education in France since 1989. There are many reasons for France to reconsider its education policies: the Bologna Process;<sup>2</sup> the rating of the French education system as merely “average” with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; the persistent class inequalities that plague all levels of French education; questions about whether the high school exit exam is too easy, given the high failure rate of students in their early years of higher education; overcrowded universities with significant absenteeism; and universities that fail to deliver the kind of education required for today’s new technology (Aghion and Cohen 2004; Green 1990; Reed-Danahay 1996). These various concerns about the state of education in France all but disappear, however, when the subject of Muslims is introduced to the conversation. The discourse of politicians, intellectuals, and the media (not to mention academic research) focuses intensely and nearly uniquely on the hijab, a matter that directly affects only those Muslim girls who would like to wear it, and within that group, only those who are in primary and secondary school.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine the challenges Muslims face when it comes to employment and housing in France. Some of these challenges are logically related to the French education system. A student who does not attend a well-regarded institution of higher education is less likely to be employed. Conversely, geographic isolation in impoverished *banlieues* can contribute to underperforming

schools. Yet, for all these potential connections between various socioeconomic experiences many Muslims face in France and the arena of education, French elites speak mainly of the hijab when it comes to Muslims and education.

In effect, the subject of Muslims and education in France is doubly removed from the rest of French politics: it is discussed in isolation from contemporary debates about French education in general and in isolation from salient socioeconomic issues that many Muslims face in France as a whole. These insular, elite debates about the hijab reduce Muslims to religious beings, as opposed to individuals who live not in mosques but in French society and who have diverse opinions and concerns regarding education, politics, society, and even their religion. Muslims as whole people, as opposed to abstracted or rarefied religious beings, are erased: both their diversity as individuals and the challenges many face due to shared socioeconomic experiences are ignored.

## A Note on the French System of Higher Education

Before continuing with the comparison of elite and Muslim discourse on Muslims and education, it is necessary to discuss the system of higher education in France. It is quite different from the American model, as well as other continental models, and the terminology can introduce additional confusion.

France was one of the founders of the university, but the history of this institution in France has not been straightforward. During the Revolution, the National Convention (essentially the legislative branch at that time) decreed in the law of September 15, 1793, that all universities would be abolished. They were replaced with “special schools” to train elites who would help lead the nation, and these schools developed into the *grandes écoles* we know today (Aghion and Cohen 2004, pp. 67–68). The French university did not reappear for more than a hundred years—in 1896—and by then the *grandes écoles* were firmly entrenched in the business of grooming elites (Aghion and Cohen 2004, p. 67). Universities struggle to make up for those lost years. In institutional terms, French universities are young compared with the *grandes écoles*, and this is a disadvantage for them on its face: the *grandes écoles* have been regarded as the source of French elites for longer, developing networks and establishing their reputations. In the words of Ezra Suleiman (1978, p. 279), the *grandes écoles* “not only create the elite, but set the conditions that determine the recognition of the elite.”

French universities face an additional institutional constraint. In what Alain Renaut, a highly regarded philosophy professor and expert in the politics of French universities, calls the “original sin” of French higher education, the Convention’s annulment of universities led to not just a split between universities and *grandes écoles*, but also between education and research (Aghion and Cohen 2004, p. 68). Research eventually was appropriated by governmental science agencies, such as the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS [National Center for Scientific Research]).<sup>3</sup> While CNRS researchers are often housed at institutions of higher education, and professors at these institutions

may ally with CNRS to conduct a project, permanent CNRS researchers are considered civil servants. Being a professor does not necessarily imply that one is considered a researcher in France, and vice versa. The consequence of this is that French institutions of higher education suffer in world rankings. These rankings are based on the Humboldt model, a measure of quality that includes an institution's research activity (Aghion and Cohen 2004, p. 67). French universities exist alongside a separate government research agency, the existence of which limits the role of universities in research rather than providing opportunities for increased collaboration. In addition, French universities must compete with a parallel higher education system for funding.

In short, French universities were established as a free higher education option for the masses. Their role has long been seen as separate from the research functions of agencies such as the CNRS and the preparation of elites accomplished by the *grandes écoles*. This has led to what Aghion and Cohen (2004, p. 68) refer to as the “pauperization” of the French university. Suleiman (1978, p. 92) goes as far as to say that the French university, overshadowed by the *grandes écoles*, produces “unemployable” graduates. As I show, the French (whether Muslim or not) are doubtful about the merits and respectability of a French university degree. Given the difficulties of getting into elite *grandes écoles*, this leads some French people to question just how “democratizing” (in the sense of widening access to the halls of power) French higher education is. Not only are *grandes écoles* seen as serving only those who have had an “easy” upbringing in France; universities are seen by the most pessimistic as distractions or even false promises.

## French Elites on Muslims and Education

When the media analysis from Chapter 2 is cross-tabulated for mentions of Muslims and education, the data suggest an uneasy, split view of Muslims: 28 percent of the references depict Muslims as good citizens, while 29 percent of the references depict them as problematic or bad citizens. Overall, the question of whether Muslims are “integrated” into France is therefore dominant in all media discussion of Muslims and education, present in 57 percent of all references to Muslims made in news articles on Muslims and education. Of the articles that discuss Muslims and education, there are 171 instances of the word “Muslim” and its variants (singular, plural, feminine, masculine) and fifty-three instances of the French words *voile* and *foulard* and their variants (singular, plural). On average, nearly every third mention of Muslims in articles that discuss education is accompanied by one mention of the *voile* or *foulard* (the term “hijab” is not used once). A different way to view this is that of the twenty-seven articles that mention Muslims and education, eighteen—67 percent—of them also mention the hijab (though not by that name).

This is just one data set. However, these conclusions are supported by other research. John Bowen (2007) also identifies an excessive interest in the hijab on

the part of the media. He claims that amid all the political uproar over issues surrounding banning the hijab from public schools,

the French news media did their best to inflame the resulting anxieties. By early 2002, many French journalists, intellectuals, and officials increasingly linked the problem of scarves in schools with three other problems of society: communalism, Islamism, and sexism. We can understand the degree of popular and intellectual support for the law banning the hijab in public primary education—including support among some Muslims—only if we appreciate the ways in which television, radio, and print media played up these broad social dangers said to be posed, or represented by the voile, *and* if we appreciate the important social and philosophical issues raised by the voile. (Bowen 2007, p. 155)<sup>4</sup>

While Bowen illustrates how French elites drew connections between Muslims and *communautarisme*, sometimes zealously and regardless of facts to the contrary, he also refutes the assumption (common among those who are not familiar with the French republican tradition) that the French are simply racist or anti-Muslim. Ultimately, whether French elites were animated by concern for the mission of republican education, or by multicultural anxiety, or something in between, the majority of them described the hijab as a threat to the republic.

Thomas Deltombe (2005, p. 362) argues that the media in France have created an “imaginary Islam” in which the hijab necessarily and automatically presents a threat to the republic and women’s rights. It is also an Islam whose adherents are all suspected of *communautarisme* or religious extremism. According to Deltombe, the media’s imagined Muslims are “eternally” depicted as “newcomers,” “immigrants” or “foreigners,” for whom the “necessary integration” can happen only by forced assimilation into an atemporal idea of France. For Deltombe, the focus of the media on the hijab in schools is just one manifestation of this larger trend.

I do not want to go too far into an analysis of elite discussion of the hijab in public schools in France, as this has been done elsewhere. Furthermore, continued analysis might contribute to the worrying lack of research on the non-religious concerns of Muslims in France (a trend that suggests that Muslims put their religion first and foremost in all social and political affairs—a stance that must be interrogated rather than assumed). So in closing, as a final indicator of the elite emphasis on the hijab when discussing Muslims and education in France, let us return to the analysis conducted in Chapter 2 that reviewed the legislative reports of the National Assembly’s Twelfth Legislature, noting all of the legislative reports that made any mention of “Muslims.” In that time frame, there were forty-three reports. Of these reports, thirty-seven discussed Muslims but not primarily the hijab (except for three references). There was,

significantly, no discussion of Muslims and education (or of housing or employment, although there were four mentions of discrimination). In these thirty-seven reports, “Muslims” were mentioned a total of eighty-one times. In the remaining six legislative reports, “Muslims” were mentioned as few as forty times and upward of a hundred times *per report*. These six remaining legislative reports were specifically about the hijab in public schools. This suggests that the Twelfth Legislature thought of Muslims and education together only in terms of the hijab.

## French Muslims on Muslims and Education

Muslims did bring up the subject of the hijab in interviews about education. But it was not the only topic they brought up, or the predominant one. And while some Muslim respondents claimed the first thing they would do if appointed minister of education would be to repeal the 2004 law, most cited other goals that had little to nothing to do with religion. Muslims discussed wide-ranging topics in education, always with mild to great disappointment in the French education system. Nevertheless, French Muslims continue to believe that education *should* be the “great equalizer” for all French citizens.

### Mixité

An illustration of the faith that French Muslims have in public education is found in their concern for *mixité* in today’s school. The notion of *mixité*—the mixing of social classes, genders, races, and ethnicities<sup>5</sup>—maps well onto the *jus soli* tradition of French citizenship and has long been praised by French equal rights associations. Regardless of whether schools actually perform the function of increasing *mixité* is unclear. A non-Muslim at the NPNS expressed concern that *mixité* is becoming a thing of the past. While her left-leaning parents insisted on keeping her in a diverse school near her home, she saw more and more of her fellow students with privileged parents pulled out and placed in different schools in less diverse neighborhoods. Muslim respondents expressed similar concerns for the fate of *mixité*, something they understand to be a positive value of the republic.

A former representative of Dynamique Diversité echoed this sentiment that schools do not provide the *mixité* they ought to and suggested that this has lasting effects: “The *grandes écoles* are for the rich, the white. Overall, there is no social diversity, and the big businesses always recruit from the same schools.” The homogeneity of the French elite, he argues, traces back to school days.

When asked what he would do if he were the minister of education for a day, one of the journalists at *Respect Mag* replied, “I would break the ghettoization of schools. More *mixité*, even if it is hard at first, because you are meeting people from different cultures for the first time. Otherwise, we live in a parallel manner. All schools need to be mixed.”



Two members of the EMF debated with each other about whether Muslim and Arab students take the initiative to mix freely with students of other backgrounds in school. One of the members, a white woman born in France who converted to Islam and who wears the hijab, stated that people of Maghrebian descent tend to stick together—that there is a slight “communitarian reflex.” “You know, people tend to gravitate toward others who look like them.” She went on to describe how in her experience, in university classes, “You will see a line of five veiled girls, then a line of five blonde girls. Some people do not have this reflex to mix.” This student was commenting more on those with an immigrant background than Muslims specifically. Her comment also seems to have connotations of race (i.e., “people tend to gravitate toward others who *look like them*”).

The other student, a man and an immigrant from Algeria, did not agree. “I propose a Marxist analysis,” he said. “I would say that is according to class. . . . I did one year of law at Paris II, the most right-wing university in France, and because I come from a wealthy background, no problems. . . . When they see a rich Arab, or a rich African, they are all friends.” The second student, who came from the Maghreb, disagreed with the notion that people with his immigrant background tend to spend their school days with other Maghrebian immigrants. For him, students tend to stick with those from the same social class, regardless of race, origins, or religion. Given the unique financial and social challenges many immigrants face, this may mean that immigrants tend to seek out one another’s company in school. The second respondent shifts the causality from one of a theoretical inter-race comfort zone to class.

A member of the JMF in Lyon expressed religious and nonreligious concerns with education in France. He said that school can be difficult for girls who wear the hijab and those who wish to avoid meat in the cafeteria that is considered *haram* (forbidden). He also expressed disappointment, however, that *mixité* is on the decline in French schools. He stated that it is becoming more and more difficult for people in France to meet and spend time with those who are different from them and attributed this to the “*déreglement des cartes scolaires*” (which translates into American educational terms loosely as “deregulation of school districts”). From the early 1960s until recently, parents had little choice regarding which French public schools their children would attend: students attended schools on the basis of where they lived, or *cartes scolaires* (lit. school maps; it is roughly the same idea as school districts in the United States; Sobocinski 2008). The districting was intended to ensure that students of all backgrounds would have the opportunity to meet one another. Such mixing was considered to be part of the duty of a French republican education. This system has been loosened in recent years, which may, as the JMF member complained, have undermined school diversity. In November 2009, the *cour des comptes* (the court of audit, more of an auditing institution than a court) presented its findings on the loosening of the *carte scolaire* to France’s Senate Finance Committee: in their view, it was leading to the “ghettoization” of



those schools in the most difficult academic situations (Dupuis 2009). Parents with the means to do so were pulling their students out of underperforming schools, leaving those schools to decline further, and separating students of different class backgrounds into different schools. It is reasonable to assume, given France's recent immigration history and the extra economic and social challenges immigrants face, that there are some implications for nonwhites and Muslims in this separation of rich and poor students.

### *School Counselors*

Muslims also expressed disappointment with the career preparation provided in secondary schools and sometimes downright disgust with the individuals entrusted with this task, the guidance counselors. Behind these complaints is an implicit assumption that French schools should prepare students for success—or, at the very least, put students on a path that could lead them to the careers they want. The interviewees' responses suggest that this is far from what really happens in the guidance counselor's office. For example, a member of the EMF who plans to become a teacher shared her opinions of the guidance counselors:

Oh, they are stupid.

*Why stupid?*

Because you speak to them in your third year, when you are fourteen years old. Already you need to choose.

*Choose what?*

Choose a path—if you are going to continue with high school. Already.

In the third year. You do not know a lot. You say, "Oh, I did this. I did not like this." Often, you are poorly defined. I think we need to do it later, leave the door open a bit, so students can choose to continue a bit longer.

*I hear that the counselors push students of certain origins to paths that are not as good.*

Yes. It is true. That happened to me. . . . "Oh, but you need to do a technical path," [the counselor said]. Sadly, there are orientation counselors that are a bit—inequality, it is there. . . . [T]hose with origins [meaning "the descendants of immigrants"] cannot lead; it is not in their nature, and they are not made for school: "But you cannot . . . be a lawyer. . . . You know, it would be good if you did a manual trade." Fortunately, it is not obligatory, so you can listen and say, "OK, but I'm going to do this instead." Happily, I have that freedom. Happily, there are some [counselors] who listen. . . . I know my children will never go to the counselor. If my son decides he wants to repair cars, and that is his passion, I will say, "Go ahead, my son. Do what you want. I just want you to do things that are in accordance with your choices, with what you want." Otherwise, I will say,

“Oh, reflect a bit!” We need to push students, children, to decide for themselves. The more you construct your liberty, your confidence, the more you permit children to become strong, to decide for themselves. It is the same with society, with religion. . . . You inculcate religion in a child, but you do not oblige them to remain in that religion. Afterward, they make the choice. My parents gave [me] this religion, then [I] had the choice to continue with it or not.

This interviewee’s dissatisfaction with, even downright distrust, of school counselors is clear. She believes not only that the nature of their role is problematic—that fourteen is simply too young for a child to know what kind of career he or she wants—but also that the way the job is performed can be discriminatory. Other Muslim interviewees similarly complained that school counselors give different advice to students based on race or ethnicity or immigration history. This particular woman, who was counseled to go to a technical school, went on to earn a master’s degree and conduct compelling research into the sociolinguistics of France’s immigrant communities.

This respondent continually emphasized the notion of *choice*: that individuals should be able to freely choose to pursue the career they want, as well as other elements of personal identity, including religion. School counselors, in her view, curtail students’ liberty to make their own choices. Freedom, in her view, is associated with being given options and the skills to choose among those options as best serves the individual. This interview excerpt not only reveals the prejudices of some school counselors but also provides another example of how traditional norms of French citizenship—in this case, liberty and equality—make their way into the discourse of French Muslims. I never asked about freedom. I merely asked whether school counselors push minority students into technical schools.

Curious about whether non-Muslims would express similar views, I asked a non-Muslim representative of the NPNS whether she felt that school counselors give different guidance to students based on prejudiced assumptions. Her response was clear: “I totally agree. If you are black, they will send you to a technical career.”

The journalists for *Respect Mag* also had difficulties with school counselors and spoke about a pervasive sense of discrimination at school. One of the journalists said he had very few problems but related this to his exceptional performance in school—the conclusion being that only the exceptional Muslim and minority students will experience few problems with discrimination at school. When they spoke about their experience in journalism school specifically, the statistics they offered were stark: “There were three of us—two Arabs and a single black.” When I asked why there were so few minority students, one of the journalists responded, “A lot of people are told that doing two years and then getting work is better for them, so they think, ‘Oh, if it’s better for me, I’ll do it.’ There is a psychological barrier. People need to be able to say, ‘I can go

to a journalism school. I can etc., etc., etc.” In other words, minority students are steered away from journalism school and toward inferior degrees, and they rarely have the resources to overcome this “psychological barrier.” But what does this barrier look like, and why is it so powerful?

One of the journalists recounted an experience he had had with a school counselor. He had attended a university immediately after high school rather than a journalism school:

I already knew that I wanted to be a journalist. The counselor said, “Why do you want to do that? It is not a job for you.” I just wanted him to explain where to go, what schools I should do, what path I should follow to be a journalist. He knew *nothing* about that. Instead of telling me, “I cannot counsel you on that,” he said, “That is not made for you.” Basically, that’s how it went. It ended after fifteen minutes with him saying that kids like me go to the *fac*.<sup>6</sup> It was not so bad. I learned things. But the orientation . . . even the orientation in France is awful, especially in the *quartier*.<sup>7</sup> People there have a tendency to send kids to the *fac*, to places that they think are “made for us.”

If 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, it has a number of causes. Not discussed by this respondent but alluded to in the earlier interview with the EMF member who said she would refuse to let her children go to a guidance counselor is the inherent hierarchy between a young student and an adult employed specifically to tell that student what to do. As she stated, it requires “confidence” on the part of a student to tell a counselor that she knows what is best for herself. In a different part of the interview, the interviewee explained that she had been able to do this because her parents raised her to have a strong “character,” to be confident and to stand up for herself when necessary. Not all children benefit from this kind of parenting. Furthermore, the students sometimes do not realize that what they are being told is poor advice, considering their goals. As the journalist explained, he did not know which schools he needed to attend or what path he should take to become a journalist. He believed the counselor would provide that information. When the counselor directed him toward an unrelated two-year degree instead, he followed the advice. He did not know what else to do.

Knowing what to do is not always enough, however. Another journalist at *Respect Mag* related the story of a friend who wanted to become a cartoonist: “The counselors told him, ‘No. No one does that. That job does not exist.’ So [my friend] went to a technical school. I wanted to do film school, to become a director. I even knew which school I wanted to go to—École Lumière—but I got the same answer: ‘that job does not exist.’”<sup>8</sup> This individual knew exactly what he wanted to do and which school he wanted to attend, so he was well aware that the counselor was incorrect and that, in fact, jobs in filmmaking do

exist. But he did not attend the *École Lumière*, possibly for a number of reasons that he did not discuss in the interview. But his comment suggests the lack of regard some school counselors have for the career ambitions of the students with whom they work.

An additional part of this psychological barrier may be the internalization by students of low expectations that others—including school counselors—have of them. If students are repeatedly told, “That is not for you,” they may eventually believe that there are certain jobs that are “for them,” and that there is little choice otherwise. This is a complicated situation, since this sort of influence does not take place on the individual level alone. The journalists at *Respect Mag* spoke about a sort of generational influence: children see their older siblings or older kids in their neighborhood, their role models, go to inferior schools or become unemployed and assume they will have a similar fate. If the children notice that this tends to happen to other people who look like them, or who have a similar background, this may further reinforce the expectations. This is similar to what Michael Dawson (1994) describes as “linked fate”: the belief that an individual’s destiny is tied to that of a group she considers her own. Many interviewees, Muslim and non-Muslim, underscored the school counselor’s role in forming these expectations. It is little wonder, then, that many Muslims focused on this issue in education in the interviews, sometimes without any prompting.

### *Tracks*

A special counselor to Rama Yade (who is not a Muslim or member of a racial minority) explained the track system in France:

In France, we have primary school, from six to eleven years [old], then middle school, eleven to fifteen years [old].<sup>9</sup> Then, after, high school. . . . We had . . . tracks according to skill level: you are in sixth-one, sixth-two, sixth-three. Then after, at fourteen years old, we could put you in professional or general education. In France for about twenty years we have had what we call the “*collège unique*.” This means that everyone is mixed together. But the results are—lukewarm.

The *collège unique* was introduced in 1975 to “democratiz[e] access to education” (“La *collège unique* de 1975 à 2001” 2001). Rather than ranking students by abilities and separating them in middle school, schools would bring all students together in a more heterogeneous classroom. Former Minister of Education Jack Lang has described the promise of the *collège unique* as unfulfilled: “It is not sufficient to democratize access to middle school, we need to also democratize success in middle school” (“La *collège unique* vu par . . .” 2001).

While the track system is gone (though debate concerning it certainly is not), informal methods for obtaining more elite education are still possible. As

Yade's counselor described, "Because the state has decided to be egalitarian, those who are privileged seek out ways to get around the system." Expensive private schools, for example, allow parents to ensure that their children go to a school with others in their same privileged socioeconomic class. Certain choices for language study (such as German and Chinese) tend to ensure that students will be in more rigorous courses with fewer struggling students.

In addition, while there are no tracks within schools, there *are* different kinds of schools. Students in high school may study in "general," "technical," or "professional" schools. The general and technical schools are geared toward students who will go on to higher education, while the professional schools are directed toward students who will pursue a trade or profession. The journalists at *Respect Mag* saw this as an early opportunity for discrimination to creep into the education system, as minority students are often steered by counselors and teachers to the professional schools: "There is discrimination even before higher education. As early as middle school, there are general and technical middle schools—very quickly and very early, you can be put in a box. You end up doing what you have not chosen, being a mechanic, whatever. The discrimination starts very early, in school. As early as school!" While the school as the privileged site of "national unification" may be "an important part of French cultural mythology," as Deborah Reed-Danahay (1996, p. 24) observes, it can still "create difference among social classes through different types of training."

### Grande École *versus* Université

Not all institutions of higher education are made equal. Even in the United States, a degree from Yale means something different than a degree from a California State University (CSU) school. Even within the California system, a degree from CSU, East Bay, is not considered as enviable as a degree from CalPoly—CSU, San Luis Obispo. But these rankings are relative: a bachelor's degree from CSU, East Bay, is still respected and will help the degree holder find a job. Differences between institutions of higher education in France, as alluded to earlier, are more striking, and they are a sticking point for many Muslims in this study.

One of the most pointed descriptions of the inequalities between the two kinds of institutions came from the non-Muslim counselor to Rama Yade:

The problem in France is that the educational system is a barrier to entry into professional life, which is very corporatist and elitist compared with the United States. You have your Ivy League schools. In France, we have our *grandes écoles*. And so if you are not from a *grande école*—if you enter the workforce and you have, I don't know, uh, a master's degree in sociology from the University of Poitiers . . .  
(*Trails off*)

*It does not count?*

Yes. Everyone knows what it means. Everyone knows except the person with the diploma, because he thinks he has a diploma, but he does not fool anyone. That is a problem in France—that people judge you more on your studies than on what you show following them. I exaggerate. If you are very talented, you have a chance to get yourself out. But people will judge you first, will put you in a box, and normally, afterward, you will remain within it.

This individual notes not only the unequal value of a *grande école* and a *université* diploma but also the false hopes individuals in France have for the opportunities a *université* diploma might provide. This is a theme that many respondents echoed, but from a different point of view: they had hoped a *université* degree would put them on track for success, only to find it was viewed as meaningless by others. This was a source of frustration for many interviewees. The editor-in-chief at Oumma.com elaborated: “In France, if you attend a *grande école*, it is easier for you to find work afterward. When you attend a *grande école*, you make connections. There are networks. If you do not go to a *grande école*, you do not have those networks.”

The journalists from *Respect Mag* pointed out with dissatisfaction that students from families with few resources for higher education are forced into the *universités*: “Money is given to parents with low incomes but not specifically directed toward kids with diverse origins. And even if you get a scholarship, it is to go to the *fac*.” As opposed to the more diffuse racism and assumptions that may push disadvantaged and minority students into the less respected *universités*, according to this journalist, an actual policy exists that obliges those with less money to attend *universités*. A representative of the Centre Regional des Oeuvres Universitaires et Scolaires (CROUS [Regional Center for Student Welfare]), the organization that provides assistance (particularly financial aid, housing, campus dining, and extracurricular events) for students in France, stated in a separate communication that each institution gets to choose whether it will respect need-based government scholarships. So either the journalist is sensitive to an unofficial bias against students with need-based scholarships to which CROUS is not or he is assuming that one exists. Without further data about family incomes and college admissions, the correct answer cannot be determined, but either possibility is important to the story about education and privilege told here. The former possibility would point to institutional discrimination against poverty, and the latter would be important as an insight into how stigmatized populations self-censor their actions, predicting rejections based on previous experiences.

A member of the EMF and her boyfriend, both Muslim and the children of Algerian immigrants, agreed that the *universités* and *grandes écoles* do not provide the same opportunities for post-graduation success. The boyfriend began, “It is not like the United States. We have a system of *grandes écoles*. It is like

your universities, but . . .” At this point, the woman joined in: “If you want to do well, you do the *grandes écoles*. *Universités* in France are a bit common.”

Their discussion of *universités* versus *grandes écoles* spilled over, of its own accord, into a critique of what they saw as the overly rigid French career system. The boyfriend explained that this begins early in France, in the early years of higher education:

In the United States, no one does law upon entering his first year at the university. It is not allowed. First you do a bachelor’s in . . . philosophy or math, whatever, and then you start. In France, not at all! In France, if you want to do law, you enter the *fac*, you start in law, and you finish in law. I did not do it like that, and that caused problems for me. The only time I did not have problems was when I stumbled on someone who had come from Canada.

He described this as *cloisonnement*, a term indicating insularity and exclusivity. The boyfriend again provided his own experience as an example: since he held a degree in social science and not finance, it would be “impossible” for him to get a job in banking in France. In London, however, “no one was shocked” when he applied for banking jobs.

Related to this, several Muslim respondents complained that French education in general does a poor job of preparing students for employment. One of the journalists from *Respect Mag* stated, “School is too theoretical. There needs to be more links with business. There needs to be more internships, but the interns should not be exploited.” Other Muslim respondents expressed similar desires for more practical learning experiences, with the hope that such internship experiences would help students get jobs after graduation—whether they were lucky enough to attend a *grande école* or not.

Strategies for addressing this problem are varied. Some Muslims simply want degrees from their *universités* to be respected. They feel that the distinction between the kinds of higher education institutions is artificial, a product not of different educational experiences but of unearned reputations. Others are hopeful about a number of *grandes écoles* opening up their doors to very small-scale affirmative action measures (although this term is most certainly never used), such as Sciences Po Paris. Fadéla Amara has supported such policies. She wants to promote, as she says, “an elite from the *banlieues*” by encouraging more young adults from difficult suburbs to attend *grandes écoles* (Chocas and Kerchouche 2008). When asked which policy Amara was proudest of, her special counselor replied that she was very proud of her efforts to increase access for the poor to the *grandes écoles*. Note that the emphasis here is on class (not surprising, considering Amara’s otherwise difference-blind republicanism) and on improving access to the *grandes écoles*—not improving the *universités*. The policy also relies on an elite leadership strategy: bring a select few of the underrepresented into the halls of power and politics will change. This policy



seeks to “democratize” elite education, rather than reduce the gap between the *grandes écoles* and the universities.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Hijab and Laïcité*

When a representative from the PMF was asked what he would do first if he were made minister of education for a day, his response was “I would change lots of things. I would ask for the abolition of the law forbidding the hijab at school. First thing.” His other suggestions included reestablishing a more hierarchical relationship between student and teacher and toughening the requirements for earning a *baccalauréat*.<sup>11</sup> But note that he ranked allowing the hijab into the classroom as his first priority.

Another interviewee, a member of the EMF, agreed but offered a specific reason—and one that did not solely relate to the hijab itself:

First, I would get rid of this *laïcité* law, because *laïcité* does not mean anything. I think we need to include diversity, even at the level of religion, and we need to trust people, tell them that liberty starts . . . where they start. Liberty is defined by *you*. As long as my religion remains mine, and it is my affair, no one can take it away from me. Whether I have my *voile* or not, I can talk to you, I can teach you. That does not impede me.

This interviewee wore the hijab and was acknowledging that when she begins teaching schoolchildren, she will be required to take it off. Thus, for her, “*laïcité*” is not synonymous with freedom. In fact, she was not sure what it means, since as she saw it her religion would not prevent her from performing her duties as an instructor. Nor did she believe that her religion would prevent others from enjoying their freedom of belief and non-belief as long as she did not proselytize (i.e., “as long as it remains mine, and it is my affair”). Again, we see fundamental disagreement concerning whether the hijab is “inherently” proselytizing. For this woman, the law of 2004 is distasteful because it is perceived as an attack on religious diversity that is masked in a vague republican language that impedes discussion of what freedom is and ought to be.

Representatives from the legal action group CCIF were also suspicious about the meaning of *laïcité* in public school policies. They brought up the inconsistencies of its implementation in France: state-paid religious instruction in Alsace-Moselle,<sup>12</sup> fish (a Lenten accommodation) in cafeterias on Friday, and state holidays that align with the Christian calendar. If so many accommodations are made for Christians, why should there be so few for those of other religions, such as Islam? Such observations about the continued but overlooked presence of Christian traditions in the French public sphere highlight the “invisibility” of dominance: How, these representatives of the CCIF asked, could politicians talk about the strictly secular nature of the public sphere when so many accommodations were being made for the Christian tradition?



Another inconsistency they pointed to seems equitable on the surface, but they maintain that the ultimate effect is discriminatory: private religious education. While it is legal for any religion to establish religious private schools in France as long as the schools conform to certain statewide educational requirements (which are rigorous), more Christian and Jewish schools exist, by default, as the Christian and Jewish communities have been in France longer and have more funds than many other religious groups to create the schools. The CCIF members elaborated:

**Member 1:** In France, if the door to religious education is closed, the Christians and Jews can turn to their private schools, but . . .

**Member 2:** The Muslims do not have any.

**Member 1:** In Lille, there is a Muslim middle school/high school, but it is under threat of closure because, at the level of finances, it does not have any—so there are really three Muslim schools officially for all of France. For the second religion of France.

So while there is no legal discrimination vis-à-vis private religious education, the respondents felt that the lack of state assistance for the newer religion of Islam amounted to de facto inequality. The respondents also noted how, beyond financial issues, some in France fear Muslim private schools: “Muslim schools? That’s where they teach fundamentalists, extremists!’ It is that, unfortunately.”

Yade’s counselor also acknowledged the minuscule number of Muslim private schools in France.

It is a bit unjust, because concretely, what does that [the 2004 law] mean? If you are Muslim and you want to continue to wear the *foulard*, you need to go to a private Muslim school, and there are [very few]. The community is not a sufficiently wealthy to have the funds necessary [to establish its own schools]. So that means [a girl who wears the hijab has to] stay at home and take correspondence courses, and staying at home often means staying under parental authority that is often traditionalist.

His comment includes an assumption that young women and girls who wear the *hijab* are often from traditionalist households with parental authority that limits their freedom. The “injustice” that he depicts in his explanation is not the same injustice that was described by the members of the CCIF. They identified the paucity of Muslim private schools in France as an unjust denial of religious freedom. The counselor identified it as an unjust denial of education outside the home—of the liberating experience of separation from one’s parents’ authority and tradition. These are two very different readings of the injustices that stem from the 2004 law and the practical nonexistence of Muslim private education in France, and they are particularly emblematic of the larger rift that can be found between Muslim and elite discourse on education in France.

One respondent, a member of the JMF, attended a school where teachers protested against students wearing the hijab. This came out when he was asked whether he had ever experienced discrimination at school. “Nothing really happened at school,” he said. “Because we were mostly Arabs, there was no one to bother us, really. I was at the school with the *affaire du voile*. The teachers were really attached to their convictions—they were not talking about *laïcité*; they were talking about Islam, the Qur’an. And they did not know anything about it, either.” When I asked the respondent to elaborate about the teachers’ concerns (as he understood them), he added, “They talked about us as barbarians—the exact same discourse as Sarkozy.” At this point, another member of the JMF joined in to clarify: “During his presidential campaign, [Sarkozy] said we cannot accept people cutting lamb throats in their bathtubs any longer.”

For the respondents from the JMF, complaints about the hijab are understood to be an alternative way to attack Muslims for their faith. They focus on how some teachers and politicians have associated Islam with barbarism and ritualistic sacrifice performed illegally in the bathtubs of apartments. This image of the “sheep in the bathtub” is used to evoke a sense of incompatibility between Islam and France: one is “backward,” one is “modern.” To allow Islam into France is to allow Muslims to practice their “backward” ways, which is unacceptable. The hijab, according to these JMF members, is just another example of what some people in France believe is “backward” about Muslims, and their ire over the hijab has more to do with that sense of superiority—or perhaps even fear?—in the face of supposed “barbarians” than with concerns for republican education and equality.

One student member of the EMF joined the organization because of this kind of hostility from a university professor. Another member of the EMF, who believed that women of all ages have the right to wear the hijab in public schools even though he personally did not like the hijab, asked questions of the student as she explained her story:

**Student 1:** There was a professor at university who insulted me in class.

**Student 2:** In sem, or in TD?<sup>13</sup>

**Student 1:** In the amphitheater. In seminar.

**Student 2:** Whoa!

**Student 1:** So I didn’t know what to do. . . . I called different unions. No one wanted to take on the case, but a student union and the EMF wanted to defend me.

**Student 2:** So? (*sarcastic*) Did he go to prison?

**Student 1:** So the day that this union and the EMF came to talk to the professor, some girls I didn’t know and who weren’t even Arab or Muslim wrote a letter to denounce the professor.

**Student 2:** Was he sent away?

**Student 1:** No, because he was a director. . . . But at any rate, he had his scare.

The male student found the professor's behavior unacceptable but was nevertheless ambivalent about the hijab. These two students sparred a bit before the interview began during a meeting of another association they had just started (a student association that brings together students from the Arabic and Hebrew language department at their university in Paris). They were trying to decide who would be the president of the association. It was suggested and agreed that a third woman who also wears the hijab would be the president. This made the man uneasy. "But, she's veiled," he said with some discomfort. "Yes?" "And?" came the icy responses from both women. He then asked, "A veiled woman as president of our student association—that is a bit cliché, isn't it?" The women felt it should be irrelevant, but the man was considering the expectations of others. His comment suggests that struggles over the hijab have become so common and frequent that to put a hijab-wearing woman in the position of president of a students' association might be read as yet another political statement about the hijab in schools, a statement that risks sounding tired and unoriginal. The president-to-be, who did not seek to make such a statement, was angry that her hijab would automatically be perceived as anything and that her personal decision to wear it might be seen as rendering her a "cliché."

Another member of the EMF described how she also faced problems wearing a hijab at the university, where it is legal to wear: "I wore the scarf for ten years. During all that period, I was at university and I wore it, except my last year at university when I did my master's. It was very difficult. At the Sorbonne, . . . I had a professor who in a one-on-one meeting said, 'I would throw you all out of the Sorbonne.'"

Not all Muslims are happy with how the question of the hijab has played out in French politics. I spoke to a representative of the humanitarian organization Muslim Hands France (the international headquarters is in the United Kingdom) about the work of her association. She described its role as "helping people to live, and well," and that this was just "part of the Muslim faith. It is not all prayers and fasting, we are not all fundamentalists." She then expressed some annoyance about the subject of the hijab. It had, she felt, made it so that all people think of when they encounter Muslims is the hijab. She also insisted that Muslim Hands France had signed on to the Red Cross Charter as a way to refute the notion that the group was religiously conservative or somehow opposed to human rights. For this individual, the issue of the hijab led to misconceptions about Muslims that make it harder for her association's messages to get across.

### ***"It Is Complicated": Discrimination in Education and Intersectionality***

Rarely did respondents attribute challenges they faced in life to their religion alone. Muslim respondents often noted that discrimination or challenges were sometimes tied not just to their religion but also to their class, race, ethnicity, or immigrant background. As one Muslim respondent put it when describing

similarities he, as a child of working-class Algerian immigrants, had with others in the working class, “When you realize there are social problems that we share, because you are from the working class . . . and, when you are also a foreigner . . . it adds something. It is a ‘plus.’ It is a complexity.” While there may be certain similarities across marginalized groups, the situation gets undeniably more complex for those who are a minority, or part of a disadvantaged group, in more ways than one. What feminists might identify as intersectionality, respondents identified simply as “complex.” Even among those Muslim respondents whose outsider status came primarily, if not solely, from their conversion to Islam, there was an awareness that for many other Muslims in France, religion was not the sole factor in their everyday struggles for equality.

Elite discourse in France also occasionally recognizes the intersectionality of Islam with other factors, such as immigration, race, ethnicity, and class. But this recognition is sometimes based not on social observation but on social assumptions—that is, stereotypes. At a meeting with UMP members in September 2009, then Interior Minister Brice Hortefeux was shown in a video filmed by the television station Public Sénat making a series of comments about a party adherent, Amine Benalia-Brouch that some journalists (e.g., at *Le Monde* and *Rue 89* [see Ternisien 2009; Haski 2009]) have since condemned as racist. As he is being approached by Benalia-Brouch, Hortefeux is heard to say, “Ah, yes, that is integration” (quoted in Leprince 2009). Because Benalia-Brouch is of Arab descent, Hortefeux was assuming he must have required integration into France—which in turn suggests that Hortefeux was assuming a history of immigration based solely on Benalia-Brouch’s appearance. Hortefeux then added, “And he speaks Arabic, eh!” (Leprince 2009). Hortefeux again was making an assumption—this time, that all people of Arab descent have ties to Arab culture, such as language. But many people of Arab descent in France do not speak any Arabic. Mediators with the organization Femmes Relais in Seine-Saint-Denis described this as a significant problem for some immigrant mothers in France who are expected to do all of the parenting but cannot communicate effectively with their francophone children. The education director at the Grande Mosquée de Lyon also acknowledged the uniquely francophone Muslims of France when he pointed out that the demand for imams who speak French and for copies of the Qur’an in French is increasing. Among those who attend the mosque in Lyon, he estimated, more than half do not speak Arabic.

Marie Apathie, the UMP’s secretary for the Department of Landes at the time of the incident, was also captured on film saying about Benalia-Brouch, “He’s Catholic, he eats pork, and he drinks beer.”<sup>14</sup> Normally such details would not be provided when introducing people in France. Here, they were meant to highlight that Benalia-Brouch is not the “average Arab”—that is, Arabs are not Catholic but Muslim, and Muslims abstain from pork and beer, or so the assumptions go, piling up one on the other. Of course, not all Arabs are Muslim—some are indeed Catholic—and plenty of Muslims consume pork and beer. “He does not correspond to the prototype at all then,” Hortefeux exclaimed (quoted

in Leprince 2009). For Hortefeux, then, there is a “prototypical Arab,” and since Benalia-Brouch does not correspond to the prototype, he must be “integrated.” At this point, Apathie also claims Benalia-Brouch as property of UMP—“He’s our little Arab”—to which Hortefeux responds, “There always needs to be one. When there is one, it is OK. It is when there are many that there is a problem” (quoted in Leprince 2009). This final exchange implies a sort of patronizing acceptance: this man can be part of the UMP because he is like “us,” and there is only one of him, so he cannot greatly influence the party.

In this exchange between two UMP leaders, we see recognition of the overlap among the categories of Arab, immigrant, and Muslim. But this recognition is predicated on stereotypes—what else is a “prototype”? This sort of uninvited collapsing of categories and identities, done not to better understand the social reality of an individual or group but, rather, as a lazy attempt to assume what people are like on the basis of appearance, frustrates many Muslim respondents. Such assumptions, they repeatedly said, lead to further misunderstandings—such as the common elite assumption that Muslims are somehow incompletely French and need to be further integrated. Benalia-Brouch (2010) later quit the UMP and wrote a book accusing UMP leaders of lying (and encouraging him to lie) about the true, discriminatory nature of Hortefeux’s comments.

How do Muslims talk about intersectionality, then, if their reflections on overlapping identities are different from the elite assumptions they so often criticize? What follow are some examples of how Muslim respondents consider the effect of occasionally overlapping minority categories on the experience of discrimination and how this overlap may shape one’s social positionality.

The journalists at *Respect Mag* were asked the open-ended question about whether they had ever experienced “any problems” in school:

**Journalist 1:** In middle school, I knew a lot of immigrant students. If there was a little prank in class, we Arabs would instantly be accused, before the others. It would get fixed afterward, but there was a feeling of injustice. We were not treated like the others.

*What did you do?*

**Journalist 1:** When we had tough situations, we [the other Arabs and I] would stick together. We were solidary. Solidarity, it is natural. Normal.

**Journalist 2:** I did not have the same experience with teachers, because I was a good student, and that helps. But despite that, I experienced injustice at school, [in] how fellow student[s] would treat me, and so on. . . . It is not necessarily the teachers’ fault. . . . Some parents help their kids with their homework, and immigrant parents cannot always do that. It is not fair.

In this response, we see an awareness that “Arab” and “immigrant” are two identities that sometimes coexist. Neither of the respondents in this conversation,

however, had personally immigrated to France. We also see recognition that racism alone is not to blame for all the difficulties Arab students face. If a student's parents immigrated to France, then the student might not have had the same advantage of receiving help with homework from them, because immigrant parents might not have had the necessary French-language skills or education. But these comments are nuanced—for example, “*some* parents help their kids with homework”; “immigrant parents *cannot always* do that.”

Compare these comments with the experience of a leader at the JMF in Paris who immigrated to France from Morocco with his parents when he was ten. He explained that he had never had a concrete experience of discrimination at school but instead had encountered unwarranted assumptions in everyday public life based solely on his appearance: “In middle school, there was the cruelty of adolescents, but, honestly, I did not have experiences where it was clear. It was in everyday life. I was reading a book on the train,<sup>15</sup> and a woman asked me if I was doing my studies in literature. She saw a foreigner who was reading a book, so surely it was because he had to, not because he chose to. It was never something really clear, never an—Islamophobic experience.” This respondent believed that an assumption that foreigners do not read and that someone with an Arab appearance must be a foreigner led the woman on the train to ask him, a French citizen, if he was a literature student. Regardless of the woman's original intentions, which are potentially unclear, we can see that the respondent was keenly aware of assumptions others may make about him based on his appearance—the “everyday” kinds of subtle experiences that he was reluctant to identify as discrimination but that add up over time to unequal treatment.

### *Teacher Evaluation*

One respondent from *Respect Mag* stated that if he were the minister of education, the first thing he would do would be to “re-do the system of teacher evaluations. Teachers today work on a point system. At the beginning of their career, they start in schools in difficult *quartiers*. They gain points, and then they leave to go to nicer schools.” One of the other journalists interjected, “It is the teachers with the least experience in the difficult *quartiers*. You should have the teachers with the *most* experience in the difficult schools.” Other Muslim respondents expressed dissatisfaction with teachers, as well—from strident comments such as “Throw them all out!” to more circumspect calls for ongoing teacher training to help instructors improve their skills.

French educators themselves acknowledge the limitations of teacher evaluation. As Marlène Isoré (2009, p. 37) writes, “The current teacher evaluation system is often described as ‘not very fair,’ ‘not very efficient’ . . . because it is based on administrative procedures rather than a comprehensive scheme with a clear improvement purpose.” The evaluation process is not connected to continued training to help teachers develop the skills they lack; nor do the

evaluations affect one's career progress. When French Muslims complain about teachers' performance and evaluation, they are addressing a secular concern others have in France, as well.

### *Halal Meat*

Apart from a passing comment by a member of the JMF in Lyon, only one group brought up the subject of halal meat in the school cafeteria: representatives of the CCIF complained that school officials "either want to serve the kids non-halal meat or make them taste it, which is against the desires of the parents. It is the parents who are responsible, who are the principal educators of their children. . . . [This is covered by] Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on the Rights of Man. And there are other texts, like the New York Convention on the rights of children." The European Convention on Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child do indeed have protections for children to be raised within the culture and religious views of their parents. It is unsurprising that a legal action group would refer to international law in its pursuit of what it perceives to be rights. Then again, it is surprising, considering the tendency of the French to pursue activities outside the courts for social change, and given that the majority of Muslim respondents seemed startled or wryly amused at the thought of going to court over discrimination. The CCIF is rare in that it reads all social conflicts through the lens of the law. And other Muslim interviewees did not place halal meat highly among their concerns about education in France.

### **Conclusion**

The subject of education demonstrates how the opinions of French Muslims are shaped by many affiliations and interests. Their concerns with education speak to many different issues in French society and politics and are not limited to matters of faith. When asked what she would do if she were appointed minister of education, one woman who wears a hijab replied, "I would put more emphasis on English. Personally, it is something that I find very difficult to learn. I have been taking lessons for ten years, but . . . three hours per week, it is not very much." Another woman in a hijab replied, "That is a big question. I would make university free." While French elite discourse often portrays Muslims as solely interested in religion and hijab-wearing women as the epitome of this, the reflex responses of these two hijab-wearing French Muslim women when asked about changing education in France spoke to issues other than religion. As another Muslim jokingly responded to the comment about making universities free, "*Ha-ha, gauchiste!*" (Ha-ha, you leftist!). *Gauchiste* indeed: her response aligns with other leftist statements she made, including her belief in a strong state to provide an equal footing for all in society. Her fellow Muslim student who made



the *gauchiste* joke identified what many French elites seem incapable of doing: a Muslim woman's nonreligious political engagement with France.

When a third female Muslim respondent who also wears the hijab was asked what she would do if she were made minister of education for a day, she replied, "Open schools in all towns." She explained:

Open schools is a concept where the parents enter into the schools.

*So parents can enter even if they are wearing hijabs or bearded?*

Yes, but that is of little importance. Open schools. The schools are closed these days. It is national education that teaches. And why are we experiencing educational failure? It is because they think that state education should have a monopoly on education. State education transmits academic knowledge; parental education transmits a type of knowledge; sports transmit a type of knowledge; theater transmits a type of knowledge. Knowledge is cross-disciplinary. I would take off these locks. I would start cross-disciplinary education.

Notice that this respondent is not *ranking* these different kinds of educational experiences. She is not saying that parents can teach children better than public schools can (something that some French elites fear Muslims do believe and would be willing to take their children out of public school for). The respondent is simply saying that different experiences provide different kinds of education or teach students different lessons. Rather than seeing state education placed in an inferior position to the lessons of parents, sports, or art, this respondent wants to see state education work in tandem with other kinds of education. This response is quite different from the common elite depiction of Muslims who wear the hijab as single-mindedly religious, willing to sacrifice the republic for the hijab. If all life experiences offer different kinds of lessons, and no single life experience provides the most desirable lessons, then state education does not sit in a place superior to that of religion—and, importantly, vice versa.

Indeed, education provides the clearest example of how elite discourse about a group can entirely drown out the voices of that group. Why might this be? The hijab in public schools has been interpreted by many elites to epitomize an affront to each of the five characteristics of normative French citizenship:<sup>16</sup> sexual liberality, secularism, republicanism, abstract individualism, and (though only a minority of French politicians openly claim this) no immigrant background. It should come as no surprise, then, that other discussions about Muslims and education should somehow fall by the wayside. Emphasis on the hijab crowded out all other discussion about Muslims and education among elites, as demonstrated by the lopsided media coverage and National Assembly discussions, even though many Muslims are in a place to speak to the complex intersections of various marginalized identities and how this affects the experience of education in France.



Of the three subjects Muslims were asked to speak about—education, employment, and housing—the strongest criticisms, deepest frustrations, and most eager, unprompted responses came when discussing education. Yet the level of disappointment these French Muslims have in some aspects of French education would make no sense if they did not believe that the French school system *should be doing better*. We see that hope in Muslims' concern for the fate of *mixité* in public schools, in their sense that schools should prepare children for their desired career paths, and in their frustration with the reproduction of inequality in schools. For many of these French Muslims, public schools are where fraternity, equality, and liberty are meant to be fostered. According to Muslim interviewees, there are reasons to suspect that these values are not being fostered—and those reasons are *not* limited to the 2004 law on secularity and religious symbols in public schools.

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## Employment

### *The Muslim Experience in (and out of) the Workplace*

Between 1945 and 1975, France experienced what Alan Jenkins refers to as the “rapid reconstruction, industrialization, and economic growth” that characterized the *Trente Glorieuses*. France’s economy blossomed under highly centralized state management that aimed to “wipe out the failures and humiliations of the prewar and wartime periods, and reconstitute the greatness of the nation as a prosperous world power” (Jenkins 2000, p. 4). While this experience certainly left a legacy for French employment policy for years to come, the *dirigisme* (central planning of the economy) that many associate with France is increasingly challenged. According to Jenkins (2000, p. 189), France is experiencing a “crisis in work” that includes “unprecedented levels of unemployment” and, perhaps partly as a response to the unemployment, “shifts in employment relations.”

It would be laughable to say that France now imitates the American economic model, but contemporary forces of globalization and market liberalization have wrought changes in France’s economic policy for more than thirty years now. Related to this, France has experienced slow but marked change in its employment policies: “More neoliberal voices are being given a new credibility, even within the Socialist government, and what some on the political right call the ‘sacred cows’ of the French ‘social democratic model’ (relatively strong nationalization, minimum wages, a substantial and ‘protected’ public sector, etc.) are coming under threat” (Jenkins 2000, p. 141).

In short, there is a trend toward the increasing commodification of labor in France, and unemployment problems exacerbate frustration with this trend. The French today are in a heated and often bitter debate over who can serve

the people of France better: the government and its post–World War II, socially minded labor laws or the free market. These are complicated issues even before the introduction of factors such as race, religion, and immigration. Setting the backdrop of the French “crisis in work”—its unemployment and changing employment relations—allows us to understand the already contentious context in which debates over Muslims and employment take place.

What does it mean to speak of France’s “unprecedented levels of unemployment”? France’s unemployment rate reached just over 9 percent in the second trimester of 2009 (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques 2009).<sup>1</sup> This is not merely an artifact of the economic meltdown of fall 2008. France’s unemployment rate reached 8 percent in 2007. This upward trend has not stopped yet, either: in the fourth quarter of 2012, France’s unemployment rate reached 10.6 percent of the active population (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques 2013). The unemployment problem is particularly hard for French youths. Compared with the other twenty-seven member states of the European Union, France had the fifth highest rate of unemployment for youths age fifteen to twenty-four in 2007 (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques 2008a). Data from 1990–2007 show that the unemployment rate for males and females age fifteen to twenty-four hovers around double the average unemployment of all age groups (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques 2008b; see Table 5.1).

This gap between the unemployment rate of adults and youths age fifteen to twenty-four continues. In the fourth quarter of 2012, adults age twenty-five to forty-nine experienced a 9.1 percent unemployment rate, and adults age fifty and older experienced a 7.2 percent unemployment rate. Meanwhile, youths age fifteen to twenty-four experienced a 25.7 percent unemployment rate (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques 2013).

Just what are these aforementioned “shifts in employment relations”? To a certain extent, the election of Nicolas Sarkozy was a referendum on French employment policies. Seen as pro-American, a clear change from most French politicians at that time,<sup>2</sup> Sarkozy claimed, among other things, that he would “relax the thirty-five-hour workweek” and create employment contracts that would permit easier firing (and therefore, supposedly, easier hiring) of employees (Bennhold 2007). Such presidential promises are part of larger changes in employment relations that Christophe Vigneau argues have been under way since the 1970s. Reflecting the trend of labor commodification, these “changes in labor law do not improve work security but organize flexibility as part of a policy against unemployment” (Vigneau 2005, p. 132).

The *Contrat de Première Embauche* (CPE [First Employment Contract]) is one example of such an attempt to make hiring and firing more flexible in France. In 2006, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin tried to inject new life into the employment market and address the high youth unemployment rate by introducing a new policy that would have allowed employers to fire employees younger than twenty-six more easily, supposedly freeing up hiring by reducing

TABLE 5.1 UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN FRANCE BY AGE GROUP

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2006	2007
Women						
Total	10.2	11.9	10.1	9.8	9.6	8.5
Age 15–24	18.3	24.7	18.2	22.3	23.9	20.2
Age 25–49	9.4	11.3	10.0	9.4	9.0	8.1
Age 50 and older	6.8	6.9	6.9	6.1	6.2	5.6
Men						
Total	6.2	8.5	7.2	8.0	8.1	7.4
Age 15–24	13.1	17.2	15.4	19.9	20.9	18.6
Age 25–49	5.2	7.8	6.5	7.2	7.0	6.6
Age 50 and older	4.7	6.4	5.6	5.4	5.8	5.2

Source: Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques, “Taux de chômage par tranche d’âge.” Reprinted from [http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg\\_id=0&ref\\_id=NATCCF03302](http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=NATCCF03302) (translation and reformatting by author).

employers’ fears of being “stuck” with an undesirable employee. The CPE proved terribly unpopular. Unionists and students streamed into the streets to protest what they saw as the exploitation of youths, bearing placards with slogans such as “*Jeunes & Jetables*” (“Young and Disposable”; see Figure 5.1). The CPE was eventually repealed. It is clear that such liberal changes to the French employment market will not happen without resistance.

In addition to such top-down employment relations changes, the traditional mobilization strategy of workers has changed somewhat. Unions have long been the arbiters of employees’ disputes with the state, but this corporatist model is plagued by problems within unions today: “diversity, fragmentation, and falling national memberships” (Jenkins 2000, p. 195). Such challenges naturally raise questions about whom the unions represent and how well they are representing. For example, unemployed French people and their advocates who were dissatisfied with the representation of large unions formed their own coalitions and staged the so-called Movement of the Unemployed in 1997–1998, with moderate success (Jenkins 2000, pp. 193–195).

While employment is clearly a contentious issue throughout France, it is arguably even more salient for France’s Muslims. Fifty-two percent of French Muslims “say they are very worried about unemployment among Muslims,” while “an additional thirty-two percent say they are somewhat concerned” (Allen 2006, para. 6). Is this concern grounded in a higher unemployment rate for Muslims in France? It is difficult to quantify the precise unemployment rate of Muslims in France, given the problems with conducting surveys that interrogate religious affiliation. The INSEE, however, reports that in 2002 one in five immigrants from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and Turkey was unemployed, compared with roughly 6 percent of immigrants from Italy, Spain, and Portugal—an unemployment rate that is even lower than that of French citizens (Tavan 2005, p. 3).



FIGURE 5.1 “*Jeunes & Jetables*.” Union Nationale des Étudiants de France (the National Union of French Students) used this image, which reads, “Young and disposable: Let us demand the immediate withdrawal of the CPE!” to protest the Contrat Première Embauche (CPE). (From <http://www.unef.asso.fr>.)

While it would be reinforcing an incorrect stereotype (and one that this book hopes to deconstruct) to suggest that all immigrants from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and Turkey are Muslim, it is nevertheless true that many are. Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj (2005, p. 23) find that 59 percent of French *citizens* who immigrated to France from the Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa, or Turkey—or who have at least one parent or grandparent who did—identify themselves as Muslim. Brouard and Tiberj (2005, pp. 23–24) also note that the number of Muslims in this group of citizens is highest among those who personally immigrated to France and decreases as generational distance from the moment of immigration increases. In other words, it is safe (and probably something of an understatement) to claim that nearly 60 percent of the immigrant population that the INSEE identifies as facing a 20 percent unemployment rate is Muslim—that is, Muslim immigrants face an unemployment rate of roughly 12 percent. This is twice the unemployment rate of immigrants from Europe. Without the opportunity for better statistical analysis due to current French laws, this is one of the best (albeit problematic) approximations available. The takeaway from this statistical reconstruction of a population is that Muslim immigrants in France *do* face a higher level of unemployment than other immigrants, as the concerns of Muslims suggest.

Unemployment is not the only problem Muslims have in regard to employment in France. Some Muslims claim to face discrimination, ignorance, and geographic isolation from places of employment. Then again, not all Muslims agree that unemployment is a problem for Muslims in France. Some, interestingly, claim that there are plenty of jobs to go around, and the unemployed are not trying hard enough. Muslims also offer a host of very different suggestions for lowering the unemployment rate in France. This diversity of solutions reflects underlying differences in political ideology regarding the responsibility of the state to secure favorable employment relations in France. Elite discussion of Muslims and employment in France, however, seems to exist in a parallel universe. It does not recognize the diversity of Muslim views on employment in France, and it rarely addresses the challenges Muslims may face in getting hired or succeeding in the workplace. Elite discourse about Muslims and employment in France is at times sympathetic; at times marked by a silence that suggests lack of interest; and at times marked by open hostility, fear, and rancor for these supposedly bad citizens and security threats.

## How Elites Discuss Muslims and Employment

When the media analysis of how Muslims are depicted in France in Chapter 2 is cross-tabulated for articles about employment, a number of images come to the forefront. But first I will provide an analysis of general patterns.

While 32 percent of all references to Muslims in the articles on employment depict them as integrated into France, 11 percent depict Muslims as problematic citizens, and 27 percent depict them as bad citizens who have failed to integrate into France. In other words, nearly 40 percent of the references to Muslims in articles on employment depict them as having trouble integrating into France. While the articles seem on the whole somewhat split on the subject of whether Muslims have integrated into France—the difference between 32 percent and 38 percent, after all, is not that significant—it is interesting that the percentage of references that are neutral in regard to the level of integration of Muslims is the lowest in this subset of articles (compared with articles cross-tabulated for housing and education). The reason for this may be that there are more depictions of Muslims as victims of discrimination in matters of employment than in matters of housing or education in France. This depiction of Muslims as objects of discrimination in France is present in only 4 percent of the references to Muslims in articles about housing and in only 7 percent of the references to Muslims in articles about education, but it makes up 13 percent of the references to Muslims in articles about employment. Curiously, this recognition of discrimination against Muslims coexists with the media's strong meta-narrative about the dubious character of Muslim French citizenship.

When we examine how articles about employment depict Muslims as having difficulties integrating into France, the following images appear: Muslims as religious extremists (eight references), Muslims simply as integration failures

(six references), Muslims as too religious (three references), Muslims as intolerant (three references), and passing references to Muslims as violent (one reference) and disloyal citizens (one reference). There is also one reference to the difficulties Muslims face in the Western world because of incompatibilities between Western values and Islam. The dominant image, by far, is that of Muslims as “too religious”: they either practice too much, are intolerant of the views of others that do not fit their religion, or are religious extremists.

What do French politicians have to say on the subject of Muslims and employment? This story is a bit more complicated and includes significant silences and indirect references that require careful interpretation.

### *A Relatively Silent Political Elite*

There is not much official discussion on the subject of Muslims and employment in France. When the National Assembly’s database is searched for all debate minutes (“*comptes rendus intégraux*”) from the Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth Legislatures that mention Muslims (“*musulmans*”) and employment (“*emploi*”),<sup>3</sup> 69 documents are retrieved. None of the 69 debate minutes includes a discussion of Muslims and employment (the words share space in the same document, but they are unrelated). This seems completely normal when we consider that French republican politics, with its emphasis on difference-blindness, would not conduct discussions of employment in terms of religious affiliations. There are, however, a handful of comments in these 69 debate minutes about the employment difficulties faced by French Muslims (and people of North African and African descent). None of these comments was met with resistance. This lack of sustained discussion in the National Assembly may reflect French republican values, but it does not reflect what seems to be an underlying awareness among some politicians that Muslims in France face particular difficulties in employment.

A search in 2009 on *elysee.fr*, the website that records the current French president’s official speeches and press conferences, for texts with the word “employment” and “Muslim” yields only eight hits. Of those eight, two are repeats, and the six unique documents do not actually discuss Muslims and employment. (The words merely appear, unconnected, in the text.) The results are nearly identical when the word “employment” is replaced with “unemployment.”

### *Nicolas Sarkozy and “Positive Discrimination”*

As president, Nicolas Sarkozy was not altogether silent on the issue of Muslims and employment. He embraced “positive discrimination,” a French notion that somewhat resembles American affirmative action. According to Sarkozy, “French Muslims are capable of working as top civil servants, researchers, doctors,” and “professors” (quoted in Huet 2003). Sarkozy made a point of recruiting Muslims for his government: his hand is behind the appointments of

Fadéla Amara, Rama Yade, Rachida Dati, and Azouz Begag. Sarkozy is largely alone in this, however, and most French politicians (as seen in the quote by Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin later in this chapter) remain leery of such an “un-republican” method.

Interestingly, Muslim interview respondents did not often express wholehearted approval of Sarkozy’s appointments. Some complained it was mere tokenism; others complained that Sarkozy hired only Muslims who are critical of Islam (Amara was cited here, although some suggested this was the fault of how the media and other politicians used and possibly abused her message of gender equality); and still others made a point of indicating how unsupported these appointees were. At the time of the interviews, Begag had already quit out of frustration. Since then, Dati has been removed as the minister of justice and appointed as a member of the European Parliament (seen as a considerable step down), and Yade, who refused to be sent to the European Parliament, was reassigned from the position of secretary of state for human rights to the secretary of state for sports (Lichfield 2009b). Sarkozy spoke about Muslims and employment more than his official discourse that is archived at the Élyséethèque would suggest. His interest in positive discrimination, however, largely remained rhetorical or was expressed in idiosyncratic appointments.

Furthermore, during his reelection bid in 2012, Sarkozy’s rhetoric turned toward a critique of multiculturalism, and he focused on security and ending illegal immigration (“Sarkozy threatens to withdraw from Schengen Accord” 2012; Willsher 2012). Many people perceived this rightward shift as a strategic attempt to draw voters away from Marine Le Pen (Beardsley 2012). Whether Sarkozy was seeking votes from the far right or not, this shift in focus took precedent over his earlier discussions of positive discrimination. Muslims and their employment difficulties, and positive discrimination more generally, were not subjects of discussion during the presidential campaign of 2012.

### *“Immigrants”: A Synonym for Muslims?*

The silence in official National Assembly and presidential discourse on this subject could be taken as significant in and of itself—perhaps there is little political will to address the challenges Muslims face in employment. As stated earlier, however, isolated comments that recognize these problems can be found scattered throughout National Assembly debates.

There is another interpretation of this silence: while French politicians do not often talk about Muslims and employment, they do speak frequently about the employment issues of immigrants and the children of immigrants. Could some French politicians also mean “Muslim” when they talk about labor and “immigrants”? This is not an unlikely elision, given the common misconception that all immigrants from Africa and Turkey are Muslim—a misconception that leads to so many “improbably inflated” estimations of the number of



Muslims in France (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 23). The connection is certainly made when discussing employment. Take, for example, Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin's critiques of affirmative action in an interview on the television channel Europe1 in 2003: "The central idea . . . is to help youths whose parents were immigrants to find their place in society. I do not want us to describe them by their religion [but] by their skills" (quoted in Huet 2003). Note here how the children of immigrants are assumed to have a religion that is thought to be the object of discrimination: in this context, that is a reference to Islam.

Tiberj (2008, p. 16) suggests that "the fight against Islamic terrorism became in many Western countries the point of entry for a new way of thinking about immigration and integration." The leftist tolerance for immigrants that largely held sway over politics and the media in the 1980s in France, Tiberj argues, has become overshadowed by anti-immigrant arguments (from the right and from the left) that are based on critiques of practices associated with Islam. For example, when addressing issues of Islam in France, Sarkozy elected in an interview in 2007 to discuss female genital mutilation and polygamy, two inflammatory issues that directly affect a small minority of Muslims in France (Tiberj 2008, p. 13). According to Tiberj, since 9/11, politicians and the media in France have discovered a new way to critique immigrants: elide the categories of "immigrant" and "Muslim." When they do so, it becomes possible to critique immigrants without inciting resistance from powerful equal rights groups and leftists who have discouraged critiques of immigrants since the 1980s. By pointing especially to examples of misogyny that are associated with Muslims, politicians and the media have found they can turn publicly acceptable anger about misogyny into criticism of Islam and of immigrants (Tiberj 2008, pp. 17–18). This immigrants equals Muslims slippage is even recognized institutionally in France: the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (CFCM [French Council of the Muslim Religion]), endowed with the political mission of representing Islam in France, has also become a representative of immigrants and their children, pursued by the media to speak for these groups, as well (Tiberj 2008, p. 18).

The discussion of politicians concerning *immigrants* and employment, then—perhaps a view into how French leaders think about Muslims and employment—is critical of immigrants. Brouard and Tiberj (2005, p. 67) state that "some [French] political discourses hint that we are lending to immigrants and to their children, those who are only in France to cheat the system and to 'get their hands on welfare money.'" Furthermore, "Some politicians do not hesitate to denounce [immigrants] as profiteers of the social support system" (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 69). Such comments are linked to obvious characters—such as Jean-Marie Le Pen of the FN, a notoriously xenophobic French nationalist party. But even President Jacques Chirac found unwanted notoriety in 1991 with his critique of Muslim and black immigrants as noisy, smelly welfare moochers no hardworking Frenchman could bear to live next door to (Guyotat 1991; Pipes 1990).

### *Muslims as Dangerous Employees*

There is one notable example of a politician openly and extensively discussing Muslims and employment in France: Philippe de Villiers. In his discourse, Muslims are depicted as dangerous employees. De Villiers is the leader of the *Mouvement pour la France* (MPF [Movement for France]), a right-wing political party that is known for its Euro-skepticism and hostility toward immigrants and Islam in France. De Villiers is well known in France. He popularized the image of the “Polish plumber” coming to steal jobs from French workers. He is recognizable enough to be depicted in the satirical puppet-based French television news show *Les guignols de l’info*, where his puppet worries about homosexuality as the end of civilization. In 2006, de Villiers published *Les mosquées de Roissy* (The Mosques of Roissy). In it, he claims that Muslims are working at Roissy (another name for Paris’s Charles de Gaulle Airport) with the intention of planning Islamic terrorist plots.

A few sections of de Villiers’s book are worth citing, as they epitomize the constructed image of “Muslims as dangerous employees.” First, de Villiers claims to describe the situation France faces today concerning Islam—a situation that, he says, few besides he are willing to speak about. He cites dangers families face in traveling; dangers parents face in sending their children to school; and dangers French people face from their neighbors. He even draws a parallel between France’s response to Islam and the ill-fated inaction of the Munich Agreement, which saw the French (along with the British and Italians) agree to Hitler’s annexation of portions of Czechoslovakia. All of this is what de Villiers (2006, pp. 10–12) terms “the progressive Islamization of French society.” In a bit of dramatic prose (although readers should perhaps bear in mind that the French take more artistic license in expressing themselves than American politicians do), de Villiers (2006, p. 12) concludes with a call to arms: “It is no longer the hour for worrying about the color of the fireman’s helmet. Each one of us must hurry to stamp out the flames. France is virtually taken hostage, but it does not know it yet.”

In the chapter “A Blind State” (referring to France), de Villiers describes in the second person a hypothetical weekend trip to Greece that the reader might take via Roissy. I am paraphrasing here: first, you ask a question of the airport agent “K. Toumi,” who is distracted because he will soon leave for Pakistan, where he will take classes at a Qur’anic school near Afghanistan. Then you will get your tickets from a pretty young woman (who looks Algerian) wearing an Air France miniskirt-and-blouse uniform, who only that morning used a room provided by the Muslim employees’ organization to change out of her chador. Then your bag will be checked by “M. Mostafa,” who is part of the Islamist movement. Finally, you will pass through the security checkpoint, only to be patted down by “Z. Morade,” an employee who visits Saudi Arabia frequently and is close to a small Algerian terrorist group (de Villiers 2006, pp. 50–52). What de Villiers has done is gather together a number of different profiles of

Roissy employees, collected by Renseignements Généraux (RG [General Information], a French internal intelligence agency that is discussed in detail below). As he says, “These individuals exist and are actually on file with police services. This is not a fictitious scenario. It is a true story—a story that, tomorrow, could be yours” (de Villiers 2006, p. 50).

The effect of this story is that we are led to believe that every employee at Roissy who has an Arabic-sounding name or who looks North African is a Muslim—and a religious extremist, at that. De Villiers makes additional assumptions: that all trips to Islamic countries are necessarily suspicious,<sup>4</sup> that all chadors are worn as a refusal of French culture, and that, furthermore, all women who look North African have just recently stepped out of their chadors. While it is true that RG found employees of the airport who had links to organizations that promote terrorism, the impression de Villiers leaves is of a widespread Islamic conspiracy that presses in on travelers from all sides of the airport. In short, according to de Villiers, Muslims make dangerous employees and should not work where they can so easily compromise the security of the French.

De Villiers was not alone in his concerns. After his book was published, the Ministry of the Interior closed “seven Islamic prayer rooms at Charles de Gaulle and another Paris airport” (“Paris court to rule on Muslim baggage handler case” 2006). And as de Villiers mentions, police surveillance of Muslims was being done at the airport before his book was released. The outcome of these episodes of surveillance, however, do not seem as damning as de Villiers would have his readers believe. “Between May 2005 and November 2006, the prefecture of Seine-Saint-Denis took away badges from 72 employees suspected of being tied to Islamic terrorist circles” (“Bagagistes musulmans de Roissy” 2008). The badges in question allowed the workers entrance to “sensitive zones” of the airport, and their revocation was done in the name of “airport security.” These employees, most of whom were Muslim, had visited Pakistan and Afghanistan, which worried officials. The seventy-two employees were part of a larger group of two hundred staff members, “including baggage handlers and aircraft cleaners, [who] had been under surveillance for months by French police and intelligence services over security risks linked to terrorism” (“Paris airport bars seventy-two employees” 2006). In a subsequent court case, French officials defended the surveillance and badge revocation of these workers, insisting that the actions were based not on religious discrimination but, rather, on the “behavior” of the employees (“Bagagistes musulmans de Roissy” 2008). That said, as Daniel Saada, the legal representative for four of the baggage handlers, stated, “These employees were brought to the prefecture, where they were asked whether they were Muslim, whether they practice, whether any employees in their company were preachers, and, if so what their names are” (“Roissy” 2006).

Two kinds of court proceedings followed the revocation of the badges: administrative proceedings to clarify whether there was sufficient evidence to take away the employees’ badges and a trial to determine whether the badges

had been revoked as a result of religious discrimination. Several of the employees had their badges returned after the clarifying administrative hearings—a detail that does not appear in de Villiers’s narrative (“Bagagistes musulmans de Roissy” 2008; “Discrimination” 2008). One such employee’s case was even appealed up to the Conseil d’État, France’s high administrative court, which determined on February 2, 2007, that the employee posed no threat to the airport. That said, there was a delay in the implementation of the Conseil’s decision. As of April 26, 2007, the exonerated employee had not yet had all of his badge privileges returned, placing him at risk for company fines (“Bagagistes musulmans de Roissy” 2008; “Roissy” 2007). The discrimination case never saw the light of day: the public prosecutor’s office ultimately dismissed it with no further action, stating that the actions of officials in taking the workers’ badges “were in no way founded on the affiliation of those concerned with the Muslim religion” (“Bagagistes musulmans de Roissy” 2008).

The situation at Roissy was not an isolated event. A similar situation arose in 2007 when workers at a “sensitive military site” were denied access to their place of work (HALDE 2007, p. 114). The workers requested assistance from HALDE,<sup>5</sup> an administrative agency that handles discrimination complaints, which examined the dossiers on the workers and discovered that the notes mentioned their religion and whether they were single, divorced, legitimate, illegitimate, and other personal details (HALDE 2007, p. 114). There was also, notably, mention that one of the two workers (who were brothers) was known to “be in connection with people implicated in Islamist milieus, notably due to his participation in a pilgrimage and conferences that included other people known to police services” (HALDE 2007, p. 32). Ultimately, HALDE proved hesitant to second-guess the military’s assessment of national security but recommended a new inquiry into the two young men’s case to make sure religious discrimination had not played a role in their dismissal.

Since 9/11, public officials in France and elsewhere, rightly or wrongly, have expressed concern that Muslim employees with access to planes or military zones might harbor sympathy for violent religious extremists. Peculiar to France, however, has been the drama over the “Fichier EDVIGE,” a project of President Sarkozy that was to create a massive police database to track the details about the private lives of politicians, union members, religious figures, and anyone else who was “likely to undermine public order.”<sup>6</sup> The former French intelligence arm of the police, RG, had long collected data on individuals it suspected might want to harm the state. As a political adviser to Rama Yade noted, “It [RG] is the police in France who inform themselves on the state of the spirit of the French, on the activities of everyone. That does not exist in most other Western democracies.” In 2008, the RG was consolidated with the Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire, another police intelligence agency that focuses mainly on “counter-espionage and anti-terrorism,” together forming the new intelligence agency Direction Centrale du Renseignement Intérieur (Central Directorate of Domestic Intelligence; see Bremner 2008; “Création de la Direction

Centrale du Renseignement Intérieur” 2008). Interestingly, the Fichier EDVIGE could be used to track minors—specifically, anyone age thirteen and older.

Databases such as this have long existed in France, but they had never extended to recording information on so many people, across so many different roles in society, and at such young ages. The “private details” included names; addresses; photographs; distinguishing physical marks; and data on health, political orientation, philosophical orientation, sexual orientation, and religious belonging (“France scales back database plans after outcry” 2008). Unsurprisingly, there was a public outcry over EDVIGE: “Hundreds of associations, including the main judges’ union, civil liberties defenders, gay rights groups and leftwing lawyers have joined the anti-Edvige mutiny. Fifteen lawsuits have been filed against it at the Conseil d’État . . . and an online petition has gathered more than 100,000 signatures” (Bremner 2008). Politicians also spoke out against the database, including many leftists, as well as Rama Yade, a supporter of Sarkozy and a member of his cabinet.

Hélène Franco, a French political figure and the leader of a leftist legal association, also spoke out against EDVIGE. She was particularly concerned that data were being collected on youths and would be held indefinitely. She stated that EDVIGE was motivated by a “police logic [that] believes that a part of [France’s] youth, notably in poor neighborhoods, is a threat” (quoted in Chemin 2008a). Franco made her concern clear that EDVIGE was targeted at youths of the *banlieues* and that its data collection would haunt these youngsters as they aged and sought employment: “Once an adult, if this youth or this high school student applies for a job that requires an administrative inquiry, he will find himself going up against this data many years later” (quoted in Chemin 2008a).

Whether Franco intended to imply the connection or not, her observation that EDVIGE is targeted at youths in the *banlieues*, combined with its collection of data on religious affiliation, suggests that EDVIGE would have included information on Muslims in its database. As Franco argues, this is likely to have had a detrimental effect on their employment opportunities later in life. Given the experiences of Muslims working at Roissy, this does not seem to be an improbable scenario. If nothing else, it is clear that de Villiers is not the only French political elite concerned with keeping track of Muslims and their employment.

In 2008, EDVIGE was replaced by Exploitation Documentaire et Valorisation de l’Information Relative à la Sécurité Publique (EDVIRSP [Database on Information Relative to Public Security]), eliminating the tracking of health and sexual habits (Monrozier and Cognard 2008). However, the EDVIRSP retains the ability to collect data on minors and about religious affiliation.

## How Muslims Discuss Employment in France

Meanwhile, how do Muslims talk about Muslims and employment? Muslims speak about a diversity of problems, causes, and proposed solutions. Responses include a variety of value statements, some of which are traditionally French

(liberty, equality, socioeconomic independence, and success); some are subtle modifications of French values (respect, which is not necessarily the same thing as fraternity or equality); and some are less common to the French (ambition and hard work). Some Muslims even responded in a way that suggested a synthesis of the values of political equality and economic liberty, uncommon in a nation where these values are usually opposed across left-right political lines (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 77).

I first analyze a number of themes that repeatedly came up in discussions about employment. I then consider how the conversations about employment among French Muslims raise questions apart from those of the standard French “crisis of work” debate, such as, “What does equality mean in France?” and “How can it be achieved?”

Are there problems with employment in France? Not a single one of the Muslims interviewed here said no, but they did differ on the nature of these problems and whether certain problems were unique to Muslims. I discuss a few of these different responses here.

The first and most important subject that came up on the question of employment was *discrimination against Muslims*. When asked whether they had experienced discrimination in employment, a group of three young Muslim men, all of them journalists working at *Respect Mag* (two had Algerian parents, and one was black), answered in unison, “Yes!” They continued:

**Journalist 1:** But for the most part, it is hidden. You suppose it is there. You feel it, you guess, but you do not have any proof. You feel that there is a problem.

**Journalist 2:** My family name . . . does not sound Arabic, so I have used another first name on my curriculum vitae. I sent my CV once with my real first name and did not get a response; a second time, I used a fake first name and got a response. HALDE released a report saying [it could not find] anything—all that money spent for a report that says there is nothing wrong—because [discrimination] is not direct. You presume it; you feel it.

These responses suggest not only the pervasiveness of discrimination in employment but also its elusiveness. Created in 2004, HALDE exists to assist those who have been discriminated against and to promote equality. The commission “can be accessed by letter by all who believe they have been victims of discrimination, either directly or through a parliamentary intermediary. It can also be accessed, with the consent of the victim, by all associations” with the proper credentials, if that association exists for the purpose of fighting discrimination (HALDE 2007, p. 1). It also promises that all petitions will receive a “written response.” The commission *can* send cases to the Procureur de la République (the public prosecutor in a court of first instance), if it so chooses. Finally, HALDE also releases reports on the state of equality in France. In the

summary report of its main deliberations in 2007, the commission noted only one incident of religious discrimination in the workplace—that is, the story noted above about the workers who were denied access to a military zone. The report also noted fifty-four claims of religious discrimination in 2006 and 110 in 2007—1 percent and 2 percent of the overall discrimination claims during those years, respectively (HALDE 2007, p. 11). It is to this small number of discrimination claims that Journalist 2 was perhaps referring when he said, “All that money spent for a report that says there is nothing wrong.” HALDE’s assessment of discrimination does not match with the sense of discrimination these men experience in their lives in France. As Journalist 1 noted, however, it is not surprising that the number of reports of discrimination (religious and otherwise) is low. Discrimination, after all, is often a subtle affair that leaves few evidentiary traces.

By functioning as an intermediary between the state and the citizen, HALDE provides a sort of alternative dispute-resolution mechanism: rather than go to court, an individual can go the commission for assistance. In this sense, it epitomizes two trends in French politics: the creation of alternatives to litigation and the centralization of politics. HALDE has a mediation component and seeks to resolve disputes “amicably” when possible.

The journalists continued to discuss the difficulties of proving discrimination:

**Journalist 1:** What can you do? It is so hard to prove discrimination.

The first trial here happened recently. Their files were organized by race.

**Journalist 2:** It was Garnier. When they sent out a call for hostesses, they said they were looking for “BBR” hostesses.

It is true that the first trials for discrimination in France have been relatively recent. The ruling in 2009 by the Court of Cassation, France’s highest appeals court on nonadministrative matters, against Garnier upheld a 2007 ruling in a lower appeals court, and both amount to “the first time in France that blue-chip companies have been convicted of racial discrimination in hiring” (“Garnier, Adecco fined for racism” 2007; Sage 2009). Garnier, a division of L’Oréal, had given “coded instructions” to the Swiss employment agency Adecco “to find only young, white women for its [sales] counters in the capital” (“Garnier, Adecco fined for racism” 2007). The “code” that Garnier used was “BBR,” which stands for “*bleu, blanc, rouge*” (blue, white, red)—the colors of the French flag and a way to insinuate that Garnier was looking to hire only “authentic” French women. Compare this with the celebratory expression “Black-Blanc-Beur” (black, white, Arab) used to hail the ethnically diverse winning World Cup soccer team in 1998.

The prosecutors, arguing on behalf of SOS Racisme, which initiated the case, argued that “BBR” was a “racist code for excluding black, Arab or Asian women” (“Garnier, Adecco fined for racism” 2007; Sage 2009). Before the memo was



issued indicating that sales-counter workers should be “BBR,” nearly 39 percent of the candidate pool included racial minorities; in the end, though, just over 4.5 percent of the people hired for the jobs were racial minorities (Sage 2009).

When discussing employment discrimination, the CCIF focused on government agents investigating Muslims in their place of work. This was framed in terms of Islamophobia:

The most recent example is this famous agent of the RG who addressed an e-mail to the Regional Council of Rhône-Alpes, in which he asked, “Can you tell us if you have salaried employees, personnel in your workplace who are of a religion other than Christianity?” By “other than Christian,” we understand clearly that he was intending to target Muslims. What confirms this is that there was another question—“If you do indeed have such employees, thank you for indicating to us if they asked for work schedule arrangements to practice their religion.” They wanted to refer to what? Probably Muslims who want to say their Friday prayers in their little corner.

This indeed happened. On September 16, 2008, the Regional Council’s Department of Human Resources received such an e-mail, which the RG claimed was sent as part of a study being conducted “at the request of the Association of Mayors of France,” which the association has since “formally denied” (Durand-Parenti and Daniez 2008). A group of Muslim leaders, including Kamel Kabtane, rector of the Grande Mosquée de Lyon, responded, “We firmly condemn a discriminatory initiative that is totally illegal, contrary to republican values and the principle of *laïcité*” (quoted in “Enquête des RG au conseil régional” 2008). This response criticizes the actions of the RG as religious discrimination while reclaiming the “values of the republic”—values that, in the interpretation of this group of Muslim leaders, pair the fight against religious discrimination with *laïcité*.

But not all Muslims agree that *laïcité* in France is a partner in the fight against religious discrimination. For some of the women I spoke to, the issue of employment was complicated by attitudes toward the hijab in France, especially following the legislature’s determination in 2003 that wearing the hijab, in certain settings, is contrary to the French tradition of *laïcité*. As noted earlier in this volume, one Muslim interviewee claimed that when she starts looking for a job as a school instructor, she will need to take off her hijab. A different respondent who has already made the move to take off the hijab reiterated this view. The woman, who is French, Muslim, and the child of Algerian immigrants and who works in the field of education policy, explained what her life was like when she wore the hijab and what it is like since she stopped wearing it:

When I wore [the hijab], I lived Islamophobia. But now I am considered “integrated”—because of a meter of tissue. The person is the



same, but the appearance is different. There is intolerance, true intolerance.

*Why did you decide to take [the hijab] off?*

Because I could not have found work.

*Really?*

Yes, it is impossible. . . . Professionally, it is the end. I needed to make a decision between [the hijab] and my professional life.

*Is it because you work in education policy?*

No. Even a cleaning woman would be asked to take it off. It is not a question of what you do; it is a question of fear.

For all of the discrimination this interviewee claimed Muslims face, she went on to suggest that practicing Christians are even more likely to be ridiculed by coworkers. In her view, Islamophobia is only one part of the “fear” she is discussing: the French, she feels, are leery of religion in general:

I was friends with a professor of law . . . and he was a practicing Christian.<sup>7</sup> He told me, “As soon as I tell people I practice, it is the end. They take me for a fool.” Because he was Christian. I remember that because the difficulties that Muslims face—intolerance, a wariness of those who believe in anything that is invisible. . . . It is not just Muslims! . . . Another student at the Sorbonne who seemed to be a practicing Christian expressed shame. She did not show [her religion or] speak of it, as if it were something one must hide. If we have a hobby or if we love soccer, we can talk about it easily. But if we go to church on Sunday, we are not going to say much about it, because people will ridicule you. In fact . . . it is easier to show that you are a Muslim than a practicing Christian, because that makes people look at you as if you’re an idiot.

This response highlights a second problem Muslims identify in the workplace: *the response of other employees to Muslims*. Sometimes this was expressed as hostility, as seen in the quote above. According to this respondent, Muslims, and the religious in general, are seen as somehow “foolish” and are made to feel ashamed for believing in anything supernatural. The fact that the respondent said it is even harder for a Christian suggests that Islam is somehow a forgivable mistake but that Christianity is insupportable.

Why might this be? The view that both Christianity and Islam are somehow aberrant could simply stem from distaste for religion in general. Figure 5.2, a photograph of an Anarchist Federation sticker, suggests that antireligious sentiment is present among some in France. The image shows a young man clutching his stomach and vomiting symbols that represent Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The caption reads, “Down with all religions!” But the interviewee suggested that some French people find greater fault specifically with those who practice Christianity than Islam. Given the declining rate of religiosity



FIGURE 5.2 Anti-religion Anarchist Federation advertisement.  
(Photograph by the author.)

(especially Catholicism) in France, this view could be tied up in assumptions that religion is a thing of France's past and that Muslims are still religious only because they are relative newcomers to the country.

Following this logic, another respondent, who converted to Islam later in life, stated that "the sanction can be more difficult" for those who convert because unlike those who grow up with Muslim parents, their religious affiliation "is not an accident. . . . If I say, 'I do not eat pork,' since I am a convert, that is an explicit decision. It is something I *choose*, and that makes people more scared. It is not an accident. I do not do it to make my mom happy. I do it because I believe it." The additional hostility this respondent describes suggests that purposeful religious practice, more evident in those who have converted than in those who (perhaps stereotypically) are assumed to be religious because of their

family or immigrant background, is viewed with greater suspicion in France than casual membership in a religion.

But is the Muslim convert's abstention from eating pork likely to be an issue in the workplace? Actually, this does become an issue for some Muslims in France. The response of other employees to Muslims is not always hostile. Sometimes it is expressed as *anxiety*, or nervousness and unease, concerning the presence of Muslims—or, in the terms used by the respondent who spoke about her Christian friends, “wariness.” Seemingly inconsequential rituals of everyday French life, from food in the company cafeteria to daily greetings, are not inconsequential for some Muslims, depending on how they practice their religion. This can produce moments of unease in the workplace. A leader of the JMF in Paris noted, “When people ask questions, they weigh their words—‘Do you want . . . *coffee*?’ . . . They’re trying to not hurt us; they are embarrassed. Some people are direct. That is better. But often there is that hesitation, that nervousness.” A fellow member of the association added that he is asked “lots of questions about fasting or Ramadan.” Some French people, it seems, are just not sure how Muslims eat and drink, and that can become awkward when food or drink are being shared.

A representative of the UJM in Lyon, an engineer, spoke about his difficulties in the company canteen. “What kind of meat *is* it? How has it been butchered?” he said, adding that such information is not provided in France. For a Muslim trying to eat a halal diet, this sort of information is important. “It becomes difficult when people want to drink and eat foie gras at company parties,” he said. “But why [won’t you eat it]?’ they will ask me. ‘You’re educated; you’re modern!’” Calling Muslims uneducated or unmodern because some of them do not eat foie gras or drink alcohol is an indirect slight, and it is not part of the “company line.” The respondent indicated that such awkward moments of informal, worker-to-worker interaction were present even in greetings: unlike many French Muslims, the engineer was not comfortable sharing *bises*, the traditional kiss on each cheek performed as a greeting throughout France, with women. He shook their hands instead, which some women took as an insult or a sign that the man did not like them. His attempts to explain, such as, “The only woman I give *bises* to is my mother,” he said, did not always persuade women that he did not dislike them.

The third problem Muslims spoke about in regard to employment was both related and unrelated to being Muslim. Many respondents were keenly aware of how *issues of class and race* could play a role in employment difficulties and were occasionally impossible to disentangle from difficulties that arise from religious affiliation. As discussed in Chapter 4, French Muslims recognize the challenges of intersectionality. Think of the journalist at *Respect Mag* who sent in a CV with a “de-Arabized” first name. What was the exact reason for the expected discrimination? In other words, what are potential employers concerned about when an Arab-sounding name appears on a CV? Arabs? Muslims? Something they associate with either or both of those categories?

When asked whether Muslims have a harder time getting jobs than the rest of the French, a representative from the PMF said yes. His response, however, included a self-conscious assessment of the continued influence of the immigrant experience on the lives of Muslims in France:

You're a sociologist. You know. The parents arrive in France—it takes two, three generations to get to the middle class. When you're in a *foyer*,<sup>8</sup> do not speak the language—it is true that there are quite a few Muslims in France who are not graduates, so already they have difficulties on the market. And this scratches at the ethnic problem. To be black is not a bonus, unless you play soccer. So there is that in addition. And if you are Muslim, that adds a black mark. It makes things harder.

It is important to end the stereotype that all Muslims are immigrants, but it would be an analytical mistake to ignore the immigration question when considering Muslims in France. Even some of those who did not personally live the immigrant experience continue to be affected by it. One Muslim respondent, born in France to Algerian immigrants, talked about growing up in a house with no books. Her parents did not read, but fortunately they understood the value of reading. The respondent's mother took her and her siblings to the public library, where they could check out books, and a librarian read stories to them. Not all immigrant parents might think to do that or have the time to do it. (The respondent's mother did not hold an outside job.) And it can be difficult to find a place to study in a small apartment, especially if the family is large. The response from the PMF member tied religion to immigration, class, race, and inferior education—not as a stereotype but as an attempt to explain the challenges Muslims face when it comes to employment. It is not religion alone that makes employment difficult for Muslims. The social positionality of many Muslims in France is inextricably tied to other groups that face their own challenges in the field of work.

The Muslim woman who took off her hijab to find a job made a similar remark: “The problems of certain immigrant families are the same as those of some other families, because they are at the same socioeconomic level. . . . It is more . . . There are problems that are relative to social class rather than immigrant origins.” Just as the problems that Muslims face cannot be reduced to their religious affiliation, the problems of immigration cannot be reduced to immigrant identities. Class continues to have an impact across these identities, and blaming employment problems solely on religion or immigration ignores this important social factor that Muslims and immigrants share with the rest of France's working class.

For all of this discussion of discrimination, workplace unease, and the additional hurdles posed by racism and class inequality, some Muslims claimed not to have experienced discrimination in the workplace or hiring. Caitlin Killian's interviews with North Africans and Muslims in France suggest two

potential reasons for this. First, they might refuse to identify racist discrimination as such as a way to maintain control; people cannot control the racism of others, but they can “refus[e] to let it bother them” (Killian 2006, p. 192). Second, Muslim and North African women often view themselves as privileged compared with their male counterparts, as Arab men may be seen as dangerous, as a threat to French women or the job security of the rest of France (Killian 2006, pp. 71–72). These women may view their workplace difficulties as less serious by comparison or even discount them entirely.

There are additional reasons that some Muslims claim not to have experienced racism in hiring or in the workplace (and perhaps more than one of these explanations may be present in any given case). The leader of the JMF who talked about his coworkers’ delicacy because of his religion said that “for scientists, it is a bit different. Working in a bank, it is another thing. For scientists, when your job is very specific, you are not really visible to society. To those working in marketing, it must be very, very different. I did not have a problem, I got a job immediately after finishing school.” His comments suggest an awareness that jobs that entail being *seen* by clients (as opposed to, for example, working anonymously in a lab) tend to include more discriminatory practices in hiring. The Garnier trial confirms this notion, particularly the accusation by the prosecution that Garnier assumed most French people would not want to buy hair-care products from an Arab, black, or Asian salesperson (Sage 2009).

And for all the difficulties female Muslim respondents have when it comes to the hijab, one female member of the EMF, a convert to Islam who wears a hijab, said that she had never experienced a problem in the workplace:

I used to work in the summers in Haute-Savoie.<sup>9</sup> When the immigrants went back home to their home countries, the students picked up the slack. It was factory work.

*Did you ever have problems in the factory because you were Muslim?*

Oh no. My name is [a common French name], which does not say much, and I wore my *foulard* as a bandana. For them, it was legitimate. I had my shirtsleeves rolled up (*laughs*). So, no, but because it did not really show.

In this instance, the respondent acknowledged that her untroubled experiences at work were due to the “invisibility” of her religious affiliation. Because of her pale complexion and, as she pointed out, her French name, no one suspected she was Muslim, and the factory workers’ typical outfit permitted her to cover her head inconspicuously, without any questions (which was probably also due to the fact that few realized she was Muslim in the first place). This illustrates common assumptions in France about who is Muslim and the ability of those who do not fit the description to pass under the radar in the workplace.

This respondent’s awareness of her different status as a white French person with a French-sounding name, coupled with her efforts to manipulate the identity

assumptions of others (i.e., that they would not think she was Muslim, that the “bandana” would be read as “factory worker”), is reminiscent of the “passing” that Kitty Calavita (2000) discusses in her work on Chinese immigration into the United States. Calavita highlights how savvy Chinese immigrants who were aware of the U.S. preference for upper-class Chinese migrants carefully constructed a look that matched confusing, ignorant, and prejudiced bureaucratic instructions about what a merchant or other upper-class Chinese person supposedly looked like. “Such ‘impression management’ was central to the efforts of the Chinese to pass inspection, as they not only sought to control expressions of their identity but also sometimes consciously appropriated and displayed the ‘identity tags’ that inspectors had come to rely on” (Calavita 2000, p. 10). The JMF leader simply did not appear before clients; the EMF member, meanwhile, managed the impressions others had of her to appear neutral to them—in other words, she muted her outward appearance as a Muslim and had no trouble in the factory.

Finally, one Muslim respondent maintained that immigrants are “all employed,” regardless of religion. As such, there was no discrimination problem against immigrants, even if they are Muslims. This respondent, who was also a student member of the EMF, had immigrated to France from Algeria six years earlier. As he described how he saw the employment situation, the EMF member who had so carefully managed her appearance in her summer job occasionally interrupted to disagree:

**Student 1:** Look at the numbers. When you look at immigrants, they are rarely unemployed!

**Student 2:** (*Groans.*)

**Student 1:** They all have jobs. They are not like the French, who have difficulties finding work. They get all sorts of social assistance. Their children, they are educated. So what I think is that at the end of the month, a good portion of immigrants have full pockets. Full of money.

**Student 2:** Oh, *full.* (*Speaks in a sarcastic tone and utters faint sounds of disagreement.*) . . . These people, at the end of their lives, they are going to have completely broken backs.

**Student 1:** No, but that, no, what we need to say is . . .

**Student 2:** Excuse me for interrupting, but . . . I agree with him that the people who come to this country do OK for themselves. But their children, the generation that comes after them, . . . We need to avoid generalities, but they are less motivated to work as their parents worked. There really is a difference between those who are born in France and those who are considered to still be immigrants. They know where they are from, and they know the opportunities that come with that.

This spontaneous debate is fascinating for three reasons. The first is that it displays disagreement among Muslims on the subject of employment. The

second is that the female EMF member is constantly thinking of the term “immigrant” as a social construction, aware that many French people will talk about “immigrants” when they are in fact referring to the children and grandchildren of immigrants. The third is that it highlights different *expectations* that Muslims have when it comes to employment. These expectations are not simply limited to employment, and I argue that there are generational patterns in these expectations.

I argued in Chapter 1 that young Muslims have a different notion of French citizenship—thoroughly convinced of their Frenchness, they do not want to hide their religion in the private sphere and feel entitled to claim a plural identity. It is not necessarily their youth that breeds this new interpretation of French citizenship. It is their association with a generation of Muslims who were born in France or even born of French parents. This generation of Muslims feels thoroughly French and therefore entitled to all of the rights and liberties they associate with that—rights that sometimes extend beyond the contemporary dominant discourse on French citizenship. These French Muslims also expect the quality of life that they believe comes with being educated in France: not just fluent but *native* in the language, culture, and history of France and bearing degrees from French institutions of higher education, these Muslims expect good jobs. As the female EMF respondent argued, the children of immigrants “are less motivated to work as their parents worked.” In other words, they are unwilling to do the kind of “back-breaking” manual labor that many of France’s immigrants do. Her comment that the children of immigrants “know where they are from” echoes this notion that Muslims born in France feel entitled to a better life and greater equality: knowing that one is from France means knowing that one should be treated like the rest of the French. If someone has a French education, she implies, of course she or he will be unwilling to work the same jobs her or his parents did—immigrant parents who potentially had *no* education. While the male respondent who was a recent immigrant thought immigrants to France regardless of religion had a good life overall, earning more money than they ever would in their home countries, the female respondent, a “*française de souche*” (see Chapter 4), refused to accept such menial conditions as “good.” For her, there was no backdrop of comparison to how things would be in another country. There was only comparison between the potential one has as a French citizen and the reality one lives. In this light, it is not surprising that she would be less quiescent about the employment conditions of immigrants, and of Muslims.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to sum up Muslims’ views on employment in France, given their diversity. As Chapter 3 indicated, some French Muslims believe in fighting directly against discrimination, while others believe they need to “wait it out,” or rely on the power of liberal entrepreneurialism to bring about greater equality. Some Muslims even blend their responses, maintaining that *both* are necessary.



Stated differently, some Muslims prefer to synthesize the values of political equality and economic liberalism.

This synthesis is interesting for a number of reasons. First, Brouard and Tiberj (2005) tell us that most French people oppose the values of economic liberty and political equality, seeing the two as mutually exclusive options pursued by the right and left, respectively. It is peculiar, then, to see these values combined. Second, this combination of the values of economic liberty and political equality that we find among some Muslims is based on traditional French values, but with some unique twists. Equality, after all, is part of the *liberté-égalité-fraternité* triad that is supposed to drive all French politics. And “being independent, making it on one’s own” is considered a socioeconomic value by 84 percent of the French (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 73).

Yet this synthesis of political equality and economic liberty is also based on some values that are *not* typically “French.” The connection some Muslim respondents make between hard work and success is not a thoroughly French value, as only 55 percent of the French believe that “ambition” and “working hard to succeed” are important (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 73). And some Muslim discussions about employment in France suggest a rhetoric of *respect*, which is not exactly the same thing as equality. For Muslims who know formal legal equality yet face ridicule and unofficial discrimination in employment, this distinction is not one of irrelevant minutiae.

This distinction brings us back to Marx’s persistent complaint that rights liberate the abstract, public citizen while perpetuating social and economic inequality. Is it possible to respect the public citizen while reviling the private citizen—and is it possible to keep up the charade when the reviled citizen begins to bring elements of that which is “private” into the public? The notion of fraternity is an important French value. Yet fraternity is based on commonality (from the Latin *frater*, implying a common mother), whereas respect challenges people to find worth in that which may be different. And the pursuit of respect potentially begets discussions about subjects the French traditionally prefer to keep out of the public sphere—specifically, religion. In short, on the subject of employment, Muslims are of many minds, and some combine very French values in an unusual way, yielding subtle modifications that ask us to rethink, but not reject, the terms of French public coexistence.



## Housing

### *The Banlieues as a Geographic and Socially Constructed Place*

*Since the beginning of the 1990s, [there has been] a stigmatization of youth from working class suburbs that makes them look like foreigners to French society. . . . [F]irst they were likened to thieves; then, with the gang-rape issue, to rapists; then, with the headscarf affair, to “veilers”; and finally, [they were likened] to dirt that gets washed out with a hose.<sup>1</sup>*

—ÉRIC MACÉ, SOCIOLOGIST AT THE UNIVERSITÉ DE BORDEAUX, QUOTED IN “BANLIEUES” 2005

In 2002, seventeen-year-old Sohane Benziane was murdered by a fellow resident of her *banlieue*. The circumstances are deeply troubling: Jamal Derrar, a local gang leader, had forbidden Benziane from visiting his apartment complex after he had a disagreement with her boyfriend. When he found Benziane at the complex one day, he cornered her in a basement full of dumpsters. His friend Tony Rocca blocked the door. Derrar then threw gasoline on Benziane, lit a match, and set her on fire. When Derrar was brought back to the building to show police what had happened, cheers of support—for Derrar—erupted from the apartment building (Crumley 2004; Rotman 2006).

This incident, along with the publication of *Dans l'enfer des tournantes* (2003 [*To Hell and Back* in the English translation]),<sup>2</sup> Samira Bellil's book about her experience of gang rape while growing up in a *banlieue* (discussed later in this chapter), spurred Fadéla Amara to start the feminist activist organization NPNS. When Amara speaks of *banlieues* and the cramped housing projects there, she identifies the problem this way: the paternalist cultures that immigrants brought with them have been perverted, leading to unchecked violence against women—particularly women who are the children of immigrants. “Today, fathers are absent, a fact that emerges clearly from debates on suburban discontent . . . now the eldest son decides conflicts within the family. He has assumed responsibility for teaching family values to younger sisters and for policing their conduct outside the home to ensure that they behave” (Amara 2006, p. 63).

When it comes to Muslims and housing in France, elite discourse typically focuses the sexism and violence of young Muslim men in the *banlieues*.

The conversation is often framed in terms of security: the threatened security either of women or of the republic. Laurent Mucchielli, a French sociologist and criminologist, contests that this frame of insecurity in the *banlieues* has existed since the 1990s. The main change has been to move from a condemnation of immigrant youths in general to a condemnation of Islam and Muslims. “Little by little, a frightening, reductionist equation appeared: Maghrebian Islam = non-integration + violence + anti-Semitism + the oppression of women” (Mucchielli 2005, p. 90). In short, today’s elite discourse on the subject of Muslims and housing focuses on the failed integration of French Muslims living in the *banlieues*, especially young Muslim men, who are viewed as intolerant, “macho,” and violent.

In analyzing media discourse surrounding the riots that spread throughout French suburbs in 2005 (more on this below), Caitlin Killian also found a tendency in the media to present male Muslim and Arab youths as dangerous and hypermasculine.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Killian (2007, p. 76) argues that in response to gang rapes in the suburbs of France, some feminists, including members of the NPNS and Élisabeth Badinter, have presented an oversimplified view of Muslim and Arab men as aggressors who threaten young Muslim women, who are depicted as better integrated than, yet in need of protection from, their male counterparts.

Muslims themselves, however, speak about a whole host of different challenges they and sometimes other *banlieusards* (inhabitants of the *banlieues*) face in regard to housing. While many recognize to varying degrees the phenomenon Amara discusses, few place as much emphasis on it as a key issue to improving the situation of Muslims in France (or the situation of the *banlieues*, for that matter). When Muslims talk about housing, they often speak about remote *banlieues* as municipal planning disasters, breeding unemployment and social marginalization; the isolation of immigrant mothers, of whom much is expected but for whom little support is provided; discrimination in housing rentals; inadequate government housing that is crumbling, too small, or too difficult to obtain; and ill treatment by the police. These varied concerns are not typically reflected in the elite discourse on housing and Muslims in France.

Before moving on to a discussion of the disconnection between these two discourses, it is important to consider the role the *banlieues* play in the story of Sohane Benziane’s murder. This chapter is titled “Housing,” but as the story demonstrates, it addresses more topics than bricks and mortar (though they matter as well). This chapter, in fact, has more to do with “place,” a term that human geographers use when describing how humans bring meaning, in various ways, to their environment.<sup>4</sup> Tim Cresswell (2004, p. 7) outlines John Agnew’s famous tripartite definition of “place” as location, locale, and sense of place, where location is the set of coordinates on a map, locale is the physicality of a location, and sense of place is the meaning people attribute to a location. The third of these, the “sense of place,” implies such constructs as social hierarchy and normative behavior.

This chapter examines where many Muslims live and dwell in France, what meanings are attributed to these places, and how this affects the experience of being Muslim in France. The chapter often focuses on the *banlieues* and debates surrounding them, as (for historical reasons that are explained later) many of France's Muslims live in these modest suburbs. It is important to remember, however, that not all Muslims live in France's suburbs, and not all suburban dwellers are Muslim. Furthermore, some suburbs, such as Neuilly-sur-Seine (of which Nicolas Sarkozy once was the mayor), are quite affluent. Nevertheless, even those Muslim men who do not live in the *banlieues* share an experience with those who do and, more broadly, with men of color: police identity checks in public spaces.

Having said all of this, I have retained the word "housing" in the chapter title because of the important role housing has played in the recent (post-World War II) history of Muslim immigration to France and because it is the term that has the most currency when discussing issues of place and Muslims in France today. For example, as is shown later in the chapter, newspaper articles addressing Muslims and the larger concept of "living conditions" in France, as opposed to housing, are far fewer in number and have an even less meaningful connection to the subject of Muslims in France.

Let us now examine the question of Muslims and housing in France in historical perspective.

## Muslims and Housing in Historical Perspective

Housing has been a perennial issue for Muslims in France, but the reasons for this and the way it has been understood have changed over time. During the *Trente Glorieuses*, there was not enough low-cost housing for North African immigrant workers (many of whom were Muslim). While some North African workers were able to find housing, many ended up in *bidonvilles*, shantytowns that cropped up in the 1950s. Translated as "can towns" or "tin towns," referring to the cans that were cut and hammered flat to create shingles for shelters made from wood and other scrap material, *bidonvilles* existed on the outskirts of major cities, without electricity or running water, sometimes unknown and often unacknowledged by those (including the authorities) within the cities. These shantytowns were not an exceptional experience for North Africans in France at the time: 43 percent of Algerians, for example, lived in some kind of *bidonville* in 1963 (Centre National de Documentation Pédagogique 2001).

The primary effort to house immigrants in the 1950s was the construction of *habitation à loyer modéré* (HLM [low-rent housing]), essentially rent-controlled apartment units. Famous for their unattractiveness and eerie resemblance to the modern prison complex, many HLM apartments initially did not have toilets or showers. Perhaps more problematic than the inside of the HLM were policies about the placement of its inhabitants and the buildings

themselves. Ariane Chebel d'Appolonia (2009, pp. 272–273) highlights the inconsistency of France's "assimilationist" tradition by reminding us that

in the aftermath of World War II, numerous initiatives intended to maintain the distinctive cultural traditions of minority groups were undertaken. State agencies in charge of housing, education and access to social benefits based their activities on ethnic quotas. For example, HLM (public housing) authorities were asked to relocate immigrants on the basis of their national origin in particular urban areas. As a result, the percentage of immigrants in these areas increased from 15 percent in 1975 to 24 percent in 1982, and 28 percent in 1990.

The upshot of this ethnic grouping, according to Chebel d'Appolonia (2009, p. 273), was "ethnic differentiation [that] turned into ethnic segregation and discrimination." For HLMs located on the outskirts of cities and in suburbs, this also meant a kind of geographical isolation that separated the immigrants and their children from the population centers of France.

In the 1960s and 1970s, North African temporary workers began pursuing permanent stays in France in increasing numbers. Deteriorating political situations in North Africa combined with the French decision to close the door on family reunification presented a "now or never" scenario, and more and more North African workers brought their families to begin a permanent life in France. The housing situation arguably went from bad to worse. In the crowded rooms where single men had once lived entire families were now cramped.

The HLMs continued to be built to respond to these housing needs, increasingly with full sanitary facilities, but new problems appeared. In the late 1970s, the *Trente Glorieuses* came to an end. Policies spearheaded by the secretary of state for foreign workers, a post created in 1974, aimed to ameliorate the lot of immigrants in France, but as Jane Freedman (2004, p. 35) states, "The rhetoric of integration and of improving the lives of immigrant workers proved to be far removed from reality, particularly once the issue of the cost of these steps to integration emerged as a major theme of discussion." Such policies can be hard to implement in the most financially prosperous times. France, squeezed by the economic crises of the 1970s, made its priorities clear. As Freedman points out, the resignation of the first secretary of state for foreign workers, André Postel-Vinay, after only six weeks in the job suggests a frustrating mismatch between rhetoric and reality.

While unemployment rose in the 1970s, it did not do so evenly throughout the country. Growing unemployment and crime became associated with not just these low-rent units but also with the suburbs, or *banlieues*, in which they were often located. Many *banlieues* were isolated bedroom communities with few local employment opportunities and inadequate public transportation to the closest major cities. The quality of schools, as discussed in Chapter 4,

was also markedly different from that in the rest of France. The construction and maintenance of HLMs slowed. The issue of housing for many French Muslims—increasingly French citizens born in France or even “ethnic French” converts—became more complex. The marginalization that accompanied the housing situation of many Muslims in France had long been geographic and economic, but now it also included social labels of “joblessness” and “deviance.”

Starting in the 1980s, youth unrest—street fighting and the burning of cars—began to surface in various *banlieues*. First officially recognized in 1981 with the “Minguettes Rodeos,”<sup>5</sup> these “youthful provocations” were directed at the police (Mucchielli 2009, p. 732). The term “riot,” however, was not used until the early 1990s. While the actors and some of the techniques of the riots of the 1990s seemed similar to those of the previous decade—suburban youths, often the children of immigrants, who were angry at the police and burning cars—the scenario was nevertheless very different. These riots typically started following the deaths of suburban youths in complicated situations that involved the police and yielded burned buildings, plundered stores, and fights sometimes involving hundreds of people that resulted in injuries (Mucchielli 2009, p. 732). French leaders continued to struggle with these youth riots through the 1990s and early 2000s, leading up to the much publicized events of 2005. The electrocution of three and death of two young men, all children of immigrants, in a Parisian *banlieue* while the police appeared to be standing by led to riots in several cities across the country, with approximately ten thousand cars and thirty thousand dumpsters burned (Mucchielli 2009, p. 733).

Parallel to this development, the rise of fundamentalist Islam and the discovery that some Muslims in France supported the movement to varying degrees, increased the stigma associated with the *banlieues*. In fact, during the riots of 2005, Nicolas Sarkozy, then the interior minister, suggested a connection between “extremists” (Islamic religious extremists) and the rioters (Mucchielli 2009). The RG felt compelled to indicate in its report on the riots that it did *not* include radical Muslim organizations (Mucchielli 2009, p. 738). Nevertheless, the connection between young Muslim men and suburban violence can be found elsewhere, particularly in the *anti-machisme* (anti-machismo) discourse of some French politicians, intellectuals, and media.

As I show through an analysis of two focusing events, elite discourse today frames the issue of housing and Muslims in terms of the threat posed by violent and intolerant young men in the *banlieues*—a problem often attributed to Islam and “cultures of origin.” To hark back to Cresswell (2004, p. 7), the “sense of place” often associated with the *banlieues* is one of radicalized, ethnic, and religious danger.

The response of many elites to these two focusing events, which concern the perceived rise of gang rape and of anti-Semitic violence, resembles what Stanley Cohen has described as “moral panics.” According to Cohen (1987, p. 9), in moments of moral panic, “a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its

nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media.” This exaggerated image, and the threat it is believed to pose, is then diagnosed and treated by politicians and thinkers, sometimes yielding important changes in law and policy, or even changes in “the way society conceives itself” (Cohen 1987, p. 9). In the two focusing events under examination here, elite discourse produced stereotypical images of African and Islamic culture and attributed complex social problems (pertaining to class, race, educational inequality, unemployment, geographic marginalization, and so forth) to supposedly cultural tendencies toward violence and hypermasculinity.<sup>6</sup> Because these supposedly cultural tendencies are depicted as foreign or religious, elite discussion of the two focusing events has a very “us-versus-them” quality, focusing on the dangerous “other” or outsider. This has the effect of disregarding the presence of these crimes among the rest of the French and downplaying local factors that may contribute to such acts of violence.

Without going deeper into the theory on moral panics, which covers topics such as the relationship between policing and deviance and the compatibility of moral panics with authoritarian shifts (see Hall et al. 1978; Cohen 1987), we can still appreciate how moral panics create a public identity that merits policing and becomes suspicious in the public eye. The elite discourse surrounding these two focusing events in France works in a similar way, depicting young Muslim (sometimes along with Arab and black) men as violent, macho, and intolerant. Young Muslim women in this discourse are often depicted as victims of their male relatives and in need of the help of France. Bans on clothing worn by some Muslim women are examples of legal efforts to protect Muslim women from the perceived violence and sexism of Islamic and African cultures. While this discourse casts young Muslim men and women in very different roles, both are portrayed in these discussions as unfit or problematic citizens.

## How Elites Discuss Muslims and Housing

The Socialist Party member and former Secretary of State for Urban Policy Fadéla Amara has been an important elite voice on the subject of Muslims and housing in France. While much of what Amara says is true, she occasionally speaks in absolutes that make it possible to read into her discourse an overwhelmingly negative depiction of the *banlieues* and a criticism of Islam as misogynist. For example, when speaking about young men of immigrant descent in the *banlieues* in her book *Breaking the Silence: French Women's Voices from the Ghetto*, a sort of manifesto for the NPNS, Amara (2006, p. 65) states, “The change in boys’ behavior toward girls was slow but absolute. The more time passed, the more the government neglected the housing projects, the more young men became radicalized.” A careful reader will be quick to note that Amara does not qualify this statement: all boys began to treat all girls differently, and not just differently, but “absolutely” so. Amara’s language suggests a 180 degree turn from the supposedly tolerant *banlieues* of her teen years in

the 1980s to an oppressive, patriarchal trap for all young women of immigrant origin. Furthermore, Amara's use of the term "radicalized" is unclear. Does she intend for the reader to make the connection to radical Islam? She offers no explanation for how this term should be understood. In his introduction to *To Hell and Back*, Alec Hargreaves (2008, p. xvii) states that both Bellil and Amara have been "accused of playing into the hands of reactionaries and Islamophobes because of [their] public denunciation of violence inflicted on women in the *banlieues*." One can see how Amara's discourse could easily be taken up by those who seek to criticize Islam.

Another example from *Breaking the Silence* introduces the concept of the macho men of the *banlieues*: "Even though only a minority of boys exhibits such extremely violent behavior, a large majority of guys in the projects have adopted this hypervirility. Respect for others and solidarity no longer mean anything; only the law of the strongest and the affirmation of their manhood remain. To exist, 'they put their balls on the line.' The only way for them to be recognized both outside and inside the projects is to act macho and violent" (Amara 2006, p. 66). Unlike the earlier citation, Amara qualifies her statement here: only a minority of the young men in the *banlieues* whose families come from paternalistic immigrant cultures are "extremely violent." Nevertheless, "a large majority" are macho. These young men are more than masculine, even more than virile: they are "hypervirile" and wholly without respect.

Some young Muslim women and women of immigrant origin in the *banlieues* are subject to violence or murder. Some face pressure to perform submissively. Some are raped, sometimes even gang-raped, and some are forced into marriages or sent to "home countries" they have never known and are not heard from again (Keaton 2006, pp. 56–57). But this does not happen to all young women in the *banlieues*, and is it not directly caused by the *banlieues*. Nor are such tragedies unique to Muslim or immigrant women (something that both Bellil and Amara have pointed out). It is true that the murder of So-hane Benziane tells an important story about the violence and misogyny that exist in those suburbs of France where, as the journalist Patrice De Beer puts it, even police sometimes dare not go ("Muslim women rebel in France" 2004). All of the Muslims interviewed for this study agreed that these problems do exist in France and need to be addressed. But (as some of the interviewees also pointed out) it would be a mistake to assume that misogynistic violence is a problem peculiar to the suburbs or to Muslim men.

As a non-Muslim leader of the NPNS was careful to note, violence against women is a world problem: "Marital violence has nothing to do with that [social milieu]. You find it everywhere. All other kinds of violence—even gang rapes and honor crimes—do not only happen in the *quartier*. A month ago, a young woman was burned by her husband. She did not come from a culture that practices honor crimes. Her husband came home drunk, poured gasoline on her, and lit a match." This woman's response was part of her larger denial of the claim that violence is endemic to the suburbs and immigrants. Such simple



associations, she said, would lead one to neglect violence against women that happens outside the suburbs and among the “ethnic French.” She was arguing that some in the suburbs have “misunderstood” the mission of the NPNS as being “Islamophobic.”

But it is difficult to say that those in the *banlieues* were simply mistaken in connecting Amara, the NPNS, and Islamophobia. Amara, a Muslim woman who grew up in a *banlieue*, has a great deal of respect for Islam and the youths of the *banlieues*. In her role as secretary for urban policy, Amara’s goal was to improve the lives of these youths. Amara’s interviews and writing, not to mention an interview with her special adviser that was conducted for this research, suggest that she understands the complexity of the *banlieues* and the diversity of life experiences among young Muslim men and women. But the absolutist language she sometimes employs when talking about the *banlieues* and the strict dichotomies she sometimes advances (in her book, one is either a fascist or a democrat; a woman who wears the hijab or the Phrygian [i.e., a republican]; a secularist or an extreme cultural relativist) belie a subtler understanding of the situation in the *banlieues*. Worse, such discourse suggesting that Islam is poisonous to the republic and that young Muslim men of the *banlieues* are misogynistic and macho, all from a “credible” source (as Amara is, herself, a Muslim), have entitled French elites to push these perhaps unintentional absolutes even further. Wendy Pojmann (2010, p. 230) observes that “the liberal, secular, republican state and civil society favors multiethnic associations that engage in acts to uphold the dominant public sphere,” and as such, “the women of the NPNS have become media darlings in France.”

Regardless of their original intentions, Amara and the NPNS have helped popularize a language used by politicians, the media, and some intellectuals (especially some feminists) when discussing Muslims and the *banlieues*. This language includes terms such as “macho,” “gang rape,” and “basement Islam” (a term used to describe makeshift prayer rooms; it often connotes secretiveness and dangerous religious preaching). For example, the French “literary theorist and essayist Tzvetan Todorov said the riots [of 2005] were caused by the dysfunctional sexuality of Muslim youths obsessed with behaving in a ‘macho’ way” (Hargreaves 2005, para. 2). H el ene Carr ere d’Encausse, a graduate of the Institut d’ tudes Politiques, France’s preeminent political studies institution, and member of the Acad mie Fran aise, France’s authoritative body on the French language and a deeply symbolic institution of French intellectualism dating back to the 1600s, provided an equally puzzling explanation: she blamed the “polygamous marital practices of Muslim immigrants from West Africa” (quoted in Hargreaves 2005, para. 2). This is “puzzling” because arrest records for the 2005 riots included “many non-Muslim Africans as well as people with French, Spanish, or Portuguese names” (Roy 2005, para. 4). The French essayist Alain Finkielkraut pointedly described the 2005 riots as the “fruit of an ethno-religious uprising” (quoted in Tiberj 2008, pp. 17–18).



In short, elite discussions of Muslims and housing in France mainly concern the subject of violence in the suburbs. Often the violence is depicted as that of angry, young Muslim men against women or of Muslims against Jews. Analysis of the two focusing events about Muslims and housing in France illustrate these frames, showing a deep concern with what is perceived as uniquely Muslim misogynistic and anti-Semitic violence.

### **Tournantes: *Is Gang Rape on the Rise?***

In 2000, *La Squale* (*The Tearaway*), a film conceived and directed by two French schoolteachers, raised interest in the issue of gang rape in France. The award-winning film, which focuses on the difficult lives of French suburban youths, begins with a scene of gang rape. A year and a half after the film's release, Bellil's autobiographical *L'enfer des tournantes* was published. Laurent Mucchielli has compared media coverage of gang rape in France to judicial statistics and concludes that much of the media coverage serves to vilify Islam and Muslims in the *banlieues*—to an extent that does not match their involvement with these crimes.

Mucchielli (2005, p. 12) notes that it is odd that the initial reviews of *La Squale* were published not in the section of the newspaper that regularly covers films but in the society pages. Indeed, *La Squale* and *L'enfer des tournantes* ignited discussion in the media and among politicians and some intellectuals on the issue of gang rape as a social problem of the *banlieues*. *Le Monde* described *La Squale* as a “testimonial film, between fiction and documentary” (quoted in Mucchielli 2005, p. 13). In a *Le Point* article titled “Group Rape: The Great Fear of the *Cité*,”<sup>7</sup> the author writes, “Shocked by the behavior and language of his young students, Fabrice Genestal . . . directed a film that includes the sexual barbarism of gangs in the *cit *. *Le Point* confirms these frightening testimonials” (quoted in Mucchielli 2005, p. 13). These and other articles on gang rape focused on its newness, its frequency, its impunity, and its shadowy nature (Mucchielli 2005, p. 13). In Mucchielli's analysis of media coverage of gang rapes, he indicates that the articles all target a common *place* and *population*: the *banlieues*, especially those around Paris, and youths with an immigrant background (Mucchielli 2005, p. 24).

But more than targeting youths with an immigrant background, the media also began to target Islam on the question of gang rape. Concerning Bellil's book, an article in *Lib ration* explained, “It is a story of group rape, of *tournantes*,” whose causes are “an archaic and miserable collective folly, founded on machismo, Islam, immigration, and disoriented and disorienting parents” (Le Vaillant 2002). But as Mucchielli (2005, p. 26) points out, “Nothing in Samira Bellil's book concerns Islam.” Mucchielli also notes an odd article in *Le Monde* that appeared around this time, highlighting how a young woman in Pakistan was condemned to group rape by a tribal court in her village. The article problematically omitted parts of the story that clarify that the trial and verdict were particular to this tribal court, not a normal judicial happening that represents

Pakistani justice or the influence of Islamic law on the Pakistani judicial system. The article also neglected to clarify that the verdict, however horrifying, reflects more on that tribe's system of honor and vendetta than on the religion of Islam in general (Mucchielli 2005, pp. 26–28). The presentation of the story in the article leaves one with the impression that Islam condones group rape and that Muslims are misogynists (Mucchielli 2005, pp. 26–27). The *timing* of that article suggests that a similar connection between Islam and group rape might be present in France, as well.

Those who have immigrant backgrounds are not only associated with the perpetrators of gang rapes. They are also typically represented as the victims in these articles: “The victims are primarily young Maghrebian women punished for their liberal morals” (Mucchielli 2005, p. 32).

The media's story—that gang rape is a problem of the *banlieues*; that it is a new phenomenon; that incidents of it are increasing; that it is committed by young men with immigrant, perhaps Muslim, backgrounds; that the victims are young women with immigrant backgrounds—does not perfectly match up with judicial and social research. Gang rape is not a new phenomenon. France was recording statistics on gang rape in the mid-nineteenth century. Georges Vigarello (2001, p. 150) claims that “such rapes were common and committed with relative impunity” at that time. More recently, a gang of “ethnic French” youths called the *blousons noirs* (lit. black leather jackets; the term refers to a French youth subculture of the 1950s and 1960s) are known to have committed gang rapes in the 1960s (Mucchielli 2005, pp. 38–39). The discourse surrounding that situation was eerily similar to that of today: the rapes were described as new, an epidemic, and confounding to judges (Mucchielli 2005, p. 34). And as Bellil herself notes (contrary to Amara's impression), gang rape was more prevalent in her community in the 1980s than in 2002 (Mucchielli 2005, p. 20). Judicial statistics indicate that the gang-rape rate has been stable in the past twenty years (Mucchielli 2005, p. 47). In short, gang rape is not new to France, and it is not increasing.

Furthermore, a judicial study on gang rape that explored the cases of fifty-two perpetrators found that, while many of the perpetrators indeed had immigrant backgrounds, the true commonality among them was a social milieu of poverty and difficulties or failure in school (Mucchielli 2005, p. 50). Also, none of the men in the study claimed any affiliation to Islam (Mucchielli 2005, p. 53). The same study indicates that victims of gang rape share that kind of social background, but contrary to elite discourse, they are for the most part white (Mucchielli 2005, p. 52).

The fact that gang rapes are more likely to happen in the *banlieues*, then, indicates less a problem with the *banlieues* as such, or immigrants and Muslims, than with the poverty and social and educational marginalization that are so common in these suburbs. As for rape in general, as the leader of the NPNS quoted above reminds us, it unfortunately happens across social milieus. Gang rapes specifically, or *tournantes*, are not caused by Muslims or by a macho

culture that feeds off basement Islam. The gang rapes of today result from poverty, unemployment, social marginalization, school failures, and men seeking some kind of group solidarity through the victimization of women. Religion and “immigrant culture” were not needed to make gang rape happen, and judging from the steady rate of gang rape, they have not increased the problem, either.

### *Incident on the RER D: Is Anti-Semitism on the Rise?*

In 2004, a woman (known only to the public as “Marie L.”) went to the police stating that she had been attacked by six African and Maghrebian youths armed with knives who overturned her child’s stroller, ripped her clothes, chopped off a lock of her hair, and drew three swastikas on her stomach with a marker pen, all while she was waiting in a Parisian RER D station (Smolar 2004b). The location is significant for two reasons. First, unlike the Métro system, the RER is a train that connects Paris with more distant *banlieues*. That this incident occurred on the RER suggests that the violence so commonly associated by the media and politicians with the *banlieues* is literally coming into Paris. Second, in 1995, the GIA sought to extend the Algerian Civil War to France via a series of civilian bombings. The group wanted to replace the Algerian government with an Islamic state, and GIA militants set off bombs in various places in Paris. The deadliest explosion happened along the RER B line, where eight people were killed and eighty were wounded (“Algerians get life for Paris bombing” 2002). The RER has therefore been associated in the past with Islamist violence and terrorism.

Within hours, the media and politicians had developed an interpretation of the event. In an article for *Le Monde*, Piotr Smolar (2004b) wrote, “Anti-Semitic or racist and xenophobic actions are resurfacing in France, and have multiplied since the beginning of the year.” Alain-Gérard Slama claimed in *Le Figaro* that this was “anti-French racism, a Francophobia that, like that of the Nazis, has become nearly inseparable from Judeophobia. . . . [They are] fanatics who believe they can bring jihad on [French] soil”; Georges Suffert wrote in *Le Monde* that the incident marked “the breakdown of the civic spirit and French integration” (although he notes that France could work to achieve the “restoration of the values of the Republic”); and Jean-Michel Thénard wrote in *Libération* that it was “a monstrous news item because it confirms the gangrene that is spreading throughout French society,” also drawing comparisons to Nazism in the 1930s (all quoted in Mucchielli 2005, pp. 92–93). Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin released a communiqué condemning “with the greatest of firmness” the “ignoble” act, which was “made more serious by these racist and anti-Semitic gestures” (quoted in Smolar 2004a). President Jacques Chirac also condemned the act as racist and anti-Semitic. Marie L. was attacked for being white, for being French, and for being Jewish. She was attacked by young men who were the products of failed French integration; they were Islamists and Nazi-like young men who hated France and Jews.

Marie L., it turns out, invented the entire story.

Seeking attention, Marie L. had drawn the swastikas on herself, torn her clothes, and cut her hair. There were no Arabs, no young black men, no knives. She strategically chose a story that she knew would draw attention—and she chose wisely. Strangely, the reaction of the press and politicians to the revelation that Marie L. had lied did not, for the most part, change their general tune of anti-Semitism among youths with an immigrant background. One article in *Le Monde* claimed that the incident “revealed a society obsessed by victims” (Prieur 2004). The general conclusion that the journalist drew from the incident was that a “cult of victimhood” exists in France—not that hasty assumptions exist about the supposed criminality and anti-Semitism of blacks, Muslims, and youths with immigrant backgrounds. As Dominique Strauss-Kahn, a French socialist and former managing director of the International Monetary Fund, unapologetically stated, “There are other [crimes] of the same genre every day” (quoted in Mucchielli 2005, p. 93).

But are there? Is anti-Semitism on the rise in France, and does it have to do with French Muslims? There is no question that France has today, and has long had, a problem with anti-Semitism. But in 2005, Laurent Mucchielli (p. 96) wrote that “anti-Semitic opinions have not ceased to diminish since World War II (including in these last few years) and only remain stable among the extreme right.” As France’s Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l’Homme (CNCDDH [National Consulting Committee for Human Rights] 2008, p. 13) noted in 2008, “Anti-Semitic violence and threats are in marked decline.” The media and political responses to the Marie L incident did not reflect data on anti-Semitism contemporary with that period.

That said, more recent data from the CNCDDH indicate that anti-Semitic violence *did* suddenly increase in 2009, and it has not returned to the lower levels of the 1990s. The same is true, however, for racist and anti-immigrant violence. Anti-immigrant violence for the most part has targeted people of Maghrebian origin, accounting for 69 percent of all racist violence in France (CNCDDH 2008, p. 35). It should be noted that some of the attacks on people of Maghrebian origin might also involve Islamophobia. Fourteen of the forty-two acts committed in 2007 against people of Maghrebian origin that the CNCDDH (2008, p. 35) classifies as “racist” include “a specifically Islamophobic character, targeting places of worship and remembrance,” and targeting individuals for being Muslim. In addition to this, since the CNCDDH started collecting data on Islamophobic violence in 2010, the number of reported incidents has only increased. It seems that France is grappling with a problem of intolerance writ large, not just anti-Semitism (see Figure 6.1).

Furthermore, when describing public opinion, the CNCDDH maintains that while there may be a “larger acceptance of minorities” today, this is not the case for Islam and Muslims (CNCDDH 2008, p. 76):

Islam only evokes something positive for 28 percent of people interviewed (+7 percent compared to the 2006 report). Of all the

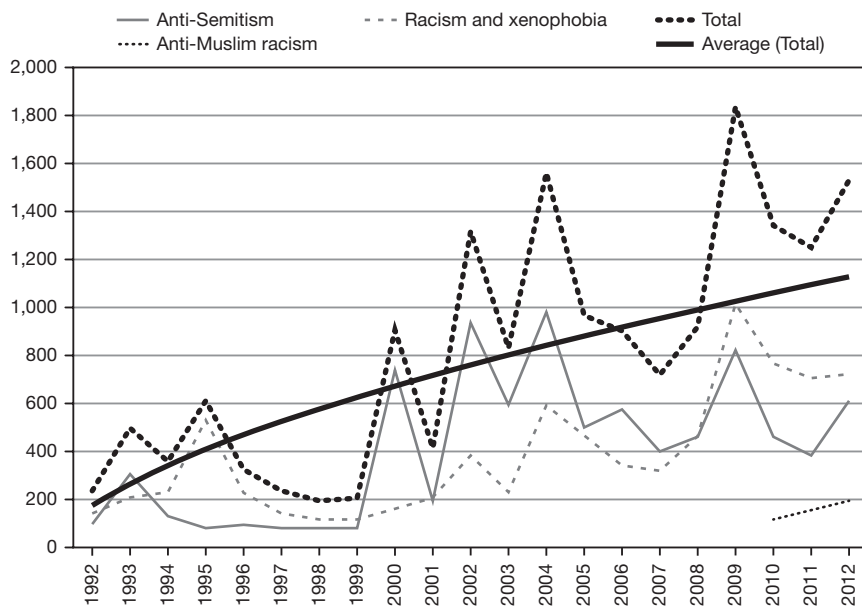


FIGURE 6.1 Evolution of racial, anti-Semitic, and anti-Muslim violence since 1992: Total number of acts and threats by year. (Data from Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme [CNCDH], *La lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie. Année 2012* [Paris: La Documentation Française, 2013], 105.)

religions, it is the one that gives rise to the most negative images, with a positive opinion level that is 11 percent lower than that of the Jewish religion and 22 percent lower than that of the Catholic religion. . . . [W]hile 84 percent of people interviewed believe that Jewish French people are French like everyone else, the proportion of people who believe that Muslim French people are French like everyone else is only 69 percent.

Thus, the elite rhetoric suggesting that the Jewish population in France is being increasingly targeted for violence misses the broader context of a troubling overall increase in racial, ethnic, and religiously motivated violence in France.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the fact that Marie L. could depend on the eagerness of elites to assume that Arabs are Muslim, and that Muslims and blacks would want to attack a Jew, points to the prevalence of these assumptions.

### *General Media Presence of Muslims in Articles about Housing*

The conclusions drawn from the focusing events are supported by the media analysis presented in Chapter 2. When the analysis of depictions of Muslims in

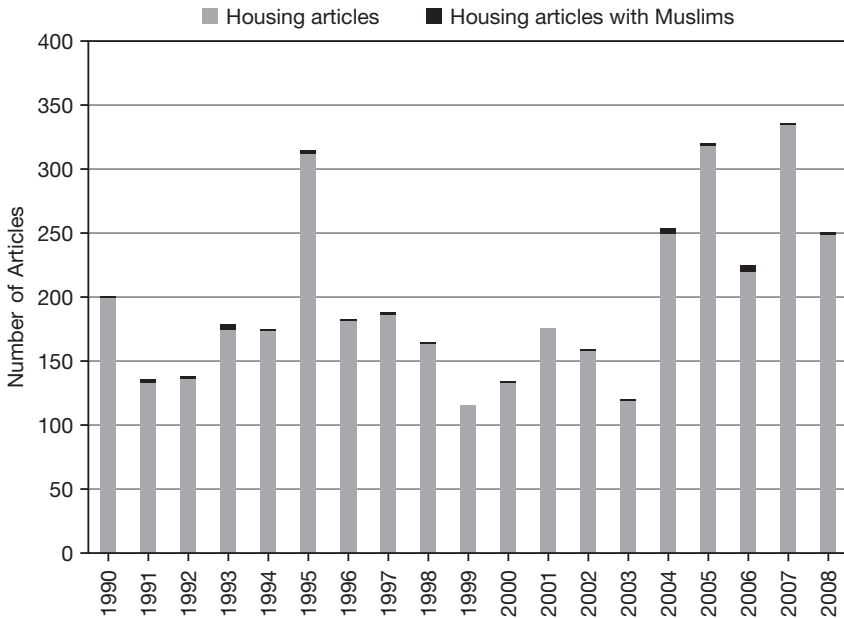


FIGURE 6.2 Level of attention on Muslims in housing articles in *Le Monde*, 1990–2008.

one hundred randomly selected articles published in *Le Monde* between 1990 and 2008 is cross-tabulated for housing, 35 percent of the ninety-seven references to Muslims broadly depict them as problematic citizens or as citizens who have failed to integrate. The specific depictions behind this negative view of their citizenship include direct mention of Muslims as failing to integrate (four references); Muslims as religious extremists (eight references); Muslims associated with violence, criminal behavior, or disorder (one reference); Muslims as disorganized (two references); and Muslims as intolerant (two references). Similar accusations of violence, religious extremism, and un-French norms and values among Muslims are apparent in the discourse that surrounded both focusing events.

Finally, it is important to note that the frame of intolerance and violence that is used by elites when discussing Muslims and housing in France exists alongside the relative *absence* of discussion about Muslims and housing. Of the 3,739 articles on housing in *Le Monde* between 1990 and 2008,<sup>9</sup> a mere 34 mentioned “Muslim” at least once in the article (see Figure 6.2). Discussion of Muslims in France is more readily found in articles about the related subject of “living conditions” than about “housing,” but not by much (and there are fewer of these articles overall compared with those about housing). When we use all the same parameters to examine *Le Monde* articles about *conditions de vie* (living conditions), we find that of the 397 articles between 1990 and 2008 that mention living conditions in the headline or lead paragraph, only 7 mention

Muslims. While this means it is more likely that an article on living conditions will mention Muslims than an article on housing will, it must be noted that these references to Muslims in articles on living conditions were either not about the Muslim population in France today or were concerned with Muslims as Islamic radicals.<sup>10</sup>

This absence of a discussion is just as meaningful as the framing of focusing events such as the releases of *La Squale* and *L'enfer des tournantes* and the RER D incident. When Muslims are not being criticized for their violence and intolerance in the *banlieues*, they simply do not appear in media coverage about housing in France. Furthermore, Muslims have an extremely marginal presence in coverage of living conditions. This is surprising, given the history of serious housing challenges that the Muslim community has faced in France since the 1950s. More important, this inattention does not reflect the discussions by Muslims in France, who often express concerns about the quality, availability, and social marginalization of housing. One could argue that this absence of references to Muslims in articles about housing reflects the French commitment to difference-blind republican neutrality. But, then, why discuss Muslims at length when considering gang rape and anti-Semitism? It seems that republican neutrality is somewhat selective.

It should be acknowledged that the *American* media coverage of the riots in 2005 also sometimes confounded the rioters—marginalized youths of the *banlieues*, often the children of immigrants, but not always of Arab immigrants—with Muslims. As Jocelyne Cesari (2005, para. 16) notes, “The American media have had no qualms in using terms such as ‘Intifada’ or ‘jihad’ to describe the recent riots.” An article in the *Washington Post* boldly claimed, “Most of the rioters are the French-born children of immigrants from Arab and African countries. A large percentage are Muslim” (M. Moore 2005). As Cesari (2005, para. 16) remarked, this is unlikely, as leaders of the Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (UOIF [Union of Islamic Organizations of France]), a prominent Muslim organization, had called for an end to the rioting. If these rioters were Muslim and just ignoring the pleas of the UOIF, then clearly religion was *not*, as stated above, a “motivating factor.” There are even more blatant examples of American media confounding “violent youths in the *banlieues*” with “Muslims,” such as the lead from an article distributed by the Associated Press: “Aubervilliers, France—Marauding bands of Muslim youth set fire to cars and warehouses and pelted rescuers with rocks early Saturday, as the worst rioting in a decade spread from Paris to other French cities” (“Paris rioters set woman afire as violence spreads” 2005).

## How Muslims Discuss Housing in France

Because it is illegal to conduct surveys in France that examine what North American political science largely refers to as “identity markers,” such as race and religion, it is difficult to conduct the kind of large-scale surveys that allow



comparisons between Muslim and non-Muslim French people on policy issues. A rough approximation is to survey those with a North African or Turkish immigrant background, as Islam has long been the dominant religion of these regions. Not everyone with this immigrant background claims to be Muslim, however, so one must consider this replacement indicator an imperfect substitute that may point to general trends that must later be qualified with in-depth interview research.

Starting with the big picture: what might a general claim about housing among the population of French people who statistically are the most likely to be Muslim—those with North African and Turkish immigrant backgrounds—look like? When asked to evaluate the performance of their government, French immigrants of North African and Turkish origin generally report more favorably than the rest of the French population (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 51). The largest exception to this, however, is on the question of housing. While 19 percent of the French with a North African or Turkish immigrant background describe housing as one of the main problems in France today, only 9 percent of the rest of the French agree. For those French people most likely to be Muslim, housing seems to be a more salient issue (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 51). Would those whom we know for sure describe themselves as Muslims agree? And if so, why do they see housing as a serious problem in France? Do the reasons they give match with those of French elites?

Throughout the interviews with Muslims conducted for this book (including with those Muslims who describe being Muslim as an identity and those who describe it as a private practice), housing was often depicted as a serious issue in France, especially for fellow Muslims. Regardless of whether I introduced the subject of housing, it came up in every interview and sometimes resurfaced when discussing separate issues, such as employment, education, and the gendered nature of challenges immigrants face. Diverse reasons were given for its “problem” status, as well. While violence in the *banlieues*, machismo, and intolerance were recognized as real challenges, they were never described as the sole problem faced by Muslims when it comes to housing in France. Overall, the diverse and nuanced comments of the interviewees suggest that elite French discourse on Muslims and housing is reductionist.

Five broad themes about housing appeared repeatedly in interviews with Muslims. These themes were also widely discussed among the respondents, whether they were students, politicians, or professionals.

### *Muslims on the Isolation of the Banlieues*

First, Muslims often spoke about the *banlieues* as isolated from the rest of France both geographically and socially. In their view, *banlieues* were a municipal planning mistake that continues to make life difficult for *all* of their inhabitants, including Muslims. Originally designed as little more than bedroom communities, *banlieues* have few businesses that provide work opportunities.



Unemployment thus remains very high. While industrious residents may look outside the community for more employment opportunities, this is not easy to do so. Seine-Saint-Denis is on Paris's Métro and RER lines, and Cénon is on Bordeaux's tramway line. Other *banlieues*, however, such as Clichy-sous-bois and Monfermeil, are poorly connected to major cities by public transportation. Multiple trains or busses may be required, creating a lengthy commute.

Not only are there few jobs; there are also few leisure activities in the *banlieues*. As interviewees pointed out, state efforts to provide more for people living in the *banlieues* have created further incentives to remain there. In establishing local bureaus for state agencies (such as Social Security or the Caisse d'Allocation Familial, the organization that distributes state aid for housing), France has made it possible for someone to live her entire life in an isolated *banlieue*, without ever leaving or even visiting nearby cities. It is important to consider that these issues affect all inhabitants of the *banlieues*, not just Muslims. Many of the Muslim respondents discussed *banlieues* in terms that bespoke a class-conscious evaluation of life in France. A political aide who works in city politics with Fadéla Amara discussed these connectivity problems: "There are cities, for example around Paris, [that] do not have public transportation. There are problems in leaving and reentering the town. When you have a car it is fine, but when you don't have a car and depend on the bus. . . . We want to increase the bus routes, promote public transportation, so that the people can move very easily." It is worth noting that in his view of housing problems, this interviewee (like Amara) mentioned violence and machismo: "The most difficult [challenge] it is to fight against violence, against the insecurity that reigns in the *quartiers*,<sup>11</sup> against the . . . situation of women in the *quartiers*, and all that. It is the return of machismo."

Few of the Muslim respondents would agree with the aide's view that fighting violence, insecurity and machismo are "the most difficult" challenge in the *banlieues*. But this man was also a Muslim—one of those among the study's respondents who viewed "Muslim" not as an identity marker but as a private practice meant to be kept at home. He did not see the need to struggle against negative stereotypes of Muslims; others needed only to look at how he was living his life to see that Muslims are not all terrorists, not all misogynists. This is important to keep in mind because it illustrates the diversity of opinion among Muslims in France. Other Muslim respondents *did* see "Muslim" as an aspect of their identity, and they wanted to mobilize politically, socially, and even legally *as Muslims* against ignorant stereotypes and discrimination.

The former representative of Dynamique Diversité I interviewed was keenly aware of the economic isolation of the *banlieues*. His organization had attempted to change that. "We support relationships between big businesses and the small businesses placed in the poor *quartiers*," he said. "To diversify the buyer-seller networks . . . we created a tool of reference for small businesses, and we brought together the small and big businesses."

A non-Muslim representative of the NPNS articulated a strong concern with machismo in the *banlieues*. But she also was concerned about the isolated nature of the *banlieues*:

The problem is that in France, we created dormitory towns. . . . During the *Trente Glorieuses*, we brought immigrants in to work. The problem is, at the beginning, France thought they would leave. But after family reunification, we built in haste, without really thinking about urban organization. That means we did not think to construct bars, cinemas, stores, places to go out—no, just places to sleep. . . . You arrive in an RER station, take two busses, walk around in the middle of nowhere. It is hard to move around.

### *Muslims on the Adequacy of Banlieues and State-Subsidized Housing*

Similar to the issue of the isolation of *banlieues* is the problem of their disrepair. France recognized this in 2003, creating the Jean-Louis Borloo program to renew the *banlieues*. In a report delivered in 2008, however, the Agence Nationale pour la Renovation Urbaine (ANRU [National Agency for Urban Renewal]) argued that the program was not succeeding, citing insufficient resources (Bronner 2008). Promises of repairs and construction have failed to be realized by their target date: of the 250,000 building demolitions and reconstructions promised, just over 45 percent of the demolitions and 42 percent of the reconstructions had been accomplished by 2008.<sup>12</sup> Restoration of existing buildings and relocation of their inhabitants has also been slow: around 54 percent and roughly 62 percent accomplished, respectively (Bronner 2008).<sup>13</sup> The goal to relocate those buildings that were demolished to improve social diversity also is not being met: buildings are being reconstructed on the very sites where their predecessors were demolished (Bronner 2008).

The NPNS representative was also critical of the poor condition of state-sponsored housing: “The buildings were built with materials of a deplorable quality. If you tap on them, they break—they are empty things. They were made quickly, to house all these people.” Not all agree, however, including Muslims. Two respondents with the EMF disagreed heatedly. “Student 1,” a young male Muslim immigrant from Algeria with an Algerian mother and Tunisian father, insisted that the state worked very hard to maintain the HLM. “Student 2,” a young female convert to Islam without any known family history of immigration, argued that the HLM were dreadful. The two debated about the situation of immigrants in France:

**Student 1:** They live well, they live with dignity.

**Student 2:** But what about the HLM?

**Student 1:** Listen, the HLM . . .

**Student 2:** (*Interrupts.*) They are in bad shape, destroyed . . .

**Student 1:** If they are in bad shape, it is because of them [the immigrants].

**Student 2:** But there are drug pushers around the buildings . . .

**Student 1:** (*Interrupts.*) But that is because of *them!*

**Student 2:** That is not because of them. . . .

**Student 1:** In general, the HLM apartments are big.

**Student 2:** No.

**Student 1:** They are large, the HLM [apartments]. And they [the immigrants] do not pay anything in rent.

**Student 2:** Look, the state does not do renovations!

At this point, a third Muslim EMF member entered the conversation. Also an immigrant to France from North Africa, she argued along with the man that the HLM apartments were not so bad:

**Student 3:** These immigrants are able to take one month off work to go to their home country on vacation.

**Student 2:** They have to sacrifice for that.

**Student 3:** No, I don't think so. In my opinion, they live well, with dignity. From the outside, the HLM is not very beautiful, but the interior . . .

**Student 1:** It is dignified.

**Student 3:** Yes, it is very good. . . .

**Student 1:** In Algeria, we have collectives to do stuff when the state is not present. . . . So in Algeria there is a collective of people in the *quartiers* who buy paint, cement, and do it all themselves. They fix their buildings. . . . Here in France, you do not find that; here they think that all is owed to them. . . . I say it is true that there are difficulties, there is racism, but if one looks at their [the immigrants'] quality of life, it is good. . . . That is why they come to France. They come to France to live well. And the proof is there: they live well.

(*Long pause.*)

**Student 2:** That is maybe not what you were expecting to hear. (*Pauses.*) You did not hear the same discourse over there as you do here, did you?

The “over there” to which Student 2 was referring was an interview I had just conducted with members of the JMF, an organization that sometimes works with Muslim youths in France, especially in difficult neighborhoods. Its goal is to convince Muslim youths that they can succeed and that doing well in school is a key component to that success. Indeed, the head of the JMF, whom I had just interviewed, had spoken about the deplorable condition of housing that many Muslims inhabit in France. He was also an immigrant, like Students 1 and 3 at the EMF. Therefore, it is hasty to say that immigrants simply “expect less” and that those born in France, as the male EMF respondent suggested,

“think that all is owed to them.” But it is accurate to say that there is disagreement among Muslims in France about their rights and protections—what is “owed to them.” I consistently found that those born in France, or who have lived most of their lives in France, expect more from the state, but a definitive statement to that effect would require a large-n representative sample of Muslim opinion that is beyond the scope of this study.

Some respondents also expressed concern that government-subsidized housing in the *banlieues* is sometimes too small for the families who live in it. Some Muslim respondents grew up in the older housing units that were initially built during the first influx of North African workers, which did not have washroom facilities in each unit. Some lived with their families in single-bedroom apartments. Again, a sensitivity to class emerged during the respondents’ discussion of these concerns.

### *Social Workers on the Isolation of Immigrant Women in the Banlieues*

As some Muslim respondents pointed out, immigrant women face additional challenges that make their lives even more difficult. Many of the immigrants in the *banlieues* are Muslim women from North African cultures. The extended support networks of their countries of origin have no equivalent in France, and these women often become stranded in a strange land they cannot navigate on their own, whether for cultural or linguistic reasons. This, of course, is in addition to the everyday challenges all new arrivals face in a new country. Traditionally, if a married couple from North Africa moves to France, the man goes out to work and the woman is left at home to take care of domestic life and, in many cases, children. This division of labor reinforces the isolation of these women. Some of them eventually find that they can no longer communicate with their children, who speak French and adopt French culture and lifestyles and may rebel against the religion and culture of their immigrant parents.

Social workers who work in communities that include Muslims acknowledge this. Femmes Relais is an organization of female mediators in the *banlieues* surrounding Paris. Of the five members interviewed, two had immigrated to France from Africa. One of the women, who came to France from Algeria, insisted that the challenges female immigrants face in France are unique in nature and difficult to face alone. The others agreed:

For me, the mission of the association, all our missions are directed *to-ward* and are *for* women. All of our activities are for the emancipation of women. It is true that these women who come from foreign countries, who do not speak the language—in general, the men work, and what they do is delegate to their wives all that is part of daily life.

*But that is a lot of work, no?*

*(Noisy agreement from the other Femmes Relais mediators at the table.)*

Of course! When you see a woman in front of you who does not speak French, who does not understand anything—how to fill out the forms when she takes the kids to the doctor. . . . That is why our mission is to help women become more autonomous, to have a dialogue with their children who are born in France, who speak French and do not necessarily speak the language of their parents. They go out with their friends, speak only French—the mother finds herself isolated.

*So she cannot speak to her children?*

She speaks to them, but they do not understand what she's saying. Or they do not want to. . . . We have, even now, mothers who do not know how to speak French. Some do not know how to take public transportation . . . and they have been in France for twenty or thirty years.

Not all immigrants who live in France's *banlieues* are Muslim, but many are. This is yet another issue that implicates Muslims but involves the nexus of immigration and class. As seen above, elite discourse on Muslims in France rarely takes these intersections of identity into account the way Muslim respondents, and these activists who work closely with Muslims, do.

### *Muslims on Housing Discrimination*

An additional concern that disproportionately affects Muslims is discrimination in housing and apartment rentals. While this is illegal, it is not uncommon, and special terms are used on the housing market to more or less discreetly discourage Muslims or Arabs from applying or to reassure others that Muslims or Arabs will not be admitted into a unit. This also includes the kind of barely visible discrimination that respondents repeatedly described as “something you just feel, you just know.” Not all housing discrimination can be traced with evidence. Some of it consists of mysteriously rescinded offers, hostile glances, awkward excuses.

Two Muslims at the JMF, one an engineer and one a philosophy student, spoke about the search for housing as a Muslim in France. Interestingly, their conversation shows a keen awareness of rights and protections provided to them as French citizens, as well as a nuanced evaluation of the impotence of the law and its agents to help in situations such as housing discrimination. Discrimination is described as difficult to counter in court, as trails of evidence are not obtainable in the way they are after, say, a violent crime. Notably, police are seen as antagonists in a race-conscious statement:

**Engineer:** It is never things that are said clearly. I went looking for an apartment—went to an agency. There was an interesting apartment, so I asked about it. When I entered, the agent said, “No point asking,” and she ignored me. I pointed to the advertisement in the

window. Then she said, “Yeah, but the owner called us and said she decided she does not want to rent it out anymore.”

**Student:** Legally, they cannot do that.

**Engineer:** Well, yes, but you don’t want to pursue it like that. There are all sorts of things like that. . . .

*What if she clearly said, “No, it’s not for Muslims”? Would you then take it to court?*

**Engineer:** Then I would express my discontent, but court—that is a very heavy measure. . . . I would wonder about the effectiveness, because if I lose, it is not worth it.

*Does the legal system work?*

**Engineer:** Globally, the judicial system works. But on questions like that—everywhere, not just in France—it is hard. These procedures are too bulky.

**Student:** The legal system, the police, they can put you in prison. So Arabs are really leery of that. We see them as always being against us. We do not often think that these people will be *for* us, could *help* us.

**Engineer:** But when you’re in court, you see that it’s supposed to be equitable.

**Student:** Using the court for a problem with the telephone company or a car accident—people go to court no problem. But for something like discrimination, it is more difficult.

These respondents thus viewed the legal system as potentially neutral but ostensibly biased against Arabs and Muslims. I asked them to further discuss the usefulness of court action when pursuing a right:

**Engineer:** Well, there you are talking more about rights claiming. There are multiple ways to do this. You do not need to do it through a court. My dad went to court because of an accident at work. He hurt himself with a pickax. He found himself in an impossible, horrible situation, so he had to go to court. It took five years. We are not like Americans who ask for lots of things from the court, who go all the time. But maybe [the U.S.] judicial system permits cases to go through more easily.

**Student:** In France, it is just not practical. In some cases, you cannot even access the courts.

*Like with school issues?*

**Student:** Exactly. These administrative courts—they are another sphere. This accentuates it.

**Engineer:** Even if you win, the time and money you spend . . . five years for a discrimination case, no one is going to do it. Going to court is just for when you really need it.

**Student:** It is traumatizing.

**Engineer:** For example, I had a problem with a car rental agency. But I treated it at the agency. I went to the claims service, and it was handled at that level.

*So you can claim your rights without always going to court?*

**Engineer:** Yes.

*Some American researchers think that the French do not talk about justice or rights.*

**Student:** We are *always* talking about justice. (*Laughs.*) But it is more about social things. Court, that is for penal things.

**Engineer:** For serious violence.

Another interviewee, a man who worked for a diversity-oriented organization, complained that passing a law is easy, but without examples to hold up for public condemnation, people cannot internalize lessons about how it is wrong to discriminate when it comes to housing. “In England [if there were a housing discrimination lawsuit], there would be a lot of media coverage,” he complained, noting that in France that simply is not the case.

### *Muslims on Police Discrimination*

Finally, many respondents spoke about a second kind of discrimination that targeted Muslims or those presumed to be Muslim (such as people with darker skin): police harassment. Similar to the concern with class, comments about police discrimination by Muslim respondents reveal an awareness of the role race plays in the lives of many Muslims in France.

There is no obvious connection between housing and police discrimination. The connection became apparent after multiple interviewees claimed that police were more hostile toward Arabs and blacks in the poorer neighborhoods and cities of France. One respondent, a young, male Muslim journalist, complained, “In certain *quartiers*, people are stopped three times a day by the same police officer.” This kind of police behavior equates to racial profiling that leads to a largely disproportionate number of interpellated Arabs and blacks (Open Society Justice Initiative 2009). Yet again, it is important to remember that not all Arabs are Muslims. There is considerable overlap, however, and the Muslim respondents seemed to be very sensitive to the intersections of race and religion, as well as of religion and class.

Cathy Lisa Schneider (2008, p. 135) describes the police actions that led up to the riots of 2005 as predatory and callous: after chasing down a group of young boys who had run out of nervousness when they were asked for their papers (which they had left at home), the police did nothing when three of the boys accidentally stumbled into an electrical substation. The three boys wandered lost in the substation, and two of them died when they accidentally touched a transformer. Shortly thereafter, police officers thought nothing of



throwing tear gas into a mosque, “asphyxiating hundreds of families attending a sermon,” when they were not immediately allowed in to continue their pursuit of youths who had ducked inside (C. L. Schneider 2008, p. 136).

These events are only part of what Cathy Lisa Schneider (2008, p. 138) describes as “police brutality (and impunity)” in France. Muslim complaints about police hostility were presented with indignation. Why, they asked, should a French person be constantly asked to display legal artifacts of his or her citizenship? Moreover, why should Muslims, Arabs, and blacks be stopped by the police more often than other French citizens? For Muslims, along with Arabs and blacks, repeated identity checks are a visceral reminder of one’s “suspect status.” Furthermore, these identity checks often happen in crowded public spaces, such as on public transportation. A lawyer representing clients suing the state for race-based profiling explained that such identity checks may include “humiliating public body pat downs” (“Fifteen French file lawsuit accusing state of racial profiling in ID checks” 2012). Indeed, the visibility of the identity check may compound the sense of “otherness,” as the stopped individual watches those who “look French” continue to walk by—some perhaps ignoring his or her existence or staring just long enough to make him or her feel on display. Human Rights Watch (2012, p. 22) even suggests that police may reinforce this sense of “outsider-ness” during identity checks by using offensive race-based slurs.

## Conclusion

When we think about the “place” Muslims inhabit in France, we can reflect on various geographic coordinates where Muslims live and dwell, the physical condition of these various locations, and the meanings people in France have given to these locations. What we have found in this chapter is that the discourse of French elites tends to depict the places Muslims inhabit as dangerous and un-French, pockets of foreignness on the soil of France that endanger the republic and women.

Susan Terrio (2009, p. 75) is careful to note that this concern is not completely unfounded. As she points out, Prime Minister Alain Juppé’s move in 1995 to address security in particularly impoverished *banlieues* was a response to violent Islamic fundamentalists preying on poor youths there. What Terrio (2009, pp. 89–90) questions is the growing association she finds among politicians, courts, and sociologists of an unspecified “immigrant culture” (which carries if not specifically Islamic, then masculinist connotations) with “delinquency.” This association, she argues, is what made it possible for inaccurate reporting of the 2005 riots to spread throughout the news (incorrectly linking them to Islam, organized gangs, and immigration), and for politicians to engage in alarmist rhetoric about the situation (Terrio 2009, pp. 11–12). In other words, exaggeration begot distortion.

When it comes to Muslims and housing (or “place” more generally) in France, what is accurate and what is exaggeration? Interestingly, French



Muslims themselves provide different answers. For example, they disagree on the centrality of patriarchal culture in the problems of France's *banlieues*. While none deny its existence, there can be tension between those Muslims who focus on the danger of machismo and those who worry about stereotyping Muslim (and Arab and black) men in a way that demonizes them and casts doubt on the strength and independence of Muslim women. As we can see, the meaning of this place, the *banlieues*, is highly contested. Different images of the *banlieues* appeared among Muslim respondents. Are the *banlieues* home to gender and racial violence or the kind of laudable, albeit not effortless, *mixité* the rest of France claims to value but turns its back on? Are the *banlieues* home to crumbling ghettos and drug dealers or to immigrants who have found a better life and more lucrative employment? Are they the home of submissive women or of immigrant mothers who are primarily held back not by husbands but by the challenges and even trauma of the immigrant experience?

For some Muslims in France, the *banlieues* are a place to fear the authority of a father or brother—but not for all.<sup>14</sup> For some Muslims in France, particularly bareheaded women, the train station or neighborhood streets are places of passage. For others, they are places that can turn hostile in the blink of an eye with (for women wearing a hijab) a snide comment or (for young men) a police identity check. This chapter cannot provide a perfect depiction of the places Muslims inhabit, in all of their complexity. What it does demonstrate, however, is that the issue of Muslims and housing in France is far more complex than elite French discourse generally acknowledges.

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## The Contentious Concept of Frenchness

*French Muslims Embracing, Reimagining,  
but Not Rejecting the Republican Triad*

*In short, to my mind, France cannot be France without greatness.*

—CHARLES DE GAULLE, *THE COMPLETE WAR MEMOIRS*

On the evening of February 10, 2011, President Nicolas Sarkozy participated in the televised interview program *Paroles de Français*, where he was peppered with questions from the French public. One questioner asked, “Do you think that multiculturalism is a failure and that it is the cause of many problems in our society?” Sarkozy replied, “My response is a clear: yes, it is a failure. The truth is that in all our democracies, we have been too preoccupied about the identity of those arriving and not enough with that of the countries that welcome them.”

Sarkozy’s comments distinguish between the search for national identity and the investigation of immigrant identities. This book complicates this division, suggesting that French elites have tried to define national identity through a rejection of the “other within”—North African immigrants, their children, and, more recently, Muslims—and that French Muslims have had to develop their own definitions of Frenchness while contending with this elite discourse. In other words, French elites and Muslims in France have shaped one another’s view of what it means to be Muslim and to be French, and the search for Muslim identity and French identity are often intertwined.

This study has interrogated the exclusionary nature of citizenship, examining its role as a contested normative ideal that French elites and Muslims struggle to define. Thus, the study has two aims: to analyze how French elites have discursively created a Muslim “public identity” that is depicted as un-French and to interrogate how French Muslims respond to these elite claims and either reaffirm their support for or subtly redefine elite articulations of the French values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The difference between elite depictions

of Muslims and the political activities of Muslim activists themselves illustrates the power of public identities and the challenges of creating a counternarrative to oppose elite discursive attacks on a group's citizenship. This concluding chapter summarizes contemporary elite and Muslim interpretations of citizenship in France and explains why it is so difficult to challenge *discursive* attacks on a group's citizenship in general and in France in particular.<sup>1</sup>

## Elites and French Citizenship

There are four elite models of French citizenship today: racial and religious; "cultural"; difference-blind abstract republicanism; and what Cécile Laborde (2010, pp. 7–8) calls "critical republicanism," which is concerned by how *de facto* inequality thrives alongside difference-blind abstract republicanism.

### *The Racial and Religious Model of French Citizenship*

The racial view, which implicitly includes religious assumptions, is perhaps best summed up by a statement from Charles de Gaulle:

It is very good to have yellow French people, black French people, brown French people. They show that France is open to all races, and that it has a universal calling. But on the condition that they remain a small minority. Otherwise, France would no longer be France. We are above all, after all, a European people, with a Greek and Latin culture, and the Christian religion. Do not let anyone tell you otherwise. The Muslims, have you gone to see them? You have seen them, with their turbans and their djellabas? You see well that these are not French people. Advocates of integration are birdbrains, even if they are researchers. Try to mix oil and vinegar. Shake the bottle. After a bit, they will separate once again. Arabs are Arabs; the French are French. (Quoted in de Villiers 2006, p. 216)

Here we see that "to be French" means to be white, which means to be Christian and to not wear turbans or djellabas—more directly, to not be Arab or Muslim.<sup>2</sup> Some might counter that this is outdated and that de Gaulle was simply echoing the common sentiments of his time. But it is not far from President Jacques Chirac's "noise and smell" speech in the 1990s or the current discourse of far-right politicians such as Marine Le Pen. Furthermore, while Philippe de Villiers himself acknowledges that de Gaulle's comment might be liable to legal sanction today, it is not clear that he personally disagrees with the sentiment. When imagining what a contemporary response to the comment would be, de Villiers (2006, pp. 215–216) chooses to refer to de Gaulle with the weighty honorific "the founder of Free France." Few things legitimate the words of a speaker like attributing to him your nation's stand against Adolf Hitler.

In short, whether it is espoused by contemporary or historic French elites, this racial and religious model of French citizenship embodies the Orientalist “dichotomous thinking” described by Edward Said (1979): *they* will never be like *us*. It is no surprise, then, that Muslims would be depicted as the radical other in elite discourse: they are incapable of integrating into France because they doubly lack the fundamental essence of French citizenship. They are frequently not white, and they are all not Christian.

This model of citizenship cannot respond to the needs and concerns of France’s increasingly diverse population. Nevertheless, it has its adherents. Marine Le Pen, the leader of the FN,<sup>3</sup> won nearly a fifth of votes cast in the first round of the presidential election of 2012 (Willsher 2012). While Le Pen has worked to distance her party from overtly racist and anti-Semitic politics, the FN remains xenophobic. Le Pen herself has likened seeing Muslims praying in the street to living under Nazi occupation (Shorto 2011).

### *The Cultural Model of French Citizenship*

In this view, being French is not about race or religion but a shared culture in which *all* can choose to partake. Regardless of his or her background, anyone can learn about French culture and learn to appreciate and participate in it. Beyond this, however, the cultural view becomes vague and amorphous. What counts as culture? Does one really just have to speak French, know the *Maximes* of Rochefoucauld, and eat certain food to be a good French citizen? When Assemblywoman Nadine Morano asked Muslim youths to “act French” (see Chapter 1) and defined that in opposition to wearing baseball caps and using slang, was she implying that a certain mode of dress and way to speak are cultural hallmarks of Frenchness?

De Villiers proposes a vision of French citizenship as a cultural engagement. He argues that immigrants and their children must adopt French “culture.” It also is not altogether clear what he means by the word, however. De Villiers (2006, p. 216) offers a rather limited definition of French culture: a shared history, language, heritage, and similar hopes and dreams. If that were truly the bar for good French citizenship, then it is unclear why he is worried about Muslims. The Muslims interviewed here all spoke French perfectly, were deeply interested in French history (some even majored in it at the university level), and did not express any hopes or dreams that the average French person would find offensive.

When de Villiers (2006, p. 216) attempts to clarify what French culture is, the definition becomes even murkier: “If we choose not to leave outside the national community multiple enclaves of transplanted populations that form in our home bits of the Sahara, extensions of Africa, miniatures of the Maghreb, there is only one way, but it is achieved through a formidable effort of stripping former identities. This . . . is Frenchification.” Being French, then, means forsaking all identities that are not French. But this is circular and answers

nothing. The existence of “enclaves” of immigrants and their children and grandchildren in France has typically been a legacy of government housing policy, not necessarily an instinctual tendency of immigrants to congregate together. The fact that so many respondents with a family history of immigration want to see more *mixité* in schools also suggests that if there is an instinct to stick together, it is not universally found among immigrants and their descendants. In the cultural model of French citizenship, “culture” remains elusive. France’s increasingly diverse population will not find connections to or meaning in this model of citizenship, either.

### *Difference-Blind Abstract Republicanism*

This study found difference-blind abstract republicanism to be the predominant model employed in elite discourse. Without appreciating the importance of this model of citizenship, one cannot understand why French President François Hollande proposed eliminating the word “race” from the beginning of Article I of the French Constitution, which states, “France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race, or religion” (“Hollande propose de supprimer le mot ‘race’ dans la Constitution” 2012). It is not that Hollande wants to legalize unequal treatment on the basis of race. Rather, he wants to fight racism by further eliminating the recognition of race in France. If there is no race, there cannot be racism. In his words, “There is no room in the republic for race” (“Hollande propose de supprimer le mot ‘race’ dans la Constitution” 2012). This view of republicanism also typically includes what Ahmet Kuru (2009, p. 11) refers to as “assertive secularism,” or the idea that religion, as a particular affiliation, ought to firmly remain in the private sphere.<sup>4</sup>

The French elites who express this view tend to focus on principles more than outcomes. For example: the freedom of conscience includes freedom from the presence of religion in public schools. This ensures that young minds have the greatest possible latitude for developing their own ideas and choosing their own beliefs. If we take this abstract idea and push it to its limits, it seems reasonable to eliminate all signs of religion in public schools, including the garments students wear. In this light, the ban on conspicuous religious symbols of 2004, which includes the hijab, is philosophically consonant with French citizenship.

Such a policy enacted in the context of today’s France, however, limits potential gains in students’ freedom in a number of ways. Wearing the hijab may be a student’s choice. Or a student might choose to interpret the hijab as having more than a religious connotation and dislike being told by others that it is a solely a religious symbol. If a student is forced to wear the hijab by her family, then such a policy may result in her being taken out of school and losing the freedom she had enjoyed within the republican walls of the French school. For all students, regardless of religion, the ban on the hijab to eliminate school bullying (whether it is for wearing or for not wearing the garment) does not

eliminate prejudice. The state misses two opportunities to inculcate republican values: first, to discuss in educational establishments the meaning of freedom, and second, to promote respect for the freedom of others.

Finally, as France has a specific social and historical relationship with Muslims and Arabs, this policy, intended to protect freedom, is easily perceived as singling a group out for discrimination. The law is neutral on paper, but it does not affect all religions equally. Targeted at “conspicuous” religious symbols, it does little to hamper the freedom of Christians to wear crosses and crucifixes (which are small and can even be worn under a shirt). It does effectively ban wearing the yarmulke, but Jewish students who wish to wear the yarmulke have more options for private religious education than French Muslims do. As for Sikhs, concessions have been made to allow an “under turban” to be worn, as Sikh leaders in France insisted the garment was not religious but cultural (“French Sikhs lambast school ban” 2004; Veronique 2008).

In this way, we can see that the pursuit of difference-blind abstract republicanism can, in its defense of the freedom of conscience, hamper certain articulations of that freedom. Furthermore, its neutrality may be perceived as disingenuous. Some French feminists champion this kind of rarefied, idea-based version of republican values. Take equality and the hijab as an example. The hijab, they argue, means women’s submission. Some members of the NPNS (including Fadéla Amara) and intellectuals (such as Caroline Fourest) say this. But in attributing one sole meaning to the hijab, these feminists deny those who wear it an equal chance to define for themselves what they think it means and what their religion means to them. The Muslim women interviewed in this study who wear the hijab, and those who do not, routinely expressed annoyance with being told “the hijab means X.” These French feminists (I say this with some hesitation, as not all French feminists agree on this issue, and some Muslim women who wear the hijab passionately describe themselves as feminist), seeking to support the rights and equality of women, routinely deny religious women the ability to speak for themselves and form their own interpretations of Islam.

This absolutist stance is similar to what Chandra Talpade Mohanty critiques in “Under Western Eyes”:

A homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group is assumed, which, in turn, produces the image of an “average third world woman.” This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being “third world” (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions. . . . These distinctions are made on the basis of the privileging of a particular group as the norm or referent. (Mohanty 1991, p. 56)

The “norm” here, of course, is the non-hijab-wearing Frenchwoman or, even more so, the nonreligious Frenchwoman. Compared with this norm, Muslim women in France are seen as “victimized,” as “tradition-bound.”

But the Muslim women interviewed here were often dynamic advocates for themselves and other women. What we have is the image, or even simulacra, of the “oppressed Muslim woman” informing some French feminist understandings of Islam and Muslims, as opposed to meaningful interactions with a diversity of Muslims. This leads not only to a homogeneous representation of a diverse group but also to an imperialistic French feminist discourse: one that speaks for certain women and ignores their rebuttals. This staunch defense of equality leads to the unequal treatment of French women, as female Muslims find their voices unappreciated—unless, that is, they speak out against Islam as an oppressor of women and Muslim men as tyrants. Those Muslim women who interpret Islam in ways that are not opposed to women’s rights and equality, as was the case among all of the female Muslim respondents in this study, do not appear in the discourse of many elite feminist thinkers in France. Nor are their complaints that some French feminists should perhaps think twice about assuming that sex appeal—tight clothes, high heels, makeup, immaculately coiffed hair—necessarily means freedom and equality for women. There is a moment of missed solidarity here, as these feminists who are suspicious of Islam and many women who wear the hijab could perhaps have fruitful conversations about how to fight the continued policing of women’s bodies in France and throughout the West.

France’s increasingly diverse population is likely to find it difficult to sympathize with this difference-blind abstract republican model of citizenship. This is already being foreshadowed by divisions<sup>5</sup> within the French left, where proponents of difference-blindness are at loggerheads with those interested in how domination plays out on the ground in everyday life. The alliances that supported the left for much of the twentieth century—alliances with workers, immigrants, minorities, and women—are threatened by this difference-blind articulation of republicanism. Some on the French left today even express dismay over immigration, and the left has proposed policies to limit immigration a number of times (Guiraudon 2001). More pertinent to this study, Muslims are being told by some on the left that they are bad citizens for being unwilling to leave their religion in the private sphere. Muslim women are to be pitied and protected but evidently not listened to. The French left excels at promoting difference-blind equality and meritocracy, but when people do not want their differences to go unacknowledged or want the pervasive discrimination of their differences to be acknowledged, the left does not seem to have a response.

Azouz Begag (2007, p. 35) passionately explains his frustration with the left:

Leftist activists stop me in the street, during public gatherings, and insult me. “What the hell are you doing in a right-wing administration with Sarkozy?” They are sickened by my involvement. Me, the writer,

the artist, the free man, I tell them that the left has done nothing for twenty years now for diversity, for the *banlieues*, that I will never forgive this treason. But the socialist activists do not give a damn about minorities in politics. They scream in my ears that my government fuels *précarité*.<sup>6</sup> I tell them about diversity, they respond to me, “*Précarité!*” They have only this word in their mouths.

Begag’s frustration is clear. He blames the left for not doing more to improve diversity in politics or to help the *banlieues*. The hypothetical leftist responds to Begag by insisting that the problem is instability and that the solution must be to fix the instability. Begag (2007, p. 35) rejects this, stating that real insecurity is found in developing countries where there is no rule of law and not enough food. France, he says, does not know true *précarité*. Here we see Begag’s deep appreciation of France, even alongside his disappointment in its inability to realize its ideal of equality. There is perhaps a second reason that Begag is frustrated by the cries that “*précarité*” must be ended: What causes it? If the left does not want to talk about diversity when racial, ethnic, and religious differences fuel so much inequality in France, then what will the left do to fix this “*précarité*”?

At base, difference-blind abstract republicanism presents a puzzle. Is it possible to believe in equality without first acknowledging difference? Both are articles of faith, but equality without the acknowledgment of difference is faith in an idea: that of the abstract person, as opposed to faith in the embodied individual. As the discussions of freedom and equality above illustrate, it is possible to reach discriminatory outcomes when one is focused on principles as opposed to people: the effects of those principles on actual people are not investigated. Outcomes are merely presupposed to be optimum if actions strictly follow the principle. While this model of citizenship has some Muslim adherents, it is unlikely to answer the concerns of all of France’s increasingly diverse population.

### **Critical Republicanism**

While critical republicanism shares meritocratic principles and the republican triad with the difference-blind abstract republican model of citizenship, it enjoys far less currency in elite French discourse. As such, its proponents have not been able to undermine the predominant elite discursive trend of questioning Muslim citizenship. There nevertheless are elites in France who express ideas along this model of citizenship, even if they do not use Laborde’s language of “critical republicanism.”

Critical republicanism, according to Laborde (2010, pp. 11, 13), faults difference-blind abstract republicanism (which she refers to as “classical republicanism,” or “official republicanism” in the English translation) for its “sociological deficit.” In other words, difference-blind abstract republicanism neglects to take note of how its principles, when applied in reality, may not be



sufficient to meet the goal of equality.<sup>7</sup> For Laborde, it is important to investigate patterns of social inequality, even if this means speaking in terms of particulars such as race, gender, or religion, because inequality frequently relates to persistent group-based social hierarchies. As such, it is impossible to fight inequality while maintaining a difference-blind view of republicanism.

Without adopting all of Laborde's theory of critical republicanism (which includes such features as a nuanced theory of non-domination and a distinction from multiculturalism), we can use this expression and this basic vision—that difference-blindness covers up social inequality—to summarize a minority trend in elite French discourse today.

Chapter 2 listed examples of French elites who work to delegitimize the dominant elite discourse on Muslims in France, who worry that difference-blindness impedes the fight against inequality, or who at the very least are troubled by the tone of suspicion often used in elite discussions about Muslims in France. In this way, they articulate a critical view of republican citizenship and identify (along with Marx) where political equality fails to secure social equality.

Similarly, there are feminists in France who denounce the laws against the hijab and the *niqab* as neocolonialism masquerading as feminism. A petition titled “We, Feminists” that circulated among French academics and activists claims, “It is time that we gather and fight those politics that systematically destroy our political community, our rights, our democratic freedoms, social link and solidarity, and dare to do so *in our name*.”<sup>8</sup> It goes on to accuse some people of using women's rights, gay rights, and gender equality instrumentally “to serve neocolonial and freedom-restricting ideologies and practices.” The goal of the petition was partly to inspire feminist solidarity across nations, beliefs, and origins, and to highlight how fights for “women's rights” are sometimes used to divide (and conquer) women of different backgrounds. It closed with 1,235 signatures, speaks freely about the history of domination and difference, and provides a very different account of feminism that would not sit well with feminists who espouse difference-blind abstract republicanism.

It should also be noted that, although it remains illegal for the state to collect data on ethnicity and race in France, there are instances in which state administrations speak in difference-conscious terms. For example, the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA [High Council for Broadcasting], which is somewhat analogous to the U.S. Federal Communications Commission, has researched diversity and discrimination in television and radio and proposed that programming should better reflect the reality of France's increasingly diverse population (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel 2008).<sup>9</sup> Thus, we should avoid the assumption that the predominance of difference-blind abstract republicanism in elite discourse concerning Muslims in France today means that it is impossible for French institutions or leaders to discuss diversity and inequality. This perhaps makes the predominance of that view of republicanism more curious. Alternative French discourses on difference and understandings

of republicanism do exist, and more and more French citizens may find it easier to locate themselves in these articulations of citizenship.

## Muslims and French Citizenship

Some French Muslims articulate the common elite model of difference-blind abstract republican citizenship, while others introduce subtle modifications that mitigate the difference-blind approach of that model. But all of the Muslims interviewed for this study articulated visions of citizenship that are premised on the celebrated French values of freedom, equality, and fraternity.

French Muslims embrace secularism. They favor aspects of *laïcité*, such as the freedom of conviction and disestablishment. But for them, this also means the freedom to acknowledge their belief in a god and practice religion as they choose in public, so long as it does not infringe on the rights of others. For many Muslims, particularly young generations, “infringing on the rights of others” consists of active proselytism. These Muslims disagree with the notion that wearing a beard or the hijab is necessarily proselytizing. Meanwhile, some French Muslims articulate the same view of *laïcité* as the one that is dominant among non-Muslim French elites. They believe that all outward manifestations of religion must remain at home; thus, the hijab has no place in public school, and the burqa has no place in the public sphere.

Similarly, some French Muslims espouse the traditional difference-blind version of republican equality. Yet even among these Muslims, one finds the desire for more affirmative action-like programs in France. Meanwhile, other Muslims reject the idea of difference-blind equality as shallow. That said, they do not reject French norms. Their criticism of difference-blind equality is closely tied to their revision of the French concept of fraternity. One of the members of the EMF argued that schools could be improved by allowing students to “share where they come from, their different origins, in the space of a dialogue.” When asked whether such things are discussed at school, she replied:

We talk about them, but it is in our private lives. There is not a class where we can talk all together about these ideas—“I am like this. Allow me to present myself. This is what I do.” . . . [There is no place to] really make a space, one day a week, where you communicate with others . . . a dialogue between milieus. The more people know each other—and you spend 90 percent of your time at school—why not try to know each other more on an individual level? It is true that it is difficult to implement [this idea], but I think it would fix these problems of violence and intolerance, and it would be an improvement, because we do not have the same religion; we do not have the same lives; and we do not have the same perceptions.

The respondent notes that there are indeed differences among citizens in France and blames violence and intolerance on ignorance of those differences. Instead

of learning about people from all kinds of different backgrounds, at the *individual* level, students are left to assume what groups believe and how they behave. She wants to see discussion as opposed to assumptions and privileges school as the place for this kind of multicultural dialogue because it is, at least supposedly, where French people of all origins come together and can meet and learn about one another. In her view, schools are missing out on this opportunity to build solidarity and fraternity.<sup>10</sup>

This desire for open dialogue about identity was present in another interviewee's unexpected response to a question about how she described herself. Nearly all of the Muslim respondents said they were "French and Muslim," together. Some said "French" first. A small minority suggested that being Muslim came first, but that it did not eclipse their other identities. Some other terms were occasionally sprinkled in, such as "woman," "feminist," or "humanist." This particular respondent, the daughter of Algerian immigrants who once wore the hijab but took it off to find work, described herself as a human being, Muslim, European (not in the sense of the European Union but in the sense that Europe has a culture she feels she shares), French, Algerian—and curious. "Curious, like the adjective," she said. "Curious about other cultures, other places, and so on." The spirit of curiosity is not foreign to France. Nor is it necessarily a friend to equality: the Exposition Coloniale was an effort to capitalize on French curiosity about colonized peoples.<sup>11</sup> But there is a distinct lack of curiosity among French elites today about the opinions and desires of Muslims in France. These are, supposedly, known already. There is no need to interrogate something that is "common sense" (Haltom and McCann 2004). Thus, stereotypes and assumptions live on, as opposed to genuine conversations with Muslims. In this sense, some Muslims articulate a version of fraternity that includes curiosity coupled with a willingness to listen, to allow people to speak for themselves.

Finally, tolerance is not the same thing as respect. Some French Muslims believe it is no longer time to fight to be accepted as French, since they already know they are French. Instead, they say it is time to fight to be accepted as French *and* Muslim. These sentiments are claims for respect. These Muslims did not want their religious identity to be tolerated, merely allowed to exist. They wanted due regard for that aspect of their life. They wanted not to see a ban on criticisms of Islam but to be free to practice their faith without social, legal, and political discrimination, provided that this did not infringe on the freedom of others to make their own choices of conscience. They also wanted to be respected as French—not to be assumed to be bad French citizens on the basis of stereotypes about their religion alone.

## The Particular Perniciousness of Discursive Attacks on Citizenship

Many French elites continue to depict Muslims as a homogeneous group that puts its religious identity before the needs of the nation, despite evidence to the

contrary. There are two reasons for this. First, French politics are centralized and elitist, making them especially unreceptive to oppositional claims. Second, Muslims have had a difficult time developing such oppositional claims. This is in part because of the diverse nature of the Muslim population in France, but also because of the primarily *discursive* nature of the challenges to Muslim citizenship. French politicians question Muslim citizenship primarily through political speeches and national debates, aided by the discourse of those who are further removed from lawmaking (i.e., the media and intellectuals). The discursive as opposed to statutory nature of these challenges to Muslim citizenship robs French Muslims of the opportunity to draw on “legal arguments” for “oppositional frames” (Barclay, Bernstein, and Marshall 2009, p. 1). This is compounded by the weakness of rights claims in France to begin with, which are not typically used for the kind of oppositional politics that question the validity of legal articulations of justice and equality.

### *Centralized French Politics*

As discussed in Chapter 2, many scholars have long noted that political culture in France is marked by elitism and a tendency toward centralization. It would be superficial to argue about whether such a political culture is “good” for a nation and its people, and comparisons between political cultures should be premised on the understanding that no human invention, including political institutions and cultures, can be flawless. There are clearly some advantages to a centralized, elitist political culture. Achievements such as France’s high-speed rail service—the Train à Grande Vitesse (TGV) is the fastest in the world—as well as its extensive system of nuclear power (an impressive feat even if one has reservations about nuclear power) and the Minitel (an ultimately doomed Internet device that was the first of its kind and gave every French household Internet access before advent of the World Wide Web) were made possible largely by France’s centralized political culture.

That said, in examining how French Muslims struggle to project their public identities and shape the political agenda in France today, this study highlights some of the challenges introduced by centralized and elitist political culture. We find that it can limit the responsiveness of elites to claims by those outside circles of power, and it can make access into those circles difficult to achieve.

The interviewees repeatedly used a term to describe this kind of political culture: *cloisonnement* (which can be translated as “compartmentalization,” but the emphasis seems to be on the isolation of French elites from the rest of society). A former member of *Dynamique Diversité* used the term to describe political and business elites in France; a leader of *Club XXIème Siècle* used it to describe French political elites who are anxious to keep their power; the editor-in-chief of *Oumma.com* used it to describe the media in France; a young man with Algerian parents used it to describe the rigidity of career training

in France. That the term should have come up in four different interviews, all while the interviewees were discussing vastly different subjects (ranging from education to hiring practices, media bias, and political representation), suggests that there are cultural and institutional barriers to elite entry that are, if not unique to France, then of particular importance to one's public life in that country. The interviewees' discussions of *cloisonnement* indicate that there are few scripts for academic and employment success in France and that they must be followed to the letter. This is made even more challenging when one considers that these scripts are not readily known by everyone. The children of immigrants I interviewed repeatedly pointed out that they do not have the same advantages as those whose parents grew up in France.

The result of *cloisonnement* is that French elites are often speaking *to*, not *with*, Muslims. This is best illustrated by the French national identity debates of 2010. Run under the auspices of the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, and National Identity,<sup>12</sup> the debates were described by Prime Minister François Fillon (2010, para. 4) as “but one step” in the direction of “strengthening our national pact.” Fillon stated that he learned from the debates that the French want “national unity, and even national pride”; that this desire expresses “anxiety” over the loss of the nation's bearings “but also a hope to build the future together”; and that French “identity is intimately tied to our republic” (Fillon 2010, paras. 7, 12, 16). A poll by the international consulting group Obéa-IntraForces (2010, p. 3), however, found that 63 percent of the French believed the debate was “not constructive,” while 62 percent believed it did not establish a definition “of what it is to be French.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Vincent Tiberj (2008) argues that the national identity debates were merely “politically instrumental” in that they shifted the limelight away from contemporary political troubles (the typical nepotism plus lingering banking difficulties) and thereby served the electoral interests of the center right.

In response to the debates about national identity, *Respect Mag* ran a cartoon parodying the concept on several different levels (see Figure 7.1). The cartoon depicts a drunken man complete with a glass of red wine, a *casquette* (a soft, beret-like hat with a bill that Americans might describe as a newsboy's hat), and full mustache under a generous red nose, asking, “Why this question? Do I seem like an Arab?” (Amiri 2009; Durand 2009). The caption that prompts the man's comment reads, “What does it mean to you to be French?” The cartoon exploits a series of stereotypes about Frenchmen to insinuate that there is a common assumption in France that Arabs are not French. The man is the personified stereotype of a Frenchman: he has been drinking wine, he has a large nose, he is wearing a hat commonly associated with the French, and he has a mustache. When the stereotypical Frenchman speaks, he jokingly dismisses the question about French identity as unnecessary. Of course he is French, the cartoon implies. The only people one needs to ask this of are Arabs. The cartoon's use of a patently ridiculous stereotype of a Frenchman also suggests that trying to identify what “makes” a person French is a fool's errand, as



FIGURE 7.1 A French political cartoon. The English translation asks, “What does it mean to you to be French?” and answers, “Why this question? Do I look like an Arab?” (Artwork by Mounir Belhaoui, previously published in Maral Amiri, “Français, sans commentaire!” and Marine Durand, “Français, qui êtes-vous!” *Respect Mag*, November 16, 2009, available at <http://www.respectmag.com>.)

the reality will always be much more complex, given the diverse nature of an entire citizenry.

An additional limitation of the French elite style of politics is that, without outside input, debates have a way of coming up over and over. The “*affaire du foulard*” has been around since 1989. Media fascination with it had lessened since the law of 2004 banning the hijab in public grade schools, but in 2009, two related debates cropped up: over the *burqini*, a full-body swimsuit that resembles wetsuit pants with a long, skirt-like wetsuit top with a sewn-in swim cap, and over the *niqab* or burqa, veils that in one way or another cover the

face. Then, in the summer of 2013, the hijab returned again: the Haut Conseil à l'Intégration (HCI [High Council for Integration]), a committee that has advised the government on the effectiveness of integrative processes in France since 1989, suggested that the hijab should be banned from higher education, as well (Le Bars 2013). Jean-Loup Salzman, the president of Université Paris 13 and the Conférence des Présidents d'Université (Conference of University Presidents), criticized the proposal straightaway (Missir 2013). "University is not grade school," he said. "The students are over eighteen; these are adults, and we cannot limit their individual liberty. We think it is a subject that requires a calmer approach [*apaisement*], discussion, and certainly not an approach tinged with Islamophobia, such as that of the HCI." In these debates, one does not hear the wide range of political concerns expressed by Muslims in this study.

While it is well known that the French approach to religion reflects a philosophical commitment to various articulations of *laïcité*, it must be acknowledged that it also reflects the elitist and centralized style of French politics. France recognizes religions through the interlocutor of a single representative organization, which in the case of Islam is the CFCM (Laurence 2005).<sup>14</sup> Prior to the creation of the CFCM, the institutional needs of Muslims in France were served largely by the patronage of foreign countries or groups associated with those countries (Laurence 2005, p. 1). Gilles Kepel (2004, pp. 253, 261), for example, notes that the UOIF has a connection to the Muslim Brotherhood via the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe, an umbrella organization for Islam in Europe based in the United Kingdom, and how the formerly prominent Tablighi Jamaat had connections to India and Pakistan.<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Laurence (2005, p. 4) 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.

Unsurprisingly, there has been disagreement concerning the role and legitimacy of the CFCM. Dounia Bouzar (quoted in Grosjean 2005) complained when quitting her post at the CFCM that the institution ignored Muslim youths and took no interest in the "second and third generations" of Muslims in France who, in her view, have developed their own way to square their religious and French identities. Nancy Venel (2005) similarly draws attention to how unlikely it is that all of France's Muslims, with very different understandings of Islam and its place in their lives, will see themselves in this organization. Ultimately, however one evaluates the success of the CFCM as a mediator between the state and Muslims, one must recognize that it has been asked to do an impossible thing: it is limited to representing Islam, but it is increasingly called on to speak for all of France's Muslims. Laurence (2005, p. 4) neatly summarizes this as the "central paradox" of the CFCM, writing, "While the government insists that the CFCM is strictly for questions of religious observance, its national visibility and heavy *médiatisation* grant it a de facto role in



Islam's—and Muslims'—public image.” Tiberj (2008, p. 18) has also noted that the CFCM has been asked by political leaders to speak for and to Muslims.

The limitation of this centralized approach to recognition—focusing on Islam as a religion and asking a single organization to speak for the interests and opinions of all Muslims in France—is that it cannot easily handle the considerable diversity among Muslims in France that is shown in this study. For example, representatives to the CFCM are elected by vote, and ballots are cast in mosques. What does this say about the participation of those who self-identify as Muslim but do not attend mosque or may even be otherwise unreligious (Venel 2005, p. 99)?

While the CFCM is to be applauded for its efforts to reduce violent radicalism and welcome Islam into France as a religion *of* France, it will continue to be plagued by legitimacy concerns because of the gap between its official purpose and the expectations others have of it. As a famous, possibly apocryphal, quotation attributed to Henry Kissinger while reflecting on the European Union goes, “Who do I call if I want to call Europe?” In other words, can individual member states impartially speak for the whole of the European Union, and if they cannot, what European institution is strong enough to speak legitimately for all of the member states? One can imagine French leaders wanting to reach out to Muslims in France but finding themselves in a similar predicament: uncertain about how to contact a diverse population with such varied interests. The CFCM cannot provide a direct line between political leaders and all of France's Muslims. The danger lies in assuming that it can provide such a link, and that consultation with the CFCM is the same thing as politically engaging with the diverse opinions and goals of Muslims in France.<sup>16</sup>

As Mohanty (1991, p. 74) urges, “It is time to move beyond the Marx who found it possible to say: They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.” French Muslims are tired of elites assuming what they are like and what they want. An institution like the CFCM, while a step forward, still cannot represent the full diversity of Muslim interests and voices. The frequent complaint found in the media analysis that Muslims are “disorganized” may reflect the difficulties centralized and elite political cultures have in engaging with diverse populations that refuse to be defined in one way.

### *The Difficulties of Creating Oppositional Claims*

French Muslims struggle to challenge the elite discourse of Muslims as failed or problematic citizens. As this book shows, Muslims in France are very diverse and do not agree on politics, policy solutions, the definition of the challenges they face, or even how Islam is practiced or relates to their French identity. While all social movements must overcome a host of differences and disagreements to develop a shared narrative that challenges the status quo (and even then, some degree of intra-movement conflict persists), Muslims in France are particularly unlikely to bridge these gaps. This is so because some Muslims in



France are adamantly opposed to the concept of “Muslim” as an identity and to the mere presence of religion in the public sphere and politics. These Muslims, notably, have been the most successful in French politics, as well, and join in as gatekeepers who work to keep out Muslim voices that suggest alternative interpretations of secularism, liberty, equality, and fraternity.

In addition to this, the discursive way in which elites question Muslim citizenship also poses a challenge to the creation of oppositional claims. Not all attacks on citizenship are made in the same way, and the way in which citizenship is undercut affects how activists can challenge denials of membership. Judith Failer (2002), Julie Novkov (2008), and Shane Phelan (2001) examine how the denial of legal rights can exclude groups from full membership in the nation. Phelan’s examination of gays and lesbians in the United States is particularly interesting, because this population is formally denied fewer rights than, say, the mentally ill Failer examines or the African Americans in Alabama Novkov studies. Yet the denial of rights to gays and lesbians, even while comparatively marginal, has served as a rallying point and consciousness-raiser, mobilizing homosexuals and their allies. As Scott Barclay, Mary Bernstein, and Anna-Maria Marshall (Barclay, Bernstein, and Marshall 2009, p. 1) put it, “Concepts enshrined in legal institutions, such as rights, equality, and justice, represent persuasive and powerful symbols for movements for social change. These legal arguments can offer oppositional frames that may eventually resonate with the public in political debates and can have concrete material consequences, as well.” Patricia Williams (1991) similarly discusses how African Americans have tried both needs-based claims and rights claims in the United States and found that rights claims based on legal injustices, for all their limitations, resonate more with the public.

Muslims in France today see their citizenship undercut largely by elite discourse and find official law (the stuff “on the books”) to be, at least arguably, facially neutral. The ban on the hijab is part of a larger law that also targets the Jewish yarmulke, and it directly affects only those Muslims who are young women of primary-school age—and, notably, some Muslims support this ban. The ban on the burqa, according to official estimates, directly affects between 367 and 1,900 Muslim women (Malik 2010), out of the conservative estimate of 3 million to 3.5 million Muslims in France (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 24). Again, some Muslims support the ban on the burqa, as well. France does not have nationwide bans on halal meat, the construction of minarets (unlike Switzerland), or the construction of private Islamic schools. There has, however, been political criticism of the presence of halal meat, minarets, and private Islamic schools as evidence of encroaching “Islamization.” But unlike legal bans on halal meat, minarets, and private Islamic schools, this discourse cannot be taken to court. “Islamization,” after all, is an increasingly common phrase in French politics, and it has not been, and probably cannot be, used as grounds for a discrimination suit.

Discursive attacks on citizenship may be more difficult to counter than attacks based in official law, because the latter are more likely to invite rights

claims, and rights claims can function as a resource that provides, in the words of Michael McCann (1994, p. 48), “normative language for identifying, interpreting, and challenging” sources of discrimination. In short, the absence of a clear, highly publicized instance of official, *de jure* legal discrimination against Muslims as Muslims, one that directly affects all Muslims or that, at least, is less likely to divide Muslims than the question of the hijab or burqa, deprives French Muslims of an opportunity to challenge the elite discourse of Muslims with a rights-based counternarrative.

Stated differently, rights claims may be a helpful tool for creating counternarratives that can challenge an elite narrative of “unfit citizenship.” But as Chapter 2 points out, formal rights claims made in a court of law are not equally effective at addressing all kinds of challenges to citizenship. In potential disputes that involve social indignities, courts are rarely involved, as most individuals will “lump” these kinds of injustices and avoid court (Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat 1981). Even in potential disputes that involve the violation of rights, the court still must be activated, and the state and its officials may not be the target of the lawsuit. (Challenging rental discrimination does not necessarily challenge a French official or administration.) It is potential disputes that involve the erasure of rights by the government that are the most likely to produce rights claims. Yet in France today, this opportunity is somewhat mitigated, as the primary challenge to Muslim citizenship is elite discourse—not the kind of *de jure* discrimination that results in the legislative erasure of rights.

Without trying to predict the future, it is possible to say that this may change. In September 2011, France passed a new law banning prayer in the streets, a practice that has existed for a long time because of inadequate prayer space for Muslims in France. Yet a temporary space was provided before the law went into effect, and there seemed to be cooperation between Muslims and local officials (Bolis 2011; “Paris ban on Muslim street prayer comes into effect” 2011). French Muslims do not choose to pray in the streets, after all. It is conceivable to imagine, however, that the *accumulation* of laws that are perceived as targeting Muslims—first the hijab ban, then the burqa ban, then the ban on prayer in the streets—may lead to a rights-based discourse that provides an alternative to the state’s discourse on Muslims in France. But this is mere speculation.

Finally, there is another reason that French Muslims have been unable to provide an effective, socially resonant counternarrative to the elite French discourse of unfit Muslim citizenship. It has been discussed numerous times in this book: France has a particularly weak rights culture. The French speak freely about their rights, and rights carry great rhetorical value, yet it is more difficult to use them as a “normative language for identifying, interpreting, and challenging” the injustices of the state in France than in, say, the United States or Britain (McCann 1994, p. 48). Rights are seen as emanating from the state in France, not as liberties with which citizens are naturally endowed and must jealously protect from state encroachment. When Muslims use rights talk in regard to equality, they often mix it in with claims that the state must do more

to promote equality. In this sense, they draw on the authority not of the law but of the state as the creator of rights and freedoms. Thus, rights claims in France are not always as antagonistic to the state as they can be in the United States and Britain.

Even the CCIF, which consists of Muslims who are willing to use legal mobilization to fight against what they term “Islamophobia,” shies away from using the court to make rights claims. As the organization’s lawyer stated:

We do not go to court just to go to court. That is not our goal. Our goal is to generate a solution, and one that is rather quick, for the litigant. That is an issue—I want to say it is a societal problem—where the law does not always resolve things. In addition, it takes a long time. A very long time. So we always bring a friendly face. We talk with the different parties, and we try to find a solution, but respectfully. . . . Mediation works in about 80 percent to 90 percent of the cases.

The CCIF is the closest thing to legal mobilization among France’s Muslims, and even it concentrates more on resolving the dispute of the individual litigant than on challenging the larger context of Islamophobia in court. Its work sounds a bit like “cause lawyering” (Scheingold and Sarat 2004) in that the CCIF is aware that the law can be used for political purposes, but its mobilization of the law remains somewhat traditional in its focus on solutions for the individual litigant.

## Broader Lessons about the Politics of Citizenship and Difference

We know that France is not unique in its struggle to find a logically coherent and equality-oriented narrative about difference. What can other nations learn from considering the experience of Muslims in France?

### *The Limits of Difference-Blindness*

In the United States, “color-blindness” continues to gain ground as an alternative to race-based policies intended to disrupt systemic discrimination and long-standing legacies of inequality. Michael K. Brown and his colleagues (2003) provide a compelling account of how average Americans and scholars across political backgrounds have come to champion color-blindness as a more appropriate path to equality in the contemporary, “post-racial” society. This belief is reflected in the comedian Stephen Colbert’s television character, meant as an amalgam of right-wing politicians and pundits, whenever he attests that he is so color-blind that he is unaware of the fact that he is white.

We find color-blind arguments in the Supreme Court’s decisions, as well. Chief Justice Roberts’s majority opinion in the decision *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* of 2007 was argued largely

in terms of race-blindness. Writing for the majority, Roberts stated that *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruled that the differential treatment of students on the basis of race was unconstitutional; therefore, limiting the number of white students who can attend a school, even if it is to promote racial diversity, is unconstitutional. This commitment to color-blindness in the law dismayed a number of Roberts's colleagues, who felt it would take away policy tools that school districts have been using for decades to fight for equality.<sup>17</sup>

The case of Muslims in France ought to give Americans pause when they consider race-blindness as a solution to inequality. As we have seen, difference-blindness can lend social inequality a sort of invisibility. Furthermore, in masking social hierarchy, difference-blindness makes economic and educational inequalities appear to be the fault of individuals. Further, for those who locate part of their identity and sense of self in a racial, gender, religious, or cultural affiliation, or in a sexual orientation, difference-blindness can be perceived as an intolerant rejection of something they value. Not all who embrace aspects of "particularism" in their lives are engaged in zero-sum identity politics, willing to sacrifice their role as citizens for the sake of a single affiliation. The French Muslims interviewed for this book spoke to the multiplicity and fluidity of their identities (or affiliations for those who deny that religion can be an identity). While they sometimes articulated different ways to balance being French and being Muslim, not one believed that those two memberships come into conflict.

In this way, many interviewees ultimately cast doubt on the nature of a unitary public or political identity and, more fundamentally, on the viability of an impregnable wall between the public and private sphere. American arguments for color-blindness either ignore this evidence about the multiplicity of identity or (purposefully or not) trivialize particular identities and affiliations as distracting, socially disruptive details that should be jettisoned for the sake of social harmony and equality.

### *The Dreaded Multiculturalism*

New challenges in "doing difference" can be seen throughout Europe, as well. President Nicolas Sarkozy's declaration that multiculturalism had "failed" was also expressed by Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel. Germany long resisted being labeled a nation of immigration, and its Turkish immigrants were seen merely as *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) for many years. Now that there is a large Turkish community in Germany (including many Muslims), new problems have arisen. Some resemble those that immigrants and their children face in France—for example, students of Turkish origin report feeling marginalized in German schools, and teachers struggle to communicate with parents who do not always speak sufficient German.

Furthermore, there is some resistance to the presence of Islam in Germany. This became clear following the publication and record-breaking sales of the

politician Thilo Sarrazin's 2010 book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany Does Itself In). In the book, Sarrazin argues that multiculturalism is a doomed project and that Muslims are unwilling to integrate and violent by nature.<sup>18</sup>

There is already uncertainty and anxiety about German identity and citizenship, given Germany's history with National Socialism and the challenges of reunification. How does Islam fit into this already complex picture? The Deutsche Islam Konferenz (German Islam Conference), which puts Muslim and state leaders in conversation with one another, has worked to increase communication and cooperation between the government and Muslims in Germany. In 2009, participants in the conference identified an overwhelmingly negative depiction of Islam in the media (Guschas 2009). As the French case shows, a negative public identity in the media can affect how accepted Muslims feel and how effectively they can make their own voices heard. If Germany wants its Muslim and Turkish population to further integrate into the nation, as leaders frequently say, German media coverage of Muslims must be addressed.<sup>19</sup>

If Germany decides to abandon multiculturalism, the question becomes: What will take its place? The same question applies to the United Kingdom, where David Cameron has claimed that multiculturalism is dead. The French case tells us that basing national membership on a monoculture is exclusionary, no matter how universal and open to all that culture is in theory. But more broadly, it also suggests that one should be suspicious of political leaders who argue that multiculturalism has “failed.” It is difficult to say that multiculturalism performed poorly in France because France never wholeheartedly pursued multicultural politics. Irene Bloemraad (2010), along with the Multiculturalism Policy Index at Queen's University, came to a similar conclusion about Germany, grouping it with France and Norway as a nation with few multicultural policies and little cultural recognition of difference.<sup>20</sup>

Today's trend of “blaming multiculturalism” when there never was a leading coalition of politicians dedicated to the principle, or consistent policy to support it, should give us pause. If the culprit is not multiculturalism, why do some European leaders point fingers at it? It is more likely that multiculturalism represents a different “failure”: the inability to “assimilate” new groups without seeing the nation change, as well. But nations—their cultures, models of good citizenship, cherished narratives—are always contested and changing. The fear that a group will change France, Germany, or the United Kingdom forever has already been realized—in the women's movement, for example, and in the fight for rights for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people. The question is whether Muslims are so radically different that they refuse to change along with their countries. The story in France suggests that this is not the case.

## Closing Thoughts

It is easy to critique France for failing to meet its lofty goals of universal inclusion and equality. But it is worth taking a moment to recall that France is

experiencing very real challenges that make radically inclusive politics a tough sell. The intensity with which French elites question Muslim citizenship draws attention to the anxieties that surround the meaning of “Frenchness.” Media claims of a French “identity crisis” may be overwrought, but it remains true that French elites’ inquiry into Muslim citizenship has been used simultaneously to define what good French citizenship is. The previous chapters investigated why French elites persistently question Muslim citizenship. But why do French elites seek to clarify what it means to be French at the same time? Why, for example, did France host national identity debates in 2010? Why, when condemning multiculturalism, did Sarkozy bemoan the nation’s neglect of its own identity? Is it *just* a way to criticize Muslims, or is it possible there are also genuine concerns about French identity?

There are long-standing and more immediate causes for concern about French identity. They can be summarized as tension in the French model of citizenship, economic crisis, and uncertainty about France’s place in the world.

### *Tension in the French Model of Citizenship*

The French model of citizenship faces two important challenges, the first being itself. As discussed in Chapter 2, several scholars have pointed out that French republicanism is premised on a paradox: the universal model of citizenship is based on a particular type of person, so while it is theoretically accessible to all, many find they do not fit the model (Bereni 2007; Camiscioli 2009; Chebel d’Appolonia 2009; Fogarty 2008; Lépinard and Mazur 2009; Scott 2005, 2007; Siim 2000). In this respect, it is simply inevitable that questions about “failed integration” will be raised. The latent particularism of the French citizenship model is self-defeating and engenders recurrent anxieties about its capaciousness.

Richard Fogarty examines how distressing it was to French officials during World War I to find that certain colonial subjects—namely, Muslim North Africans—seemed unable to integrate into the supposedly universal model of French citizenship. These concerns have returned, and we hear them from French elites today. Obviously, the concerns articulated by French officials during World War I and French elites today are different: the discourse on North Africans and Muslims during World War I was deeply marked by the colonial mind-set of cultural superiority, and French officials at that time described these colonized subjects as “savage, primitive warriors” (Fogarty 2008, p. 134). But while the colonial tinge has largely left today’s elite French discourse, in both periods, the same suspicion exists that Islam is a jealous institution that interferes with national identity and that Muslims are simply too different to integrate into the nation. The universal model of French citizenship was not designed with Muslims in mind, and their presence worrisomely draws attention to the limits of that universality. Importantly, the most common political response has been to criticize Muslims for failing to integrate, not to question how capacious French universality is.

The second challenge to the French model of citizenship is its homegrown competition. French scholars have highlighted important inconsistencies in the application of republican universalism. Both Fogarty and Elisa Camiscioli (2009) powerfully argue that difference-blind republican universalism in France has always coexisted with racial hierarchy, ethnic preferences, and religious prejudice.<sup>21</sup> Difference-blind republicanism, then, struggles with the legacy of long-standing racial, ethnic, and religious views of the nation. This internal conflict between national narratives of neutrality and prejudice exacerbates difficulties with increased immigration from non-European, non-Christian nations. As the population of France becomes more diverse in racial, ethnic, and religious terms, national narratives of prejudice find increased cause for complaint.

In a cartoon published in 2010 in the far-right magazine *Rivarol*, a white family is depicted on a couch, watching a television program together. They appear distressed; the father has a scowl and crosses his arms across his chest. Two text bubbles emanate from the television: “My dear citizens . . . a new world has begun. . . . Welcome those who immigrate.” Meanwhile, a mob of what appear to be angry-looking foreigners—with dark skin and clothing associated with Islam—sneak up behind the family, teeth bared, through an open window. One man’s right leg is seen thrown over the sill, mid-break-in; even more foreigners wait outside, seen as inky splotches of indeterminate number. Only the family dog sees, but he does not bark out in warning. The cartoon demonstrates how racism, religious prejudice, and xenophobia combine with fears about increased immigration to create the impression that France is being invaded and attacked by those who would do the nation harm.

But it is not just the far right that sees danger in Islam. The way in which some French feminists have associated Islam with misogyny<sup>22</sup> makes it difficult for leftists to feel justified in defending the rights and interests of Muslims. Thus, socialists who support gender equality are finding that they have become strange bedfellows with conservative xenophobes who wish to punish Muslim behavior.

Some have argued that the solution to the problems of exclusion in today’s difference-blind republican citizenship could be more openness to difference, as long as it is in the name of pursuing equality. There are legitimate concerns about the limitations of claims for recognition, however. The French are often astute critics of the shortcomings of identity politics. It is possible that Muslim claims for recognition will lead some people to believe that all Muslims think of their religion as an identity, which they do not. Some French observers point out that identity politics can proliferate stereotypes, in the way that affirmative action has led some Americans to assume unfairly that African American or Latino classmates are scholastically inferior. And some minorities may be uncomfortable with being subsumed under a group with which they do not identify themselves. Should not people have the choice to self-identify however they want and not be forced to identify, for example, by their race? While these



are very real dangers, it would be wrong to assume that avoiding recognition claims means avoiding the proliferation of stereotypes. Also, avoiding identity politics does not ensure complete freedom in self-identification, as some may find those politically mobilized identities empowering.

### *Economic Crisis*

France has not escaped the economic crisis unscathed, and this has increased tension. During times of economic stress, France—like any other nation—reduces its financial commitment to equality. As noted earlier, when the French economy slumped in the 1970s, France ended its policy of family reunifications and chose to underfund its efforts to improve the lives of immigrant workers (Freedman 2004). Simon Wuhl (2002, pp. 303–304) suggests that the burdens of an economic crisis fall disproportionately on those who already experience social discrimination. In other words, inequalities between “insiders” and “outsiders” are exacerbated during times of economic insecurity, suggesting that the nation is not all-inclusive.

Steven Erlanger (2013) describes the situation in France today this way: “At stake is whether a social democratic system that for decades prided itself on being the model for providing a stable and high standard of living for its citizens can survive the combination of globalization, an aging population and the acute fiscal shocks of recent years.” France’s economic difficulties began long before the great recession, and these long-standing challenges involving competitiveness, unemployment, and a large and costly civil service apparatus certainly have not improved with the added strain of the economic crisis. It is in this context that we see such developments as Interior Minister Manuel Valls questioning the financial sustainability of family reunification policies (Louarn and Bamat 2013).

### *Uncertainty about France’s Place in the World*

Finally, France’s political role on the world stage has been unclear since the end of World War II. As a colonial power, France had control over much of the world and its resources. French politicians saw France as an educator, an enlightened nation with the noble mission of civilizing the world. French politics have long had a visionary nature about them: whether Louis XIII and Louis XIV were working to centralize one of the first and strongest nation-states or French revolutionaries were challenging feudalism with notions of nationalism and political equality, the French have been trailblazers in world politics. This combination of power and foresight is sometimes described as “grandeur,” and it was what Charles de Gaulle (1964, p. 3) saw as the defining feature of France: in his words, “France is not really herself unless she is in the front rank.”

De Gaulle is not alone. Steven Ekvovich, an expert on France at the American University of Paris, claims, “The French public still wants their president

to play a very important role on the world stage. . . . The French have, of course, an expectation. The grandeur of France is still very important” (quoted in Beardsley 2011). After World War II, France invested heavily in the European Union, seeing that institution as a way to maintain relevance and power in world politics. Today, France is no longer a colonial power or the economic powerhouse it once was. Furthermore, France is now mired in the political woes of how the European Union will subsidize southern Europe’s economic meltdowns. In this light, it should come as no surprise that there are questions about France’s place on the world stage.

If France is no longer the world leader it once was, and the nation’s identity has long been associated with grandeur, what, then, is to be the defining characteristic of France today? Some French elites seem to be searching for it in what they believe to be the mirror opposite of Muslim citizens. French Muslims seem to be searching for it in traditional values of France: liberty, equality, and fraternity. This search, inexorably tied to increased diversity in France, is likely to be France’s greatest challenge for the twenty-first century.

# Appendix

## Sample Questionnaire

### Protocole d'Entretien: Les Activistes Musulmans dans les Groupes Qui Encouragent la Diversité

Interviewé (le code, pas de nom): \_\_\_\_\_

Sections d'entretien dont on a parlé (en cas de nécessité d'un deuxième entretien):

- \_\_\_\_\_ A. Passé, Expériences
- \_\_\_\_\_ B. Réseau Social/Activisme
- \_\_\_\_\_ C. Sujets Concrets
- \_\_\_\_\_ D. Expériences Légales

D'autres sujets dont on a parlé: \_\_\_\_\_

Mes commentaires brefs suivant l'entretien/pistes concernant des entretiens au future:

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#### Déclaration Préliminaire

Mon projet de recherche porte sur les immigrés et les enfants des immigrés en France, et les discriminations qui les touchent. Je m'intéresse aussi à votre sentiment envers le système judiciaire en France. Cet entretien durera entre une heure et une heure et demie.

## Protocole d'Introduction

L'université américaine dans laquelle j'étudie exige votre permission écrite avant de commencer l'entretien. Voici le document que j'espère vous voudrez bien signé, s'il vous plaît, avant le début de l'entretien. Ce document stipule que toutes les informations que vous me donnerez seront confidentielles, que votre participation est tout à fait volontaire, et que vous avez le droit d'arrêter l'entretien si vous le voulez et quand vous le voulez.

Parce que le français n'est pas ma langue maternelle, j'ai des difficultés à écouter et prendre des notes au même temps. Pour cette raison, je souhaiterais enregistrer notre conversation. Je serais la seule personne, avec une assistante à la transcription, à écouter cet enregistrement. Votre anonymat sera garanti. Votre identité n'apparaîtra pas sur l'enregistrement. Enfin, les enregistrements seront détruits après la transcription, et ce au plus tard en mars 2009.

- A. **Passé, Expériences:** *Pour commencer, je voudrais vous poser des questions sur votre vie personnelle et sur la manière dont vous la décririez.*
- a. Où êtes-vous né?
  - b. Parlez-moi un peu de votre famille.
  - c. De quelle origine est votre famille?
  - d. Depuis combien de temps est-ce que votre famille est établie en France?
  - e. Ressentez-vous une appartenance ou une proximité à un autre pays?
  - f. Pouvez-vous me parler de vos études.
  - g. Quelle est votre activité professionnelle?
- B. **Réseau Social/Activisme:** *Maintenant, je voudrais vous poser des questions concernant votre vie sociale.*
- a. **Réseau Social**
    - i. Quel genre de musique écoutez-vous? Qui sont vos artistes préférés?
    - ii. Que faites-vous pour se détendre?
    - iii. Pouvez-vous me parler de votre relation à la religion?
      1. Êtes-vous croyant?
      2. À quelle religion appartenez-vous?
    - iv. Vos amis, sont-ils croyants? À quelles religions?
    - v. Il y a beaucoup des mots que l'on peut utiliser pour se décrire. Homme, femme, croyant, séculaire, protestant, catholique, musulman, immigré, d'origine immigré, étudiante, professionnelle, Français, noir, blanc, maghrébin, . . . Quels sont les mots que vous utiliserez de vous décrire?
      1. Pourquoi avez-vous choisi ces termes?
    - vi. Comment pensez-vous que les autres gens vous voient?
    - vii. Dans quelle mesure avez-vous l'impression que ce que vivent les immigrants en France vous affecte, ou vous concerne dans votre vie quotidienne?
      1. [Si il ya une histoire de l'immigration] Et ce que vivent les gens d'origine \_\_\_\_\_?

2. Et ce que vivent les Musulmans de France?
3. Et ce que vivent les Musulmans de l'étranger, comme en Iran ou Palestine?
- viii. D'après vous, le plus important aujourd'hui pour les Français d'origine immigrée est de
  1. Chercher à s'intégrer en évitant tout conflit avec le reste de la société?
  2. De revendiquer leurs droits, même si cela crée des tensions avec le reste de la société?
  3. Ou quelque chose d'autre?

**b. Activisme**

- i. Comment êtes-vous devenu membre de cette association?
- ii. Quels sont les buts de cette association?
- iii. Est-ce qu'il y a un sujet que vous aimeriez bien que l'association prenne en main?
- iv. Quel était le plus grand défi lancé à votre association?
- v. Quel était le plus grand succès de votre association?
- vi. Quel est le plus grand atout pour cette association?
- vii. Pourquoi avez-vous choisit une association qui travaille sur des questions de la diversité en général, au lieu d'une association qui travaille sur des questions spécifiques aux Musulmans Français?

**C. Sujets Concrets:** *Je voudrais vous parler maintenant de trois aspects de la vie française.* Pour commencer: Pensez-vous qu'en France le principe d'égalité entre les citoyens quel qu'il soit est plutôt bien respecté? Pourquoi? Dans quel domaine?

**a. L'École**

- i. Revenons à vos études. Aimez-vous/avez-vous aimé l'école?
- ii. Pouvez-vous me parler d'un problème que vous avez eu à l'école? Peut-être avec un prof ou un autre étudiant?
  1. [Si oui, écoutez; puis] Comment avez-vous réagi? Qu'avez-vous fait?
- iii. D'après vous, est-ce que le fait d'être \_\_\_\_\_ change/a changé quelque chose pour vous à l'école?
  1. [Si oui, écoutez; puis] Qu'en pensez-vous? Quelle est votre réaction? Comment expliquez-vous cela?
- iv. Est-ce que le fait d'être \_\_\_\_\_ a provoqué des ennuies pour vous à l'école?
  1. [Si oui, écoutez; puis] Comment avez-vous réagi? Qu'avez-vous fait?
  2. Et vos amis qui étaient \_\_\_\_\_, est-ce qu'ils ont vécu la même chose et réagi de la même manière?
- v. Si vous étiez le ministre d'éducation pour une journée, que changeriez-vous?

**b. L'Emploi**

- i. D'après vous, quel rôle doit jouer l'État dans le domaine de l'emploi?
- ii. Est-ce que vous avez eu des problèmes de discrimination dans votre vie professionnelle, en embauche ou promotion?

1. [Si oui, écoutez; puis] Pourquoi, selon vous, avez-vous eu ces problèmes?
    - a. [S'ils ne le mentionnent pas, pousser] Pensez-vous que c'était une question de [couleur? D'origine? De religion? De sexe? De classe?]
  - iii. Pensez-vous que les \_\_\_\_\_ ont plus que les autres Français des problèmes en matière d'emploi?
  - iv. Avez-vous déjà eu un problème dans votre vie professionnelle qui selon vous était dû au fait que vous êtes Musulman? Q'avez vous fait?
  - v. Avez-vous connaissance d'un ami ayant eu ce type de problèmes? Qu'a-t-il fait?
- c. **La Discrimination Religieuse**
- i. Avez-vous le sentiment qu'il y a de la discrimination vis-à-vis des musulmans? Pensez-vous qu'il est difficile d'être musulman en France?
  - ii. Le mot «Islamaphobie,» est-ce que cela évoque quelque chose pour vous?
  - iii. Est-ce qu'il y a de l'Islamaphobie en France?
  - iv. Est-ce que les Musulmans en France doivent se mobiliser pour le respect de leurs droits et lutter pour l'égalité?
    1. [Si oui] Comment?

D. **Expériences Légale:** *Il ne reste que quelques questions. Je suis curieuse de savoir ce que vous pensez de la loi et la justice.*

- a. Avez-vous subi ou engagé des procédures judiciaires? [Etes-vous déjà allé au tribunal?]
  - i. [Si oui] Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé?
  - ii. [Si non] Avez vous un ami qui est allé en justice?
    1. [Si oui] Que s'est-il passé pour lui?
- b. Que pensez-vous du système judiciaire—Est-il utile? juste? efficace?
- c. Pour mieux sanctionner les discriminations, que pensez-vous qu'il faudrait faire?
- d. Si vous aviez un propriétaire qui a refusé de vous louer un appartement, l'attaqueriez-vous au tribunal?
  - i. Et si ce propriétaire qui a refusé de vous louer un appartement l'a fait parce que vous étiez \_\_\_\_\_, l'attaqueriez-vous au tribunal?

**Après l'Entrevue Commentaires et/ou Observations:**

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## ENGLISH TRANSLATION

### Interview Protocol: Muslim Activists in Groups That Foster Diversity

Interviewee (code, not name): \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Sections Visited (in case a second interview is necessary):

- \_\_\_\_\_ A. History, Life Story  
 \_\_\_\_\_ B. Social Network/Activism  
 \_\_\_\_\_ C. Interview Topics  
 \_\_\_\_\_ D. Experience with/of the Law

Other topics we discussed: \_\_\_\_\_

Quick reactions following the interview/leads for future interviews:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

#### Opening Statement

My research project examines immigrants and the children of immigrants in France and the discrimination that affects them. I am also interested in your feelings toward the judicial system in France. This interview will last between one hour and an hour and a half.

#### Introductory Protocol

The American university where I study requires me to obtain your written permission before beginning this interview. Here is the document that I would like you to please sign before we begin. This document stipulates that all the information that you give me will remain confidential, that your participation is completely voluntary, and that you have the right to end the session if you want and when you want.

Because French is not my native language, I sometimes have difficulties listening and writing notes at the same time. Because of this, I would like to record our conversation. I will be the only person, apart from a transcription assistant, who will hear this recording. The recording will remain anonymous. Your identity will not appear on the recording. Finally, the recordings will be destroyed after their transcription, by March 2009 at the latest.



- A. **History, Life Story:** *To begin, I would like to ask you questions about your personal life and how you would describe yourself.*
- a. Where were you born?
  - b. Describe your family for me.
  - c. Where is your family from?
  - d. How long has your family lived in France?
  - e. Do you feel a sense of belonging or closeness to another country?
  - f. Talk to me a bit about your schooling.
  - g. What is your job?
- B. **Social Network/Activism:** *Now, I would like to ask you questions about your social life.*
- a. **Social Network**
    - i. What kind of music do you listen to? Who are your favorite artists?
    - ii. What do you do to relax?
    - iii. What is your relationship with religion?
      1. Are you religious?
      2. What religion do you belong to?
    - iv. Are your friends religious? What religions?
    - v. There are many words we can use to describe ourselves: man, woman, religious, secular, Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, immigrant, child of immigrants, student, professional, French, black, white, Maghrebin, . . . What are the words that you use to describe yourself?
      1. Why did you choose these words?
    - vi. How do you think other people see you?
    - vii. To what extent do you feel that the experience of immigrants . . . affects you or is relevant to your daily life?
      1. [If there is an immigrant history, insert] And those with a \_\_\_\_\_ background?
      2. What about Muslims in France?
      3. Or Muslims abroad, such as those in Iran or Palestine?
    - viii. What do you think is the most important thing for French people who are the children of immigrants to do?
      1. Try to integrate and avoid all conflict with the rest of society
      2. Claim their rights, even if that creates tension with the rest of society
      3. Something else?
  - b. **Activism**
    - i. How did you become a member of this association?
    - ii. What are the goals of this association?
    - iii. Is there a subject that you would like the association to take up?
    - iv. What has been the biggest challenge for your association?
    - v. What has been the greatest success for your association?
    - vi. What is the greatest asset of your association?
    - vii. Why did you choose an association that works on questions of diversity in general, instead of an association that works on questions that are more specific to French Muslims?

C. **Interview Topics:** *I would like to speak to you now about three aspects of French life.*

To begin with: Do you think that the principle of equality between citizens, regardless of their differences, is respected fairly well in France? Why? In what areas?

a. **School**

- i. Let's return to your schooling. Did you/do you like school?
- ii. Can you tell me about a problem that you had at school? Maybe with a teacher or another student?
  1. [If yes, listen; then] How did you react? What did you do?
- iii. In your opinion, does/did being \_\_\_\_\_ change things for you in school?
  1. [If yes, listen; then] What did you think of that? How did you respond? How do you explain this?
- iv. Did being \_\_\_\_\_ create problems for you in school?
  1. [If yes, listen; then] How did you respond? What did you do?
  2. And your friends who were \_\_\_\_\_, did they experience the same thing, react in the same way?
- v. If you were the minister of education for one day, what would you change?

b. **Employment**

- i. In your opinion, what role should the state play in the sphere of employment?
- ii. Have you had problems with discrimination in your professional life, in hiring or promotion?
  1. [If yes, listen; then] Why do you think you had these problems?
    - a. [If they do not mention it, prod] Do you think it had something to do with your [race? immigrant background? religion? gender? class?]
- iii. Do you think that \_\_\_\_\_ have more difficulty than other French people when it comes to employment?
- iv. Have you had a problem in your work life that you think had to do with the fact that you are Muslim? What did you do?
- v. Do you have a friend who experienced this kind of problem? What did he or she do?

c. **Religious Discrimination**

- i. Do you feel that there is discrimination against Muslims? Do you think that it is difficult to be Muslim in France?
- ii. Does the word "Islamophobia" mean anything to you?
- iii. Is there Islamophobia in France?
- iv. Should Muslims in France mobilize for their rights and fight for equality?
  1. [If yes] How?

D. **Experience with/of the Law:** *There are only a couple questions left. I am curious about what you think of the law and the justice system.*

- a. Have you been involved in or made use of judicial procedures? (Have you ever been to court?)
  - i. [If yes] What happened?
  - ii. [If no] Do you have a friend who has gone to court?
    - 1. [If yes] What happened to him or her?
- b. What do you think of the court system? Is it useful? Fair? Efficient?
- c. What should be done to better punish discrimination?
- d. If you encountered a landlord who refused to rent you an apartment, would you take him or her to court?
  - i. What if this landlord refused to rent you the apartment because you are \_\_\_\_\_? Would you take him or her to court then?

**Post-interview Comments and/or Observations:**

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# Notes

## CHAPTER 1

1. Home page for AIGEurope, n.d., available at <http://www.aigefrance.fr>, accessed December 2, 2008.

2. Zinédine Zidane, a talented French soccer player born in Marseilles to Algerian immigrant parents, was largely credited with the win in 1998.

3. In a rare showing of race-consciousness, France embraced its World Cup winning team as “Black, White, and Beur,” the last word being a slang term for “Arabs.” In other words, France embraced the racial diversity of its soccer team in a deeply meaningful parallel to the “Blue, White, and Red” of the French flag. Such symbolism suggests that racial diversity is an integral part of France.

4. Forty square meters equals about 430 square feet. He shared the studio apartment with his mother, father, and sister.

5. The *niqab* and the burqa are garments that cover the face (although the *niqab* reveals the eyes). Although they are not exactly the same, the terms are often used interchangeably in French politics and will be used that way in this book.

6. For a thorough introduction to Islam, see Esposito 1999.

7. To read more about intersectionality, see Simien and Hancock (2011). Townsend-Bell (2011), Wadsworth (2011), Hankivsky and Cormier (2011), and Dhamoon (2011) demonstrate the advantages of an intersectional approach through examination of their research in the United States and abroad.

8. The word “hijab” refers to both a general code of modest dress and a head covering worn by some Muslim girls and women that typically covers most or all of the hair and is pinned under the throat. Hijabs come in all colors and fabric and are worn in different ways. For an excellent overview of their historical origins and contemporary manifestations, see El Guindi 1999.

9. The *banlieues*, or suburbs of France, appear throughout this book. Unlike in the United States where patterns of white flight have led to the association of suburbia with

wealth and whiteness, France's racial and religious minorities, along with the economically disenfranchised, tend to live in the *banlieues*.

10. When interview comments involve an exchange among multiple respondents, the speakers are distinguished by brief descriptors in bold, sometimes accompanied by further distinguishing numerals. The assignment of these numbers is unique to each recorded exchange (in other words, "Student 1" is not the same person throughout the text). My interjections during the interviews are set off in italics. The prepared questions are available in the Appendix.

11. Available at <http://www.annuaire-musulman.com>.

12. It bears noting that this is a valid opinion, whether one agrees with it or not.

13. Unless indicated otherwise, the terms "liberal" and "republican" are used throughout this book to refer to political theories of social contract. Such references should not be confused with American political parties or markers of left-right political orientation.

14. This rather indirect statistic is provided because, as I explain later, it is illegal to collect information identifying people on the basis of differences such as race and religion in France. This makes the job of the researcher challenging.

15. Too roughly but often translated into English as mere "secularism," *laïcité* is the French republican style of secularism that involves a strict separation of religion and state. Theoretically, no images or references to religion should appear in public discourse whatsoever. The degree to which this has been and is today the case in France is debatable. Public money, for example, goes to Catholic cathedrals but not mosques, because cathedrals are part of France's "cultural heritage." *Laïcité* has gone through different phases and meant different things. While it is frequently mobilized by politicians, the media, and intellectuals today as an obvious paradigm, it is anything but.

16. This title is not to be confused with the expression used to describe the Holocaust. While the phrase "the Jewish question" may in certain francophone contexts allude to "the final solution," Bauer's essay had a different goal altogether.

17. Scholars such as Wendy Brown (1995), for example, read Marx's essay in light of the difficulties of using universal rights, which are based on the abstract individual, to demand protection for a particular identity. This is especially true when there is tacit social animosity directed at that identity. This is a generalizable claim that is not limited to European Jews in the nineteenth century. Without neglecting the disturbing rhetoric in Marx's essay, we can still appreciate the analytical value of his argument about the nature of rights and (in)equality.

18. Wendy Brown (2006, p. 45) traces how important shifts in thinking about "particular" identities from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries collapsed the earlier focus on religious difference with a later interest in ascriptive (or, as some thinkers might say, biological) differences. This creates the impression that the "normal" or "neutral" citizen is secular while, for example, racial minorities are seen as fundamentally different due to religious-like "practices and beliefs." Marx recognized this at some level, as his discussion of Jews in "On 'The Jewish Question'" considers both Judaism as a religion and "Jewishness" as a socially constructed identity.

19. That is, there are parallels between Marx's argument and the political debate in France. I am not suggesting equivalence between how Jews were treated in nineteenth-century Europe and how Muslims are treated in France today.

## CHAPTER 2

1. An assertion supported by a Gallup poll that indicates that French Muslims embrace their French identity, despite the fact that the French do not embrace them (Sitte 2009).

2. *Voile* and *foulard* are French terms commonly used to describe the hijab. They translate as “veil” and “scarf.”

3. This is possible in France only because of the Constitutional Court’s power of abstract review.

4. Similarly, Jane Marceau (1981, p. 129) finds that in French business hiring practices, the reliance on “well-trying mechanisms of selection,” such as privileging graduates from a *grande école*, is seen as way to avoid recruitment “mistakes.”

5. Rouban defines “entourage” as presidential advisers, members of the prime minister’s cabinet, directors and deputy directors of ministerial cabinets, central administration directors, and secretary-generals of various ministries.

6. The ENA is a specialized elite school of administration initially formed by President Charles de Gaulle to democratize and make more transparent entrance into the higher ranks of civil service. The Institut d’Études Politiques de Paris, known more commonly as Sciences Po Paris, is the most prestigious school for the study of politics in France.

7. In the sense of an isolated, segregated group apart from the rest.

8. I was interested in how the National Assembly’s discourse defined and what it associated with Muslims as a group of people, so I avoided terms that might normally be considered at least obliquely related to Muslims, such as “Islam” and “immigrants.”

9. *Le Monde* is an important, mainstream left-of-center French newspaper.

10. Similarly, Ariane Chebel d’Appollonia (2009, p. 274) notes that the GIA bombings and a head-scarf debate that took place in 1995 acted as triggers that increased anti-immigrant sentiment during that year.

11. The random sample of *Le Monde* articles was generated by use of the R language for statistical computing.

12. The Conseil d’État is the top French administrative court, where all school-related legal disputes go. In strict terms, it does not have the power of constitutional review.

13. The term “*médiatisé*” repeatedly came up in interviews with elites and activists and merits explanation. This handy French term, which strangely has no English equivalent, is an adjectival reference to media attention. It is also a noun in French (*médiatisation*) and a verb (*médiatiser*). Not necessarily part of an “echo chamber effect,” a metaphor used in media studies to describe the media’s repeated coverage of a single event in relative isolation from the facts of the event, *médiatisation* is a more general comment on media coverage. It is then coupled with other words to indicate the quality or nature of that coverage. “*Très médiatisé*,” for example, is essentially a (less clumsy) way to say “highly media covered.”

## CHAPTER 3

1. As I explain in Chapter 5, Muslims have been the subjects of illegal intelligence gathering in the workplace. Chapter 2 recounts how a marriage annulment could be overturned due to social outcry over the groom’s interpretation of Islam. Various political leaders have opposed the construction of mosques (Cody 2009; Erlanger 2009). These examples do not even consider the intersection of race and ethnicity with religion and the legal consequences of being Muslim *and* Arab or Muslim *and* black. Arabs and blacks, for example, are subject to more “random” police checks than other French citizens (Open Society Justice Initiative 2009).

2. This contentious statement worries some scholars, who fear that referring to people who do not follow the religion of Islam as “Muslim” is imprecise and reflects common but erroneous assumptions that, for example, all Arabs are Muslim (Brouard and Tiberj 2005). Worse, the notion of Muslims who are not religious might make Islam appear to be more

than a religion and less than a choice: it becomes seen as an inherited marker, which limits an individual's freedom of conscience. Some people do, however, claim an affiliation with other Muslims even if they are not religious—they feel some sort of bond or tie or believe that they have shared experiences that lead to mutual understanding. Hence, Jytte Klausen (2005) speaks about “cultural Muslims,” and Nancy Venel (2004) speaks about “sociological Muslims.” It is best to keep these debates in mind, remembering that religion is a choice, but it is also a multifaceted social construction that includes more than the religious practice alone.

3. In France, a popular form of slang called *verlan* (from the French *l'envers*, or backward) consists of reversing syllables to create new words. *Arabe* in *verlan* becomes *beu-ra*, which for ease of pronunciation became *beur*. This term would later be reversed again, into another slang term for Arab in France: *rebeu*.

4. This trend continues to the present (see Chapter 6).

5. Richard Fogarty (2008, p. 132) provides a quote that is sometimes attributed to Napoleon and reflects the spirit of French Republican meritocracy: “*la carrière est ouverte aux talents*” (loosely translated as “to the talented go the jobs”).

6. “Objectifs,” n.d., available at <http://www.21eme-siecle.org/index.php?id=19>, accessed 3 September 2009.

7. “Nos ambitions pour la France,” n.d., available at [http://p-m-f.org/crbst\\_33.html](http://p-m-f.org/crbst_33.html), accessed September 3, 2009.

8. Unlike the Bible, which is not wholly composed of direct revelation (and self-consciously so, as seen in the existence of a book that is specifically titled “Revelation”), Muslims believe that the Qur’an, in its entirety, is the final revelation of Allah made directly to Muhammad. Considering the supposed purity of the Qur’an’s authorship, it is important to many Muslims that the purity of that message be maintained by prioritizing the original text—which is in Arabic.

9. In this context, the word “liberal” refers to a kind of economic theory that, among other things, embraces the free market and depicts individuals as rational and self-interested actors who seek to maximize their benefits.

10. For today’s Banania logo, see <http://www.banania.fr>.

11. These are all of the photos of Muslim women that appeared in the forty-seven articles that resulted from searching for the term “Muslim women” on *Le Monde’s* website for one one-month period (February 19–March 18, 2010). Specifically, the images are from Bachir 2010; “Canada” 2010; Delli et al. 2010.

12. La Fontaine is a famous French poet of the seventeenth century and an icon of French culture. He is perhaps most famous for his *Fables*.

13. The idea of “social mobility” is expressed in French via the phrase “*l’ascenseur social*,” or “the social elevator.”

14. The HALDE is a nonjudicial administrative agency that specializes in resolving discrimination complaints (see Chapter 5).

15. This is in part due to the inability of lay individuals to access the Constitutional Court for judicial review in France. The French Constitutional Court traditionally accepted petitions from only the legislature and the executive. This hesitance to use the court for political goals may change, as the avenue to the Constitutional Court was widened in March 2010 when the high Administrative and Cassation courts were given the power to send cases up to the Constitutional Court for judicial review.

16. In this context, “liberal rights” is used to refer to the kind of rights Marx discusses in “On ‘The Jewish Question’”: individual rights that protect the citizen’s political freedom at the cost of corraling certain practices in the private sphere.

17. Loi Gayssot of 1990 no. 90-615 du juillet 1990 Tendant à réprimer tout acte raciste, antisémite, ou xénophobe, NOR: JUSX9010223L; Loi no. 72-546 du 1 juillet 1972 relative à la lutte contre le racisme (Loi Pleven), JORF no. 0154 du 2 juillet 1972, p. 6803.

18. It bears mentioning that not all antidiscrimination groups in France are progressive. The Alliance Générale contre le Racisme et pour le Respect de l'Identité Française et Chrétienne (AGRIF [General Alliance against Racism and for the Respect of French and Christian Identity]), for example, is a conservative group that targets what it defines as “anti-French and anti-Christian speech” (Bird 2000, p. 409).

## CHAPTER 4

1. The problematic but socially significant term “ethnic French” is laden with meaning. It suggests that there are “real French” people and that “French” is an ethnicity into which one must be born. The terms “ethnic French” and *français de souche* (*souche* refers to roots, and the term means something like “full-blooded Frenchman”) have similar connotations, and both are politically contentious—the latter perhaps more so.

2. The Bologna Process is the European Union’s effort to harmonize educational degrees across member states.

3. Think, perhaps, of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the United States or the Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN [European Council for Nuclear Research]) in Europe.

4. Communalism, or *communautarisme*, may look like “communitarian,” but it carries a negative connotation that Anglo-Saxon theorists of communitarianism do not typically employ. The assumption is that those who adhere to communalism value a small subset of the national community, such as an ethnicity, over the nation writ large. As such, communalism is a threat to the French values of fraternity and the *vivre ensemble* (shared civic life) that is necessary for republican citizens to realize the common good.

5. And religions? This is not always clear, and may depend on the speaker. Amara’s introduction to *Mixité(s)* (in Huston et al., 2007), a consciousness-raising monograph aimed at youths and produced in partnership with the NPNS, suggests that there is tension between respect for religious difference and the value of *mixité*. Amara states, “Girls and boys, poor and rich, Arabs, Jews, Muslims, Catholics, . . . must all live together” (in Huston et al., 2007, pp. 6–7). She also criticizes, however, those who want to reserve certain hours in public pools for women-only swimming: “Why not return to separate schools?” (in Huston et al., 2007, p. 6). The women-only swimming hour is a cause associated with Islam and groups such as the PMF that fight for it (even though, arguably, some women of different backgrounds and personal convictions might also appreciate such a program). The argument made here, then, is that religion can be contrary to *mixité*; certain articulations of religion are opposed to the mixing of genders and therefore should not be tolerated. Whether there is indeed an unavoidable slippery slope between “women-only swimming hour” and state-sanctioned misogyny and gender inequality is open to question. What remains clear is that Amara sees the relationship between religion and *mixité* as ambiguous.

6. *Fac* is another term for university.

7. *Quartier* literally means “quarter,” a neutral reference to a part of town (i.e., “neighborhood”). In this context, however, it is a slang term for impoverished parts of town, a reference that sometimes includes the *banlieues*.

8. *Bande dessinées* (lit. drawn strips) receive a kind of wide-ranging respect in France that is not accorded to American comics. In fact, the awkward term “graphic novel” (with which some implicated authors, such as Neil Gaiman, have refused to be identified) reflects



the common American sentiment that comics cannot be serious or considered on par with novels or other works of art. This assumption is not as prevalent in France as it is in the United States.

The École Lumière is a highly respected film school named after the early French filmmaker Louis Lumière.

9. French schoolchildren begin attending school even before this, in *maternelle*, or kindergarten, which is for three- to five-year-olds. The term for middle school in French is *collège*, which should not, of course, be confused with the English term “college.”

10. Suleiman (1978, p. 277) criticizes such marginal, class-conscious selection policies as “unable to transform these institutions in any significant way” but ironically effective at “ward[ing] off criticism” about their insularity.

11. Similar to American college entrance exams, one’s performance on the *baccalauréat* will affect the admission decisions of French institutions of higher education. Unlike American college entrance exams, however, a passing grade on the *baccalauréat* is required for graduation. Taking the “*bac*” is a notoriously stressful experience.

12. Alsace-Moselle is a region of France that peculiarly is not as strictly secular as the rest, because it was still part of Germany when the French law on the separation of church and state was passed in 1905 (see Fetzer and Soper 2005).

13. The student is asking, “In seminar? Or in TD [*travaux dirigés*]?” *Travaux dirigés* typically brings together a smaller group of students for practice on course material, with direct assistance from an instructor when needed. In the American university system, we would say “In lecture? Or in your TA [teaching assistant] section?” The student was trying to assess the gravity of being insulted in class by asking what kind of class it was: was she being insulted by an instructor leaning down over her work so that few could hear or aloud before a class of hundreds?

14. Landes, part of the Aquitaine in southwestern France, is just south of the Department of Gironde, in which lies Bordeaux.

15. The French are voracious readers on trains. With so many people reading books of all sorts on French trains, it could understandably be seen as somewhat unusual to ask a stranger reading a book if he or she is a literature student.

16. The characteristics are drawn from Scott 2007. For more details, see Chapter 2 in this volume.

## CHAPTER 5

1. Here unemployment is defined as those who have not worked even an hour in the previous week yet are old enough to work (fifteen and older), capable of work, and who have been seeking work in the past month: “Chômeur (BIT),” available at <http://www.insee.fr>.

2. The French presidential election took place in 2007, a period of low French political approval for the United States. French approval ratings of the United States dropped considerably during the presidency of George W. Bush, especially following the invasion of Iraq.

3. This includes the period from 1997 to 2012.

4. Earlier in the text, de Villiers (2006, p. 49) states, “There is nothing innocent, of course, about the pilgrimage to Mecca.” This statement, with its matter-of-fact tone (“nothing innocent, of course”), is an overstatement, at best. The pilgrimage to Mecca, or *hajj*, is an important religious observance for all who follow Islam (one of the five pillars of the religion, in fact), and it is not limited to Islamic militants. According to the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia (see “Record number of pilgrims arrive for *hajj*” 2008), nearly two million

Muslims went to Mecca for the hajj in 2008. Such numbers are typical. Moreover, not all pilgrims are repeat visitors, as the hajj is usually done only once in a lifetime. This, according to de Villiers's logic, would place the number of Islamic militants in the tens of millions.

5. In 2008, a constitutional reform led to an important change in state mediation in France, which was not implemented until in mid-2011: the collapsing of three independent review agencies into one larger ombudsman-like entity, the Défenseur des Droits (Piquemal 2010). To some people's surprise, HALDE was also subsumed under the new Défenseur des Droits (Piquemal 2010). It is too early to evaluate how this might change what was once HALDE or the quasi-legal review of discrimination in France in general.

6. "Décret no. 2008-632 du 27 juin 2008 portant création d'un traitement automatisé de données à caractère personnel dénommé 'EDVIGE,'" NOR: IOCC0815681D, available at <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr>. EDVIGE stands for Exploitation Documentaire et Valorisation de l'Information Générale, which translates very loosely as "General Information Database."

7. "Practicing Christian" in this context does not necessarily mean fundamentalist or born-again. Just as there are people who self-identify as Muslim but do not attend mosque, there are people who self-identify as Christian but do not attend church services. This is particularly true in France, where religiosity and religious practice have long been in decline. For example, while 64 percent of the French self-identified as Catholic in 2009, only one-quarter attended mass "regularly" or "occasionally," and a mere 7 percent attended each Sunday (Institut Français d'Opinion Publique 2009, pp. 9, 13). In this climate, being a "practicing Christian" can be seen as somewhat unusual.

8. *Foyer* here refers to government-subsidized housing.

9. Haute-Savoie is a French department better known for its Alps than for its Muslims. According to l'Annuaire Musulman (<http://www.annuaire-musulman.com>), as of September 2013, the department has only seven mosques (compared with fifty in Bouches-du-Rhône, the coastal department of southern France that contains Marseille).

## CHAPTER 6

1. The original word *racaille* is translated here as "dirt," but it can also mean "scum" or "rabble." Nicolas Sarkozy used this word to describe perpetrators involved in the 2005 riots (see Bernard 2007). Kärcher is the name of a company that manufactures motorized sprayers (known as pressure washers) that blast surfaces clean with high-power jets of water. During his presidency, Sarkozy responded to the gang-related shooting death of a child bystander in Courneuve by saying, "From tomorrow, we will clean the *cité* with a Kärcher." The *cité* in question is La Cité de 4,000," the large housing project in which the child lived. (Cosnay 2010).

2. *Tournantes* is a purposefully blunt expression. It evokes the image of a lazy Susan as a sort of graphic metonymy for gang rape.

3. Interestingly, *Le Monde* ran an article in response to the riots that included a man-on-the-street quote describing the rioters as lacking "balls." Killian (2007) illustrates how this accusation does not undermine the image of the hyper-virile and violent young man in France but is intended as a show of his disempowerment. In other words, his violence is seen by the newspaper interviewee as pointless and ineffective. Whether the 2005 riots were "strategic" or "effective" is open for discussion, but the powerful gendered message of men's violence is clear.

4. Human geography is a subfield in the discipline of geography that focuses on human activity and meaning making in spatial terms.

5. Minguettes is a neighborhood in the Lyonnais suburb of Vénissieux.

6. Killian (2007, p. 27) also describes the media and political attention paid to gang rapes in the suburbs of France as a moral panic, displacing concerns about suburban socioeconomic difficulties with discourse about violent male youths from patriarchal African and Islamic cultures. Terrio (2009, p. 13) similarly argues that “representations of youth crime gave rise to moral panics and created a collective amnesia regarding other historical episodes of juvenile delinquency.”

7. While *cit * has multiple definitions, in this context, it is meant to refer to low-income housing projects.

8. I use the term “race” here with hesitation. It is the CNCDH itself that uses the term “racist” to describe acts that seem oriented toward a certain religion, such as bombing mosques. I am uncomfortable eliding the terms “anti-Semitism” and “Islamophobia” with racism, as it reinforces the notion that religion is not a choice but an inherited, visible characteristic with which one is born.

9. Determined by a reference to *logement* (housing) in the headline and lead paragraph.

10. Two of the references were unrelated to the discussion of quality of life; one was about food associated with Muslims (such as couscous); one was about the Maghreb under Vichy; one was about Muslims in Afghanistan; and two were about Islamic radicals.

11. Like *cit *, *quartier* is a word that has multiple meanings in French. It can simply mean “neighborhood,” but here the connotation is that of a *rough* neighborhood.

12. The 2011 ANRU report merely reproduces the same 2008 numbers (Lienemann 2011).

13. Loi no. 2003-710 du 1 ao t 2003 d’orientation et de programmation pour la ville et la r novation urbaine, NOR: VILX0300056L.

14. Tricia Danielle Keaton’s interviews with young Muslim women living in suburbs and on the outskirts of cities includes a range of life stories, reminding one to avoid easy assumptions. Even one of her examples of a family with a violent patriarchal figure somewhat defies expectations. Keaton relates that a young woman named Fatima lived with an extremely violent father who kept close watch over his daughters. In the same history, however, we learn that a brother physically defended Fatima from her father and that Fatima and two of her sisters were working hard to become lawyers to gain independence from and potentially even take legal action against their father (Keaton 2006, p. 169).

## CHAPTER 7

1. I acknowledge, of course, that some French Muslims are part of the elite in France today—but they are few in number.

2. The djellaba, after all, is a garment that reflects Islamic views on modesty.

3. Marine is a daughter of the party’s founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen.

4. That is not to say that Catholicism, or Christianity in general, is always kept out of the public sphere. Catholicism sometimes has a sort of “invisibility” because of its social privilege, meaning that references to it may appear in the public sphere in ways that would be derided if done by other religions.

5. These divisions are evident in comparisons between Interior Minister Manuel Valls and Minister of Justice Christiane Taubira. Valls is known for his focus on security, criticism of the thirty-five-hour workweek, and desire to reduce levels of immigration (he is nicknamed “Sarkozy of the left”), while Taubira is known for her efforts to pass gay marriage and progressive penal reform legislation.

6. *Précarité* is a political buzzword in French politics. It literally means “precariousness” but is often used to describe insecurity, especially job insecurity. In its most general sense, it is used as a blanket term to describe “at-risk” populations. At risk for what? Whatever social ill is being discussed at the moment: unemployment, poverty, obesity, school failure, and so on.

7. Laborde (2010, p. 13) also presents a critique of “tolerant republicanism” as entirely too permissive in its pragmatic acceptance of difference. Very few examples of this are found in elite discourse today, and therefore it is not examined here.

8. Elsa Dorlin, “Internationale féministe: Nous, féministes,” n.d., available at <http://www.change.org>. The petition also served as a cautious note of support for François Hollande in the presidential election.

9. The study was led by Éric Macé, a sociologist at the Université de Bordeaux.

10. A Muslim respondent in Killian’s (2006) study expressed a similar desire for schools to do a better job of fostering multicultural dialogue. Tricia Danielle Keaton (2006, p. 113) points out that “94 percent of the literature used by teachers [in French public schools] was by French writers of European descent. . . . Although there is a large body of literature written in French by people from countries once colonized by France, such works were nearly absent from teachers’ selections.”

11. The Exposition Coloniale of 1931 was an exhibition in Paris meant to demonstrate the wealth and cosmopolitanism of France through a showcase of its colonies. The expo included human zoos in which colonial subjects were placed in reconstructions of their home villages for show. Such exhibitions were wildly popular at the time.

12. The Ministry of Immigration, Integration, and National Identity, which combines immigration issues with the subject of national identity, was created by Nicolas Sarkozy. It was first led by Brice Hortefeux, then Éric Besson. A cabinet reshuffle in 2010 eliminated the post.

13. “Interview performed by telephone on 15–26 January 2010 of 1,000 people living in Metropolitan France, age 18 and older, . . . [a] representative national sample that is corrected for the French population according to the quota method (sex, age, region)” (Obéa-InfraForces 2010).

14. For further information about the development of the CFCM, a particularly excellent collection of articles on the subject is in *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2005).

15. The Tablighi Jamaat is “a movement which advocated a return to rigid faith”; it began in India in the 1920s as a form of identity consolidation (Kepel 2004, p. 261).

16. It also bears noting that French leaders do not always listen to the CFCM, either. In September 2013, a *charte de laïcité* (secularism charter) appeared in every classroom of every public school in the form of an informative poster. Dalil Boubakeur, head of the CFCM, complained that the charter makes “allusions to Islam” and will “stigmatize” Muslims (Battaglia 2013). When Boubakeur shared his concerns with Minister of Education Vincent Peillon, he says, “Monsieur Peillon swore to me that it is not a matter of targeting the Muslim community. But hell is paved with good intentions” (quoted in Battaglia 2013).

17. Justice John Paul Stevens skewered Roberts’s reading of *Brown* as a fundamental misunderstanding of the landmark case. In explaining what he describes as the “cruel irony” at the heart of Roberts’s reasoning, Stevens (*Parents v. Seattle* 2007, pp. 798–799) wrote, “The first sentence in the concluding paragraph of [Roberts’s] opinion states: ‘Before *Brown*, schoolchildren were told where they could and could not go to school based on

the color of their skin.' This sentence reminds me of Anatole France's observation: '[T]he majestic equality of the la[w], forbid[s] rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal their bread.' The Chief Justice fails to note that it was only black school children who were so ordered" (*Parents v. Seattle* 2007, Stevens's dissent, para. 2). Stevens, like the critical republicans described in this chapter, is bemoaning the "sociological deficit" of the chief justice. School segregation in the era of *Brown v. Board of Education* was far more damaging to African Americans than it was to whites. For Stevens, the lesson of *Brown* was not that race is off-limits as a legal category but, rather, that differentiations on the basis of race should have the goal of reversing social exclusion and inequality.

18. Sarrazin's name, ironically, is similar to the inaccurate but historical word for Muslims in Spain at the time of the Crusades. In the epic poem *La chanson de Roland* (The Song of Roland), Charlemagne is fighting the Sarrasins (Saracens in English).

19. Interestingly, the Hybride Europäisch–Muslimische Identitätsmodelle (HEYMAT), a research center at Humboldt University in Berlin, gathered young Muslims for their own Youth Islamic Conference, in which some participants played the role of journalists. They reflected on what journalists can do to be more sensitive to how they depict Muslims in the news, and came up with a number of suggestions for journalists to improve their practices ("Youth Islam conference experimental game," n.d., Deutsche Islam Konferenz, available at <http://www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de>).

20. The Multiculturalism Policy Index is available at <http://www.queensu.ca/mcp>.

21. Joan Wallach Scott (2005) makes a similar argument about gender inequality.

22. This is not to imply that there are not articulations of Islam that are misogynist. There are, just as there are articulations of other faiths that are misogynist.

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# Index

*Page numbers followed by f and t refer to figures and tables, respectively.*

- Académie Française, 133
- Activists: *beur* generation and, 53–54; equality and, 54–60; neutrality pursuits of, 56–57; public identity and, 6; recognition demands of, 57–60; repertoires for change used by, 60–69, 61f, 69f. *See also* Civil rights; Rights
- Affaire du foulard*. *See* Hijab debates
- Affirmative action, 108–109
- African Americans, 166
- Agence Nationale pour la Renovation Urbaine (ANRU [National Agency for Urban Renewal]), 143
- Agnew, John, 127
- AIDS blood transfusion scandal of the 1990s, 68
- Alliance Générale contre le Racisme et pour le Respect de l'Identité Française et Chrétienne (AGRIF [General Alliance against Racism and for the Respect of French and Christian Identity]), 187n18
- Amara, Fadéla, 92–93, 126, 131–132, 142
- Antidiscrimination law, 74–76
- Anti-Semitism, 136–138, 138f
- Apathie, Marie, 97–98
- Assimilation, 18–19
- Association Culturelle Franco-Tunisienne d'Oullins et du Grand Lyon (ACFTOGL [Cultural Franco-Tunisian Association of Oullins and Greater Lyon]), 59
- Badinter, Élisabeth, 35, 40, 42, 43, 45, 127
- Badinter, Robert, 35
- Banlieues*, 150, 184n9; French Muslims' views on, 141–146; gang rape in, 134–136; housing in, 127–128, 129–131, 132–133; media and, 140
- Bauer, Bruno, 18–20
- Begag, Azouz, 79, 109, 156–157
- Bell, Derrick, 72
- Bellil, Samira, 126, 132, 134–135
- Benalia-Brouch, Amine, 97–98
- Benziane, Sohane, 126–127, 132
- Bereni, Laure, 42
- Besson, Éric, 191n12
- Beur* generation, 51–54
- Blousons noirs*, 135
- Bologna Process, 80, 187n2
- Bowen, John, 33, 82–83
- Boyer, Alain, 43
- Brown, Michael K., 168
- Brown, Wendy, 184nn17–18
- Brown v. Board of Education*, 169, 191–192n17

- Burqa, 53, 159, 163–164, 166–167, 183n5. *See also* Hijab; Hijab debates; *Niqab*
- Business Angels des Cités (BAC), 66
- Calavita, Kitty, 123
- Career preparation, 86–89
- Carrère d'Encausse, Hélène, 133
- Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS [National Center for Scientific Research]), 81–82
- Centre Regional des Oeuvres Universitaires et Scolaires (CROUS [Regional Center for Student Welfare]), 91
- Change, social: repertoires for enacting, 60–69; shortcomings in enacting, 70–76
- Chappe, Vincent-Arnaud, 75
- Chebel d'Appolonia, Ariane, 20, 42–43, 129
- Chirac, Jacques, 4, 110, 136
- Citizenship, 12–13, 15, 17–18, 18–19, 27–29, 46, 76–77, 170–174; discursive attacks on, 160–168, 163*f*; education and, 78–81; employment and, 124; equality and, 54–60; French elites and, 30–35, 31*f*, 152–159; how Muslims fall short of deserving, 35–42, 37*t*, 38*f*, 40*t*, 41*f*; models of, 152–159; Muslims in France and, 49, 159–160; perceptions of Muslims and, 23–26, 25*f*; politics of, 168–170; rights and, 166–169; the undeserving citizen and, 42–46. *See also* Deserving French citizen; Rights
- Civic mores, 78–81
- Civil law, 72–73
- Civil rights, 27–28, 59–60, 70–76. *See also* Activists; Rights
- Class, 9, 120–123, 142
- Cloisonnement*, 92, 161–162
- Club XXIème Siècle (Twenty-First Century Club): centralized French politics and, 161–162; liberal entrepreneurialism approach of, 64–66; neutrality pursuits and, 56–57; recognition demands and, 58
- Cohen, Stanley, 130–131
- Collectif contre l'Islamophobie en France (CCIF [Collective against Islamophobia in France]): court system and, 68–69, 69*f*; education and, 93–94, 100; employment and, 117; mediation approach and, 67
- Collège unique*, 89–90
- Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme (CNCDH [National Consulting Committee for Human Rights]), 137–138, 138*f*
- Common good, 20, 43, 80, 187n4
- Common law, 72–73
- Communalism, 187n4
- Communautarisme*, 83, 187n4
- Communitarianism, 20, 85, 187n4
- Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT [General Confederation of Labor]), 75–76
- Conformity, 42–46
- Connolly, William, 53–54
- Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN [European Council for Nuclear Research]), 187n3
- Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (CFCM [French Council of the Muslim Religion]), 110, 164–165
- Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA [High Council for Broadcasting]), 158–159
- Constitutional Court, 186n15
- Constructivist analysis, 12–15
- Contrat de Première Embauche (CPE [First Employment Contract]), 104–105, 106*f*
- Council of Europe's European Court of Human Rights, 73
- Courts: activism and, 68–69, 69*f*; mediation approach, 66–67; shortcomings in enacting social change and, 70–76
- Cresswell, Tim, 127, 130
- Crime, 10, 130, 134–136, 190n6
- Critical republicanism, 157–159. *See also* Republicanism
- Cultural model of French citizenship, 153–154. *See also* Citizenship
- Dahmane, Abderrahmane, 7
- Dawson, Michael, 89
- De Gaulle, Charles, 152, 173–174
- Deltombe, Thomas, 83
- Derrar, Jamal, 126
- Deserving French citizen, 29–35, 31*f*, 46; elite category of, 34–35; how Muslims fall short of being, 35–42, 37*t*, 38*f*, 40*t*, 41*f*; the undeserving citizen, 42–46. *See also* Citizenship
- De Villepin, Dominique, 104–105
- De Villiers, Philippe, 111–113, 152, 153–154
- Difference-blindness, 168–169, 172–173
- Dirigisme*, 103
- Discourse, 12–13, 15, 70–76; analysis of, 13, 14, 160–168, 163*f*; unified, 33–34
- Discrimination: *beur* generation and, 52; citizenship and, 24, 25*f*, 35–42, 37*t*, 38*f*, 40*t*, 41*f*; difference-blind abstract republicanism, 155; in education, 86–89, 90, 94, 96–99; in employment, 17, 107, 114–124, 119*f*; in housing, 17, 146–149; immigration and, 172; media and, 158–159; positive, 108–109; shortcomings in enacting social change and,

- 70–76; the undeserving citizen and, 42–46.  
*See also* Inequality; Injustice
- Diversity: *beur* generation and, 52–54; difference-blind abstract republicanism, 156; difference-blindness and, 168–169; education and, 85–86; French Muslims and, 47–49, 165–166; housing and, 147–148; liberal entrepreneurialism approach and, 65–66; media and, 158–159
- Dynamique Diversité (Diversity Dynamic): centralized French politics and, 161–162; education and, 84; housing and, 142–143; liberal entrepreneurialism approach, 64–66; mediation approach and, 67; recognition demands and, 58–60
- École Nationale d'Administration (ENA [National School of Administration]), 32, 185n6
- Economy: central planning in, 103; crisis in, 173; inequality in, 55. *See also* Employment
- Education, 9–10, 16, 78–81, 100–102, 159, 188n9; centralized French politics and, 163–164; curriculum, 79; difference-blindness and, 169; discrimination in, 96–99; French elites' views on, 82–84; French Muslims' views on, 84–100; French system of higher education, 81–82; guidance counselors, 86–89; halal meat in cafeteria, 100; intersectionality and, 96–99; *mixité* and, 84–86; teacher evaluation, 99–100; track system and, 89–90
- Ekovich, Steven, 173–174
- Elite discourse, 12–13; citizenship and, 29–35, 31f; intersectionality and, 97; perceptions of Muslims and, 24–26, 25f; republicanism, 154–159; shortcomings in enacting social change and, 70–76
- Elites. *See* French elites
- Emancipation, 19–20
- Employment, 9–10, 16–17, 103–107, 105t, 106f, 124–125, 188n1; *banlieues* and, 141–142; difference-blindness and, 169; education and, 80–81, 86–89, 91–92; French elites' views on, 107–114; French Muslims' views on, 114–124, 119f; hiring practices, 185n4; housing and, 129–130, 145–146; liberal entrepreneurialism approach and, 64–66; mediation approach, 66–67; social change and, 75
- Engel, David, 27, 63
- Entrepreneurialism, liberal, and social change, 63–66. *See also* Activists
- Epistemology, 10–13
- Equality, 170–171; activism and, 54–60; critical republicanism and, 157–158; employment and, 115; neutrality, 21–22, 54–60, 80; recognition demands, 21–22, 54–60; shortcomings in enacting social change and, 70–76.  
*See also* Inequality
- Erlanger, Steven, 173
- Ethnicity: citizenship and, 17; difference-blindness and, 168–169; “ethnic French,” 187n1; immigration and, 172; recognition demands and, 60
- Ethnographic approach, 11, 15
- Étudiants Musulmans de France (EMF [Muslim Students of France]), 159; activism and, 68; court system and, 69, 69f; education and, 85, 91–92, 95–96; employment and, 122–124; housing and, 143–145
- European Union's European Court of Justice, 73
- Exclusion, 28–29, 92
- Exploitation Documentaire et Valorisation de l'Information Relative à la Sécurité Publique (EDVIRSP [Public Safety Database]), 114
- Failer, Judith, 27, 166
- Feminism: citizenship and, 28–29; critical republicanism and, 158–159; difference-blind abstract republicanism and, 155–156; housing and, 126, 131–133; the undeserving citizen and, 45
- Femmes Relais, 97, 145–146
- Fichier EDVIGE, 113–114, 189n6
- Fillon, François, 4, 32, 162
- Fogarty, Richard, 171
- Fourastié, Jean, 49
- Fourest, Caroline, 33, 42, 155
- Franco, Héléne, 114
- Fraser, Nancy, 54–55
- Freedman, Jane, 129
- Freedom, 159
- French elites, 12–13, 15; citizenship and, 29–35, 31f, 152–159; deserving French citizens as, 34–35; discursive attacks on citizenship and, 160–168, 163f; French Muslim identity and, 5–8; higher education and, 81–82; how Muslims fall short of deserving French citizenship and, 36–42, 37t, 38f, 40t, 41f; makeup of, 30–34, 31f; views of, on housing, 131–140, 138f, 139f; views of, on Muslims and education, 82–84; views of, on Muslims and employment, 107–114
- French Muslims. *See* Muslims in France
- Front National (FN [National Front]), 110, 153

- Garnier, 116–117, 122  
 Gaspard, Françoise, 41, 59  
 Gauls, 79–80  
 Gays and lesbians, 166. *See also* Gender  
 Gaysot Law of 1990, 71  
 Gender, 9, 17, 187n5; homosexuals, 166; misogyny, 172, 187n5; rape, 134–136, 190n6; sexual attitudes, 43–45  
 Generations, 49  
 Germany, 169–170  
 Governmental action as a mechanism of enacting social change, 68, 70–76  
*Grandes écoles*, 30–31, 32, 90–93; French system of higher education, 81–82; hiring practices, 185n4; versus *universités*, 91–92  
 Greta (*groupe ment d'établissements* [a group of public schools that provides adult continuing education]), 67  
 Group Islamique Armé (GIA [Armed Islamic Group]), 38–39  
 Guibal, Jean-Claude, 21  
 Guidance counselors, 86–89. *See also* Education  
 Gumbel, Peter, 30
- Habitation à loyer modéré* (HLM [low-rent housing]), 128–130, 128–131, 143–145. *See also* Housing  
 Halal meat, 100, 166  
 HALDE (Haut Autorité de Lutte contre les Discriminations et pour l'Égalité [High Authority against Discrimination and for Equality]), 186n14, 189n5; employment and, 113, 115–116; mediation approach and, 67  
 Hall, Peter, 74  
 Hancock, Ange-Marie, 5–6  
 Harkis, 36–37  
 Haut Conseil à l'Intégration (HCI [High Council for Integration]), 164  
 Hein, Jeremy, 59–60  
 Higher education, 81–82, 188n11, 188n13. *See also* Education  
 Hijab, 12, 38, 41, 59, 62, 78, 80–85, 93, 94–96, 100–101, 117–118, 154–156, 158, 159, 163–164, 167, 183n8, 185n2 (chap. 2). *See also* Burqa; Hijab debates; *Niqab*  
 Hijab debates (*affaire du foulard*), 38–39, 163–164; centralized French politics and, 163–164; critical republicanism, 158–159; difference-blind abstract republicanism, 154–156; education and, 80–81, 82–84, 93–96, 100–102; employment and, 117–120, 119f; how Muslims fall short of deserving French citizenship and, 38–39, 41–42, 41f; rights and, 166. *See also* Religion  
 Hollande, François, 17–18, 154  
 Homosexuals, 166. *See also* Gender  
 Hortefeux, Brice, 97–98, 191n12  
 Housing, 9–10, 16, 17, 126–128, 149–150, 184n9; anti-Semitism and, 136–138, 138f; discrimination in, 146–149; French Muslims' views on, 140–149; gang rape and, 134–136; historical perspective on, 128–131; media and, 138–140, 139f; subsidized, 143–145  
 Human emancipation, 19–20
- Identity, 5–8, 18, 184n18; as deserving French citizen, 6, 29–35, 31f; French Muslims and, 160; as Muslim, 5–8, 76–77; politics of, 20. *See also* National identity; Public identity  
 Immigration, 18–19, 47, 172; *beur* generation, 51–54; education and, 98–99; employment and, 75–76, 106, 109–110, 121, 124; gang rape and, 135; generations, 49; housing and, 145–146; liberal entrepreneurialism approach and, 65–66; of Muslims, 15–16, 17; *Trente Glorieuses* (Glorious Thirty) and, 49–51, 50f  
 Inequality, 19–20, 184n17; critical republicanism, 157–158; difference-blindness and, 168–169; education and, 90–93; shortcomings in enacting social change and, 70–76. *See also* Discrimination; Equality; Social inequality  
 Injustice, 9, 23–24, 25f. *See also* Discrimination; Rights  
 Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris, 133, 185n6  
 Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (INSEE [National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies]), 14, 105, 106  
 Insularity, 92  
 Integration of Muslims in France, 5–8, 39–40; centralized French politics and, 164; employment and, 107–114; “failed integration,” 5–8, 39–40, 107–108  
 Intellectuals, 15, 33, 40–42, 41f. *See also* French elites  
 Interest groups, 74  
 Interpretivist methods, 11  
 Intersectionality, 9, 96–99, 183n7  
 Interview protocol: questionnaire in English, 179–182; questionnaire in French, 175–178  
 Intolerance, 108, 159–160  
 Islamophobia, 42, 117–118  
 Isoré, Marlène, 99–100
- Jeunes Musulmans de France (JMF [Young Muslims of France]), 58–59; activism and, 62; education and, 85, 95, 99, 100; employ-

- ment and, 122–124; housing and, 144–145, 146–148
- Juppé, Alain, 149
- Kabtane, Kamel, 117
- Keeler, John, 74
- Kepel, Gilles, 164
- Khosrokhavar, Farhad, 41, 59
- Killian, Caitlin, 121–122, 127, 189n3, 190n6, 191n10
- Kuru, Ahmet, 154
- Labor in France. *See* Employment
- Laïcité*, 18, 184n15; education and, 93–96; employment and, 117–120, 119f; French Muslims and, 159. *See also* Secularism
- Laporte, Bernard, 4
- La Squale*, 134, 140
- Lefebvre, Frédéric, 4
- Lejeune, Aude, 72, 73
- Le Monde*, 185n9; anti-Semitism and, 136, 137; depiction of Muslims in, 38–40, 40t; gang rape and, 134–135; housing and, 139–140; riots and, 189n3
- Lenfer des tournantes*, 134, 140
- Le Pen, Jean-Marie, 75, 110
- Le Pen, Marine, 152–153, 190n3
- Lépinard, Eléonore, 42–43
- Les hommes debouts*, 50, 50f
- Les mosquées de Roissy* (The Mosques of Roissy) (de Villers), 111–113
- Liberal entrepreneurialism and social change, 63–66. *See also* Activists
- Liberal rights, 70–76. *See also* Civil rights; Rights
- Libération*, 134, 136
- Ligue Internationale contre le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme (LICRA [International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism]), 75
- Lukes, Steven, 12
- Marginalization, 47; citizenship and perceptions of Muslims, 166; gang rape and, 135–136; housing and, 17, 130; how Muslims fall short of deserving French citizenship and, 35–42, 37t, 38f, 40t, 41f; media and, 140
- Marriage annulments, 44–46, 185n1
- Marx, Karl, 19–21, 53–54, 71, 184n17
- Mazur, Amy, 42–43
- McCann, Michael, 12, 70, 167
- Meaning production, 12–15
- Media, 15, 32, 185n13; American, 140; centralized French politics and, 161–162; critical republican-ism, 158–159; gang rape and, 135; housing and, 133, 138–140, 139f; how Muslims fall short of deserving French citizenship and, 37–40, 38f, 40t; marriage annulments, 45–46; on Muslims and education, 82–83; role of, in altering the Muslim public identity, 60–62, 61f. *See also* French elites
- Mediation, 66–67. *See also* Activists
- Merkel, Angela, 169
- Methodology, 10–11, 12–15
- Mills, Charles, 28, 43
- Ministry of Immigration, Integration, and National Identity, 191n12
- Misogyny, 172, 187n5. *See also* Gender
- Mitterrand, François, 52
- Mixed methods of discourse analysis, 13–14
- Mixité*, 187n5; education and, 84–86; housing and, 150
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, 155–156
- Moore, Kathleen, 6
- Morals, 78–81
- Morano, Nadine, 6, 153
- Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les Peuples (MRAP [Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples]), 74–75
- Mouvement pour la France (MPF [Movement for France]), 111
- Mucchielli, Laurent, 32, 127, 134–135, 136
- Multiculturalism, 20, 151, 169–170
- Muslims in France, 8–9, 47–48, 151–152; changes since the 1950s, 48–54, 50f; citizenship and, 23–26, 25f, 159–160, 160–168, 163f; deserving French citizens category and, 35–42, 37t, 38f, 40t, 41f; diversity among, 5–8; equality and, 54–60; as migrant laborers, 49–51, 50f; views of, on education, 84–100; views of, on employment, 114–124, 119f; views of, on housing, 140–149. *See also* Education; Employment; Housing
- National identity, 6, 18; centralized French politics and, 162–163; education and, 78–81. *See also* Identity
- Neutrality, 21–22, 54–60, 80. *See also* Equality
- Ni Putes ni Soumises (NPNS [Neither Whores nor Submissives]): difference-blind abstract republican-ism, 155; education and, 84; housing and, 131–133, 143–144; neutrality pursuits and, 56–57; religion and, 187n5; the undeserving citizen and, 45
- Niqab*, 7, 24, 35, 62, 158, 163, 183n5. *See also* Burqa; Hijab; Hijab debates
- Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), 74–75



- Norms, 42–46
- Novkov, Julie, 166
- Objectivism, 11
- The Obscurantist Temptation* (Fourest), 33
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 80
- Oumma.com, 32–33, 58, 60–62, 61f, 161–162
- Parents v. Seattle* (2007), 168–169, 191–192n17
- Paris-centrism, 32
- Paroles de Français*, 151
- Parti Communiste Français (PCF [French Communist Party]), 45
- Parti des Musulmans de France (PMF [Muslim Party of France]), 53, 76; education and, 93; employment and, 121; liberal entrepreneurialism approach, 63–66; recognition demands and, 57–60; religion and, 187n5
- Parti Socialiste (PS [Socialist Party]), 45, 65
- Pateman, Carol, 28, 43
- Phelan, Shane, 27–28, 166
- Pleven Law of 1972, 71, 74–75
- Pluralism, 20
- Police, 10, 17, 51, 112–114, 127–128, 130, 146–147, 148–149, 185n1
- Political correctness, 32
- Political emancipation, 19–20
- Politics, 15, 30–32, 31f; centralized French politics, 161–165, 163f; citizenship and, 36–37, 37t, 168–170; employment and, 108, 125; housing and, 133; liberal entrepreneurialism approach and, 65–66; shortcomings in enacting social change and, 70–76; *Trente Glorieuses* (Glorious Thirty) and, 50–51; uncertainty regarding, 173–174. *See also* French elites
- Positivism methods, 11
- Postel-Vinay, André, 129
- Power, 5–6
- Prayer, 6, 49, 133, 153, 167
- Précarité*, 157, 191n6
- Prejudice, 154–155, 172
- Provine, Doris Marie, 21
- Public identity, 5–6, 76–77; *beur* generation and, 52–54; centralized French politics and, 161–163; of Muslims, altering, 60–62, 61f; recognition demands and, 55; the undeserving citizen and, 43–44. *See also* Identity
- Questionnaire used for interviews with Muslim informants: English version, 179–182; French version, 175–178
- Qur'an, 8, 59, 69, 95, 97, 111, 186n8
- Race, 190n8; citizenship and, 17; difference-blindness and, 168–169; employment and, 120–123; immigration and, 172; intersectionality and, 9
- Racial model of French citizenship, 152–153. *See also* Citizenship
- Raffarin, Jean-Pierre, 110
- Rape, 134–136, 190n6. *See also* Gender
- Recognition demands, 21–22, 54–60. *See also* Equality
- Redistribution, 55
- Religion, 15–16, 184n18, 185–186n2, 187n5, 189n7; *beur* generation and, 52–54; centralized French politics and, 164; citizenship and, 36–37, 42–46, 152–153; difference-blind abstract republicanism and, 154–156; education and, 93–96, 100–102; employment and, 107–108, 117–120, 119f; immigration and, 172; recognition demands and, 60; rights and, 166–169; *Trente Glorieuses* (Glorious Thirty), 49–51, 50f. *See also* Hijab debates
- Renseignements Généraux (RG [General Information]), 112, 113
- Republicanism, 12–15, 20, 171–172; critical republicanism, 157–159; difference-blind abstract republicanism, 154–157; education and, 79–80; tolerant republicanism, 191n7
- Republican social contract theory, 20
- RER D station incident, 136–138, 138f, 140
- Respect Mag*, 68; centralized French politics and, 162–163, 163f; education and, 84, 87–89, 90, 91, 92, 98–99; employment and, 115, 120–121; recognition demands and, 58–59
- Rights, 184n17, 186n16; citizenship and perceptions of Muslims, 23–26, 25f, 166–169; demand for, 21–22; emancipation and, 19–20; shortcomings in enacting social change and, 70–76. *See also* Activists; Citizenship; Civil rights; Injustice
- Riots, 130, 140, 189n3
- Rocca, Tony, 126
- Roselmack, Harry, 32
- Rouban, Luc, 31–32, 185n5
- Salzmann, Jean-Loup, 164
- Sarkozy, Nicolas, 4, 7, 17–18, 33–34, 36, 104, 108–109, 130, 151–152, 169, 191n12
- Sarrazin, Thilo, 170
- Schatzberg, Michael, 11–12
- Scheingold, Stuart, 27, 70
- Schneider, Cathy Lisa, 148–149
- School counselors, 86–89. *See also* Education
- Sciences Po Bordeaux, 31f
- Sciences Po Paris, 32, 92, 185n6

- Scott, Joan Wallach, 34, 192n21
- Secularism, 20, 184n15; *beur* generation and, 53–54; education and, 93–96; French Muslims and, 159. *See also* *Laïcité*
- Senegalese group in Lyon, 59
- Senni, Aziz, 66
- Sexual attitudes, 43–45. *See also* Gender
- Shia branch of Islam, 8–9
- Shklar, Judith, 21, 27
- Siim, Birte, 42–43
- Simonet, Claude, 4
- Slama, Alain-Gérard, 136
- Soccer match on October 15, 2008, between the French and Tunisian national teams, 2–5
- Social change, 70–76
- Social contract theory, 28–29, 73; liberal view of, 20
- The Social Elevator Is Broken, I Took the Stairs* (Senni), 66
- Social emancipation, 19–20
- Social inequality, 21–22; citizenship and perceptions of Muslims, 25*f*; difference-blindness and, 168–169; intersectionality and, 9; shortcomings in enacting social change and, 70–76. *See also* Inequality
- Social workers, 145–146
- SOS Racisme, 35, 52–54; employment and, 116–117; neutrality pursuits of, 56–57; recognition demands of, 58
- State, the, 68, 70–76
- Straw, Jack, 7
- Suffert, Georges, 136
- Suleiman, Ezra, 20, 30, 81, 82, 188n10
- Sunni branch of Islam, 8–9
- Taubira, Christiane, 190n5 (chap. 7)
- Teachers, 99–100. *See also* Education
- Terrio, Susan, 149
- Thénard, Jean-Michel, 136
- Three dimensional approach to understanding power, 12
- Tiberj, Vincent, 162
- Track system, 89–90. *See also* Education
- Train à Grande Vitesse (TGV), 161
- Trente Glorieuses* (Glorious Thirty), 50*f*, 103–107, 105*t*, 106*f*, 128, 143
- Triangulation method for discourse analysis, 13–14
- Turkey, 169–170
- Undeserving citizens, 42–46. *See also* Deserving French citizen
- Unemployment problems, 103–104, 129–130. *See also* Employment
- “Unfit citizen” frame, 13. *See also* Citizenship; Deserving French citizen
- Union des Jeunes Musulmans (UJM [Union of Young Muslims]), 59
- Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (UOIF [Union of Islamic Organizations of France]), 140, 164–165
- Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP [Union for a Popular Movement]), 97–99
- United Kingdom, 170
- Universal model of citizenship, 171–172. *See also* Citizenship
- Universities/*Universités*, 81–82, 90–93. *See also* Education
- U.S. Civil Rights Movement, 72
- U.S. political system, 73
- Valls, Manuel, 18, 173, 190n5 (chap. 7)
- Venner, Fiammetta, 42
- Vigneau, Christophe, 104
- Violence, 159–160; housing and, 131–140, 138*f*, 139*f*, 141–142; perceptions of, 108, 111–114; against women, 131–133
- Waiting as a means of enacting social change, 62–63. *See also* Activists
- Weldon, Laurel, 9
- Williams, Patricia, 70, 166
- Woll, Cornelia, 30–31, 74
- World War II, 49–51, 50*f*
- Wuhl, Simon, 173
- Yarmulke, 166

**Jennifer Fredette** is Professor of Public Law at North Central College in Naperville, Illinois. She is the translator of Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj's *As French as Everyone Else? A Survey of French Citizens of Maghrebin, African, and Turkish Origin* (Temple).