LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, LAÏCITÉ?: DEFINING FRENCH NATIONAL IDENTITY

© 2014
By Elizabeth Adair Abbot

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion
Of the Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies
Croft Institute for International Studies
Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College
The University of Mississippi

University, Mississippi
May 2014

Approved:

______________________________
Advisor: Dr. Anne Quinney

______________________________
Reader: Dr. Kees Gispen

______________________________
Reader: Dr. Olivier Tonnerre
ABSTRACT
ELIZABETH ADAIR ABBOT: Liberté, Égalité, Laïcité?: Defining French National Identity
(Under the direction of Professor Anne Quinney)

The French notion of laïcité, or secularism, originating from the French Revolution, today is engrained in the sense of French National Identity. In modern French society, this idea of laïcité is especially important in classrooms, which are seen as public, secular spaces where national identity is transmitted. This has created many problems with the recent increase in immigrants to France from traditionally Muslim North African countries, as demonstrated by the controversial headscarf ban in 2004. This thesis further examines these tensions in analyzing the Chart de Laïcité, issued by the government to be posted in all French public schools in September 2013. Using these tools, I ultimately try to answer the question: Can someone truly be both Muslim and French?
Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER I: HISTORY OF LAÏCITÉ AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN FRANCE ........ 5
RELIGION IN FRANCE BEFORE THE REVOLUTION ............................................................... 6
THE REVOLUTION ......................................................................................................................... 7
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY ....................................................................................................... 11
TWENTIETH CENTURY AND LAÏCITÉ TODAY ........................................................................ 15

CHAPTER II: LAÏCITÉ IN SCHOOLS .................................................................................. 19
THE HEADSCARF CONTROVERSY ............................................................................................ 19
THE CHARTE DE LAÏCITÉ ............................................................................................................. 21
RESPONSES TO THE CHART AS EXAMINED THROUGH FRENCH MEDIA ................. 28

CHAPTER III: FRENCH UNIVERSALISM ....................................................................... 35
DEFINING UNIVERSALISM AND NATIONALITY ....................................................................... 36
UNIVERSALISM AND LAÏCITÉ .................................................................................................... 39
UNIVERSALISM TODAY .................................................................................................................. 44

CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................. 48

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................................. 50

APPENDIX I ................................................................................................................................. 54
INTRODUCTION

The separation of church and state, known in French as laïcité, is an ideal that is fundamental to the Republic of France. Laïcité dates back to the French Revolution, when the revolutionaries wanted to separate their new government from both the monarchy that they had found so oppressive and the Catholicism that had been used to justify it. The French, largely influenced by the philosophies of the Enlightenment, grew wary of religion being involved in government in any way as, from their perspective, it could be used to justify oppression. Although a law in 1905 declared that France would not recognize any official religion, France was not constitutionally laïque until 1946. Under laïcité, no one may be persecuted for his or her religious beliefs, the state cannot be fiscally connected to any particular religion, and public spaces must be kept neutral. Public schools, being subsidized by the state, must be therefore free from any religious influence, including, according to a 2004 law, any religious signs worn by students. This law was fairly controversial as it was made in the interest of prohibiting Muslim girls from wearing signs such as the burqa and the hijab to school. Although laïcité was made in order to prevent religious persecution, it is sometimes used today to justify anti-Muslim sentiment and practices in France.

The French notion of secularism, or laïcité, has permeated French society throughout history and remains very important today as a recent surge in North African immigrants have tested this value. The French state is constitutionally secular, meaning
that France recognizes no official religion and therefore guarantees the religious neutrality for all public spaces. Laïcité, which is arguably like a religion in and of itself, is so engrained into the French national identity that without major policy reform, Muslims (who practice their faith more publicly), can never be fully integrated into French society. This is especially important in schools, which are the institution responsible for forming a person’s knowledge of the state and identity as a French citizen. In order to keep religion out of public schools, the French government has already banned wearing any type of religious signs, including hijabs for Muslim girls, in the classroom, which sparked worldwide criticism of the French notion of laïcité as suppressing religious freedom.

In September 2013, the Ministry of Education created a Charte de Laïcité to be hung in all public French schools, which attempts to explain both laïcité and its consequences in the classroom. The chart, printed in the blue, white, and red of the tricolore, is almost like propaganda, transmitting the values of the state to children in classrooms across the country. The chart is also under attack for being too pointed towards Muslims, as it specifically mentions that laïcité involves equality between men and women, therefore implying that in the Muslim faith men and women are not completely equal, and that students are not allowed to wear ostentatious religious signs to school, thus referencing the hijab and other Muslim practices. Newspaper articles from both various sources discussed the chart at length, some saying that it was very much needed in classrooms today while others found it ultimately powerless and useless. The Chart itself represents the larger struggle between French Republicans who see the practice of Islam as an attack on the French national identity and Muslims who see this
strict interpretation of laïcité as an attack on their freedom to exercise their religion.

The Chart de Laïcité symbolizes the French unwillingness to compromise their Republican values. Since the Revolution, the French have defined themselves as a nation with universal ideals that are more important to preserve than differences such as culture, ethnicity, and language. These notions of universalism do not support a pluralist society, but instead require that any outsiders assimilate into society to be considered truly “French.” Laïcité is a part of this universalism, as the French see it more important to keep public spaces free of religion than to allow complete religious freedom, which, in their eyes, would only highlight cultural differences. The fear of outsider cultural differences threatening the French way of life can be seen clearly in the recent rise in popularity of the extremist party the Front National, which runs on an anti-immigration and xenophobic platform. More and more people are voting for this party due to the threat that they believe the North African immigrants pose to their society.

Can the Muslim immigrants in France and their descendants every truly be considered “French?” Tensions between the immigrant communities and the French authorities over issues such as the infamous “Burqa Ban” of 2011 have resulted in violence, riots, and police intervention. Although tools such as the Charte de Laïcité are meant to solve these tensions by forcing immigrants to conform to French ideals, will this forced assimilation actually be effective or will it just cause further backlash and resistance from the immigrant community? The French cling to this defense of laïcité in order to bolster their argument against the immigrant community that they perceive as a problem and even a threat to their society. Exploring these arguments more in-depth exposes several cracks in this theory of French universalism, which has been twisted to
exclude a significant portion of French society, namely the immigrant community.
CHAPTER I: History of Laïcité and National Identity in France

France has a long and complicated religious history, especially in relation to the Catholic Church. Before the French Revolution of 1789, France was ruled by a monarchy so closely connected to the Catholic Church it was known as “La Fille Ainée de l’Église.”\(^1\) During this time, there was little tolerance for other religions, including protestant Christianity. This religious intolerance was manifested in the Wars of Religion in the 1500s, though the Edict of Nantes of 1598 attempted to rectify it. The Revolution of 1789, which was based largely on the ideas of the Enlightenment, was a reaction to the close relationship between the Catholic Church and the State and attempted to sever the religious and political ties that had been so oppressive. Thus, the idea of separation of Church and State in France was born in the Revolution. The first concrete manifestation of this separation was the secularization of public schools in 1881. All religious teachings and symbols were banned from classrooms in order to promote equity. This was a pivotal event as the classroom in France is viewed largely as a tool for molding French citizens and promoting national ideals. The removal of religion in public schools symbolizes the removal of religion in forming the French national identity. It wasn’t until 1905, however, that France became legally laïque. The Fifth Republic of France is now constitutionally laïque, and many view laïcité as a key characteristic of modern French identity. Currently, an influx of post-colonial immigration has created tensions and an

\(^1\) “The Eldest Daughter of the Church”
even stronger emphasis on laïcité in France, which ironically has led to new laws and practices that have been criticized as being intolerant, perpetuating the very evil that separation of church and state was instituted to prevent. Examining the history of secularism in France leads to a better understanding of these contemporary issues associated with a resurgence of French laïcité.

**Religion in France Before the Revolution**

As mentioned above, before the French Revolution, the relationship between church and state was quite different. France was a largely Catholic country ruled by a monarchy closely linked to religion. French kings claimed their political power came from God, a concept known as the Divine Right of Kings. Catholicism played a large role in most official ceremonies, including coronation ceremonies. Since political authority was so closely linked to Catholicism, there was little tolerance for other religions, including other sects of Christianity such as Protestantism. French Protestants, known as Huguenots, were often actively persecuted. These religious tensions resulted in Religious Wars throughout the sixteenth century. The violence escalated on August 23 1572, now known as the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre. Catholics, outraged after the marriage of the king’s sister to Henri de Navarre, a known protestant, took to the streets of Paris and killed Protestants. The massacre was extremely violent: “Protestants were slaughtered everywhere, from the Louvre to their own modest homes” (Gerson 30).

Henri de Navarre later converted to Catholicism and became King of France but never forgot the plight of the Huguenots. In 1598, he issued the Edict of Nantes, a document that guaranteed certain rights to non-Catholics (Gerson 11). While the Edict
established that Catholicism would still be practiced across France, Article VI of the Edict also clarified:

And in order to leave no occasion for troubles or differences between our subjects, we have permitted, and herewith permit, those of the said religion called Reformed (Protestant) to live and abide in all the cities and places of this our kingdom and countries of our sway, without being annoyed, molested, or compelled to do anything in the matter of religion contrary to the consciences, [...] upon condition that they comport themselves in other respects according to that which is contained in this our present edict (Gerson 150).

While this proclamation did not go so far as to create complete religious freedom for France or separate church and state, it did create an atmosphere of some religious tolerance. Writer Yves Bizeul notes that during the four hundred year anniversary celebration of the Edict of Nantes in 1998, “The Edict took on a mythical hue in as much as it was interpreted as the origin of the basic principles of our modernity, particularly toleration, laïcité, and human rights” (58). The Edict, of course, did not distance the monarchy from Catholicism, but it was the beginning of religious tolerance in France.

**The Revolution**

The Catholic monarchy remained in place in France until the Revolution in 1789. Just before the Revolution, the state was on the verge of bankruptcy. In an attempt to try to gain more wealth, the state passed a decree in November 1789 that placed all Church
property “at the disposition of the nation” (Betros). A few Church officials supported this measure seeing saving the state and bettering society as a religious act. In 1790, the state went one step further, closing all of the monasteries in the country and forcing their inhabitants to depart in order to sell both the monasteries themselves and their contents (Betros). The state took control of both the Church’s revenue and property, thus further blurring the line between Church and State in the early stages of the Revolution.

While Catholicism remained very much a part of French life in the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment emerged and gained popularity. The Enlightenment, highly influenced in France by philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire, encouraged the scientific method, objectivity, reason, and individualism. The Enlightenment “proclaimed independence, equality and tolerance” as opposed to “the seventeenth century [which] had proclaimed the importance of authority, social distinctions and coercion” (Dansette 5 Vol. 1). During this time, many in France started to question the political authority of the King as well as the authority of the Catholic Church. For example, philosophers Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert compiled the famous *Encyclopédie*, the first volume of which was released in 1751. Through this monumental work, which sought to compile all that was known at the time in all areas of the human experience, Diderot and d’Alembert critiqued many aspects of life in France during the eighteenth century, including religion. In the entry entitled “Priests,” religious authorities were characterized, at best, as superstitious hacks attempting to “predict the future” and, at worst, as megalomaniacs trying to “establish […] their empire” by

---

2 « Prêtres »
3 « prédirent l’avenir »
“paint[ing] the gods as cruel, vindictive, [and] implacable”\(^4\) (d’Alembert and Diderot).

The “systeme des renvois” or suggestions for further reading at the end of every entry in *l’Encyclopédie* directed the reader to articles such as “superstition” and “ignorance” after they read the entry on the Church. The king censored this work because it was seen as subversive to official doctrine, and the philosophes lives were put into peril as a result.

Their entries on religion in *l’Encyclopédie* demonstrate the bold and changing views of many leading thinkers and philosophers of the time. The Enlightenment brought with it a growing desire by French people to create a new government not linked to the oppressive, and at times seemingly nonsensical, authority of the Catholic Church.

The French Revolution was the turning point when church and state started to become more separate, and the nation moved away from Catholicism as its official religion. The Church was considered to be a part of the Monarchy and the ancien régime, and many clergy members received political and financial benefits and were socially above the third estate, or anyone who wasn’t noble. Therefore, to many during the Revolution, the Church symbolized the oppression and inequality of the ancien régime.

Clergy were stripped of their privileges, and following the Revolution, the new government did not recognize Catholicism as the official State religion (Dansette 47-49 Vol. 1). It was not really “irreligion” which motivated this dismantling of the connections between the state and the Church but more a desire to move past the days of the ancien régime and the intolerance it perpetuated (Dansette 49 Vol. 1). The French were not trying to completely destroy the Catholic Church. To the contrary, most French people, especially in the countryside, were still practicing Catholics (Vovelle 78-81). The

\(^4\) « établir […] leur empire […] peignirent les dieux comme cruels, vindicatifs, implacables »
movement away from a national religion was merely the beginning of the formation of a French government not directly tied to the Church.

According to Article X of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, written in 1789 by the newly formed National Assembly, “No one may be troubled for his opinions, even religious, provided that their expression does not trouble the public order established by the Law.”\(^5\) France had come a long way since the religious persecution of the 1500’s. This sentiment as spelled out in Article X is arguably the beginning of the concept of laïcité, which advances the ideal that everyone, no matter what religion, is viewed as equal under the law. The key point in this Article was that one’s religious beliefs could not threaten the “public order” as established by the government. From the beginning of secularization, the French government placed limitations on religious expression.

During this period, for some French citizens, the Revolution itself became a kind of religion. Revolutionary leaders tried to create new holidays not based on religion but rather recognizing days important to the Revolution. Ideas such as the Fatherland, Progress, and Philosophy began being worshipped in formal settings, and the National Assembly even passed a law requiring Notre Dame de Paris to be renamed the “Temple of Reason and Liberty” (Dansette 95 Vol. 1). The new government also recognized the cult of the “Supreme Being” as opposed to a God (Dansette 96). Indeed, in the opening paragraph of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the National Assembly states that it is setting forth the rights “in the presence and under the auspices

\(^5\) « Nul ne droit être inquiété pour ses opinions, même religieuses, pourvu que leur manifestation ne trouble pas l’ordre public établi par la Loi. »
of the Supreme Being.” These Revolutionary cults did not last long, but they demonstrate that as post-Revolutionary France moved away from a Catholic State, it moved towards one where nationalism and the ideas of the Enlightenment were the State Religion. While this form of worship of the State produced by the Revolution was short-lived and seems extreme today, there are echoes of these views in the idea of modern French citizenship (Brubaker 35).

The Nineteenth Century

The years following the Revolution were politically tumultuous as France experienced a semi-democratic government with the first National Assembly, the Reign of Terror immediately following the Revolution, Napoleon’s Empire, the brief return of the Monarchy, and finally a return to a more democratic system. Under Napoleon’s rule, the state took on a unique relationship with the Church. Despite protest from anti-Catholic revolutionaries, Napoleon sought to again merge the state with the Church, but he also wanted to take more control away from the Pope. In 1801, France, along with Rome, signed a Concordat that recognized Catholicism as “the religion of the vast majority of French citizens” (Betros). Under this Concordat, all clergy members had to swear an oath of loyalty to the state, their salaries were paid by the government, diocese were redrawn in order to line up with political boundaries, and Napoleon himself had the authority to appoint bishops. An additional article from 1802 mandated that all instructions from Rome be approved by the French government, further taking power away from the Pope and giving Napoleon’s Church “it’s own national identity” (Betros).

6 « en presence et sous les auspices de l’Être Suprême »
Relations with Rome eventually deteriorated, culminating in the Pope ex-communicating Napoleon in 1808 and Napoleon having the Pope arrested in 1818, but Napoleon continued to bring aspects of Catholicism (albeit, aspects that he controlled), into his regime (Betros).

In the 1880s, separation of Church and State again became an issue. At that time, Jules Ferry, a prominent figure in the Ministry of Education, proposed an education reform. From 1880 to 1882, Ferry worked on creating a program that secularized public elementary schools and made them free and compulsory (Dansette 48-49 Vol. 2). He wanted to replace the religious education children typically received with “moral and civic instruction” (Dansette 50 Vol. 2). Catholics criticized this proposal, but Ferry insisted that children should learn “the good and traditional morality of our forefathers” instead of religion in order to make them better French citizens (Dansette 50 Vol. 2). Concretely, this meant that religious doctrines could not be taught in class, religious symbols were banned from classrooms, and religious figures, such as priests, both Catholic and Protestant, were not allowed to be teachers (Eggert and Hölscher 67). Just as during the Revolution, Catholicism became less merged with the government, and a sense of nationalistic pride and duty to become a better citizen became more prominent.

The secularization of schools is a key event in the history of laïcité as French schools are critical in educating and forming not only citizenship, but also national identity. Under Jules Ferry’s new laws, secularized schools “became great engines of assimilation, welding France for the first time into a unified nation” (Brubaker 15). Since all children in France were learning the same ideals and becoming more nationalistic, citizenship and culture became more unified across the country. This helped create a
more assimilationist understanding of nationhood in France, which started to become centered on a common culture and more nationalistic ideals. Teachers in the late 19th century could be called “instituteurs” on an “internal mission civilisatrice [...] to institute the nation” (Brubaker 11). By turning “peasants into Frenchmen,” schoolteachers were encouraging students to participate in a national public sphere (Bowen 12). The absence of religion in schools therefore led to a more assimilated, culturally similar society. Once again, the State itself became replaced by religion, teaching children morals, traditions, and showing them their place in the world as French citizens.

In 1898-1899, France experienced another defining moment known today as the Dreyfus affair. After a crushing military defeat by Prussia in 1871, France was split into two factions: the Republicans who supported a secular France, and more conservative Monarchists who wanted a restoration of the Monarchy and were largely Catholic (Fischel 121). Just after this defeat, a Jewish officer in the French army named Alfred Dreyfus was accused of treason, sentenced to life deportation in a military fortress, and was stripped of his military rank (Dansette 166-168 Vol. 2). This was not because his superiors had any real evidence of his betrayal, but rather because of religious prejudice. Upon learning of the charges of treason, an official at military headquarters claimed, “It is the Jew who is guilty” (Dansette 168 Vol. 2). After Dreyfus was accused, an intelligence officer placed a forged document in Dreyfus’ file further implicating his guilt so that the government would not appear anti-Semitic (Dansette 168 Vol. 2). This scandal further brought out the divisions in the country into Dreyfus’ supporters, or “Dreyfusards,” who were largely Republican (including famous novelist Émile Zola),
and opponents, or “anti-Dreyfusards,” the Catholic Monarchists (Dansette 167-178 Vol. 2). Furthermore, because this scandal came just after a crushing military defeat, many were indifferent to Dreyfus’ actual innocence or even believed him to be innocent, but were reluctant to retract his punishment because it would weaken the prestige of the French Army (Fischel 120). They believed that the interest of France as a country was more important than an individual’s incarceration. The Dreyfus created tension in a society that had been founded upon ideas of religious tolerance following the Revolution.

The Dreyfus affair is an important event as it is a leading example of religious-based conflict in French history and a symbol of French anti-Semitism. This scandal came at an interesting time as just over ten years earlier, the book La France Juive was published, which denounced the “destructive effect of Jews on society” (Dansette 167 Vol. 2). It has been argued that “the ethnic strand in French self-understanding did not crystallize until the time of the Dreyfus affair” (Brubaker 102). Thus, due to this affair, the French started to understand themselves as having a particular ethnic heritage. Dreyfus’ Jewish heritage was seen as evidence that he was not entirely “French;” had he shared a Catholic heritage, he would not have been accused of treason. This scandal, and the intolerance that underlies it, suggests that the French sense of true citizenship remained linked to a person’s religious heritage, with deep suspicion of persons, at least by the anti-Dreyfusards, who did not share a similar Catholic heritage, including recent Catholic converts, atheists, and non-religious people. The discrimination against Dreyfus, and Jews in general, is indicative of a larger problem of deeper racism underlying a secular, non-racist theory and ideology. This phenomenon is not unique to France, but can be found throughout history in other European countries and America.
Twentieth Century and Laïcité Today

In 1905, France became legally laïque. Largely fueled by tensions that resulted from the Dreyfus affair, both secular radicals and Protestants pushed for the complete separation of Church and State in order to make all French citizens equal in the eyes of the law. Under the law passed December 9 1905, the French State, which before had recognized Catholicism as “the religion of the majority of French people,” proclaimed that it would no longer recognize any specific religion (Dansette 229 Vol. 2). Article I of the law reads, “The Republic assures the liberty of conscience. It guarantees the free exercise of religion under only the restrictions decreed hereafter in the interest of the public order”7 (Loi du 9 décembre 1905 concernant la separation de Eglises et de l’Etat). The State would furthermore not pay the salaries of or have any say in the appointment of religious officials, Catholic or otherwise. Interestingly, however, many religious buildings and churches remained the property of the state because they were deemed part of France’s *patrimoine*, or national heritage (Dansette 229-230 Vol. 2). This change in the law is a monumental turning point in French history since, although a majority of the population remained Catholic, the State no longer officially recognized any religion and severed most of its ties with Catholicism. Secularism became an even larger part of French national identity. To be French became to be laïque.

The Republic of France today is constitutionally laïque although there are still some religion-based tensions. The current French Constitution was passed October 4,

7 « La République assure la liberté de conscience. Elle garantit le libre exercice des cultes sous les seules restrictions édictées ci-après dans l'intérêt de l'ordre public. »
1958. The first Article of the Constitution reads, “France is an indivisible, secular, democratic, and social Republic. It ensures the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion. It respects all beliefs. It is organized on a decentralized basis.” France today is legally a secular, or laïque, nation and therefore is not associated with any religion and allows all citizens to be regarded equally before the law, regardless of their religious beliefs. The French notion of laïcité is better understood when compared to the American notion of secularism. While in the U.S., there is a notion of “freedom of religion,” in France, there is more of a notion of “freedom from religion.”

While the U.S. was founded on the idea of religious liberty, France “had to be protected against one church in particular, the Catholic Church, whose agenda was socially conservative and anti-democratic” (Laurence and Vaisse 139). The French are therefore wary of mixing politics and religion and believe that religion should be confined to the private sphere (Laurence and Vaisse 139-140).

In the late twentieth century, after de-colonization and the Algerian War, there was a large influx of immigrants to France from North African countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. Many of these immigrants are practicing Muslims, which has created problems for French perceptions of laïcité and national identity. The Islam faith requires several public practices such as daily prayer and, while the headscarves worn by women are not required by the Quran, they are a common practice among many Muslims. These public displays of religion are alien, to say the least, to the French perspective and violate the notion that religion should be removed from public life. As

8 « La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale. Elle assure l’égalité devant la loi de tous les citoyens sans distinction d’origine, de race ou de religion. Elle respecte toutes les croyances. Son organisation est décentralisée. »
France is also a traditionally Catholic country, Islam also violates traditional religious norms. There have been many conflicts in contemporary France, and resulting religious intolerance, despite the laïque laws that were ironically designed to prevent religious conflict.

In 2003, French President Jacques Chirac formed the Staï Commission and charged them with examining the practical application of laïcité in France. The Report that the Commission wrote upheld the already in place application of laïcité, taking it one step further and passing a law in 2004 that banned students from wearing ostentatious religious signs in school, including the hijab. Interestingly, this report “took integration to be a prerequisite for education, rather than its outcome” (Scott 102). According to scholar Joan W. Scott, “Those who did not conform in advance, who were not already ‘French,’ fell outside the purview of the universal because, as in the body of the nation, commonality was a prerequisite for membership in the educational community” (103). Therefore, many Muslims today feel excluded from this notion of being “French” as they do not share a common culture with the français de souche.

Examining a brief history of laïcité and how it has shaped French national identity helps give insight to the religious conflicts of today. Formed from ideas that first appeared in the Edict of Nantes and the French Revolution, laïcité has become a part of a shared national culture. The secularization of schools in 1881 was not only a factor in promoting laïcité but also of creating an assimilationist view of nationhood in France. Today, the large Muslim immigrant population has forced France to confront these ideas and what it means to be laïque and, in turn, what it means to be “French.” Bearing in mind the roots of laïcité and the goals it sought to promote can provide better
understanding and perhaps caution towards the contemporary issues facing France that are centered around religion.
CHAPTER II: Laïcité in Schools

Laïcité is still very much a part of French society today, especially in the sphere of education. As previously discussed, French public schools are legally secular, and students are not allowed to wear any type of ostentatious religious symbols to school, be it a cross necklace or a hijab. The reason laïcité is such a big issue for schools specifically is because, historically, schools in France are where Republican ideals and values are taught and how citizens of the Republic are created. Islam, and religion in general, is repressed in schools because neither lines up with the strictly Republican values founded upon this idea of laïcité.

The Headscarf Controversy

One of the most controversial issues in regards to Islam in public schools in France is whether Muslim girls can wear the hijab, which in France can also be called the foulard (headscarf) or voile (veil). The first main manifestations of this issue occurred in 1989 when a principle of a middle school in a Paris suburb suspended three girls for refusing to remove their hijabs upon entering the building (Fetzer and Soper 78).

Partially in response to incidents such as this, in 1994, François Bayrou, the then Minister of Education, issued a “circular” which stated that:

In France, the national project and the republican project have merged with a certain idea of the citizen. This French idea of the nation and the
Republic is, naturally, respectful of all beliefs, in particular religious and political convictions and cultural traditions. But it clearly excludes the splintering of the nation into separate communities, indifferent to one another, considering only their own rules and their own laws, engaged in simple co-existence. (qtd. in O’Brien xvii-xviii)

Thus, the idea of being a French citizen is opposed to the idea of a pluralist society governed by separate sets of laws. He goes on to decree:

In institutions students are allowed to wear distinct symbols, manifesting their personal attachment to convictions, especially religious. But ostentatious symbols, which constitute in themselves elements of proselytism or of discrimination, are forbidden. Provocative behavior, failure to fulfill obligations of conscientiousness and safety, acts susceptible of being construed as pressure on other students, interfering with involvement in activities, or disrupting the order of the institution are forbidden. (qtd. in O’Brien xviii)

This circular caused much debate in France. The use of the word “ostentatious,” or in French “osentatatories,” which is also found multiple times in the 2003 Stasi Report, is particularly problematic as it leaves a lot of room for interpretation. What constitutes an ostentatious versus a non-ostentatious symbol? This was particularly problematic for school administrators as it was up to them to decide how to interpret this circular (O’Brien xviii).

In addition to citing laïcité as one of the reasons hijabs should not be allowed in schools, many in France find the hijab to be sexist. Paris public school teacher Elizabeth
Altschull argues that the veil is a way to “hide the female body,” that it represents “an extremely archaic male ‘obsession’ with women’s hair” and that it reduces women to “a walking temptation to sin” (Fetzer and Soper 82-83). Some also argue that the hijab can further cause harm to Muslim girls by outwardly distinguishing between “good,” those who wear the hijab, and “bad” Muslims, those who do not. There are reported incidents of Muslim girls being bullied and called names such as “whores” in schools because they refuse to wear the hijab (Fetzer and Soper 82). A popular feminist movement in France called Ni Putes Ni Soumises has these same views and is opposed to women wearing veils in public in general (Agence France-Presse).

However, there are also many counter-arguments to support Muslim women wearing hijabs that are based on broader notions of religious freedom and “the more pluralist, ‘soft’ form of laïcité,” or interpreting laïcité as being more inclusive rather than exclusive (Fetzer and Soper 83). Some feel that it is their right as women to decide themselves whether or not to wear it and view these laws as oppressive. Some also feel that expelling girls from school is too harsh a punishment, as it doesn’t allow them to get the education they need to have professional careers and become “emancipated” (Fetzer and Soper 83). While there are many arguments for and against the headscarf ban, it is important to note that this is one of the most recent major applications of laïcité and it demonstrates the tensions between Muslims and secularists in France.

**The Charte de Laïcité**

On September 9, 2013, the National Ministry of Education, under direction of Minister Vincent Peillon who is a member of the Socialist Party, published a *Charte de
Laïcité and declared that it was to be posted in all French public schools, preferably at entrances and in hallways. The chart, printed in shades of blue, red and white, features fifteen articles that communicate the principles of laïcité and how it should be executed in a school setting. Minister Peillon unveiled the chart at Samuel Beckett High School in a suburb of Paris called Ferté-sous-Jarre (Battaglia “Face” 2). This high school is one of the worst in the country, with only 55% of its seniors passing the baccalauréat in 2010 (Le Blevennec and Cerdan). There the Minister presented the following graphic that is to be hung in public schools all around France:
CHARTRE DE LA LAÏCITÉ À L’ÉCOLE

La Nation confie à l’École la mission de faire partager aux élèves les valeurs de la République.

1. La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale. Elle assure l’égalité devant la loi, sur l’ensemble de son territoire, de tous les citoyens. Elle respecte toutes les croyances.

2. La République laïque organise la séparation des religions et de l’État. L’État est neutre à l’égard des convictions religieuses ou spirituelles. Il n’y a pas de religion d’État.

3. La laïcité garantit la liberté de conscience à tous. Chacun est libre de croire ou de ne pas croire. Elle permet la libre expression de ses convictions, dans le respect de celles d’autrui et dans les limites de l’ordre public.

4. La laïcité permet l’exercice de la citoyenneté, en conciliant la liberté de chacun avec l’égalité et la fraternité de tous dans le souci de l’intérêt général.

5. La République assure dans les établissements scolaires le respect de chacun de ces principes.

6. La laïcité de l’École offre aux élèves les conditions pour développer leur personnalité, exercer leur libre arbitre et faire l’apprentissage de la citoyenneté. Elle les protège de tout prosélytisme et de toute pression qui les empêcherait de faire leurs propres choix.

7. La laïcité assure aux élèves l’accès à une culture commune et compartagée.

8. La laïcité permet l’assurance de la liberté d’expression des élèves dans la limite du bon fonctionnement de l’École comme du respect des valeurs républicaines et du pluralisme des convictions.

9. La laïcité implique le rejet de toutes les violences et de toutes les discriminations, garantit l’égalité entre les filles et les garçons, et repose sur une culture du respect et de la compréhension de l’autre.

10. Il appartient à tous les personnels de transmettre aux élèves la sens et la valeur de la laïcité, ainsi que des autres principes fondamentaux de la République. Ils veillent à leur application dans le cadre scolaire, ils leur revient de porter la présente charte à la connaissance des parents d’élèves.

11. Les personnels ont un devoir de strict neutralité : ils ne doivent pas manifester leurs convictions politiques ou religieuses dans l’exercice de leurs fonctions.

12. Les enseignements sont laïques. Afin de garantir aux élèves l’ouverture la plus objective possible à la diversité des visions du monde ainsi qu’à l’étendue et à la précision des savoirs, aucun sujet n’est a priori exclu du questionnement scientifique et pédagogique. Aucun élève ne peut invoquer une conviction religieuse ou politique pour contester à un enseignant le droit de traiter une question au programme.

13. Nul ne peut se prévaloir de son appartenance religieuse pour refuser de se conformer aux règles applicables dans l’École de la République.

14. Dans les établissements scolaires publics, les règles de vie des différents espaces, précisées dans le règlement intérieur, sont respectueuses de la laïcité. Le port de signes ou tenues par lesquels les élèves manifestent ostensiblement une appartenance religieuse est interdit.

15. Par leurs réflexions et leurs activités, les élèves contribuent à faire vivre la laïcité au sein de leur établissement.
The statements in this chart reveal the ideals that the French Government believes students should uphold in order to be true citizens of the Republic. One of the most significant points is number four: “Laïcité allows the exercise of citizenship while reconciling the freedom of each person with equality and brotherhood for all for the benefit of the general interest.”

Additionally, in the sixth statement, the Ministry of Education proclaims, “The laïcité of Schools gives students conditions to forge their personalities, exercise their free will and have their first experience of citizenship. It protects them from all proselytism and from all pressure that would prohibit them from making their own choices.”

Point number seven reads, “Laïcité assures students access to a common and shared culture.” This reveals that, in the view of the government, French Republican values take precedence over cultural values, including the Islamic culture that belongs to large numbers of North African immigrants now living in France.

The major conflict with Islam in schools is the issue of public versus private practice of faith.

Statement number eight allows for the “exercise of the liberty of expression […] within the limits of the proper functioning of the School and of respect for republican values and for pluralism of convictions.” This point is interesting in that it places limits on the liberty of expression, again suggesting that the proper functioning of the school as a place of learning and as a place of transmitting the meaning of French citizenship is
more important than individuals’ rights to express their religion. One of the most intriguing statements is number nine, which states, “Laïcité implies the rejection of all violence and all forms of discrimination, guarantees equality between girls and boys and is based on a culture of respect and of understanding each other.” The phrase “equality between girls and boys” is also written in bold, further marking its importance. This rule seems especially pointed towards Muslim students, as many in France perceive aspects of the Muslim faith such as the hijab as signifying gender inequality. Through the mention of gender equality, the French government seems to be specifically singling out Islam and thus implying that Islam and French citizenship are incompatible.

In a letter to the public that Minister Peillon released with the chart, he explained why he chose to implement it across the nation, saying:

The purpose of the chart that you hold between your hands, displayed in our elementary schools, our middle schools, our high schools, is not only to remember the rules that permit us to live together in an academic setting, but above all to help each one of us to understand the sense of the rules, to appropriate them and to respect them. Laïcité in Schools is not an obstruction of liberty, but the condition of its realization. It is never directed towards individuals or towards their conscience, but it guarantees equal treatment of all students and equal dignity of all citizens. (Charte de la Laïcité à l’École)
Minister Peillon has thus taken the position that the practice of laïcité is in place in order to create a more egalitarian learning environment. He notes that taking religious aspects out of public schools is one way to put all students on an equal playing field. However, he also claims that it is not directed against any individuals despite, as previously noted, many of the articles of the chart appear to be pointed towards specific groups of people. Clearly, there is a fine line between, on the one hand, promoting certain freedoms, such as promoting a learning environment free from proselytism, and on the other hand, suppressing other freedoms, such as banning students from wearing outward signs of religion.

In the same government document, following the letter from M. Peillon and the chart itself, there are several more pages explaining why the Ministry created the chart, what it means, and how exactly to implement it in classrooms. The government notes that too often, laïcité “suffers […] from ignorance or misunderstanding”15 (Charte de la laïcité à l’École: Valeurs et symbols de la République). The document explains that schools are essential in teaching young French citizens about laïcité, which is a fundamental belief of the Republic itself. Hanging this chart in classrooms, in the opinion of the government, is equivalent to hanging a French flag, the motto of the Republic (Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité), or even la Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen of 1789 (Charte de la laïcité à l’École: Valeurs et symbols de la République).

15 « souffre […] de méconnaissance ou d’incompréhension. »
The comparison of this chart to the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* is especially interesting – the 1789 document set up the values of the Republic right before the French Revolution and is one of the first times in French history that an official document declared any kind of separation from the Catholic Church. It is comprised of seventeen articles, each containing one or two sentences which set out guidelines for the new Republic and declared a rupture from the monarchy. In this document, basic human rights and freedoms were also discussed, including the freedom not to be judged on one’s religious opinions. Not only does the *Charte de Laïcité* follow a strikingly similar format of the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme*, with fifteen articles instead of seventeen, but it also tries to explain guidelines of being a French citizen. The *Charte de Laïcité*, however, focuses on one of the biggest social problems in France: the cultural assimilation of immigrants into French society. It is as if the French government re-interpreted the historic *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme* to suit today’s needs and to redefine and clarify what it means to be a French citizen.

The balance of the document explaining the *Charte de Laïcité* describes how and where to post the charts around the schools and ends by reminding schools to post other symbols of the Republic. According to the document, the *Charte de Laïcité* is to be posted where it will be “visible to all with priority given to places of entrance and passage”¹⁶ (Charte de la laïcité à l’École: diffusion, pistes pour une appropriation par l’ensemble de la communauté éducative et propositions d’exploitation pédagogique). Further asserting the connection between the *Charte de Laïcité* and the *Déclaration de l’Homme et du Citoyen*, the document cites Article L 111-1-1 of the Code of Education

---

¹⁶ « visible de tous. Les lieux d’accueil et de passage sont à privilégier. »
which specifies that the 1789 document is also to be posted throughout public schools in
visible places (Visibilité des symboles de la République à l’École).

Responses to the Chart as examined through French Media

In order to better gauge and understand reactions in France to this chart, I
examined various reputable French news sources such as the daily newspapers Le Monde
and L’Express, and the weekly newspaper Le Figaro. I wanted to get opinions from more
than one news source because each of these publications is known in France for having
some bias – Le Monde is center-left, L’Express center-right, and Le Figaro has more right
wing views. The articles pertaining to this chart of course cannot possibly reflect the
opinions of every French citizen, but they do give good insight into the general public
reaction. Responses were varied throughout these sources; some were more supportive of
the chart and its mission while others oppose it.

Several of these news sources published articles directly supportive of the chart.
According to an article in Le Monde, “More than nine out of ten Frenchmen”¹⁷ are in
favor of the project that Minister Peillon proposed about a year ago called “Moral and
Civic Education”¹⁸ which aimed to better teach students about laïcité (Battaglia “Face”²).
The chart is merely the latest installment of this project. In addition, many teachers have
come forward in support of the chart stating their belief that it will be beneficial to the
learning environment. Several government officials have also stood behind the chart
stating that instituting laïcité remains one of the biggest issues facing France today.
Overall, it seems that many in France do support the implementation of the chart in

¹⁷ « plus de neuf Français sur dix »
¹⁸ « enseignement moral et civique »
As mentioned above, teachers are one of the main groups in France who support the chart. The head of a teachers’ union called Syndicat national des personnels de direction de l’éducation nationale (SNPDEN), Philippe Tournier, told Le Monde: “Who could oppose the chart? No one!”19 (Battaglia “Face”4). M. Tournier believes that the chart will help to bridge inequalities between schools across the country and will thus allow everyone to receive a better education (Battaglia “Face”4). Benjamin Marol, member of the Syndicat national des enseignements de second degré (SNES), asserts that many students today perceive laïcité as “liberticide” and is hopeful that this chart will help change that conception (Battaglia “Face”2). Both educators believe the chart will help all students to better understand laïcité and will produce positive effects in the classroom.

In an interview conducted by L’Express, Malika Sorel, a member of the High Council of Integration20 which coincidentally helped to create the chart, expressed his support for the chart. When asked what she thinks about the current implementation of laïcité in schools, Sorel replied, “Education finds itself in a very serious situation”21 (Missir 1). She went on to explain that students who come from a “Muslim culture”22 are accustomed to religion occupying a central place in their lives and therefore must be reminded what is expected of them in French schools. Sorel sites incidents of girls wearing long dresses, students demanding halal meat in the cafeteria, and gym classes separated by gender as problems that the French public school system is trying to

19 « Qui peut être contre la charte ? Personne ! »
20 « Haut Conseil à l’Intégration »
21 « l’enseignement se trouve dans une situation gravissime. »
22 « culture musulmane »
overcome. However, when pressed on exactly how many girls he knew of who had continued wearing a veil after the law banning ostentatious religious signs was put into place in 2004, she could not give a concrete answer. Instead he asserted, “The question is not one of numbers. Must we wait until there are a large number of veiled girls excluded in order to act? […] A single student wearing a veil serves as an example to the other students, who can be led to contest the rule” (Missir 3). Sorel concluded this interview by stating that, while she does support the chart and believes that it will help to re-enforce laïcité in schools, she does not think that it is “an end in and of itself” (Missir 3). Rather, she believes that the minister should go one step further by making larger reforms in and outside the classroom, including training teachers on how to better approach the subject of laïcité (Missir 3). Mme Sorel does feel, however, that the chart will ultimately be a helpful tool for teachers.

Although many people favor the chart, there are also several groups who have publicly opposed it. Leaders of the Muslim population in France have noted that they feel attacked by the chart. Some journalists have observed that the chart is not the answer to the problems Muslims are facing in French schools. Both Muslims and many journalists in France believe that the chart is not only pointed towards Muslims and therefore discriminatory, but also that the chart will not solve any of the problems related to laïcité in the classroom. Installing this chart, they believe, could cause an even stronger pushback from Muslim students who feel singled out and attacked.

In one article from *Le Monde*, journalist Gérard Courtois poses the question of

23 « La question n’est pas celle du chiffre. Faut-il attendre qu’il y ait un grand nombre de filles voillées exclues pour agir ? […] Une seul élève voilée donne un exemple aux autres enfants, qui peuvent être amenés à contester le règlement. »

24 « une fin en soi »
whether this chart is really the best way to go about solving the issue of separation of church and state in schools. While he notes that laïcité should be taught at school, he asks if the “pompousness of a chart, unveiled with much pomp and displayed […] to reaffirm such well-established evidence”\(^{25}\) was really necessary (2). To M. Courtois, the chart seems to be a symbol that was unveiled for the sake of ceremony but which ultimately is not effective in actually making school a more “laïque” place. He notes that these values have been in place in public schools in France since 1881 when Jules Ferry declared that school and church should be separated, and asks what a piece of paper with some articles printed in blue, white, and red can really do. M. Courtois ends his article by noting that a chart “will not suffice”\(^{26}\) to address these issues (3).

Well-known politician and leader of the Front National party, Marine Le Pen, has also come out publically against the chart. This is especially surprising given that her party is extremely conservative, and one of its main platforms is anti-immigration. While she agrees that there is a problem of laïcité at school, she feels that this chart is not the most effective method for trying to solve it, even calling it a “media-centered gesticulation.”\(^{27}\) Thus, even a politician who is usually anti-immigration and pro-assimilation such as Le Pen thinks that the chart is more for show and a meaningless display for the media.

Muslim communities in France have also voiced opposition to the chart. Dalil Boubaker, president of the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (CFCM), has stated that he “regrets” the “allusions” to Islam made in the chart that serve only to further

\(^{25}\) « la solennité d’une charte, dévoilée en grande pompe et affiché […] pour réaffirmer d’aussi solides évidences »

\(^{26}\) « n’y suffira pas »

\(^{27}\) « une gesticulation médiatique »
stigmatize the Muslim community in France. He believes the chart will be counter-productive because “ninety percent of Muslims are going to have the impression of being targeted by this chart, while ninety-nine percent of the time they do not pose any problem to laïcité”\textsuperscript{28} (Battaglia “Face”5). Muslim students, even those who pose no problem to laïcité in the classroom, are expected to feel blamed and marginalized, which will potentially incite more tension between the French government and Muslims. M. Boubakeur wonders why the chart specifically references the 2004 law banning religious signs at school and equality between girls and boys as he feels that these are both directly aimed towards Islam. While he acknowledges that this may not have been M. Peillon’s intention, he notes, “Hell is paved with good intentions”\textsuperscript{29} (Bettaglia 5).

In a September issue of \textit{Le Monde}, an artist known as Colcanopa published the following cartoon:

\textsuperscript{28} « Quatre-vingt-dix pour cent des musulmans vont avoir l’impression d’être visés par cette charte, alors que dans 99% des cas ils ne posent aucun problème à la laïcité. »

\textsuperscript{29} « […] l’enfer est pavé de bonnes intentions. »
In the top panel, Minister Peillon is depicted saying, “This sign will be posted at the entrance of each school.” In the bottom panel, he is motioning towards what looks like a metal detector with a cross, a Star of David, and a crescent, explaining, “And here is the same sign integrated with a religious symbol detector for problematic establishments.” While this cartoon is exaggerating the situation, the central message is still relevant. Posting the chart in public schools is almost like installing a “religious sign detector”—it singles out students who wish to display their religious beliefs just as a metal detector would. According to this illustration, the Charte de Laïcité is in itself almost as ridiculous as installing a hypothetical religious symbol detector.

Colcanopa. « Le ministre de l’éducation nationale veut voir la charte affichée dans tous les établissements scolaires. » Published in Le Monde 07 September 2013.
These reactions demonstrate that the French response to the chart is nuanced, although it is worth noting that 90% do support it. On one hand, there are those who are in favor of the chart because they see it as a tool that can help reinforce these ideas of laïcité in classrooms. They see the current integration of Muslim students in schools as problematic and believe that the chart can only help. By setting up the chart in a manner similar to the *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen*, it can become a tool that also teaches civil responsibility and what it means to be a French citizen, which many perceive as positive. On the other hand, those who oppose the chart see it as an ineffective tool, which needlessly singles out one religion. By doing so, the chart may at best be nothing more than a poster hanging in schools without real consequence, or, at worst, it may actually cause further backlash from Muslim students who feel needlessly singled out for discrimination.

What does all this say about French society today? Clearly the French continue to have issues with the way that Muslims, specifically Muslim students, have assimilated (or, rather, have not assimilated) into mainstream French society. Muslims continue to be set apart as not completely “French” because of cultural differences. This is in keeping with the pattern seen throughout history wherein the French have expected immigrants to assimilate into French society and adopt French customs and culture. The *Charte de Laïcité* is merely the latest attempt by the French government to force this kind of cultural assimilation. As long as Muslims continue to defy French norms by publicly practicing their religion, they will not be considered to be full French citizens under the current prevalent way of thinking.
CHAPTER III: French Universalism

The French policy of universalism is one that is unique to France and largely influences policies of laïcité, immigration, and integration today. Originating from ideas born during the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, French universalism is the idea that all people share common claims to freedom, equality, and reason despite their individual race, ethnicity, or religion. Therefore, anyone who accepts the values of the State can, in theory, become French. This has encouraged an assimilationist policy in regards to integration of immigrants which basically requires people to give up, or at least hide, their individual cultures and ideologies if they do not coincide with those of the State. Laïcité is an important part of Universalism as it encourages people to practice their respective religions privately while maintaining a neutral public space. With the recent increase in immigrants in France who practice Islam, which is not only seen as “foreign” and “exotic” to many in France but also requires more public displays of faith, there has been an increase in tensions. Political groups like the Front National party are blatantly anti-immigrant and view immigration as the root of many problems in modern French society, while immigrants see the practices of French Universalism as restrictive and fight for more personal and religious freedoms. As the Front National is currently growing in popularity, it will be interesting to see how these two opposing ideologies interact in the future and whether France will ever reform its policies of universalism and assimilationalism.
Defining Universalism and Nationality

French Universalism is an ideology that is highly influential in France today. Unlike other European nations such as Germany, which use markers such as race, ethnicity, and language in order to determine citizenship status, France as a nation has defined itself using principles of “free will, consent, [and] self-determination […] based on universal human liberty, equality, and reason which antedate specific languages, ethnicity, and particularist culture” (Bader 779). Therefore, anyone could, in theory, become “French” as long as he or she adopted these values in addition to passing a language test. Like laïcité, this idea of universalism originated with the French Revolution. Based on Enlightenment ideas, the Revolution transformed France from a monarchy made up largely of disjointed peasants to a democratic country made up of citizens who found it necessary to come together to take a more active role in their government. In order to join together all of the citizens whose identity as French could no longer be based on the Church, ethnicity, or history, a new sense of nationalism was created (Walzer 38). This new nationalism emphasized the universal rights spelled out in the Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen, the universality of the French language (as opposed to regional languages such as Breton), and the republic (Schor 43-46). In order to be a citizen of this new republic, therefore, one had to adopt these same values.

Since Revolutionary times, these same values have largely influenced French citizenship and nationalism. These values are still very much in place today, encouraging an assimilationist view of citizenship where non-traditional peoples who wish to claim
any sort of French identity or citizenship must give up their own cultural ideals for those of the Republic. In France, “naturalization is perceived as involving not only a change in legal status, but a change in nature, a change in political and cultural identity, a social transubstantiation that immigrants have difficulty imagining, let alone desiring” (Brubaker 78). Unlike other European nations, gaining citizenship in France does not require biological French ancestry, but it does require immigrants to abandon certain aspects of their culture (including speaking a different language or wearing some forms of Islamic dress) in order to assimilate into the dominant French culture.

The State itself reinforces these values. According to a report done for the EUDO Citizenship Observatory by Christophe Bertossi and Abdellali Hajjat, citizenship and nationality are “two distinct notions” in France, citizenship encompassing political rights and duties, and nationality “defin[ing] membership of the French nation and the modes of incorporation of individuals in the ‘community of the citizens,’” and embracing French nationality is the only way to become a true citizen with full rights (1-2). Furthermore, “French nationality illustrates a tension between colour-blind principles of inclusiveness – an inclusiveness that ought not to take account of different origins, in particular ethnic origins – and a culturalised conception of French integration” (Bertossi and Hajjat 3). Thus there is some contradiction in the French laws, founded upon ideas of inclusiveness from the Revolution, and the cultural idea of what it means to be “French.” French citizenship can be attained through lineage (known as *jus sanguinis*) by declaration (marriage or *jus soli*), and by decree (naturalization). Due to the recent economic crisis, increasing rates of unemployment, and the rising success of extreme political parties such as the National Front, nationality law has become a political issue in France (Bertossi and
Nationality rights have also become a form of immigration control. Political parties in France use tighter immigration and naturalization laws in order to win more votes from people who view the presence of immigrants in France as a problem. The French government judges access to citizenship based on “degree of assimilation” as foreigners have to prove that they are “sufficiently fluent in the French language,” have “sufficient knowledge about the ‘rights and duties of French citizenship,’” and are “culturally assimilated” (Bertossi and Hajjat 15). Therefore, if someone seeking to naturalize in France does not meet these criteria, he or she can be denied citizenship. In the 1970s, when the applicants for naturalization increasingly came from African countries instead of European ones, these criteria were all the more important and “assimilation […] became defined as accepting French values, especially when candidates practiced polygamy or wore Islamic headscarves” (Bertossi and Hajjat 22).

The French Office of Immigration and Integration requires foreigners, especially those who come to France for family reunification, to sign the *Contrat d’Accueil et de l’Intégration*,\(^{31}\) which outlines several principles of the Republic and asks that the signatory comply with these values. It reasserts that France is a “république indivisible, laïque, démocratique, et sociale” and teaches about basic French rights such as voting requirements. Interestingly, the contract also features an entire section entitled “*La France, un pays Laïc,*” which states that in France, religion is “private” and reasserts freedom of religion as long as that religion does not trouble public order. Just below this, there is a section entitled “*La France, un pays d’égalité,*” which emphasizes the equality

---

\(^{31}\) See Appendix 1
between men and women in France. These two sections seem especially pointed towards Muslim immigrants who might believe in outward signs of religion such as wearing a burqa or a hijab, as these practices are also largely viewed in France as a violation of women’s rights. In addition to signing this contract, immigrants also must attend a daylong seminar on French values and prove that they have basic proficiency in speaking French. As evidenced by this contract, the State maintains an active role in requiring immigrants to assimilate into French society.

Today, debates about French citizenship have centered on laïcité and what is, according to Bertossi and Hajjat, an “alleged conflict between Islam and republican values” (25). According to these scholars, these “perceived” cultural conflicts and sentiments of Islamophobia were heightened by right-wing parties such as the National Front in order to gain votes. In changing the nature of this debate, “the proposed solution to the ‘problem of integration’ shifted from nationality to new politics of national identity, a wider agenda in which the legal status of nationality was not a key policy anymore” (Bertossi and Hajjat 25). The Burqa ban is one example of this shift as it shows that the French were not so much focused on the legal status of the women wearing the burqas as they were concerned about the cultural tensions between themselves and Muslims. Thus, not only are these cultural differences between the French and Muslim immigrants one of the problems standing in immigrants’ way of having a truly French nationality, it is also a tool that politicians emphasize in order to be elected.

**Universalism and Laïcité**

Laïcité plays an important role in French Universalism as, in theory, it allows all
citizens to come together as Frenchmen regardless of religious beliefs. This requires all public spaces, including schools, to be neutral and free of religious influence. As a nation, France is “linked to an expansive, assimilationist idea of citizenship, and is premised on the strict separation of a public and private sphere as the founding principle of the democratic order” (Terrio 441). Therefore, neutral public spaces where citizens can come together and participate in civic life are essential to the French Republic. This line of thinking emphasizes that religious life should be kept private. For many French people, religion is something that one does not show or even talk about. The inclusion of religion into public spaces would be shocking to many as it would prevent them from coming together as French citizens.

The conflict created for Islamic immigrants to France is unavoidable. Islam is a religion that encourages public display. According to the Quran, there are 5 Pillars of Faith every Muslim should practice:

1. Belief in one God (Allah) and his Prophet Muhammad, recited as a testament of faith (shahadah)
2. Prayer five times a day (salat)
3. Making the Pilgrimage journey to Messa (hajj)
4. Fasting during the month of Ramadan (sawm)
5. Giving to charity (zakat) (Kayyali 14).

The prayer, Pilgrimage, and fasting are all essential components of Islam which require public display unlike Christianity, which for many Frenchmen and women is more easily kept private.

Many Muslim women also veil themselves, although this practice is only
mentioned in the Quran once:

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty (Quran 24:31).

Different groups of Muslims have interpreted this verse different ways, with some sects choosing to wear full burqas which cover the entire body except for the face, and others choosing to simply wear a scarf, or hijab, to cover their heads (Kayyali 14-15). These public displays are not only integral to the Islam faith, they are a way of life for many Muslims. This is a fundamental cultural difference between Muslim immigrants and the français de souche.
Islam seems inassimilable to many in France not only because of these public religious displays, but also because the practice of Islam seems fundamentally “foreign.” For example, headscarves and mosques are not any more visible or public than nun habits or churches, but they are “subjectively shocking because they were new, foreign” (Bowen 20). Islam’s spread into France is also tinged with mixed feelings left over from colonialism, as many immigrants are from former French colonies. The above chart, entitled Distribution of Foreigners by Nationality from the *Institut national de la*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>2010 en %</th>
<th>Effectifs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>39,5</td>
<td>1 506 184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe des 27</td>
<td>35,1</td>
<td>1 339 284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Espagnols</td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td>127 714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italiens</td>
<td>4,5</td>
<td>172 470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugais</td>
<td>13,0</td>
<td>495 454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britanniques</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>157 027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autres nationalités de l’UE 27</td>
<td>10,1</td>
<td>386 619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autres nationalités d’Europe</td>
<td>4,4</td>
<td>166 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afrique</td>
<td>40,4</td>
<td>1 544 156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algériens</td>
<td>12,2</td>
<td>455 548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marocains</td>
<td>11,4</td>
<td>434 958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisiens</td>
<td>3,8</td>
<td>146 704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autres nationalités d’Afrique</td>
<td>13,0</td>
<td>496 945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asie</td>
<td>13,9</td>
<td>531 704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turcs</td>
<td>5,8</td>
<td>221 255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodgiens, Laotiens, Vietnamiens</td>
<td>1,1</td>
<td>40 343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autres pays d’Asie</td>
<td>7,1</td>
<td>270 105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalités d’Amérique et d’Océanie</td>
<td>6,2</td>
<td>235 518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3 817 562</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Champ : France.*

*Source : Insee, recensement 2010, exploitation principale.*

32 However, it is worth noting that there is an important distinction between nuns and hijab-clad women as they have different statuses – nuns as church officials and Muslim women as laypeople.
statistique et des études économiques displays the number and percentage of immigrants in France in 2010 broken down by country of origin. As it shows, in 2010, 40.4% of the total immigrant population in France was from Africa, which represents over one million people. Of this percentage, the top three countries represented are Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, all former French colonies. French colonists in Africa feared Muslims and Islam as a religion due to colonial warfare with guerrilla groups who drew much of their rhetoric and inspiration from Islam (Fetzer and Soper 64).

In the last few decades, Muslim immigrants have become even more visible in France. As the first wave of male immigrants after the end of colonialism were joined by their families, immigrant communities were established in major French cities. As these communities grew:

Immigrants became neighbors, schoolmates, and joint users of public spaces. An increasingly vocal second generation emerged, tenuously rooted in the culture of the parents’ generation, yet economically and socially marginalized in the country of residence. Groups marked by dress, language, religion, and custom as “culturally distant” comprised the fastest-growing segment of the immigrant community (Brubaker 78).

Thus, recently Muslims in France have not only become increasingly visible, they are also the fastest growing segment of the French population, which previously, like much of Europe, had concerns about low birth rates and an aging population (Brubaker 76). All of these factors, along with the stark cultural and religious differences between the French and the Muslim immigrants have led many in France to feel afraid and threatened by the immigrants’ presence. The French cling to their own national and cultural
identities. The importance they now place on the definition of their country as laïque is in part a response to the threat they feel from the recent patterns of immigration.

**Universalism Today**

The large percentage of immigrants from Northern Africa has created various tensions in France and has exposed cracks in French universalism, one of which is the Christian heritage still seen in French society today. Although France is a constitutionally laïque country, a few ties to the traditional Catholicism remain. For example, most national holidays are still based on Catholic holidays, such as Christmas, Easter, and Ascension. Furthermore, a number of churches are owned and maintained by the State as they constitute a part of France’s *patrimoine*, or cultural heritage. Another specific example of the remnants of France’s Catholic heritage is the 1996 State celebration of the baptism of Clovis, a king credited with spreading Catholicism throughout France in the sixth century (Terrio 438-440). Although France is a largely secular nation, these faint ties to Catholicism remain, still equating French citizenship with Catholic tradition and heritage on some level.

Another flaw in the concept of French universalism is that it can be taken to the extreme and used as a tool of discrimination, as exemplified by the far-right party *Le Front National* in France. Created in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen but now led by his daughter Marine Le Pen, this political party has gathered a surprising increase in support in recent years. In the first round of the 2012 French Presidential elections, Marine Le Pen won a staggering 17.9% of the vote, coming in third place behind François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy (Schofield). The Front National runs on a platform of being anti-
European Union and anti-Immigration. Originally, the party under Jean-Marie Le Pen had neo-Nazi views, and M. Le Pen has even spoken out saying that the Nazi occupation of France was “not particularly inhuman,” that “races are unequal,” and that “Jews have conspired to rule the world” (Shorto 1). His daughter Marine, however, has attempted to modernize the party, and in doing so has revived it. The party is no longer blatantly racist and anti-Semitic, but Le Pen does express regret that immigrants no longer “blend in” with French society and are now allowed to be “governed by their own codes and traditions” (Shorto 4). In attempting to modernize the party, Le Pen has shifted to a more left-wing stance regarding economic policies. Advocating that the State should subsidize healthcare, education, transport, and other services, the party has appeal to both blue and white-collar workers who fear economic changes associated with immigration and globalization (Shorto 4-5).

A few of the goals of the Front National are to reduce the yearly number of immigrants to France from 200,000 to 10,000, to close the French borders to the Schengen zone, and to completely suppress family reunification (www.frontnational.com “Immigration”). On the Front National’s official website, an entry describing the party’s policies towards immigration is subtitled, “Stopper l’immigration, renforcer l’identité française.” The irony of the utilization of the Anglicism “stopper” aside, the Front National clearly seeks to appeal to a sense of French nationalism in order to validate their anti-immigration stance. Also on its website, the party cites economic reasons to support its position that immigration is a major problem for France, and in the opening paragraph on the website, states, “Assimilation is no longer possible in this context of mass

33 “Stop Immigration, Reinforce the French Identity”
immigration.”

Laïcité has come into play in these tensions because, in combating the increasing influence of Islam in French society, Marine Le Pen has “donned the cloak of secularism as a value system that is under threat,” thus portraying Islam as a religion which should be controlled and Muslims as a people whom should be feared and reigned in before they try to force their values on others in France (Shorto 5). Thus, based on both economic reasons and fear-based arguments, the far right is largely opposed to immigration of Muslims because of their “foreignness” and inability to easily assimilate into French culture.

Scholar and author Joan W. Scott has recently written a book about French universalism and the “cracks” she sees emerging due to anti-Muslim policies such as the headscarf ban. According to Scott, the inassimilability of Muslims is one issue that is exposing issues and problems in the French system of universalism (Haven 1). She writes that the French feel very threatened by the presence of Islam, citing a Le Figaro magazine cover from 1980 which featured the bust of a woman wearing a hijab with the caption: “Will We Still Be French in 30 Years?” (Haven 2). This publication and the underlying sentiment marked an attitude shift in France from “it needs to be torn off” to the fear that “it’s going to be put on us” (Haven 2). The French response has therefore been to “insist ever more firmly on the uniqueness of French universalism and to reassert its superiority” (Haven 2). Scott criticizes this response, postulating that instead the French should offer more compromises, such as the possibility of allowing schoolgirls to wear the hijab during gym but insisting that they have to attend gym class (Haven 3). Scott’s thoughts are critiqued by many, but she sees the French response of extreme nationalism as

---

34 “L’assimilation n’est plus possible dans un tel contexte d’immigration de masse.”
problematic for the future, and, ultimately, unsustainable.

It is difficult to predict what will come of these issues in the future. Will the French continue to assert their cultural dominance, as evidenced by the growing popularity of the Front National, or can French society change to be more tolerant of inassimilable cultures? Will the French continue trying to implement measures such as the *Charte de Laïcité* in schools, and will these measures even be effective? According to scholar Michael Walzer, “Civil religion is more likely to succeed by accommodating than by opposing the multiple identities of the men and women it aims to engage” (80). Perhaps in order to better maintain social order, France should consider redefining what it means to be “French” in order to accommodate more cultural minorities. By using universalism and laïcité in order to marginalize and suppress the rights of a specific group within the population, France finds itself violating its own original Revolutionary ideals of religious tolerance and universal rights and inclusion. These issues are crucial to modern day France as its citizens struggle with their own cultural identities in the face of ever-increasing waves of immigration.
CONCLUSION

Tensions between religion and school are still prevalent in France today, with the newest incident being the teaching of “Gender Theory” in schools as highlighted in a *Le Monde* article from March 31, 2014. Under the leadership of a woman named Farida Belghoul, parents, Muslim and otherwise, have organized “journées de retrait de l’école” (JRE), or days of absence from school about once a month, in order to protest (Battaglia “Journées” 1). While the group largely exaggerates what “Gender Theory” actually teaches their children (some rumors including even sexual harassment), this recent development shows the increasing need for compromise between religion and secular schools in France.

With the recent increase of North African immigrants into France, many in France feel that their ideals and even their national identities are under attack. In response, laïcité is being used to re-assert Republican values and to cover up feelings of xenophobia and even racism, which is ironic because it was created as a way for French society to be more inclusive after the Revolution. As a result, Muslims in France are “otherized” and face what they feel is discrimination based on their religion. Because of these deep cultural divides and the discriminatory policies towards Muslims, they can never really become “French,” that is, fully accepted by the French as a part of the community. Implementations of laïcité such as the headscarf ban, the burqa ban, and the new Charte de Laïcité in schools, have so far not been very effective in helping Muslims assimilate into French society. The Charte de Laïcité attracted some attention, but is now largely
forgotten in the French media, and seems to have been more of a symbolic statement than an action bearing any real power. The French government wants to assert its ideals and have Muslims conform to them. However, in applying laïcité in such a rigid way, Muslims are marginalized rather than included in French society. The rise in popularity of groups such as the Front National show that the French are becoming less tolerant of immigration in general and are adopting a more rigid and xenophobic approach to dealing with immigration. If France as a nation ever wants to move forward in trying to ease some of these tensions, perhaps it needs to make more compromises with incoming immigrant groups, maybe letting go of the hard-and-fast application of some of its national ideals.
Bibliography


Missir, Marie Caroline. "Charte de la laïcité: face à l'islam, l'Education nationale ne veut
<www.lexpress.fr/education/charte-de-la-laicite-face-a-l-islam-l-education-nationale-ne-veut-pas-de-vague_1279934.html>.


<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/magazine/mag01LePen-t.html>.


Bienvenue en France,

La France, une démocratie
- La France est une république indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale.
- Le pouvoir repose sur la souveraineté du peuple, exprimée par le suffrage universel ouvert à tous les citoyens français âgés de plus de 18 ans.
- Sur de nombreux bâtiments publics, vous verrez gravée l’inscription «Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité». Cette devise est celle de la République française.

La France, un pays laïc
- En France, la religion relève du domaine privé.

La France, un pays d’égalité
- L’égalité entre les hommes et les femmes est un principe fondamental de la société française. Les femmes ont les mêmes droits et les mêmes devoirs que les hommes. Les parents sont conjointement responsables de leurs enfants. Ce principe s’applique à tous, Français et étrangers. Les femmes ne sont soumises ni à l’autorité du mari, ni à celle du père ou du frère pour, par exemple, travailler, sortir ou ouvrir un compte bancaire. Les mariages forcés et la polygame sont interdits, tandis que l’intégrité du corps est protégée par la loi.

La France, un pays d’égalité
- Chacun peut avoir les croyances religieuses de son choix ou ne pas en avoir. Tant qu’elles ne troublent pas l’ordre public, l’État respecte toutes les croyances et la liberté de culte.
- L’État est indépendant des religions et veille à l’application des principes de tolérance et de liberté.

La France, un pays laïc
- En France, la religion relève du domaine privé.

La France, un pays laïc
- En France, la religion relève du domaine privé.

La France, un pays laïc
- En France, la religion relève du domaine privé.
Préambule

L'intégration de populations étrangères exige une tolérance mutuelle et le respect par tous, Français comme étrangers, des règles, des lois et des usages.

Choix de vivre en France, c'est avoir la volonté de s'intégrer à la société française et d'accepter les valeurs fondamentales de la République.

C'est pourquoi vous devez préparer votre intégration républicaine dans la société française en signant, à cette fin, le contrat d'accueil et d'intégration prévu par l'article L-311-9 du code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile.

Le présent contrat est conclu entre l'Etat, représenté par le préfet du département et Madame/Mademoiselle/Monsieur……….

Article 1 : Engagements de l'État

L'État assure l'ensemble des prestations suivantes :

- Une réunion d'accueil collectif
- Une visite médicale permettant la délivrance du titre de séjour
- Un entretien individuel permettant notamment d'apprécier le niveau de connaissance en français du signataire du contrat
- En tant que de besoin :
  - un bilan linguistique
  - un entretien avec un travailleur social, donnant lieu, si nécessaire, à l'établissement d'un diagnostic social et à la mise en œuvre d'un appui social individualisé
- Une journée de formation civique présentant les droits fondamentaux et les grands principes et valeurs de la République, ainsi que les institutions de la France
- Si nécessaire, une formation linguistique dont la durée est fixée en fonction des besoins et capacités d'apprentissage de la personne. Cette formation est destinée à permettre d'atteindre un niveau de langue correspondant à celui exigé pour le diplôme initial de langue française (DILF)
- Une session d'information sur la vie en France qui a pour objet de faciliter la compréhension de la société française et l'accès aux services publics
- Un bilan de compétences professionnelles, sur une demi-journée permettant de faire un point sur les compétences professionnelles et le projet professionnel des signataires et de les orienter en conséquence. Ce bilan vise à encourager les signataires du CAI à trouver un emploi.

Art 2 : Engagements du signataire du contrat

M / Mme / Mlle …………………………..

dont le niveau de connaissance du français est jugé satisfaisant / non satisfaisant (rayer la mention inutile) s'engage :

- À participer à la journée de formation civique, à la session d'information sur la vie en France s'il a souhaité en bénéficier, et au bilan de compétences professionnelles
- À suivre avec assiduité, lorsqu'elle lui a été prescrite, la formation linguistique destinée à lui permettre d'atteindre un niveau satisfaisant en français, ainsi qu'à se présenter à l'examen organisé à l'issue de la formation pour l'obtention du diplôme initial de langue française (DILF)
- À se rendre aux entretiens fixés pour le suivi du contrat.

L'assiduité de l'étranger à chacune des formations prescrites est sanctionnée par une attestation nominative remise par l'OFII.

Art 3 : Durée du contrat

Le présent contrat est conclu pour une durée d'un an. Il peut exceptionnellement être prolongé par le préfet dans la limite d'une année supplémentaire, pour engager ou terminer une formation prescrite. Dans ce cas, la clôture du contrat intervient à l'échéance de cette formation, dans des conditions précisés au signataire par l'OFII.

Art 4 : Suivi du contrat

La réalisation du contrat fait l'objet d'un suivi administratif et d'une évaluation par l'OFII. Au terme du contrat, l'O… ce vérité que les actions de formation ou d'information inscrites au contrat ont été effectivement suivies et délivre au signataire une attestation nominative récapitulatrice qui précise les modalités de leur validation. Cette attestation est transmise au préfet qui peut tenir compte, lors du premier renouvellement de la carte de séjour, du non respect des engagements pris dans le cadre du contrat.

Art 5 : Respect du contrat

Le signataire est informé que le préfet :

- Peut résilier le contrat en cas de non participation à une formation prescrite ou en cas d'abandon en cours de formation, sans motif légitime
- Tient compte de la signature du contrat et de son respect pour l'appréciation de la condition d'intégration républicaine de l'étranger dans la société française prévue pour la délivrance de la carte de résident.

Ministère de l'immigration, de l'intégration, de l'identité nationale et du développement solidaire

O… ce Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration

La loi n° 76-17 du 6 janvier 1978 relative à l'informatique, aux fichiers et aux libertés s'applique à ce contrat. Elle garantit un droit d'accès et de rectification pour les données vous concernant auprès de l'O… ce Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration.

C.A.I. 01/2010

N° de contrat : ……………………………. N° AGDREF : …………………………………………

Le préfet du département : ……………………. Mme, Melle, M …………………….

Fait à .............................................. Pour les mineurs, le représentant légal

Pour les mineurs, le représentant légal