

The Muslim Label: How French North Africans Have Become “Muslims” and not “Citizens”

Nora Fellag*

Mercer County Community College (USA)

French North Africans face a significant problem in their ability to successfully integrate into contemporary French society: they are trapped under the “Muslim” label historically given to them by the French state. By looking carefully at past and present policy surrounding the organization and creation of an *Islam Français*, this paper aims to link the struggle for integration faced by France’s Maghrebi population to the French state’s continual categorization and labelling of French North Africans as “Muslims” and not as “true” French citizens. I argue that the acceptance of Islam as the main identity marker for French Maghrebi communities has significant historical roots, especially regarding the colonial and post-colonial relationship between “Islamic” Algeria and “secular” France, and is most recently evident in the institutionalization of Islam in France via the 2003 creation of the *Conseil Français du Culte Musulman* (CFCM). The labelling and conceptualization of French Maghrebis by their Islamic faith has become an enormous diversion in their upward mobility in that it has devalued core structural areas that truly foster integration (e.g. employment, education and housing) and has, at the same time, helped legitimize the stigmatization of French Maghrebi “Muslims”.

Keywords: Maghreb; North African; immigrants; minority; France; Sarkozy; Muslim; Islam; *laïcité*; *communautarisme*

In October of 2005, a series of riots broke out in the suburbs of Paris and other major French cities. The upheaval – sparked by the death of two young men being chased by the police – signified the ‘boiling point’ of marginalized ‘*jeunes ethniques*’ (Begag, 2007: xx) who had become increasingly angry at police presence in their neighbourhoods and frustrated by the lack of opportunity and stifling conditions in the *banlieues*, not to mention *laïc* policies and the xenophobic rhetoric of conservative

* Adjunct Professor of Sociology, Mercer County Community College, NJ, USA (M.A. Humanities and Social Thought, New York University, USA). I would like to thank NYU Assistant Professor Sylvia Maier for revising an earlier draft of this article. Email: noratitem@yahoo.com.

politicians. Seven years later, in 2012, rioting continued in a “sensitive urban zone” north of Paris, revealing the ongoing isolation and alienation of French minorities (largely of North African descent) from French social and political life. The French Maghrebi ‘Muslim’ population (which constitutes the largest ‘Muslim’ population in Western Europe and North America) (Pew Research Center, 2011: 124) continues to be excluded from the resources that necessarily lead to greater equality and integration into French society. Part of this struggle for social and economic integration, I argue, relates to the historical tendency of the French state to label French North Africans as “Muslims”, and not as “true” French citizens.

In this article, I first provide a socio-political account of the historical tendency of French political officials to recognize Islam as the “master status” for French Maghrebis (commonly known as “Arabs” in normal parlance but often referred to as “Muslims” by French politicians in the Interior Ministry), with a special focus on the colonial and post-colonial relationship between “Islamic” Algeria and “secular” France. I argue that the historical focus on the religious background of France’s first big wave of “Muslim” immigrants (Algerian *harkis* who migrated to France following Algerian independence) set the stage for the continual “Muslim” labelling by contemporary French politicians.

Second, I highlight the ongoing focus on the Islamic religious background of first- and second-generation French Maghrebis in modern-day France via the institutionalization of Islam since the 1980s, most recently evident in the 2003 creation of the *Conseil Français du Culte Musulman* (French Council of the Muslim Faith, or CFCM). The chief concern, I argue, with contemporary initiatives and policy-making geared towards minority populations in France (especially those policies that began in the 1980s) is that far too much attention has been paid to religious institutions and “Muslim” solutions versus core structural areas in need of improvement (e.g., employment, education and housing). Likewise, policies and institutions created at the state level have helped legitimize the stigmatization and prejudices of French Maghrebi “Muslims” in the greater French polity (often seen as the “other”, and not as “true” French citizens) and have, alongside traditional French principles of *laïcité* (secularism) and *républicanisme* (republicanism), articulated exclusive boundaries of “Frenchness” for people living in France today.

In order to understand this process, special attention will be paid to French minority integration policy-making and discourse (from the 1960s to today), focusing

especially on the strategies and rhetoric of Nicolas Sarkozy during his time as Interior Minister (June 2005-March 2007). Recent survey data (e.g. Pew Research and Europol) and previous research on first- and second-generation French immigration will assist in quantifying the degree to which French North Africans are socially and economically stratified. Lastly, academic discourse on the subject of “Islam in France” will provide both an historical background of the treatment of Islam and “Muslims” in France as well as a foundational analysis on which I will build my arguments.

1. French “Muslims”

The subject of minority integration and incorporation in France has received a great deal of attention from sociologists, political theorists and immigration specialists alike. Many have outlined the effects of racial and ethnic discrimination on second-generation French Maghrebis (Simon, 1998: 41-61; Silberman *et al.*, 2007: 1-27; Begag, 2007) and have examined inequalities in the labour market and in educational attainment (Frickey, *et al.*, 2004; 2002; Silberman and Fournier, 2008: 45-94; Meurs *et al.*, 2006: 763-801) as well as in housing (Simon, 1998: 41-61). Pertaining to the “Muslim” labelling of France’s large Maghrebi population, several observers have recognized and criticized the propensity for (especially far-right) French political actors to regard Islam-origin immigrants and minorities in France as a single “monolithic community” (Giry, 2006: 88; Shepard, 2006; Warner and Wenner, 2006: 457-479), while others have acknowledged that a putative “Muslim” culture in France is actually a myth (Laurence and Vaisse, 2006; Giry, 2006).

Yet little scholarly work thus far focuses exclusively on the struggle for integration faced by France’s Maghrebi community due to the administrative and politico-ideological labelling of French North Africans as “Muslims” and not as “true” French citizens. One exception to this is Vincent Geisser and Aziz Zemouri’s *Marianne et Allah* (2007), which sets out a compelling argument: Islamic *communautarisme* in France (the grouping together of Muslims into one monolithic community) was in fact created by French politicians and not by Islamic activists. French politicians have encouraged Islamic *communautarisme* (while at the same time criticizing it as conflicting with French Republicanism) by institutionalizing Islam at the national level and creating crony networks in the local spectrum in order to pander to the local “Muslim” vote. Geisser and Zemouri’s argument is strong, but gives too

much credibility to Islamic *communautarisme*, confusing political Islamic organizations and their constituents with an extensive, all-inclusive Islamic community, which does not truly exist in France. It also lacks an in-depth discussion of the “Muslim” labelling of French Maghrebis; specifically, the historical background of the stigmatization of Islam, the unwarranted tendency of some French policy-makers to accept Islam as a “master status” for persons of (varying) Islamic religiousness, and the enormous distraction to integration that such an emphasis on religion poses.

Naomi Davidson (2012) argues, similarly, that French “Muslims” are trapped in a religious identity, and supports this claim through a critique of the colonial and post-colonial racialization of Islam, which has created an embodied “Muslimness” almost inescapable by persons of Islamic origin. Davidson offers valuable insight into the racialization of Islam yet ends her investigation of *Islam Français* and the racialization of Islam in the 1970s, leaving out the crucial period of the 1980s and beyond that is critical to the study of Islam in contemporary France. Davidson’s work also lacks a detailed analysis of the specific ways in which embodied, racialized Islam affects the integration of French Maghrebis.

Furthermore, most academic discourse pertaining to the subject of minority integration in France uses the term “Muslim” to refer to immigrants and minorities of Islamic faith. In contrast, this paper makes a conscious effort not to use the terms “Muslim” and “Maghrebi” or “North African” interchangeably. The premise is that religious identity should not define one individual or group of persons and not another; for example, if, in contemporary scholarly and political discussions of “Islam in France” we do not habitually refer to French persons of Catholic or Protestant background as “Christians” then we should not do the same for persons of Islamic background. Moreover, the use of the term “Muslim” to describe France’s Maghrebi community ignores the (albeit small) portion of French Maghrebis that are of Jewish or Christian faith or those that are non-practising Muslims. Thus the word “Muslim” will repeatedly appear in quotations so as not to position first- and second-generation minorities of North African descent into one homogenous Islamic identity whose values and needs presumably revolve around Islam.

2. Structural integration

Many French North Africans, clustered in the *banlieues* of big cities (alongside other, mainly sub-Saharan African, immigrant groups) with poor housing, limited job opportunities and underfunded, overcrowded and academically inferior schools, remain largely marginalized and have great difficulty achieving upward mobility. Political participation among the Maghrebi community is still minimal (it was not until 2002 that two cabinet members of North African origin were finally appointed) (Laurence and Vaisse, 2006: 171) and socio-economic integration (e.g. income, education and housing) has become extremely delayed. On top of this, ethnic discrimination in France serves as yet another (huge) barrier to the group's upward mobility and overall integration

Not only does the nation's foreign-born population suffer heavily from unemployment (nearly 15% of immigrants living in France in 2010 were unemployed) (Schain, 2012: 15); research has also shown that second-generation North African (as well as sub-Saharan African and Turkish) minorities that have grown up in France and have gone through French school systems (unlike their parents' generation) have much higher unemployment rates and continue to experience much greater difficulties obtaining employment than the "Franco-French" (Meurs *et al.*, 2006; Frickey *et al.*, 2004; Canaméro *et al.*, 2000; Dupray and Moullet, 2004). Studies have also revealed that the hourly wages of first- and second-generation North Africans in France tend to be less than those of the "Franco-French" (Algan *et al.*, 2010: F10).

Some researchers attribute the issue of labour integration to prolonged job-search processes, job instability and recurrent unemployment (Frickey *et al.*, 2004). On the other hand, educational attainment has been particularly low for French North Africans and other immigrant groups (for example, in 2004 and 2010 more than half of France's immigrants did not reach upper secondary school and almost half of all immigrants dropped out of secondary school) (Schain, 2012: 88). Even among second-generation French North Africans, secondary school and university graduation rates lag behind those of the "Franco-French" (Langevin *et al.*, 2013). Some attribute these educational disparities to underfunded schools in the *banlieues* that rely on municipal and regional governments for aid (Thomas, 2005; Trancart, 1998), the hierarchical tracking systems of French schools that place low-income minorities into the lowest tracks (Alba and Silberman, 2009), and family structural factors like

single-parent homes and larger families (which would necessitate reforms in family and educational policies) (Langevin *et al.*, 2013).¹

Likewise, although housing has significantly improved for immigrants since the 1970s, it is estimated that 50% of Maghrebi immigrants (as well as 37% and 36% of sub-Saharan African and Turkish immigrants respectively) lived in public housing projects in 2006, many of which are in the economically distressed *banlieues* or in *zones urbaines sensibles* (“sensitive urban zones”) – areas deemed by the state as particularly impoverished and crime-ridden (Laurence and Vaisse, 2006: 36). Landlords and realtors in France have been known to restrict access to apartment-renting for French Maghrebis by having applicants screened by their race and/or ethnicity, or by adding in special hurdles like extra deposits or documentation requirements (*ibid.*: 61).

Such discrimination has been recognized as a major problem for French North Africans and other immigrant groups; for instance, within the labour market, recent “discrimination testing” studies have suggested that employers in France are less likely to hire candidates with North African (as well as sub-Saharan African) names than those with “Franco-French” names (Cediey and Foroni, 2008; Amadieu, 2004). In fact, in 2006, a year after the *Haute Autorité de Lutte contre les Discriminations et pour l'Egalité* (HALDE) was established, 45% of the organization’s complaints concerned employment discrimination (Schain, 2012: 107).

Institutional discrimination also accompanies a general feeling of non-acceptance common among many people of North and sub-Saharan African origin in France. For example, a 2008 survey revealed a slight increase in unfavourable opinions towards Muslims from 29% in 2004 to 38% in 2008 (Pew Research Center, 2008: 2); another survey from 2011 showed that 62% of French participants surveyed felt relations between Muslims and Westerners were generally bad (Pew Research Center, 2011: 1). Perhaps one of the most visible indicators of “Islamophobia” in France, however, is the increase in acts of intolerance against French “Muslims”.² Hate crimes against Muslims and Islamic practice (i.e. attacks against hijab-wearing women, mosque vandalism, etc.) have become a real cause for concern in France and have been contested by prominent Islamic organizations and French politicians alike.

3. The historical ‘Muslim’ label

The modern-day conditions of French Maghrebis can in many ways be attributed to the historical unwillingness of the French government to take an active role in integrating and incorporating its “Muslim” migrants, whom the state considered largely “unassimilable” from the very start of Maghrebi migration to France. The historical focus on the Islamic religious background of France’s North African immigrants – whose migration began in the early twentieth century and intensified during the 1960s and 1970s – warrants particular consideration when discussing contemporary minority integration policy. Indeed recent French policy exists under a whole different set of social, political, and economic circumstances, yet what has survived from the policies of early-to-mid twentieth century France (albeit in nuanced form) is the “Muslim” label; i.e. the tendency of policy-makers in the Interior Ministry to rhetorically and systematically categorize French Maghrebis as “Muslims” – a title not without real consequences.

For example, unskilled labourers from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia that began to migrate to metropolitan France in the early twentieth century to work in factories were viewed as temporary guest workers and were housed in isolated enclaves, valued solely as labourers and not as potential citizens that could integrate into French society (Schain, 2012; Bowen, 2011). France’s first big wave of immigrants of Islamic faith, however, occurred after the Algerian War, when several thousand *harkis* – Algerians who served as auxiliaries in the French Army during the war – migrated to France. As Todd Shepard (2006) notes, the French state did not want Algerian *harkis* (often referred to as “Muslims”) to repatriate to France;³ on the contrary, the de Gaulle administration sent direct orders to French officials in Algeria to ‘cease all initiatives linked to the repatriation of *harkis*’ (*ibid.*: 230). Officers began a process of “weeding out” “Muslims” whom they considered less desirable: the elderly, the young, the disabled, and single women. French officials wanted only young men to migrate to the *Métropole* to meet labour and military needs – all others were considered an inevitable burden on French society.

At the cabinet level, reports written for the secretary of state for repatriates officially placed “Muslim” *harkis* in the category of ‘repatriates of Muslim origin’ (with *pieds-noirs* – persons of European origin living in French Algeria – as ‘repatriates of European origin’) (Shepard, 2006: 230-231). The recognition of large groups of (mostly young male) Algerian migrants as “Muslim” repatriates placed their

Islamic religion as their primary identity, using the title “Muslim” to describe them indefinitely; moreover, growing concerns over the ability for Algerian “Muslims” to assimilate into European culture led French officials under de Gaulle to begin to refer to “Muslim” *harkis* as “refugees” instead of “repatriates”, or, in other words, “citizens” (de Gaulle stated on July 25, 1962, that ‘the term “repatriates” obviously does not apply to the Muslims [...] In their case, we are dealing only with refugees’) (Shepard, 2006: 231). The Evian Accords of 1962, which gave “Muslim” French citizens the ability to migrate to France, claim French nationality, and enjoy the same benefits and integrative measures as European-origin repatriates (many of whom were born and raised in Algeria), were indeed re-interpreted and re-fashioned to exclude French “Muslims”.

Paradoxically, “native” Algerians of Jewish backgrounds were granted full French citizenship upon Algerian independence, but not those of Islamic origin.⁴ In the late 1950s to early 1960s, influential Jewish organizations in France fought hard to persuade French officials that Algerians of Jewish faith were not part of a distinct ethnic group, a concept that shadowed French republicanism (universal citizenship devoid of any collective ethnic or religious subdivisions). These organizations convinced the French state that Algerian “Jews” were assimilable, unlike the presumably homogenous “Muslim” population. This helped legitimize not only the belief that Algerian “Muslims” were unable to assimilate into French culture, but the notion that they were a distinct group primarily defined by their religious background.

Thus, upon Algerian independence and during a mass exodus to France by Algerian *pieds-noirs* and *harkis*, the right to keep French citizenship for “Muslim” repatriates (turned “refugees”) was continuously challenged (Shepard, 2006; Giry, 2006; Amiraux, 2010). Their status as refugees and not citizens – a blatant violation of the terms of the Evian Accords – legitimized their invisibility to both social welfare programmes and to the general public and led to blatant segregation; i.e. the isolation of thousands of *harki* veterans and their families, sometimes for several years, in remote military-supervised camps throughout France.

4. Why Islam stood out (and still does)

While it is important to note that North African migrants were not the only groups subjected to prejudice in France (anti-Italian violence rose in the 1800s and anti-Semitism grew in the 1930s and into the Vichy regime), the large groups of North

African (especially Algerian) migrants during the 1960s carried with them the historical, social and political weight of Islam, which elicited heightened degrees of prejudice and scorn from the French polity. It was the Islamic religious background of non-European Algerians that surfaced, above all other ethnic, racial, territorial or cultural characteristics, as the “master status” for the presumably homogenous “Muslim” Algerian population, and that led French officials to believe that Algerian and other North African “Muslim” migrants were incompatible with French society and thus undeserving of the title of “French citizen” (as well as the ensuing integrative programmes and policies afforded to this title).

Aversion to Islam and Muslims was certainly not new; indeed, French officials had long demonstrated antipathy towards Islam and Islamic practices during their time in French Algeria (Amiraux, 2010; Davidson, 2012; Geisser and Zemouri, 2012; Giry, 2006; Shepard, 2006). For instance, in 1959 Frantz Fanon described an incident when several local Algerian women wearing the traditional *haïk* (a long white veil that concealed a woman’s entire body except her eyes) were gathered together at the Forum of Algiers for a public “unveiling” whereby a group of French women removed their robes in front of a crowd to signify their “deliverance” from traditional (read, “repressive”) Islamic culture (2001). Fanon explained this fixation as a starting point for the infiltration of French values and principles into the general Algerian public. The current ban on headscarves in French public schools and full-face veils in public places reveals the extent to which Fanon’s observation still endures today: practising, headscarf-wearing Muslim women continue to be seen as an embodiment of “backward” Islam and of “repressive” Islamic cultural-religious traditions and are still trying to be made more “Western” and “modern” via contemporary French laws (Fanon, 2001; Weibel, 2000).

Yet stereotypes regarding Islam and Muslims are actually rooted even further back than European colonization, and as far back as the Middle Ages, when – as Edward Said (1979) explained in *Orientalism* – Europe and the “West” began to view Islam and the Near East as its most absolute opposite. The vision of the “Orient” had been patched together through a myriad of encounters with the East and (especially for France and Britain) represented ‘one of the deepest and most recurring images of the Other’ (Said, 1979: 1)). Islam, because it was deemed a ‘fraudulent new version of [...] Christianity’, was considered unholy and illegitimate, and was placed in a position whereby Western Christian “Orientalists” felt the need to control it (*ibid.*:

59). Additionally, but the fear imposed on Europe by the Ottoman armies until the end of the seventeenth century, which ‘represent(ed) for the whole of Christian civilization a constant danger’, created an impression of Islam as an ominous and volatile force (*ibid.*). Orientalism persevered through the early nineteenth century through French expansionism in the Maghreb region (*ibid.*: 5-6).

The Orientalist tradition also contributed to the *racialization* of Muslims; that is, the perception that persons of Islamic origin are not only religiously dissimilar but also racially different (Davison, 2006). For example, at the same time that principles of *laïcité* were officially introduced in the French *metropole*, French colonial officials were funding the creation of religious associations in Algeria, which were responsible for managing Muslim-state relations (Davidson, 2006: 30). French secularism did not apply to Algeria as it did in the *metropole*, in part because Islam was perceived as an intrinsic human feature rather than a religious affiliation that could be moderated or kept private.

The long-established European collective imagination that typically viewed Islam and Muslims as blasphemous, illegitimate, treacherous, and – later, during colonization – backward and in need of civilizing has left its mark indefinitely on contemporary Muslims of varying degrees of religiousness. The process of “othering” Islam, Islamic cultural-religious practices, and Muslims has manifested itself in a variety of continued stereotypes today, like the belief that modern Muslim men are distrustful and in need of controlling (Geisser and Zemouri, 2012) or are unruly and backward (Amiriaux, 2010). One can argue that the Orientalist tradition of domination and control persists in contemporary France as French politicians continue to view Islam as a religion that needs to be “managed” at both the national and local level, and whose customs and practices need to be tamed, controlled and, ultimately, made more “French” (Amiriaux, 2010).

Due to these long-standing prejudices, French persons of Islamic background cannot escape the “Muslim” label and continue to be classified (and sometimes directly discriminated against) by the French state as primarily and indefinitely “Muslim”. At the same time, just as the Orient helped define the Occident, by viewing Islam (in its especially negative sense) as the primary identity marker for French “Muslims” of varying degrees and backgrounds, numerous contemporary French politicians, academics, journalists and members of the general public still rely on “othering” French “Muslims” in order to help define what it means to be “French”.

France's Maghrebi population has become trapped in a particularly disadvantageous position: they are treated as special "non-citizens" inherently dissimilar from the "Franco-French" and therefore in need of special *Islamic* "management" (Venel, 2004). Meanwhile, the labelling of French Maghrebis by their Islamic background has reinforced long-standing "Western" biases against Islam while simultaneously legitimizing the existence of a so-called "French" identity.

5. Minority integration policy in France

During the 1970s and early 1980s the French Republic took a relatively laid back, 'differentialist' (Brubaker, 2001: 531-548) stance on immigrant in-state relations, generally tolerating cultural and religious differences (at least in rhetoric, hence François Mitterrand's slogan: "*droit à la différence*"). Mitterrand took some action in the 1980s towards integrating second-generation immigrants by creating the *zones d'éducation prioritaire* (ZEPs), which allowed extra funding for schools in underprivileged areas, and by funding social-service programmes via newly established immigrant associations. Yet, due to the emerging racist, anti-immigration and neo-nationalist stance promoted by the *Front National* (FN) in the 1980s, Mitterrand quickly adopted a "colour-blind" approach concerning France's minority communities, adhering to a more traditional Republican credo of regarding French people primarily as *citoyens* and not as members of any racial, ethnic or religious group. This ideology led to an avoidance of programmes that were seen as targeting specific populations in France (i.e. "ethnic lobbying") (Laurence and Vaisse, 2006).

Furthermore, outbreaks of disturbances in the economically distressed, immigrant-filled *banlieues* prompted many French conservatives in the early 1980s to criticize French Maghrebis as bearers of social unrest and as incompatible with French *laïcité* – commonly understood as the need to keep cultural and religious practices private to ensure the equal treatment of citizens, and the justification behind France's bans on religious symbols and practices in the public arena. As a result, president Mitterrand began promoting an *Islam de France* ("French Islam"), versus an *Islam en France* ("Islam in France");⁵ by doing so, the government sought to incorporate and eventually "domesticate" "Muslims" (Bowen, 2011) and the practice of Islam and to decrease foreign influence on French Islamic organizations (Laurence and Vaisse, 2005; 2006). These efforts were augmented after the controversial 1989 "headscarf affair" and, in December 2002 under the Rafarin administration, Interior

Minister Nicolas Sarkozy accomplished what former Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevenement had tried to achieve in the late 1990s: the establishment of the French Council of the Muslim Religion, a national elected organization managed by leaders of established Islamic organizations and supervised by advisers of the Ministry of the Interior.⁶ Through the CFCM the government could take a more direct role in the management and regulation of Islam-related matters such as mosque and religious personnel financing, imam training, the regulation of halal foods, and so forth. The French state had once again reverted to the colonialist tradition of “managing” the practice of Islam (Amiraux, 2010).

5.1 The CFCM: a tool for incorporating French “Muslims”

Vincent Geisser and Aziz Zemouri (2007) have presented very strong arguments against the CFCM: they criticize the French state for viewing French “Muslims” as potentially harmful to *laïcité* and for accusing the Maghrebi community of forming isolated enclaves (in contrast to French Republicanism) while at the same time cultivating Islamic *communautarisme* by promoting and advancing the institutionalization of Islam via the CFCM; they also accuse French politicians of using religious representation to their political advantage in order to secure a “Muslim vote”. Their analysis highlights the hypocrisy of the French government in both criticizing French Maghrebis for violating *laïcité* while simultaneously promoting an Islamic national elected organization; however, one must be careful not to place too much emphasis on the CFCM as a mechanism for Islamic *communautarisme*. Despite the efforts of the state to institutionalize and “standardize” Islam, there is little evidence that such an “Islamic community” exists in France (Bowen, 2011; Giry, 2006; Laurence and Vaisse, 2006; Schain 2012). Further, it is without a doubt that Sarkozy and the Interior Ministers under his presidency courted a “Muslim vote”. That said, the belief that the CFCM could “satisfy” French “Muslims” was indeed authentic. Sarkozy expected the CFCM to be a double victory: it was to integrate French Maghrebi “Muslims” into the wider society and make them feel “acknowledged” (and therefore less inclined to “make waves” in the social and political spheres), while securing Sarkozy and his political allies a favourable position within the French North African community.

For example, during a speech at the 20th annual gathering of the *Union des Organisations Islamiques de France* (UOIF) in April 2003, shortly after elections

were held for the representatives of the CFCM, Sarkozy paid homage to those he called ‘*responsables de la communauté musulmane*’ [‘those in charge of the Muslim community’], UOIF President Monsieur Breze and Secretary General Fouad Alaoui. He spoke of Muslims in France as finally being able to have the ‘*droit de vivre leur foi comme les autres*’ [‘right to live their faith like everyone else’] and to be ‘*Français à part entière, des Français comme les autres*’ [‘entirely French, French like everyone else’]. He remarked that ‘*la religion [...] est porteuse de valeurs positives et d'intégration*’ [‘religion [...] is a carrier of positive values and of integration’].

That rhetoric made a link between the state-led Islamic Council and the “emancipation” of French Muslims who could, because of the CFCM, practise their faith openly, without shame or fear, and could join the rest of the general public and finally become “entirely French” (even though about half of all French Maghrebis have French citizenship and a huge portion were born and raised in France). To Sarkozy, religious representation via prominent Muslim interlocutors was seen as a loophole for integration and, ultimately, citizenship.

Sarkozy also elaborated some of the ideas in his 2005 book, *La République, Les Religions, L'Esperance* [The Republic, Religions, Hope]. During an interview for a French magazine, he explained that ‘the integration of Muslims, a big challenge for our country, had a lot to gain from the organization of a French Islam and a lot to fear from an Islam in France’] (Jeambar, 2004). When referring to troubled youths in France’s distressed *banlieues*, he commented:

[...] If one wants to give direction to life, if one wants these youngsters who have only the religion of money, drugs, violence and television to learn to respect others, the speech of a man of faith and of peace can be useful. A worship place is a space where different people meet to find hope. [translated by author]

Again, Sarkozy expressed his belief that the organization of Islam in France had a direct affect on the integration of “Muslims”. He felt especially passionate about the usefulness of Islam to aid struggling, marginalized youths in the distressed *banlieues* and articulated this belief in other interviews (Alia and Berjon, 2003; Leclerc *et al.*, 2003). While he has been widely criticized for his close ties with national Muslim organizations, his conviction was that religion offered the most hope to the struggling, marginalized citizens of the Republic (hence the title of his book) – ‘The Republic, Religions, Hope’.

Sarkozy's views on religion and integration also manifested themselves in the government's treatment of the French Maghrebi/West African community during times of strife; for example, the Interior Ministry used religious representatives to help calm the *banlieue* riots of 2005. While the CFCM did not take any direct action as the riots escalated – which was criticized by some who thought it should have taken a more mediatory role (Coroller, 2005) – Sarkozy turned to Great Mosque of Paris (GMP) rector and CFCM president Dalil Boubakeur, asking him to visit a Mosque in Clichy-sous-Bois that had been damaged; around the same time, the secretary general of the UOIF and vice president of the CFCM Fouad Alaoui issued a *fatwa* denouncing the riots and calling for peace. Both of these initiatives were ultimately unsuccessful, as Boubakeur's visit and the UOIF's *fatwa* had little, if any, influence on the rioting.

Similarly, after the 2003 “headscarf ban” was announced by then President Jacques Chirac, the CFCM immediately issued a peace statement to “Muslims” in France (even though no significant backlash occurred following implementation of the law) (Giry 2006: 157-58). Even during the lead up to the Iraq War, the UOIF was asked to help keep the *banlieues* calm in case of rioting. These actions echoed the emerging reliance on Islamic representatives as facilitators of social stability; i.e. as a means of “satisfying” angry French “Muslims”.

This is not to say that the CFCM is completely inadequate; for one, the CFCM (as stated in its statute) does have some ability to open lines of communication between diverse Muslim associations that have often been in competition with one another, forcing them to work together to create common goals and initiatives for practising French Muslims, although this has at times led to internal disputes. Another mission of the CFCM has been to create a platform for national and local administrators to communicate with Muslim leaders about various religious matters, providing smaller prayer spaces (“mini-mosques”) a direct link through which they can negotiate with the state for funding and other provisions (Laurence and Vaisse, 2006). The main drawback, however, concerned its perceived ability to integrate the so-called “Muslim” portion of the French population.

5.2 The CFCM as a flawed mechanism for “incorporation”

Fashioned in part as a mechanism for “incorporating” French “Muslims”, the CFCM was (and still is) ill equipped to do so, for a number of reasons. For one, the CFCM

does not represent a significant portion of the French Maghrebi population.⁷ Instead, the CFCM gives political clout to a few Muslim leaders of established Islamic associations that are willing to carry out the interests of the state while at the same time reaping benefits that advance their own politico-religious agendas.⁸

To illustrate the “top-down” structure of the CFCM, one only needs to examine the biased presidential election of GMP rector Dalil Boubakeur following the CRCM’s establishment in 2003. The GMP has long been France’s preferred interlocutor for Islamic-state affairs because Boubakeur advocates for a moderate, integrationist “French Islam”, maintaining a close relationship with French political leaders who welcome his support for *laïc* policies. During the CFCM’s first elections in April 2003, due to the electoral voting system that favoured smaller prayer spaces, leaders of the *Fédération Nationale des Musulmans de France* (National Federation of Muslims of France, or FNMF) and the UOIF, which managed most of the small prayer spaces, excelled: the FNMF won the most votes followed closely by the UOIF, and then the GMP. Dalil Boubakeur remained president, however, revealing the state’s enduring favouritism towards the GMP as well as its expectations of the CFCM to parallel state interests (Laurence and Vaisse, 2006: 149).

CFCM leaders indeed function as catalysts for the political interests of the state; for example, following France’s passage of the 2010 full-veil ban in public spaces, then Minister of State Michèle Alliot-Marie (under President Sarkozy) openly expressed her reliance on the CFCM to ‘sensitize these women and explain to them that the wearing of the veil is contrary to republican principles’ (*Le Parisien*, 2010). The then CFCM President Mohammed Moussaoui expressed some trepidations about the ban and stated that the CFCM was not to act as an agent of the state; however, overall, he supported the ban on behalf of the CFCM and expressed the agency’s willingness to convince full-veiled Muslim women that the veil was not an obligation in Islam and that it was not acceptable in France (Heneghan, 2010). Indeed the CFCM was expected to carry out the state’s “assimilationist” objectives, acting as an apparatus of *Islam de France* (i.e. facilitating the “Frenchification” of Islamic practice and, ultimately, of “Muslims”). Not only this; CFCM leaders have also become participants in the continual “Muslim labelling” paradox whereby French Maghrebis (and other “Muslims”) are targeted for their religious practices, stigmatized by vigorous “Islamophobic” policies, and expected to learn how to become “French” by none other than Muslim leaders of a state-supported Islamic Council.

At the same time, the GMP, along with the UOIF, the FNFM – which were granted vice presidencies⁹ – and the Committee of the Coordination of French Turkish Muslims (CCMTF) (whose president was appointed as secretary general) have long promoted divergent politico-religious agendas, often tied to countries abroad that help organize and finance the organizations. For example, the GMP represents a moderate “republican” Islam and has maintained ties with the Algerian government, which supports it financially and appoints its directors (Bowen, 2011: 26), while the National Federation of French Muslims (FNMF) are closely tied to the Moroccan government (its president, Mohamed Bechari, has openly expressed interest in supporting French Moroccans) (Abdallah, 2003); meanwhile, the UOIF (also mostly supported by Moroccans) promotes a more fundamentalist Islam and has been linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. In more recent years, the FNMF has lost a significant amount of support to the newly founded Rally of Muslims in France (RMF), a breakaway group from the FNMF; the RMF is also pro-Moroccan and promotes a traditional, yet somewhat “secular”, Islam.

As the only legitimate interlocutors between the state and Islamic practice in France, these groups, which act as umbrella organizations to smaller Muslim associations and mosques, are able to assert a considerable amount of power: they are able to lobby directly for funds and other provisions to support and expand their own networks of mosques and are likewise able to promote particular religious positions that generally reflect the interests of overseas governments, which strive to retain political and religious influence over their expatriate communities.¹⁰ Indeed, the race for political power has led to tensions within the CFCM as leaders jockey for their own politico-religious causes.¹¹

Moreover, the gap between powerful Islamic associations (especially conservative bodies) and everyday people who identify as “Muslims” in France is further widened by the moderate religiosity of most French “Muslims” (Giry, 2006; Geisser and Zemouri, 2012). Though it is difficult to measure the religiosity of any individual or community, especially in a nation that condemns official surveys related to ethnic, racial or religious traits, there are a few indicators of the low-to-moderate religiosity of French “Muslims”: for instance, a 2006 report (Pew Research Center) showed that the majority of Muslims surveyed, who were identified specifically as “Muslims”, identified themselves first and foremost as “French citizens” rather than as “Muslims”. They were also more likely to be concerned about unemployment than

about religious issues. The same report showed that an overwhelming majority (89%) of Muslims identified with moderate Muslims rather than with Islamic fundamentalists. Moreover, mosque attendance is fairly low in France, and only slightly higher than church attendance for the Christian/Catholic/Protestant French population (Brouard and Tiberj, 2005: 23, 7-28; Schain, 2012). This is especially noteworthy given that the CFCM allows (participating) mosques in France – each with a particular number of delegates (larger mosques having more delegates) – to elect its members (including the president). In this sense, the CFCM’s ability to represent the majority of “Muslims” in France is highly questionable.

Yet even if the CFCM did represent a significant portion of French Maghrebi “Muslims” it is incapable of fostering the “incorporation” of France’s North African population because it does not involve itself (and has never claimed to) in community development initiatives (i.e. cultural, sports, educational or youth programmes), which focus directly on the economic and social integration of French North Africans and other immigrant groups. Despite all of this, state-led efforts towards a “French Islam” have monopolized integration policy, rendering structural improvements less relevant.

5.3 How the CFCM impedes integration

In order to recognize the lack of emphasis on institutional and structural inequalities in recent French policy, it is necessary to undertake an evaluation of the strategies that have dominated integration policy-making over the past decade. In short, despite the fact that Sarkozy has (quite controversially) advocated for positive discrimination to reduce unemployment among France’s ethnic minorities,¹² the bulk of his work has not included structural reforms – such as improving education in low-income, immigrant-filled *banlieues* – but, rather, “religious” mechanisms. During his first term as Interior Minister (2002-2007) Sarkozy’s chief focus was the institutionalization of Islamic practice through the creation and maintenance of the CFCM; he also advocated amending the Law of December 9, 1905 on the Separation of Churches and the State so that mosques and other Muslim institutions could be financed with public funds. Again, the chief motives behind Sarkozy’s CFCM, in its particularly top-down form, were not only to secure a “Muslim vote” (Geisser and Zemouri, 2007), but to “satisfy” marginalized “Muslim” minorities – many of which frustrated and angry at being confined to low-income, violence-prone neighbourhoods.

During his second term (June 2005 to March 2007) and into his presidency (2007-2012), Sarkozy and his political allies continued to avoid structural reforms¹³ in favour of toughening up immigration policies¹⁴ and police activity in the *banlieues*, as well as increasing bans on public religious expression¹⁵ – partly to woo conservative, xenophobic politicians and their constituents, but also with the belief that such bans maintain the secular nature of French social life. Meanwhile the CFCM, with all its internal issues, continued to serve as the principal state-supported “initiative” towards incorporating French North Africans (and, as Geisser and Zemouri (2007) point out, as a means to secure a so-called “Muslim vote”).

Even current Interior Minister Manuel Valls has continued in the republican tradition of “managing” Islam via the CFCM. He has been a critic of the CFCM, but only for its foreign influence and its inability to represent French “Muslims”; he has called for more “French imams” who preach in French and has promoted increased state funding for prayer spaces and imam training.¹⁶ Part of this is an attempt to deter foreign influence (i.e. funding mosques/religious associations, sending foreign imams to France, etc.) and to promote an Islam “acceptable” in France, but also to sustain the illusion that French “Muslims” are being “listened to” and incorporated. These efforts – while not as blatantly linked to integration as those articulated by Sarkozy in the past – are coupled with a French integration model still devoid of structural improvements. Indeed, efforts have been made by the Hollande administration to allocate more “priority security zones” and beef up security in these areas; however, a shift in policy towards core structural inequalities is still lacking.¹⁷

Moreover, while institutionalized Islam in the form of the CFCM has helped divert political leaders from addressing structural issues, it has also highlighted the tendency of the French government to acknowledge the marginalization of French Maghrebis as a “Muslim” problem, with “Muslim” solutions, revealing the ongoing propensity of the French state to define and treat French persons of Islamic origin as, first and foremost, “Muslims” (with Islam-based identities, interests and influences). Not only does such a concept legitimize the stigmatization and racialization of Islam in France; it hinders France’s large Maghrebi population (and its smaller West African and Turkish community) from becoming truly “French”, especially since, at the same time that French “Muslims” are viewed primarily by their Islamic religion, the current administration continues to vigorously endorse an enforced *laïcité* as a

core principle of the French Republic and, therefore, French citizenship¹⁸ (Geisser and Zemouri, 2007).

At the very least, the stigmatization of French persons of Islamic faith can have severe social consequences, especially for second-generation youths who may not feel fully accepted as “French” by the wider French society but are also detached from their (or their parents’) country of origin. The more second-generation French “Muslims” feel alienated, the greater the struggle for self-identification becomes. Such an identity crisis not only impedes integration but can also be a potential hazard; when young “Muslim” minorities fail to identify with the culture of their parents but feel excluded by French society they may be in danger of seeking out other venues for self-identification, namely Islamic radicalism: for instance, in 2009 a Europol report found that a high number of suspects arrested on charges of Islam-related terrorism in 2008 were French nationals (Europol, 2009: 18). The recruitment of vulnerable, identity-conflicted youths into radical and potentially violent extremist groups is one particularly concerning consequence of the state-backed division and exclusion of French “Muslims”.

Conclusion

The “Muslim” label has hindered the economic and political integration and the social acceptance of contemporary French Maghrebis of Islamic faith for several key reasons: it has lead to a “home-grown” stigmatization, isolation and exclusion of “Muslims”, as seen in the early days of post-Algerian independence migration and today via the continuing republican commitment towards “French Islam” and the belief that religious mechanisms necessarily remedy the so-called “Muslim problem”. Not only are French Maghrebis pigeonholed by their religious creed, regardless of the ethnic, cultural and political diversity within the French Maghrebi (and sub-Saharan and Turkish) population and irrespective of the low-to-moderate religiosity of many French “Muslims”; contemporary venues like the CFCM highlight the underlying notion that French Maghrebis require “Muslim solutions” to their social and economic problems. This – along with nationalist and xenophobic sentiments and policies articulated by French political leaders – has delayed the social and economic integration of French compatriots of Islamic background.

Yet, the reality is that France can no longer afford to alienate and stigmatize French “Muslims”, especially considering that the number of people in France of

Islamic faith is projected to increase in upcoming years (Pew Research Center, 2011: 124). The only mechanisms suitable for economic and social integration involve improvements in the *banlieues* and *zones urbaines sensibles*, which currently offer residents second-rate education, few employment opportunities and little hope for the future. The Hollande administration must decide how to distribute the limited education resources appropriately, as well as how to recruit, train and retain qualified teachers in low-income districts. Within higher education, Hollande has pushed for several reforms targeting retention and access (as well as administrative reforms), but more emphasis must be placed on diversifying French universities. The educational system must be tackled head-on in order to give minorities in France a fighting chance in the post-industrial service-based labour market.

At the same time, the historical role of French political leaders in legitimizing the stigmatization of Islam in France (which has been aggravated by modern global stereotypes of Muslims as “terrorists” or “extremists”) warrants increased efforts by government policy to prevent discrimination (mostly in the labour and housing markets). This is not to say that the French state is solely responsible for discrimination in France but, rather, the traditional state-led stigmatization of Islamic practice in France has contributed to (and maybe even exacerbated) negative attitudes and perceptions of people of Islamic background in the larger French polity; thus, greater efforts to develop and implement an effective anti-discrimination policy will be critical to begin moving away from such “Muslim” labelling.¹⁹

That being said, lowering socio-economic disparities between immigrant and non-immigrant populations may not completely eradicate prejudices against French Maghrebi “Muslims”, but it will no doubt facilitate the social and economic incorporation of persons of North African origin in France. In order for this to begin to occur, however, French Maghrebis must be shed of their “Muslim” labelling and be identified by the state as *citizens*, first and foremost, and not as members of one homogenous group whose identity, values, and needs presumably revolve around Islam.

Notes

1. ZEP schools in the *banlieues* receive extra funds and pay for teachers, and offer work/study programmes and other social services. However, this only covers 11% of

primary schools. In *colleges*, the success of ZEP policy has been heavily disputed (see, for example, Brizard, 1995; Meuret, 1994; Benabou *et al.*, 2004).

- 2. Racist acts reported to the police increased by more than 23% in 2012. For details see *Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de L'Homme* [National Advisory Commission on Human Rights], *L'institution Française de Protection et de Promotion des Droits de L'Homme* [French Institute of the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights], ‘La lutte contre le racisme, l’antisémitisme et la xénophobie, année 2012’ [The Fight Against Racism, Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia, Year 2012’]. 2013. <http://www.cncdh.fr/fr/publications/la-lutte-contre-le-racisme-lantisemitisme-et-la-xenophobie-annee-2012>. Retrieved: Aug, 1 2013.
- 3. They were considered for repatriation because they sided with the French during the war and were, via the Evian Accords between France and Algeria following independence, promised citizenship by the French.
- 4. Under French Algeria, Algerian Sephardic Jews had been granted French citizenship through the Crémieux decree of 1870 but the Vichy regime overturned that law in 1940.
- 5. See Laurence and Vaisse (2006) for a detailed analysis of the difference between Islam *en France* and Islam *de France*.
- 6. Councils for the other major religions already existed in France (the Catholic Conference Episcopale, the Jewish Consistoire Centrale and the Protestant Federation); the difference between these councils and the CFCM was the reliance on the latter to integrate the large, marginalized Maghrebi “Muslim” community in France, and the presumption that French Maghrebi “Muslims” would respond best to religious venues (because of their presumed religious “needs”) versus actual structural improvements (i.e. strengthening schools in suburbs).
- 7. Laurence and Vaisse (2006: 99) estimate that the total combined membership of Islamic associations in France only includes about 10-15% of French ‘Muslims’; surveys have also shown that Muslims in France are more likely to trust local or overseas imams and institutions than national Muslim leaders in France (Pew Research Center, 2006).
- 8. The CFCM was looked upon as a way of organizing the hundreds of Muslim associations that had sprouted up in France in the 1980s after the promulgation of association laws that prohibited “foreigners” from forming civil associations were finally adjusted.
- 9. Sarkozy granted representative seats to a handful of other prominent Islamic federations, a group of experts on the Islamic religion, and five “grand” mosques.
- 10. Another example of this is the *Comité de Coordination des Musulmans Turcs de France* (Committee of Coordination of Turkish Muslims in France, or CCMTF), supported by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) in Turkey, which operates under the Turkish Islamic Association of Religious Affairs (DİTİB) in France (and throughout Europe) to promote a moderate “Turkish Islam” in France. Overseas governments seek to manage expatriate communities in Europe as part of their foreign policy; they organize and supervise the building of mosques, send imams and (particularly with funds from the Saudi-based World Islamic League) finance religious instruction. The goal is to control the level of power of varying political/religious groups (especially those that stray from the religious/political stances of the funding country) in order to protect their own interests (Çitak, 2010; Laurence, 2005).
- 11. The first sign of internal turmoil was in January 2005, when anthropologist Dounia Bouzar gave up her seat on the CFCM executive board because she felt CFCM leaders were merely jockeying for political power; in 2008, the GMP boycotted CFCM elections after Dalil Boubakeur deemed the electoral mechanisms unfair (since the GMP has a much smaller mosque network compared to newer, larger Islamic organizations). In 2011 both the GMP and the UOIF boycotted CFCM elections (they returned in 2013), leaving the *Rassemblement des Musulmans de France* (Network of Muslims in France, or RMF) to lead the CFCM; again, in 2013, the UOIF boycotted and withdrew its position in the CFCM. Additionally, local chapters of the CFCM (Regional Councils of the

Muslim Religion or CRCMs) have criticized the CFCM for favouring certain regional representatives (those tied to larger bodies, namely the UOIF, RMF and the GMP) over others (Maret, 2013).

12. The French government did pass a law in 2006 requiring companies with at least 50 employees to accept anonymous resumes, in an attempt to prevent ethnic discrimination; yet the law was never implemented and has recently been made optional due to the realization that the initiative might actually hurt minority employees (Connexion, 2011). Additionally, Sarkozy, alongside Valérie Pécresse (former Minister for Higher Education) supported the passing of a higher education reform, in which one objective was for Ivy League universities to recruit 30% of students receiving state grants.
13. In 2006, the government did disburse a large sum of money to a number of civic associations; yet the effort, which was clearly a desperate attempt to maintain social order in the wake of the 2005 *banlieue* riots, was too little too late.
14. For instance, deportation of illegal immigrants vastly increased in 2004; in 2006, an immigration and integration bill toughened qualifications for family reunification and immigrant naturalization and initiated “selective immigration” measures for new immigrants based on particular needed skills (Laurence and Vaisse, 2006)
15. Sarkozy supported the 2004 ban against headscarves in public schools and, in 2011, supported bans against full veils in public places, as well as praying in streets.
16. Valls also, in 2013, promoted a state-funded course on “knowledge of secularism” directed towards imams, hospital/prison chaplains, teachers in Muslim schools and other Islamic religious representatives.
17. For example, in education, Hollande has discussed employing more teachers in distressed areas, shrinking non-attendance and fail rates, and even banning homework (on the basis that some parents are less equipped to help with assignments than others); yet, so far, reform has been limited to adding a half day of school on Wednesdays (originally a day off) for school children aged 3-11 (and even this has been criticized as many teachers and parent associations have long called for a reduction of school days for France’s youth).
18. The Hollande administration continues to target French persons of Islamic faith by pledging to extend the 2004 law on public displays of religious symbols to private education (as was originally decreed).
19. France did officially ban discrimination in employment and housing in 2001 and 2002, and, in 2005, HALDE was established in an effort to manage and control discrimination (HALDE has since merged with the *Défenseur des Droits* [Defense of Rights] along with three other independent administrative authorities, and the effectiveness of this newly merged anti-discrimination association is yet to be seen). However, if ethnic discrimination in both employment and housing is truly to be tackled, anti-discrimination bodies must be given greater legal authority in order to follow through on the numerous grievances it receives each year.

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