

3-25-2021

## French Muslim Youth's Perception of their Cultural Identity in a Post-Charlie Hebdo Reality in the 19th Arrondissement.

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

FRENCH MUSLIM YOUTH'S PERCEPTION OF THEIR CULTURAL  
IDENTITY IN A POST-CHARLIE HEBDO REALITY IN  
THE 19TH ARRONDISSEMENT

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

by

Gaëlle Bernard

2021

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This dissertation, written by Gaëlle Bernard, and entitled French Muslim Youth's Perception of Their Cultural Identity in a Post-Charlie Hebdo Reality in the 19<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Eric Dwyer, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 25, 2021

The dissertation of Gaëlle Bernard is approved.

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Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

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Andrés G. Gil  
Vice President for Research and Economic Development  
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2021

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my sons Darren and Raiden. Darren long gone are the days I took you and your brother to my night classes so I could pursue my dreams. You patiently watched over your brother to make sure he stayed quiet while I was teaching or presenting my work. I strived to do better to show you that anything is possible. To my loving husband Zak, your ever-loving support means more to me than words can express.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of the many people who stood by me, fed me, nurtured me, encouraged me, and watched over my babies while trying to find the inspiration and courage to write this dissertation. First, Nana (Mrs Phyllis Tyler) who welcomed me with open arms so that I could attend school and pursue my dreams, thank you. Secondly, I would like to thank my committee members, whose guidance and support truly helped me complete this dissertation. Thank you, Dr. Eric Dwyer, for sticking up with me for so long (I am finally done!). Even when I doubted myself, you always cheered me on and believed in my study. I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Mathews, Dr. McIntyre-McCullough, Dr. Luszczynska, Dr. Akhtar and Dr. Eric Dwyer for your expertise, knowledge, time, and feedback. It is truly appreciated. Dr. Keisha McIntyre-McCullough thank you for your kind and motivational words. Thank you for constantly checking up on me and encouraging me along the way.

My dear friends Carolyn, and Alicia, whose continued support helped me not abandoning my hopes of ever finishing this dissertation. Wanda, we went on many adventures together, our first adventure started all this. I did it. I thank you my sister.

To conclude, many thanks to my family and friends for their support. Maman, you dreamed one day your little girl would attend an American university. Je voulais te dire merci du fond du cœur.

I am my ancestors' wildest dreams.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION  
FRENCH MUSLIM YOUTH'S PERCEPTION OF THEIR CULTURAL  
IDENTITY IN A POST-CHARLIE HEBDO REALITY IN  
THE 19TH ARRONDISSEMENT

by

Gaëlle Bernard

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Eric Dwyer, Major Professor

On January 7, 2015, the headquarters of Charlie Hebdo, a satirical newspaper in France, was attacked by two armed men, Chérif and Saïd Kouachi, who shot and killed 12 staff members and injured another 11. The motive of the gunmen was the defense of their Muslim religion, in response to the newspaper's history of publishing caricatures of the prophet Mohammed (AFP, 2015). This terrorist attack of January 7, 2015 continues to have a lasting impact on the lives of French people, most particularly French Muslims.

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the negotiation of Muslim youth identity in a post-Charlie Hebdo reality in the 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. This qualitative study also examined the effect of the attacks on educational policies. Research questions included 1) How do Muslim youth construct their cultural identity? 2) What is the impact of laïcité in the construction of Muslim youth identity? 3) How did the terrorist attacks impact Muslims' lived experiences? And 4) How do the terrorist attacks impact educational policies? The present study was

guided by a postcolonial and critical race theory lens. This qualitative study included eight participants purposely selected from the 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris. Data were gathered from semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

Findings revealed the importance of both the French identity and the parents' ethnic and religious background in the formation of the participants' identity. Participants also expressed a sense of not totally belonging in either cultures as they experienced a process of otherization in France but also in their parents' homeland. Findings also showed how laïcité instead of being a process of acculturation is a process of assimilation. Findings showed that documents and tools provided by the government are constructed around assimilationist ideologies and problematic views of Islam and Muslim youth, further marginalizing the Muslim community.



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## PREFACE

### *Nos ancêtres les Gaulois*<sup>1</sup>

As far as I can remember, I was always a studious and hardworking student. I would sit in the front row so that I could see the blackboard better, eagerly listening to my teacher.

During a history lesson in fourth grade, our teacher taught us about our ancestors, the Gauls. I looked with puzzlement at the pictures he showed us. How could the Gauls be my ancestors? My skin was brown. They had red hair and freckles. That day I came home and told my mother about this inconceivable fact. To my surprise, she replied that she too had been taught that her ancestors were the Gauls. I was surprised because I knew my mother went to school in Guadeloupe. Guadeloupe is now a French overseas state located in the Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean. The population is mainly composed of the descendants of African slaves. I could not understand for the sake of me how we were descendants of the Gauls.

However, *l'école de la République Française* [the French Republican School] assured me that it was a certain fact. From that moment I became a different person. Even though I was still the same studious student who never really questioned my teachers after all they had the knowledge, I began wondering about knowledge.

### *L'école de la République*

“Look at them! Are you sure you want to teach *them*? It is a colorful class that you have.”

“Yes, I love it. Maybe I can teach *them* something.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Our ancestors the Gauls.

My sixth-grade teacher Mrs LeGoff proudly recounted to us the conversation that took place when she showed our class picture to her upper-class family. Her parents obviously seemed concerned that their daughter was teaching in an urban school with such wide diversity. I remember feeling angry when she told us what she felt was a big accomplishment. I felt like a guinea pig, an experiment to a young teacher who wanted the thrill to teach a colorful class as if we were that different from other children. I was young maybe 12 or 13, but I already had this feeling of anger and injustice building up. School was supposed to be the place of upward mobility where we had a chance to be treated equally. “*Liberté, égalité, fraternité!*” [Liberty, equality, fraternity!] they said. But my experiences would say otherwise.

“If you don’t understand French, go back to China,” shouted our French Language Arts teacher to Richard as he struggled to find the correct answer. As soon as she said that she probably regretted her words as a buzzing sound of anger spread throughout the class. “What did you just say? I was born in Paris!” shouted Richard as he flipped over the table in anger. The chaos that followed that altercation was indescribable. I was the class president, so the teacher, now fearing a complete lack of safety, sent me running to get the school counselor. Instead, the school principal came running, screaming commands to stop immediately. My responsibility as class president was to explain the situation. Despite the obvious inappropriateness of the teacher’s comment, the principal felt that the class should be punished for responding in an inappropriate manner, and we were given detention for weeks. The teacher took a month of paid vacation.

Afterwards, our class was deemed as the most disruptive class in the whole middle school, which entitled teachers to make derogatory comments, knowing that we would be blamed for anything that would result from those comments. Our

origins, referring to both our races and our neighborhood, would become labels defining us, following us, haunting us, and explaining our inability to successfully integrate into French society.

“I want to become a TV host for the national channel,” I said with assurance as the career counselor asked me what I wanted to do. He looked at me with sympathy and told me that as a black woman I would never be able to be a TV host for the national channel. I would be most likely to succeed in secretarial work or as a nurse’s aide, not even a nurse. Therefore, he advised me to attend a vocational school. In France, minorities (except for Asian minorities), regardless of their academic achievement, are often advised to pursue a less academic path. Thankfully, my mother opposed the decision, and I was able to join a language program in a traditional school.

### **College Experiences**

“There was *nothing* in Africa before Europeans came and certainly not democracy,” replied my professor of British history. I was in a French university, and I had approached my professor regarding the possible topic of my thesis for the completion of my master’s degree. I had just come back from a wonderful year abroad in an American university, where I had learned the most amazing facts about African societies. During that year, our Black History professor taught us history like I have never been taught before. I became fascinated with Africa and more specifically with Ancient Africa. For that reason, I wanted to focus on the kingdoms of Ancient Africa and their democratic systems for my thesis. When I came back to France, I was confident that my professor would approve my topic and help me to investigate the issue. However, her answer felt like a cold shower. As she proceeded to explain to me that there was nothing in Africa before colonization except some



unruly tribes, she called another professor to support her argument. When she told him my topic, he looked at me and laughed and said with a condescending attitude, “But dear, there was *nothing* before colonization and certainly not democratic systems.” He suggested that I explore colonial or post-colonial Africa instead. Right there, I decided that this master’s program was not for me anymore and that I would finish the year and explore new possibilities.

Those different experiences did have a crucial impact on my schooling and the choice of my career. I decided that I wanted to pursue a career in teaching and become an educator who could make a positive impact.

### **Personal connection**

Before moving to the United States to pursue my doctoral degree I lived in Paris’s 19<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* with my mother and my brother. My connection to the Kouachi brothers was personal. I had family living in the same neighborhood: my grandmother’s cousin.

My cousin is around my age. He converted to Islam at a young age. He had lived all his life in that neighborhood and knew everybody. Most particularly, he knew Chérif and Saïd Kouachi, the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks of the *Charlie Hebdo* headquarters in January 2015. He first met Chérif when he was around 11 years old. Even though the Kouachi brothers lived in another part of town they would often hang around our neighborhood.

He remembers Chérif as a nice young man who was often in the street and did not have too much schooling. He never knew him as a violent person capable of such a terrible act. He remembers Chérif as wanting to become a rapper, which was not uncommon among young people living in rough neighborhoods in France. Hip-hop was a way to express one’s frustration and a possible escape from one’s bleak fate. He

also saw him five months before the attack at the youth center playing PlayStation. He was so quiet and looked like any normal young person—not a future kamikaze. My cousin could have never imagined what was in the making.

The day of the attack, my cousin was looking at the television, watching in awe the events unfolding. When he saw that the terrorists were from the cell *La filière des Buttes Chaumont* (Buttes Chaumont network), or more commonly known in the neighborhood as *la rue de Meaux* (a street in our neighborhood, which is known for being a terrorist cell), he immediately thought it was one of the older members of the cell, not the Kouachi brothers.

However, he later received a message on Facebook from a friend, telling him that Chérif and his brothers were the terrorists who committed the attacks. My cousin was shocked because he knew Chérif. Still, at the same time, he was not so shocked because it was Chérif and his path toward jihadism was an indication of his views.

My interest in the topic of cultural identity among French youth discussed in the proposed dissertation study surfaced after the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks of January 2015 in Paris. I first discussed this topic informally with my friends, who like me were a product of a French education. We had been taught by the Republican School. Our story never told, our backgrounds erased, being taught how to be French. Thus, we could relate to the topic as we personally understood the ramifications of a French education, dissecting the events trying to understand the how and the why and what could be done to prevent the killing of innocents in the name of religion. The need to investigate the subject matter at hand became a necessity after the second terrorist attacks in November 2015, with a death casualty of 130 it impacted the country even more than the first attack.

Both attacks had a terrible and deep impact on me.

Hearing such a personal perspective from my cousin on the subject compelled me to want to know more and investigate the subject matter at hand.

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

- The French Revolution (1789). It signified the end of the monarchy and the establishment of a secular and democratic republic achieved through a bloody uprising of the French people.
- Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790. This statute aimed to establish a church subordinated to the State rather than the Pope.
- Concordat of 1801. Acknowledged the Catholic faith as the religion of the great majority of French people.
- Law of 1905. Marked the absolute separation of the Church and State
- Algerian War. The war between France and the Algerian National Liberation Front that led to the independence of Algeria in 1962.
- Arab Spring began with the Tunisian Revolution in December 2010 and spread to other countries in North Africa and the Middle East.
- Charlie Hebdo attacks. On January 7, 2015 Chérif and Said Kouachi shot and killed 12 staff members of the satirical Newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* and injured another 11.
- November 13 terrorist attacks, A series of coordinated terrorist attacks, which occurred on November 13, 2015 in Paris and its suburbs. 130 people were killed that day and more than 300 people were injured.
- September 2020. Two people were injured near the Charlie Hebdo former offices amid the trial of the suspects of the January 2015 attacks.
- October 2020. Samuel Paty a middle school history teacher is beheaded after showing Charlie Hebdo's 2012 cartoons depicting the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Burkini:** Aheda Zanetti, an Australian Muslim woman, created the burkini a combination of the word burqa and bikini (Taylor, 2016). It is a modesty swimsuit for women covering the head and the body.

**Century of Enlightenment:** A philosophical and intellectual movement that took place in Europe in the 18th century.

**Djellabas:** A loose hooded cloak traditionally worn by Arabs.

**Enseignement de langue et la culture d'origine (ELCO):** Bilateral agreements taken in 1977 by the European communities and 9 countries (Algeria, Spain, Croatia, Tunisia, Italy, Morocco, Serbia, Turkey, and Portugal) to facilitate the assimilation the children of immigrant workers. The native language as well as the culture of the country of birth should be taught to children (Eduscol, 2016).

**Filière des Buttes Chaumont (*filière irakienne du 19e arrondissement*):** A jihadi network created in the 19th arrondissement with the intent to send jihadists to the Iraq war.

**Français de souche:** It refers to a person born from French parents' centuries after centuries. This term is often used among French politicians and the media (Duval, 2015).

**Frenchness:** What does it mean to be French? That is a question the Minister of National Identity, Eric Besson, wanted answered in 2009 through a national debate.

**Fiche S:** The *fiche S*, S standing for *Sûreté de l'État*<sup>2</sup>, is a document assigned to individuals who are considered to pose a risk to the national security. People suspected of plotting terrorist attacks, political protesters as well as just knowing a

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<sup>2</sup> State Security

person who is suspected of being a terrorist could be assigned a *fiche S*. People who have a *fiche S* may not have done anything illegal and yet still have a *fiche S* (Sandford, 2018).

**Groupe Salafiste pour la prédication et le combat (GSPC):** An Algerian terrorist faction created in 1998, which later became Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

**Harkis:** Native Muslim Algerians who fought alongside France (Clancy-Smith, 2017).

**Je suis Charlie:** A slogan created by Joachim Roncin and later adopted by people who supported freedom of speech and stood against the murders of the journalists.

**Je ne suis pas Charlie:** A counter slogan to express one's disagreements with the Satirist journal pointing out its racism.

**Jihadi:** A person who participates in the jihad.

**Laïcité:** Secularism is a fundamental concept in the French constitution separating Churches and State.

**Liberté d'expression:** Freedom of Speech.

**19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement:** One of the 20 arrondissements (districts) in Paris and where the Kouachi brothers lived most of their life. It has a large immigrant population.

**Republican March:** The Republican March was organized on January 10th and 11th to protest the terrorist attacks of January 7th.

**Republican School:** After the laws passed by Jules Ferry in 1881, 1882, and 1886, a free, secular, and mandatory public school was created for all to attend. The Republican School is highly centralized. All decisions making regarding education is made by the government, aiming to offer the same instruction to its students.

**Salafi:** An ultra-conservative branch of the Sunni Islam. Wagemakers (2016) states “Salafis claim that their ideas and teachings amount to nothing more or less than Islam in all its purity.” (p. 2)

**Verlan:** A slang commonly used among the Youth in France. Lefkowitz (1989) noted, “Verlan as a spoken phenomenon originates in the working class, immigrant-populated northern suburbs of Paris known as La Zone” (p. 313).

**Vivre ensemble:** The concept of living together in harmony despite religious or ethnic differences.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*There are so many other labels people like to assign. Where am I an insider and where am I an outsider? It all depends on where I'm standing and who is trying to put me into which box.*

— Eowyn Ivey, 2016

On January 7, 2015, the headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo*, a satirical newspaper in France, was attacked by two armed men, Chérif and Said Kouachi who shot and killed 12 staff members and injured another 11. The motive of the gunmen was the defense of their Muslim religion, based on the newspaper's history of publishing caricatures of the prophet Mohammed (AFP, 2015). Some interpretations of Islam forbid any representation of the image of the prophet (AFP, 2007). The world's interpretation of the motive of the gunmen was Islamic fundamentalism resulting in an act of terrorism. Welch and Perivolaris (2016) observed, "At the same time, while their targets had specific resonance in a French context, the terrorists made explicit reference to horizons beyond France by asserting their allegiance with the international jihadi struggle. It soon emerged that the Kouachi brothers had long-standing connections with the transnational networks of radical Islamism" (p. 208). The terrorist attack of January 7, 2015 continues to have a lasting impact on the lives of French people, most particularly French Muslims. Muslims are constantly the target of violent political diatribes. France "struggle[s] to incorporate Muslim communities into secular societies whose values are often at odds with Islamic beliefs and whose members are often hostile to their presence" (Read, 2007, p. 231). Globally the political instrumentation of Islam further reinforces the idea that Islam is incompatible with the values of western democracies.



The incorporation of Muslim communities into secular France poses a significant problem in education as the faith of Muslim students is viewed as being incompatible with secularism at school. Therefore, Muslim students should erase any visible signs of affiliation to said religion.

On October 11, 2019, Julien Odoul, an elected official, said about a school chaperone, “In the name of our republican and secular principles, I asked Marie-Guite Dufay [PS<sup>3</sup> president of the region] to remove the Islamic veil from a school chaperone present in the hemicycle” (*L'Express*, 2019). Those types of outbursts further contribute to the disenfranchisement of Muslims and carry well over into the Republican schools and the treatment of Muslim students. Their religious affiliation further stigmatized them, and teachers often see them as others who need to be integrated into French society even though they were born into French society.

The terrorists touched a sacred principle of the Republic of France, that of *liberté d'expression* [freedom of speech]. “*Je suis Charlie*” [I am Charlie] then echoed throughout the world. Joachim Roncin, the French Art director for the magazine *Stylist*, created the picture and posted it on Twitter to express his sadness after the attacks (Provost, 2015). Many countries showed solidarity with the French nation with rallies and vigils being held in cities around the world under the banner of “*Je suis Charlie.*” Most notably, on January 11, 2015, the Republican March, organized by the leadership of the French Republic, gathered an estimated 1.5 million marchers, including many world leaders such as David Cameron, then Prime Minister of England, and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany (Lichfield, 2015; Wilsher, 2015).

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<sup>3</sup> PS refers to the “Partie Socialiste” or Socialist Party, one of the major political parties in France.

However, dissident voices also arose. The mantra “*Je ne suis pas Charlie*” [I am not Charlie] arose to protest the specter of a double standard with respect to freedom of speech in France. Smyrnaiois and Ratinaud (2017) conducted research on tweets following the Charlie Hebdo attacks, finding “that smaller, highly politicized, and polarized groups had similar attitudes toward the events: they were less engaged immediately after the attacks in emotional expression of sympathy and shock, but they participated vividly in the following days in polemical discussions or engaged themes” (p. 1). Twitter user Aboujahjah (2015), a Lebanese writer living in Brussels, tweeted:

I am not Charlie; I am Ahmed the dead cop. Charlie ridiculed my faith and culture and I died defending his right to do so. #JesuisAhmed” (Twitter citation, 2015).

Rosenbaum (2015) in her newspaper article titled *I am not Charlie Hebdo and you shouldn't be either* argued “Freedom of speech always has to be balanced against other freedoms, such as freedom from racial vilification” (paras.2). The cartoons from *Charlie Hebdo* indeed may have been perceived as racial slander against a particular religious group. As a response, those feeling attacked tried to convey different perspectives on the subject. Badouard explains: “*Je Ne Suis Pas Charlie* represented a heterogeneity of voices. [...] Muslim users also emphasized that the terrorists were not representative of their religion, often citing Quran verses about peace and love” (as cited in Gigletto and Lee, 2007, p. 12).

Tweeting “*Je ne suis pas Charlie*” was a way for people to distance themselves from what Charlie Hebdo represented, a satirical journal which desecrated Islam. My study aimed at describing and understanding how French Muslim youth were impacted by those attacks and how they perceived or constructed their identity

in a post Charlie Hebdo Île de France. In the educational context, Muslim students, particularly their identity, are viewed as a threat to *laïcité*, or secularism. Following the Charlie Hebdo attack, French Muslim students found themselves being treated as potential terrorists by teachers and school administration. Some students were criminalized in schools for not respecting the minute of silence for the victims of the terrorist attacks or for simply stating “I am not Charlie” out loud (Barbouch, 2015; Gueye, 2015). The decision by the students not to respect the minute of silence was predicated on the fact that some students like Ahmed felt his religious beliefs were not respected (Enfant de 8 ans, 2015). Different incidents occurring in different schools highlight the climate of paranoia and suspicion that took place after the different terrorist attacks of January 2015. For example, Ayman was 9 years old, when on January 15, 2015 Ayman and his father Mr. Mathlouthi were called in for questioning at the police station in Villers-Cotteret. The police officer informed the father that allegedly Ayman shouted “Allah Akbar” during the minute of silence. Ayman strongly refuted the allegations and mentioned that two other children did not respect the minute of silence, but he was not part of the group (Barbouch, 2015; CCIF, 2015). Ahmed was 8 years old, when on January 28, 2015, Ahmed and his father were interrogated by the Police in Nice. In a video, Ahmed told his story. On January 8, the morning after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, Ahmed was asked by his teacher if he was for or against Charlie. He replied, “I am against Charlie” (CCIF, 2015; Islamotion, 2015). Ahmed’s reasoning was shaped by the disrespect shown to his religion by the cartoon about Mahomet. A 14-year-old middle school student reported that, on January 8, 2015, he participated in the minute of silence with his middle school classmates without any incidents.

The next day, during a class debate regarding the events, the student raised his hand and declared that the “terrorists” were right. The following Monday and Tuesday, the student was called to the principal’s office, where he apologized for his actions. In the meantime, he was suspended while awaiting the decision of the disciplinary committee. On Wednesday, the principal still decided to press charges against the student for expressing his opinion. On Thursday, the student and his parents were called in for questioning. The teenager was detained for 24 hours in jail. On January 17, he was presented in front of the judge to be indicted for “apology of terrorism” (Tourret, 2015; “Apologie d’acte de terrorisme”, 2015).

In all the students’ accounts presented above, it is noteworthy to mention that the students reported feeling traumatized by the treatment they received (“Apologie”, 2015; Barbouch, 2015; “Un lycéen juge”, 2016). Their voices were left unheard. Those students did not measure the consequences of their acts. One may reasonably assume that their negative experiences may impact these students in several ways going forward. The targeting of these students was expressly the result of their religious affiliation or their differing views on the attacks. Following the different incidents that occurred throughout the schools in France, an investigative commission was mandated to investigate the difficulties encountered by teachers in the schools in a post Charlie Hebdo France. The next section examines this investigative commission and its outcome.

### **Investigative commission post Charlie Hebdo**

On January 15, 2015, the centre-right political party, Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), presented to the Senate a report to create an investigative commission. The UMP argued the necessity to investigate the role of the Republican

School and the difficulties encountered by teachers. The UMP mentioned numerous incidents (around 200, according to the Minister of Education) occurring in different schools during the minute of silence. (S. Rep. No. 590, 2015). The UMP stated that teachers' testimonies reported heinous speech occurring during class debates. It revealed a discrepancy between some students and the *republican moral* (S. Rep. No. 590, 2015). Therefore, it seemed crucial for the UMP party to propose measures that could help teachers in their mission to transmit the republican values as well as to investigate the phenomenon of radicalization among French youth. The Senate approved the investigative commission. The committee was composed of members from the different political parties to ensure neutrality. The president of the committee Françoise Laborde is a member of the PRG (Radical party of the Left). The PRG is a social-liberal political party with opposing views on different topics from the UMP.

*The Commission d'enquête sur le fonctionnement du service public de l'éducation, sur la perte de ses repères républicains que révèle la vie dans les établissements scolaires et sur les difficultés rencontrées par les enseignants dans l'exercice de leur profession*, a public school committee, held from January 26 to June 29, 2015, emphasized religion as an important issue and a threat to *laïcité* (the law prohibiting the veil in school, the debate over proposing a substitute meal when pork is served for lunch in schools, and different religious celebrations) in the Republican school, mentioning the minute of silence not being respected, reporting the numerous incidents following the terrorist attacks and the threats against *l'école de la*

*république*<sup>4</sup> [the Republican School] (S. Rep. No. 590, 2015). The UMP recorder without explicitly mentioning a religion stated, “a denial of nationality from French youth of a different religious background” (Conge, 2015). One might guess the different religious background he was referring to. The report denounced an increase in anti-Semitic feelings since the attacks (S. Rep. No. 590, 2015). The manifestation of religious signs at school, despite the law of 2004 banning religious signs from public schools, was noted as problematic. Instead of the veil, Muslim students would wear outfits such as long dresses or *djellabas* deemed by the public school officials as religious but explained as cultural outfits by those wearing them. The report denounced this circumvention of the law (S. Rep. No. 590, 2015).

The committee published its report on July 1, 2015, suggesting 20 proposals. Those proposals, far from being novel ideas, found their roots in the Obin report of 2004 regarding religious signs in public schools and the *Refondation de l'École* [Reforming the School] law passed in 2013 (Conge, 2015). Some of those proposals included the following:

- 1) Sacralization of the Republican Schools by extending the ban of religious signs by chaperones during field trips.
- 2) A pact for teachers. They should take an oath to uphold the republican values when first becoming teachers. They should abide by a moral code and sign the school’s rules. The report emphasized the fact that teachers were not ordinary employees; they were state representatives and “They fulfill an eminent moral magistracy, transmitting values and training the French of tomorrow” (S. Rep. No. 590, 2015).

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<sup>4</sup> In France the school system is a centralized one see the section the Republican School for more details.

- 3) Wearing of a uniform, thereby avoiding any religious sign or outfit.
- 4) Refocusing the program of the history of France and its chronology around the national narrative (S. Rep. No. 590, 2015). The reports noted that the instruction of a national history was necessary to reinforce the feeling of belonging to the French nation. According to Troendle (2015), an UMP senator, the history taught should be devoid of any guilt and repentance as French history is one of human progress. Not surprisingly this claim made by the UMP senator echoes similar claims made by different UMP politicians such as François Fillon. He stated during his presidential campaign that France was not guilty for wanting to share its culture with the people of Africa, America, and Asia, further adding that the instruction of the French history in schools was only teaching children to be ashamed of their country and history (Pour François Fillon, 2016).
- 5) Creation in each French department of a Specialized school for the most disruptive students.
- 6) Students' showing a mastery of French throughout elementary education and in particular in 5th grade in order to advance to 6th grade. Learning French would become the focus of primary school curriculum.
- 7) Elimination of ELCO (teaching of languages and cultures of origin) as a stand-alone program and its integration into the foreign language learning curriculum.
- 8) Better control of the Parliament in terms of choices made in the curriculum and instruction.

Even though the report is just a report, the president of the committee vowed to ensure the report would translate into concrete measures, specifically the mastery

of French, the instruction of *laïcité*, and a better formation of future teachers (Conge, 2015). It is important to note that the report was not supported by the Left, the opposing political party, who judged this report to be too old-fashioned (Conge, 2015). The president Françoise Laborde did not vote on the passing of the report, mentioning that the recorder was a member of the UMP and regretted the manner the report was written (Conge, 2015).

This report nevertheless shed light on the targeting of Muslim students of Arab and African descent even though the report specifically mentioned that the incidents involved a minority of students (S. Rep. No. 590, 2015). As a matter of fact, the emphasis on 200 incidents (which prompted the report) during a minute of silence involving 12 million students would seem a bit excessive.

However, the report also highlighted the crucial role of the Republican School in helping shape the notion of identity and belonging to the nation. Bonet (2011) argued, “As the most visible hand of the state and oftentimes the first one student encounters, public schools have profound effects on the ability of students to negotiate their sense of nation, belonging and citizenship” (p. 46). Since the report was mandated, the situation remained painfully the same. There are still instances where the public school stigmatizes Muslim children on the basis of their religion as seen in the examples above. Thus, my study aimed to give a voice to Muslim youth marginalized by both society and the school system.

### **Context/Background**

In understanding the terrorist attacks of January 7, it is important to look at the events that led to that fateful day, the Filière des Buttes Chaumont, and the involvement of the Kouachi brothers (the perpetrators of the attack). It is additionally



important to know who they were and where they came from to have a deep grasp of their motivations. Who were the people that led them on their path of destruction?

Where did they gain their ideological beliefs from?

Looking at their past and the people they followed offer some insight into their lives and the fateful day they carried their attacks. It also shed lights on the importance of the French government in their upbringing and how the Republican school played a role. As noted earlier, the Republican school criminalized Muslim youth for having different beliefs and feelings about the Charlie Hebdo attacks. As a matter of fact, France promotes the concept of Frenchness over cultural or ethnic identity. Displaying a different point of view is seen as anti-French and a failure to having integrated the French society fully. The Republic school is the vector of those values and is responsible for teaching children using an assimilationist approach (Simon, 2006; Bleich, 2000).

***The Kouachi Brothers and their “fall” into Islamic fundamentalism.***

The *Filière des Buttes Chaumont*, also known as the *filière irakienne du 19<sup>e</sup> arrondissement* (the Iraqi network of the 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement), was a jihadist network of which the Kouachi brothers were members (Vincent, 2008). The mosque Adda’wa saw the creation of the Iraqi network in 2003 under the leadership of Farid Benyettou (Tourancheau, 2005; Vincent, 2008). This network marked the beginning of the terrorist path for the Kouachi brothers that led to the murder of 12 people. A look into this network helps us understand the indoctrination of the Kouachi brothers and other youth that led them to becoming Jihadi willing to sacrifice their lives for their beliefs.

## *Space and Place*

**The 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, the hometown.** The 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement is located in Paris and is part of one of 20 districts or *arrondissements*. The 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement is home to two of Paris's biggest parks: the Parc de la Villette (the biggest park in Paris) and the Parc des Buttes Chaumont (the third biggest park in Paris). It is also the home of the Conservatoire de Paris, one of the most renowned music schools in Europe, and the Cité des Sciences et de L'Industrie, which houses a museum and an exhibition center. It is a vibrant district with several events attracting people from all over the capital (for example, the *cinéma en plein air*, otherwise known as the August open air exhibition).

The 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement is also home to immigrants, particularly those of African descent (personal observations).<sup>5</sup> While some parts of the district are posh, such as near the town hall (district Armand Carrel), other parts can be pretty rough like the *156 rue d'Aubervilliers*, where the Kouachi brothers grew up.

The Kouachi brothers found a home and family at the mosque Adda'Wa. As a matter of fact, the mosque filled a void left by the diminution of staff members due to budget cut of youth organizations. Repeated budget cuts affected youth organizations around France. In some cases, the budgets cuts were up 350% (Collectives des Associations Citoyennes, 2016). Those youth organizations were places where children from the neighborhood could come and mingle with other children under the guidance of a youth mentor, usually from the same neighborhood. It helped steer the youth from getting into trouble and keeping them occupied. However, once

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<sup>5</sup> The law of 1978 states "It is prohibited to collect or process personal data which reveals, directly or indirectly, racial or ethnic origins, political, philosophical or religious opinions or trade union membership, or which relate to health or to their sex life."

dismantled young people are left drifting. Disenfranchised youth has nowhere else to go, no activities to keep them from being idle all day. Most specifically budget cuts affecting “les éducateurs de rue” (street educators) could have a more serious impact. Those streets educators are specialized in the prevention of radicalization. Véronique Le Goaziou noted “On the field, educators see for themselves the risk of religious radicalization. Specialized prevention has its own toolbox that it can activate to ensure that young people who start showing worrying signs do not make it through to the end. Educators therefore clearly have a card to play in the field of preventing radicalization” (as cited in Jouanneau, 2016).

The mosque offered them a place where they could mingle, a sense of community and belonging. The mosque Adda’Wa was that place for the Kouachi brothers and other young people.

**Mosque Adda’Wa, where it all began.** In 1969, a group of Maghrebi immigrants created the *Association Cultuelle Islamique* (ACI, or Islamic Cult Association) (Sweeny, 2016). In 1979, The ACI acquired an old textile factory. Rapidly the mosque became the biggest mosque in Europe with around 5000 believers visiting the mosque on Fridays (Sweeny, 2016; Werley, 2015).

In 1994, Larbi Kechat, Adda’Wa’s rector, would later be under house arrest for his presumed links with the Islamic Salvation Front, an Algerian political party (Sweeny, 2016; Tourancheau, 2005). Nevertheless, the charges were later dropped. In 2004, Larbi Kechat became the honorary president of the association with all powers regarding the management of the funds and the construction of the mosque. A committee of honor, whose members remained anonymous until 2013, was also created (Sweeny, 2016). It was later found that all the members of the committee were

foreigners, and none resided in France. Among them was Omar Abdelkafy, an Egyptian preacher and member of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, which was created by Yusuf Al Qaradawi, an Egyptian Islamic Theologian, who was suspected of having terrorist ties and was barred from entering France in 2012 (Sweeny 2016; Associated Press, 2012). Nevertheless, Larbi Kechat always maintained that his mosque advocated a moderate form of Islam (Sweeny, 2016; Tourancheau, 2005).

Yet, the mosque Adda' Wa provided a fertile ground for homegrown terrorists. Farid Benyettou the charismatic leader of the Iraqi network, found his most fervent followers, the Kouachi brothers, among them. Those mentors and more specifically their ideals resonated better with the Kouachi brothers. They became part of a community where their ethnic and religious background was not being erased as well as their voices. To better understand how the Kouachi brothers became members of the terrorist cell "la filière des Buttes Chaumont" a closer look at their mentors is necessary to understand how education or the lack thereof played a role in this issue.

### *People*

**Farid Benyettou, the charismatic leader of the Iraqi network.** Farid Benyettou, the emblematic leader of the network, started recruiting young men from the 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement in 2003 to fight in the Iraq War (Vincent, 2008). Benyettou, a man of Algerian descent and 23 years old at the time, was preaching at the mosque Adda'Wa, where he spread his radical views<sup>6</sup> (Tourancheau, 2005; Zagdoun, 2015).

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<sup>6</sup> Benyettou preached an Islam based on the 3 principles from Muhammad Ibn Abdelwahhab from which derived wahhabism (Suc, 2016). Wahhabism is an ultra-fundamentalist form of Islam considered to be the purest form of Islam strictly following the Sharia.

Under the influence of his brother-in-law Youssef Zemmouri, a fundamentalist Muslim, Benyettou became acquainted with an ultra-fundamentalist vision of Islam (Tourancheau, 2005; Zagdoun, 2015). Zemmouri was a member of the Algerian *Groupe Salafiste pour la prédication et le combat* (GSPC)—a terrorist organization—and was arrested in 1998 for a terrorist plot during the FIFA World Cup (Tourancheau, 2005; Zagdoun, 2015). After his arrest, Benyettou espoused his brother-in-law’s ultra-fundamentalist vision of Islam, changing his clothing attire to reflect his beliefs and immersing himself in religious books (Filiu, 2004; Tourancheau, 2005). The year 2003 then marked the beginning of the Iraq War and the beginning of the Iraqi network of the 19th arrondissement (Tourancheau, 2005; Vincent, 2008). Benyettou vehemently protested the military intervention in Iraq, and in March 2003 the police intercepted a coded message from Iraq from a jihadist from the 19th arrondissement (Tourancheau, 2005). Benyettou preached outside the mosque Pré-Saint-Gervais, wearing the official attire reserved for imams and was subsequently expelled from the mosque (Filiu, 2004; Tourancheau, 2005). He later joined the mosque Adda’wa and continued his preaching outside the official religious teachings. As a result of his young age, his charisma, and connection to the neighborhood, he was able to start his network, recruiting young men from the neighborhood to go fight in Iraq against the Americans. Among those young men was Chérif Kouachi, who later committed the attacks with his brother against Charlie Hebdo. In 2004, Benyettou organized a collective prayer with young Muslims to protest the law effectively banning religious signs in public schools (Filiu, 2004; Tourancheau, 2005; Zagdoun, 2015). Benyettou grew increasingly critical of the American presence in Iraq. To prepare for the jihad, Benyettou and his followers trained in the park *Les Buttes Chaumont*, which became the name of their network. He

was arrested and convicted in 2005 for his role in the Iraqi network (Tourancheau, 2005; Zagdoun, 2015). He had a great influence on the Kouachi brothers and their subsequent views on Islam as well as their newfound allegiance to the Iraqi network. Therefore, the Brothers no longer had a place like the youth centers and instead alternative measures were found that were problematic for them and created an international incident. How students are socialized and how they are perceived in a society is important, especially ones who are viewed as outsiders because of race, ethnicity, and religion.

**Boubaker El Hakim, the mentor.** Boubaker El Hakim, born in the 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris in 1983, was of Tunisian descent and the other leader of the *Buttes Chaumont* network. He was considered as the French senior officer of ISIS (Seelow, 2016; Suc, 2016). In 2002, El Hakim left for Syria to study in salafis schools and briefly reached Iraq (Seelow, 2016). He created the *Buttes Chaumont* network in 2003 with Farid Benyettou (Thiolay, 2015). He later left again for Iraq, where he was interviewed by a journalist for RTL, a French radio show, while in a training camp for jihadists. On the show, he proclaimed:

*Je suis de Paris 19e! Tous mes potes dans le 19e je leur dis venez faire le jihad! Je suis prêt à me faire exploser, mettre des dynamites et boum boum!* (Digiacomì, 2016).

I am from the 19<sup>th</sup> in Paris! I am telling all my friends in the 19<sup>th</sup> to come do the Jihad! I am ready to blow myself up, put out dynamite, and boom boom!

El Hakim encouraged the youth from the 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement to come fight “the war” with him. His message was heard by some youth, the Kouachi brothers being among them, who later left to train for the jihad. It was the beginning of the destructive path taken by the Kouachi brothers that led to the attacks of January 2015. The violent message was heard by those marginalized Muslim youth. Where the Republican

schools failed to reach them, the fundamentalist Muslim El Hakim succeeded. El Hakim provided a space where they felt they belonged unlike the French society that viewed and treated them as others. Their voices for the first time were heard throughout the world, through their bloody attack of Charlie Hebdo, a journal representing a symbol of freedom of speech. By shedding light on how Muslim youth currently perceive their identity also is important to understand why they feel marginalized. Thus, highlighting the importance of place such as youth organizations for the youth to belong but also for their voices to be heard and respected as French citizens and an integral part of the French society. Mentors are also important to be the bridge between the Republic and the disenfranchised Muslim youth, while promoting a sense of belonging to the Republic (Jouanneau, 2016).

Four days later in a TV interview, El Hakim declared:

*Je viens de France, on va tuer les Américains! On va tuer tout le monde, nous! Je vis en France, moi! Allahû akbar!* (Suc, 2016).

I am from France. We are going to kill the Americans! We are going to kill everybody! I live in France! Allah Akbar!

A decade later he was able to put his plan in motion through the Kouachi brothers.

Because they had been marginalized by the French society, he was able to reach them and manipulate them into committing those heinous acts.

The lack of belonging physically, educationally, and socially created this entryway for these extreme fundamentalists to manipulate already vulnerable young men.

In 2005, El Hakim was arrested and sent back to France where he continued his work with the network. He is seen as a hero who actually fought the jihad (Suc, 2016; Thiolay, 2015). He was arrested in 2005 and convicted in 2008 to serve ten years incarcerated. While in prison El Hakim continued his work as a jihadist training fellow inmate (Suc, 2016). Released in 2011, he left to go live in Tunisia, his

parents' birthplace, after the fall of the regime of Tunisian president Ben Ali. He became the leader of the commando unit dedicated to perpetrating terrorist attacks in France. He is presumed to be behind the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, in part as a result of his longstanding connection and influence on the Kouachi brothers, as well as the November 13 terrorist attacks. He was killed by an American Drone in Syria in December 2016 (Digiacomì, 2016; Suc, 2016).

**Chérif and Saïd Kouachi, the perpetrators.** The Kouachi brothers were born in the 1980s to Algerian parents. They grew up in the 19th arrondissement of Paris at 156 Aubervilliers Street. This neighborhood is where the Kouachi brothers, Chérif and Saïd, spent their childhood before moving away after the death of their mother (Lebourg, 2015). The decaying tower was known to be a pedophiles' lair. Young children would hang around in the parking garage, their parents unable to look after them (Lebourg, 2015). The Kouachi brothers and their other siblings would often be left without supervision by their mother, while she was trying to make ends meet, sometimes resorting to prostitution (Lebourg, 2015). Two of the five children had already been placed in the foster care system.

Evelyne, one of the residents of the tower, remembers the Kouachi brothers. She recounted witnessing a particular incident when one of the building managers asked Chérif to drop on his knees to apologize (Lebourg, 2015). The Kouachi brothers became orphans at an early age. Chérif and his brother one day discovered their mother dead from a drug overdose (Lebourg, 2015). Now orphans, Chérif and Saïd were sent alongside their little brother and sister to a youth center specializing in isolated foreign youth in Southwestern France. Thus, most of their upbringing was



under the guidance of the French government and the Republican school. They did not grow up in a radicalized household as it is often believed.

The Republican school instilled the values of the Republic in them “liberty, equality, brotherhood”. The French government had a big influence on their upbringing yet decades later they would commit an attack against a Journal, which displayed a value upheld by the Republic that of freedom of speech. Why would the Kouachi brothers, who did not grow up in a radicalized household but were raised with French values through the republican school, later become terrorists? When thinking of their identity did they perceive themselves as French or did they perceive themselves as Muslim with the ethnic background of their parents. The perception of Muslim youth of their identity can give a possible explanation for the lack of allegiance to the French republic from the Kouachi brothers. Given the treatments of Muslim youth by the Republican schools and its agents we can begin to understand why the Kouachi brothers turned to others who embraced them fully. Why would disenfranchised youth have allegiance to a country that mistreat them and treat them as second-class citizens all the while promoting Frenchness and Oneness, effectively excluding them from those ideals?

At the beginning of the 2000s, they returned to Paris, where they started attending meetings with a group of young *salafis* under the leadership of Farid Benyettou, whose practice and views of Islam were more rigoristic following Wahhabism (Pelletier, 2015). They would train at the *Parc Les Buttes Chaumont* in order to later join Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Chérif was arrested in January 2005 on his way to Syria (Pelletier, 2015; Samuel and Sawyer, 2015). In 2008, Chérif was convicted of associating with criminals for a terrorist enterprise and sentenced to three years in

prison with 18 months suspended. He was released as he already served his time between 2005 and 2006 while in preventive custody (Samuel and Sawyer, 2015). During his imprisonment, Chérif met Djamel Beghal. Beghal was serving a ten-year sentence for his part in plotting an attack against the US embassy in Paris. He also met Salim Benghalem, a French national of Algerian descent, and one of the US's most wanted international terrorists (Samuel and Sawyer, 2015). Unlike his brother Chérif, Saïd Kouachi was only in police custody for his link with the network and was never convicted. He later flew to Yemen in 2011 to receive military training with Al-Qaeda Yemen.

The Kouachi brothers were under the surveillance of the French and US secret governmental agencies, and their surveillance by the French authorities ended six months before the attacks due to lack of evidence (Arfi, 2015). On January 7, 2015, the Kouachi brothers would carry out the *Charlie Hebdo* attack and kill 12 people.

Often when such an atrocity occurs, the background of the perpetrators is closely scrutinized; the family is seen as “other” and not properly integrated into the French society as Polonska-Kimunguyi and Gillespie (2016) stated: “Having been born in Paris made the two brothers French citizens, a fact never mentioned by F24<sup>7</sup> in the period covered. Instead, frequent references to their ‘Algerian origin’ and status of ‘offspring of Algerian parents’ (*France 24*, 2015) portrayed them as foreign” (p. 575).

Noteworthy is the fact that the brothers born of Algerian parents were orphaned and raised by different French institutions (Lebourg, 2015). Therefore, the Republican school had an influence on their upbringing. Thus, is it important to look at ways the Republican school can help students feel less marginalized and more a

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<sup>7</sup> *France 24 an International news program.*

part of the French society. Welch and Perivolaris (2016) observed that “The terrorists’ gesture in carrying out the attacks was to bring back home the globalized conflict of terrorism and insurgency, opening up a front of that battle at the heart of their own country; but in doing so as French citizens, they simultaneously raised the question precisely of their own sense of identity, locatedness and attachment to the place of their birth” (p. 281). In a post 9/11 era, terrorism has been mostly linked to Islam and by extension to Muslims and Arabs, now representing a negative “Other” (Nurullah, 2010, p. 1022). Views of Muslims in the Western world were impacted.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The events of January 2015 deeply impacted Muslims. Muslims are constantly asked to justify themselves for attacks they did not commit but are associated with, simply because of them sharing the same religion as the terrorists. They were also seemingly asked to condemn the attacks in order to prove their allegiance to the Republic. Disgruntled Muslims expressed their feelings about having to prove their allegiance, many pointing out that when a person from another community committed a heinous act, only the individual was held responsible and not the entire community. Guérolé (2015) pointed out that “To specifically demand that Muslims in France, condemn this act is to lock up these French people in religious labeling. It is therefore to look at them from a non-republican perspective” (paras. 4).

It is to look at them as Muslims and not as French citizens whose religion is Islam. It is to further marginalize them as not being an integral part of the French society because of their faith. Postcolonial theory offers a different theoretical perspective to address the dislocation of Eurocentrism in predominant ideas of Western, identity, culture, science, and education (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin.,

1995). Postcolonial theory's concepts of otherization, hybridity, subaltern etc. can be used to explain this societal phenomenon. Critical race theory allows us to look at the construct of race and racism in the French society. Two tenets are particularly interesting when studying this phenomenon. The first tenet is "racism is ordinary not aberrational" (p. 7). Color blindness makes it difficult to challenge racism as it insists on the fact that everyone receives equal treatment regardless of color. For example, in France ethnic data that mention the race of the participants is forbidden. France looks at its citizens through the concept of Frenchness and not race. However, at the same time France practices "Differential racialization" (p. 9). Muslims is the minority group that is seen as a problem compared to other minorities mostly based on their faith. When some Muslims refuse to conform, some French politicians, philosophers and commoners alike strongly voiced their opinion about the failure of assimilation to the French society of those Muslims. Muslim youth were not spared from the public opprobrium. In the French Republican school, the refusal to do the minute of silence of an 8-year child was not seen as the rebellious act of a child but the overt action of a future potential terrorist. Their allegiance to France is questioned. Are they well integrated into the French society? Is them being Muslim a sign of anti-Frenchness? The problem is how this same youth perceive their cultural identity in the light of the events. "Perception is like a set of lenses through which an individual views reality. These lenses evolve from perspectives of location, subjectivity, particularity, history, embodiment, contradiction, and the web of teachings imparted to the individual" (Munhall, 2008). As a research examining perception allows us to understand the meaning of the participants' live experiences. Through their voices one can begin to understand "multiple realities that are socially constructed based on these

perceptions” (Munhall, 2008) How do they feel about their French identity while maintaining their Muslim faith and identity? How do they feel about the treatments they receive in the aftermath of the attacks? Studies specifically investigating this explosive situation are scarce if non-existent given the fact that it is a current situation that is still unfolding. Studies giving voices to the Muslim youth in a post Charlie Hebdo Île de France and most particularly from the same neighborhood of the perpetrators of the attacks do not exist.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the negotiation of Muslim youth identity in a post-Charlie Hebdo France. This qualitative study also examined the effect of the attacks on educational policies.

While being interviewed on National Public Radio (NPR), Karen Greensberg (2017) explained:

OK. So, let's be clear. Eighty percent of the individuals involved in these terrorist plots or wanting to go abroad are U.S. citizens. Sixty percent of them are U.S.-born, and 40 percent of them are converts. So, in other words, this is a homegrown issue. And we need to address the fact that there are - there is a wide swath with different ethnicities, different nationalities, different religions that are attracted to the message of ISIS. And we need to nip this in the bud earlier. We need to take care of these individuals when they're younger. Many of them start to go down this road when they're teens. And we need to focus here and begin to think about this in an ameliorative way if we're going to truly feel safe in our country (2017).

Therefore, it is important to study Muslims' youth and their identity formation as many terrorists are homegrown terrorists. It is also important to look at the impact the educational system and the educational policies have on fueling resentment amongst Muslim youth.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This present study was grounded in two theories: postcolonial theory and critical race theory. Looking at France colonial past and its influence on its ancient colonies through the prism of Postcolonial theory allows us to take a closer look at the “the ongoing significance of the colonial encounter for people’s live both in the west and the non-west” (Prasad, 2003, p. 3). The descendants of the immigrants from the ancient French colonies are still considered as others when they are asked to be integrated into the French society in which they were born.

This study sought to understand how otherization has an influence on Muslim youth perception of their identity through the prism of postcolonial theory. This study also aimed to give a voice to these Muslim youth using critical race theory. Its key constructs of identity and culture also offers a way to understand identity perception by Muslim youth.

### ***Postcolonial Theory***

Postcolonial studies draw on critical theory in order to comprehend and analyze the loss of power, culture, and identity when a group of people is subjected to the dominance of another group. The West’s colonization, imperialism, and decolonization served as a basis, even though today it has been expanded to include a multiplicity of racial, geographical, and cultural contexts and histories.

Postcolonial theory seeks to criticize what is considered to be the “traditional” value system and epistemology from which western philosophy, politics, education, and social-economic concepts draw their source. The “othering” of the dominated cultures resulted from the interaction of the colonizer and the colonized as well as the feeling of superiority commonly exhibited in the colonizer, as “some groups, when they have become large and powerful, have set out to prove that their superiority

gives them the right over the material possessions and even the lives of others” (Ada & Compoy, 2004, p. 16). Postcolonial theory today is applied in different fields such as anthropology, education, literature, history, and so forth to shed light on matters of poverty, race, and inequalities, as well as the loss of cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge including language. Postcolonial theory aims to disrupt and resist imperialism and colonialism (Crossley & Tickly, 2004, p. 148). In other words, it offers a different theoretical perspective to address the dislocation of Eurocentrism in predominant ideas of Western, identity, culture, science, and education (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin., 1995). Postcolonial theory can also help explain a societal phenomenon but cannot predict it. Postcolonial theory “comprises instead a related set of perspectives, which are juxtaposed against one another, on occasion contradictorily” (Young, 2003, pp. 6-7).

Postcolonial theory thus considers different viewpoints and power relations among people who have been oppressed:

Postcolonial theory represents a complex field of study, encompassing an array of matters that include issues such as identity, gender, race, racism, and ethnicity...focuses on exploding knowledge systems underpinning colonialism, neocolonialism, and various forms of oppression and exploitation present today...challenges epistemic violence; that is, it questions the undervaluing, destruction, and appropriation of colonized people’s knowledge and ways of knowing, including the colonizer’s use of that knowledge against them to serve the colonizer’s interests. Postcolonial theory therefore offers a critique of imperial knowledge systems and languages and how they are circulated and legitimated and how they serve imperial interests. (Lunga, 2008, p. 193).

It is also important to note that postcolonial theory is not a methodological framework solely used to analyze socio-historical phenomena, since *post-* may suggest such. Indeed, while attaching the prefix *post-* to colonial can indicate significant breaks in consciousness and subjectivities, for me the term lacks the

political and historical referents to the powerful social movements of the anti-colonial and masks the significant continuities in the history of violence and capitalist exploitation in the modern, modernizing, and late modern worlds. While it is necessary that the culture and politics of late modern and neoliberal racial and gender formations be understood in all their contemporary specificity, I would argue for the need to simultaneously name, locate, and analyze these formations as the historical legacies of colonialism and imperialism (Carby, 2007, p. 215).

Noteworthy are the different topics addressed by authors who use a postcolonial framework. It encompasses matters “of slavery, migration and diaspora formation; the effects of race, culture, class, and gender in postcolonial settings; histories of resistance and struggle against colonial and neo-colonial domination; the complexities of identity formation and hybridity; language and language rights; the ongoing struggles of indigenous peoples for recognition of their rights” (Crossley & Tickly, 2004, p. 148). There are several key postcolonial terms. Given the topic of this dissertation and the literature review, the following terms will be explored:

(1) hybridity, (2) other/othering, (3) subaltern, (4) language, (5) ethnicity, (6) identity, (7) culture, and (8) cultural education.

In their book *Post Colonial Studies: The Key terms Second Edition* Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2007) explore the different key terms in postcolonial studies:

*Hybridity* is defined as one of the most contested word in post-colonial studies. It refers to the creation of new transcultural forms in the “Third Space of Enunciation” (p. 109). In this “Third Space” a new cultural identity that is a mix between the colonized culture and the colonizer’s culture emerges.



*Other/Othering* are two interconnected process according to Ashcroft et al. *Other* is defined as a person who is “separate from one’s self” (p. 154). The colonized person is “other” in the eye of the colonizer. *Othering* is the process by which colonizers create its “others” (p. 156) Ashcroft et al. (2007) further state “the construction of the O/other is fundamental to the construction of the Self” (p. 156).

*Subaltern* refers to those who are “inferior in rank” (p. 198). Those who have been othered, i.e., the colonized are viewed as “subaltern” by the colonizers.

*Language* is both a tool of colonization and the tool of resistance. Colonizers used their language to assimilate and colonized the population they encountered. In some instances, children were beaten for speaking their native language. Language then became a tool of resistance for some colonized people. It is a way to affirm oneself to be close to their ethnic culture.

*Ethnicity* is defined as the culture, tradition, language, social pattern, and ancestry of a group (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 75). The authors powerfully state “a person’s ethnic group is such a powerful identifier because while he or she chooses to remain in it, it is an identity that cannot be denied, rejected, or taken away by others. Whereas race emerged as a way of establishing a hierarchical division between Europe and its “others,” identifying people according to fixed genetic criteria, ethnicity is usually deployed as an expression of a positive self-perception that offers certain advantages to its members” (p. 75)

This dissertation will also look at the data through the prism of critical race theory.

### ***Critical Race theory***

Critical race theory (CRT) is also used to inform the present study. CRT is concerned with “empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender” (Creswell, 2012). CRT specifically focused on the construct of race and racism in the American society. However, CRT can be applied to any society where race and racism play an important role within the framework of a particular society. There is a popular saying sometimes attributed to Winston Churchill, though no one can prove for sure he actually said it, that goes “history is written by the victors.” The following African proverb is in the same spirit: “until the lion has his own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story.” CRT aims to give people of color a voice that is often unheard. It helps depict a more accurate picture of a story and therefore may help “shatter the complacency that may accompany such privilege and challenge the dominant discourses that serve to suppress people on the margins of society” (Creswell, 2012, pp. 31-32). Through CRT one seeks not only to “explain the experiences of people of color [but also] offer transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination in our societal and institutional structures” (Creswell, 2012, p. 32).

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) laid out the basic tenets of CRT:

- The first tenet is “racism is ordinary not aberrational” (p. 7). Color blindness makes it difficult to challenge racism as it insists on the fact that everyone receives equal treatment regardless of color. For example, in France ethnic data that mention the race of the participants is forbidden. France looks at its citizens through the concept of Frenchness and not race. Race is erased as it is incompatible with the French Republic’s values.

- The second tenet is “interest convergence or material determinism” (p. 8). Racism benefits most White people regardless of their socioeconomic. Therefore, there is little incentive to change things except if it will benefit them. France was and still is to some extent a colonial empire. It benefits from its former colonies’ immense resources. To continue profiting it is in the best interest of the French nation to promote commonness and maintain the former colonies in a state of subalternism. The *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF) or simply La Francophonie is an organization “influenced by the quest of leaders of Francophone countries for an organizational framework for its member states. As its heritage is more cultural than political in nature, la Francophonie is essentially a matter of values permeating a culture or of a language as a unifying force”. (as cited in Mason, 1999)
- The third tenet is “Race and racism are products of social thoughts and relations” (p. 8). There is no scientific basis to support the construct of race.
- The fourth tenet is “Differential racialization” (p. 9). It is the way the dominant society will racialize different minority groups at different times based on their needs. France like many other countries reinforces the distinction between the different minorities. Asian minorities are often seen as the minority model whereas minorities from the African diaspora are seen as problematic.
- The last tenet is “a unique voice of color” (p. 10). The narratives of minorities offer a unique and powerful way to describe their experiences on race and racism with their white counterparts.

**CRT Key Constructs.** Through the lens of critical race theory, the topic at hand can be investigated, and young Muslim participants can be given a voice where they can tell their story and their perspective on the matter. Two CRT key constructs important for the study are *Identity* and *Culture*.

***Identity:*** Identity is a recurrent topic in postcolonial theory and more specifically the notion of *self*. Identity is the way an individual or a group of people defines itself. It is important when it comes to the concept of *self*, social values, and national understanding. It includes both essentialism and othering. In colonial discourse the “self is “coherent, bounded, individualized, intentional, the locus of thought, action, and belief, the origin of its own actions, the beneficiary of a unique biography” (Rose 1998, p. 3). However, CRT and postcolonial theory challenges this notion of *self* and attempts to offer a different understanding of the concept of *self*. Young Muslims must navigate through different identities such as “border-crossing identity, transnational identity, hyphenated identity, hybridity, double consciousness, and multiple negotiated identities” (Tindongan, 2011, p. 75).

***Culture:*** The concept of culture has evolved over time and holds different meanings in different disciplines. For the purpose of this study the concept of culture was viewed from a sociological standpoint. It was engaged as the ways of thinking, speaking, acting, and the material objects that together shape a people’s way of life. (Macionis & Gerber, 2010).

### **Research Questions**

Most of the terrorist attacks in France were perpetrated by French nationals who were attracted to Jihad. Those French nationals grew up in France with the values of the French Republic. They received a French education in a system

promoting Frenchness and loyalty to its Republic. How did they become terrorists?

Why do they feel more allegiance toward the Islamic State than to the French nation?

As such, this study posed the following questions:

1. How do Muslim youth construct their cultural identity?
2. What is the impact of *laïcité* in the construction of Muslim youth identity?
3. How did the terrorist attacks impact Muslims' lived experiences?
4. How do the terrorist attacks impact educational policies?

### **Rationale and Significance of the Study**

There are relatively few empirical studies available regarding French Muslim youth's school and lived experiences following the terrorist attacks of 2015. Further there has been no study investigating the effects of the ongoing terrorist attacks since January 2015 on young Muslims in France. Most of the published literature on identity negotiation of young Arab Muslim in France remains mainly conceptual. This qualitative research was developed in an effort to provide empirical data on young Muslims in France. In addition, there are few if none, studies concentrating specifically on young Muslims attending or who attended secondary schools in the 19th arrondissement, the hometown of the Kouachi brothers. The study aimed to shed light on the experience of young Muslims attending or who attended a secondary school in a secular society such as France post January 2015.

The study will contribute to the understanding of identity negotiation of young Muslims in a post-Charlie Hebdo France.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

For the purpose of this study, I made the following assumptions. First, participants would willingly participate in the study. I assumed that participants would

respond truthfully to the interview questions. To increase the possibility of truthful responses, participants would be guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

Pseudonyms assigned to participants would be used instead of any identifying information. I assumed that young Muslims could be given a voice where they could tell their story and their perspective on the matter. Lastly, I presumed that the terrorist attacks of January 2015 were and continue to be disruptive to education and the teaching and learning process and have had an impact on the negotiation of identity of young Muslims as well as educational policies.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study was limited to Muslim youth attending or who attended a secondary school in the 19th arrondissement and who lived in the 19th arrondissement at the time of the interview. This study focused on French-born Muslims of African immigrant descent (Maghreb and sub-Saharan). Muslims of other origins were not directly relevant to the present study. It is also important to note that this study could only focus on participants 18 years and older. At first, this study intended to focus on middle school aged students. However, obtaining permission from the schools was extremely difficult because of the sensitive nature of the study. Despite multiple attempts to contact the schools to allow for the study to take place in their establishments they simply refused to respond to my requests. When I contacted one of the schools directly the secretary told me to not insist any further and to not be surprised if they were not responding given the nature of the topic and the unwillingness to speak about it.

## **Summary**

As France attempts to cope with recent tragic events, the country faces many challenges. One of these challenges is its response to Islam. Islam has always been a complicated question for France; however, the events of January and November 2015 have exacerbated the issue. France, through the Republican school, aims to reaffirm the republican principles and most particularly *laïcité*. The challenges to teaching the values of the Republic and the French national identity while facing an ever-increasing diversity remain the task of teachers. Young Muslims find themselves at a crossroads, facing multiple challenges as well such as integration, assimilation, their religious beliefs, and their cultural affiliation, all the while navigating a hostile social and political climate. The goal of my study is to give a voice to this disenfranchised youth, while demonstrating the importance to establish a dialogue between Muslim youth where their voices are heard by the French Republic and most specifically the Republican school.

## **Organization of the Study**

The organization of this dissertation is as follows:

Chapter I: Introduction of the context in which the terrorist attacks took place. The chapter introduces the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, key terms and the research questions.

Chapter II: Literature Review focuses on the historical background of France that led to this complex situation. It also provides the scholarly background for the study while showing the gaps in the literature that this study aimed to help fill.

Chapter III: Methods detail how the study was conducted along with information

about participants. It examines qualitative case study methodology and the importance of this methodology for this inquiry. I then discuss the data analysis processes. I also tackle the role and background of the researcher. I also discuss subjectivity, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Chapters IV A and IV B: Findings and Analysis is a presentation of findings, results, and analyses.

Chapter V: Discussion and Implications for Practice is reviewed to give meaning to the findings, results, and analyses, and their implications for future research on topic of Muslim youth identity.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

The aim of my study is to investigate the negotiation of a Muslim youth identity and their educational as well as lived experiences following the terrorist attacks of January 2015 in France. In this chapter, the literature on French schooling sheds light on how the ideology of the French Republican school reinforces the concept of universalism, thus effectively erasing cultural differences in the school context. Following this discussion, the literature on French national identity will be reviewed in order to further understand how the nation of liberty, equality, fraternity and its core principle of universalism is also known for its long-standing tradition of welcoming immigrants whose lived realities contradict this notion of universalism. Next, this chapter discusses colonization and immigration and its place in the national curriculum. This chapter concludes with a review of the literature on Muslim youth identity and identifications of gaps and limitations in the literature.

#### **The French Revolution of 1789 and its Legacies**

In order to grasp the concept of *laïcité*, French national identity, or *Frenchness*, and the concept of the Republican school, an understanding of the philosophical outcomes of the French Revolution is essential.

#### ***Laïcité***

The *siècles des lumières* (Centuries of Enlightenment) in France marked a turning point in the history of France. Intellectuals sought to undermine the Old Regime and its centuries of privileges and social inequity, by overthrowing the absolute monarchy as well as the influence of the Catholic Church (Kuru, 2009). Even though “the aim of the Revolution was not, as once was thought, to destroy the

authority of the Church and religious faith in general” (De Tocqueville, 1955, p. 19), it did effectively reduce the authority of the Catholic Church. However, the monarchy and the Church formed one ruling entity with the monarchy being considered the *fille aînée de l’église* [elder daughter of the Church]. Intellectuals at the time sought to create a secular democratic form of government that would encompass the concepts of equality, liberty, and inalienable rights. Nevertheless, the separation of the Church and State was still not fully complete. In an attempt to regulate the Church, the National Constituent Assembly passed the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790. This statute aimed to establish a church subordinated to the State rather than the Pope, as seen in Title II, Article XXI:

Before the ceremony of consecration begins, the bishop elect shall take a solemn oath, in the presence of the municipal officers, of the people, and of the clergy, to guard with care the faithful of his diocese who are confided to him, to be loyal to the nation, the law, and the king, and to support with all his power the constitution decreed by the National Assembly and accepted by the king (Robinson, 1904, p. 425). The Concordat of 1801 acknowledged the Catholic faith as the religion of the great majority of French people. However, the State had the control over the nomination of the bishops and would pay clerical salaries (Goyau, 1908).

The Law of 1905 marked the absolute separation of the Church and State as article 2 noted, “The Republic does not recognize, remunerate or subsidize any religion” (The Senate, 1905). Furthermore, the law granted the State the right to control and ultimately have power over the religions. Even though it granted the liberty to express one’s belief, it also sought to protect the people from religious control. Religious groups had to register as an *association cultuelles* (“religious” association) and were submitted to strict regulations (Association cultuelles, 1905).

Interestingly the law of 1905 currently does not apply to Alsace-Lorraine, which was at the time a territory of the German empire. The law of 1905 established total French secularism, or *laïcité*. French secularism particularly in education is viewed as incompatible with Muslim students' Faith. Later, it would translate into a ban on any religious sign specifically targeting the headscarves worn by Muslim female students. If they refused to remove their headscarves, they were denied entry to school further marginalizing them.

### **The Republican School**

The principles of the French Republic and its concepts of *laïcité*, universalism, and assimilation are best conveyed by the Republican school.

The Republican school would become the guarantor of *laïcité* and the vector of the concepts of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* [liberty, equality, brotherhood]. It is “an instrument of the secular state for the public education of the future citizens, where all religious symbols are banned and public spirit should be taught...The public school is then meant to produce French citizens and not the citizens of a multiethnic polity” (Galeotti, 1993, p. 592). The debate over the mission and centrality of schools began during the Revolution of 1789.

From the Constituent Assembly, three reports—de Talleyrand, de Condorcet, and de Le Pelletier—influenced the modern conception of the French Republican school. De Condorcet was the first one to propose a free, secular public education, stating that “instruction should be universal ... [and] distributed with all the equality which available resources allow” (Condorcet, 1792). However, it was not until the appointment of Jules Ferry as the minister of Public Instruction that school became free, mandatory and secular. Ferry replaced religious instruction by courses on

morality. Nonetheless, Ferry was not anti-religious and thus offered a school-free day for students' need for religious instruction (Kuru, 2009, p. 146).

### ***A highly centralized system***

From the French Revolution of 1789, the Republican school inherited a highly centralized organization. The universalistic principle of the Republic is thought to best promote equality and a strong French identity. However, the notion the French have of equality can, according to Limaje (2000) deepen inequalities as the notion of equality progressively comes to mean that all citizens confronted by a similar situation should be treated identically under the law... This critical definition has a basic weakness. The concept of equality before the law has had little impact on reducing economic, social and cultural inequalities in France” (pp. 74-75). To remedy this situation and offer equality of opportunity, the *zones d'éducation prioritaires* (ZEP) (educational priority zone) were created in 1981. Today ZEP have been replaced by REP and REP+— “*Réseau d'éducation prioritaire*” [priority education network]; nonetheless, the term ZEP remains widely used in the educational system when referring to those programs. Schools located in ZEPs are usually allocated additional teachers and security personnel; they also have a greater autonomy. However, the Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche (2012) noted that ZEPs were not effective, mostly benefitting teachers rather than students. Moreover, a process of decentralization starting in the 1990s sought to facilitate the management of the school system at the micro level. Regional and local governments were thus given more autonomy to deal with local issues and provide tailored solutions. Nonetheless, the State still decides and implements educational policies and the National Curriculum. The Kouachi brothers along with the disenfranchised youth received an education, where they were taught the morals

and values of the French Republic through a uniform national curriculum. Their history, their backgrounds, their parents' history was a footnote in French history books. Their uniqueness was never part of the curriculum. Those students could never see themselves reflected in this French curriculum. Postcolonial studies draw on critical theory in order to comprehend and analyze the loss of power, culture, and identity when a group of people is subjected to the dominance of another group such as Muslim youth are for example.

Postcolonial theory today is applied in different fields such as anthropology, education, literature, history, and so forth to shed light on matters of poverty, race, and inequalities, as well as the loss of cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge including language. Postcolonial theory aims to disrupt and resist imperialism and colonialism (Crossley & Tickly, 2004, p. 148). In other words, it offers a different theoretical perspective to address the dislocation of Eurocentrism in predominant ideas of Western, identity, culture, science, and education (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin., 1995).

Teachers, who are civil servants, are responsible for disseminating Republican values ensuring that young French pupils would develop a French identity and become active members of the French society. Limaje (2000) noted “the civil service is viewed as the best status for teachers to ensure that they remain independent of outside pressures, be they of passing political views, the voices of families or children or religious positions” (p. 75).

Teachers are paragons of knowledge trusted to instruct the National Curriculum, leaving “outside knowledge, experience and aspirations stop[ped] at the school door. Other concepts of the school’s responsibility to respond to the ‘whole’ child are simply not relevant to the prevalent French philosophy of

schooling/instruction” (Limaje, 2000, p. 80). Teachers are at the center of a centralized education system.

Their domain and position of power is the classroom. Teachers are to teach the future French citizens and thus the different cultural identities that can coexist in a classroom are erased to give place to the future French citizen. The curriculum taught is uniform and the same in every part of France and its ancient colonies that are now considered French regions. Thus, the little black girl in Guadeloupe whose ancestors were slaves brought to the island on slave ships will be taught that her ancestors were the Gauls, the original people of France. Evers (2013) sought to examine the impact of several initiatives led by the Minister of Education and local governments on French-Muslim youth in Marseille. The goal of those initiatives was to transform French-Muslim youth from disenfranchised projects into “secular, upwardly mobile individuals” (p. 435). Two of those initiatives analyzed were the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in school in conjunction with Greek and Latin and as part of Mediterranean languages thus “impelling youth to replace their putative claims to Islamic personhood with a secular Greco-Roman model of personhood” (p. 438). The second initiative was the rebranding of MSA as an elite language, which could offer French-Muslim students from poor neighborhood a way to move upward. The study included students aged 11-14 years old as well as their teachers. The academic inspector was also interviewed. Evers (2013) found that those initiatives was an attempt to erase French-Muslim students’ religious affiliations and their modest social status. Those initiatives were in direct contrast with how those students perceived themselves and understood their identities. Thus, raising concerns from the French state, who linked French-Muslim youth with local criminal and terrorist activities (p. 438)

### *Laïcité and the headscarf debate*

A controversy arose in 1989 when three female Muslim students wore their veils to a public school in Creil. They were suspended by the principal and asked to remove their headscarves. The principal argued that a key objective of the school was to limit excessive external signs of religious or cultural belonging. In other words, students had to respect the secular aspect of the school. After much debate over the matter, the State Council decided in November 1989 that students were free ‘to express and manifest their religious beliefs within public institutions out of respect for pluralism, without infringing on educational activities of the curriculum and the obligation to attend class’ (Kastoryano, 2006, p. 59). However, a sharp turn was operated in 2003 with the Stasi commission:

The secular state, guarantor of freedom of conscience, protects not only freedom of religion and of speech but also the individual; it allows all to freely choose, or not, a spiritual or religious option, to change it, or to renounce it. It makes sure that no group, no community can impose on anyone a belonging or a denominational identity, especially because of his or her origins. (*Commission de Réflexion sur l’Application du Principe de Laïcité dans la République*, 2003, p. 14). The edict continued, noting that the expression of one’s cultural or religious identity should still be bound to the secular realm: the exacerbation of cultural identity should not become a fanatical defense of difference, bringing with it, oppression and exclusion. In a secular society, each person must be able to take some distance about tradition. That does not involve any renunciation of oneself but rather an individual act of liberty that allows one to define oneself in relation to one’s cultural and spiritual references without being subjected to them (p. 16). However, even though *laïcité* does not impede one from expressing his or her spiritual beliefs the report

emphasized: Beyond the status of religions, the requirement of *laïcité* also calls on everyone to work on him or herself.

Through secularism, the citizen gains protection of his freedom of conscience; in return, he must respect the public space that everyone can share. Demanding state neutrality does not seem very compatible with the display of an aggressive proselytism, particularly within the schools. Being willing to adapt the public expression of one's religious particularities and to set limits to the affirmation of one's identity allows everyone to meet in the public space (p. 16). In 2004, the legislation banning ostentatious religious signs in public schools was put to a vote. Even though this law applied to all religions, the law became known as the "headscarf ban" legislation, emphasizing the strong anti-Muslim implications of the law.

Those laws did nothing to bridge the gap between French-Muslim youth and the secular state. Andre, Mansouri and Lobo (2015) examined the Muslim youth through the lenses of Muslim religious leaders. Where did they received their religious education from? What role do they play as religious leaders while addressing a disenfranchised youth and minimizing the risk of radicalization? They argued that some French Muslims are able to navigate their French citizenship and their Muslim identity quite expertly, while others find it difficult to navigate between assimilating into a French secular state and their faith (p. 298). Andre et al. (2015) argued that this small minority, which is already marginalized did not find a way to reconcile their faith and migrant heritage with their French identity. Therefore, it gave rise to a certain religious revivalism, emphasizing the failure of the French state to connect with all its citizens. Instead "for the last 20 years, an imported Salafist proselytism has gained ground in France particularly among the young, disenfranchised Muslims of the banlieues and has preached and imposed stricter practices, such as wearing the



niqab for women” (Andre et al., 2015, p. 299). However, even if they advocate a stricter view of Islam only a small fraction will eventually become Jihadists. Farid Benyettou was this charismatic “religious” leader who led the Kouachi brothers to have a stricter vision of Islam and eventually led them on the path to Jihad.

Bucaille and Villechaise (2018) focused even further on Salafism and Muslim youth in France. In their study they analyzed nineteen interviews from young Muslims between the ages of 18 and 35 mostly from Algerian descent and to a lesser extent of Moroccan descent. They lived in the urban project of Bordeaux. The participants had a “Salifised” vision of Islam (p. 7) as well as set views on the wearing of the veil, food practices and their personal culture true to Islam principles. Their sense of belonging is aligned with the salifized vision. Their faith and its moral codes are at the center of their lives. At first it seems that the expression of those young Muslim’s faith is antithetic to the values of the Republic. However, Bucaille and Villechaise (2018), found that their faith act more as a form of political protest, challenging the inequalities and discrimination and the marginalization of Muslim youth face.

### ***Getting rid of substitute meal for Muslim student***

To go further to establish more firmly the principle of *laïcité*, some schools decided to remove substitute meals for children who do not eat pork. In a note sent to parents, the Mayor of Chilly-Mazarin and a member of the political party Les Républicains stated “La majorité municipale ne souhaite plus différencier la composition des repas en fonction d'un interdit religieux qui relève de la sphère privée

et familiale, en application du principe de *laïcité*<sup>8</sup> (*Une 3e ville*, 2015). The unilateral decision was taken before the beginning of the school year. The only exception to this rule would be in the case of a food allergy with a doctor's note to prove said allergy and in that case only could a substitute meal be served to the student. The mayor insisted on the fact that school lunches were not mandatory. Other mayors from the same political party also removed substitute meals on the same basis (Fischer & Le Goebel, 2015). However, in some instances the decision to remove the substitute meals was overturned by the tribunal on the basis that it was not in the best interest of the child (Feertchak, 2017).

### ***Multiculturalism and the Republican School***

The Republican school has a long tradition of being resistant to multiculturalism as the principle of French universalism prevailed (Bleich, 2000). During the immigration wave of the 1970s and 1980s the assimilationist concept became obsolete and marked the beginning of the differentialist turn (Brubaker, 2001, p. 531-532). Regions in France asked for the right to promote and strengthen regional languages and cultures. Anti-Racist groups also advocated “the right to difference” (Bleich, 2000, p. 59). Specifically, French born-citizens of North African descent reclaimed their ethnic identity launching several anti-racist marches where “the pendulum of antiracism appeared poised to swing toward an “American” model of ethnic identification and race - or ethnicity-conscious politics as national level *beur*<sup>9</sup> organizations sought to mobilize *beur* votes” (Bleich, 2000, p. 60). The children of Muslim immigrants who did not speak French could benefit from the *Enseignement*

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<sup>8</sup> The political majority do not wish to differentiate the composition of the meals based on a religious interdiction, which is a private family matter, anymore. This in an effort to apply the principle of *laïcité*.

<sup>9</sup> *Beur* is a colloquial term that refers to people whose parents are from the Maghreb.

*de langue et la culture d'origine* (ELCO) program (akin to Teaching Content in the Home Language) if they were a native of one of the countries participating in the program.

Countries represented in the ELCO program are Algeria, Croatia, Spain, Italy, Morocco, Serbia, Portugal, Tunisia, and Turkey (Eduscol, 2016). Those programs were set up with the goal of the return of the immigrants to their home countries and maintaining their home languages would facilitate their reintegration in their native countries (Sayad, 1991; Scott, 2007). However, the “right to difference” and differentialism did not continue. France reverted to an assimilationist approach trying to erase differences while promoting French universalism and a color-blind society to fight racism (Simon, 2006; Bleich, 2000).

### **Frenchness: Universalism and Assimilation**

The concept of a French national identity as understood today emerged during the French Revolution of 1789 and is rooted in French Republicanism. The Jacobin Club, one of the most famous political organizations during the Revolution of 1789 and known for its revolutionary ideas, advocated for a highly centralized Republican state as well as solid central powers (Rey, 1992). It laid the foundation for the concept of Republicanism, which was more explicitly expressed in the French Constitution of 1958 in Articles 1 and 2:

France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race, or religion. It shall respect all beliefs. It shall be organized on a decentralized basis...The principle of the Republic shall be government of the people, by the people and for the people.

Scott (2007) noted that in order to provide equality before the law “that equality is achieved, in French political theory, by making one’s social, religious, ethnic, and other origins irrelevant in the public sphere; it is as an abstract individual that one becomes a French citizen” (p. 11). Ernest Renan in his discourse “what is nation” states: one confounds the idea of race with that of the nation and attributes to ethnographic, or rather linguistic, groups a sovereignty analogous to that of actually existing peoples” (p. 1). In short, “the basic or global French ideology” is as powerful as it is simple, and devoid of concrete elements. At its base, it consists of a single principle: the human subject as universal” (Dumont, 1994, p. 201), thus making the precepts of *universalism* and *assimilation* two important aspects of French republicanism.

Universalism, the “oneness and sameness of all individuals...taken to be the antithesis of communalism” (Scott, 2007, p. 11), could be more specifically defined as

Knowledge, justice and personal development...found in the universal rather than the particular; that the progression should be away from particular facts towards universal laws, away from particular judgments towards general principles, away from one's "parochial" origins towards a cosmopolitan sensibility or the universal fellowship of the human spirit” (Boyle, 2000, p. 1).

Therefore, this notion of French national identity or “Frenchness” requires more than immigrants’ simply integrating the French society into their own lives, but rather completely assimilating into the French society in order to become French. National identity prevails over group or religious identity and is achieved “not simply by swearing allegiance to the nation but by assimilating to the norms of its culture” (Scott, 2007, p. 13). Immigration patterns altered the ethnic composition of the French population as well as the religious landscape of France. Islam became the second religion of France. Interestingly, for Muslims to assimilate to the French society while

retaining their faith, the government created the concept of *French Islam* to further establish their Frenchness.

### **Frenchness and African Immigration**

In order to gain a better understanding of the current presence of Muslims in France and their status in the French society, it is important to look at African immigration patterns. It is estimated that France's total immigrant population is around 11.8 million people, of which 4 million are from the Maghreb and 1 million from sub-Saharan Africa (Borrel & Lhommeau, 2010). Political and economic immigration started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the Industrial Revolution, mainly attracting immigrants from Europe. Political refugees fleeing totalitarian regimes found a safe haven in France (Hassell, 1991). Immigrants looking for better economic opportunities also found France to be an attractive place as with World War I and World War II the need for labor force increased. The immigration of African immigrants was facilitated by colonization. As a matter of fact, as colonial possessions, France could draw upon this readily available source of labor (Alba & Silberman, 2002).

Algeria most particularly was an important source of immigration as it was part of the departmental structure of France, and almost 2 million Algerians had migrated to France by 1954 (Alba & Silberman, 2002). France exercised its control over Algeria, deciding policies that would further promote the assimilation of Algeria. For the French State, Algerians were French (Bradford, 1999). The French military adopted a policy of forced assimilation where “the Algerian people were characterized as ‘Muslim French,’ Algerian towns were infused with French-style architecture, and there was a high degree of linguistic acculturation” (Wiles, 2007, p. 704), including “the removal of the veil...an essential step in the French nationalist agenda to make

Algeria French, for the veil was a visible barrier to the establishment of French “indivisibility” (Bradford, 1999, p. 127).

The Algerian war of independence marked a turning point in the history of French colonialism leaving both sides with deep-seated feelings of resentment. To this day, the bitterness between French and Algeria persists. During the 2014 World Cup of soccer, Marine Le Pen, the president of *the National Front* (a French ultra-conservative political party) advocated for the withdrawal of the double nationality of French citizens of Algerian descent. The most affected population was the *Harkis*, those Algerians who worked for and fought with the French during the war. Once the independence was won, the *Harkis* sought asylum in France, where they were placed in camps sometimes for more than 20 years. The children of *Harkis*, who had fought for the French, had to attend separate school, and were segregated from French children including immigrant children of Algerian descents (Limaje, 2000).

Immigration from Morocco and Tunisia was a more recent phenomenon starting in the 1960s and occurring on a much smaller scale. Unlike Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia were simply protectorates. These countries benefited from greater autonomy and thus were subjected to French assimilation policy to a lesser degree with the consequence “of the development of an indigenous *petite bourgeoisie* in both protectorates, a stratum that proved to be fertile soil for nationalism” (Alba & Silberman, 2002, p. 1174). Besides, immigrants from Morocco and Tunisia were often from a different socio-economic category than Algerians. When they migrated to France, they were more likely to become small business owners (Limaje, 2000).

The immigration of sub-Saharan Africans also occurred on a much smaller scale. Like Algerians, they were most likely to be recruited during the war such as the *tirailleurs sénégalais* (Senegalese infantrymen). Bass (2014) rightly stated, “sharing

French language, culture, and political history has left former colonies with similar French institutional forms and ways of functioning (e.g., education, government) that facilitate immigration to and integration within France” (p. 23).

### **Views of Muslims in France Since 2015**

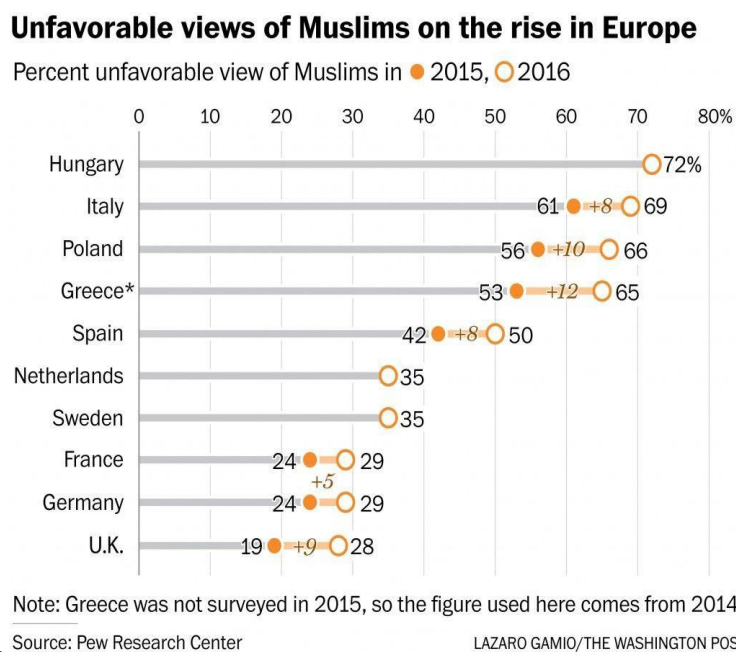
There are an estimated four to five million Muslims living in France. The presence of Muslim immigrants in France is complicated historically (as a result of events such as the Algerian War and the Harkis<sup>10</sup>) and currently by socio-geopolitical events and movements including the attacks of January 7, 2015, colonialism (1534-1980), the Arab Spring (2010-2012) and the migration of 20,258 Tunisians between January and March 2011 the majority of whom hoping to join France where they have family (Boubakri and Spot, 2013, p. 11), globalization and transnationalism. Anti-Islamic sentiments have always existed in France however, it was crystallized by the 2015 attacks. Public disdain became more widespread, obvious, and vehement. In the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks of January 2015, Manuel Valls, member of the Socialist Party in France and Prime Minister of France at that time, surprisingly declared in June 2015 during an interview, “we cannot lose this war because it is a war of civilizations. It is our society, our civilization and our values that we are defending” (Associated French Press, 2015). This declaration by the Prime Minister who is a member of the Socialist Party was rather surprising as it was the same concept used by the ex-Republican French president Nicolas Sarkozy, whose values are in total opposition with the Socialist Party. However, Manuel Valls’ sentiments were reflected in an uptick of the unfavorable views of Muslims within the

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<sup>10</sup>During the Algerian War (1954-1962) the Harkis, Algerians who fought alongside France to preserve the colonial system in place were in danger after the end of the War many moved to France to avoid persecutions.

French population and across some European countries. In fact, the Pew Research Center in the United States revealed that unfavorable views of Muslims were on the rise in Europe (See Figure 1). It was observed that France, while being perceived as one of the more tolerant nations while being also greatly indifferent on matters of multiculturalism and diversity (Taylor, 2016), showed a small increase of 5% in their negative views of Muslims between 2015 and 2016.

Figure 1  
*Unfavorable Views of Muslims on the Rise in Europe*

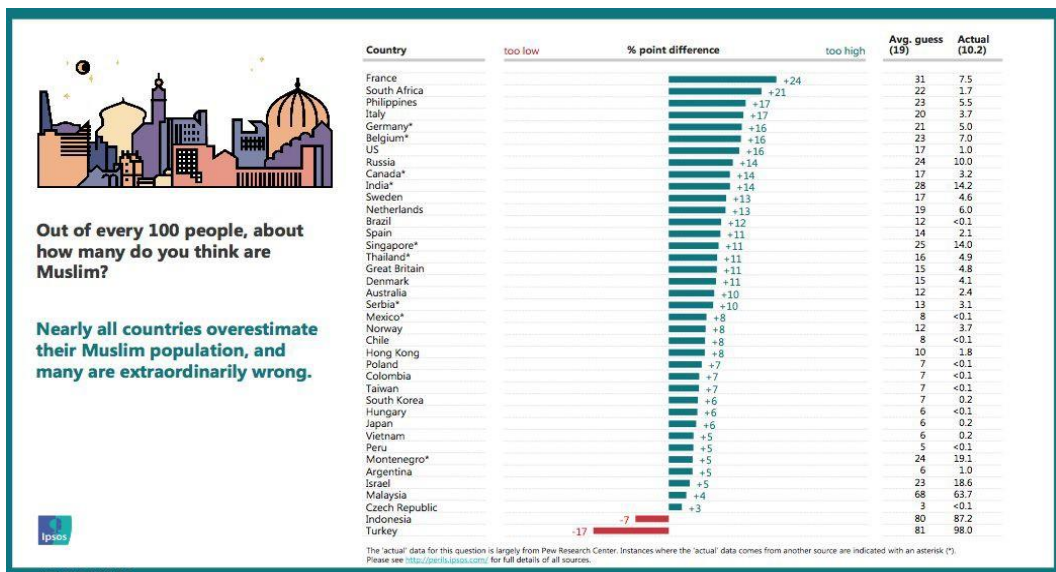


However, polls conducted by Ipsos, an opinion poll institute in France, presents another view. In 2016, Ipsos published the results of a survey: *Perceptions Are Not Reality: What the World Gets Wrong*. The survey was conducted in 40 countries and included questions regarding the Muslim population in the respective countries. The surveyed population was asked “out of every 100 people in their country, about how many they thought were Muslim?” The results are presented in Figure 2, showing that France ranked highest in believing that there were far more Muslims in France than



there were. It could be argued that in the light of the recent attacks in France the Muslim population has been at the center of excessive media exposure. In fact, it is often highlighted in the media that France has one of the highest Muslim population and Islam is the second religion in France, thus possibly explaining this belief. However, as demonstrated by the results only 7.5 out of every 100 people are Muslims in France.

Figure 2  
Overestimating the Muslim Population.



Another Ipsos survey specifically conducted in France was commissioned by the Foundation for a French Judaism regarding the *vivre ensemble*<sup>11</sup> [live together] after the terrorist attacks of January 2015. Interestingly, ethnic, or religious surveys are usually prohibited in France (Simon, 2008, p. 67); nevertheless, Ipsos interviewed a representative sample of the French population as well as a sample of people who considered themselves Jewish and a sample of people who considered themselves

<sup>11</sup> *Vivre ensemble* supposedly promotes social cohesion among a multicultural society, *laïcité*, the republican school, and the equality of the regions.

Muslim. The survey found that 53 percent of French people did not view immigration as beneficial for France. In fact, 30 percent claimed that racism was justified in some situations. The poll also showed that 53 percent declared that religious fundamentalism was well implanted in France. Additionally, a considerable number of French people opposed specific religious measures in public school: For example, 63 percent opposed alternative menus for Jewish and Muslim students, 71 percent were against excused school absences based on religious holidays that are not in the French calendar, and 74 percent were against veiled mothers as chaperones. Only 29 percent considered the Muslim population to be well assimilated into the French population (Ipsos, 2016). This survey contrasts with the Pew Research Center survey and the unfavorable perceptions of Muslims. While the increase of negative views was only 5% in France, the Ipsos survey shows that negative views associated with religion, most particularly Islam, are quite high.

An argument had been presented that private Muslim schools should be established perhaps to address some of the challenges presented in the public schools (Bowen, 2009). Interestingly, French people seem to oppose the creation of Muslim private schools. Bowen posited that even though the creation of Muslim private schools would solve the issues of the meal or religious holidays, it would also reinforce their otherness and limit Muslim students' contact with non-Muslim students, thereby furthering their perceived difficulties with respect to assimilating into French society (p. 448).

### **Muslim Youth in France**

Muslims currently living in France are mostly from the ancient French colonies in Africa. Many are the children of those immigrants and to a much lesser extent to the Middle East. Those immigrants mostly live in derelict social housing

built in the 1960s and 1970s to answer a demand in cheap labor (Windle, 2004, p. 100). Second and third generation Muslims are still regarded as immigrants or are often seen as not well assimilated into French society, even though they were born in France, only speak French and had never been to their parents' country of birth. Croucher (2009) stated that French Muslims have often been criticized for not speaking proper French (p. 307). The *verlan*, for example—a popular French slang—is used by young people in the French projects as an identifier. Lefkowitz (1989) noted, “Verlan as a spoken phenomenon originates in the working class, immigrant-populated northern suburbs of Paris known as La Zone...Many of these immigrants speak neither French nor their parents' language well and have never seen Paris. They are caught between cultures and have been forced to create their own” (p. 313). The children of Muslim immigrants who do not speak French can benefit from the *Enseignement de langue et la culture d'origine* (ELCO) program (akin to Teaching Content in the Home Language) if they are a native of one of the countries participating in the program. Countries represented in the ELCO program are Algeria, Croatia, Spain, Italy, Morocco, Serbia, Portugal, Tunisia, and Turkey (Eduscol, 2016). However, the Investigative report of 2015 (S. Rep. No. 590, 2015), advised the elimination of the ELCO program as a stand-alone program and its integration into the foreign language program, a less intensive program. Muslim youth also have to deal with being a visible minority in a France that struggles to deal with its immigrant population (Keaton, 2005, p. 413). Beginning in the 1980's the media started playing a central role in the irrational fear and stigmatization of “immigrant youth” (Terrio, p. 93, 2009). The 1990's was a turning point in the tough anti-crime measures specifically targeting youth from the immigrant population. After the riots in the

French projects, Nicolas Sarkozy, then prime minister expressed that we needed to clean the projects with a Karcher, a popular brand of high-pressure cleaners.

More to the point, being African or Arab, or being identified as "black," has never carried the same advantages in French society as being perceived and identified as French, a racialized signifier of European ancestry and increasingly "white." Further, this understanding has already been shown to determine access to better jobs, schools, and neighborhoods, as well as ease of entering France or other Western countries. (p. 414)

Young Muslim women faced another challenge. The headscarf debate and more recently the *burkini* scandal. In Summer 2016 in the wake of the numerous terrorist attacks, tension has been high. Thirty towns located on the sea prohibited religious clothes on the beach (Smith & Rubin, 2016). Muslim women wearing the *burkini*, a bathing suit that covers the body, have been asked to either remove the garment, leave the beach, or fined (Quinn, 2016).

### **Identity Formation among Youth**

One of the key developmental tasks during adolescence is forming a coherent personal identity (Erikson, 1968). During the adolescent stage, the young individual will forge his identity as these "new identifications are no longer characterized by the playfulness of childhood and the experimental zest of youth: with dire urgency they force the young individual into choices and decisions which will, with increasing immediacy, lead to commitments "for life" (Erikson, 1968, p. 155). The young individual makes occupational and ideological commitments to become a productive member of society. Therefore, those formative years are crucial and need to be investigated. Campelo et al. (2018) studied the psychological and social profiles of European youth willing to partake in radicalization. Campelo et al. (2018) reviewed

22 qualitative and quantitative studies. A three-level model was developed to study the phenomenon of radicalization “(1) individual risk factors include psychological vulnerabilities such as early experiences of abandonment, perceived injustice, and personal uncertainty; (2) micro-environmental risk factors include family dysfunction and friendships with radicalized individuals; (3) societal risk factors include geopolitical events and societal changes such as Durkheim’s concept of anomie” (p. 1). The profile of the Kouachi brothers fit that model. They became orphans at an early age. They went to a youth center in the South of France effectively uprooting them from everything and everyone they knew. Once they were old enough, they returned to their childhood neighborhood. There they befriended Farid Benyettou and became radicalized.

### **Research on Muslim Youth Identity**

The following section explores research pertaining to Muslim youth identity in a non-Muslim country.

Keaton (2005) examined national identity politics and what the author refers to as arrogant assimilationism among 14 Muslim girls of African descent in the other France. She found that while France aggressively pursued an assimilationist politics mainly through national education, the lived experiences of these Muslims girls told a different story. While they self-identify as French, how they are perceived in French society differs greatly. They are still seen as others even if they were born in France and had French citizenship. Moreover, if they wore visible religious signs such as the headscarf they were identified as Muslim girls, religion becoming a strong marker for their identity. Croucher et al. (2008) also found religion to be a strong identity marker among Muslims. In their study they surveyed a total of 1198 participants both in France (n= 600) and Britain (n = 598). The participants completed a 14-page survey

based on *Multigroup measure of ethnic identity* and used a 4-point Likert-style scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* (p. 190). Results showed that ethnic identification and religiosity were highly correlated in France ( $r = .75$ ) and Britain ( $r = .76$ ) (p. 195). They contend that this could be attributed to “non- Muslim vehement/ aggressive attacks on Muslim identity and religion in both nations” (p. 195). This study, like the Keaton’s study, also noticed the important aggressive assimilationist policies through education most particularly in those results. Research on Muslim youth identity in the aftermath of a terrorist attack were also conducted after 9/11.

### **Identification of Gaps and Limitations in the Literature**

While there were a few studies focusing on Muslim youth in France, to the researcher's knowledge there were no studies that focused on Muslim youth in Ile de France et specifically from the same neighborhood as the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks. The present study adds another perspective, a more in depth look into Muslim youth who knew the perpetrators and who are also currently under surveillance, adding another layer to the studied phenomenon. The biggest contribution of this study is giving a voice to this marginalized group, whose voices are often left out of the discussion about Muslim youth. This study also looks at the phenomenon through a postcolonial and critical theory lens. Few studies took the postcolonial approach or critical race theory.

### **Summary**

The legacies of the French Revolution as well as the concept of Frenchness were discussed. *Laïcité* and the Republican School are the two most important legacies relating to this study. It shaped the curriculum and educational policies of France’s educational system. Understanding the concept of Frenchness is of the utmost important to understand some aspects of this study. This literature review also

highlighted the theoretical framework informing this study. Postcolonial theory and Critical race theory will be the lenses through which the data will be analyzed.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter focuses on the methodological aspect of the research. It will address the purpose of the research questions, the research design, the participants and sampling procedures, the data collection process, the data analysis, the researcher's role, validation strategies, trustworthiness as well as ethical considerations.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the negotiation of Muslim youth identity in a post-Charlie Hebdo France. This qualitative study also examined the effect of the attacks on educational policies. Chapter IV aimed at answering the following questions alluded to in Chapter I:

1. How do Muslim youth construct their cultural identity?
2. What is the impact of *laïcité* in the construction of Muslim youth identity?
3. How did the terrorist attacks impact Muslims' lived experiences?
4. How do the terrorist attacks impact educational policies?

#### **Research Design**

Merriam (1998) stated that qualitative research provides “the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education,” by focusing on “discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspective of those being studied” (p. 1). This study examined the construction of the cultural identity of Muslim youth in a post Charlie Hebdo Île de France. Thus, the use of a case study was appropriate for this study, as Merriam (1998) noted, “A case study is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meanings for those involved” (p. 19). Moreover, it “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life



context” (Yin, 1994, p. 19). By examining the formation of cultural identity of Muslim youth in a post Charlie Hebdo Île de France, this study provided an in-depth look and further our understanding of how Muslim youth construct their identity post 1/15 and the terrorist attacks, which deeply impacted the French community. The research was conducted in Ile de France in the 19th arrondissement where the Kouachi brothers were from.

### **Research Participants and Sample**

Given the topic at hand, the participants were purposefully selected. In order to identify the participants, purposeful sampling was selected as Merriam (2002) states, “to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 12). The first participant was approached and selected in the 19th arrondissement outside of a public pool. Snowball sampling was also used to find more participants. A recruitment screener was also used to select participants (see Appendix A).

The participants selection was determined by the following criteria: religious background and ethnicity (self-identified). All selected participants must identify as Muslims and had to either be French-born children of immigrants of African descent or came to France as infants. All participants had to be from the 19th arrondissement. Originally 12 interviews were conducted. However, four participants chose not to go any further once we reached questions about religion. Therefore, eight full interviews were conducted in the 19th arrondissement. They all attended school in the 19th arrondissement. Among the participants, three of them were of Senegalese ancestry, three of Malian descent, one of Ivory Coast descent and one of Algerian descent. They all live in the 19th arrondissement. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, and given the sensitive nature of the topic, limited individual

description is provided. It is important to note that a lot of participants had a Fiche S. This was even more a reason to safeguard their anonymity. Instead, participants are described using common characteristics. All participants are self-identified French citizen children of African descent immigrants. They also self-identified as Muslims. They all reported the importance of their faith.

Table 1.  
*List of Participants, Ethnic Origin and Age Range.*

<i>Participant (pseudonyms)</i>	<i>Ethnic origin</i>	<i>Age range</i>
Issouf	Mali	18-25
Kouassi	Ivory Coast	26-35
Ousmane	Mali	18-25
Reza	Algeria/France	26-35
Amadou	Senegal	18-25
Ibrahima	Senegal	18-25
Boubacar	Mali	18-25
Assane	Senegal	18-25

### **Data Collection**

Data collection took place in France. Individual interviews were the primary research method. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to address research questions one, two and three. Then, to address research question four, the section continues with a document analysis from official documents such as bulletins, charter, infographics found on the Ministry of Education *Eduscol* in the aftermath of Charlie Hebdo.

Table 2  
*Research questions and methods used to answer.*

<p><b>Semi-structured Interviews</b></p>	<p>Research Question 1: How do Muslim youth construct their cultural identity?</p> <p>Research Question 2. What is the impact of <i>laïcité</i> in the construction of Muslim youth identity?</p> <p>Research Question 3. How did the terrorist attacks impact Muslims’ lived experiences?</p>
<p><b>Documents</b></p>	<p>Research question 4. How do the terrorist attacks impact educational policies?</p>

**Individual Interviews**

The participants were interviewed on site. The interviews were only conducted once because of time constraints and logistics. I had a limited time in France. It was also very difficult to interview participants as a result of the sensitive nature of topic. Even though participants were interested in the study and wanted to have their voices heard they were hesitant to participate for fear of being targeted even more than they already are in their everyday lives. The interview length was one hour maximum. The interviews were conducted in participants’ native language, French, which is also the researcher’s native language.

At the beginning of the interviews, I introduced myself as a French student working on my doctoral dissertation. The project was explained in detail, as well as the reasons for carrying such a project so that participants could understand why I am undertaking such a task. Subjects would understand the crucial part they play in my research. They were also informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any

point via a consent form (See Appendix C). The participants were also assured of the protection of their identity.

The interviews were recorded with the verbal consent of the participants as well as with their written consent. To protect anonymity, participants only agreed to sign the IRB with their initials. Recording the interviews allowed the researcher to be an active listener (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I explained the reasons for recording the interview to the participants beforehand. Notes were taken as well (Gambold, 2010, p. 397). To elicit data an interview protocol was created. I used a non-directive style of interviewing by using open-ended questions while avoiding to the best of my ability leading questions (Roulston, 2008, p. 583). This allows the participants freedom in expressing their feelings and attitudes regarding the topic at hand thus eliciting further information (Ayres, 2008, p. 811).

Table 3.  
*Participants Interview Sample Questions by Research Questions*

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Questions</i>
How do Muslim youth construct their cultural identity?	<p>Do you identify and position yourself as a (parent ethnicity—i.e., Algerian, Moroccan, Tunisian etc.), French, in-between or both? Have you always identified yourself like this or did it change after the terrorist attack?</p> <p>Do you feel that people see you as French or do you feel that they see you as other (parent ethnicity)?</p>
What is the impact of <i>laïcité</i> in the construction of Muslim youth identity?	<p>Can you define <i>laïcité</i>?</p> <p>Is <i>laïcité</i> compatible with being a Muslim in France?</p>
How did the terrorist attacks impact Muslims' schooling experiences?	<p>Since the attack did you experience any difficulties related to your background, such as discrimination, stereotyping, or being misunderstood? How so?</p> <p>Since the attack have you felt excluded based on your culture or religion? How so?</p> <p>What did you think about the attack of January 2015? Do you understand the motivation of the terrorists? Do you sympathize?</p>

Considering the primary questions, I prepared a set of semi-structured interviews (See Appendix B). Those questions were generated from my readings of post-colonial and critical race theory studies. The questions aimed to find out more about the participants views on identity, *Laïcité* and the terrorist attacks of January 2015. I developed my questions to cover the issues I wanted additional information on, and the questions that arose when I was watching the news regarding the attacks. Questions also emerged from my conversation with my cousin. As he was telling me the story a lot of questions came to my mind regarding the views of the participants on the terrorist attacks. The questions for the semi-structured interviews were related to the first three research questions about Identity, *Laïcité* and Terrorism (See Appendix B). Then the questions were arranged according to the emergent themes as follows:

Hybridity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you identify and position yourself as a (parent ethnicity i.e, Algerian, Moroccan, Tunisian, etc.), French, in-between or both? Have you always identified yourself like this or did it change after the terrorist attack?</li> <li>• Does your life as one of the descendants of an African immigrant from France create a hybrid (mix between two cultures) and diaspora (the dispersion of any people from their original homeland) identity?</li> </ul>
Other/othering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oftentimes we hear about integration of young Muslim into French society even if they were born in France. Is the successful “integration” in the French society a reason behind the loss or negation of the Muslim/ African origin identity of some Muslim youth (the Oreo effect)? What is the reason for wanting to assimilate? (better job? a more anonymous life? distancing oneself from the negative action of the terrorist? etc?)</li> <li>• Do you feel that people see you as French or do you feel that they see you as other (parent ethnicity)?</li> <li>• Since the attack did you experience any difficulties related to your background, such as discrimination, stereotyping, or being misunderstood? How so?</li> </ul>

Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In terms of your background, how do you usually describe yourself to people outside your community?</li> <li>• Do you feel as a unique person, or do you think that you belong to a particular ethnic group?</li> <li>• Do you have any wish to go live in your parent's birth country?</li> </ul>
Identity	<p>What are the factors that make you identify yourself as (parent ethnicity), French, or in between? And does that have a relationship with being a French citizen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes people describe themselves somewhat differently to members of their own community. How do you describe yourself to them?</li> <li>• Which part of your background do you feel closest to? Sometimes this varies, depending on what aspect of your life we are talking about. What about at home? Or at work? Or with friends?</li> <li>• Do you think that keeping the (parent ethnicity) identity is an opposition to the French culture, or it is self-determination?</li> </ul>
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How closely do you identify with and affiliate with your culture?</li> <li>• Which culture do you identify with more?</li> <li>• How do you understand the surrounding culture and society around you, and are you considered as a foreigner?</li> <li>• Does naming Muslim children in Muslim or Parent origin names protect the Muslim (or parent ethnicity) identity in France?</li> </ul>
Cultural education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the impact of the French cultural encounter on your Muslim identity?</li> <li>• Can you define <i>laïcité</i>?</li> <li>• What did you learn about <i>laïcité</i> at school?</li> </ul>
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is <i>laïcité</i> compatible with being a Muslim in France?</li> <li>• What do you think about getting rid of substitute meal in schools?</li> <li>• How important is religion to you? Why?</li> <li>• Since the attack have you felt excluded based on your culture or religion? How so?</li> </ul>

## **Documents**

To answer research question 4 documents on French educational policies as well as documents on France's educational system were analyzed. The documents were obtained from the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports' website. Those documents discussed the French school's curriculum mandates, administrative policies, and existing programs. Those documents were collected in order to "help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem" (Merriam, 1998, p. 118). The documents gave additional insight to how students were treated in the aftermath of the attacks.

## **Reflective Journal/Field Notes**

Lastly, a reflective journal with field notes was used. Field notes are paramount to effectively translating fieldwork into a case study (Gambold, 2010, p. 397). They provided additional data to be used for the analysis. The reflective journal allowed me to note and describe the processes through which the researcher goes through while conducting the study.

## **Data Analysis**

Merriam (2002) noted that the act of analyzing data and collecting data should be a simultaneous process (p. 14). It also requires moving "deeper and deeper into understanding the data and making interpretation of the larger meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2003, p. 190). The interviews were first transcribed by the researcher. Then Microsoft Word files were created to organize the data collected. The files were organized using pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. To protect the confidentiality of the data, only the researcher has access to it, and it is stored in the researcher's personal password protected computer.



To answer the research questions posed, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Eight participants answered questions about identity, religion, secularism, schooling, and the terrorist attacks. The interviews were recorded using an audio recording device then transcribed into word documents. The interviews were then translated from French to English by the researcher. Once the interviews were translated, I started the coding process. The interviews were coded. The coding process allows the researcher to establish connections of meaning during the data analysis process. According to Lockyer (2004) coding is “A systematic way in which to condense extensive data sets into smaller analyzable units through the creation of categories and concepts derived from the data” (p. 137). The researcher has to extrapolate the central meaning of the data and then give it an appropriate code, which will in turn contribute to deeper understandings and development of themes, and concepts. The coding process could be seen as a systematic process of deconstruction and reconstruction of data which would help to provide viable answers to research questions and understand a case more in depth; ergo the *what* and the *why*. Coding is progressive in nature and requires sorting and defining of the data collected as applicable to the research purpose (Glesne, 2006).

I used the computer program Atlats.ti 8 to proceed with the analysis. A priori coding was used for the first cycle of the coding process. Saldana (2015) stated “a provisional list of codes should be determined beforehand to harmonize with your study’s conceptual framework or paradigm, and to enable an analysis that directly answers your research questions and goals” (p. 49). I developed the main codes, using the postcolonial and critical race theoretical framework that guided the study. The

main codes used were (1) Hybridity, (2) Other/Othering, (3) Subaltern, (4) Identity, (5), Culture, (6) Colonial education, (7) Language and (8) Ethnicity.

I read through the interviews multiple times to see what other words or ideas emerged from the readings to find smaller themes that could be grouped under the larger main themes. Lastly the final reading was meant to connect the themes uncovering the similarities and differences among the themes. Instead of the names being referred to, a colored schema was used throughout. Each participant was assigned a color as follows:

Table 4  
*Colored Schema for Each Participant*

---

Participants
Issouf
Kouassi
Ousmane
Reza
Amadou
Ibrahima
Boubacar
Assane
Gaëlle

---

I also included myself in the table as one of the “participants.” While interviewing the participants as a researcher I either asked more details or also interjected my voice with the participants about some shared experiences.

## **Document Analysis**

This type of analysis according to Merriam (1998) can help ground the investigation according to the context of what is being investigated (p. 126). To select the documents, I examined different criteria: date of publication, document source, and content:

**The date of publication.** The documents had to be published after the terrorist attacks. If they were published before they had been updated to address the attacks.

**The source of the document.** Most of the documents came from official government websites. On those websites external resources approved by the government as resources that could be used by the educational body were linked. I looked at those resources as well since they were official recommended materials.

**Content.** I read the different educational documents and took notes on the excerpts relevant to the research questions. I selected documents whose content directly related to the response to the terrorist attacks in the educational setting.

## **Background of the Researcher and Confronting Subjectivity**

I am a French native woman; whose parents are from the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. I was born and grew up in France. I remember vividly my schooling experience and those of my classmates especially those of immigrant descent. The relationship with teachers and school administrators was not always easy. As a woman of color, I have numerous anecdotes with negative racial or religious undertones.

Given my background, I understand subjectivity is an issue that has to be guarded against throughout the study as “one’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently present in both the research and the non-research

aspects of our life” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). In order to check for any possible biases or prejudices and subjective opinions that might negatively affect the study, the use of a reflective journal is a useful tool (Peshkin, 1988). Through this medium I was able to keep track of my thoughts and feelings and research-related concerns. During data collection and analysis, the journal enabled me to reflect and provide a space to record questions that may arise pertaining to both personal feelings and matters related to the process of conducting the study. Given my particular position as a researcher but also as being from the same neighborhood and experiencing similar experiences as the participants I had to consider my assumptions and reflections to ensure that what was reported was actually what happened and not what I thought happened (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, maintaining trustworthiness is integral to the process. A variety of methods were used to ensure trustworthiness of this study. Guba and Lincoln (1981) proposed four aspects to assess the soundness of a study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

*Credibility* was established by continuing extensive background reading on qualitative research and research methods prior to conducting the study. According to Yin (1994) this allows the researcher to incorporate the correct operational measures for the focus of the study. Throughout the study reflexivity was employed as a means of controlling or limiting subjectivity as it related to what was being read and observed, while keeping in focus the research process (Glesne, 2006). This was done through the reflective journal. The use of multiple sources such as educational documents, curriculum, policies, surveys was also employed to strengthen credibility

(Shenton, 2004). A range of documents were used as a means of verifying experiences and viewpoints against each other so that a rich picture of the perceptions of the group being studied could be established based on what was shared by a range of people.

Debriefing sessions with professors as well as peer scrutiny was also part of the process. Shenton (2004) stated that a “fresh perspective...may allow [such individuals] to challenge assumptions made by the investigator...[and that] questions and observations may well enable the researcher to refine his or her methods, develop a greater explanation of the research design and strengthen his or her arguments in the light of comments made” (p. 67). Debriefing and peer scrutiny sessions were done throughout the study. Moreover, the use of quotations was used as a means of presenting the ‘voice’ of the subjects of the study as opposed to simply the interpretations by the researcher of what was said and or recorded.

*Dependability* was established through the use of an audit trail as it “provides a mechanism for retroactive assessment of the conduct of the inquiry and a means to address issues related to the rigor of the research as well as the trustworthiness of the results” (Rodgers, 2008, p. 44). All documents related to the research were conserved.

Regarding *transferability*, Merriam (1995) stated, “the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations, refers to external validity, or generalizability” (p. 57). Thick description of the case being studied will be one means to attempt to facilitate transferability. The use of purposeful sampling was the other means to increase the transferability of the study. The participants were chosen because they best fit the purpose of the study.

*Confirmability* “is concerned with providing evidence that the researcher's interpretations of participants' constructions are rooted in the participants' constructions and also that data analysis and the resulting findings and conclusions can be verified as reflective of and grounded in the participants' perceptions” (Jensen, 2008, p. 113). Here as well the use of multiple sources, reflective journaling, and audit trail were used to ensure confirmability.

### **Ethical Considerations**

It is the responsibility of the researcher to take into account any ethical issues that may occur during the study. The researcher must ensure that participants are protected and therefore will conduct the research in accordance with the guidelines of Florida International University Institutional Review Board. A trusting, respectful relationship with the participants was established. Participants were reminded that they could withdraw their participation from the study at any moment. They were also reminded that they had the choice to not answer questions that might make them feel uncomfortable. An ethical challenge associated with this study was the risk for participants to be reluctant to share their opinions given the particular topic at hand. It was of the utmost importance to maintain the confidentiality of the participants and ensure their anonymity.

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined the case study design that was used in this study. Young Muslims who identify as Muslims and French-born children of immigrants of African descent were selected to participate in this study. The focus was on how they identified themselves in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face in France and all interviews were recorded and

transcribed verbatim, then translated in English by the researcher. Data were analyzed using a qualitative lens.

## CHAPTER IV-A

### FINDINGS

Chapters IV-A and IV-B aim to present the findings from the research questions.

Within Chapter IV-A I explored the following research questions:

1. How do Muslim youth construct their cultural identity?
2. What is the impact of *laïcité* in the construction of Muslim youth identity?
3. How did the terrorist attacks impact Muslims' lived experiences?

To accomplish this exploration, I conducted semi-structured interviews.

This chapter focused on the participants and their responses to the interview questions.

I also conducted document analysis to understand the response of the government post Charlie-Hebdo, results of which are presented in Chapter IV-B. Chapter IV-B looked at documents from the government's Education website as well as the resources listed on the website to accompany teachers in their journey to explain the terrorist attacks of January 2015.

Originally 12 interviews were conducted. However, four participants chose not to go any further once we reached questions about religion. Therefore, eight full interviews were conducted in the 19th arrondissement. In order to gain in-depth understanding a case study approach was used. Postcolonial theory and critical race theory were the theoretical lenses applied to this case study. These lenses offer a different theoretical perspective to address the dislocation of Eurocentrism in predominant ideas of Western, identity, culture, science, and education, while giving a voice to people of color (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1995).



## **Interviews**

First, I explored the negotiation of a Muslim youth identity and their lived experiences, including their educational experiences when relevant, following the terrorist attacks of January 2015 in France. The different participants who were attending or attended a secondary school in the 19th arrondissement experienced a similar process of identity negotiation where ethnicity, culture, faith, and race intersect. The participants, though cautious given the political climate and the nature of the topic, were eager to share their experiences and how they constructed and negotiated their identity. Some answered the questions with details while showing the depth of their reflection on the subject matter. Other participants, on the other hand, were quite brief in their answers as though they did not want to share too much of anything that could seem as causing dissension and disturbing the status quo. Even though their views and voices provided this study with diverse and rich data, as their stories were eerily similar, common themes quickly emerged.

Two main themes emerged from the data: (a) the importance of Islam in participants' lives and (b) the intersection of their Muslim identity, their ethnic origin, and their French citizenship.

Regarding Islam, all participants expressed its importance in their life even when they declared themselves as not being very religious. Being Muslim is part of who they are, their essence. However, the practice of Islam is of the personal domain or a personal choice. Culturally all participants identified as being close to the culture of their ethnic background but also being closed to the French culture. The consensus among several participants was that the French Republic, as well as the media, promoted negative views of Muslims.

The participants stated the importance of their ethnic heritage and their parents' upbringing in the formation of their identity. Negative views from French society in general, as well as a strong family influence, contribute to reinforcing feeling closer to their ethnic background according to participants. Participants mentioned that even though they did not feel being Muslim was incompatible with being a member of the French society, they asserted that being Muslim is seen as a failure toward fully integrating in the French society.

In this section, the results are a report of the interview findings collected from eight participants. For research questions 1 to 3 the semi-structured interviews focused on the following themes: (1) Hybridity, (2) Other/Othering, (3) Subaltern, (4) Identity, (5), Culture, (6) Colonial education, (7) Language and (8) Ethnicity.

### **Research Question 1: How do Muslim youth construct their cultural identity?**

#### ***Hybridity and Identity***

*Hybridity* can be defined as “new transcultural forms that arise from cross-cultural exchange. Hybridity can be social, political, linguistic, religious, etc. It is not necessarily a peaceful mixture, for it can be contentious and disruptive in its experience. The process of hybridization can take many forms: It can be linguistic, cultural, political” (Ashcroft et al., p. 108). Bhaba (1994) states that this process takes place in the “Third space of enunciation” (p. 37). Recognizing this *third space* of enunciation in the construction of cultural identities would “open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38).

*Identity* can be defined as “the way in which an individual and/or group defines itself. Identity is important to self-concept, social mores, and national

understanding. It often involves both essentialism and othering” (Key Terms, n.d)

Identity is a recurrent topic in postcolonial theory and more specifically the notion of “self”. Identity is the way an individual or a group of people defines itself. It is important when it comes to the concept of “self”, social values, and national understanding. In colonial discourse the “self is “coherent, bounded, individualized, intentional, the locus of thought, action, and belief, the origin of its own actions, the beneficiary of a unique biography” (Rose 1998, p. 3). A person’s identity is related to how they understand and perceive themselves.

Following is an examination of the ways in which participants perceived their cultural identities. Participants were asked if their lives as descendants of African immigrants born or raised in France created a hybrid identity. Kouassi the second participant interviewed offered an interesting answer about his cultural identity. His parents are from Ivory Coast:

*I would identify myself a little more like both, a little of both, so Afro European I could say. Because here in France we are accused of having this skin color, but we have origins that are extra European that are not in Europe. And on the other hand, in Africa we are called the little white man. So, there is a paradox, so we do not know too much. I would say I feel more African anyway. Ivory Coast (origin of parents). Here there is a lot of hypocrisy. You can see me as French when you follow the World Cup like Paul Pogba Ngolo Kante. They don’t see you as French when you go to prison or when you work at the post office. That is the problem. But in both cases in the worst and in the best, we must see you as a Frenchman.*

(Kaoussi, July 2019).

**Kaoussi**'s statement about identity was echoed in other participants' perceptions of their identity. They find themselves at the crossroad of being and feeling French but also identifying as the ethnicity of their parents. **Ousmane**, **Assane**, **Ibrahima** and **Amadou** expressed that they felt their culture was a mix of the French culture and the culture of their parents. Examples of comments included the following:

*Yes, it creates a hybrid culture.*

*Me? It is a bit of both. Although I have Malian parents, I lived almost all my life in France. I still have a certain French identity but really, I know that I my heart goes towards Mali more, which is my homeland because when I am in France for example, we don't have the same mentality at all as Malians in Mali, even if I speak with Malians from the village. For example, marriage. Getting married to a woman from Mali is going to be more difficult than getting married with a French Malian from France. We are in a society where we have mixed everything, and our identity is very sparse, very fragmented.*

**Assane**'s answer also conveyed that dual identity:

*Yes, a bit of both when we go over there, we are French they call us French when we are here sometimes, we are called foreigner, and I was born in France. I live in France I feel more French than Senegalese. When I'm at home it's Senegal. French at work. We adapt.*

*Well, as French, but I'm Senegalese too. Where I live, I live in France. I work in France. However, I have family in my home country, so I go there. So, both so that means yeah.*

*So, I'm French I'm 2000% French and I'm 2000% Algerian. When I'm in France I'm French when I'm in Algeria I'm Algerian. Both. But I think I am more French culturally speaking.*

Issouf and Kouassi expressed that though they were feeling French their parents ethnic background still influenced how they perceived their cultural identity.

*Me? A little more French because I was born in France. I was born in France and I lived in France, I did everything in France and yeah, I live it (the Malian culture) every day. It is my parents. I grew up with both, but more French.*

*Sometimes we are even more French than French who are born in Spain or wherever, they say they are French but us we are born in France.*

*To be honest I accept some aspects of the French identity, but I do not accept it 100% because if I accepted it 100% it means to deny our other origin and that's what they want some of them. That's what they would like me to do I cannot deny the origin of my parents, to agree to be French and after when I'm French I'm told "hey but you're still African".*

Boubacar on the other hand expressed that his culture was more French; however, it was still deeply infused with the culture of his parents.

*French, since they lived here. They were born here. I was born here. I have French citizenship.*

The participants recognized the influence of their parents' cultural background, but because they were born and raised in France, they felt that the French culture was the dominant culture in their life. They share a collective identity with French culture and a sense of belonging to French society by being born and raised in

a French society. Their French identity is either connected to their citizenship or education:

*In fact, I was born here. I am French.*

*I have dual citizenship.*

*I'm French because I have my papers.*

*I was born in France. And I lived in France, I did everything in France.*

*I was born here. I have French citizenship.*

*The fact that we grew up in France, that we have a European education*

However, they express their sense of belonging to their parents' ethnic culture and embracing that identity, as well. Other participants expressed that they felt closer to their parents' cultures, as stated below:

[I identify more with the] *African culture. I do not eat pork; I don't drink wine. It's the French culture, isn't it?*

*Yes. Malian culture.*

**Kouassi** gets a little more specific about the process of hybridization and how he came to have a culture where both the French culture and the culture from his parents mixed. He explained:

*The situation in France and even what happened before. That is to say the colonial past of our country where we live in France. We know they did a lot of damage in our countries and that's because of that, it's what drove our parents to come here. Otherwise, if everyone respected the laws of each country. Back home our parents receive 5000/6000 euros [distorted notion of income in Africa]. They would not be here [in France]. So, there is a lot of injustice. We are criticized for something they started.*

Interestingly the colonial past of France greatly contributed to the process of otherization.

### ***Other/Othering/Self-Otherization and Identity***

*Other* can be defined as “the social and/or psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalizes another group” By declaring someone *Other*, persons tend to stress what makes them dissimilar from or opposite of another, and this carries over into the way they represent others, especially through stereotypical images” (Key Terms, n.d) In other words, the colonizers define themselves as the norm and the people they conquered as *others*. They see them as less than them and as a people to subjugate, to civilize. Even when they have been civilized, they are still considered as others. Participants pointed out that feeling of being othered and considered as a foreigner even though they were born and raised in France. When asked if they were considered as foreigners by other French people, Kouassi felt strongly about that question. The volume of Kouassi’s voice increased as he expressed the following:

*Of course, in France we are still seen, we won’t say as “foreigners” but in any case, not very far from that. Second class French citizen. That is how they see us [referring to white French people], that is the reality. It must be said one must not be afraid. Some under the effect of integration, they want to integrate so much that they will say “no! the French people, they are all good” [some Muslims want to assimilate so they won’t speak negatively about French people], but no, it must be said. [...]Even before I say what I am, they have already defined what I am.*

Amadou, on the other hand, wanted to reaffirm his Frenchness despite being seen as a

*stranger in the eyes of some French people but I'm French because I have my papers. So, it's when we see you. Is that it? Yeah, when they see me, they will say yeah, he's an African, not that he is French directly.*

For **Assane**, **Boubacar**, **Issouf** and **Ousmane**, their race had everything to do with how they were perceived, as they stated:

*Like a stranger, because of the color of my skin”*

*Yes because of the color of the skin.*

*Well like a stranger. Because the skin color says a lot of things. Yeah, after if we show them our ID yeah [...] Just by looking, they will say it's an immigrant. They do not know where we come from.*

*I do not feel that through their eyes I am also French. To a white person, they will say "Ah, he is French!" But me they are probably going to doubt "oh this one must be of Malian origin. He is of African origin; he does not come from here ". I am totally considered a stranger. There is no doubt. The only day they tried to hug me was in the subway during the day of the World Cup. At that moment we were all French. Ngolo kante ngolo kante. Everyone loved black, Arabs, everyone loved each other that day.*

When asked further questions about otherization, **Kouassi** pointed out that I had to be more specific when asking the question about who does the otherization. He declared:

*Very good question, madam. When you say, do people see me as “French or other?” who are the people you are talking about? Is it the whole French population? Outside the Muslim community and the Black community? You must be honest. People, they see me as outside of these communities*



[mentioned], *an African. You must be honest. But I'm proud I do not see the problem. I'm African.*

However, **Reza**, **Ousmane**, **Assane** and **Kouassi** also pointed out that the process of otherization took place in their own community of origin. When they visit their parents' countries of origin, the local population do not see them as totally one of their own. The examples below give more insights into that phenomenon:

*I am a foreigner here. I am a foreigner in Algeria.*

*In Mali we are not really Malian.*

*When I go on vacation [back home], I am French [...] when we go over there, we are French. They call us French.*

*In Africa we are called the little white man. So, there is a paradox.*

To delve deeper into the question of otherization, I asked participants how they described themselves to other French people. Based on their answers, they seemingly indicated that they fully integrated the concept of otherization to the point of self-otherization in some instances. Some examples of the comments describing that process included the following:

*Most of the time I will say directly that I am Malian. I mean of Malian origin. Madame, if I said I have papers, you know I have French papers. If they see me walking and they say to me "Where do you come from?" I'm not going to tell them I'm from France. I'm going to tell them directly the origin because that is what they are waiting for. They see my skin and they know. They categorize me as "No, he is not French; he comes from somewhere else. He is a foreigner."*

*I am Black, I live in the hood, but I am French like you.*

*Even before I say what I am, they have already defined what I am. This is also the problem. When I speak with real French people who have white skin, they will tell me that maybe I [did not finish his sentence]. Last time there was a lady who asked me the question "what is your origin?" I told her I was from [...], and I lied to her, I told her I am West Indian so she would leave me alone. But she said to me "but sir where are you from?" First, I said French after she pushed me to say West Indian. Yet she repeated "what is your origin?" Well now I will tell you the truth I am African, West African Ivory Coast. But you understand the question [he speaks to me]. On three occasions she told me, sir, where are you from? For her there are French people yes but there are those of French descent. When you said French it was not enough as if it was necessary to specify? You must justify yourself. It is according to their goodwill whether they accept it or not. There is also money that plays a role whether we are French Muslims black or Arab when we live in the 92, we are well seen. In Boulogne over there. Money makes everyone agree.*

*So, if it's a French person I say I'm French. And what do they say? They have nothing to answer because when necessary, I can use a proper speech [he means he speaks standard French] When it's an African I'm African, when it's an Arab I'm Arab. At the same time, the Maghreb is in Africa.*

Assane on the other hand expressed the confusion as to how to identify himself to others:

*When I go on vacation, I am French. But afterwards there are some who recognize between Senegalese. But compared to a French person how do you describe yourself? I don't know because sometimes it gets on their nerves when we say that we are French. For example, when we go to the police and*

*all that, they tell us a random country to make fun of us. They like to laugh at us. It doesn't bother us; we're used to it.*

Ousmane explained that this self-otherization was also a result of other's perceptions of the participant identity:

*It's clearly people's view of me. It's really the perception that we are given.*

Some of the factors in participants identification with their parents' ethnic background was language and parental education.

### ***Language and Parental Influence on Identity Formation***

Language is often a terrain for both colonization and resistance. Language was used to spread the values and ideals of the colonial empire. Speaking the mother tongue was repressed violently in some instances. Speaking about that repression, Brubaker (2001) wrote "the school teachers of the French Third Republic, notorious for shaming and humiliating those who spoke languages or dialects other than standard French" (p. 533).

Speaking the native tongue became an act of resistance and affirmation of one's appurtenance to an ethnic group. Jaspal and Cinnirella argued (2011)

that participants reproduced representations of 'ethnic authenticity' by emphasizing the importance of the heritage language as a marker of ethnic identity. The acceptance and reproduction of this social representation enabled individuals to affirm their own membership in the ethnic group, given that they claimed to possess the crucial self-aspect for inclusion in the group (i.e. knowledge of the heritage language) (p. 516).

Issouf and Assane both noted the use of their native language and the role it had on their sense of belonging and identity formation:

*Since I was very little at home, I speak Malian with my parents, as I can speak French with my sisters. I go out, I speak French. With friends who speak the*

*same language as me sometimes to tease each other we will speak Malian, you see.*

*At home it is Senegal, we speak the language. But sometimes we mix it up a bit.*

Assane and Ousmane also pointed out that their parents' education and transmission of their culture played an important role in them feeling close to their parent's culture.

*I have the culture of Senegal. I know a lot of things, stories.*

*When it comes to education as a person my parents educated me more [...] I don't have a French culture when it comes to education. The Malian culture in relation to my parents, in relation to the education I received, the stories I heard when I was very young about Mali. My parents were born in the village, they were not going to tell me stories about Clovis. Even if we talked about it at school, my culture is totally Malian.*

Besides, participants also viewed their connection to their parents' ethnic background as a way to assert oneself and cement their ethnic identity by embracing their parents' values, tradition, and education. When answering the question about if keeping the parent ethnic identity was an opposition to the French culture or was it self-determination Kouassi, Boubacar, Reza, Amadou, Assane, and Ibrahima saw it as a way to assert one's identity:

*For some I would say that it is more a way to assert oneself. We went to school and they taught us the story of Napoleon, but we are black.*

*One way to assert yourself. I would never deny everything my parents taught me. Because the person I am today is because of my parents who gave me these values, this education, this respect for people.*

*It's a plus for France if they don't understand that... If we were all doctors, how would we do it? And well it's the same for identity. We are all different, and it is this difference that makes France one of the most beautiful countries.*

*A way to assert oneself.*

*It's a way of opposing to show that it's more the same than before, because it's not the color that makes the nationality*

*It is to affirm that I am Senegalese.*

### **Religion and Identity**

The impact of French cultural encounters on Muslim identity affected the participants in different ways. For **Issouf**, **Reza**, **Boubacar**, and **Assane** French culture did not really have an impact on their faith. They said that they were able to separate their French identity and culture from their Muslim identity by practicing prayer at home, as stated here:

*Well, it is going well. You must separate things. Go to work. Do a little bit of everything. And we come back home, and we do the prayer*

*None. I had a religious education from a very young age even before the religious phenomenon was a “hype” phenomenon. Islam has no issues with the laws of the republic. You practice your religion. If we talk about pensions it is (speaks in Arabic), the isolated woman (speaks in Arabic). Besides, one of the first laws that we learn at ENA<sup>12</sup> is a law of Mohammed.*

*It's compatible.*

*It's normal. it's just that there are a lot of French people who find it difficult to accept the Muslim religion.*

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<sup>12</sup> ENA or Ecole Nationale d'Administration is an elite school that trains future French presidents.

On the other hand, Kouassi, Ousmane, Amadou, and Ibrahima felt that the French culture was a bit incompatible with their Muslim faith because they do not understand it. Often, they found that the media was the main culprit in terms of projecting a distorted image of Islam to the non-Muslim French population:

*Yeah, it's a problem. Yes, it has an impact even a very big one. One issue here is that there is a problem with the media [...] The problem is that the media overwhelms us, they accuse us. "Oh, there is a problem with Muslims" Every day we say there is a problem with Muslims. Every day there is a problem with Muslims here in France. I do not know why. Somebody explains it to me!*

*There are advantages and disadvantages. We are in a country where there is a lot of diversity. So even at the level of Islam, there are Muslims everywhere, other countries, etc., and in France, we can see that there is still a certain freedom. We have a certain freedom of worship etc., but there are still a lot of stigmatizations among the French who increasingly reject Islam. In France you can see through the media. They are focusing a bit on Islam. As soon as there is a problem or something, we will put an Islamic scandal to drown everything in the mix. It's quite strange.*

*It's not compatible. There is a clash.*

*Yes, there is a little clash with Muslims and Christians.*

Participants were then asked if successful integration meant the loss or negation of the Muslim/African origin identity for some Muslim youth. What would be the reasons behind assimilation and if they would do what it takes to assimilate? For Issouf, Kouassi, Ousmane and Reza the answer was a resounding no:

*Not at all [laugh] On the contrary if I am given the choice, I take away my French nationality and I keep the Islam.*

*Madam I can answer in all honesty if to assimilate it is to have a better job or to be seen like them in their eyes, madam, so assimilation does not interest me. We must respect everyone as they are. Here in France, there are Portuguese, even Jews everyone came, and we respected them. There is a problem with us. They blame us for choosing this religion. So maybe if we are not Muslims anymore and maybe if we eat pork and we drink wine maybe we will be accepted. But no, they will always blame us for something. We are proud to be Muslim.*

*Personally, I would never deny my Muslim identity for money etc. Religion is more important to me than the French identity we will say. We try and I quote to make us "sell out". Oreos. They want all our education, our way of doing things, to be French, but before doing that they would have to explain to me what the French identity is. I would like to know how they define a good French person, because even that they never told us. For example, is it eating bread? On anti-terrorist posters, they would say ok if you notice people who don't eat too much, who no longer watch TV, who dress a certain way, who starts to have a long beard etc., let us know. If that is what is meant by not being French, it's vague. While supposedly it is to be a welcoming land. It's a bit of a spiel. They welcomed us to change us or? The day they define the concept of a good French well, we will talk.*

*So, the term integration; I don't accept it. I can't accept it. I know that I have a French culture and that I was born in France. In fact, I am French by filiation. My father is Algerian. In addition to that fact, my mother is French by blood. I don't see integration. For me it's not about the person. As long as she or he respects the laws of the republic, you can't talk to me about integration. You*

went to school in France, you work in France, you have studied in France, you have a French culture. For the most part when they go to their home country, they are French. They have no culture [Arabic culture], they can't speak Arabic, they can't write it, they can't read it. I'm lucky to have both cultures. I'm proud of it. I am as much Algerian as I am French. You can't talk to me about integration. For me when we talk about integration to an immigrant or an immigrant's child, I find it disgusting. French history since Napoleon is a melting pot. We had the Germans, the Arabs, the Ottomans, the Spanish, the Italians. So really in France who is really French. We are French because we follow the laws of the republic, we respect the laws of the republic, because we consider ourselves French. I find that the media play a lot on integration. You can't talk about integration [when your children were born here].

On the other hand, Amadou and Assane felt that assimilating was the way to follow in order to leave a peaceful life in France.

*I think we must ignore that. For example, when you go to work you will not show that you are Muslim you see. You make abstraction of all that, you go about your day quietly and after you practice [your religion]. It does not help to show people that you are Muslim you will be frowned upon. It's stupid. Ok there are some who shows it but. So, for people to consider you as integrated, you do not have to show your culture, you do not have to show that you're Muslim is that? As French in the eyes of people. And then in the eyes of your relatives you show that you are Muslim. But outside you must keep an image. To have a better job, at school. But even in everyday life the Muslim religion is frowned upon because of terrorism. So, it means you must not show it, do not deny it, but do not show that you are Muslim, but without denying it.*



*Maybe they have a hard time getting accepted.*

Participants were also asked about the naming of Muslim children or Parent's origin was a way to protect Islam or parents' ethnic identity in France?

*It is a way to assert oneself and it is a way of detaching oneself too. I know I was born in France I am interested in the history of the country. I know that before when Bonaparte was there and even afterwards, it was necessary to pick names from the Christian calendar, but why do they want to force us to pick names from the Christian calendar, but no, that's not our identity. And I will answer a slightly more general question even in Africa Christianity is not their general identity. That's all.*

*Yes. I think our parents gave us [names] according to our grandparents, what they were named. For them it's a certain value. We must not forget that Muslim names have a meaning, an aura for us. For us it's not just a name. I'm not going to call my child John when I have no attachment to Christianity. It's not that I don't want to do it, but why I'm going to call my children John. We give a name to a person so that their name conveys something, which brings something to our parents, love. We are not going to call our children John. I believe it's Chinese immigrants who do that (adopting the name of the country they live in) . For me it's misrepresents oneself, it's a travesty. No, I come as I am. You accept me as I am if you accept me in the country, I am aware it is necessary to work hard, I must respect your laws etc. But let me live in peace. It's freedom.*

*A name is something that is chosen. I have my father's name. For me it's a pride so why choose a name in the calendar. Fatoumata is beautiful, Mohammed is beautiful, and Jean is beautiful, and Riley is beautiful. Why if it*

*is a name that comes from the United States, we do not talk about it a lot but if it is a name that is African sounding it is not accepted.*

*Yes yes, it is the way. But in any case, in our religion when you have a child you must give it a Muslim name. It's part of our religion and we cannot give a Muslim child a French name. It's not compatible with the religion.*

*After the parents. Originally*

*Yes, we must call our child with a Muslim name*

Lastly participants were asked how important religion was to them. They all expressed the importance of religion in their lives.

*Ah, we must think about the beyond. We are just passing. We must think about the day after the judgment.*

*Religion is paramount. Any man who has no religion is lost; he is doomed to fail in his life. You can have billions, but it's a total failure if he does not have something he must follow, no path that guides him.*

*This is the priority of my life. I cannot be religious and say that there is not a superior being. That is to say a superior being to whom I owe everything and tell myself that it is not important. For me it's the number one thing. God is higher than anything. So, I can't afford to put society, money, my life etc before my beliefs and convictions. For me this is the most important thing. As soon as I get up in the morning, I say to myself it's thanks to God. So, I say to myself all day long I have to try to do my best and every day like that I have to do my best. I can't forget God for a moment. Even in my life`s choices if I chose to do something it is because it is authorized by religion.*

*It's as important as the air I breathe. It gave me values. My speech, respect, non-judgment from others. I can't steal from someone. I was immersed in it*

*since very young, I had the religious foundation from the beginning and I grew up with it, which is not the case for most people. The concern is that as long as we keep knocking on religion, as long we do not give people the means to practice their religion properly, we will have this problem of nationalism religion etc.*

*This is important, frankly without religion I would have made mistakes. This is a course of action.*

*It is important. It helps you in faith, in respect.*

*It is important.*

*I don't practice too much but I know a lot, but I actually have trouble with prayer. But I intend to be more involved later.*

Participants highlighted how the concept of hybridity played a role in the construction of their identity. They explained how they felt about their identity: neither totally French nor totally their parents ethnic background but rather a mix of both cultures. The transmission of their parents' cultures is very much valued and carried through the language, the food, the religion, and the affirmation of their belonging to their parents' culture. On the other hand, the transmission of the French culture is very much acknowledged in their lives as well. This incompatibility that some participants felt between their Muslim faith and French culture also translated into the concept of *laïcité* and their identity. Participants must contend with being Muslim in a secular state. Research question two explores the impact of secularism in the construction of their Muslim identity.

## **Research Question 2. What is the impact of *laïcité* in the construction of Muslim youth identity?**

### ***Laïcité and being Muslim.***

*Laïcité* is defined as secularism. Though the concept of secularism exists in many societies the French have put an emphasis on secularism and *laïcité* is the essence of the French nation. It is stated in the opening of the French constitution “La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale.”<sup>13</sup> *Laïcité* also marked the separation of Church and the State. Therefore, religion is supposed to be absent from the public sphere and remain of the private domain.

Participants had to reflect on their faith and secularism in France and if both could coexist with no issue. For **Issouf** and **Kouassi** the answer was emphatically yes. They did not see an issue with being a practicing Muslim and secularism.

*Well yes, because once again it's about adapting at school. For example, at school when it was time for prayer, I did not go to pray. I was waiting to go home to pray. Always the adaptation.*

*Very good question. I would say yes.*

**Issouf** adapted his religious self to fit the parameters of secularism in public spaces particularly at school. He would practice his religion at home. **Reza**, however, was a bit more detailed with his answer. He thought that it was compatible to be a Muslim in a secular country, but there were issues causing difficulty. According to **Reza**, people had a skewed view of Islam and both the media and Muslims themselves are to blame.

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<sup>13</sup> France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic.

*Of course. The problem is that people have hijacked Islam. People have turned away from the vision of Islam; I know the Qur'an. I know the Hadith.*

*But when you say people, you're talking about Muslims, or you're talking about the media?*

*So, I start with the media and then I will talk about the pseudo-Muslims. There was a time when you were Muslim, you were just Muslim. We weren't trying to find out where you came from, what group you were from. The term Islamist was created when we added “-ist” at the end when he is a radical Muslim.*

*Why don't we say Jewist? We say radical Jew. So why add anything? It is useless. So, he is a Muslim. He may be a moderate, he may be a practitioner, he may be radical, but he is a Muslim. The media gave a bad image. The majority of young people who felt neglected and all that found some freedom in Islam. Except that they interpreted it in their own way. The concern today is that Muslims have no institution in France. So, imams have no rights. I said they have no right.*

*Well if we have the CRIF?<sup>14</sup>*

*No, we have nothing at all. We have the rectorate of Paris. However, he is a doctor. He did not study religious studies. To be an imam there are 5 pillars/conditions. In France they don't have [those 5 pillars]. Hence, the fact that when an imam gives an interpretation of the Quran, it is necessarily wrong. Because he himself has no foundation. Example: If you tell a child who does not know that  $1 + 1 = 2$  and you tell him about the Pythagorean*

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<sup>14</sup> CRIF is the Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France [Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions].

*Theorem, what will he understand? Well, it's exactly the same. We are in the Buttes Chaumont sector. We all know the Buttes Chaumont sector. I grew up here. The Buttes Chaumont sector I know it very well. The concern was that in fact it was people who had learned three words in Arabic and who came to give lessons to young people who were lost, who had lost their parents, who had spent a little time in prison. And I'm not denigrating them. Far from it. It's just that. They found the weaknesses they played with it. Because the term Islam means peace. At the time of the prophet [said name in Arab] when he was mayor of Medina, there were three large Jewish tribes [said name in Arab]. You also had Christians. He created a multicultural law not to harm anyone. And today we don't apply his words. In fact, we interpreted it as we wanted. I believe that any religion is good, but once man intervenes, it becomes perverted, because we tend to try to legalize what we want and prohibit what we don't want. We are human beings, and it is normal to interpret, but you do not have enough science to interpret things your way.*

*Yes*

Other participants, on the other hand, felt that secularism and Islam were not compatible.

*No.*

*Why?*

*For example, the veil is prohibited at school. Why? Let them explain why when they can find a real explanation for the fact that the veil is prohibited at school, but I don't see a rational explanation to explain why the veil is prohibited. It's really targeting (us). They really target the Muslim community by saying that the veil is prohibited, because they know there is a certain*

*identity to wearing the veil. We know when we see a woman with the veil, she is Muslim. So, secularism is not compatible with my beliefs, at least my convictions. It's about making laws to make us forget religion. It is really to hide all that and make us live in a world of teddy bears. We are believers so we must not live in a world of teddy bears. One should always be aware that one day the punishments will happen. Personally, compromising my religion is not my thing.*

*It is not compatible but after all we do not have a choice. It's either that—show you're a Muslim—or you're not going to school. If you are a girl, it is harder for those who wear the veil. She must remove it in front of the entrance. It's hard.*

*So, when you go to school you see girls removing the veil?*

*All the time, yes! Since I am in college, they remove the veil.*

*Yes, because religion is practiced at home, the prayer. We don't have to show it.*

*You are a boy. But what if you were a girl?*

*Yes, there is a clash. It is not compatible. In this instance, it is not compatible.*

*Have you known any girls who had to reveal themselves before going to school?*

*Yes. We could not wear caps or a veil.*

Assane agreed with Amadou and made a specific distinction when it came to religion and gender. They both pointed out that being a Muslim girl who wears the hijab made secularism and Islam even more incompatible.

As part of secularism and enforcing it in public schools the discussion about getting rid of substitute meals was a hot topic. Participants were asked their thoughts

about that initiative. Issouf, Ousmane, Amadou, Boubacar, and Assane all expressed their discontentment with the initiative:

*It's disgusting. After yes for the Jews. Now they want to do this for us Muslims knowing that we are a big part in France. They really want to break people.*

*It's shocking why stop a person from following a certain diet. What do they want? I don't see what is disturbing about a person who doesn't eat meat, doesn't eat pork, doesn't drink alcohol. It is to force everyone to follow one path. For them there is only one way, one truth. Whereas normally France is supposed to be about diversity.*

*It's not nice. They want to have a conflict. It hurts no one to give a meal to a Muslim who does not eat pork. And it's stupid to want to get rid of that.*

*I think it's wrong, because most people who don't eat pork will have to eat at home.*

*It is unfair.*

Participants were aware of the meaning of secularism and how it related to religion. Some participants felt the need to adapt and keep religion to the private sphere. Other participants such as Reza blamed the media for the misrepresentation of Islam and the spread of negative views about Islam, thus influencing the public perception.

After the terrorists attacks the lives of Muslim across the nation were impacted directly or indirectly. Research question 3 looked at how it impacted their lived experiences.

**Research Question 3. How did the terrorist attacks impact Muslims' lived experiences?**

*Discrimination and stereotype of the Muslim community post Charlie Hebdo*



While anti-Islamic sentiments have always existed, they were crystallized by the 2015 attacks. Public disdain became more widespread, obvious and vehement. In the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attacks of January 2015, Manuel Valls, member of the Socialist Party in France and Prime Minister of France at that time, surprisingly declared in June 2015 during an interview, “We cannot lose this war because it is a war of civilizations. It is our society, our civilization and our values that we are defending” (Associated French Press, 2015). This declaration by the Prime Minister, who is a member of the Socialist Party, was rather surprising as it was the same concept used by the ex-Republican French president Nicolas Sarkozy, whose values are in total opposition with those of the Socialist Party. However, Manuel Valls’s sentiments were reflected in an uptick of the unfavorable views of Muslims within the French population and across some European countries. In fact, the Pew Research Center in the United States revealed that unfavorable views of Muslims were on the rise in Europe. Participants were asked if they experienced any difficulties related to their background since the attack. Some participants such as Issouf, Kouassi and Reza felt the impact of those negative views of Muslims:

*At first, yes, but after what I liked is that the French people, the others they began to read, they began to understand what really Islam is. Since then no. People know very well that there are good Muslims like bad Muslims. People make the difference. After that depends on the neighborhood. For example, here (in the 19th arrondissement) they have no choice. But for example, if you go to a city where there are only racists and you come as a Muslim, they will automatically think about the attacks. They're going to tell him he's a shady guy.*

*There was too much fuss about Islam. Today you know very well if someone talks a little bit bad about Islam, they will be in every newspaper. We see it. It's like that. Even politics, to have a political career they must badmouth Islam a little bit. You have to say Islam is not good. It's barbarism; they do the prayer too much; they do this "blah blah." They do not integrate. If to be integrated means to necessarily look like that person, I do not want that.*

*So yes yes, absolutely! So, on the one hand, the people who attacked Charlie Hebdo were friends of mine. Ten days before I was with Chérif. You should know that in the 19th the majority had unwanted S files, because we rubbed shoulders with such and such. The concern that occurred with Chérif; I knew him very well, we discussed; he had his opinions, and it was not in favor of France. He believed that the United States greatly oppressed Muslims. After what he did, we were all shocked. If he really did it. But I am not going to go into conspiracy theory. It was shocking and I do not endorse it.*

On the other hand, other participants did not directly experience the effects of the terrorist attacks on their lived experiences. Ousmane even felt that it brought people to Islam to try and understand Muslims. Amadou and Assane, though, did recognize that they saw on social media a wave of hatred against Muslims making overt threats:

*No, now we can see that after the attacks more and more people are interested in religion and come to our religion. This is what we realize after the trials we went through. It can be positive. It is something that happens even if the attacks were sad, to see people die. Even the day after the attacks as Muslims I said to myself it's bad. Innocent people are dead, children under the guise of*

*religion, because it has nothing to do with it (our religion). It is just killing people, it's barbaric.*

*I was back home (in Senegal) in a French school, so we had a minute of silence like everyone, but we felt via the (social) networks that it was already hard for Muslims. So luckily, I was not there.*

*Not too much but Muslims in France I have seen this on social networks telling them to be ready to go. I saw a lot of insults.*

Then, Kouassi, Issouf, and Reza reflected on their personal experience and the treatment they personally received in the aftermath of the attacks based on their culture or religion. They were asked if they felt excluded based on their culture or religion.

*We feel a big difference toward us. We feel the difference, even distrust. There is one point I would like to raise. French people who are white, I do not know if we can call them of pure origins, they think; and it is an idea which is beginning to get rooted in their head, they think we are replacing them. It's something new that has also appeared in the French world. For them we are replacing them. For them we are too numerous. But it's been 20 years they say Muslims are 5 million in France. It has not changed so our parents did not have children (as many we have been told). In fact, it suits them well in the media. It is to make people who live in Brittany believe, to make them believe the Muslims are only 5 or 6 million<sup>15</sup>. Five or 6 million: It is perhaps the number of Muslims in Île de France we do not know all over France you have*

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<sup>15</sup> According to the Pew Research Center there were 5,7 million Muslims in France in 2017.

*to go to Marseille, you have to go to Montpellier, you have to go to Lille, Bordeaux Toulouse. We are very, very numerous here.*

*Not excluded, but a lot of jokes about my last name because one of the guys had the same last name as me. So sometimes people joke a little bit about it. Even at times for interviews I have not been hired in relation to this stigma. You go on YouTube or Facebook, just type [my surname], you see terrorism. But it's not all there is about [name associated with terrorism], there is everyone else; [other famous people have that name]. There are football players. There are presidents. Well, for example, I go to a meeting, I write [my last name], well everyone looks at me while it has nothing to do with it [the terrorist]. After that, it is bad memories. After tomorrow, even if I hear someone who goes to the dentist and says Mr Le Pen,<sup>16</sup> we are going to turn around, we are going to look, we are going to say he's a racist. It goes both ways.*

*I got arrested because I was running<sup>17</sup>. No seriously! I was a taxi driver at the time. I was leaving to turn on my parking meter. They arrested me and handcuffed me on the ground. I was running and I told them to wait until I turn on my parking meter; after that you can do whatever you want. I can't work if I don't turn on my parking meter on time. I couldn't turn it on. It was in front of everyone and just being on the ground and people looking at you even though you did nothing wrong, even if you were released. First, it's*

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<sup>16</sup> Mr Le Pen was the leader of a far-right party in France called "Le Front National". He is well known for his nationalistic views and negationist views about the Shoah.

<sup>17</sup> This anecdote eerily reminds us of Ahmaud Arbery who was killed while running black.

*humiliating. Secondly, even if you are released, people wonder "Yeah, but he did something." There is a little doubt.*

On the other hand, Ousmane, Amadou and Assane expressed that they did not personally feel excluded in the aftermath of the attacks but knew of others who did feel excluded:

*Not especially. I really didn't have the problem of being excluded.*

*Personally, no, but I know that some Muslims feel excluded. For example, my sister has trouble finding work as she wears the veil, while she has a bachelor's in commerce, she cannot find work because she has the veil.*

*No, it's just that I hear a lot of stereotypes about Muslims. For example, he will go to Syria. For example, if we want to get married. We meet the mother-in-law and the family, and she talks about those stereotypes. Non-Muslims are suspicious. The Muslim person? They live in society they are open. There is media misinformation about what a Muslim is. Why? They don't like the ideas that are in the Quran. I say the Quran is the truth and they don't like the truth; they want to lead people astray.*

Lastly, participants gave their thoughts on the terrorists. Some participants personally knew them. They lived in the same neighborhood, played video games together, and attended the same mosque. They reflected on the motives of the terrorists and this is what they had to say:

*Frankly in hindsight I told myself they should have done otherwise. It is true for us in Islam we must not speak ill of the prophet, we must not make a caricature of the prophet. But they should have done otherwise. In my opinion it's someone who put this idea in their head, and they made a mistake.*

*We must respect each religion. People here would not accept if it was a caricature of Jesus. We put him [Jesus] like that in a nightclub. They would not accept that. So, we also do not accept that. However, it's not that I defend those who did that. For me, they did not have to do this. But it is them, Charlie Hebdo, who is provoking, Charlie Hebdo. People will say they (Charlie Hebdo) criticized all the other religions, but we see it only when they talk about the Muslim religion. However, they go harder (on us) than on the others. We see it. We feel it. We are already stigmatized if it is to add to it and treat us less than.*

*We can understand but that doesn't mean we're going to excuse it. You can see the reason why they did it. It's true that making caricatures hurt some people. Everyone has their sensitivity. Even me seeing the caricatures of Jesus, Mohamed, to see this is not pleasant, but I'm not going to kill people for that either. We will say there is tolerance and tolerance. These people did not accept it, so they have attacked. It's sad to have killed people, innocent people. But I can understand why they did it. For them these things hurt them, but I'm not going to excuse them and say "Yes, it's good they've killed people."*

*I found out two days later. It was a friend of mine who called me and told me it was a guy from the 19th district. I looked it up. I saw Chérif. I was shocked. Chérif was someone who was rowdy, but his big brother was adorable. So, after that, I did not endorse it. I'm not Charlie Hebdo. I say it clearly.*

*However, I am the police officer who died in the line of duty. I am the person who suffered, but I am not Charlie Hebdo. However, it is a right, a constitutional right. I have the right not to be so-and-so. I have the right not to*

*endorse something. I do not endorse what they did. I talk about Chérif and the bombings, and I do not endorse what Charlie Hebdo did either I believe it is a call to hatred. OK, you did it [Charlie Hebdo caricature]; move on to something else! Stop targeting the same thing, because the issue is that there are people who are weak-minded, and in the end the blame is on us, those who are “integrated”. The term integration: I hate it, but oh well. So, it's an amalgam? That's it.*

*I understood because of the cartoons. They made a caricature of the prophet. They did not like that so...*

*First, to me this story, I'm not too sure if it's true or if it's false. There are rumors that say it's true, others say it's false. It's a cover up by the state. After I understood why they did that, because they spoke badly of the religion. They did not like the chronicles on the religion.*

Amadou and Boubacar on the other hand did express that they did not understand the motives of the terrorists and were quite shocked:

*I was shocked. For me, the terrorists are not Muslims because the Muslim religion is about love, peace, and they do the opposite of religion. It is they who give a bad image of our religion because the Muslim religion is a religion of peace and love. They kill in the name of Allah, and it is not our religion.*

*I did not understand.*

In the aftermath of Charlie Hebdo some participants stated they did feel the discrimination while other participants did not feel the change of treatment. While they unanimously condemned the terrorist attacks, they stated they could understand why they occurred. They mentioned the continued relentlessness of Charlie Hebdo and the targeting of the Muslim community.

The responses of the participants were quite enlightening with respect to their views on the terrorist attacks. Many Muslims across the nations echoed their sentiments. Children at school refused to participate in the minute of silence and defiantly proclaimed “I am not Charlie”. Those different incidents in the schools were viewed by the government as incivilities and contrary to the values of the French Republic.

Research question 4 focused on the national debate and subsequent educational policies that emerged from that debate to address the response to the terrorist attacks.



## CHAPTER IV-B

### FINDINGS

In this chapter documents were analyzed. Since it was not possible to conduct interviews in the classroom, I decided to analyze official documents from the French government as well as resources they made available to teachers to teach the events. Unlike Chapter IV-A, this chapter addresses the educational policies, while interviews are included, they are not the main focus. I had intended to observe a classroom and teachers' practices, however I could not obtain permission to conduct the study in the school settings. Therefore, I shifted my focus to document analysis to get a broader view of how the Educational system responded to the terrorist attacks educationally. The documents were specifically designed in the aftermath of the attacks to help educators in the classroom.

#### **Research question 4. How do the terrorist attacks impact educational policies?**

The terrorist attacks were a cataclysmic event in French society. People scrambled to understand how and why it happened. Support from the entire world poured in. World leaders marched hand in hand together in Paris to commemorate the victims. More than 3 million people marched in the Parisian streets (Le Parisien, 2015). Two weeks after the attacks, the French Minister of Education, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, unveiled a series of measures to help restore teachers' authority in the classroom and to ensure that Republican values were transmitted. This wave of measures came after several reports that students were not respecting the minute of silence. Vallaud-Belkacem stated,

When these young people feel frustrated with school, they look for an identity elsewhere and put forward their religious identity, ... It is not surprising that they are

impervious to republican values. It is not just family that must transmit values, but school also” (Alami, 2015, paras.2).

Echoing the Education Minister [Ousmane](#) stated:

*The person I am today is because of my parents who gave me these values, this education, this respect for people. It's not the French system at all. We can see today that the French have an education. You will not tell me that they are better educated than us. I find that we even have better principles than them. We can also see it with the babysitters of white children who are often black moms. And why? Because they know that at the educational level, they regulate children well. They teach them the values. we see that the children educated in this way are much better than those who are educated supposedly with the national education. At the educational level they really train nobody.*

Parents are the primary educators who transmit the values. Education Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem wanted to change that and put school at the forefront of the transmission of the Republican values. To achieve this goal the Ministry of Education unveiled a €250 million plan to train French teachers to discuss issues of racism and reinforce the notion of “*le vivre ensemble*” [live together] (Alami, 2015). The plan also included the implementation of the *enseignement moral et civique* (EMC) (moral and civic education). EMC would be taught from kindergarten to 12th grade through educational tools provided by the Ministry of Education. It also included the singing of the national anthem “La Marseillaise” (De la Baume, 2015). The official website for the Ministry of Education, Eduscol, provides official bulletins, reports on EMC but also information about *laïcité* at school and radicalization prevention. Interestingly, the Ministry of Education must draw attention on the fact that

radicalization is not just regarding Islam. In the figure below the arrow points at the sentence “Radicalization is not exclusive to Islamist terrorism”.

Figure 3  
*Prevention against Radicalization at School*



Participants expressed feeling targeted for their religion and being regarded and treated as potential terrorists, while the Ministry of Education wants to reinforce that Islam is not targeted when it comes to preventing radicalization, but rather attention is paid to all religious extremism.

## **EMC**

The Ministry of Education published an official bulletin highlighting the different components of the EMC. It focuses on three goals:

- 1) Respect others
- 2) Acquire and share the values of the Republic, and
- 3) Build a culture of civism.

The first goal—Respect others—aims to teach students to value other human beings and respect their freedom and treat them as equal and to develop relations of fraternity echoing the French national motto “liberty, equality, fraternity”. It also mentions that it includes the respect of their philosophical and religious views, which fosters

secularism (Ministry of Education, 2018). The second goal—Acquire and share the values of the Republic—focuses on the transmission of the Republican values. It is necessary to transmit those values to guarantee the freedom of its citizens and “in addition to the transmission of knowledge, the Nation sets the school’s primary mission to share the values of the Republic with students. Public education service helps all students acquire respect for the equal dignity of human beings, freedom of conscience and secularism” (Ministry of Education, 2018). Lastly, the third goal—Build a culture of civism—emphasizes that while citizens enjoy a certain freedom, they are still part of a community with common values and laws that they must respect. Of those common values, secularism is one of them.

### ***Laïcité***

*Laïcité*, or secularism, is a core aspect of the French Republic in Article 1 of the French constitution it is said that France is an indivisible country, secular, democratic and social. *Laïcité* is a concept that is taught at school in civic education. The law of 1905 established total French *laïcité*. Still, French secularism particularly in education is viewed as incompatible with Muslim students’ faith. Later, this incompatibility translates into a ban on any religious sign specifically targeting the headscarves worn by Muslim female students. If they refused to remove their headscarves, they were denied entry to school further marginalizing them.

The participants in this study expressed their views on the principle of *laïcité* taught at school. Participants were asked what they were taught about secularism at school. The answers below reflect their definition of secularism according to what they were taught: Amadou, Boubacar, Assane and Issouf defined *laïcité* in terms of either respect for religions or the non-showing of religious signs:

*It's to be good to others, no? Do not show your cross at school, and things that show you are part of a religion.*

*Respect for several religions.*

*Secularism is when we are told we are in a secular school we are in neutral territory. We do not display religions.*

*According to them we are all the same, must not show one's origins, not show one's religion. Liberty equality fraternity. I do not even believe it.*

**Kouassi**, **Ousmane** and **Reza** on the other hand did not see secularism as simply respect for religions or not showing their faith:

*For me if I understand secularism is the weapon that we use against Muslims to say to Muslims "oh no do not show yourselves too much, "le vivre ensemble" [live together]. But it does not bother anyone when someone wears a cross around the neck. So why does it bother when someone wears a djellaba, or when someone puts on a veil. I don't get it. I see this through discrimination. In the sense they always want to remind us "Oh yeah! You're Muslim, so you're different."*

*We are told that secularism was not showing any ostentatious sign. This is the version of what we hear secularism is. There must be no religious signs in public space. They are trying to take away our religion. For me it is! Supposedly for them, it's for people to accept. each other. But in fact, no, it's just that presidents decided to be atheists, and everyone has to bow to their choice. I want to live my faith as I want. If they, for example, don't want to show any ostentatious sign outside, that's their problem. But I don't see how if I see someone with a cross outside or even in class, I don't see how that affects*

*me. Secularism for me is vague, it's a ploy they use when they want to create a controversy.*

*The right to worship as long as you don't go against the laws of the republic. Except that today it means that you have no right to worship, which is a bit odd because really secularism is perfect. You practice your faith as you see fit as long as you don't bother others. Apart from secularism we talk about behavior. You can have any behavior you want at home, but outside with the neighbors you're not going to piss off the world {with your behavior}. I consider it a "savoir vivre", if we really knew what it meant if we hadn't distorted its meaning. After the media really hijacked its meaning. I believe that the conflict we have today really started in the 95s.*

*With the law about the veil, you think?*

*My sisters went to school with the veil; it never bothered anyone. My sister passed her baccalaureate at 14. Her teachers loved her. There was never a problem. Except that French people are stupid. When [French people] are told that the veil disturbs, well then, the veil now disturbs.*

These participants saw secularism as a ploy, even a weapon used against Muslims. Even though secularism had existed in the French constitution for decades, it was not until two decades ago with the controversy about the veil that secularism in the public space and more specifically the school sites became an ongoing debate. They felt that their rights to worship were respected as long as it did not infringe on French laws. They particularly do not understand how an ostentatious religious sign goes against secularism. To help teachers and students alike, the Ministry of Education created resources to implement *laïcité* in schools. A charter was created in different formats

so teachers could use it in their classrooms, or the school could put in the bulletin board outside of the school visible by all. This charter contains 15 points explaining the principles of *laïcité* in the Republican schools. The charter states, “The Nation entrusts the School with the mission of sharing to the students the values of the Republic”.

Figure 4  
*Secularism Charter at School*

**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.

•• LA RÉPUBLIQUE EST LAÏQUE ••

**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.

**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.*

**6** La laïcité de l'École offre aux élèves les conditions pour forger 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 empêcheraient de faire leurs propres choix.

**7** La laïcité assure aux élèves l'accès à une **culture commune et partagée**.

**8** La laïcité permet l'exercice 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 le **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. Il leur revient de porter la présente charte à la connaissance des parents d'élèves.

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

•• L'ÉCOLE EST LAÏQUE ••

**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.

Logo of the French Republic: République Française

Logo of the Ministry of National Education: ministère Éducation nationale



The first point states “France is **an indivisible Republic, secular, democratic and social**. It ensures equality before the law, throughout its territory, by all the citizens. She respects all beliefs”. The Charter emphasizes that while France is a secular Republic it respects all beliefs. Therefore, the Republican school is also a place where all beliefs should be respected. In point 3, the charter further states that “Secularism guarantees **freedom of conscience** to all. **Everyone is free to believe or not to believe**. It [*Laïcité*] allows the free expression of one’s convictions, with respect for those of others and within the limits of public order”. Therefore, freedom of religion is respected as well as the freedom to express one’s religion and is a right that French citizens enjoy. Some participants expressed that they could indeed freely express their religious beliefs as long as it was within the limits of public order. Other participants, on the other hand, pointed out that they did not feel that religious beliefs were respected and that they could not freely express their faith without fear of being stigmatized.

Lastly, in point 10 the charter states, “**It is the responsibility of the staff to convey to students the meaning and value of secularism, as well as other principles and fundamentals of the Republic**. They [educators and school staff] ensure their application in the school context. It is their responsibility to carry this charter to the knowledge of the parents of students”. School officials such as teachers, the administration and staff are public servants and as such it is their responsibility to transmit the Republican value of secularism and that they are to ensure those values are respected in the Republican School. Teachers are given resources to teach secularism at school. Let us look at some of those resources.

## Web Resources

### *Réseau Canopé*

The website offers educational resources for the schools. It published a video “Vinz et Lou - Secularism and religious facts” about *laïcité* for students ages 7 to 12 years. In this video students learn the distinction between “knowing” and “believing”. Teachers are given the keys to share knowledge about secularism and religious facts while transmitting elements of culture essential to the understanding of the contemporary world, to speak about it in a peaceful way, and to calm the controversies and tensions raised by the project” (Réseau Canopé, 2017).

Figure 5

*Vinz et Lou - Secularism and religious facts*



## *Enquête*

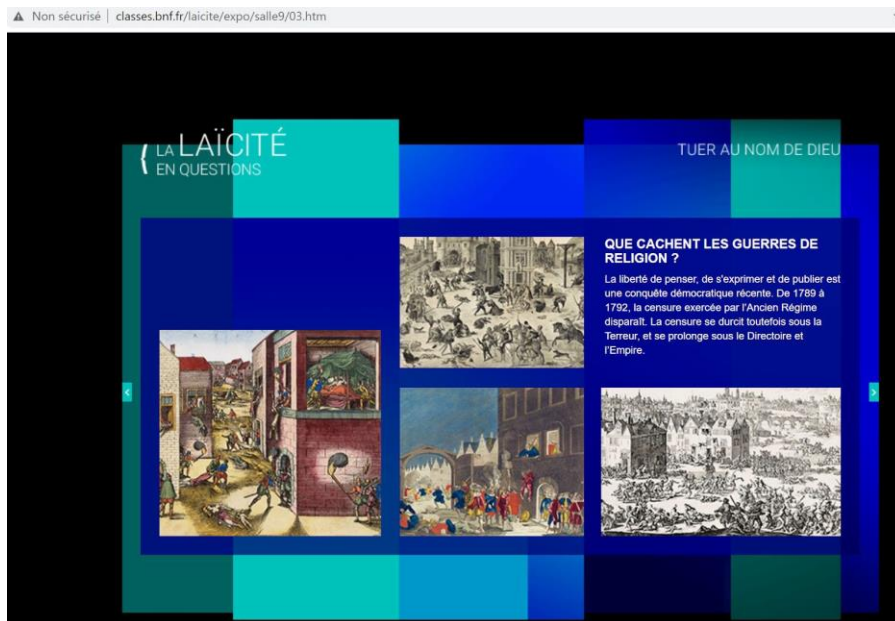
**Enquête** is described as follows on their website “an association approved by the Ministry of National Education and laureate of “France is committed”. Enquête designs pedagogies and playful educational tools in secularism and religious facts to develop in children a calm and thoughtful relationship to these subjects” (Enquête, 2019). On this website, the organization Enquête proposes different resources such as activities teachers can use in their classrooms to teach about secularism “in those troubled times” (Tanisme Pen Point, 2020). One of those activities is True/False. The facilitator will organize a True/False on secularism around the following concepts: freedom, equality, separation and neutrality, school, pluralism. The facilitator uses the “True-False Quiz: secularism in concrete terms is what?”. Teams compete against each other by answering questions about secularism. Enquête describes the rules as follows: To play True-False, form three teams. Ask a team a question: if they find the answer, it gains one point, if it is able in addition to justify it, it gains two points. If she does not find the answer, other groups have the right to respond. You can also animate this activity with a river of doubt if you have space. Summarize with the children the essential principles of secularism. If necessary, have a hanged man about expressions "freedom of conscience" and "freedom of worship". Ask them what these expressions concretely involve: showing that there are very different beliefs depending on the person. Help them find the words learned: there are people who have a religion, monotheistic or polytheistic, there are atheist people and agnostic people (p. 11)

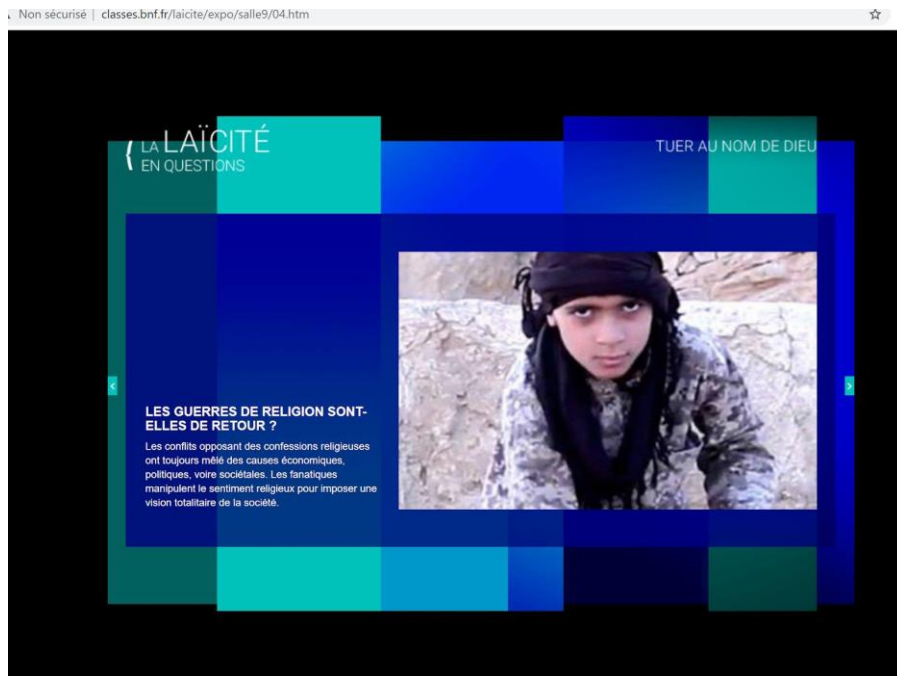
## *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*

The **Bibliothèque Nationale de France** (BNF) or the National Library of France proposes a virtual exhibition. This file also includes problematized educational avenues and resources.

In the section titled “To kill in the name of God,” BNF tackles the topic of killing in God’s name. In the figure below the slides discuss religious wars. The picture of a visually Arabic child dressed in a military suit was chosen to evoke possible modern religious wars. One can wonder the intent behind choosing such a specific picture, especially knowing it is a resource used in schools. The question “would Muslim children feel even more targeted and stigmatized?” could be raised.

Figure 6  
*To Kill in the name of God.*





### *Bibliothèques sans Frontières*

**Bibliothèques sans Frontières** [Libraries Without Borders] proposes a web series directly following the attack of Charlie Hebdo. On its website it states “These short videos echo a strong demand from parents, teachers and students after the attacks against Charlie Hebdo and its journalists in January 2015. Somewhat helpless in the face of questions to which they had no answers, many teachers have turned to Libraries Without Borders, asking for educational support. Responding to this call, with the support of the January 11 Fund, *Bibliothèques sans Frontières* is now offering a web-series of 10 videos on secularism explained by law, intended for children and young people, but also for adults, whether they are teachers, parents, or quite simply citizens” (Bibliothèques sans Frontières, 2017). In one of their videos titled “Why condemn Dieudonné and not Charlie Hebdo,” they address the question of the double standard, an issue also raised by the participants. Dieudonné is a famous French humorist. He has publicly spoken about the Jewish community and was

legally condemned for his comments. Libraries Without borders mentioned that students have asked why he was condemned for his comments about the Jewish community and not Charlie Hebdo for their comments about Islam.

### ***Generation laïcité***

**Generation laïcité** is a joint initiative of the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH) and the Observatory of secularism, to help young people discover what secularism is. Through a question-answer game, students can discover secularism daily. It is interesting to note that out of 30 questions, 7 questions or scenarios concern Islam, 2 are in regard to Judaism, and one in regard to Catholicism. The rest are generic questions about religion in general.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, several themes that emerged throughout the study were explored. The themes of hybridity and identity, *laïcité*, othering, language, and parental influence on identity formation as well as the Muslim faith and discrimination were discussed. The views of participants on their identity were presented to support the themes that emerged. An analysis of official written documents was also provided to present the impact of the attacks on educational policies at the national level.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

#### Summary of the Purpose Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the negotiation of Muslim youth identity in a post-Charlie Hebdo France. The study was particularly warranted with respect to understanding attitudes of young Muslims living in an area of Paris known to harbor homegrown terrorists. This qualitative study also examined the effect of the attacks on educational policies. To understand these phenomena, I examined how Muslim youth in the 19th arrondissement constructed their cultural identity. I also investigated how the terrorist attacks of January 2015 impacted their lived experiences. Additionally, educational policies and materials directly implemented in the aftermath of the attacks were examined to gain a deeper understanding of the measures taken by the government as a direct response to those attacks at the educational level.

A qualitative case study, which “means to study research problems inquiring into the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” was used (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). It allowed me a platform for offering participants a voice often unheard in the actual context. As a matter of fact, the situation in France regarding the events remains highly volatile. In the wake of the attacks of Charlie Hebdo and later that year of the November attacks that left 130 dead (Walt, 2020), as well as the Nice attacks of 2016 (Salaün & Pailliez, 2020) and most recently the beheading the history teacher (Walt, 2020), Muslims are still under a microscope. Participants face the challenges of being Muslim in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks.

The research questions were the following:

1. How do Muslim youth construct their cultural identity?
2. What is the impact of *laïcité* in the construction of Muslim youth identity?
3. How did the terrorist attacks impact Muslims' lived experiences?
4. How do the terrorist attacks impact educational policies?

### **Context of Findings**

This study serves to add literature onto an ongoing phenomenon: terrorist attacks by Muslim youth in France. As terrorist attacks continue to occur—the latest attack occurring on October 16, 2020—it is crucial to hear the voices of Muslim youth to find policies that may effectively bridge the divide between Muslim youth and the French Republican School. This study highlights eight participants' voices on their cultural identity, *laïcité*, and their views on the terrorist attacks of January 2015. Following is a discussion and implications of the findings

### **Discussion, Implications of Findings**

#### **Research Question 1: How do Muslim youth construct their cultural identity?**

##### ***Hybridity: What am I?***

Galeotti (1993) wrote that the educational system is “an instrument of the secular state for the public education of the future citizens, where all religious symbols are banned and public spirit should be taught...The public school is then meant to produce French citizens and not the citizens of a multiethnic polity” (Galeotti, 1993, p. 592). Similarly, Bleich (2000) wrote that the French Republican School has promoted French universalism at school since its inception. As a matter of fact, to guarantee the integration of all its citizens, France requires its citizens and immigrants to “completely assimilate into the French society in order to become French. National identity prevails over group or religious identity” (Scott, 2007, p. 13). While the French Republican School is promoting French universalism and a



common French identity, in their study Croucher et al. (2008) found that “French-Muslims reported significantly higher levels of ethnic identification than non-Muslims” (p. 191). The present study shows that participants find themselves at a crossroad regarding their identity. They must navigate between their ethnic identity, religious identity, and French identity.

### ***Ethnic Identity, Language and Culture***

Findings reveal that the participants perceived their identity as a mix of French culture and the culture of their parents. At home they were raised traditionally following the cultural customs of their parents, such as food choices, religion and language. Kouassi stated that he did not eat pork or drink wine because of his African culture (which would equate with his Muslim religion). Issouf and Assane emphasized speaking their parents’ language Malian and Senegalese at home or with their peers who also speak the language “to tease each other”. Croucher et al (2008) noted “our ethnic identities define who we are; these identities offer commonality in linguistic and nonverbal behavior” (p. 184). They found commonalities in speaking the language with their peers even if they all speak French. Code switching a big part of their language identities. Participants also pointed out the cultural aspect of their upbringing. Assane explained that he had the culture from Senegal, and he knew a lot of stories from Senegal. Ousmane also pointed out that his parents transmitted their culture to him through education, he also spoke about the stories he heard about Mali. His parents told him stories that he could relate to unlike the stories told about Clovis<sup>18</sup> at school. Embracing their parents’ ethnic culture is a way to assert themselves and their heritage in the French society, to showcase the diverse country

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<sup>18</sup> First king of the Franks

that France is. Reza as a matter of fact expressed that this diversity made “France one of the most beautiful countries”. It is also a way to honor their parents. They are who they are because of how their parents raised them, the values they instilled in them. Ousmane noted “I would never deny everything my parents taught me. Because the person I am today is because of my parents who gave me these values, this education, this respect for people. It’s not the French system”. To not acknowledge and embrace their ethnic identity would be like disowning their parents and their values as Kouassi explained “To be honest I accept some aspects of the French identity, but I do not accept it 100% because if I accepted it 100% it means to deny our other origin and that's what they want some of them. That's what they would like me to do I cannot deny the origin of my parents”. When asked how they would describe themselves to members of their own community Kouassi answered “I am proud of who I am. I feel like a black Muslim”. While participants spoke highly of their parents’ cultural background and influences in their lives, they mentioned the influence of the French culture in their lives as well.

### ***French Identity, Language and Culture***

Participants also recognized the influence of the French culture on their upbringing. Participants were asked if they identified more as French or their parents’ ethnicity. They almost unanimously responded that they identified more with the French identity. Reza emphatically exclaimed “I am 2000% French!” The factors that contributed to them identifying more with their French identity were school education, language, location and citizenship. Location as in where they physically lived and where they were born, was one of the first factors they mentioned. Amadou, Assane and Kouassi stated “I live in France”. Where they lived but also the location where they were born was an important factor for them, rooting their French identity

in France. Issouf declared “Sometimes we are even more French than French who are born in Spain or wherever, they say they are French but us we are born in France”. Then, Reza commented “we have a European education”, thus citing education as another factor of their identification with the French identity. The language was another aspect. Issouf said “I can speak French with my sisters. I go out, I speak French”. Citizenship is really what gives participants a certainty in their French identity, that they too are French just the same as white French. Boubacar acknowledged “I was born here. I have the French citizenship”. Amadou echoed Boubacar’s statement “I’m French because I have my papers”. Their French citizenship is documented.

There is always a strong need as well to have their Frenchness validated by other French people. Participants mentioned that they were seen as French when there was the World Cup of soccer. The French national soccer team had 17 non -white players out of 23. Kouassi mockingly said

You can see me as French when you follow the world cup like Paul Pogba Ngolo Kanté [ soccer players]. They don’t see you as French when you go to prison or when you work at the post office. That is the problem, but in both cases in the worst and in the best [scenario] they must see you as a Frenchman”.

Ousmane echoed that sentiment stating:

The only day they tried to hug me was in the subway during the day of the World Cup. At that moment we were all French. Ngolo Kante Ngolo Kante. Everyone loved blacks, Arabs, everyone loved each other that day. Personally, I feel like I am a foreigner because I work at the cash register in a rather upscale district, you will say. I feel the gaze of customers on me. Some won’t

even say hello. We can feel a certain disgust because yes, I have to give you money [ to pay], but you remain black. Even if the person is going to speak to you, they will use a vocabulary that they would not use with a white person. Respect is not the same.

Ousmane was treated as a subaltern, as somebody who is less than by the clients coming to store. He clearly felt the difference in the way of how they addressed him, interacted with him, and ultimately respected him or lack thereof.

***Other: a stranger in my homeland/contested identities***

Apart from feeling that their identity is the result of mixing the French culture and their parents' culture, participants also expressed that, despite identifying with French culture and being taught French culture, they feel as strangers in their homeland as a result of *otherization* by other French people. Ousmane noted "there is still a lot of stigmatization among the French who increasingly reject Islam". Kouassi recounted an experience he had

Last time there was a lady who asked me the question "what is your origin?" I told her I was from, and I lied to her, I told her I am West Indian so she would leave me alone. But she said to me "but sir where are you from?". First, I said French after she pushed me to say West Indian. Yet She repeated "what is your origin?" Well now I will tell you the truth I am African, West African Ivory Coast. But you understand the question (he speaks to me). On three occasions she told me, sir, where are you from? For her there is French yes but there is those of French descent. You have to justify yourself.

Otherization also occurred through the media and politics. The media regularly discusses the Muslim community. Fredette (2014) found that between 1994 and 2008 there was an increase of mention of the word Muslim in the renown French

newspaper Le Monde (p.37). It was directly related to current events. Though I do not have current statistics on the mention of the word Muslim or Islam in France in the media a quick search on google for articles about the French Muslim community or Islam yields a great number of results with newspaper articles and videos. Kouassi lamented “The problem is the media overwhelm us; they accuse us. Oh, there is a problem with Muslims. Every day they say there is a problem with Muslims”.

Ousmane also stated “In France you can see through the media they are focusing a bit on Islam”. Fredette (2014) also found that “Unfortunately for Muslims, “becoming news” has meant “becoming a problem.” In each of these events, Muslims are associated with violence, extreme religiosity, and disrespect for France’s secularism” (p. 39). The politicians and to a certain extent the French government regularly discuss Muslims as well. Indeed, it has become a political platform for some like Marine Le Pen who is the leader of the far right but more surprisingly or maybe not leaders from the right and sometimes the left joined the chorus about anti-Muslimness. In the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks of January 2015, Manuel Valls, member of the Socialist Party in France and Prime Minister of France at that time, surprisingly declared in June 2015 during an interview, “we cannot lose this war because it is a war of civilizations. It is our society, our civilization and our values that we are defending” (Associated French Press, 2015). Nicolas Sarkozy in 2010 said during a speech “It must be admitted, and I must say it, we are suffering the consequences of fifty years of insufficiently regulated immigration, which have resulted in a failure of integration” (Mallié, 2010). During that same speech Sarkozy explored the possibility of stripping away the citizenship of criminals of immigrant descent. Politicians make very public comments on the failure of integration of Muslims into the French society. Reza echoed that feeling stating, “it is clear that the

French government has a real problem with foreigners or the children of foreigners and it is they who create this discomfort through the media, through the laws which, it's institutional racism". One can wonder how do you fail to be integrated in a society you were born into? Is their religiosity a marker of a failed integration?

Participants mentioned that the color of their skin was often a giveaway for their non Frenchness, for them being seen as Other. This discrimination based on skin color preclude them from attaining equal citizenship. Despite their verifiable citizenship, their visible ethnic marker thrust them in an ambiguous relationship with French society. They are only acknowledged as French when they positively contribute to French society on the local, national, or international stage like during the World Cup.

Noteworthy is the concept of color blindness the French Republic is trying to convey through its principle of universalism and Frenchness. No matter the color, origin, religion the French people are one and the same (Scott, 2007, p. 11). However, Fredette (2014) remarked: "young Muslims, are less trustful of the French republican ideal of *laïcité*, at least as it is articulated by most French elites. They do not have the same degree of faith in the difference-blind model that the cohort (using the phrase loosely) ahead of them does" (p. 53). This concept of color blindness does not translate into the inevitable question that occurs after stating being French "*But where are you from?*" The answer of "I am French" is not satisfying enough. One participant pointed out that even when at the police station, the police officers would make fun of his answer by randomly shouting African countries in a mocking manner further othering him. At every level they are othered. What was striking was the look of resignation on their face "We are used to it".

Participants explained that they constantly had to remind other French people of their own French identity and belonging to the French Republic. They insisted on the fact that they were born in France and thus were French. Ousmane noted “I was born here. I am French!” Amadou went further stating “I’m French because I have my papers”. Their citizenship to them should outweigh their skin color in determining their Frenchness.

Interestingly, participants noted that while the process of otherization occurred in France, it also occurred in their parents’ native country. Reza plainly pointed out “I am a foreigner here. I am a foreigner in Algeria”. Ousmane stated that “in Mali we are not really Malian”. Ironically Kouassi described how paradoxically in Africa he was called a white man. His Frenchness made him a white man in the eyes of the locals despite his dark skin. Frenchness is rooted in whiteness.

Otherization done by other members of the French society, the media and politics was not a surprising finding, however, self-otherization was a finding I did not expect to find. I define self-otherization as the internalized “foreignness” ascribed by others to the subjects. Participants were asked how they described themselves to other French people (i.e., not issue from the diaspora, or of not known immigrant heritage), what the media refer to as a Français pure souche. Ousmane replied “

Most of the time I will say directly that I am Malian. I mean of Malian origin. Madame, if I said I have papers, you know I have French papers. If they see me walking and they say to me "Where do you come from?" I'm not going to tell them I'm from France. I'm going to tell them directly the origin because that is what they are waiting for. They see my skin and they know.”

In research question 2 I discussed the impact of *laïcité* on the construction of Muslim youth identity.

**Research Question 2. What is the impact of *laïcité* in the construction of Muslim youth identity?**

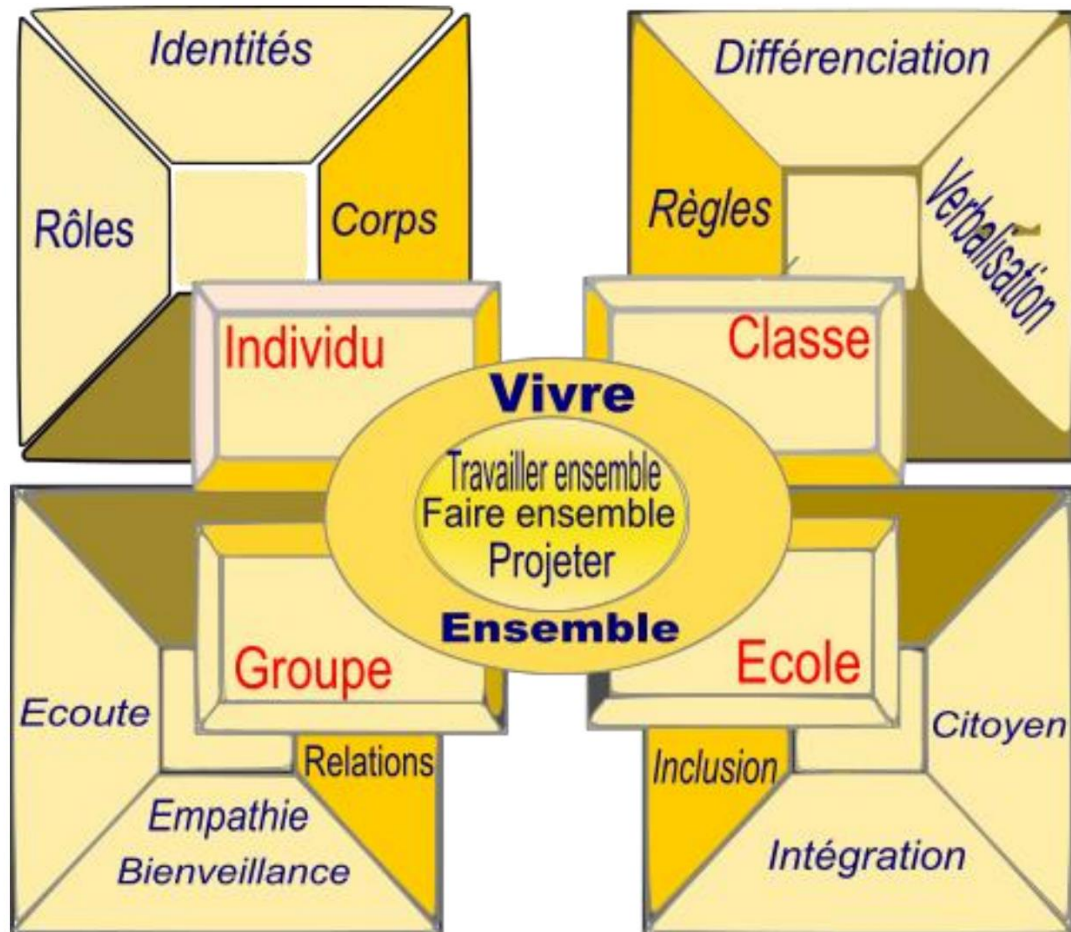
***To be or not to be laïc***

Secularism in France and especially in the public sphere is a major topic of discussion. Participants were asked to reflect on their knowledge of the concept of *laïcité* and what they were taught at school, as well as how this concept impacted their religiosity. Findings reveal different perspectives on the subject matter. For some participants they understand and agree with the concept of secularism and religiosity being a private matter. They understand the separation of state and religion. They would practice the prayer at home because school or work is a public space where practicing one's religion has no place. On the other hand, some participants felt that being a practicing Muslim in a secular state was not compatible especially if wearing visible religious signs such as the veil, expressing incomprehension as to why the veil would be banned at school. While secularism was originally about the Catholic Church some participants felt that now secularism is specifically targeting Islam. Davis (2011) argued that secularism protected French citizens from the influence of religious groups and most specifically the Catholic Church. However, the focus shifted to Islam as France became home to the largest Muslim population in Western Europe (p. 122-123). The ban of religious signs following the incident of 1989 was the beginning of a dredge between Islam and the secular French State. Participants were asked about their knowledge of the concept of *laïcité* they were taught at school. They all perfectly understood what *laïcité* meant. Participants noted that you could



not show any visible religious signs in the public sphere. Kouassi noted it was part of “le vivre ensemble”<sup>19</sup> a notion taught at school.

Figure 7  
The four pillars of “le vivre ensemble”



The four pillars are *Individual* encompassing identity, body and roles, *Classroom* encompassing rules, differentiation, verbalization, *Group* encompassing listening, relationship, empathy and benevolence and *School* encompassing inclusion, integration, and citizenship. Participants understood *laïcité* to be the freedom to practice any religion “as long as you don’t go against the laws of the Republic” stated

<sup>19</sup> Live together.

Reza, the respect of diversity and people accepting of each other. Viewed as such *laïcité* seems to be an all-encompassing tenet, one that promotes the acceptance of everyone. Conceptually *laïcité* could be regarded as acculturative in its tenets. When one look at the definition of acculturation “a process through which a person or group from one culture comes to adopt the practices and values of another culture, while still retaining their own distinct culture” (Cole, 2019, para. 1), *laïcité* seems to lend itself in that process. *Laïcité* is defined on the official French government website as “*Laïcité* guarantees freedom of conscience. From this derives the freedom to express one's beliefs or convictions within the limits of respect for public order. Secularism implies the neutrality of the State and imposes the equality of all before the law without distinction of religion or belief” (paras. 1). Therefore, in theory Muslims should be free to exercise their religion free of pressure from others and particularly from the State. However, the reality seems quite different according to participants. Kouassi described *laïcité* “as weapon that we use against Muslims” to force them to assimilate.

### ***Frenchness/Assimilation***

As mentioned previously, the concept of integration has been an integral part of the public French discourse. The question was how can someone who was born in France and raised in France need to be integrated into the French society? Aren't they intrinsically integrated, already a part of the community they were born and raised into? If *laïcité* is carried out the way it is articulated, then Muslims would be an integral part of the French society as they are without changing. However, it seems that *laïcité* instead participates in the process of assimilation. Assimilation is defined as “the process by which a person or group adopts a new culture that virtually replaces their original culture, leaving only trace elements behind, at most” (Cole,

2019, paras. 13). Cole (2019) further elaborates “Assimilation, as a process and an outcome, is common among immigrant populations that seek to blend in with the existing fabric of society” (paras. 2). France at its core promotes universalism, the “oneness and sameness of all individuals...taken to be the antithesis of communalism” (Scott, 2007, p. 11). Immigrants must completely assimilate into the French society to be seen as French. Islam and practicing their religion seem to be in direct opposition of Frenchness. This process of assimilation started during the colonization era. During the occupation of Algeria, the French military adopted a policy of forced assimilation where “the Algerian people were characterized as ‘Muslim French,’ Algerian towns were infused with French-style architecture, and there was a high degree of linguistic acculturation” (Wiles, 2007, p. 704), including “the removal of the veil...an essential step in the French nationalist agenda to make Algeria French, for the veil was a visible barrier to the establishment of French “indivisibility” (Bradford, 1999, p. 127). To this day we still have this neo colonialism taking place through La Francophonie set up to spread and maintain the French language worldwide through its ancient colonies. An expansion of colonialism in which international activity provides exclusively for the benefit of France and not necessarily those who come in contact with it.

*Laïcité* perpetuates the process of assimilation. Amadou explained “For example when you go to work you will not show that you are Muslim you see. You make abstraction of all that, you go about your day quietly and after you practice (your religion). It does not help to show people that you are Muslim you will be frowned upon. It's stupid”.

Some participants rejected this process of assimilation. When asked if to achieve successful integration meant the loss or negation of their ethnic and religious

identity would they want to be a part of that process, participants rejected that process of assimilation. “Take away my French nationality and I keep Islam” said Issouf. Ousmane stated “Religion is more important to me than my French identity”. Kouassi flatly said “if to assimilate is to have a better job or to be seen like them [...] so assimilation does not interest me.” For participants, the parameters of *laïcité* as part of the assimilation process and not the acculturative process as it is purported to be, is forcing them to choose between participating in Frenchness by way of universalism or to reject Frenchness to hold on to their ethnic and religious identity. Reza argued:

So, the term integration I don't accept it. I can't accept it. I know that I have a French culture and that I was born in France. In fact, I am French by filiation. My father is Algerian. In addition to that fact, that my mother is French by blood. I don't see integration. For me it's not about the person. As long as she or he respects the laws of the republic, you can't talk to me about integration. You went to school in France, you work in France, you have studied in France, you have a French culture. For the most part when they go to their home country, they are French. They have no culture [Arabic culture], they can't speak Arabic, they can't write it, they can't read it. [...] We are French because we follow the laws of the republic, we respect the laws of the republic, because we consider ourselves French.

For him, the term *integration* does not resonate because once again how can you ask someone who was born, raised, educated in that country to assimilate into that country? Participants live every day a conflict of battling biases, those of Frenchness and *laïcité*. To this end, the children of immigrants then pay a price, not only in France but in the country of their families.

**Research Question 3. How did the terrorist attacks impact Muslims' lived experiences?**

***Being Muslim in a post-Charlie Hebdo area***

Participants had to reflect on their lived experiences in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. Findings again show differing experiences. Participants mentioned the negative representation of Islam and Muslims that occurred in the aftermath of the attacks. Demonizing Islam became a national sport which would land you on the news further spreading harmful generalizations of Islam and Muslims. The media has always fueled those harmful views of Muslims as Bowen (2007) noted “the French news media did their best to inflame the resulting anxieties. By early 2002, many French journalists, intellectuals, and officials increasingly linked the problem of scarves in schools with three other problems of society: communalism, Islamism, and sexism” (p.155). Participants did state that the media reinforced negative stereotypes the general population may have had about Muslims. Charlie Hebdo crystallized even more those anti-Muslims sentiments. Christophe Castaner the minister of the Interior encouraged people to report individuals presenting signs of Islamist radicalization. Those signs included: rigorous religious practice [...] exacerbated during the Ramadan”, “wear a beard”, “conversion ” to Islam,“ change of behavior in the entourage ”, “whether he used to do the kiss and doesn’t do it anymore”, refusal to work with a woman ”,“ regular or ostentatious practice of ritual prayer ”, or even“ wearing the full veil ” for a female civil servant ” (Lyes, 2019, paras. 2). The issue with those broad and loose signs of radicalization is how is the average citizen able to make the difference between what constitutes normal religious practices and true radicalization.

This call to exercise your civic duty by denouncing suspicious behaviors also led to an understanding of the motives of the terrorists by the participants. Not surprisingly when participants were asked if they understood the motives of the terrorists, they answered yes. Kouassi declared

We must respect each religion. People here would not accept if it was a caricature of Jesus. We put him [Jesus] like that in a nightclub. They would not accept that. So, we also do not accept that. However, it's not that I defend them those who did that. For me they did not have to do this. But it is them Charlie Hebdo who is provoking, Charlie Hebdo. People will say they [Charlie Hebdo] criticized all the other religions but we see it only when they talk about the Muslim religion. However, they go harder [on us] than on the others. We see it, we feel it. We are already stigmatized if it is to add to it and treat us less than...

Other participants echoed Kaoussi's point of view. Ousmane stated "We can understand but that doesn't mean we're going to excuse it". Reza's views on the matter were quite unique as he knew the terrorists. He explained

I found out two days later. It was a friend of mine who called me and told me it was a guy from the 19th arrondissement. I looked it up. I saw Chérif. I was shocked. Chérif it was someone who was rowdy, but his big brother was adorable. So, after that I did not condone it. I'm not Charlie Hebdo, I say it clearly. However, I am the police officer who died in the line of duty. I am the people who suffered, but I am not Charlie Hebdo. Nevertheless, it is a right, a constitutional right. I have the right not to be so-and-so. I have the right not to condone something. I do not condone what they did I am talking about Chérif and the bombings and I do not condone what Charlie Hebdo did either.

While the participants understood the motives of the terrorists based on the context of the caricature, they were not making an apology of terrorism. In fact, they adamantly did not condone it. They expressed that while the terrorists disagreed with Charlie Hebdo, they should have expressed their discontent without killing innocent people. As mentioned previously *laïcité* seems to be promote assimilation rather than acculturation.

Participants reflected on being Muslim in a post Charlie Hebdo secular France. *Laïcité* became an even greater topic and focus of the Republican school. Educational policies were put in place to ensure *laïcité* would be a notion well integrated and upheld by French citizens.

#### **Research Question 4. How do the terrorist attacks impact educational policies?**

##### ***Discussion***

To answer this question documents were analyzed. The government in the aftermath of Charlie Hebdo published official documentation to not only help teachers address the events but also to give them tools to promote *laïcité*, Frenchness, and the values of the Republic. Those documents reinforced the process of assimilation. While respect of diversity is mentioned several times, the notion of universalism is also reinforced. The idea that students of immigrant descent need to integrate into the society they were born into is at the forefront. Students are taught to recognize the sign of radicalization and to denounce any suspicious behavior. The government provides ample resources for all educational level to help teacher. The government also provides external links of resources designed by other entities.

## Implications of Findings

This study explored how ethnicity, race, religion, citizenship, and culture shaped the participants' identities. These findings of this study shed light on *laïcité* and how as a process of assimilation it fosters an environment in which participants can understand the terrorists' attacks. It also highlights the extent to which terrorist cells and opportunities for radicalization exist in non-traditional communities. Studies have found a correlation between perceived stigmatization and re- Islamization (Hadad, 2007; Santelli, 2008). The negotiation of identity of the young Muslim participants occurs through multiple factors such as education, language, location, and citizenship creating multiple identities: a French identity, an Ethnic Identity, and a Muslim identity. The negation of those multiple identities occurs in the "Third Space of Enunciation" (Bhabba, 1994, p. 35). A hybrid identity encompassing all their identity emerges. They are not just French, or Muslim or African, they all those identities and proud of being who they are. However, *laïcité* only wants them to embrace their French identity in order to be fully assimilated into the French society. The rejection of who they are is well integrated into the public school and the curriculum. The feeling of not being fully recognized in their integrity (with their history, their religion, their double sense of belonging ...) is symptomatic of the difficulty that French society has in recognizing its multicultural dimension (Santelli, 2008, p. 155)

As Kouassi noted "We went to school they taught us the story of Napoleon, but we are black". As a black woman who went through the school system, I was also taught that my ancestors were the Gauls. The curriculum is not inclusive or reflective of the diversity in the classroom. The French history curricula specifically includes not only the story of colonizing, but also the stories of the colonized, especially those



whose families end up in France. France briefly promoted differentialism (Bleich, 2000, p. 59). The right to be different and that difference being embraced. However, France reverted to an assimilationist approach trying to erase differences while promoting French universalism and a color-blind society to fight racism (Simon, 2006; Bleich, 2000). Low expectations of Muslims students are also an issue plaguing the public school system (Bonet, 2011, p. 49). Ousmane felt strongly about low expectation at school and had a lot to say about his schooling experience:

“The teachers are already going to put us in a category. In fact, even in middle school, they have the opinion that as we are the children of foreigners, they are not going to make us aspire to more. They will always hold us back and make us feel that already if we get to bac + 2, doing a BTS is good. It’s like there’s a “certain contentism”<sup>20</sup> (be glad you made it this far). They will not try to push us towards more and tell us “Yes you can try to study medicine etc.” when you are young. Instead, they will say “it’s good you know there are still vocational high schools, or ways that will allow you to still have a good job and your parents did not have your luck (opportunities). Instead of pushing us to do a lot more than our parents, they will just try to tell us: hey, it’s good, you’re the little stranger, you’re the first generation, it’s already good if you have a bac +2. Leave the real jobs to the white people etc. those who come from families who have more qualities etc. who will be able to push you to pursue long studies like medicine, law etc.” We weren’t really pushed to do that. We are not aware of these things. We have not been informed of the various (job) opportunities.

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<sup>20</sup> This is a term coined by the participant. The researcher kept that word as is to encapsulate the participant’s strong opinion on the topic.

I go to school [university] and we feel a disconnect in the school setting. I am in a pretty famous school. There is a gap regarding access to schooling etc. between minorities and the white majority.

The words of the participants appeared to be a predicted outcome when Bonet stated (2011) “dominant and widespread anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments, fueled by the discriminatory practices of agencies representing the state, have infiltrated the public school arena. These sentiments, which led to the disturbing practices of discrimination detailed above, have been destructive to students’ educational aspirations, outcomes, psychosocial abilities, and sense of belonging” (p. 51). Anti-Islamophobia Education, multicultural and antiracist pedagogy could be effective tools to promote *laïcité* as an acculturative process and accept that there is not one unique way to be French. Anti-Islamophobia education is a term coined by Jasmine Zine. “Anti-Islamophobia lends itself in a multicultural and anti-racist framework” (Zine, 2012, p. 114). Anti-Islamophobia aims to develop critical pedagogical tools that can be used to analyze and challenge systems of oppression and domination for greater social justice. It also includes challenging harmful stereotypes as “renewed Orientalist constructions of difference have permeated the representation of Muslims in media and popular culture. Images of fanatical terrorists and burqa-clad women are seen as the primary markers of the Muslim world” (p. 115). Zine proposes an Anti-Islamophobia kit to accompany educators. The kit includes activities to help all students understand how racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and faithism are factors leading to oppression. Activities also highlight the positive contribution of Muslims to world culture and knowledge as well as a positive Muslims figures to counter the negative images of Muslims (pp. 116-117).

Multicultural education addresses discriminatory practices in education with the purpose to promote social justice, equity, and high expectations for all students. Multicultural education help students make connections, including their experiences into the curriculum, but also highlighting their experiences as something to build upon. Banks (1993) noted five dimensions of multicultural education:

- (1) Content integration. Educators include examples, data, and information from different cultures when teaching.
- (2) The knowledge construction process. Educators guide students on the journey to understand how race, ethnicity, social class influence the creation and construction of knowledge.
- (3) Prejudice reduction. Educators work with students to gain more democratic racial attitudes.
- (4) An equity pedagogy. Educators uses techniques and methods to promote the academic achievement of all students regardless of their race, religion, economic status.
- (5) An empowering school culture and social structure. Restructuring the school culture and organization of the school to help empower minorities and low-income students. Educators' expectations for achievement should be high for all students. Labeling practices should be completely erased (p. 5).

Anti-racist pedagogy, views education as transformative. It focuses on social justice and the dismantlement of structural racism and social inequality. Drawing from Critical Race Theory, anti-racist pedagogy understands the social and historical construct of racism which is embedded in the very fabric of our societies as well of the institutionalization of racism. Anti-racist pedagogy rejects the dominant form of knowledge and exclusionary educational practices. Anti-racist pedagogy aims to produce a decolonized, anti-racist classroom where students' experiences and background are valued and an integral part of the classroom (Ono-George, 2019, p. 503). This forces educators to confront, address and remedy their own internal biases. This would permit students to express their plural identities. Frenchness would be inclusive of the specificities brought on by children of immigrants.

## **Researcher's Reflection on the Study**

I reflected on my relationship with participants as a researcher who is also part of the minority herself. I also reflected on the assumptions I may have had while doing this study and how it might interfere with my data analysis and reporting as closely as possible the voice of the participants. Being the “instrument” of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), I kept a journal to record my assumptions, possible bias, and observations. In France I was a non-Muslim Black woman interviewing Muslim youth males. At first, I wondered if they would accept to participate and genuinely answer my questions given the context. Some potential participants once they understood the line of questioning refused to participate any further. I also noticed that Muslim of Arabic origin were less open to participate once they heard the questions about religion. I was even asked if I worked for the government as an undercover agent. They were extremely distrustful of me in this context of the dominant negative perception of their culture but mostly religion. Besides most of them noted having a *fiche S*, therefore they were not particularly eager to discuss religion. One of the possible participants jokingly said, “everything is fine, everybody loves everybody, we want no trouble”. I introduced myself as being also from the same arrondissement and to make a deeper connection I asked them if they knew my cousin. Once they learned who my cousin was, they were more relaxed and eager to speak with me. Also confirming their complete anonymity made things easier. This is one of the reasons few information about the participants is given in the study to protect their anonymity as stated earlier some have an active “fiche S”. Several of the participants expressed that they hoped my study would help make their voices heard. They liked the idea that someone from their same neighborhood was listening to their stories and could relate to their stories as well, being that I am a

French black woman from that same district. As a matter of fact, while telling me their stories, there were several moments where I could relate and share my own experiences with them, making me even more relatable and pushing them to further open up and discuss the questions more in depth. My hope is that their voices are heard not only in the United States but also in France, making seen and heard the unheard.

Overall, the study generated a positive interest from the participants. While I was interviewing some of the participants, they hailed other Muslim youth hanging around to come and participate because “You have to help a sister out” as a participant put it. Participants were even caring. Due to logistics I had to carry my toddler in a baby carrier while interviewing participants. He fell asleep and while interviewing some of the participants they would turn me around and hold his bobbing head, all the while answering my interview questions.

As mentioned earlier, I noted my assumptions and possible bias in my journal. While interviewing the participants I anticipated some of the answers based on my own experiences. While some of the answers directly aligned with my assumptions, others were surprising. When I asked about the impact of the terrorist attacks on their lived experiences, I did not expect any participants to express it had no impact. I assumed that they all must have been impacted by the attacks.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations for this study. Due to constraint this study could only focus on participants 18 years and older. At first, this study intended to focus on middle school aged students. However, obtaining permission from the schools was extremely difficult due to the sensitive nature of the study. Despite multiple attempts to contact the schools to allow for the study to take place in their

establishments they simply refused to respond to my requests. When I contacted one of the schools directly the secretary told me that to not insist any further and to not be surprised if they were not responding given the nature of the topic and the unwillingness to speak about it.

Secondly, the possible sample within the area was limited. As previously stated, due to the nature of the topic, recruiting participants was not an easy task. Potential participants at first expressed interest in being interviewed but quickly withdrew when we talked about religion. Then, due to the very targeted area where the interviews were conducted and the fact that a lot of the participants had a *fiche S* maintaining confidentiality was a limitation. Participants were given a random pseudonym. The descriptions of the participants were not an in-depth description. Their ethnic background was included; an age range was provided. More specific details were not shared. As well the topic of radicalization was not part of the discussion. Participants were willing to discuss certain subject matters but would not go further on the topic of radicalization.

Another limitation for this research was the time requirements and constraints. I had a very limited time in France and had to conduct the interviews over one day. I could only conduct one interview due to time constraints. Participants were not willing to talk about this topic more than one time.

Due to time constraints, it happened that all participants interviewed were males whereas I had intended to also interview female participants, but it did not happen. While it was a hard and sensitive topic to discuss, all participants thanked me for the opportunity to have their voices heard and to be able to speak freely on the topic. Their voices were recorded but to protect anonymity no names were attached to the recordings.

## **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study sample was relatively small with respect to size and with respect to the participants background and gender. It would be beneficial to include Muslim women to future studies on that specific topic. More specifically it would be interesting to include Muslim women who wear the hijab as their experiences is unique. A study specifically focusing on Arab Muslim would also be a good research topic as only one accepted to participate in the study. Given that the Kouachi brothers were Arabs they could offer a unique perspective as well.

In addition, conducting research over a longer period and do follow up interviews would deepen the understanding of Muslim youth's identity. In this study French educational policies were examined. A study solely focusing on the implementation of those policies in the classroom and the effectiveness of the provided tools would be a much-needed study.

## **Conclusion**

This study looked at the identity negotiation of Muslim youth in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in the 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. In a context of anti-Muslim sentiments, Muslims' identity is under a microscope and the topic of heated discussions in the media, on the political stage and among the general population. Muslim youth claim multiple identities. They proudly claim their French, Muslim, and Ethnic identity. They understand the concept of *laïcité* that was taught at school, as respect for all beliefs, as long as they respect the laws of the Republic. Therefore, claiming their ethnic and above all their religious identity should not be incompatible with *laïcité* if *laïcité* is to be understood as part of the acculturative process. However, participants found that *Laïcité* was more a part of a process of assimilation and French universalism, which requires them to only claim their French identity. This creates a

conflict leading to feelings of not fully belonging and not being given full opportunities to be part of the French society.



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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

### Recruitment Screener

Have you ever attended a school in the 19th arrondissement?

Yes - Accept

No - Reject

Are you 18 and above?

Yes- Accept

No- Reject

What is your religion?

Christian- Reject

Jewish- Reject

Muslim- Accept

Buddhist-Reject

Other- Reject

Are your parents or grandparents from the Maghreb or Sub-Saharan Africa?

Yes- Accept

No-Reject

Are you a French citizen?

Yes- Accept

No- Reject



## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions

#### Identity

- Do you identify and position yourself as a (parent ethnicity i.e Algerian, Moroccan, Tunisian etc), French, in-between or both? Have you always identified yourself like this or did it change after the terrorist attack?
- How closely do you identify with and affiliate with your culture?
- What is the impact of the French cultural encounter on your Muslim identity?
- Which culture do you identify with more?
- How do you understand the surrounding culture and society around you, and are you considered as a foreigner ‘?
- What are the factors that make you identify yourself as (parent ethnicity), French, or in between? And does that have a relationship with being a French citizen?
- In terms of your background, how do you usually describe yourself to people outside your community?
- Sometimes people describe themselves somewhat differently to members of their own community. How do you describe yourself to them?
- Which part of your background do you feel closest to? Sometimes this varies, depending on what aspect of your life we are talking about. What about at home? Or at work? Or with friends?
- Does your life as one of the descendants of an African immigrant from France create a hybrid (mix between two cultures) and diaspora (the dispersion of any people from their original homeland) identity?
- Oftentimes we hear about integration of young Muslim into French society even if they were born in France. Is the successful “integration” in the French society a reason behind the loss or negation of the Muslim/ African origin identity of some Muslim youth (the oreo effect)? What are the reasons for wanting to assimilate? (better job? a more anonymous life? distancing oneself from the negative action of the terrorist? etc?)
- Do you think that keeping the (parent ethnicity) identity is an opposition to the French culture, or it is self-determination?
- Does naming Muslim children in Muslim or Parent origin names protect the Muslim (or parent ethnicity) identity in France?
- Do you feel as a unique person, or do you think that you belong to a particular ethnic group?
- Do you have any wish to go live in your parent’s birth country?
- Do you feel that people see you as French or do you feel that they see you as other (parent ethnicity).?

#### *Laïcité*

- Can you *define laïcité*?
- What did you learn about *laïcité* at school?
- Is *laïcité* compatible with being a Muslim in France?
- What do you think about getting rid of substitute meal in schools?
- How important is religion to you? Why?

## Terrorism

- Since the attack did you experience any difficulties related to your background, such as discrimination, stereotyping, or being misunderstood? How so?
- Since the attack have you felt excluded based on your culture or religion? How so?
- What did you think about the attack of January 2015? Do you understand the motivation of the terrorists? Do you sympathize?

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