

# *As French as Anyone Else: Islam and the North African Second Generation in France*

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Amid growing Islamophobia throughout Europe, Muslims in France have been described as “ethnoracial outsiders” (Bleich 2006, 3–7) and framed as a cultural challenge to the identity of the French republic. Based on ethnographic research of 45 middle class adult children of North African, or Maghrébin, immigrants, I focus on the actual religious practices of this segment of the French Muslim population, the symbolic boundaries around those practices, and the relationship between how middle class, North African second-generation immigrants understand their marginalization within mainstream society and how they frame their religiosity to respond to this marginalization. How respondents frame their practices reveals their allegiance with the tenets of French Republicanism and *laïcité* as well as shows how Muslim religious practices are being accommodated to the French context. This religiosity is not a barrier to asserting a French identity. Individuals frame their religious practices in ways that suggest they see themselves as just as French as anyone else.

France has the largest concentration of Muslims in Europe today (Hargreaves, Kelsay, and Twiss 2007). Muslims are estimated to be about 6–8 percent of France’s total population (including immigrants and those born in France); the majority of them being of Maghrébin origin (Gray

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2008; d'Appolonia 2009).<sup>1</sup> Islam in France has long been a topic of both scholarly and popular attention, particularly addressing the perceived lack of integration of French Muslims into mainstream society (Bleich 2006, 2009; Fernando 2005; de Galembert 2005; Gaspard and Khosrokhavar 1995; Kastoryano 2004; Voas and Fleischmann 2012). The 2004 law banning “conspicuous religious symbols” in public schools and the debate over the Islamic headscarf, or hijab, is just one example of the concerns about French Muslims and how they seemingly threaten the identity of the republic (Bowen 2004b; Fernando 2005; Kastoryano 2004; Killian 2007; Silverstein 2004a).

How Islam operates in France is situated within a larger context of Islamophobia in France and throughout much of Western Europe (Bleich 2009; Voas and Fleischmann 2012). In a society hesitant to openly acknowledge race and ethnicity as meaningful categories, religion distinguishes inclusion versus exclusion (Scott 2007). French and North African, or Maghrébin, are often placed on opposing ends of an ethnonational identity continuum in larger society, and being French and Muslim are therefore seen as incongruent (Kastoryano 2002). Regardless of the degree to which they personally identify as Muslim, Maghrébin-origin individuals are often categorized as Muslim in media and popular culture at least partially because Islam is the major religion of the Maghreb (Alba and Silberman 2002; Hargreaves, Kelsay, and Twiss 2007; Brubaker 2013). That Islam is stigmatized in France (Bleich 2006) further complicates how North African-origin individuals negotiate their religious identities (Babes 1995).

In this article, I illustrate how these processes of identity construction occur in the wake of such stigma. I offer a more comprehensive conception of what being Muslim in France means to a segment of the second-generation population — middle class adults of North African origin. Based on ethnographic research and interviews with 45 middle class second-generation North African immigrants, I focus on the actual practices of French Muslims, how they frame their religion, and — perhaps most importantly — how these framings reflect their understanding of both French Republican society and their social location within it. Specifically, I address the following questions: How do the negotiations involved

<sup>1</sup>Due to French law prohibiting distinguishing French citizens based on faith, statistics on religious identification and Islam are scarce and somewhat inconsistent (Bowen 2004a; Laurence 2001; Laurence and Vaisse 2006).

in individuals' religious identities, and the boundary work they do as part of these negotiations, reflect how they locate themselves in French society? How are individuals adapting Islam to the French context? How do they interpret the stigma related to being Muslim in France? Middle class adult children of North African immigrants, those individuals who are upwardly mobile compared to their immigrant parents, well-educated, and hold professional types of employment, are perhaps the best reflection of French Republicanism's successes and limitations. By focusing on the symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002) that these individuals draw regarding their Muslim religiosity, I show how they situate themselves as similar to other French citizens. In other words, how they assert their Muslim religiosity is one way they respond to and combat their marginalized place in mainstream society.

Religion is one domain where immigrant groups negotiate their relationship to wider society (Cadge and Ecklund 2007; Connor and Koenig 2013; Zolberg and Woon 1999). For Maghrébin immigrants, a Muslim identity was often a crucial tool in their struggle against French colonialism (Cesari 2002). Less is known about how children of these immigrants, who face their own challenges navigating between their parents' country of origin and French society, have inherited this legacy.

Previous research on second-generation immigrant religiosity (Cesari 2002; Chen and Jeung 2012; Ramadan 2002; Voas and Fleischmann 2012) has focused on the connection between and relative salience of ethnic identity and religious identity. I intervene in this debate by showing how their religiosity allows them to respond to marginalization regarding their Maghrébin ethnic origin and Muslim identification. I therefore consider how individual religiosity and identity are constructed, adapted, and influenced by the French context (Roy 1994; Bowen 2004a,b, 2009; Fernando 2005; Gray 2008). I argue that respondents frame their religiosity in ways that allow them to agentially respond to their marginalization and legitimate their inclusion within mainstream French society. The middle class segment of the North African second generation often positions their religious identities in ways that correspond to the tenets of French Republicanism. Namely, they frame their religiosity as a personal and private matter. That respondents are choosing a more privatized expression of their religious identity reveals how Islam is being adapted or accommodated to the French context. Examining how respondents conceptualize their religious practices reveals how *French* this population really sees themselves. As Europe debates multiculturalism and immigrant

incorporation, considering how religiosity factors into the sociocultural realities of residents in these societies is crucial (Joppke 2009).

In what follows, I provide a brief background of the North African-origin population and Islam in France. I then discuss the methodology and the conceptual framework of this study, including how this challenges and contributes to existing research on the second generation in Europe, religiosity, and Islam. I then discuss the variation in religious identification and practices among my respondents, and how this relates to their experiences of marginalization. I then address the boundary work of my respondents and how they negotiate their religiosity to fit within Republican society. I conclude by discussing the implications of my findings for second-generation immigrant religiosity, symbolic boundaries, and social exclusion.

### *BACKGROUND*

Any discussion of how religion is practiced in France must include a discussion of *laïcité* and Republicanism. *Laïcité* is a component of French Republicanism and the French term for the separation of church and state (Gunn 2004). Established by law in 1905, it withdrew state official recognition and financial support from religions while also guaranteeing citizens the right to form private religious associations (Laurence 2001; Scott 2007). The French state cannot promote any particular religion and individuals are encouraged to keep their religious affiliations to themselves (Bowen 2004a).<sup>2</sup> Religious expression is supposed to be confined to the home and places of worship. Because of France's emphasis on *laïcité*, the distinction between public versus private spheres in terms of how religion is practiced becomes more meaningful than it might be in other societies. Under the Republican model, citizens are supposed to interact with the state as citizens and not as members of any particular group. Despite France's emphasis on *laïcité* and the division between church and state, Christianity has factored significantly in the development of French Republicanism and French identity more generally (Gray 2008). However, as Auslander (2000) notes: "The everyday signs of religious adherence to Christianity or Judaism have not been understood to threaten the

<sup>2</sup>Over the years, several exceptions to this rule have been made allowing the French state to, among other things, subsidize private religious schools and the building of mosques, recognize Christian holidays, and create Muslim state organizations (Bowen 2006; de Galambert 2005; Killian 2007; Laurence 2001).

foundations of the French nation because they are not associated with immigration (or racial difference)” (2000, 291).

The same, however, has not been true for Islam (Bleich 2009). In other words, Islam is framed as dangerous to the French republic because of its association with immigration. The majority of French Muslims (*français de confession musulmane*) originated from France’s relationship with Maghreb through the colonialism of Algeria in 1830, of Tunisia in 1881, and of Morocco in 1912. Algeria would remain in French control until 1962 and Tunisia and Morocco, until 1956 (Laurence 2001). Though emigration from the Maghreb to France began as early as the early 1900s, World War I brought immigrants from these colonies en masse to France for work. These immigrants, who were expected to only be temporary residents, often settled in the outlying *banlieues*, or suburbs, of major cities because of the presence of cheaper housing and factory employment. The number of Maghrébin immigrants continued to increase with World War II, the end of France’s Fourth Republic in 1958, and the Algerian War of Independence in 1962. Due to an economic recession and declining employment opportunities, France temporarily suspended immigration of non-European workers in 1974. This led to migrant workers settling permanently with their families in France as opposed to returning to their home countries (Body-Gendrot 1993). According to the Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques (INSEE), which conducts the French census, more than half of the immigrants who arrived before 1974 came for employment-related reasons; and another one-third came to join their husbands or family. Second-generation North African immigrants descended primarily from this population (Silberman, Alba, and Fournier 2007). The growing attention paid to immigrants is not due to numbers, as the actual number of immigrants has remained relatively constant since 1930, but rather due to changing demographic composition as presently more immigrants are from former North African colonies than from other regions. As of 1999, about 26 percent of second-generation immigrants are of Maghrébin origin.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, about 14 percent are of Algerian origin, 9 percent are of Moroccan origin, and 4 percent are of Tunisian origin (Tribalat 2004).

<sup>3</sup>There is a paucity of data on second-generation North African immigrants because the French census does not count racial or ethnic origin of those born in France. The available data combines individual country of birth with parent country of birth (see Meurs, Pailhe, and Simon 2006; Simon 2003; Tribalat 2004).

Existing research on the North African second-generation focuses largely on inherited disadvantage from the first generation, particularly on specific outcomes including educational attainment and employment prospects (Simon 2003), and disparities vis-à-vis “whites”<sup>4</sup> (Heath, ROTHON, and Kilpi 2008; Lombardo and Pujol 2011; Penn and Lambert 2009; Silberman, Alba, and Fournier 2007). In addition, discrimination against and exclusion of North African-origin individuals has been documented, most recently in the 2009 study, *Trajectoires et Origines*, which found a mismatch between feeling French and having one’s Frenchness denied by others (Simon 2012). Simon (2003) identified three possible social mobility paths for the second generation: “a reproduction of the positions of the first generation; a successful social mobility through education; or a mobility hindered by discrimination” (2003, 1091). As of 2003, about 15 percent of second-generation North African immigrant men and about 23 percent of second-generation North African immigrant women hold salaried jobs. I focus on the segment of the North African second-generation population, who have achieved upward social mobility as evidenced by their educational and employment outcomes.

A few recent studies have shed light on the religious practices of French Muslims across generations, which correspond with the findings presented here on middle class second-generation French Muslims. As of 2007, 33 percent of people from Muslim-origin families are believing and practicing Muslims and 38 percent are believing Muslims. In terms of practices, 61 percent of French Muslims pray every day; 23 percent attend mosque every Friday; 70 percent fast during Ramadan; and 62 percent only consume meat that is halal. Praying daily and going to the mosque on Fridays are the most discriminating distinctions between believing and practicing Muslims (Institut Français d’Opinion Publique 2009). A 2001 report of the High Council of Integration distinguished between being “of Muslim culture” and “of Muslim religion” based on how often Muslims pray in mosques; they estimate that there are about one million Muslims “of Muslim religion” and about three million Muslims “of Muslim culture” (Haut Conseil à l’intégration 2001; Bowen 2004b). In terms of second-generation immigrants, as of 1999, about 18 percent attend mosque regularly, about 28 percent attend sometimes, and about

<sup>4</sup>Following the lead of my respondents, I use the term “white” throughout this article to refer to *français de souche* or those of native French-European origin, even though I recognize that “white” is not a commonly used racial term in French society.

54 percent never attend (Penn and Lambert 2009). Recent research has begun to challenge prevailing notions of French Muslims as completely different from other French citizens (Klausen 2008; Laurence and Vaisse 2006). When considering the ratios of regular mosque participation to regular church participation, French Muslims are as “secularized” as other French people (Hargreaves, Kelsay, and Twiss 2007; Laurence and Vaisse 2006). According to a 2006 Pew Report (Pew Research Center 2006), French Muslims are equally likely to identify as French (about 42%) as they are to identify as Muslim (about 46%). A 2007 Gallup poll similarly found that while Muslims in Paris are more likely to define religion as an important part of their lives than the Parisian population as a whole, that does not prevent them from identifying with being French (Nyiri 2007).

### DATA AND METHODS

The research presented here is based upon ethnographic data from semi-structured interviews conducted from 2008 to 2009 with 45 middle class adult children of Maghrébin immigrants living in the Parisian metropolitan region.<sup>5</sup> Respondents were born in France and have at least one Maghrébin immigrant parent.<sup>6</sup> My sample includes 21 women and 24 men. Respondents range in age from 21 to 49 years old (the average age being 32 years old). In terms of parents’ country of origin, 25 of them are of Algerian origin, 12 are of Moroccan origin, and eight are of Tunisian origin. Eight respondents are parents. 35 percent of respondents live in Paris, and 65 percent live in the *banlieues*, mostly in the Inner Ring *départements* of Seine-Saint-Denis, Val-de-Marne, and Hauts-de-Seine. All respondents are French citizens and about a third of them have dual citizenship (with the country of their Maghrébin origin). Respondents’ parents emigrated from the Maghreb between 1950 and 1970, primarily for economic reasons. Often fathers came to France first for work, and mothers later followed them. They generally have low levels of educational attainment, often not greater than elementary school. Some respondents’

<sup>5</sup>All names and identifying information, except those of cities, have been changed to protect anonymity, per Institutional Review Board guidelines.

<sup>6</sup>I included three respondents in my sample even though they were not born in France because they immigrated when they were two years of age or younger. As these individuals themselves identified as second generation and spent the majority of their lives in France, I felt confident including them in my sample.

parents are, in fact, illiterate in French. All respondents' parents speak Arabic. Usually, fathers worked in low-skilled jobs, such as construction, while mothers were homemakers or domestic workers.

I delineate middle class based on my respondents' educational attainment levels and professional statuses. In terms of educational attainment, I focus on those who passed the *Baccalauréat* (BAC) exam, the exam all French students must pass upon finishing high school to pursue further studies, and attended college (whether or not they actually graduated). In terms of employment, I focus on individuals with professional types of employment (the French socioprofessional category of *cadre*), which include jobs such as journalist, lawyer, and banker.

I recruited respondents through contacting various organizations and associations (in person and via mail, telephone, and email) that are geared toward immigrant-origin individuals, as well as advertising on relevant Internet forums and websites. Due to the difficulties in obtaining access to a large respondent sample, I used snowball sampling, in which existing respondents generate potential respondents (Small 2009). Because of my outsider status as a non-French person, snowball sampling was crucial for getting me "inside" this population. About half of my sample is connected in some way because they are involved in similar professional and social networks. In addition, my sample is relatively homogenous in terms of educational attainment and employment status. It is therefore limited in its ability to generalize to the entire second-generation population, as this sample cannot be seen as representative of the entire second-generation population. My position as an outsider undoubtedly shaped how my respondents perceived me (Horowitz 1986; Venkatesh 2002); yet I remained cognizant throughout the research process of not imposing my own understandings over those of my respondents.

Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and three hours. Interview questions addressed a variety of topics including ethnic and cultural identity, religiosity, social networks, employment, family history and parental background, relationship to parents' country of origin, educational experiences, and experiences and perceptions of racism, discrimination, and marginalization. Interviews were conducted in French and digitally recorded. A native French-speaking transcriber later transcribed the interviews. Interviews were then coded for emergent themes. These themes included how respondents perceive and describe their religious identities and affiliations, their perceptions and experiences of marginalization, their



religious practices and their beliefs about those practices; and the boundaries around Muslim identity.

### *CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND EXISTING RESEARCH*

I examine the intersections of individual religiosity, or degree of religious commitment (Voas and Fleischmann 2012), identity, and perception of social location, or position within French society. In doing so, I extend and challenge existing research in two domains: the relationship between second-generation immigrant religiosity and national belonging and the relationship between symbolic boundaries and cultural membership. I follow Eid's (2008) definition of religious identity as encompassing familiarity with beliefs, observation of religious practices, and a sense of belonging to one's religious culture.

Children of Muslim immigrants in Europe "grow up in a world in which Islam is a chronic object of discussion and debate, a world that is thick with self-conscious and explicit discussions about Islam" (Brubaker 2013, 4). Previous research on second-generation immigrant religiosity has unpacked different negotiations of religious identities, including religious primacy, racialized religion, ethnoreligious hybridization, and familistic traditioning (Chen and Jeung 2012). In response to Islam being framed as a minority religion, young Muslims employ one of the following responses — becoming more privatized or individualized in expressing their religion; becoming more fundamentalist in expressing their religion; or relating their religious identity to an ethnic-based one (Cesari 2002; Ramadan 2002; Voas and Fleischmann 2012). However, this has not been conceptualized in terms of socioeconomic status and middle class attainment.

Furthermore, second-generation religious participation has been found to depend on the relative salience of religious identity versus ethnic national identity (Voas and Fleischmann 2012). I show how this operates in a context where religion stands in for race and ethnicity as a marker of difference because race and ethnicity are not acknowledged. What is crucial here is not just how a second-generation immigrant group constructs and negotiates religious identity but also how they do this in the context of a religion that is stigmatized in larger society. How does this fact shape how they frame their religiosity, as well as elucidate their identities as minorities?

For Muslim immigrants, accommodating their religious practices was part of the larger processes of assimilation into French society. Killian

(2007) shows how first-generation Muslim women accommodate their religious practices to the French context, meaning that they keep an “Islam of the heart” and express their faith only in the private sphere. She further argues this differs across generations in that second-generation French Muslims are more likely to express visible symbols of their religious and ethnic identities. However, I challenge this by showing the relevance of socioeconomic status to second-generation French Muslims’ expressions of faith. My middle class respondents similarly accommodate their religious practices to the French Republican context as the first-generation French Muslims Killian studies. They are just as interested in relegating religious expression to the private sphere and not imposing it on others. Though they acknowledge their racial and ethnic origin and Muslim-related identity as marking their difference, they see themselves as just as French as anyone else which is revealed through how they frame their religious practices. This is despite the stigma they face for having Maghrébin origins and being Muslim. These are individuals that engage with Islam in *laïque* terms. My findings on the middle class show how the second-generation similarly accept *laïcité* as they navigate two different cultural worlds — French and Maghrébin. Their social positions are explained less by assimilation, and more by a denial of cultural citizenship, a claim to belonging to French society that is actually accepted by other French citizens (Beaman 2012).

I show how in the wake of their experiences of marginalization, this segment of France’s North African second-generation adopts a more privatized expression of their religious faith. This can be explained both by how these middle class individuals are successfully assimilated by traditional measures and by how they are responding to their experiences of marginalization. They can be considered “secular Muslims” (*musulmans laïques*) — those Muslims who embrace French Republicanism and its notion of *laïcité*, while also acknowledging their allegiance to being Muslim and countering prevailing images of pious and fundamentalist Muslims (Fernando 2009).<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, this research intervenes in current debates regarding how symbolic boundaries are created, maintained, and reinforced (Lamont and Molnar 2002). As my respondents are citizens, their exclusion is not based upon citizenship status, but rather their race and ethnic

<sup>7</sup>While secularism is not an exact translation of *laïcité*, I follow the trend of other scholars who use the terms interchangeably for simplicity’s sake (Kastoryano 2004).

origin and their Muslim affiliation. As race and ethnic origin are not acknowledged as a base for exclusion, a connection to Islam is used to reinforce their difference from other French citizens. Respondents draw boundaries around their religiosity and religious practices in response to the stigma and marginalization related to being Muslim. In addition, respondents draw symbolic boundaries vis-à-vis other North African-origin individuals around what a real or authentic Muslim is. Individuals can adopt a “consumer” approach to Islam by adopting those practices that appeal to them (Cesari 2002). By focusing on how respondents are similar to other French citizens and also distinct from other French Muslims, this approach is similar to other research on boundary work, such as by Lamont (2002) who compares the symbolic boundaries African Americans draw vis-à-vis whites with the symbolic boundaries North African immigrants draw vis-à-vis French people and also by Jackson (2001) who shows how African Americans in Harlem cross symbolic boundaries regarding race and class through code-switching and behavior-switching. However, the French context reveals the relevance of national cultural repertoires for how individuals draw boundaries. In other words, respondents access French Republicanism and *laïcité* in drawing these boundaries. The boundaries my respondents draw around being Muslim allow them to contest their external identification or assigned identities as “other” and instead assert their identities as French.

By focusing on middle class individuals, I also complicate existing notions about the assimilation and integration of French Muslims of North African origin into mainstream French society. This is a segment of the population that could be described as successfully assimilated based on their educational and professional accomplishments and who remain committed to France’s Republican ideology. Yet, they often feel excluded from full inclusion in mainstream society. How they frame their religious practices is instructive for framing the future integration of Muslims in France and elsewhere. For those French Muslims who are middle class, Islam can hold a significant place in their lives, yet not hinder their national belonging — seeing themselves as French and desiring to be seen as French by others. In what follows, I demonstrate how religious identity functions as an important indicator of assimilation and integration, despite the assumed contrarian nature of Islam relative to its more dominant Christian counterpart in France.

## RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION AND PRACTICES

First, I discuss the variation of religious identifications among my respondents, rather than treating their religious identifications as homogeneous and assuming that they are all Muslim and that manifests itself in identical ways (Tietze 2002).<sup>8</sup> I emphasize that these are categories based on how respondents define themselves, not how I as the researcher categorize them. What I highlight here is the heterogeneity of ways these individuals configure their religious identities. In the next section, I link their religious practices and identifications with their experiences of marginalization and difference.

The majority of respondents, about 68 percent, identify as practicing Muslims (*Musulman pratiquant*). These practices include the following: ritual prayer, or *salât*; observing Ramadan; abstaining from alcohol and cigarettes; following proper food regulations (halal); attending mosque; observing Muslim holidays; and wearing the hijab. It is important to note that these practices could potentially conflict with French Republican society (i.e., fasting during Ramadan conflicting with the French work schedule; Killian 2007).

Lila, a 26-year-old of Algerian origin and a law student, sees being Muslim as an integral part of her identity. It dictates her daily behavior. Though she does not wear the hijab, she does the ritual prayers and observes Ramadan. Eid ul-Fitr, the holiday which celebrates the end of the fasting period and of Ramadan (*la fête d'Aid* in French or "Feast of the Sacrifice" in English), is very important to Lila. She will even miss her examinations to celebrate it. She was raised in a Muslim family. However, she, her three brothers, two sisters, and parents practice to varying degrees. Her mother is a strict Muslim, and her siblings are more liberal in how they practice.<sup>9</sup>

Baya, a 25-year-old of Algerian origin, who teaches high school biology in the eastern *banlieue* of Bagnolet, learned about Islam through watching her parents practice as she was growing up. However, they did

<sup>8</sup>Here, I follow Brubaker (2013, 6) who cautions that "people who identify as Muslims (like those who identify with any other religion) do not identify *only* or *always* as Muslims, and they may not identify *primarily* as Muslims, though some of course do" [Emphasis in original].

<sup>9</sup>Some respondents did note a difference between their religious practices and those of their siblings, and explained that their siblings were too young to have yet developed a religious identity.

not force her to practice it. At age 16, she began asking questions and studying Islam. She now even takes courses in written Arabic at a local mosque. Baya already spoke Arabic at home but wanted to deepen her proficiency as she grew in her Muslim faith. However, this has not interfered with her educational and occupational success. Other respondents also articulated a connection (or reconnection) to speaking Arabic, especially at home. It is not uncommon for children of North African immigrants to “turn back” to studying Arabic later in their lives, as it remains the “highest-status vehicle for religious knowledge” even though the language itself is gradually declining in Maghrébin-origin Muslim households (Bowen 2004a, 48). Baya explains, “My parents were shocked when I told them I wanted to do the daily prayers but they never told me I had to, it was just something I decided on my own.”

Similarly, Zara, a 28-year-old of Moroccan origin, who works as a social worker, is a devout Muslim who considers being Maghrébin and being French as constitutive elements of her identity. For her, being a Muslim means “respecting Islamic principles, the five pillars — faith, fasting, praying, giving donations, and the pilgrimage. I do all of these, except the pilgrimage which I haven’t done yet. *Inch’Allah* (God willing), I will have an opportunity to do the pilgrimage.” Although her parents raised her Muslim, Zara did not really take the religion that seriously until she was about 15 years old. It was not until she was 20 years old that she started to do the daily prayers.

Semi, a 35-year-old of Algerian origin, who works in the *banlieue* of Levallois where he also was born and grew up, also strongly identifies as a practicing Muslim. As an example of Semi’s strong Muslim identity, after our interview in a café just outside of Paris, he insisted on paying for coffee because “that is what a Muslim man is supposed to do.” He started doing the daily prayers when he was 25 years old, because it was, as he put it, “just a natural thing to do.” His entire family consists of practicing Muslims as well, though his brother and sister do not do the daily prayers. Semi differentiates between Maghrébins who are practicing Muslims and Maghrébins who are not; those that are Muslim have a more difficult time being accepted by French society than those who are “just Maghrébin.”

These examples reveal the heterogeneity among practicing Muslims. For Lila, Zara, Semi, and others who identify as practicing Muslims, being Muslim is a constitutive element of their identities, yet as I will

show it is not something that prevents them from feeling French and desiring full inclusion in French Republican society.

About 13 percent of respondents self-identify as a believing or cultural Muslim (*Musulman croyant*), in that they believe but say that they are not practicing. They often participate in only a few rituals, such as observing Ramadan. For these individuals, being Muslim is more of a cultural claim than a religious one (Bowen 2004a; Venel 2004). They essentially see themselves as “less” Muslim than other French Muslims. Nadia, a 24-year-old of Algerian origin and graduate student studying human resources and communications, explains this distinction:

So, I have the tendency to say that I am a cultural Muslim, which means that in terms of culture I am Muslim, because I was raised that way, even though my father was not Muslim. . . Algerian culture is anchored in the Muslim religion, so the foundation of the education I received had a religious foundation. So I have a tendency to say that I am Muslim in a cultural sense, because I observe Ramadan, I don't eat pork, I only eat halal meat, . . .but apart from that I do not do anything.

Nadia does not remember being particularly interested in Algerian or Maghrébin culture until she was a teenager. She increasingly felt a need for an attachment to her Maghrébin culture; she sought out connections with other Maghrébin youth online and began to learn more. Even though Nadia practices Islam in ways somewhat similar to self-identified practicing Muslims, she does not feel as attached to being Muslim as a religious identity as are practicing Muslims. Part of Nadia's cultural Muslim identity relates to her creating a social network of like-minded Muslim friends of Maghrébin origin. Her Muslim friends characterize themselves similarly in terms of their religious identity and religiosity.

Diana, a 34-year-old, who emigrated from Algeria when she was two years old, identifies similarly. Though her father is a devout Muslim, her parents always let her decide her religious practices. She sees herself as Muslim, but emphasizes that she does not take her faith too seriously. Similarly, Farid, a 35-year-old journalist of Moroccan origin, who lives in Ivry-sur-Seine, a *banlieue* south of Paris with his Algerian-origin wife, five-year-old daughter, and one-month-old son, considers himself Muslim, but emphasizes that it does not dominate his identity. He only started believing about five years ago and does not see it as dramatically dictating his everyday life.

Still some respondents, about 16 percent, are not at all religious. Nouria, a 30-year-old social worker of Algerian origin, was raised Muslim

but then she started to question Islam when she was a teenager and later stopped believing altogether:

I used to do everything that practicing Muslims do – I prayed, I followed almost all the pillars of Islam, I observed Ramadan. . . but as I got older I started to distance myself a bit more from the religion and I realized that I was Muslim because my parents were Muslims. If I ever adopt a religion it will be because *I* choose it.

As she increasingly distances herself from her Islamic faith, she and her two brothers and sister, who have all had a similar religious evolution as Nouria, do not tell their devout mother they do not practice as they know it would disappoint her. Islam represents a connection to her parents and the values and practices they transmitted to her and her siblings, more so than an actual religious faith. Most of the respondents who are not at all religious either “broke away” from their parents’ religion or were raised in atheist or non-religious households.

### *BEING MUSLIM, BEING DIFFERENT*

For many children of Maghrébin immigrants, a Muslim identity is one dimension along which they are marginalized. Zara’s first childhood experiences of feeling different were directly related to her being Muslim:

When I was young at school I remember having henna on my hands, you know the tattoos people have, and my schoolteacher got really upset with me because. . . at the time I was seven years old, so it was 20 years ago, and the teachers did not even know what henna was, and I remember my schoolteacher punishing me because she thought that I colored my hands with felt-tip pens. It really traumatized me. It was such a horrible feeling.

It was early moments like these that reminded Zara that her way of life at home was markedly different from her way of life at school and that this difference was something that not everyone had to navigate. In addition to the complications of being of Maghrébin origin in French society, children of North African immigrants who identify as Muslim must confront a religious identity that is portrayed as counter to mainstream French society (Brubaker 2013). For many respondents being conscious of this distinction, and how being Muslim would often mark them as different, was part of how their parents socialized them.

Similarly, Saïd, a 30-year-old of Algerian origin, who is both a doctoral student at Sciences Po and a freelance journalist, characterizes

himself as a practicing Muslim who observes Ramadan, abstains from eating pork, but does not do the ritual prayers. He also has to navigate being Muslim in a society that has not easily accepted such an identity:

If a Muslim wanted to become French, he had to renounce his religion; he had to say, "Voilà, I want to be French so I am abandoning Islam." That is how it was before. And I think in the minds of many French people today, you can still find this mindset, this idea that it is difficult to be French and Muslim at the same time. Either we are French and not Muslim, or we are Muslim and therefore cannot be French.

Saïd positions his religious identification as a barrier which separates him from being fully accepted as French by others. More generally, he feels neither French nor Maghrébin, and therefore, his religious identity can be seen as constitutive of that unsettled space. He vividly remembers his Muslim identity being used against him a few years ago when he tried to rent an apartment. He had called a landlord to schedule an appointment to view an apartment. When he arrived, the landlord asked him whether he was Muslim. Saïd did not completely understand why he asked this question and responded that he was, indeed, Muslim. He later felt uncomfortable and did not pursue renting that apartment.<sup>10</sup> Saïd explained that this experience was one of many in which he is treated differently because of his ethno-religious identity, one which complicates his feelings of belonging in French society. He asserts a French identity but does not find that identity to be accepted by others. Of note is how Saïd was set apart for merely identifying as Muslim, not for his actual practices.

That identifying as Muslim sets them apart from their fellow citizens is something that is continually reinforced for this segment of the North African second generation. Nasser, a 29-year-old of Moroccan origin and former banker, regularly confronts how his being Muslim is questionably viewed and derided by others:

I know that they always mock me in terms of halal, what you can eat. Saturday, I went to a conference... and there was a buffet with different sliced meats that I could not eat. I did not say anything, it did not bother me at all. I ate salad. And people said to me, "you don't eat the sliced meat?" And I said "no, it is not halal." And one guy said, "but this isn't a Muslim celebration." I didn't understand... why they would say that to me, especially when I never asked them anything, I didn't say anything, I didn't ask why there

<sup>10</sup>Saïd further explained that this apartment was actually too small to be legally used as an apartment.



weren't other options, no, nothing... I consider it my choice to eat halal, that others should respect. There were people there who were vegetarian, who eat neither meat nor fish, but I am not going to ask them why they do not eat meat or fish... No, I respect their decision. I am not going to tell them, "well, this isn't a vegetarian meal." It is things that this that we encounter more and more, that I see more and more... We are sometimes obligated to hide our differences as if we are ashamed of them. But I've arrived at an age when I tell myself, "It's my difference. I am not looking to put it out front, but I don't want people to tell me to hide it."

Nasser is particularly bothered by others' reactions to his only eating halal meat because he feels that he is keeping his religious practices private and not forcing them on anyone else. To him, this is part of being a member of a *laïque* society. The fact that Nasser is a practicing Muslim and that this is considered in opposition to being French is one in which he is continually reminded. This is regardless of the fact that *he* does not see being Muslim as oppositional to being French.

#### *DRAWING BOUNDARIES: MAKING RELIGIOUS IDENTITY FIT IN FRENCH REPUBLICAN SOCIETY*

In framing their religiosity, respondents who self-identify as Muslim draw symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002) around the meaning of a "real Muslim" (Cesari 2002). In this section, I discuss the boundaries respondents draw to distinguish themselves from others, including other Muslims who might practice differently, those who are not religious, and those who practice a different religion. Cultural resources associated with religion help to mediate symbolic boundaries of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (Chong 1998; Ecklund 2005). Culture in this sense encompasses rituals, values, customs, traditions, practices, and worldviews (Swidler 1986). All of this speaks to how this segment of the French Muslim population makes distinctions among each other's practices and configures their religious identities to fit within the confines of French society.

This group therefore draws boundaries around being authentically Muslim and attempt to redefine what it means to be a believer in Islam, by distinguishing "between those who merely believe and those whose belief leads to practice." This redefinition "allows them to remain a bona fide part of their parents' community. It facilitates their participation in Islamic holidays, feasts, and commemorations of life-cycle events, such as births, marriages, and deaths, without feelings of shame, guilt, or conflict" (Cesari 2002, 41). Individuals draw boundaries that allow for a more liberal

definition of a Muslim identity, such as Nadia when she distinguishes being a cultural Muslim and a religious Muslim.<sup>11</sup> This boundary work aligns with the tenets of French Republicanism. This evidences how symbolic boundaries are shaped by the national contexts and repertoires to which individuals have access. Because they desire full inclusion and acceptance into French society, they frame their religiosity in ways that facilitate that.

For instance, while one of the pillars of Islam involves praying five times a day (*salât*), Karim, a 32-year-old with dual Algerian and French citizenship, who lives in the southwestern *banlieue* of Melun with his wife and two young children, does not do the ritual prayers because he feels he already has a connection to Algerian culture. This also illustrates the connection to respondents make between being Muslim and being Maghrébin. Karim had a strong Muslim upbringing and remains close to his parents. Being Muslim has always seemed very natural to him, both because of his parents' religious attachment and because he grew up in a predominately Muslim neighborhood. For example, many of his neighbors took Arabic courses on the weekend too and many of his classmates and friends also fasted during Ramadan. Ever since he was five years old, he has traveled to Algeria at least once a year. His parents instilled in him a strong link with Algeria and Algerian culture, one that he plans, with his wife, to pass on to his young children. He distinguishes between those Muslims who do the ritual prayers and those who do not, explaining that most often it is those who lack a strong connection to the Maghreb that pray daily to establish that. Karim does not feel he needs to "prove" any aspect of his identity by praying five times daily:

I think that because I've spent a lot of time in Algeria, I've traveled there a lot, I go to Algeria often, I know the country ... I've met people in Algeria who are about my age and the majority of them do not do the daily prayers, they spend their time with other things besides doing the daily prayers. The other thing is that I speak the language [Arabic] and I think also that my parents transmitted to me many things... while my friends that do the daily prayers, and those who began to do so at an early age, for a lot of them they do not travel to Algeria or they seldom go there, they do not speak [Arabic] well or not at all, and they are more distant from the country [Algeria], its history, and I feel like they do the daily prayers to try to establish a link with Algeria, because it is the religion that binds them to it. But for me, I don't really have that need.

<sup>11</sup>Venel (2004) identifies ritual prayer as the distinction between practicing and believing Muslims. However, while my respondents who identify as non-practicing or cultural Muslims do not do the ritual prayer, some respondents who identify as strongly practicing Muslims also do not do the ritual prayers.

Karim articulates what for him is essential in being a French Muslim — possessing a genuine connection to the Maghreb while living in France. As Karim feels this connection, the actual practices or rituals associated with Islam, namely the *salât*, are less pertinent for him.<sup>12</sup> Negotiating religious practices is part of how Karim constructs his overall identity — by making sense of the differences (including educational achievement, professional success, and religious practice) between him and others in his community. Respondents like Karim do not just have an ethnic or religious identity, but also an ethnoreligious identity, in which their Maghrébin origin and Muslim religion are inextricably linked.

Youssef, a 32-year-old Parisian of Algerian origin, similarly experiences feeling different based on his religious identification. In particular, he feels most challenged in this regard at his work at the French Football Federation:

At my job, there about 10 Arabs,<sup>13</sup> five of whom drink alcohol, do not observe Ramadan, who love to go out, go to clubs, hang out, smoke, etc. . . and there are five others who, who do not go out. Me, I do not drink, I do not smoke, I do not really go to clubs and all that. But it is to me that they say, “you are extremist” but they love the others [the five Arabs who go out, etc.], they love them. . . but with an Arab like me it’s different. Do you see what I’m saying? If tomorrow, you give in to what the French do, what they are, that’s great. Then they’ll say, “Youssef is a great guy, he drinks, he can drink two barrels of beer.” You see what I’m saying?

Youssef asserts that it is not only the fact that he is Muslim that leads his coworkers to see him as different, but also the way that he practices his Muslim faith. To him, the Muslim identity that the French more easily accept — that of the Muslim who drinks alcohol and goes to night-clubs — is not an authentic one. In order for Youssef to be a Muslim who is not made to feel different, he would have to significantly alter his religious identity, and not be what he sees as a “true” Muslim:

I claim a Muslim identity, but do I practice it 100 percent? No, I do not practice everything in Islam, but I do identify as Muslim. . . I believe in God, I agree with the dogmas of the religion. But after that. . . everyone has their interpretation [of Islam], our own way to live. So I agree with some things, disagree with other things, but I think I act correctly

<sup>12</sup>Previous research has framed ritual prayer as a measure of the degree of immigrant assimilation, in that a decline in the number of times one prays signifies greater levels of assimilation (Bowen 2004a).

<sup>13</sup>Many respondents used the term Arab interchangeably with Maghrébin and North African.

in accordance with Islamic values, ones that are similar to other monotheistic religions, above everything the positive aspects, respecting others, those sorts of things.

Youssef observes Ramadan, as he has his entire life. His three older sisters practice in the same ways that he does. He explains that his father is more “Republican” than religious. Youssef is not even sure if his father believes in God. The fact that Youssef does not completely follow Islamic practices, such as doing the daily prayers and regularly attending mosque, poses no barrier to identifying as Muslim. This is one example of how respondents adapt Islam to the French context. While religion is often a locus of difference for this population, respondents still assert a French identity through how they actually frame their religion. That many respondents feel they relate to their religion in similar ways as their compatriots confirms for them that they are as French as anyone else.

Likewise, Elyamine, a 29-year-old of Algerian origin, has been Muslim all his life. “This religion has been in my heart ever since I was born,” he explains. His parents, with whom he is really close, are really strict with their religious practice. Elyamine has become increasingly strict with his religious practice in recent years. Today, he does the ritual prayers. Observing Ramadan with his family is so important to him that even when he lived in London for work, he returned to France so that he could observe with them. Elyamine cited this as proof of his religious devotion when explaining his religiosity. It also reveals his ties to his family and his Algerian background. Growing up he often traveled to Algeria, especially as his oldest sister and much of his extended family lives there. Elyamine sees himself as an authentic Muslim. The boundaries he draws around being a true Muslim are similar to how Lila places observing Eid ul-Fitr above her law school exams.

Nadia, who describes herself as a cultural Muslim rather than a religious Muslim, believes that religion is a personal matter, one that should be kept to oneself. Therefore, she does not feel that Muslim women should wear the hijab, as it brings religion into the public sphere:<sup>14</sup>

I completely tolerate women who wear the hijab, it is a personal choice, but at the same time, we live in a country where there is not an official religion, a secular country, and I think that is something we should all respect also... we should not be shocked when

<sup>14</sup>Killian (2007) discusses how first-generation Muslim women not wearing the hijab is an example of accommodating to French society as it is not actually required in Islam. What is required is for women to dress modestly.

women [who wear the hijab] cannot find work, but it is a totally different notion of things that could bother some people who do not know anything about Islam, who could also have a negative image of it, to see someone who arrives with a veil covering part of their face. That dynamic is really important. The religion that one practices is for oneself and not for others.

Despite individuals affirming their religious identity, they locate it within a Republican context, in that they also acknowledge the division between church and state and the relegation of religion to the private sphere.

Furthermore, many respondents refer to the significance of the practices they adopt, while negating the importance of those which they do not. In this vein, observing Ramadan, even if one does not fast but celebrates Eid ul-Fitr, is the minimum threshold one must cross to claim any type of Muslim identity. Practicing ritual prayer, abstaining from alcohol and cigarettes, or wearing the hijab are framed as less relevant for everyday Muslim life. Often these respondents also distinguish themselves from their parents in terms of how they practice Islam, and this boundary work facilitates that.

Boundary work is also used to expand the definition of being a Muslim by countering prevailing stereotypes of French Muslims. Farid loves both hip-hop and Islam and denies any conflict there. He thinks others' definitions of Muslim are too limiting. To him, just because he does not attend mosque on Fridays nor has a wife who wears the hijab does not mean that he is any less a Muslim as those Muslims who do.

Salim, a 36-year-old of Tunisian origin, considers being Muslim to be the most important thing in his life, before being Maghrébin or Tunisian. He converted to Islam about 10 years ago after being in a near-fatal car accident caused him to reevaluate his life. Yet he is married to a white christian woman and sees no incongruity there:

It does not pose any problems for me, none at all. It is actually the opposite. Difference is always a richness... So we live normally, me, I observe Ramadan, she does not. I pray [does the daily prayers], she does not. And there are no problems. That's part of Islam too, accepting differences.

Since Islam is a patrilineal religion (Gray 2008), Salim's four-year-old son is Muslim. His wife accepts this, but the entire family also celebrates Christmas. I emphasize here how Salim assertively defends his Muslim identity against those who would suggest its incongruence with being

married to a non-Muslim woman. He elaborates that contrary to conventional wisdom, Islam is a religion of peace.

Linda, a 34-year-old, who has lived in Paris for about 10 years and has six siblings, considers herself very knowledgeable about Algerian culture and knowing about Islam is a constitutive part of this cultural fluency. Although she identifies as a practicing Muslim, she sees many differences between her and other Muslims due to how she was raised. Even though her parents are devout Muslims, they have always been more liberal than the typical Maghrébin family. For example, Linda recounts a story of her 28-year-old brother who is also a practicing Muslim and has a very traditional view regarding gender roles:

He came to see me recently in Paris and the day he arrived at my place, there were three male friends there also. . . We were all getting ready to go out for someone's birthday or something. And then when he arrived, he did a double-take. He was obviously shocked, but he wasn't going to say anything to me then and if he had, he would have been stuck outside! And afterwards, after he left town, he called our mother. He told her: "I was just at your daughter's place and did you know, she had three men at her place?" And do you know what my mother said? She said. . . "It is a little complicated to sleep with three men at the same time, isn't it?" And that story just made me feel so good, she just dismissed him. . . So, I love my parents' state of mind, they are practicing [Muslims] but at the same time they are very, very, very open. . .

Linda appreciates her mother's acceptance of French gender norms. Although Linda came of age in a practicing Muslim household, she was not raised to be restricted by her religion. The traditional roles that are often prescribed to Muslim women — particularly those that she sees operating in other Muslim families — were never assigned to her. While she sees her brother as fitting the stereotype of a "radical French Muslim," Linda sees herself as having a more "assimilationist" French Muslim identity. This is at least partially due to Linda's middle class status (she works as human resources director and owns a condo in the 15th arrondissement). This French Muslim identity does *not* conflict with French secular society. Despite institutional constraints around identity options, there exists a heterogeneity of religious identity among French Muslims.

Another example of how respondents draw boundaries around their religious identity is how they frame celebrating Christmas to signify their similarities with other French people. Many individuals celebrated Christmas when they were children to "fit in" with others. This is an example of blurring the boundaries between themselves and others. Soria, a 21-year-old medical student of Algerian origin, remembers, "When I was

younger my parents wanted me and my sisters and brothers to do the same things as the other children.” Her neighborhood in Rueil-Malmaison, a western *banlieue*, was predominately French and hers was one of the few immigrant families. Growing up, she received what she characterizes as an “Islam education.” She learned the rituals from her parents and did not question them much until she grew older. Today, she fasts during Ramadan, believes in God, and otherwise “tries to do good things in [her] life.” Soria continues to celebrate Christmas, as she and her family see it as a French tradition and holiday, not a religious celebration.

Growing up, Nadia and her seven older siblings felt awkward when their classmates would talk about the Christmas gifts they received and Nadia and her siblings had nothing to contribute. Her parents quickly changed that and the family continues to celebrate Christmas today.

Safia, a 32-year-old journalist of Tunisian origin, who grew up in an upper-middle-class Parisian neighborhood, also celebrated Christmas with her family as a child, to not be different from the other students at school. However, she has not continued the tradition with her own children because her husband, who is also of Maghrébin origin, is afraid their children will forget “where they come from.”

Youssef also stopped celebrating Christmas once he grew up. He sees this as a generational difference — between Maghrébins of his parents’ generation and Maghrébins today:

Before, we did not want to do anything to appear different, but today it is not as necessary. We wanted to be like everyone else [before] and today we are not as ashamed to be different. . . . So our parents tried really hard to copy what everyone was doing, but I think that also, it is complicated to explain to your five-year-old child that he is different, it is much easier to just buy a Christmas tree and celebrate Christmas, especially if Christmas is largely a commercial thing.

Religious practices — even of religions in which they themselves do not believe — are one site to locate acceptance of and adherence to French Republicanism. By exhibiting the multiple ways one can be a Muslim, middle class children of North African immigrants are constantly negotiating their religiosity, which becomes particularly sensitive in a *laïque* society.

### *DISCUSSION: BEING MUSLIM AND BEING FRENCH*

Like some recent research (including Foner and Alba 2008; Klausen 2008; Laurence and Vaisse 2006; Nyiri 2007), this article challenges

prevailing notions of French Muslims as completely different from other French citizens, particularly in terms of religiosity. However, I have especially focused on the middle class segment of the French Muslim of North African origin population to reveal the complications of negotiating marginalized identities even for those individuals who could be described as successfully assimilated. These data suggest that middle class French Muslims are increasingly choosing more privatized and individualized expressions of their religious identity, which reflects how Islam is being adapted to the French context. Like French Christians, young Muslims often relate to their religion as consumers, “choosing which rules and tenets of their religion to embrace and which ones to dismiss” (Cesari 2002, 41). Muslims who defend French *laïcité* are often seen as products of assimilation (Laurence and Vaisse 2006). Yet this assimilation is limited, as they remain excluded and marginalized because of their ethnoraacial identifications.

Even respondents like Lila and Elyamine who are deeply religious engage with their faith on *laïque* terms. This is not an issue of second-generation immigrants not taking their religious identity seriously. When many respondents assert a religious identity, they do so in way that can be characterized as very French. Often, the ways individuals practice their religion are more aligned with French Republicanism, and its emphasis on secularism, than in opposition to it. They frame their religion as a private and personal affair. Respondents’ privatized expressions of their religious identity reflect how Islam is still being adapted to the French context in the second generation. How they frame their religiosity is in response to the marginalization and exclusion they face.

The role religion plays in the lives of middle class children of North African immigrants does not negate conforming to *laïcité*. Rather, this population uses their religious practices to legitimate their membership in the French imagined community (Anderson 1991). Their religiosity does not hinder them from feeling French or locate them outside a French secularism (see also Fernando 2005; Maxwell and Bleich 2014). They are not interested in asserting an oppositional identity based on their religious attachments. They draw boundaries in terms of their religious identities and practices, which include them with other French people. Often, individuals’ religious identifications are shaped by their childhood experiences and the values that their parents and other family members transmitted to them. Their religiosity allows this generation to make two seemingly disparate



connections — one with French Republican society and the other with Maghrébin culture.

Because of how Islam is widely perceived in French society and the prevalence of anti-Muslim sentiment, any degree of association with Islam becomes problematic for children of Maghrébin immigrants. That my respondents were not more fundamentalist in their religious expressions is at least partially due to their middle class status, particularly in terms of employment and educational attainment. While they often experience marginalization and discrimination comparable to children of Maghrébin immigrants who are less successful, they also deeply support France's Republican ideology and all that that constitutes. That respondents would express their religiosity in *laïque* ways is due to the influence of having been raised in French Republican society, as well as reflective of their feelings of belonging to France. This is regardless of the stigma and marginalization they have faced due to their Maghrébin origins. Being Muslim matters for this segment of the North African second generation but does not represent the totality of their identities. This suggests that future incorporation and integration of Muslims in Western European societies will not be especially problematic as individuals are adept at adapting their religious practices to national contexts.

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