

## Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

But had it?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Woman:** “Not like the others.”

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

**Woman:** There is a problem.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

## **Who Are France’s Muslims?**

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

## Why These Cases?

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

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

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

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

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

## Epistemology and Methodology

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

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

### *Epistemology*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Methodology and Methods*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Outline of the Book

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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