

It has become a truism now to say that the headscarf (1989) and burkini (2016) affairs have been in the limelight of French public debate and have evoked many discussions about Islam and its rightful place, whether it has one being a question in itself, in French society. It is therefore salient to analyse these two events and what they represent, which will assist in deciding whether there is a particular relationship between the French Republic and Islam and, if so, what this particular relationship entails.

Commenté [EM1]: Unclear. Sentence structure.

Commenté [EM2]: OK. What is your argument?

It can be argued that due to France being a secular republic, there is in fact no relationship between the French Republic and Islam. The law of 1905 that officially separates Church and State claims to allow “freedom of conscience and guarantees the freedom to practice religion” (Gouv.Fr). This law also claims to end the system of “recognized religions”, which has the aim to end prejudice and discrimination against those who have religious views as the people of France now have what we call ‘a shared identity’. This introduces the term ‘laïcité’, which is a central argument within discussions concerning the headscarf and burkini and whether Muslims should be permitted to wear them. However, in contrast to what this law states, secularism is now used within modern French politics to target a particular group in French society; Muslims.

Commenté [EM3]: Good point.

Commenté [EM4]: headscarf

Commenté [EM5]: :

To begin with, in 1989, three Muslim girls were sent home from school in Creil when they insisted on wearing their headscarves to class, which was the catalyst that evoked huge public debates in France, that are still discussed in present day, on whether wearing the headscarf imposes Islamic views on others and whether the headscarf is unacceptable in the name of laïcité and the republic. The recent debate between Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen during the presidential election in April 2022 illustrates the idea that the ‘rise of Islamophobia in the media has allowed the FN (now known as the RN) to reshape concepts such as laïcité in its own image’ (Mondom & Winter, 2017:37). Le Pen clarifies that she is “for the the ban of headscarves in public spaces”. She believes that the headscarf is a “uniform imposed by Islamists”, the women who wear it are “isolated and put to the side” and that “this admission is not acceptable in our country, therefore we must free these women and make Islamists retreat” (TheParisian, 2022). By saying that it is not “acceptable in our country”, a country founded by republican values such as laïcité, and we must “free these women”, not only can we infer that the far right believe that the headscarf opposes the French republican values, but we can also say that they believe it directly opposes western

Commenté [EM6]: Mondom

Commenté [EM7]: Repetition of "the"

Commenté [EM8]: Le Parisien

values, such as the equality and freedom of women, and they use these ideas to persuade the public that banning the headscarf means that by doing so, they are in fact protecting the secular republic and even more so women's rights. This demonstrates that the headscarf, a symbol of Islam, does not agree with French policies in the far right's perspective. However, those who understand Islam and its teachings, understand that the headscarf's role is not to oppress women. [Therefore, we can gather that certain political parties such as the RN, whose support from the public has increased substantially when comparing their vote count in 2017 and 2022 presidential elections, use secularism and republican values to disguise their islamophobia] that is embedded in their political views and desired laws. In the same debate, Le Pen does not fail to argue that "a law that bans the headscarf in public spaces is a law against radical Islamism", which brings to light this idea that "The republic is now understood as the nation in the traditional extreme right manner, and secularism as the weapon against the divisions caused by the nation's new primary enemy: Islam (Mondom & Winter, 2017:37). [This clear association between the headscarf and extremism highlights the right-wing view on Islam and the extremely negative connotations that they associate the religion with, including radicalization. This demonstrates the negative relationship between Islam and the Republic. It can also be said that the discussion of banning headscarves "violates the freedom to manifest religious belief guaranteed in the French constitution, in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and in the 1905 Law on the Separation of the Churches and the State" (Almeida, 2018:22). This proves that the definition of secularism itself has been altered in French politics in order to justify the suppression of Islamic symbols, such as the headscarf, as an act of defense of the republic, thus reiterating that Islam and the republic cannot co-exist and the negative relationship between the two.

Subsequently, it is evident from Le Pen's statement, quoted above, that she believes that banning the headscarf would prevent this group of women from being cast aside. However, this has been proven to have a contradictory effect when regarding the burkini controversy in 2016, which involved French policemen forcing a woman to remove her clothing on a beach in Nice following the burkini ban. Through reading McCue's research (2008:102) on the social participation of Muslim women in the Australian community, there is strong insinuation that the availability of Muslim women's sport clothes, including the burkini, has helped to increase their participation levels in physical activity, such as swimming, which we can assume would have the same effect in France. This is due to the fact that these clothes

Commenté [EM9]: Good point.

Commenté [EM10]: Mondon

Commenté [EM11]: New paragraph

becoming available encourages Muslim women to engage in social activities comfortably whilst still remaining true to their religious beliefs. However, following the terrorist attack on 14th July 2016 in Nice that killed over 80 people, the debate on the future of the burkini in France arose and led to the mayor of Cannes establishing the first 'burkini ban' on the grounds that they are 'simply a uniform that is a symbol of Islamic extremism' (Le Monde, 11 August 2016). Similarly to Le Pen's statement regarding the headscarf, this evidently relates the terms 'burkini' and 'Islamic extremism' together, insinuating that anyone who wears the burkini is automatically an extremist Muslim, creating more tension between the Republic and the Muslim community. This consequently deters Muslim women specifically from participating in any leisure activity, as they feel they cannot without disregarding their entire belief system, which in turn marginalises them further from French society. How can we expect a different outcome with the potential ban of the headscarf that the right-wing parties are fighting for when the underlying reasons for the skepticism of both the burkini and the headscarf are the same? This highlights once again the unfavourable relationship between the Republic and Islam, as the ban of the burkini reiterates the idea of there being a barrier between being a Muslim and being a full citizen of the secular republic; the idea that Muslim women cannot claim to be fully assimilating into French society if they are still following their Islamic beliefs.

In summation, regarding the evidence given, there is a distinctly negative and unfavourable relationship between Islam and the French Republic, with the ideas of secularism and preserving the French national identity being used within French political debate to suppress Muslims from practicing their religion in a free manner. With the rise in Islamophobia following multiple terrorist attacks, we can only assume that the hostility towards the Muslim community in a political context will only worsen, as will this particular relationship.

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Commenté [EM12]: Mondon