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The Burkini Buzz: Exploring French National Identity Discourse Through Social Media

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"The Burkini Buzz: Exploring French National Identity Discourse Through Social Media"

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Honors College Thesis April 2017
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Abstract

In the context of globalization, the question of national identity has increasingly become important when seeking to understand modern international politics. France in particular has experienced tensions of identity politics that are an outcome of its colonial, revolutionary, and republic history. The August 2016 “Burkini Controversy” that occurred in the southern regions of France is one example of this political tension, engaging diverse perspectives and cultures that challenge the dominant narrative of French identity. The platform in which people engage in identity discourse has also moved towards social media, an unprecedented form of communication and resource for information. This thesis analyzes the use of Twitter and tweets in the wake of the “Burkini Controversy” to gauge, and better understand French identity politics.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction----- | 5 |
| Chapter One: French Nationalism, What is it?----- | 7 |
| Introduction: Literature Review----- | 7 |
| Defining A Nation: A Collective History or Memory?----- | 10 |
| Beginnings of French Modern History and Defining Principles ----- | 11 |
| 20 th Century: The Past Romanticized, Collective and Forgotten Memory----- | 15 |
| The Forgotten Memory, Colonialism----- | 21 |
| Main Pillars of French Culture ----- | 25 |
| Chapter Two: The Burkini Controversy----- | 26 |
| Introduction----- | 26 |
| History of the Burkini----- | 27 |
| The Burkini- Part of a Global Sportswear Movement----- | 28 |
| Burkini Controversy Timeline----- | 30 |
| Breaking Down the Ban----- | 33 |
| <i>Laïcité and Secularism</i> ----- | 34 |
| <i>Feminist Arguments</i> ----- | 37 |
| <i>Government Intervention</i> ----- | 39 |
| <i>Memories of the Colonies and Colonized</i> ----- | 40 |
| Chapter Three: The Role of Social Media----- | 41 |
| Introduction----- | 41 |
| Tweets: | |
| 1. The Tweet That Began All Tweets----- | 43 |
| 2. Political Cartoons----- | 46 |
| 3. The Power of Comparison: History and Culture----- | 49 |
| 4. Feminist Perspectives----- | 53 |
| 5. Freedom of Speech----- | 57 |
| 6. French Government, the Nation’s Point of View ----- | 61 |
| 7. Right –Winged Politics, and Conservatism ----- | 67 |
| Conclusion----- | 70 |
| References----- | 73 |

Introduction:

Identity and belonging are inherently personal questions, but have national, if not global consequences. In this thesis I will examine the essential modern question of national identity through social media responses to the Burkini controversy in August of 2016. My focus is to examine French attitudes towards national identity, and how their concept of a nation forms despite immigration, globalization, and cultural conflicts

Tensions about national identities and the question of the ‘other’ are not exclusive to France. France is one of many countries, and in particular, one of many European countries that are engaging in identity discourse. Such discourse points to “signs of a new age of populism and nationalism emerging in Europe, a development that eventually could undermine post-war security and unity.”¹ Europe, or more properly known as the European Union, faces economic and cultural challenges to its unity posed by global forces. In 2016 alone, mass migration movements from Turkey, refugee resettlements, economic depressions, and Great Britain’s unprecedented “Brexit” have disproportionately affected member states and questioned values of unity. And while the E.U serves as an economic and political pact, there is no less anxiety and discussion about what the identity of a “European” actually is, let alone the relevance of regional and national identities. With the integration of more immigrants, many critics have questioned the concept of the European identity as “an idea expressing contrived notions of unity rather than an identity in the proper sense of the word and even takes on the proportion of an ideology.”² Globalized movements of political and economic integration have forced people to reexamine the power of identity and belonging within their communities. And more importantly, in doing so

¹ “In Europe, Nationalism Rising.” *Harvard Gazette*, February 27, 2017. <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/02/in-europe-nationalisms-rising/>.

² Stråth, B., 2002, A European Identity. To the Historical Limits of a Concept, “European Journal of Social Theory” 5(4), p. 387-401

they must discriminate between themselves and the ‘other’: countries or people who don’t contribute to their perceived national image.

However, while France may align with the broader European discussion on identity politics, there are tensions within its borders that are particular to the country. It would be a mistake to dismiss France’s complex and deep-rooted history of nationalism, and claim recent events such as the burkini controversy purely as a European problem. Rather, it is necessary to discriminate populist and national movements on a country-by-country basis, and even more important to investigate the particulars of French identity. This paper will investigate the uniqueness of French national history and its relation to identity conflict within the broader scope of political identity discourse.

The Nice attacks that killed 86 people on Bastille Day and the burkini controversy- a ban on burkini swimwear- questioned the symbolic and visual definition of French identity. It was not a coincidence that the Nice bombing happened on Bastille Day, nor that the burkini controversy sparked debate between secular and Islamic communities. Both events occurred in the French Provence Alps d’Azur, providing a window into the third densest region of foreign identities in France: with 327,621 foreigners comprising 6.6% of the total French population.³ And while the events themselves reveal the occurrence of identity discourse, the narratives on social media in the aftermath reveal the major actors, or characters who perform the scripts of their own stories and identities. That is, in analyzing the narratives surrounding these events, we can know more than just who were involved, but their beliefs and understanding of France as a nation. In my thesis I want to answer who these actors are, what themes they represent, and how they perform their identities through social media.

³INSEE. “Population Immigrée Selon Les Principaux Pays de Naissance En 2013 | Insee.” Accessed May 9, 2017. https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2012727#tableau-TCRD_012_tab1_regions2016.

Social media has made sharing personal reflections and narratives not only easier and accessible, but nearly instantaneous after events occur. In 140 words or less, Twitter and Facebook users provide personal reflections that reach a broad, engaging audience. Its usage is significant, according to a French research survey 75% of respondents ages 15-34 were on Facebook, and over 57% said they visited social media sites nearly every day.⁴

I will first discuss the dominant French identity, and the origins of French nationalism, followed by the context of the Burkini controversy, and finish with an analysis of social media posts. What is the dominant French narrative on identity, and how is it contested? How do individuals understand identity, specifically national identity? How do people understand French norms, and does clothing choice carry significant power?

Chapter 1: French Nationalism, What is it?

True Champagne must be made in the Champagne region of France, or else it is considered sparkling wine. Look more closely down the wine aisle and the same logic can be made about cognac, Pinot noir, and other French gastronomy. In both the global and national economies French products command an “authority and legitimacy not afforded to most commodities.”⁵ The scrupulous attention to French authenticity is not merely the result of gastronomy enthusiasts, but of national movements, French bureaus, trade agreements, and laws and ensure that French identity is recognized and protected all around the world. French products including but not limited to movies, books, and music, are considered what is called l’exception culturelle.⁶ That is, since these products represent and proliferate culture they must be treated differently as they impact the integrity of the French nation.

⁴ “Social Networking on the Rise Among France’s Older Web Users - eMarketer.” Accessed April 21, 2017. <https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Social-Networking-on-Rise-Among-Frances-Older-Web-Users/1013650>.

⁵ Guy, Kolleen M. *When Champagne Became French: Wine and the Making of a National Identity*. JHU Press, 2007.

⁶ L’exception culturelle is not one but a series of laws and policies to protect French culture. Its origins and themes can be traced to UNESCO’s agreements on protecting cultural heritage. See pages 7 and 14

However the question of French authenticity extends beyond the global consumer, and such regulations are in place partly due to various processes of globalization. So important is retaining the image and integrity of French culture that the French government subsidizes culture devoting one percent on its national budget to culture and spending at least 1.5 of GDP on cultural activities.⁷ According to 2014 OECD statistics, France is the second leading nation among G7 countries that spends highest percentage on cultural activities.⁸ The increase in regulations is seen by some as defensive, and a sign of losing control over a threatened culture. Time magazine writer and former European Time editor Donald Morrison argued in a largely controversial article that the regulations are a sign of France's overextensions to preserve culture because of the its unavoidable death at the hands of globalization. Products and cultural regulations are "mighty oaks being felled in France's cultural forest make barely a sound in the wider world. Once admired for dominating excellence of its writers, artists, and musicians, France today is a wilting power in the global marketplace."⁹

The impending threats of globalization dominate many contemporary discussions; one only has to read Harrington's *Clash of Civilizations* to get a sense of the threats to regions by the forces of globalization and access to culture (as perceived by many throughout the world). Through media, technology and movement of peoples, "the world is becoming a smaller place. The interactions between peoples of different civilizations are increasing; these increasing interactions intensify civilization consciousness and awareness of differences."¹⁰ The awareness of difference and the physical ability to move into different communities has made the need to

⁷ Donald Morrison, and Antoine Compagnon. *The Death of French Culture*. Malden,MA: Polity Press, 2010.

⁸ OECD. "Central Government Spending." OECD Publishing, June 25, 2014. doi:10.1787/83a23f1b-en.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Huntington, Samuel P. "The clash of civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, 22+. *Academic OneFile* (accessed March 27, 2017).

http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=vol_b92b&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA13187561&asid=1a42b7d099492b170bf619f11fff6a81.

maintain the type of close-knit imagined communities and traditional cultures to which Benedict Anderson describes all the more important for countries.¹¹ However this paper is not about how globalization threatens nationalism, but how and what the national identity of France in particular might be in the age of globalization. If “North African immigration to France generates hostility among Frenchmen and at the same time increases receptivity to immigration by “good” European Catholic Poles”¹² as Harrington suggests, what culture values make French culture compatible with some and not others? Furthermore, how do products of globalization like social media facilitate identity discussions?

Notions of identity can easily be preoccupied and narrowed by understandings of how someone belongs in the present and their current image and its relation to others. This understanding of identity is simplified and declared into one simple phrase, such as “I am French” or American, German, etc. because it reflects the current understanding of geographic and political boundaries just as a passport declares your nationality and rights as a citizen. Equally important however is defining how identity is a power and force, and a product of intersecting histories and origins. The source of political tension derives deeply within individuals perceptions of community, and “invigorates differences and animosities stretching or thought to stretch back deep into history.”¹³ Globalization has not instigated the question of French identity alone. Ironically, part of the French dominant narrative is consistently asking what French identity is: it’s a “Pleasure the French derive from reading foreigners’ views of

¹¹ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verso, 1991.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Huntington, Samuel P.

France, there is hardly a more penetrating glance than their own.”¹⁴ Throughout modern history, the French have questioned their identity, creating and recreating a narrative that fit the times.

There is a deeper meaning to understanding French protectionist policies on its products. Important as it is to question why France is protecting its products, we must also ask what image and dominant narrative is being produced. Not only to the world, but to its own citizens? The exception culturelle is not one law but a concept manifested in a series of laws and public policy. In other words, it is a top-down and policy-enforced identity, created by the French government. As such, we must assume that the purpose of this created narrative is to be used as a force within France and a projected force for those on the outside looking in.

The answer is that France has experienced an evolution and history of a constant identity change and creation that can be traced back to the origins of the French Revolution and continued through multiple government changes, republics, regimes, and occupations. Each era necessitated an investigation of the nation’s integrity and collective understanding of its citizens and inhabitants.

Defining A Nation: A Collective History or Memory?

Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* defines nationalism as “in minds of each lives the image of their communion.”¹⁵ This intangible idea however is more than a present understanding of visual and theoretical commonality. The idea of belonging is rooted in history and memory, two distinct concepts that French philosopher Pierre Nora defines and contributes specifically to the French creation of a nation, and *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, or detached notions of France. History and memory are “the intersection of two developments...one a purely historiographical movement, the reflexive turning of history upon itself, the other...historical:

¹⁴ Corbett, J. *Through French Windows: An Introduction to France in the Nineties*. Through French Windows: An Introduction to France in the Nineties. University of Michigan Press, 1994..

¹⁵ Anderson, Benedict

the end of a tradition of memory.”¹⁶ History as he defines is not a recording of true events, but an over-edited version of an idea of the past, one that leaves out truths. History distrusts memory because relies on individuals and recollection that not only is subject to bias, but eventually dies with its holders. No one today remembers the French Revolution, it is not a “spontaneous memory, we must deliberate archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations...such activities no longer occur naturally.”¹⁷ Such artifacts of the past serve as material, symbolic, and functional purposes. *La Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* for instance is material evidence that a memory of the French Revolution existed, it symbolizes the French nation, and functions as law. What is important to realize however is that the power of the document derives from the values that are defined by society. These explicit values change and are manipulated by the telling of history as it corresponds and fits the purpose of the present time.

The telling of the French narrative or dominant identity then is not necessarily a collective memory, but an idea and implied understanding of French history. It is not factual truth, but rather based on myths and ideas “subject to amnesia and manipulation”¹⁸ changed to best fit the goals of the nation given any certain époque or time. It is better to look at the collective memory as historiography, to understand patterns and what values still survived, or believed to have survived that define French identity today.

Beginnings of French Modern History and Defining Principles:

Despite several changes in regimes, empires, and republics, fundamental French beliefs and pillars to their identity began with the French Revolution. Contrary to the American

¹⁶ Nora, Pierre. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.” *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7–24. doi:10.2307/2928520.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Sangster, A., and P.P. Battistelli. *Myths, Amnesia and Reality in Military Conflicts, 1935-1945*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017.

counterpart, the French Revolution truly revolutionized the concept of government and the understanding of the self-autonomous individual. Enlightenment era concepts of rationalism, freedoms, and humanity governed literally and metaphorically severed the heads of monarchial government and replaced it with a republic of people. Eighteenth century French writers Voltaire, Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau are still celebrated for their contributions, if not creating of republicanism and the French republic.

The death of absolutist monarchs was a radical concept and forced the question of not only national identity, but the extent of individual autonomy.. For the first time in centuries, the french people were no longer inferior subjects of a divine ruler, but in theory were considered self-autonomous, rational, and born with unalienable rights. Suddenly, the nation was forced to understand what a *citoyen* was, if (nearly –save for colored and women) everyone was his own master. *La Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* became the essential document defining the rights of man as equals in society. As much as one individual was self-autonomous, article three stated “that the principle of any sovereignty lies primarily within the nation, no corporate body, no individual may exercise any authority that does not expressly emanate from it.”¹⁹ Not one individual could claim superiority over the other, but just as important, not one individual could claim superiority over the state.

Revolutions beget revolutions, and with radical change in government and power also came radical change in expectations of citizens themselves. Sameness, strength, secularity, and uniformity were important to keeping the new state separate from the absolutist, economically and socially dividing *les trois états* system. In their very beginnings of the revolution, the French

¹⁹ “Déclaration Des Droits de l’Homme et Du Citoyen de 1789 / Constitution / Droit Français / Accueil | Légifrance, Le Service Public de L’accès Au Droit - Accueil.” Accessed April 20, 2017. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/Droit-francais/Constitution/Declaration-des-Droits-de-l-Homme-et-du-Citoyen-de-1789>.

were concerned with the image of France and how citizens represented themselves. A paranoia attitude of image and presentation started the Reign of Terror, where the consequences of disobedience and unconformity would send someone to the guillotine. Societal norms and rules changed frequently, from dress codes to specific greetings that regulated citizens' conduct in public. But with this change brought fear and uncertainty that citizens would turn on one another, for the sake of keeping the image of the new French government. The racialization eventually killed Robespierre and left the founders of the revolution dead. However when France searched for order, it did not kill the remaining influential words lefts by the revolution, *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

As the radical fervor waned, an eagerness to reestablish order and continuity followed. 19th century France saw more revolutions and socioeconomic divides that demanded a stronger government. The return to absolutist government and the bourgeoisie class was realized through Napoleon III, who instilled nationalistic pride in the nation, and sought to create an empire. The Napoleon's Empire stretched across Europe and colonized Northern Africa. The imperialist movement proliferated French ideals to other parts of the world, if not instilled a pride within their own nation of stronger culture and universalism that would continue to build the image of France until the era of decolonization.

The riches from colonialism and imperialisms and brief time of political peace before WWI characterized the Belle Époque. Peace and stability allowed for communities in art to flourish, and extended until WWI. If the title of the Belle Époque does not immediately come to mind, then the description of the era certainly will: "Myth has replaced history to such a degree that these words immediately conjure up a music-hall scene: show girls in black stockings...the artists of Monamarte... [where the] backcloth shows the Eiffel tower and the Moulin rouge

together”.²⁰ Classic stereotypes of French art and culture that have their origins in this era, due to the flourish of arts, literature, and relative peace and stability in Europe. But myths have their elaborations and inaccuracies, and for reasons of cultural patrimony and nationalism later in the 20th century, the era was celebrated and sold as the golden age of French culture. Not to diminish the achievements and grandeur, however, ones who profited from these achievements were ones who profited from growing capitalism and leisure time- a privilege enjoyed by middle class. Classism and economic divides existed, but not nearly as noted in as the iconic images were used later to celebrate French culture and pride that was lost during the wars.

But if there were ever such a time when the French continued to persevere through identity crisis and nation building, it would occur during the 20th Century. Occupations from both World Wars created a memory of change and oppression. The Vichy government stopped the proliferation and continuation of French culture and admiration, ending the Belle Époque. Despite the lack of cultural flourish as to be expected from war and violence, actual memories of the French past and nostalgia survived, and were revived after WWII. Contrary to destroying the French past, Phillipe Jullian writes how “the experience of war cemented this identity [and] has continued to support the French Nation,” both in politics and in art.²¹ When it came to physically rebuilding the French nation after WWII, France also sought to rebuild its pride and culture, as a testament of survival and strength. General Charles de Gaulle who would later become the French President of the fifth république, and Mitterand became the founding fathers in reestablishing France as a nation.

Why was the history of France as a nation important? Although its political borders and the way in which the state was governed changed, certain key elements of republicanism,

²⁰ Phillipe Jullian. *La Belle Époque*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1982.

²¹ Ibid

secularity, democracy, and images of liberty prevailed. France not only started a revolution, it sought to expand and survive its values into other territories, and testify its strength from surviving hardship and war. The following ideas created from the 18th to early 20th century were the foundations for the dominant narrative and identity of France reinvigorated after WWII and existing to present day.

20th Century: The Past Romanticized, Collective and Forgotten Memory

Unifying France after decades of violence, occupation and economic hardship was no small feat after WWII. During office, president Charles de Gaulle testified his struggle in perhaps the most appropriate French way, comparing disunity to French gastronomy: “No one can simply bring together a country that has 265 kinds of cheese.”²² Beyond cultural and regional differences within France, relations with the French colony of Algeria intensified in the 1950s and the two countries were on the brink of war. The subject of decolonization and post- WWII rebuilding left many questioning not only the extent of French political boundaries, but the definition French nationality. It became paramount, at the least part on the French government to establish French pride and cultural pillars that would distinguish the country apart, if not become a beacon of cultural and artistic advancement.

The government under Charles de Gaulle sought to reaffirm the French status and tenants of republicanism. For de Gaulle, “France appeared to him to be an indomitable entity, a ‘person’ to whom a mystical dialogue was maintained throughout history.”²³ The time under his leadership now known as Gaullism, affirmed heritage, stability, strong economy, and the reestablishment of a post war republic as priorities of a French nation. The reintroduction of the

²² Keyes, Ralph. *The Quote Verifier: Who Said What, Where, and When*. St. Martin’s Press, 2007.

²³ Serge Berstein. “Gaullism.” In *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*, edited by Joel Kreiger, 306. Oxford University Press. Accessed April 1, 2017.
https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Oxford_Companion_to_Politics_of_the.html?id=2wd30pXJxpYC.

myth and history began again, establishing heritage as a political and nationalistic force, one critical to the country's survival. The passion for preserving heritage, or more appropriately creating ideas of French unity was bolstered by the U.N agreement towards cultural heritage, which states tangible items such as monuments, buildings and intangible concepts such as social events, rituals and music have the rights to be protected.²⁴ The only way for France to move forward was to stabilize itself, particularly in the face of the growing world superpowers, Russia and the United States. De Gaulle's strategy was to effectively instill French pride and national sentiment through centralizing and enforcing culture as part of the French bureaucracy.

One of the most defining moments came when Charles de Gaulle established the Ministry of Culture in 1950 with minister André Malraux. Under their leadership, the ministry of Culture's goal was to:

“to make accessible to as many people as possible the major works of humanity, and first of all, of France. In this capacity, the Ministry develops cultural policy directed at the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage in all its aspects, and supports the creation of works of art, and the development of artistic practices...”²⁵

Within this governmental organization, the ministry bolstered national institutions of art and culture including opera houses, traditional architecture, museums, and libraries. Most notably, he established *maisons de culture*, administrative units spread across the nation to ensure space and programming for cultural activities. With each administration, leaders added or manipulated the tone of the cultural ministry. Whereas André literally and figuratively revived facades and traditional notions of French culture (he sought to clean the face of older buildings) minister Jack Lang under the socialist presidency of François Mitterand sought to include modern forms of art embracing new and populist culture. Mitterand and Lang's openness to modernism, jazz, rap,

²⁴ UNESCO. “CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE - Convention-En.pdf.” United Nations, November 1972. <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/convention-en.pdf>.

²⁵ “Missions - Ministère de La Culture et de La Communication.” Accessed April 1, 2017. <http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/Nous-connaître/Decouvrir-le-ministère/Missions>.

and even tagging led to the period of les grands travaux, a period marked by the establishment of the musée d'orsay, modern architecture such as the pyramids in the louvre, the grand arche de defense, and la fête de la musique.

The administrations under Mitterand and de Gaulle were the first of the following movements that led to government interventions on behalf of establishing nationalistic sentiment in *la patromonie culturelle*, the concept that representations of culture exist (materially and intangibly) and that have the right furthermore to be protected.²⁶ The concept of cultural patrimony is usually invoked when speaking about cultural and foundational artifacts including but not limited to written constitutions, arts, and documents. France in particular has intervened economically and politically to protect not only the concept of French identity, but materials and products produced in France that presumably represent culture. Products known as the “exception culturelle” are exempt from regulations normally controlling international trade according to the 1993 GATT agreements and the TIPP.²⁷ Originally created to protect French television and cinema, the “exception culturelle” has been evoked to apply to an array of products and services, including but not limited to books, radio, music, artistic works, and intellectual property rights. Protecting French services and goods deemed as pieces of culture serves a two fold purpose in thought: “one is the belief that the public’s desire for culture would be stimulated by having a maximum of high-quality cultural objects at its disposal,” the other

²⁶ UNESCO. “Définition Du Patrimoine Culturel | Organisation Des Nations Unies Pour L’éducation, La Science et La Culture.” *UNESCO*. Accessed April 11, 2017. <http://www.unesco.org/new/fr/culture/themes/illicit-trafficking-of-cultural-property/unesco-database-of-national-cultural-heritage-laws/frequently-asked-questions/definition-of-the-cultural-heritage/>.

²⁷ Service, Members’ Research. “TTIP and the Cultural Exception.” *European Parliamentary Research Service Blog*, August 29, 2014. <https://epthinktank.eu/2014/08/29/ttip-and-the-cultural-exception/>.

invigorating the French economy in the global market through mercantilist and protectionist policy.²⁸

It would be a glaring omission not to discuss the importance of language in French culture. Like other arts, services, and products, French is also regulated and overseen by several organizations and laws. Although the government does not control the integrity or grammatical usage of the language, it has under the Toubon Law claimed the language “un élément fondamental de la personnalité et du patrimoine de la France,” and has mandated that French be used in all governmental publications, state-schools, advertisements, and workplaces.²⁹ Other non-governmental organizations such as l’Académie française and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie serve to keep the integrity of the language, its usage, and protection against English influences. Linguistics and French governmental officials have noted challenges in the usage and evolution of the French language, with most recently the inclusion of more English words, in addition modification of gender nouns, colloquialism in French youth, and differences in dialects. French “oscillates between an ideology of uniformity... and a tendency to fragmentation,” that is the language may unify the country in one identity and its former colonies, but in a post-colonial world and a globalized world, questions on regulations and oversight have risen.³⁰ Do the French let the language evolve, or is it integral to keep the language static for survival?

Another key characteristic of French culture and unity is the concept of secularism. Long before the 20th century, France has had a tumultuous relationship with religion, in particular with

²⁸ Bousquet, Gilles, and Alain Pessin. “Culture and Identity in Postwar France.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern French Culture*, edited by Nicholas Hewitt, 53, n.d.

²⁹ “Loi N° 94-665 Du 4 Août 1994 Relative À L’emploi de La Langue Française | Legifrance.” Accessed April 11, 2017. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000005616341>.

³⁰ Ball, Rodney. “Language: Divisions and Debates.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern French Culture*, edited by Nicholas Hewitt. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

the Catholic Church, the predominant faith of the country until the end of the 20th century. Although the French Revolution ended absolutist rule and Catholic sentiment, France did not formerly separate Church and state until a 1905 law known as the Concordat. In the process of separating Church and state, the law explicitly states that no religious signs should be publically proselytized in schools, and that above all, French citizen's allegiance to their country takes priority before individual identities such as religion.³¹ This separation formed the French concept of *laïcité*, a form of secularism. Whereas secularism connotes a separation from religious affiliation, *laïcité* demands the exclusion of personal religious displays or beliefs in the public sphere. The concept is a stronger form of equality, whereby all citizens must display their allegiance to France first before personal identities.

France has a history of national movements specifically aimed at unifying and strengthening its core republican and cultural values, but its identity is not monolithic. French regionalism is another geographic, political, and cultural force that molds the French identity. Geographically and politically, France is decentralized into 13 administrative departments, to provide more autonomy to local governments.³² But beyond administrative purposes, there are also 22 recognized cultural regions in France that take pride in their own traditions, gastronomy, accents, football leagues, and in cases such as Brittany, a different language. As previously mentioned, when de Gaulle compared France to a country of 265 different kinds of cheese, he was specifically explaining the complexity of French regional pride and its challenge to unify. More

³¹ Loi du 9 décembre 1905 concernant la séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat. | Legifrance. Accessed May 8, 2017. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006070169&dateTexte=20080306>.

³² As of January 2016, France consolidated its 22 regions into 13 in order to simplify and economize its administration by vote of the national assembly

recently in the age of globalization, scholars have noted “a revival of ethno-territorial identities and a challenge to the centralist model of the unitary state.”³³

But just what is French regionalism and what is its impact on national identity? Where one can easily argue that cultural regions are defined by types of cheese or football teams, it can be difficult to officially define each region separately in terms of ethnicity. This is because “France does not allow the collection of statistical data on the basis of 'ethnic' or linguistic criteria, only those of nationality... In the one and indivisible Republic, there can only be one identity and one language.”³⁴ In other words, France in terms of a nation does not view itself necessarily as multicultural, even in terms of immigrants who are not defined by their ethnicity but country of origin. The country rather sees cultural regionalisms as contributions to the greater national identity.

The reality however is that certain regions of France are more ethnically and culturally diverse than others. According to 2013 INSEE demographics, the Île de France region has the highest percentage of immigrants per population at 18.4% with both the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur and Corse regions tying at second highest at 10.2%.³⁵ Comparatively, immigrants in regions such as Pays-de la loire and Bretagne are only 3% of each region's population.³⁶ Inferred but not expressed in these statistics are differences in cultural attitudes and environments shaped by the interactions of native born French citizens, recent immigrants, and persons who trace their heritage from other countries. Breaking down the statistics even further, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur has the second highest percentage of immigrants born in Algeria out of all the regions.³⁷

³³ Cole, Alistair. “Decentralization in France: Central Steering, Capacity Building and Identity Construction.” *French Politics; Basingstoke* 4, no. 1 (April 2006): 31–57. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.fp.8200091>.

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ INSEE. “Population Immigrée Selon Les Principaux Pays de Naissance En 2013 | Insee.” Accessed May 9, 2017. https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2012727#tableau-TCRD_012_tab1_regions2016.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

This statistic is particularly significant as the burkni controversy predominantly took place in this region, and provides context to identity and cultural tensions. Therefore, when discussing French national identity, it is also important to also note the variance in attitudes and perceptions as they pertain to each region's demographic and history.

The Forgotten Memory, Colonialism:

French culture and identity are not limited to its hexagonal borders. Critics of French identity, particularly of the 20th and 21st century identity movements, quickly refer to France's contentious relationships with its former colonies as sources of identity conflicts and values. As historian Francois Vergès notes:

One would have to be blind to think that colonial discourse had not deeply penetrated French society and culture. As we know, memory, be it that of groups or individuals is not linear; it does not strictly respect the chronology of events; rather it gives them a more complex meaning, a higher density of signs. History is not simply an object for our interpretation, a thing which we give meaning, but it is intimately linked to the lived experiences of groups and individuals whose destinies intertwine."³⁸

The origin of colonialism itself "was thought to be humanitarian, it had an ideology of assimilation, it justified colonial intervention. Colonial conquest was undertaken in the very name of Republican principles."³⁹ French colonies extended into northern Africa, and were expected for centuries to adhere to the same educational, linguistic, and governmental standards as its own country. A person was not Algerian but French, although racial, and socioeconomic strati purposefully separated the colonizers from the colonized. Assimilation policies proved problematic when decolonization started in the 1950s. Former colonies gained independence, but for the new "Algerians" who had been told they were French for years suddenly were not when they sought to move to France for economic opportunity and stability.

³⁸ Vergès, Françoise. "Colonizing, Educating, Guiding: A Republican Duty." In *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution*, edited by Blanchard Pascal, Lemaire Sandrine, Bancel Nicolas, and Thomas Dominic, by Pernsteiner Alexis, 250-56. Indiana University Press, 2014.

³⁹ Ibid

The Parisian banlieues and French riots of the 1990s were the violent aftermaths of decolonization and identity politics, and in particular the French and Algerian past. Best depicted in the French pop culture film *La Haine*, immigrants and descendants of Algerian immigrants of the 1960s, particularly male youths struggled to surpass economic hardship and prejudice. The term ‘beurs’ specifically meant to define French and Arab heritage quickly became a derogatory term towards Arab youth were typically unemployed or marginalized. Instead of an integration and melting pot of culture, there was an inequitable divide both geographically and conceptually in the French banlieues where most of the marginalized groups lived. Even the term “‘banlieue’ had long been synonymous with urban disorders, fear of crime, racial issues and deindustrialization” because of the long history of failed social programs such as *la politique de ville* that were made put poorly executed.⁴⁰ Riots in the form of burning cars, strikes, and police tension became the image of not only the banlieue, but of racial and ethnic inequity. By “1999, no less than 23 percent of the French population claimed foreign origin... Together, those groups represented about 30 percent of French residents of foreign descent—between 4 and 5 million people. Making France the largest nation in Europe with Muslim and Jewish minorities.”⁴¹ Inequity within the banlieues and minority groups were not exclusively an example of economic disparity, but of identity and racial tension.

The origins of the banlieues came when more than a million people emigrated from Algeria to France during and after the French-Algerian war in the 50s-60s. Housing had to be quickly created to accommodate the rush of people, what resulted in concentrated ethnic groups living in poorer accommodations. But aside from the physical environment, the real problem

⁴⁰ Fabien Jobard. *An Overview of French Riots : 1981-2004*. Dave Waddington; Fabien Jobard; Mike King. *Rioting in the UK and France. A Comparative Analysis*, Willan Publishing, pp.27-38, 2009, 978-1-84392-504-0.<<http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9781138861534/>>.<hal-00550788>

⁴¹ Ibid

existed in the very identity and nationality of the new inhabitants. What some French would consider new immigrants, others would say they were extended French francophones from French society, with diverse and different backgrounds, not necessarily different nationalities.

“Pieds-noirs” became a term for individuals who were born in Algeria, but became French citizens again through a repatriation process. The name “pied-noir” literally meaning black foot, applied primarily to white descendants of French settlers. There was a second distinction for “Harkis”, Algerian born people who fought on behalf of France during the revolution, but were not considered ethnically French. These nuanced and distinct details in classifying groups of people were politically and racially charged, a “division produced by colonial classifications that recognized only French people – but, as an exception to the principle of republican equality – French people with distinct statuses.”⁴² In general, pied noir was associated with “trauma” and “exile” particularly because the perceptions of frenchness in Algeria and in France were different.⁴³ People were forced to consider how geographic origin and race not only affected legal repatriation, but social acceptance or social integration and reintegration in France.

Other persons whose families had existed in Algeria for generations before and even fought for independence still moved to France for economic opportunity and escape from the post war destruction. Their identity although still less “French” than the previous groups, did not even consider themselves Algerian. In an interview after the decolonization of France, one Algerian- born journalist described that living in Algeria was a mere concept: “Algeria didn't exist. Algeria – and the word was created by France – was a pure creation, out of nothing, by

⁴² Savarese, Eric. “After the Algerian War: Reconstructing Identity among the Pieds-Noirs.” *International Social Science Journal* 58, no. 189 (September 1, 2006): 457–66. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2451.2007.00644.x.

⁴³ Ibid

France, along with the pacification and creation of a new country.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, the historic culture of French republic principles and pride according to historian Jules Roy “were never applied in Algeria: ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’ concerned Europeans exclusively.”⁴⁵ Immigrant groups who were under French colonial control met disappointment when upon moving to France, nothing really changed. Neither French nor truly Algerian, they could not benefit from the principles that for so long were preached to them, but not celebrated with them.

Algeria is not the only territory that France colonized. Among the countries in Northern Africa, France also colonized Tunisia and Morocco. But whereas France claimed Morocco and Tunisia as protectorates, Algeria was in fact another department, or extension of the French state. The repercussions of this territorial distinction lasted well beyond the Algerian war, if not augmented tensions between persons of Algerian origin who may have once considered themselves French. The Algerian War and conflicts therefore are perceived more than a war of decolonization but a civil war, one that redefined French boundaries. Although Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco may share similar cultural beliefs, those who identify with Algerian origin experienced more hardship integrating in French culture because of their political past.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the French colonial past has consequently impacted French perceptions of Northern African identities and their relationship with Islam. In his book *Can Islam Be French?* John Bowen explains how “France’s long colonial engagement in and with North Africa leads many non-Muslims in France to think of people from a North African background as prototypical

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Roy, J. 1993. “Enfant de la Mitidja (entretien avec D. Bermond)”, In : Ageron, C., ed., *L’Algérie des Français*. Paris: Seuil, 139–142.

⁴⁶Baldwin-Edwards, Martin. (2006) *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: North Africa as a region of emigration, immigration and transit migration*. [Preprint] (In Press)

Muslims,” ignoring some cultural nuances and problematizing the image of Islam with post-colonial territories.⁴⁷

Main Pillars of French Culture:

France’s history reveals as much of its cultural origins as it does of its preoccupation with identity and nationalism. Each movement and era came with its own history, memory and myth, which collectively created the dominant cultural and political identity of France today.

Withstanding the changes to this era are fundamental values and ideas of republicanism, secularism, nostalgia, and unity. So particular are these values that other authors such as D.E Ager have compiled key characteristics and values that define the French nation. In addition to reiterating the previous values, Ager expands on the idea of French unity, that while “republican values (Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity) form a unifying set of beliefs which lie at the heart of ‘Frenchness’” the following values also play a key role:

- The sovereignty of the peoples, individually and not through membership of any group, class, or category
- The social contract, made as free choice by individuals with the state,
- This ideas of fraternity, or the expression of a general will to act together
- The indivisibility of the state
- The universality of the rights of man⁴⁸

And while these values are expressed, enumerated, and manifested in governmental documents, monuments and museums, do they still hold true to modern France? Globalization, anglo influences, and immigration have been challenged to impact these values, but in what ways are these discussions being manifested within French society itself? More importantly, how does France respond in real time, with real people in moments where the integrity and identity of their nation is questioned?

⁴⁷ Bowen, John. *Can Islam Be French?* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010.

⁴⁸ Ager, D. E. *Identity, Insecurity and Image: France and Language.* Multilingual Matters, 1999.

Chapter 2: The Burkini Controversy

Introduction:

Beginning in August of 2016, the “Burkini” had become the word and clothing choice of controversy on French Riviera beaches. The burkini, sometimes written as burquini (a word combination of burqa and bikini, but of no relation to each other) is akin to a scuba diving swim piece. Although its original designer claims the garment has no relation to Islam, the garment is a popular bathing choice for Muslim women. It modestly and loosely covers the torso, legs, and head in the form of a burqa. However, the burkini’s affiliation with Islam manifested into something more than a choice of personal fashion taste, but an explicit symbol of a political and religious identity. Over the course of a month, several incidences of women forced off French beaches, riots, and political fighting matches were documented on social media.

The rise in reported incidents of discontent towards burkini wearers happened not nearly a month later after the Nice attacks on July 14th. Their occurrence, while by themselves could be representative of identity politics, were exacerbated by levels of tension and fear following terrorism attacks. Public and visible associations to Islam, as manifested in clothing were unnerving to community members. The problem was not identifying a relationship to a religion, but identifying with a community has perceived connections to terrorism.

The principle of terrorism is sustained psychological terror beyond the act of its initial violence; it is the anticipation of another attack. Proactivity against terrorism is a form of paranoia. In order for the public to be preemptive, they must form boundaries, ideas, images and clues that can distinguish those who are innocent and those who are threats. Through this dynamic, visual signs of identity are paramount to perceived notions of security and survival. What differs from a social norm can be perceived as a threat.

That is not to grossly oversimplify that the burkini equated to threats of terrorism, or terrorists. However, its use to define the wearer as a member of a contested community within France deepened the lines of difference and questioned personal liberties of appearance. Furthermore, such public appearances contested the loyalty to one's country and French notions of French identity.

By no means are the events surrounding the burkini controversy the first of its kind in France regarding clothing and public appearance, secularity and religion. In 2004, France enacted a law defined any "ostentatious" religious articles of clothing or symbols unfit and inappropriate to wear in public schools.⁴⁹ However, the growing presence of social media as a source of reporting and medium for discussion arguably contributed to the controversy's proliferation and heated response. The public became the unofficial reporters and analysts on French nationalism and culture.

History of the Burkini:

Nearly twelve years before the controversy started in 2016, Australian-Jordanian Aheda Zanetti created a swimsuit without the intention of starting a political controversy. In a statement to the New York Times, she confronted criticism over her design: "it was...my aim for them [burkini wearers] not to be judged for who they are, or where they're from, and who people think they're representing."⁵⁰

In contrast to its reception in France, the swimsuit's original conception had an inclusive purpose, rather than a divisive one. Zanetti wanted to create a swimsuit that allowed women who wished to dress modestly to partake in sports. Although Zanetti herself identifies as a Muslim woman who has seen other members of her community struggle to find appropriate

⁴⁹ Code de l'éducation - Article L141-5-1, L141-5-1 Code de l'éducation § (n.d.). Accessed May 8, 2017.

⁵⁰ Ives, Mike. "'Burkini' Inventor Says Sales Have Skyrocketed on Heels of Controversy." *The New York Times*, August 24, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/25/world/australia/burkini-ban-france-aheda-zanetti.html>.

swimwear, the clothing line was not intended for Muslim women exclusively. Zanetti further described the suit as a form of empowerment, showing “freedom and happiness...you can’t take that away from a Muslim, or any other woman, that chooses to wear it.”⁵¹

The burkini’s ability to diversify beach attendees and lifeguards has been one of its claims of success in Australia. In 2007, an Australian non-profit called “Surf-Life Saving” sought out a partnership with Zanetti’s company Ahiida to create swimwear suitable for lifeguards.⁵² The non-profit’s goal was to diversify Australian’s lifeguards by including Muslim women, who were formerly limited by choices in swimwear. Zanettia has also claimed that her creation has been a solution for other demographics and individuals such as Christians, Mormons, Hindus, Jews, and men who seek modest swimwear.⁵³

Not all of the attention around Zanettia’s burkini or other garments such as her hijoob (hijab and hood) had been negative. Since 2008, Zanetti claims to have sold over 700,000 garments all over the world.⁵⁴ Although other companies have created garments similar to the burkini, the Ahiida Company was the one who originally coined the phrase.

The Burkini- Part of a Global Sportswear Movement:

Despite the recent media attention to the burkini, sportswear for Muslim women has been in existence for more than the past decade. Small companies such as Capsters and Oiselles both have been making sport hijabs for women since 2001.⁵⁵ Despite the lack of media attention, Muslim women have had the option, albeit limited to certain sports, to wear hijabs for decades,

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² “The Surprising Australian Origin Story of the ‘burkini.’” *Washington Post*. Accessed February 11, 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/08/17/the-surprising-australian-origin-story-of-the-burkini/>.

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ives, Mike. “‘Burkini’ Inventor Says Sales Have Skyrocketed on Heels of Controversy.”

⁵⁵ Maizland, Lindsay. “Nike’s New Athletic Hijab Makes a Political Statement, Whether It Wants to or Not.” *Vox*, March 9, 2017. <http://www.vox.com/latest-news/2017/3/9/14868478/nike-athletic-pro-hijab-political-statement>.

like the most recent American fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad who competed in the 2016 Olympics.⁵⁶ Other athletes have also worn head coverings for even longer including Bahrain's Ruqaya Al Ghasara competed in the Olympic 100-meter dash in 2004.⁵⁷ That is not to say however that women athletes have not faced discrimination in sports. Until 2014, FIFA banned head coverings and as a result, limited the inclusion of Muslim football players.⁵⁸

With the grown media attention and coverage of Muslim women athletes since the 2016 Olympics, Nike released a performance hijab on in March 2017, making it the first major sports company to do so.⁵⁹ According to their website the company hopes that “By providing Muslim athletes with the most groundbreaking products, like the Nike Pro Hijab, Nike aims to serve today’s pioneers as well as inspire even more women and girls in the region who still face barriers and limited access to sport.”⁶⁰ Nike, along with other companies, seeks to advocate, and sell to an increasingly growing market that engages in sports. Advocates however are quick to point out that this movement for greater women’s diversity in sports did not start or will end with Nike. Mara Guban the co-founder of a nonprofit Shirzan stated in an interview how “It's interesting that it's being presented as though Nike invented it, which of course is not true.”⁶¹ But, she added that the raised media attention has beneficially started to incorporate more attention and inclusion to diverse women athletes. Guban admitted that “Muslim women in sports still face barriers, but ultimately they're role models. Eventually, the hijab will not be as

⁵⁶ Gomez Morales, Dayna. “Muslim Female Athletes Wear Hijabs. Until Now, No Major Athletic Company Made Them.” *PBS NewsHour*. Accessed April 21, 2017. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/muslim-female-athletes-wear-hijabs-now-no-major-athletic-company-made/>.

⁵⁷ Weiner, Natalie. “Nike’s Pro Hijab Is Huge for Muslim Women, but Not for the Reasons You Think.” *Bleacher Report*. Accessed April 21, 2017. <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/2697709-nikes-pro-hijab-is-huge-for-muslim-women-but-not-for-the-reasons-you-think>.

⁵⁸ Gomez Morales, Dayna

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ “Nike Pro Hijab.” Accessed April 21, 2017. http://www.nike.com/us/en_us/c/women/nike-pro-hijab.

⁶¹ Weiner, Natalie.

remarkable as it is right now.”⁶² While the immediate goal is to promote diversity in sports, the end goal for Gubuan is for the hijab to become a normalcy, not an anomaly in sports.

The burkini is not an outlier in women’s clothing, as it has existed in several countries for years. But in comparison to Australia and other global sports movements, France’s reaction to the burkini is different, if not indicative of its own tensions towards image and identity. The timeline of events below demonstrate unprecedented media and legal reactions against the burkini.

Burkini Controversy Timeline:

The actual burkini controversy does not follow one sole event, but a whole month of controversy, arrests, fines, beach bans, and riots in southern France. One event in particular however, seemed to initiate the discussion of beachwear on August 9th when the Marseille Mayor Michel Amiens canceled a burkini-themed party. The subsequent events and discussion that ensued gained national and international attention. At the controversy’s height one image of a woman taking off part of her swim clothing in front of officers circulated several news outlets, journals, and social media platforms around the world. The poignant image that circulated the global media furthermore incited subsequent backlash from French authorities. By the end of August, heated debates on national identity exceeded the summer temperatures.

August 9th, 2016: MARSEILLE A burkini pool party at a private water park originally scheduled for September 10th, was canceled by the Mayor of Marseille, Michel Aimes. The cancelation came after the party’s organizers, a community group called Smiles13, received harsh criticism including written death threats.⁶³

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ “‘Burqini’ Pool Party in France Called off after Death Threats,” August 9, 2016.
<http://www.thelocal.fr/20160809/burqini-pool-party-called-off-in-southern-france>.

August 12th: CANNES The first mention of a burkini ban in a French newspaper was on August 12th in *Le Monde*.⁶⁴ The article's date of publication came just after Cannes Mayor Lisand established the ban on July 28th, to be effective until August 31st. The article quotes Mayor Lisand instating the repercussions for wearing burkinis where: First offenders will be given a written warning, and any subsequent offenses are subject to a 38€ fine.⁶⁵

August 14th: CORSICA Al Jazeera reports four people injured on the island of Corsica during a fight over women wearing a burkinis. Later, 500 people rally on the island's capital, Bastia.⁶⁶ *Le Libération* reports a crowd of 100 people setting vehicles on fire that was later abated by 100 riot police officers. Five people were injured.⁶⁷

August 13th: NICE A nice tribunal court judge refuses to overturn the ruling of the Cannes Burquini Ban, citing the French constitution, laïcité, and national security as reasons for upholding the ban after the recent Nice attacks. His ruling came after a group of three women represented by Monsieur Sefen Guez of the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) challenged the Cannes Mayor.⁶⁸

August 16th: NICE and CANNES A French woman is approached on the beach by four police officers on the Promenade d'Anglais Beach for wearing a long leggings, and a head covering. A photo from an undisclosed French photographer was taken, and later given to UK journalists

⁶⁴ Camus, Elvire. "Burkini : le Collectif contre l'islamophobie conteste l'arrêté cannois." *Le Monde.fr*, August 12, 2016. http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/08/12/burkini-le-collectif-contre-l-islamophobie-conteste-l-arrete-de-la-mairie-de-cannes_4982041_3224.html.

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ "French 'Burkini' Ban: Secularism or Security?" Accessed February 2, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2016/08/french-burkini-ban-secularism-security-160817191824853.html>.

⁶⁷ "Corse : Une Violente Rixe Fait Cinq Blessés." *Libération.fr*, August 14, 2016. http://www.liberation.fr/france/2016/08/14/corse-une-violente-rix-fait-cinq-blesses_1472297.

⁶⁸ lefigaro.fr, and AFP Agences AP, Reuters. "La justice valide l'interdiction du port du burkini à Cannes." *Le Figaro*, August 13, 2016, sec. Société.

who published the news story first in the Guardian on August 23rd.⁶⁹ That same day, another woman who revealed herself as Siam at the Bocca Beach in Cannes is fined 11€ for wearing leggings and a head covering as well. However, she does not disclose her story until a week later on August 23rd in a French news magazine, *l'Obs*.⁷⁰ Although another UK publication, the Daily Mail claimed Siam was in the picture⁷¹, subsequent publications including a French T.V journalist who was present on the beach when Siam was confronted, confirmed that they were two separate incidences.⁷²

August 22nd : NICE Twitter user Feiza Ben Mohamed uploads a video which shows officers patrolling a beach and waiting for two girls to come out of the water for wearing a burkini.⁷³

August 23rd: An image showing a woman taking off her tunic is released onto social media via the Guardian. The image sparked media frenzy.

August 24th: Christian Estrosi, former mayor of Nice and President of the Regional Council of Provence-Alpes Côtés-d'Azur deplors the publication of the image showing the burkini incident on the Nice beach. In a statement published by Numerama, Estrosi denounces the photos, claiming that it is a “manipulation” of media and puts “police officers in danger.”⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Quinn, Ben. “French Police Make Woman Remove Clothing on Nice Beach Following Burkini Ban.” *The Guardian*, August 23, 2016, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/24/french-police-make-woman-remove-burkini-on-nice-beach>.

⁷⁰ “Siam, Verbalisée Sur Une Plage de Cannes Pour Port D’un Simple Voile.” *L’Obs*. Accessed February 14, 2017. <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/societe/20160822.OBS6680/siam-verbalisee-sur-une-plage-de-cannes-pour-port-d-un-simple-voile.html>.

⁷¹ “Turn Your Headscarf into a Headband: What Armed Police Told Muslim Woman on French Beach as They Fined Her for ‘Inappropriate’ Clothing as Minister Warns against Creating ‘Stigma’ with Burkini Ban | Daily Mail Online.” Accessed February 14, 2017. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3756424/Fundamentalists-don-t-beach-infidels-france-s-clampdown-burkini-ridiculed-armed-police-fine-muslims-headscarfs-sat-sand-topless-sunbathers.html>.

⁷² “Siam, Verbalisée Sur Une Plage de Cannes Pour Port D’un Simple Voile.” *L’Obs*.

⁷³ Mohamed, Feiza Ben. “Voici La Vidéo Des Deux Jeunes Filles Se Faisant Sortir de L’eau Par La Police À #Nice06 Sans Porter de Burkini...pic.twitter.com/NoY6i6V7bK.” Microblog. @feizak, August 22, 2016. <https://twitter.com/feizak/status/767813987274723328?lang=en>.

⁷⁴ Champeau, Guillaume. “Burkinis : Estrosi Menace Les Internautes Qui Montrent Les Policiers En Action - Politique.” *Numerama*, August 24, 2016. <http://www.numerama.com/politique/191021-burkinis-estrosi-menace-les-internautes-qui-montrent-les-policiers-en-action.html>.

August 24th: The highest court in French Government, le Conseil d'État rules against a burkini ban made by Mayor Villeneuve-Loubet of the Alpes-Maritimes. This ruling comes after the Ligue des droits de l'homme (LDH) and two other private citizens decided to take the matter to a higher court following the tribunal hearing on August 13th. Le Conseil d'État concluded: "the mayor's order had seriously infringed, in a manner that was clearly illegal, fundamental liberties such as the freedom to come and go, religious freedom and individual freedom."⁷⁵

August 24th: The New York Times reports an increase in burkini sales from Ahiida.⁷⁶

August 30th: GENEVA The United Nations human rights office releases in a press statement: We call on the authorities in all the other French sea-side towns and resorts that have adopted similar bans to take note of the Conseil d'Etat's ruling that the ban [adopted in Villeneuve-Loubet] constitutes a grave and illegal breach of fundamental freedoms."⁷⁷

August 31st: Le Figaro reports that between late July and the end of August, about 30 towns and beaches institutes a burkini ban.⁷⁸

Breaking Down the Ban:

Despite the fears and themes of terrorism surrounding the burkini ban, my focus in this paper is not on terrorism, but rather the question of national identity. The discussion of terrorism cannot be ignored, but it is a shallow misinterpretation and attribution of the burkini controversy. To understand the contention, clothing must be approached and understood as a physical representation of culture, which carries various meaning and power. In the following section I

⁷⁵ "The Council of State Orders a Decision Banning Clothes Demonstrating an Obvious Religious Affiliation to Be Suspended." Accessed February 14, 2017. <http://english.conseil-etat.fr/Activities/Press-releases/The-Council-of-State-orders-a-decision-banning-clothes-demonstrating-an-obvious-religious-affiliation-to-be-suspended>.

⁷⁶ Ives, Mike. "Burkini' Inventor Says Sales Have Skyrocketed on Heels of Controversy."

⁷⁷ Section, United Nations News Service. "UN News - UN Human Rights Office Welcomes France's Court Ruling to Suspend Seaside Ban on Burkini." *UN News Service Section*, August 30, 2016. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54784#.WKKCThChaBI>.

⁷⁸ Mareschal, Edouard de. "Les arrêtés anti-burkinis invalidés les uns après les autres." *Le Figaro*, August 31, 2016, sec. Société.

will review the critiques that have surrounded the meaning and controversy of the burkini in France.

Laïcité and Secularism

Laïcité and French Secularism are not mere concepts, but implicit terms that carry legal power and are found in the French constitution. Arguments against the publicly wearing burkini's reference laïcité have referenced the following French constitution excerpt:

“La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale. Elle assure l'égalité devant la loi de tous les citoyens sans distinction d'origine, de race ou de religion. Elle respecte toutes les croyances. Son organisation est décentralisée”⁷⁹

“France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social republic”: a phrase not entirely different from the U.S constitution, bears similarity with the American version of the separation of church and state. However, laïcité does not truly translate to secularity, especially when applied to defining separation of religion and government. A closer reading of the second sentence of the article supplies a better definition, although subtle, of the scope of laïcité: “The country shall ensure equality of all citizens before the law without distinction of origin, class or religion.”⁸⁰ Although the constitution distinguishes religion as a force outside the duties or influence of government, it is not a clear binary separation comparable to the U.S terms of “separation of church and state”. On the contrary, laïcité is better defined as a form of neutrality, in which religions exists but cannot define, excuse, or influence law on behalf of citizens.

The distinction in the second phrase is small, but its impact is large: “All citizens before the law”; the government sees its people as citizens of France equally and uncharacteristic of any individual traits. Laïcité is different from its English translation of secular, which recognizes religion as a defining characteristic of its citizens and allows exemptions. Secularism allows

⁷⁹ NEXINT. “Conseil Constitutionnel,” July 2, 2008. <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/la-constitution/la-constitution-du-4-octobre-1958/texte-integral-de-la-constitution-du-4-octobre-1958-en-vigueur.5074.html>.

⁸⁰ Ibid

religious symbols in society as long as they are not sponsored or promoted by the government, and in some cases, makes exemptions in laws for religious beliefs. Laïcité however is the absence of defining characteristics that distinguish individual beliefs from one another, other than French citizenship within the public sphere. A person is first defined by its nationality, not by its individuality.

La laïcité can be better understood as a law that insists secularity is equality. Everyone in the public view has the right to equal treatment which requires everyone's equal restraint from demonstrating religion that would otherwise infringe upon another citizen's freedom. Secularity is not a separation, but an equalizer.

According to the French government, three principles govern laïcité, “la liberté de conscience et la liberté de culte [freedom of conscience and cult], la séparation des institutions publiques et des organisations religieuses [separation of public and religious organizations], et l'égalité de tous devant la loi quelles que soient leurs croyances ou leurs convictions [and equal treatment before the law regardless of belief]”.⁸¹ While the first principle defines the individual's right to be a self-autonomous free thinker, the second principle defines the barrier between beliefs within an individual and what is allowed to be expressed before groups of individuals, the public. The government does not define religion, as its role is not to define the conscience of an individual. However, a secular separation exists when an individual enters the public, where the role of the government is to protect the collective.

Furthermore, the French government approaches the subject of religion on a rational basis, not a force that can exempt anyone from conducting himself or herself differently within a public collective. In other words the “law represents the General Will, but it is not simply a

⁸¹ “Qu'est-Ce Que La Laïcité ?” *Gouvernement.fr*. Accessed February 27, 2017. <http://www.gouvernement.fr/qu-est-ce-que-la-laicite>.

combining of private interests. Law is instead an act of public reason to be decided by rational arguments. Thus religious preoccupations enter political debate only if they are supported on rational grounds.”⁸² Although the establishment of laïcité did not come until 1905 under the Third Republic, its conceptual origins can be traced back to core Enlightenment beliefs that conceived the French Revolution and beginnings of the modern French state. In other words, citizens are defined by their ability to reason, their ability to tolerate various other perspectives, and restrain their beliefs that would impede upon another’s. This intrinsic and rational theory ended the absolutist monarchy that governed France since feudal times, a pride that exists to the present day.

Laïcité has been invoked several within the past century and certainly within the past where some see that the public is under threat by public displays of belief – or more precisely, displays of certain belief that have either been associated with terrorism or historic controversy about ethnicity within France. The burkini is not the first time the topic laïcité has been approached. In 2010 *Loi interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l'espace public* was created and passed in the French senate, prohibiting face-coverings, including but not limited to helmets, veils, and burquas, and in public.⁸³ In 2004, girls were banned in state-schools, with the exception of universities, from wearing head scarfs, hijabs, crosses, or any other type of religious symbol.⁸⁴

To be clear, laïcité does not only apply to Muslim populations. Proponents of laïcité laws argue that secularity applies to all citizens, and holds the standards of public equality, not just simply nostalgia for French principles, but the requirements for a republic society. Opponents of

⁸² “French Views of Religious Freedom | Brookings Institution.” *Brookings*, November 30, 2001. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/french-views-of-religious-freedom/>.

⁸³ LOI n° 2010-1192 du 11 octobre 2010 interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l'espace public, 2010-1192 § (2010).

⁸⁴ LOI n° 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics, 2004-228 § (2004).

the aforementioned laws including the human rights watch, argue that they are discriminatory against minority populations.⁸⁵

The controversy exists in different interpretations of the public sphere and rights to practice. Religions such as Islam that necessitate certain traditions and regulations on appearance intrinsically rely that belief is through outward expression and practice; it's a way of life. Explicit expressions of faith however are not recognized by proponents of laïcité. Faith as "a way of life" demands interaction with others, that is, the shared experiences and lives of the public sphere. Individuals must act and be seen as equal French citizens if the law expects to likewise view the public as equals and French citizens above all else.

Feminist Arguments

Another layer of debate to the burkini controversy was the question of feminism and the amount of authority women have over their bodies when it comes to clothing and societal expectations. However, within the broad topic of feminism, there was a divide. Was it possible to be both a feminist and wear a burkini? Did feminism itself only apply in western culture, and were the pillars of western feminism such as liberation and freedom inapplicable, if not intolerant, of other cultures? And more importantly how was feminism represented in French society and was it a part of French national identity?

In a twist of irony, some critics compared the treatment of women's clothing and modesty to French attitude of prostitution. The irony was depicted by cartoonists, who could not help to see the hypocrisy of the government towards the image of woman: don't be promiscuous, but don't be covered.

⁸⁵ Avenue, Human Rights Watch | 350 Fifth, 34th Floor | New York, and NY 10118-3299 USA | t 1.212.290.4700. "France: Headscarf Ban Violates Religious Freedom." *Human Rights Watch*, February 26, 2004. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2004/02/26/france-headscarf-ban-violates-religious-freedom>.

However, the choice was not simply binary. The situation presented in the above picture depicts women as the victim of two societies: the western society (in this case, French) demanding public spheres to be secular, and a traditional religious society demanding modesty. The autonomy and desires of the individual woman is not represented. Nor does the picture represent nuanced understandings of feminism. While some viewed the burkini and coverings as a limitation to female autonomy, a tradition forced upon them, others viewed the burkini as a conscious choice to demonstrate identity and autonomy as a Muslim woman.

French notions of feminism celebrate the body and oppose censorship to sexuality. The movement can be traced to the works of French feminist Helene Cixous, who fought to transform “l'écriture féminine,” and the understanding of women solely as “the function within the discourse of man.”⁸⁶ Cixous implored women to write about the “return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her... censor the body and you censor the breath and speech at the same time.”⁸⁷ Cixous, along with influential French feminists of the seventies sought to counter historic female censorship in French society, reflecting that she and women alike: “have been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with that stupid sexual modesty.”⁸⁸ The distinct approach to fight against female body censorship prevailed through debates in the legalization of prostitution, where French feminists debated women’s agency in the sex industry, or whether the existence of prostitution itself represented sexual violence. On April 6, 2016 the French senate passed a law that permitted prostitution but fined clients for the purchase of sex.⁸⁹ Although the debate ended with an ironic and somewhat paradoxical compromise, (permitting the act of prostitution but with punitive costs to the sex

⁸⁶ Cixous, Hélène, Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen. “The Laugh of the Medusa.” *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875–93.

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ LOI n° 2016-444 du 13 avril 2016 visant à renforcer la lutte contre le système prostitutionnel et à accompagner les personnes prostituées, 2016-444 § (2016).

workers) attitudes towards women's bodies are much less directed at the body itself, but the dangerous and violent societies that surround her and impede her choice and liberty.

In opposing female body censorship, French feminism also opposes coverings such as the burkini, in which some view as an infringement on personal liberty. French feminism seeks to be universal, its regards towards the female body supersedes cultures that may restrict open female sexuality and the body. This approach however encountered unexpected results in violence towards women in the 1980s, during the first "affaire du foulard" or ban on head coverings. Research on the social consequences of the bans found that it "exposed women to sexual violence by making the girls refusing to wear it more vulnerable to sexual harassment" thereby exacerbating cultural tension and positioning women in more violent situations that contested their culture.⁹⁰ However the finding did little to speak of the personal autonomy of women choosing to wear head coverings. If anything, the findings promoted the belief that women of the Islamic faith were being oppressed, and the banning of headwear was more essential than ever to preserving the principles of freedom and liberty of France.

Government Intervention

The idea that western feminism is universal and exists to protect women bolsters the validity and power of French law. That is the French government exists as a champion of human rights and freedoms. But this assumption, bias as it is, still carries assumptions that the women must be carefully censored even in a western society. Terrence G. Peterson, a professor at Florida International University who studies France's relationship with Muslim immigrants and the Muslim world, observes that women have always been regarded as "problematic" in western civilization. The covering of women's body's is no longer a question of feminism, but a

⁹⁰ Amiraux, Valérie. "L'« affaire du foulard » en France : Retour sur une affaire qui n'en est pas encore une." *Sociologie et soci*étés 41, no. 2 (2009): 273–98. doi:10.7202/039268ar.

question of conformity: “These sorts of statements are a way to police what is French and what is not French.”⁹¹ The government again intervenes on behalf of the perceived public and dominant narrative to dictate the image of the French citizen.

Women therefore no matter if they are prostitutes or fully veiled are treated with the same discontent; they represent a marginal figure that is controversial and potentially un-French. The theme of citizenship before any individual identity again prevails: To assimilate into the Republic—the only legitimate guarantor of equality and freedom in French nationalist discourse—a woman's body can be neither veiled nor prostituted. A body that is veiled or commoditized is necessarily a victimized body. As a consequence those women cannot speak for themselves.”⁹² The assumption is that the government must intervene in order to protect, that women who cannot comply with the preferred French image are forced into a lesser situation, one of oppression of the female body, covered or not.

Memories of Colonization and the Colonized

The burkini however does not only represent the religious and cultural identities of the present, but the historic identification with countries previously colonized by France. Historically, the integration of formerly colonized people into the French country has been fraught with racism and ethnic tension. During the time of the 1989 headscarf bans, many Algerian people who came to France, felt tension twofold. Not only was the ban a critique against their religion, but a “symbolic reminder of the colonizers' absolute superiority and sovereignty over the Algerian territory.”⁹³ Assimilation into French society did not seem

⁹¹ Taub, Amanda. “France’s ‘Burkini’ Bans Are About More Than Religion or Clothing.” *The New York Times*, August 18, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/19/world/europe/frances-burkini-bans-are-about-more-than-religion-or-clothing.html>.

⁹² Billaud, Julie, and Julie Castro. “Whores and Niqabées: The Sexual Boundaries of French Nationalism.” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 31, no. 2 (2013): 81–101.

⁹³ Fanon, Frantz. *A Dying Colonialism*. Grove/Atlantic, Inc., 1994.

plausible, since for many Algerians, the French were their colonizers. Why continue to try to assimilate, when they had, in some form, forced to be a part of French society years before?

Even so, much of the tension fell on Algerian women. One woman witness to the tension remarked that “there is someone more indigène than the indigène, and that’s his wife...the poorest of Algerian men has an infinitely superior condition to that of Algerian women; even dressed in rags he is a man.”⁹⁴ Her quote is a bit ambiguous. It is assumed that identity of the Algerian woman is easily recognizable and therefore harder to assimilate. But as for her suggested inferior position in society, is the assumption on part of her Algerian heritage or assumptions made of her in French society? Neither interpretation is mutually exclusive, but both suggest a missing voice – that of women demonstrating their identity.

3: The Role of Social Media

Introduction:

French history has demonstrated that national identity is not a stagnant concept. Even the dominant narrative and image of France has changed over time to sustain republican values and images. Recent events such as the Burkini ban in France are manifestations of debates and changing perspectives of national identity in an increasingly globalized world.

In a time where knowledge, information, people, and cultures exchange quickly due to the facets of globalization, social media emerges as an insightful tool to understand timely discussions surrounding identity. Increased Internet access has allowed nearly instantaneous reactions and reports to events. Social media has effectively transitioned the power of reporting and opinion to the public, where having a journalism degree is no longer necessary to publish ideas and write to a global audience.

⁹⁴ Winter, Bronwyn. *Hijab and the Republic*. Syracuse University Press, 2009.

Social media demands user engagement. A post or a tweet is not written for personal reflection, but for others to comment, like, and share. The newsfeeds and twitter feeds of social media do as their name suggest, they feed users with vast amounts of information that is unprecedented in human history. This information also more widely monitored and accepted by journalists and news media themselves. The image below from the French newspaper publication Le Monde compares newswriting today versus the age before social media:



The political cartoon by French journalist Jean Plantureux or “Plantu” humorously depicts the journalism writing process of refining and sifting through mass amounts of information. Whereas journalists and the public alike relied on a few publications for news sources in periods before the modern time, new technology has exposed several more sources to gather information. And although Internet and social media advancements have broadened the stage for political and

⁹⁵ PLANTU. “JOURNALISTE AU JOURNAL ‘LE MONDE’ ... DUR MÉTIER !! Le Dessin Du Monde de Ce Jeudi.pic.twitter.com/yvaAYVdwIo.” Microblog. @plantu, September 11, 2014. <https://twitter.com/plantu/status/510039546667753472>.

news discussion, it has also problematized the way in which people process, refine, and discriminate information. Newer problems such as distinguishing real from “fake” news sources have arisen, and question what information and perspectives are people being exposed to.

The amount of information, and furthermore the way in which conversations exist in social media offer a unique opportunity to analyze the voices that demand to be heard through social media. What better way to analyze national identity than to use a communication medium that encourages individuals and representative figures to express their thoughts?

Social media platforms such as twitter do have limits. Users must express an idea in 140 characters or less. But short phrases can be powerful insights into large concepts such as identity, and are easier to remember. Even so, a short phrase that may seem insufficient and brief can, and will invite responses and that initiate deeper discussions in a thread.

The following tweets come from organizations and individuals that either represent, or have a significant influence and interest in French culture. By no means are the tweets exhaustive or comprehensive of the diverse opinions about French identity. Nor is one tweet is necessarily more important than another, but I have chosen each of the following users to express different perspectives representing journalists, persons who identify as Muslim, government officials, women, political cartoonists, activist groups, and politicians. All contribute to an engaging and diverse dialogue.

1. The Tweet That Began All Tweets

Lets start with the first tweet of the original photo that sparked the Burkini debate:

Who: The Guardian⁹⁶
Number of Followers: 6.44 Million
Number of Article Shares: 107K

⁹⁶ Quinn, Ben. “French Police Make Woman Remove Clothing on Nice Beach Following Burkini Ban.” *The Guardian*, August 23, 2016, sec. World news. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/24/french-police-make-woman-remove-burkini-on-nice-beach?CMP=share_btn_tw.



97

Although the image above is the formal article that describes the “Burkini Ban” on a beach, the post has been shared 107,000 times over social media, with the capacity of 6.44 million views from Guardian followers directly, not including indirect views of re-postings, and sharing by non-followers.

The article itself is a typical news article that contextualizes the associated image, and provides quotes from bystanders of the event. The article follows an AP style⁹⁸ form that prioritizes information at the beginning of the article and consists of short paragraphs. The third paragraph for example sets the tone for the rest of the article: “The images of police confronting the woman in Nice on Tuesday show at least four police officers standing over a woman who was resting on the shore at the town’s Promenade des Anglais, the scene of last month’s Bastille Day lorry attack.”⁹⁹ As important as the actual event itself is the historical context of the Nice terrorist attacks weeks before. Without this context, the event does not communicate the same level of tension. The paragraph’s placement in the article prioritizes this contextual detail and

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ AP style, short for Associated Press style aims to unify and clarify language that used by media. More importantly, the style aims to communicate a story or event with the most brevity and accuracy as possible. As such, certain narrative tones and styles may be omitted.

⁹⁹ Ibid

associates the image as not a stand-alone event, but a continuation of conflict and images of terrorism. In other words, the details and facts that follow support a tone that the event was not about proper beachwear but about potential threats to the image and safety in France. The short paragraph is key to understanding that what transpired occurred in context of preexisting tension, and is a manifestation of deeper cultural differences.

Why the article is important: Perhaps more powerful than the article itself detailing the event is the image. The image shows an unsettling and awkward scene: three male police officers surrounding a woman removing clothing while bystanders look on. If the photo itself does not initiate shock or curiosity, the article further elaborates the discomfort with quotes from bystanders who saw the event take place. One bystander recalled how “the saddest thing was that people were shouting ‘go home’, some were applauding the police [and] her daughter was crying.”¹⁰⁰ For what may have been only a few moments that day resulted in weeks of twitter trends and discussions surrounding the event. Hashtags including #Burkini #WTFFrance #BurkiniBan quickly became international trends.

The article’s design furthermore has made it simple for readers to engage with twitter and social media. Highlight any part of the article, and a twitter icon will appear for the reader to tweet the selection portion with a link to the original article. Clearly, the news publication optimized the distribution of its content, encouraging readers to share on social media.

Strictly speaking, the tone of journal articles and newspaper reports are meant to be neutral and factual. With exceptions of subtle nuances and the use of quotes to reveal the public’s attitude as explained above, articles are less revealing towards public opinion. Political cartoons however are a medium between a photo image and an op-ed. They are not neutral, they emphasize and exaggerate specific elements to form strong opinions. If a picture can say a

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

thousand words, then a political cartoon can create a narrative and story from the same thousand words. The next tweet transforms the above photo image into political discourse.

2. Political Cartoons

Who: Khalid Albaih, a Sudanese political cartoonist originally born in Romania. Published under his hashtag #kheartoon, Albai has drawn political cartoons for several global publication including Al Jazeera, The Atlantic, The Guardian, and NPR. He currently resides in Doha, Qatar.¹⁰¹

Number of Twitter Followers: 16.1K

Number of Image Shares: 1.1K, 702 Likes



Connection to French Culture: Khalid Albaih may not identify as a French citizen, but his influence in political culture and politics have gained considerable world recognition,

¹⁰¹ Albaih, Khalid. "Khalid Albaih on About.me." *About.me*. Accessed April 18, 2017. <https://about.me/khalidalbaih>.

¹⁰² on Twitter: "#Kheartoon - Laws - To Cover or Uncover? Name of Freedom, While Others in the Name of Religion #cartoon <https://t.co/ZWIVwjHYcN>." Accessed April 18, 2017. <https://twitter.com/khalidalbaih/status/768373288317947904>.

particularly in his response to French identity politics. Since the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015, Khalid has made several cartoons demonstrating the tension between French secularity and religious identity. His “#kharpoons” have been featured in several publications, and have been as far as propaganda for revolutionary movements in Yemen and Tunisia.¹⁰³

When asked about his motivation and purpose to draw political cartoons, he responded: “This is my passion. I don't make a living off these political cartoons. In fact, I encourage people to copy and share them. It is an honour, but it does not come without dangers.”¹⁰⁴ Albaih refers to the dangerous and often violent tension between freedom of speech and cultural sensitivity, as seen in the Charlie Hebdo attack in France. His journalist role demands that he investigate truths and perspectives freely, but in doing so walk along a precarious line that divides western ideals from others. That is, while he recognizes the privilege of freedoms such as speech and expression in France, he sympathizes in the existence of other cultures and traditions that demand censorship in the form of taste and respect. In reference to the Charlie Hebdo attacks, Albaih reflected upon the unique and precarious situation and duality of Muslim Identity:

“Muslims seem to lose either way. They are constantly asked to apologise for crimes they neither committed, nor supported. They, too, are victims of the violence of extremists. Still, they are asked to apologise and somehow atone for these crimes that were committed in the name of their religion. Then they must face the wrath of extremists who attack them for refusing to approve of the methods they view as the only way to defend Islam”¹⁰⁵

Another one of Albaih's missions and passions is advocacy for freedom of expression, especially over social media. His encouragement for others to share his work testifies to the power and importance of social media to initiate powerful discussions, and action. As important as the tweet of the cartoon itself is the comments that follow his posts. His position may be clear and

¹⁰³ Albaih, Khalid. “When Cartoons Upset the ‘Wrong People.’” Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/01/paris-charlie-hebdo-cartoons-att-20151810528121783.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

distinctly liberal, but he engages with other twitter users and followers, even answering questions about liberty and identity.

Tweet: Political cartoons emphasize particular details in a poignant and creative way. And while the cartoon simplifies the image of a woman in front of police in cartoon form, to say that the cartoon is a simplified version of the event would be incorrect. Albaih purposefully omits representations of bystanders in his drawing, and transforms the original photo taken at the beach to represent the event as a comparison not only between two distinct cultures, but between genders. The cartoon depicts two women, or possibly the same woman, in a submissive kneeling stance as two authoritative male figures reprimand her appearance on a mono-colored, seamless background. The distinct difference between the two situations is that one shows a woman veiled in front of officers, while the other is unveiled in front of Muslim men.

The minimalist design depicts more of the identity challenges that women face and hypocrisy of gender norms than of exclusively French identity. Albaih depicts self-image as a hard choice for women, that is, they must choose which social “law” to follow. While presumably one law seeks to liberate women from restriction and forced modesty, the other sees to protect the values of religion and tradition. These two laws are representative of western and traditional cultures, and in particular, between French republican ideals and Muslim values respectively.

As much as the minimalist design represents the two dichotomies between gender and culture, it is a limited perspective. In other words, the viewer must infer or know what the two cultures, French and Muslim, represent. The cartoon assumes that liberalization and modesty exclusively define the boundary between the westernized France and Islamic culture. Whether all French citizens or Muslims agree with this exclusive representation is not conclusive, and further

debated in the twitter responses, shares, and reposts. Twitter followers in effect replace the bystanders seen in the original beach photo, but absent in the cartoon. Albaih effectively transforms the setting from the French Riviera to the very phones and twitter accounts around the world- demanding a response and reaction from followers.

But what do Muslim women think of the comparison between French and traditional cultures? And furthermore, how do they see themselves in the broader discourse of French identity? Critical to this discussion are the tweets and responses from women who identify as Muslim and voice their perspectives. It is important to note that not one individual, or in this case, woman can be the spokesperson for a whole gender and culture. However women such as Hend Amry below have engaged and opened discussions with a broader audience on twitter about women's gender roles traditions.

3. The Power of Comparison: History and Culture

Who: Hend Amry

Number of Followers: 160K

Number of Tweet Shares: 3,026 2,905 Likes



¹⁰⁶ 2) Hend Amry (@LibyaLiberty) | Twitter." Accessed April 19, 2017.
https://twitter.com/LibyaLiberty?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

Connection to French Culture: Similar to Khalid, HEND Amry is not a French citizen, but tweets frequently about Muslim identity and social justice. Born and raised in America and currently living in Qatar, Amry does not identify as a citizen of one nation. She describes herself more as a global citizen in her Twitter bio, and at the same time rebuking globalization as a force that integrates and assimilates identities: “I am East and West, citizen and refugee. The melting pot is a failed paradigm—maybe more like a tossed salad. I am an international crouton.”¹⁰⁷

Her combination of compelling, satirizing tweets and nonconforming national identity has gained her popularity on Twitter and pop culture news outlets such as BuzzFeed and the Tempest. Amry effectively uses this popularity to not only voice her concerns about social justice, but engage in activism and discussions about identity and politics. She frequently responds to comments on her tweets, exemplifying the use of social media as a platform for discussion and expression. In an interview with the Tempest, Amry explained how her tweets were a powerful tool in not only advocating for social justice, but human rights:

“As for my tweets, they do cover a wide range of topics, not just Muslims. Social Justice can't be just about your own defined identity group. You either care about all human life equally or you are a political pundit. Also, I'm a Muslim and proud of it but that's not my only identity.”¹⁰⁸

More than expressing her advocacy for social justice, Amry explicitly challenges the irony of the French republican ideas of universality. As previously stated in the previous chapter, a core concept of the French dominant narrative is the belief that human rights and republicanism are universal, and if not, should be. Indirectly Amry reveals the hypocrisy in France's commitment to human rights and liberties in her definition of social justice. Social justice and the pursuit of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Lemon, Jason. “Hend Amry Tells Us about Her ‘Double Life.’” *StepFeed*, April 10, 2017. <http://stepfeed.com/hend-amry-tells-us-about-her-double-life-3686-4266>.

human rights do not advocate exclusively on behalf of one identity. Prohibiting public displays of religion does not produce equality but exclusion, limiting the individual to one form of identity, that is, the French universal.

Tweet: Amry's tweet extends from Khalid's Albaih method of comparison, poignantly comparing other identities in Europe against one another. Amry specifically does not mention France in her tweet, rather grouping France with Europe as a homogenous force against Muslim swimwear. Although the origin and context of the picture are debatable, the image reflects a perception of what traditional identities are accepted in Europe and likewise France. Comparing the modest clothing of Catholic nuns to burkinis worn by Muslim women poignantly shows that clothing choice represents more than a religion, but a perception. In her opinion, the burkini ban is as much of an infringement of women's rights as it is a prejudice against Islam. Ironically, France's history with the Catholic Church has been fraught with distrust, power struggles, and laws establishing secularism.

But as if to anticipate a discussion about French history with religion, Amry followed her tweet with another, sharing an image found from an Algerian poster in 1958, questioning concepts of beauty:



109

Amry adds another dimension French discourse on identity to twitter, resurfacing examples of colonialism, still relevant in French society. She suggests that the burkini ban is a continuation of long French colonial constructs of beauty and control. As stated before in Chapter 2, one of the many affects of the post-colonial era is questioning nationality, belonging, and image. The drawing, taken from an article from the *Funambulist* magazine asserts how “the poster above shows that beauty, a seemingly innocent and benevolent value, is a weaponizable concept in the establishment of this universalist project by either colonial or imperial power.”¹¹⁰ Beauty in other words has been used as a social force to persuade women to conform to a superior or preferred image, that is, the French ideal of womanhood and liberation. The poster does not ask if women think they are pretty, as much as it asks if they want to become liberated and show pride in their

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ “State Misogyny: France’s Colonial Unveiling History Against Muslim Women.” *THE FUNAMBULIST MAGAZINE*, August 14, 2016. <https://thefunambulist.net/history/state-misogyny-frances-colonial-unveiling-history-against-muslim-women>.

image. That image again follows the French universalist idea that all women are only truly free if they abandon traditions that hide their appearance or integrity.

While Amry speaks about feminism from a traditionalist culture, how do western feminists within France react to the burkini controversy?

4. Feminist Perspectives

Who: Osez le Féminisme

Number of Followers: 29.6K

Number of Retweets: 108, 87 Likes



111

Connection to French Culture: The national feminist group advocates for women’s rights across France, and has multiple chapters in French regions including Nice and the French Riviera where the burkini controversies took place. Their advocacy for women’s rights not only reflects social movements, but provides an interesting intersection between western and other forms of feminism.

Tweet: Similar to the tweet sent by the daily mail, the organization tweeted a link to one of their articles along with a brief sentence previewing their point of view, condemning the passing event

¹¹¹ “Osez Le Féminisme on Twitter: ‘#burkini : Les Instrumentalisations de L’été Sont Toujours Contre Les Droits Des Femmes <https://t.co/pnFMIGQy9w>.’” Accessed April 13, 2017. <https://twitter.com/osezlefeminisme/status/768439710574383104>.

as a instrument against women's rights. What not immediately clear from the tweet is if the burkni ban, or the burkini itself infringes women's rights.

The article further elaborates on their position. The group favors secularity, but not because it equalizes individuals in the public space, but because religion is a manifestation of the patriarchy. "Osez le Femnisme" elaborates:

Les religions, toutes les religions, parce qu'elles ont été pensées, construites et dirigées par des hommes, sont le reflet du patriarcat. Les femmes y sont très souvent reléguées au second plan, considérées comme étant "impures", et devant donc "payer" pour leur soi-disante "impureté... certaines femmes vivent une oppression religieuse, qui va à l'encontre de leurs libertés fondamentales"¹¹²

And while France certainly is not immune to misogyny or patriarchal influences, the French group asserts a pride that France is a nation that allows the freedom and rights of women. Religion therefore is not a form of freedom, it is oppression, a direct force that censors the appearance, actions, and individuality, and the power specifically belong to women.

Despite their overall attitude towards the principles of religion, "Osez le feminsime" does not agree with the act of banning burkinis on account of public disorder and terrorism. The group questions: "Où sont les droits des femmes quand on fait justement d'une catégorie de femmes les responsables du "désordre public, voire pour certains du terrorisme?"¹¹³

The burkini ban is not about secularity as much as it is about victimizing women, and in particular, a group of women who according to their point of view, are already victims of religious conformity. In banning burkinis, the state places the burden of public shame on women for acts of terror that they did not commit. "Osez le feminisme" directly asks the question that HEND AMRY depicted in her photo of Catholic nuns on the beach: "Dans ce cas pourquoi ne pas sanctionner TOUS les signes ostentatoires religieux et non pas uniquement celui-ci porté

¹¹² "Arrêtés Anti-Burkini, de Qui Se Moque-T-on ? Des Femmes Pardi !" *Osez Le Feminisme !*, August 24, 2016. <http://osezlefeminisme.fr/arretes-anti-burkini-de-qui-se-moque-t-on-des-femmes-pardi/>.

¹¹³ Ibid

exclusivement par des femmes?”¹¹⁴ If religion is such a threat to public space, why has there not been bans on all forms of religion on the beach, and furthermore, why is this tension and microaggression placed on women?

Reactions:

Not everyone agreed with their position on women’s rights, or their assumption that women in minority groups are victims:



115

Twitter user “Univers Chiffonné” describes a divide in the notion of feminism. The point of view that “Osez le féminisme” expresses is a western notion of feminism, the belief that women’s rights are a universal concept regardless of different cultural forms of liberty and choice. What Osez Feminism explicitly does not explain is how Muslim women choose to wear the hijab, not out of force but for personal and religious expression. This in effect is a different form of power and independence, that this, the woman’s power to choose the identity she wishes to present in public.

In contrast, other twitter users like the ones below thought that the burkini ban was just, or not harsh enough:

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ “Osez Le Féminisme on Twitter: ‘#burkini : Les Instrumentalisations de L’été Sont Toujours Contre Les Droits Des Femmes <https://t.co/pnFMIGQy9w>.”



116



117

The twitter users above argue that wearing a burkini violates the laws of the French republic, and the liberties and freedoms that the state represents as discussed in Chapter 2. User “Danièle” adds to the argument further, that incidences like these initiate responses from the “FN” or le Front National, a nationalist political party in France. Danièle speaks to an awareness of right-winged movements, and more specifically, nationalist movements gaining popularity in reaction to identity conflict events such as the burkini controversy.

But arguments invoking religious secularity, and women’s rights were not the only French liberties and freedoms that were being discussed and presumably violated. Journalists such as Marc Reese also spoke how the dissemination of the burkini controversy over social media was contested with freedoms of speech.

5. Freedom of Speech

Who: Marc Reese

¹¹⁶ Ibid

¹¹⁷ Ibid

Number of Followers: 18K

Connection to French Culture: Marc Reese is the editor in chief of the Next INpact, a French online news publication that covers news and discussions in technology. Marc Reese and Next INpact were strong advocates against online government censorship and the HADOPI laws, a 2009 controversy that involved the state revoking an individual's Internet access if caught with copyright infringement.¹¹⁸ His passion is advocating for private rights and lists a few of his favorites in his bio: "LCEN, copie privée, Hadopi, terro, renseignement, etc."¹¹⁹ His tweets likewise express a biting distrust in government control, and uses twitter to not only educate the public on freedoms and rights, but to hold the government accountable for what he perceives as infringements.

Below are three of Marc Reese's tweets, all written within an hour on August 26th, each succeeding the former:



120

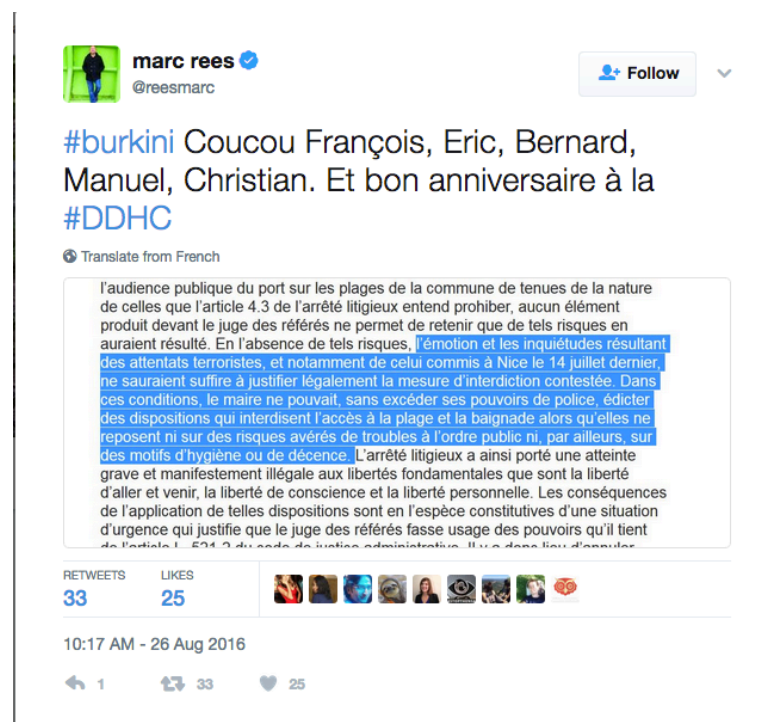
¹¹⁸ Gouvernement de France. "L'Hadopi En Bref | Hadopi." Accessed April 21, 2017. <https://www.hadopi.fr/la-haute-autorite/lhadopi-en-bref>.

¹¹⁹ "Marc Rees on Twitter BIO." *Twitter*. Accessed May 8, 2017. <https://twitter.com/reesmarc/status/768808060257173510>.

¹²⁰ "Marc Rees on Twitter: 'L'arrêté #Burkini ? 'une Atteinte Grave et Manifestement Illégale Aux Libertés Fondamentales' (aller, Venir, Conscience, Personnelle).'" Accessed April 13, 2017. <https://twitter.com/reesmarc/status/769169035829383168>.

In the above tweet, Reese quotes a statement from the Conseil d'État, the legal and executive branch of the French government, which condemned the burkini ban as an infringement of French rights. What makes this tweet distinct from others who tweeted similar discontent with the ban is that it not only directly quotes French republican values and rights, but positions the government against itself. Reese exposes the contradictions of the French government. Who, or what values, is the government actually protecting? The fundamental rights established in les droits de l'homme et citoyen, or the security of its citizens based on perceived images of the 'other' and terrorism?

To elaborate his point further, Reese tweets the following, calling out the president and mayors who banned the Burkini and citing an excerpt from the in les droits de l'homme et citoyen (#DDHC):



121

¹²¹ “Marc Rees on Twitter: ‘#burkini Coucou François, Eric, Bernard, Manuel, Christian. Et Bon Anniversaire À La #DDHC <https://t.co/qO5epUexyz>.’” Accessed April 13, 2017. <https://twitter.com/reesmarc/status/769176847615680513>.

But what possibly impassioned Marc Reese the most was Former Mayor of Nice Christian Estrosi's statement against the use of social media and photography during the controversy. Below, Reese tweets one of his articles, comparing the burkini ban and condemnation of the use of social media to the loi de renseignement. The law, created in 2015 was in reaction to the Charlie Hebdo incident, allowing government surveillance through phone taps and mobile data to prevent further terrorist attacks.¹²²



123

As stated before, Reese was not new to arguing against government surveillance and censorship, and infringements on freedoms of speech. For journalists like Reese, the burkini ban incited

¹²² LOI n° 2015-912 du 24 juillet 2015 relative au renseignement, 2015-912 § (2015).

¹²³ "Marc Reese on Twitter: 'L'arrêté #Burkini ? 'une Atteinte Grave et Manifestement Illégal Aux Libertés Fondamentales' (aller, Venir, Conscience, Personnelle).'" Accessed April 13, 2017. <https://twitter.com/reesmarc/status/769169035829383168>.

discussions about representations of identity, and questioned the integrity of French freedoms themselves. The ban represented fallacies and inconsistencies within the French republican image: that France is not as uniform as it may seem. He illuminates a concern that the government's increasing paranoia about the image of France has manifested into a surveillance state, where the government interferes into private lives and liberties if they deem a potential threat. This threat, however as Reese implies is free speech that both exposes the French government's reluctance to evolve its dominant image of France and evidence of islamaphobia.

The government's reaction to the burkini controversy was swift and organized both through the local and national governments. Although local governments throughout southern France had been imposing bans throughout the summer, it was not until the media broke a news story that representatives from the national government chose release statements. Social media again demonstrates its power to expose and promote "watchdog" behavior on government officials. Similar to Marc Rees, one of the tweets below comes from a journalist who retweeted a press release from the Mayor of Nice, effectively exposing local politics to a global audience. The second tweet below shows the French government using social media to engage in response to the criticisms and controversy.

6. French Government, the Nation's Point of View

I choose tweets from two different representatives from the French government that revealed their perspective and attitude towards the Burkini event. The first is a retweet of a press release from the Mayor of Nice. The second is a series of tweets from the official French government twitter on behalf of Emmanuel Vallis, the French Prime Minister. The former provides a regional perspective of France identity whereas the later speaks to the reaction to the Burkini events on behalf of the French Nation.

The first tweet is an image of a public statement from the department of Nice tweeted by Jules Darmanian, a contributor to Buzzfeed:



124

Within the statement, the Mayor of Nice Christian Estrosi condemns the use of social media that exposed the burkini controversy to the world. Estrosi further threatens to sue the Daily Mail and other publications who distributed the images of the women and police officers. The English translation of his condemnation reads “I am denouncing what seems like a manipulation that undermines the local police, and puts the officers at risk.”¹²⁵ Compared to the previous tweets,

¹²⁴ “Jules Darmanin □ (@JulesDrmnn) | Twitter.” Accessed April 13, 2017. <https://twitter.com/JulesDrmnn/status/852254101031309312>.

¹²⁵ Champeau, Guillaume. “Burkinis : Estrosi Menace Les Internautes Qui Montrent Les Policiers En Action - Politique.” *Numerama*, August 24, 2016. <http://www.numerama.com/politique/191021-burkinis-estrosi-menace-les-internautes-qui-montrent-les-policiers-en-action.html>.

the mayor explicitly confronts the use of social media as a threat to security and law enforcement more than the woman actually wearing the burkini.

This immediate response reveals a heightened anxiety felt by the local officials to censor and stabilize their image. In light of the Nice terror attacks in the previous month, the government was still on high alert for any signs of tension or manifestations of terrorism. An exposé that revealed police surrounding a Muslim woman could potentially instigate another violent response. Estrosi was effectively engaged in a power struggle between public social media and local law enforcement. Unregulated and non-contextualized pictures as Estrosi suggests are not only “manipulations,” but dangers to the integrity of law enforcement and safety of France.

Social media is a powerful force that rapidly distributes information, whose reactions and trends are hard to predict. What was originally a localized problem on a beach became a global sensation that exceeded the purview of Estrosi’s control. And while pictures without context or his perspective are threat, the global perceptions and negativity are an even greater threat to the French image and stability. Suddenly, France must respond to an image and perception that they have no control over, that is, the world’s perception of France. In terms of national identity, this situation forces the French nation to look within its boundaries and either strengthen the dominant French narrative or evolve it to respond to the recent event.

Notably, Estrosi does not mention the details of the burkini event in his statement, nor does he comment about the identity or rights of the woman who was confronted. His position strongly declares a protectionist tone for law enforcement and security of the French state, regardless of conflicting identities or social tensions.

In contrast, the quotes and statements from Manuel Vallis via social media the following day were not only more polished, but directly confronted the issues of identity and the rights of citizens.

Who: Le government de France

Number of Followers: 391K

Number of Tweets Since Joining Twitter: 22.9K

Before the reading the text of the following tweets, I was impressed by the look, tone, and use of social media by the French government. In contrast to Estrosi's bitterness towards social media, the national government used it as a tool to streamline their message in an effective and eye catching way. Instead of simply quoting Vallis in 140 character bits, the government created visuals quoting excerpts of his speech in a series of tweets. Each image was also accompanied by other social media logos and links at the bottom including Facebook, Instagram, and most surprisingly, Snapchat. It was apparent that the government applied efforts to reach a broad audience and counter potentially negative images and social media comments from the day before. An explanation for this streamlined response is that the government wanted to be perceived as strong and uniform in their power and identity following the unprecedented and uncontrolled media outburst.

Below are three tweets that describe specific elements and perspectives on the burkini ban:

Fig a) Vallis asserts that the burkini ban does not infringe on liberties or individual freedoms. Rather, he claims that it is the covering of women imposed by a religion that is the infringement of women's rights. Therefore, it is not only imperative, but the right for France to protect women's rights equally as citizens of France regardless of religious background.

Fig b) Here, Vallis defines the purpose and role of the state in relation to protecting the French citizen. It is the government's role to protect regardless of religious background.

Anticipating anti-Muslim sentiment, Vallis denies notions of islamaphobia, asserting that France

does not support acts of racism, anti-semitism, or of anti-chrisitan anti-Muslim sentiment. While this is not a comprehensive list of religions in France, Vallis takes precautions to include religious identities. In doing so he implies that no identity is greater than that of the French identity and citizenship. That while an individual may belong to these groups they are ultimately considered part of the French community that does not tolerate any infringement on their safety.

Fig c) In one of his final tweets, Vallis explicitly reasserts how laïcité is part of the French national identity. He defines laïcité as a freedom that allows citizens to believe or not believe in religious dogma. In order to support this freedom, individuals must adhere to a common and unanimous identity in public without any symbols of allegiance to powers above the state. His language at the end, to call upon the citizens to defend this right and identity, insinuates that any other image besides French nationality can be perceived as threats.

FIG a)



126

¹²⁶ “Gouvernement on Twitter: ‘Suite À L’avis Du #ConseildEtat, Assumons Le Débat Sur Le Burkini. Texte Du Premier Ministre <https://T.co/H2BrwzcMci> <https://T.co/ybXvIFJo8T>.’” Accessed April 13, 2017. <https://twitter.com/gouvernementFR/status/769451628265078784>.

FIG b)

Gouvernement @gouvernementFR · 27 Aug 2016

Replying to @gouvernementFR

#burkini : "L'État est là pour accompagner et protéger les musulmans de France" >> facebook.com/notes/manuel-v...

Translate from French

ASSUMONS LE DÉBAT SUR LE BURKINI

“

L'Etat est là pour accompagner et protéger les musulmans de France.
Il doit être implacable face aux actes anti-musulmans, comme il doit être implacable face aux actes antisémites, anti-chrétiens ou racistes.

”



Lire la suite

du texte du Premier ministre Manuel Valls sur sa page Facebook

LE 26 AOÛT 2016

GOUVERNEMENT.fr    

127

¹²⁷ Ibid

FIG c)



128

7. Right –Winged Politics and Conservatism

Who: Le Front National

Number of Followers: 181K

Number of Retweets: 89, 88 Likes

It would be remised not to discuss the growing political movement of French nationalism and populism. Due to the upcoming 2017 presidential election, the political party's influence has increased and strengthened while questioning the integrity of French values and identity. One of

¹²⁸ ibid

the Front National's core mission is to preserve what they believe is a dominant narrative of France. That is, they support a unified and strong nation that includes anti-immigration policies, freedom from the European union, and economic protectionist policies to name a few.¹²⁹



130

The above tweet is a quote from Florian Philippot, the Vice President of the FN who denounces elected officials that support burkinis as failures of the French electoral system. In other words, Philippot questions the French state's ability to defend their values, or more precisely, their identity as French. His statement insinuates the need for an overturn in politics, one that can strengthen France's image and minimize perceived fears of terrorism through excluding religious symbols related to extremism.

More outspoken on this issue is Marie Le Pen, the leader of the FN and candidate for the French 2017 presidency. On numerous occasions, Le Pen has spoken on the issue of French

¹²⁹ "FN – Front National." Accessed April 21, 2017. <http://www.frontnational.com/>.

¹³⁰ "Front National on Twitter: '@f_philippot : 'Des Élus Défendent Le #burkini. Par Électoralisme, Ils Sont Prêts À Abandonner Toutes Les valeurs.' #BourdinDirect.'" Accessed April 13, 2017. https://twitter.com/FN_officiel/status/769066014860509185.

national identity, and in consequence has gained popularity from her responses to the burkini ban. In an interview with the French publication *le point*, Le Pen explained how the ban was “une question de laïcité républicaine, d'ordre public, assurément ; mais bien au-delà, c'est de l'âme de la France dont il est question”¹³¹ Much like Estrosi, Le Pen believes that the integrity and “soul” of French values are at risk if burkinis were allowed on beaches. Allowing burkinis would be hypocritical according to Le Pen, because they imply that women’s bodies are illicit and are in danger of violence: “La France n'enferme pas le corps de la femme, la France ne cache pas la moitié de sa population, sous le prétexte fallacieux et odieux que l'autre moitié craindrait la tentation.”¹³²

But what is the French identity according to Le Pen? According to an interview with the American Television show “60 minutes”, Le Pen defined that France “isn’t Burkinis on the beach. France is Brigitte Bardot. That’s France.” Regardless if the “60 Minute”- American audience knows Brigitte Bardot, Le Pen’s tone and implication is clear: France is not a country of immigrants or diverse religious identity. France is France because it is exclusive and to its secular, nostalgic, and republican image.

As for Brigitte Bardot, Le Pen was nostalgically alluding to a French actress, whose fame came from starring in classic French films on the beach. Her French pop culture reference however is to exclusively distinguish differences in ethnicity, but to elaborate the French nostalgia and symbolic meaning of public beaches. According to Foreign Policy writer Sophie Fuggle, beaches symbolize much more than places of relaxation in France. One only needs to look at French history in WWII to see how beaches were “sites of violence, trauma, and

¹³¹ “France’s Marine Le Pen to Appear on 60 Minutes.” Accessed April 20, 2017. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/frances-marine-le-pen-to-appear-on-60-minutes/>.

¹³² Ibid

invasion.”¹³³ Such tensions seen on French beaches today are figurative and literal reminders of an invasion and threat to the French state and identity.

Beaches today are symbolic of public freedom and historical resilience. They are part of le patrimoine culturel, geographic places that represent French values. The burkini therefore is a symbolic invasion and threat to the idea of liberty and freedom, Fuggle explains: “Not only does the burkini remind people of the class, race, and gender tensions back in the city, but those wearing it seem to be refusing to participate in the pretense of social leveling that is supposed to occur through the exposure and vulnerability that stripping down entails.”¹³⁴ The French beaches are places where France not only demands adherence to French laws, but demands beachgoers to demonstrate their loyalty to France through exposure – a right that was defended and won in France’s history. Outward expressions of loyalty and nostalgia for the past are the main themes in Le Front National’s understanding of French identity.

Conclusion:

What have the tweets in response to the burkini controversy revealed about French national identity? And more importantly, what is there to say about the dominant French identity in the age of globalization? To answer these questions, we must return to the main pillars and republican principles of French identity and their relevance today. Upon reflecting on French society, French philosopher Michelle Foucault had the following to say about western societies in the modern era:

“we can see that throughout the entire history of Western societies (it is perhaps here that the root of their singular historical destiny is located — such a peculiar destiny, so different from the others in its trajectory and so universalizing, so dominant with respect to the others), the acquisition of capabilities and the struggle for freedom have constituted

¹³³ Fuggle, Sophie. “Brigitte Bardot vs. the Burkini.” *Foreign Policy*. Accessed April 20, 2017. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/08/23/brigitte-bardot-vs-the-burkini-france-burkini-ban/>.

¹³⁴ Ibid

permanent elements. Now the relations between the growth of capabilities and the growth of autonomy are not as simple as the eighteenth century may have believed.”¹³⁵ If we are to assume that France is a western society, its guiding and founding ‘universal’ principles according to Foucault face forces unanticipated by the eighteenth century enlightened philosophers who contributed to the French nation. France as a nation now exists in a post-colonial world, one that contains traditions and religions that its citizens claim as part of their identity. And although France does not seek to ban individual freedoms and beliefs, there exists an anxiety for identities that demand outward expression undermine France as a uniform nation.

Is the current identity tension in France, then, a binary divide between the historic and republican image and traditionalist cultures like Islam? This question has been expanded upon by authors such as John Bowen, who have criticized the identity politics in France as problem of cultural integration regarding Islam culture. Bowen asks: “Can they [French Muslims] become *citoyens à part entiere* rather than *citoyens entièrement à part*, ‘complete citizens’ of France rather than ‘citizens completely on the sidelines’?”¹³⁶ As expressed in the burkni tweets, there is a precarious divide between those who see traditionalist cultures as part of a multicultural France and those who see them as incompatible with French norms of secularity. Bowen furthermore concludes: “recent French political rhetoric is not promoting a convergence with Islamic norms and ideas... This form of ‘block thinking’ substitutes generalizations across a category of people for an inquiry into the motives of particular individuals,” predicting a continuation of tension in French identity politics.¹³⁷

However, I disagree that French National identity can be summarized in binaries, or another example of Samuel Huntington’s “west versus the rest” assumption of identity in the globalized world. In analyzing discussions and posts on Twitter, people have diverse and

¹³⁵ Foucault, Michel, and Paul Rabinow. *The Foucault Reader*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

¹³⁶ Bowen, John

¹³⁷ Ibid

complex understandings of France's identity and its capacity to include seemingly conflicting identities. Within these discussions arose themes surrounding feminism, post-colonialism, republicanism, nationalism, populism, Islam, religion, image, and community that created a much more complex historical understanding of France's identity as a nation. These themes are part of an evolving understanding of national identity itself. That is, the concept national identity is not stagnant, but is an evolving reflection of its present and historical development.

Advancements in technology and communication platforms such as Twitter have dramatically changed the way in which people engage in political discourse. The sheer volume of opinions and engagement on social media alone has almost humorously outdated Foucault's assertion on media's progression: "Today when a periodical asks its readers a question, it does so in order to collect opinions on some subject about which everyone has an opinion already; there is not much likelihood of learning anything new."¹³⁸ I argue that Twitter and other social media platforms alike have provided opportunities for people to engage in new ideas and discussion, and not only provide opinions but demand ones from others. This engagement offers new opportunities to learn new perspectives and completely change how politics are discussed. No longer is the "periodical" demanding opinions from its readers, the readers themselves are demanding discussions from each other.

Tensions and national identity outbursts continue in France, but it will not be a stalemate between a dominant French republican narrative and traditional culture. We cannot dismiss the convergence in other social themes and French history that suggest a more complex nation.

¹³⁸ Foucault, Michelle

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