Constructing Muslims in France

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Constructing Muslims in France: Discourse, Public Identity, and the Politics of Citizenship.  

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Between 1945 and 1975, France experienced what Alan Jenkins refers to as the “rapid reconstruction, industrialization, and economic growth” that characterized the Trente Glorieuses. France’s economy blossomed under highly centralized state management that aimed to “wipe out the failures and humiliations of the prewar and wartime periods, and reconstitute the greatness of the nation as a prosperous world power” (Jenkins 2000, p. 4). While this experience certainly left a legacy for French employment policy for years to come, the dirigisme (central planning of the economy) that many associate with France is increasingly challenged. According to Jenkins (2000, p. 189), France is experiencing a “crisis in work” that includes “unprecedented levels of unemployment” and, perhaps partly as a response to the unemployment, “shifts in employment relations.”

It would be laughable to say that France now imitates the American economic model, but contemporary forces of globalization and market liberalization have wrought changes in France’s economic policy for more than thirty years now. Related to this, France has experienced slow but marked change in its employment policies: “More neoliberal voices are being given a new credibility, even within the Socialist government, and what some on the political right call the ‘sacred cows’ of the French ‘social democratic model’ (relatively strong nationalization, minimum wages, a substantial and ‘protected’ public sector, etc.) are coming under threat” (Jenkins 2000, p. 141).

In short, there is a trend toward the increasing commodification of labor in France, and unemployment problems exacerbate frustration with this trend. The French today are in a heated and often bitter debate over who can serve
the people of France better: the government and its post–World War II, socially minded labor laws or the free market. These are complicated issues even before the introduction of factors such as race, religion, and immigration. Setting the backdrop of the French “crisis in work”—its unemployment and changing employment relations—allows us to understand the already contentious context in which debates over Muslims and employment take place.

What does it mean to speak of France’s “unprecedented levels of unemployment”? France’s unemployment rate reached just over 9 percent in the second trimester of 2009 (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques 2009). This is not merely an artifact of the economic meltdown of fall 2008. France’s unemployment rate reached 8 percent in 2007. This upward trend has not stopped yet, either: in the fourth quarter of 2012, France’s unemployment rate reached 10.6 percent of the active population (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques 2013). The unemployment problem is particularly hard for French youths. Compared with the other twenty-seven member states of the European Union, France had the fifth highest rate of unemployment for youths age fifteen to twenty-four in 2007 (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques 2008a). Data from 1990–2007 show that the unemployment rate for males and females age fifteen to twenty-four hovers around double the average unemployment of all age groups (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques 2008b; see Table 5.1).

This gap between the unemployment rate of adults and youths age fifteen to twenty-four continues. In the fourth quarter of 2012, adults age twenty-five to forty-nine experienced a 9.1 percent unemployment rate, and adults age fifty and older experienced a 7.2 percent unemployment rate. Meanwhile, youths age fifteen to twenty-four experienced a 25.7 percent unemployment rate (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques 2013).

Just what are these aforementioned “shifts in employment relations”? To a certain extent, the election of Nicolas Sarkozy was a referendum on French employment policies. Seen as pro-American, a clear change from most French politicians at that time, Sarkozy claimed, among other things, that he would “relax the thirty-five-hour workweek” and create employment contracts that would permit easier firing (and therefore, supposedly, easier hiring) of employees (Bennhold 2007). Such presidential promises are part of larger changes in employment relations that Christophe Vigneau argues have been under way since the 1970s. Reflecting the trend of labor commodification, these “changes in labor law do not improve work security but organize flexibility as part of a policy against unemployment” (Vigneau 2005, p. 132).

The Contrat de Première Embauche (CPE [First Employment Contract]) is one example of such an attempt to make hiring and firing more flexible in France. In 2006, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin tried to inject new life into the employment market and address the high youth unemployment rate by introducing a new policy that would have allowed employers to fire employees younger than twenty-six more easily, supposedly freeing up hiring by reducing
Employers’ fears of being “stuck” with an undesirable employee. The CPE proved terribly unpopular. Unionists and students streamed into the streets to protest what they saw as the exploitation of youths, bearing placards with slogans such as “Jeunes & Jetables” (“Young and Disposable”; see Figure 5.1). The CPE was eventually repealed. It is clear that such liberal changes to the French employment market will not happen without resistance.

In addition to such top-down employment relations changes, the traditional mobilization strategy of workers has changed somewhat. Unions have long been the arbiters of employees’ disputes with the state, but this corporatist model is plagued by problems within unions today: “diversity, fragmentation, and falling national memberships” (Jenkins 2000, p. 195). Such challenges naturally raise questions about whom the unions represent and how well they are representing. For example, unemployed French people and their advocates who were dissatisfied with the representation of large unions formed their own coalitions and staged the so-called Movement of the Unemployed in 1997–1998, with moderate success (Jenkins 2000, pp. 193–195).

While employment is clearly a contentious issue throughout France, it is arguably even more salient for France’s Muslims. Fifty-two percent of French Muslims “say they are very worried about unemployment among Muslims,” while “an additional thirty-two percent say they are somewhat concerned” (Allen 2006, para. 6). Is this concern grounded in a higher unemployment rate for Muslims in France? It is difficult to quantify the precise unemployment rate of Muslims in France, given the problems with conducting surveys that interrogate religious affiliation. The INSEE, however, reports that in 2002 one in five immigrants from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and Turkey was unemployed, compared with roughly 6 percent of immigrants from Italy, Spain, and Portugal—an unemployment rate that is even lower than that of French citizens (Tavan 2005, p. 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 5.1</th>
<th>UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN FRANCE BY AGE GROUP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
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<td>10.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 15–24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 25–49</td>
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<td>Age 50 and older</td>
<td>6.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>Age 15–24</td>
<td>13.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 25–49</td>
<td>5.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 50 and older</td>
<td>4.7</td>
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While it would be reinforcing an incorrect stereotype (and one that this book hopes to deconstruct) to suggest that all immigrants from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and Turkey are Muslim, it is nevertheless true that many are. Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj (2005, p. 23) find that 59 percent of French citizens who immigrated to France from the Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa, or Turkey—or who have at least one parent or grandparent who did—identify themselves as Muslim. Brouard and Tiberj (2005, pp. 23–24) also note that the number of Muslims in this group of citizens is highest among those who personally immigrated to France and decreases as generational distance from the moment of immigration increases. In other words, it is safe (and probably something of an understatement) to claim that nearly 60 percent of the immigrant population that the INSEE identifies as facing a 20 percent unemployment rate is Muslim—that is, Muslim immigrants face an unemployment rate of roughly 12 percent. This is twice the unemployment rate of immigrants from Europe. Without the opportunity for better statistical analysis due to current French laws, this is one of the best (albeit problematic) approximations available. The takeaway from this statistical reconstruction of a population is that Muslim immigrants in France do face a higher level of unemployment than other immigrants, as the concerns of Muslims suggest.

FIGURE 5.1 “Jeunes & Jetables.” Union Nationale des Étudiants de France (the National Union of French Students) used this image, which reads, “Young and disposable: Let us demand the immediate withdrawal of the CPE!” to protest the Contrat Première Embauche (CPE). (From http://www.unef.asso.fr.)
Unemployment is not the only problem Muslims have in regard to employment in France. Some Muslims claim to face discrimination, ignorance, and geographic isolation from places of employment. Then again, not all Muslims agree that unemployment is a problem for Muslims in France. Some, interestingly, claim that there are plenty of jobs to go around, and the unemployed are not trying hard enough. Muslims also offer a host of very different suggestions for lowering the unemployment rate in France. This diversity of solutions reflects underlying differences in political ideology regarding the responsibility of the state to secure favorable employment relations in France. Elite discussion of Muslims and employment in France, however, seems to exist in a parallel universe. It does not recognize the diversity of Muslim views on employment in France, and it rarely addresses the challenges Muslims may face in getting hired or succeeding in the workplace. Elite discourse about Muslims and employment in France is at times sympathetic; at times marked by a silence that suggests lack of interest; and at times marked by open hostility, fear, and rancor for these supposedly bad citizens and security threats.

How Elites Discuss Muslims and Employment

When the media analysis of how Muslims are depicted in France in Chapter 2 is cross-tabulated for articles about employment, a number of images come to the forefront. But first I will provide an analysis of general patterns.

While 32 percent of all references to Muslims in the articles on employment depict them as integrated into France, 11 percent depict Muslims as problematic citizens, and 27 percent depict them as bad citizens who have failed to integrate into France. In other words, nearly 40 percent of the references to Muslims in articles on employment depict them as having trouble integrating into France. While the articles seem on the whole somewhat split on the subject of whether Muslims have integrated into France—the difference between 32 percent and 38 percent, after all, is not that significant—it is interesting that the percentage of references that are neutral in regard to the level of integration of Muslims is the lowest in this subset of articles (compared with articles cross-tabulated for housing and education). The reason for this may be that there are more depictions of Muslims as victims of discrimination in matters of employment than in matters of housing or education in France. This depiction of Muslims as objects of discrimination in France is present in only 4 percent of the references to Muslims in articles about housing and in only 7 percent of the references to Muslims in articles about education, but it makes up 13 percent of the references to Muslims in articles about employment. Curiously, this recognition of discrimination against Muslims coexists with the media’s strong meta-narrative about the dubious character of Muslim French citizenship.

When we examine how articles about employment depict Muslims as having difficulties integrating into France, the following images appear: Muslims as religious extremists (eight references), Muslims simply as integration failures
(six references), Muslims as too religious (three references), Muslims as intolerant (three references), and passing references to Muslims as violent (one reference) and disloyal citizens (one reference). There is also one reference to the difficulties Muslims face in the Western world because of incompatibilities between Western values and Islam. The dominant image, by far, is that of Muslims as “too religious”: they either practice too much, are intolerant of the views of others that do not fit their religion, or are religious extremists.

What do French politicians have to say on the subject of Muslims and employment? This story is a bit more complicated and includes significant silences and indirect references that require careful interpretation.

**A Relatively Silent Political Elite**

There is not much official discussion on the subject of Muslims and employment in France. When the National Assembly’s database is searched for all debate minutes (“comptes rendus intégraux”) from the Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth Legislatures that mention Muslims (“musulmans”) and employment (“emploi”), 69 documents are retrieved. None of the 69 debate minutes includes a discussion of Muslims and employment (the words share space in the same document, but they are unrelated). This seems completely normal when we consider that French republican politics, with its emphasis on difference-blindness, would not conduct discussions of employment in terms of religious affiliations. There are, however, a handful of comments in these 69 debate minutes about the employment difficulties faced by French Muslims (and people of North African and African descent). None of these comments was met with resistance. This lack of sustained discussion in the National Assembly may reflect French republican values, but it does not reflect what seems to be an underlying awareness among some politicians that Muslims in France face particular difficulties in employment.

A search in 2009 on elysee.fr, the website that records the current French president’s official speeches and press conferences, for texts with the word “employment” and “Muslim” yields only eight hits. Of those eight, two are repeats, and the six unique documents do not actually discuss Muslims and employment. (The words merely appear, unconnected, in the text.) The results are nearly identical when the word “employment” is replaced with “unemployment.”

**Nicolas Sarkozy and “Positive Discrimination”**

As president, Nicolas Sarkozy was not altogether silent on the issue of Muslims and employment. He embraced “positive discrimination,” a French notion that somewhat resembles American affirmative action. According to Sarkozy, “French Muslims are capable of working as top civil servants, researchers, doctors,” and “professors” (quoted in Huet 2003). Sarkozy made a point of recruiting Muslims for his government: his hand is behind the appointments of
Fadéla Amara, Rama Yade, Rachida Dati, and Azouz Begag. Sarkozy is largely alone in this, however, and most French politicians (as seen in the quote by Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin later in this chapter) remain leery of such an “un-republican” method.

Interestingly, Muslim interview respondents did not often express wholehearted approval of Sarkozy’s appointments. Some complained it was mere tokenism; others complained that Sarkozy hired only Muslims who are critical of Islam (Amara was cited here, although some suggested this was the fault of how the media and other politicians used and possibly abused her message of gender equality); and still others made a point of indicating how unsupported these appointees were. At the time of the interviews, Begag had already quit out of frustration. Since then, Dati has been removed as the minister of justice and appointed as a member of the European Parliament (seen as a considerable step down), and Yade, who refused to be sent to the European Parliament, was reassigned from the position of secretary of state for human rights to the secretary of state for sports (Lichfield 2009b). Sarkozy spoke about Muslims and employment more than his official discourse that is archived at the Élyséethèque would suggest. His interest in positive discrimination, however, largely remained rhetorical or was expressed in idiosyncratic appointments.

Furthermore, during his reelection bid in 2012, Sarkozy’s rhetoric turned toward a critique of multiculturalism, and he focused on security and ending illegal immigration (“Sarkozy threatens to withdraw from Schengen Accord” 2012; Willsher 2012). Many people perceived this rightward shift as a strategic attempt to draw voters away from Marine Le Pen (Beardsley 2012). Whether Sarkozy was seeking votes from the far right or not, this shift in focus took precedent over his earlier discussions of positive discrimination. Muslims and their employment difficulties, and positive discrimination more generally, were not subjects of discussion during the presidential campaign of 2012.

“Immigrants”: A Synonym for Muslims?

The silence in official National Assembly and presidential discourse on this subject could be taken as significant in and of itself—perhaps there is little political will to address the challenges Muslims face in employment. As stated earlier, however, isolated comments that recognize these problems can be found scattered throughout National Assembly debates.

There is another interpretation of this silence: while French politicians do not often talk about Muslims and employment, they do speak frequently about the employment issues of immigrants and the children of immigrants. Could some French politicians also mean “Muslim” when they talk about labor and “immigrants”? This is not an unlikely elision, given the common misconception that all immigrants from Africa and Turkey are Muslim—a misconception that leads to so many “improbably inflated” estimations of the number of
Muslims in France (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 23). The connection is certainly made when discussing employment. Take, for example, Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin’s critiques of affirmative action in an interview on the television channel Europe1 in 2003: “The central idea . . . is to help youths whose parents were immigrants to find their place in society. I do not want us to describe them by their religion [but] by their skills” (quoted in Huet 2003). Note here how the children of immigrants are assumed to have a religion that is thought to be the object of discrimination: in this context, that is a reference to Islam.

Tiberj (2008, p. 16) suggests that “the fight against Islamic terrorism became in many Western countries the point of entry for a new way of thinking about immigration and integration.” The leftist tolerance for immigrants that largely held sway over politics and the media in the 1980s in France, Tiberj argues, has become overshadowed by anti-immigrant arguments (from the right and from the left) that are based on critiques of practices associated with Islam. For example, when addressing issues of Islam in France, Sarkozy elected in an interview in 2007 to discuss female genital mutilation and polygamy, two inflammatory issues that directly affect a small minority of Muslims in France (Tiberj 2008, p. 13). According to Tiberj, since 9/11, politicians and the media in France have discovered a new way to critique immigrants: elide the categories of “immigrant” and “Muslim.” When they do so, it becomes possible to critique immigrants without inciting resistance from powerful equal rights groups and leftists who have discouraged critiques of immigrants since the 1980s. By pointing especially to examples of misogyny that are associated with Muslims, politicians and the media have found they can turn publicly acceptable anger about misogyny into criticism of Islam and of immigrants (Tiberj 2008, pp. 17–18). This immigrants equals Muslims slippage is even recognized institutionally in France: the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (CFCM [French Council of the Muslim Religion]), endowed with the political mission of representing Islam in France, has also become a representative of immigrants and their children, pursued by the media to speak for these groups, as well (Tiberj 2008, p. 18).

The discussion of politicians concerning immigrants and employment, then—perhaps a view into how French leaders think about Muslims and employment—is critical of immigrants. Brouard and Tiberj (2005, p. 67) state that “some [French] political discourses hint that we are lending to immigrants and to their children, those who are only in France to cheat the system and to ‘get their hands on welfare money.’” Furthermore, “Some politicians do not hesitate to denounce [immigrants] as profiteers of the social support system” (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 69). Such comments are linked to obvious characters—such as Jean-Marie Le Pen of the FN, a notoriously xenophobic French nationalist party. But even President Jacques Chirac found unwanted notoriety in 1991 with his critique of Muslim and black immigrants as noisy, smelly welfare moochers no hardworking Frenchman could bear to live next door to (Guyotat 1991; Pipes 1990).
There is one notable example of a politician openly and extensively discussing Muslims and employment in France: Philippe de Villiers. In his discourse, Muslims are depicted as dangerous employees. De Villiers is the leader of the Mouvement pour la France (MPF [Movement for France]), a right-wing political party that is known for its Euro-skepticism and hostility toward immigrants and Islam in France. De Villiers is well known in France. He popularized the image of the “Polish plumber” coming to steal jobs from French workers. He is recognizable enough to be depicted in the satirical puppet-based French television news show Les guignols de l’info, where his puppet worries about homosexuality as the end of civilization. In 2006, de Villiers published Les mosquées de Roissy (The Mosques of Roissy). In it, he claims that Muslims are working at Roissy (another name for Paris’s Charles de Gaulle Airport) with the intention of planning Islamic terrorist plots.

A few sections of de Villiers’s book are worth citing, as they epitomize the constructed image of “Muslims as dangerous employees.” First, de Villiers claims to describe the situation France faces today concerning Islam—a situation that, he says, few besides he are willing to speak about. He cites dangers families face in traveling; dangers parents face in sending their children to school; and dangers French people face from their neighbors. He even draws a parallel between France’s response to Islam and the ill-fated inaction of the Munich Agreement, which saw the French (along with the British and Italians) agree to Hitler’s annexation of portions of Czechoslovakia. All of this is what de Villiers (2006, pp. 10–12) terms “the progressive Islamization of French society.” In a bit of dramatic prose (although readers should perhaps bear in mind that the French take more artistic license in expressing themselves than American politicians do), de Villiers (2006, p. 12) concludes with a call to arms: “It is no longer the hour for worrying about the color of the fireman’s helmet. Each one of us must hurry to stamp out the flames. France is virtually taken hostage, but it does not know it yet.”

In the chapter “A Blind State” (referring to France), de Villiers describes in the second person a hypothetical weekend trip to Greece that the reader might take via Roissy. I am paraphrasing here: first, you ask a question of the airport agent “K. Toumi,” who is distracted because he will soon leave for Pakistan, where he will take classes at a Qur’anic school near Afghanistan. Then you will get your tickets from a pretty young woman (who looks Algerian) wearing an Air France miniskirt-and-blouse uniform, who only that morning used a room provided by the Muslim employees’ organization to change out of her chador. Then your bag will be checked by “M. Mostafa,” who is part of the Islamist movement. Finally, you will pass through the security checkpoint, only to be patted down by “Z. Morade,” an employee who visits Saudi Arabia frequently and is close to a small Algerian terrorist group (de Villiers 2006, pp. 50–52). What de Villiers has done is gather together a number of different profiles of
Roissy employees, collected by Renseignements Généraux (RG [General Information], a French internal intelligence agency that is discussed in detail below). As he says, “These individuals exist and are actually on file with police services. This is not a fictitious scenario. It is a true story—a story that, tomorrow, could be yours” (de Villiers 2006, p. 50).

The effect of this story is that we are led to believe that every employee at Roissy who has an Arabic-sounding name or who looks North African is a Muslim—and a religious extremist, at that. De Villiers makes additional assumptions: that all trips to Islamic countries are necessarily suspicious, that all chadors are worn as a refusal of French culture, and that, furthermore, all women who look North African have just recently stepped out of their chadors. While it is true that RG found employees of the airport who had links to organizations that promote terrorism, the impression de Villiers leaves is of a widespread Islamic conspiracy that presses in on travelers from all sides of the airport. In short, according to de Villiers, Muslims make dangerous employees and should not work where they can so easily compromise the security of the French.

De Villiers was not alone in his concerns. After his book was published, the Ministry of the Interior closed “seven Islamic prayer rooms at Charles de Gaulle and another Paris airport” (“Paris court to rule on Muslim baggage handler case” 2006). And as de Villiers mentions, police surveillance of Muslims was being done at the airport before his book was released. The outcome of these episodes of surveillance, however, do not seem as damning as de Villiers would have his readers believe. “Between May 2005 and November 2006, the prefecture of Seine-Saint-Denis took away badges from 72 employees suspected of being tied to Islamic terrorist circles” (“Bagagistes musulmans de Roissy” 2008). The badges in question allowed the workers entrance to “sensitive zones” of the airport, and their revocation was done in the name of “airport security.” These employees, most of whom were Muslim, had visited Pakistan and Afghanistan, which worried officials. The seventy-two employees were part of a larger group of two hundred staff members, “including baggage handlers and aircraft cleaners, [who] had been under surveillance for months by French police and intelligence services over security risks linked to terrorism” (“Paris airport bars seventy-two employees” 2006). In a subsequent court case, French officials defended the surveillance and badge revocation of these workers, insisting that the actions were based not on religious discrimination but, rather, on the “behavior” of the employees (“Bagagistes musulmans de Roissy” 2008). That said, as Daniel Saada, the legal representative for four of the baggage handlers, stated, “These employees were brought to the prefecture, where they were asked whether they were Muslim, whether they practice, whether any employees in their company were preachers, and, if so what their names are” (“Roissy” 2006).

Two kinds of court proceedings followed the revocation of the badges: administrative proceedings to clarify whether there was sufficient evidence to take away the employees’ badges and a trial to determine whether the badges
had been revoked as a result of religious discrimination. Several of the employees had their badges returned after the clarifying administrative hearings—a detail that does not appear in de Villiers’s narrative (“Bagagistes musulmans de Roissy” 2008; “Discrimination” 2008). One such employee’s case was even appealed up to the Conseil d’État, France’s high administrative court, which determined on February 2, 2007, that the employee posed no threat to the airport. That said, there was a delay in the implementation of the Conseil’s decision. As of April 26, 2007, the exonerated employee had not yet had all of his badge privileges returned, placing him at risk for company fines (“Bagagistes musulmans de Roissy” 2008; “Roissy” 2007). The discrimination case never saw the light of day: the public prosecutor’s office ultimately dismissed it with no further action, stating that the actions of officials in taking the workers’ badges “were in no way founded on the affiliation of those concerned with the Muslim religion” (“Bagagistes musulmans de Roissy” 2008).

The situation at Roissy was not an isolated event. A similar situation arose in 2007 when workers at a “sensitive military site” were denied access to their place of work (HALDE 2007, p. 114). The workers requested assistance from HALDE, an administrative agency that handles discrimination complaints, which examined the dossiers on the workers and discovered that the notes mentioned their religion and whether they were single, divorced, legitimate, illegitimate, and other personal details (HALDE 2007, p. 114). There was also, notably, mention that one of the two workers (who were brothers) was known to “be in connection with people implicated in Islamist milieus, notably due to his participation in a pilgrimage and conferences that included other people known to police services” (HALDE 2007, p. 32). Ultimately, HALDE proved hesitant to second-guess the military’s assessment of national security but recommended a new inquiry into the two young men’s case to make sure religious discrimination had not played a role in their dismissal.

Since 9/11, public officials in France and elsewhere, rightly or wrongly, have expressed concern that Muslim employees with access to planes or military zones might harbor sympathy for violent religious extremists. Peculiar to France, however, has been the drama over the “Fichier EDVIGE,” a project of President Sarkozy that was to create a massive police database to track the details about the private lives of politicians, union members, religious figures, and anyone else who was “likely to undermine public order.” The former French intelligence arm of the police, RG, had long collected data on individuals it suspected might want to harm the state. As a political adviser to Rama Yade noted, “It [RG] is the police in France who inform themselves on the state of the spirit of the French, on the activities of everyone. That does not exist in most other Western democracies.” In 2008, the RG was consolidated with the Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire, another police intelligence agency that focuses mainly on “counter-espionage and anti-terrorism,” together forming the new intelligence agency Direction Centrale du Renseignement Intérieur (Central Directorate of Domestic Intelligence; see Bremner 2008; “Création de la Direction
Centrale du Renseignement Intérieur” 2008). Interestingly, the Fichier EDVIGE could be used to track minors—specifically, anyone age thirteen and older.

Databases such as this have long existed in France, but they had never extended to recording information on so many people, across so many different roles in society, and at such young ages. The “private details” included names; addresses; photographs; distinguishing physical marks; and data on health, political orientation, philosophical orientation, sexual orientation, and religious belonging (“France scales back database plans after outcry” 2008). Unsurprisingly, there was a public outcry over EDVIGE: “Hundreds of associations, including the main judges’ union, civil liberties defenders, gay rights groups and leftwing lawyers have joined the anti-Edvige mutiny. Fifteen lawsuits have been filed against it at the Conseil d’État . . . and an online petition has gathered more than 100,000 signatures” (Bremner 2008). Politicians also spoke out against the database, including many leftists, as well as Rama Yade, a supporter of Sarkozy and a member of his cabinet.

Hélène Franco, a French political figure and the leader of a leftist legal association, also spoke out against EDVIGE. She was particularly concerned that data were being collected on youths and would be held indefinitely. She stated that EDVIGE was motivated by a “police logic [that] believes that a part of [France’s] youth, notably in poor neighborhoods, is a threat” (quoted in Chemin 2008a). Franco made her concern clear that EDVIGE was targeted at youths of the banlieues and that its data collection would haunt these youngsters as they aged and sought employment: “Once an adult, if this youth or this high school student applies for a job that requires an administrative inquiry, he will find himself going up against this data many years later” (quoted in Chemin 2008a).

Whether Franco intended to imply the connection or not, her observation that EDVIGE is targeted at youths in the banlieues, combined with its collection of data on religious affiliation, suggests that EDGIVE would have included information on Muslims in its database. As Franco argues, this is likely to have had a detrimental effect on their employment opportunities later in life. Given the experiences of Muslims working at Roissy, this does not seem to be an improbable scenario. If nothing else, it is clear that de Villiers is not the only French political elite concerned with keeping track of Muslims and their employment.

In 2008, EDVIGE was replaced by Exploitation Documentaire et Valorisation de l’Information Relative à la Sécurité Publique (EDVIRSP [Database on Information Relative to Public Security]), eliminating the tracking of health and sexual habits (Monrozier and Cognard 2008). However, the EDVIRSP retains the ability to collect data on minors and about religious affiliation.

How Muslims Discuss Employment in France

Meanwhile, how do Muslims talk about Muslims and employment? Muslims speak about a diversity of problems, causes, and proposed solutions. Responses include a variety of value statements, some of which are traditionally French
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(liberty, equality, socioeconomic independence, and success); some are subtle modifications of French values (respect, which is not necessarily the same thing as fraternity or equality); and some are less common to the French (ambition and hard work). Some Muslims even responded in a way that suggested a synthesis of the values of political equality and economic liberty, uncommon in a nation where these values are usually opposed across left-right political lines (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 77).

I first analyze a number of themes that repeatedly came up in discussions about employment. I then consider how the conversations about employment among French Muslims raise questions apart from those of the standard French “crisis of work” debate, such as, “What does equality mean in France?” and “How can it be achieved?”

Are there problems with employment in France? Not a single one of the Muslims interviewed here said no, but they did differ on the nature of these problems and whether certain problems were unique to Muslims. I discuss a few of these different responses here.

The first and most important subject that came up on the question of employment was discrimination against Muslims. When asked whether they had experienced discrimination in employment, a group of three young Muslim men, all of them journalists working at Respect Mag (two had Algerian parents, and one was black), answered in unison, “Yes!” They continued:

**Journalist 1:** But for the most part, it is hidden. You suppose it is there. You feel it, you guess, but you do not have any proof. You feel that there is a problem.

**Journalist 2:** My family name . . . does not sound Arabic, so I have used another first name on my curriculum vitae. I sent my CV once with my real first name and did not get a response; a second time, I used a fake first name and got a response. HALDE released a report saying [it could not find] anything—all that money spent for a report that says there is nothing wrong—because [discrimination] is not direct. You presume it; you feel it.

These responses suggest not only the pervasiveness of discrimination in employment but also its elusiveness. Created in 2004, HALDE exists to assist those who have been discriminated against and to promote equality. The commission “can be accessed by letter by all who believe they have been victims of discrimination, either directly or through a parliamentary intermediary. It can also be accessed, with the consent of the victim, by all associations” with the proper credentials, if that association exists for the purpose of fighting discrimination (HALDE 2007, p. 1). It also promises that all petitions will receive a “written response.” The commission can send cases to the Procureur de la République (the public prosecutor in a court of first instance), if it so chooses. Finally, HALDE also releases reports on the state of equality in France. In the
summary report of its main deliberations in 2007, the commission noted only one incident of religious discrimination in the workplace—that is, the story noted above about the workers who were denied access to a military zone. The report also noted fifty-four claims of religious discrimination in 2006 and 110 in 2007—1 percent and 2 percent of the overall discrimination claims during those years, respectively (HALDE 2007, p. 11). It is to this small number of discrimination claims that Journalist 2 was perhaps referring when he said, “All that money spent for a report that says there is nothing wrong.” HALDE’s assessment of discrimination does not match with the sense of discrimination these men experience in their lives in France. As Journalist 1 noted, however, it is not surprising that the number of reports of discrimination (religious and otherwise) is low. Discrimination, after all, is often a subtle affair that leaves few evidentiary traces.

By functioning as an intermediary between the state and the citizen, HALDE provides a sort of alternative dispute-resolution mechanism: rather than go to court, an individual can go the commission for assistance. In this sense, it epitomizes two trends in French politics: the creation of alternatives to litigation and the centralization of politics. HALDE has a mediation component and seeks to resolve disputes “amicably” when possible.

The journalists continued to discuss the difficulties of proving discrimination:

**Journalist 1**: What can you do? It is so hard to prove discrimination.

The first trial here happened recently. Their files were organized by race.

**Journalist 2**: It was Garnier. When they sent out a call for hostesses, they said they were looking for “BBR” hostesses.

It is true that the first trials for discrimination in France have been relatively recent. The ruling in 2009 by the Court of Cassation, France’s highest appeals court on nonadministrative matters, against Garnier upheld a 2007 ruling in a lower appeals court, and both amount to “the first time in France that blue-chip companies have been convicted of racial discrimination in hiring” (“Garnier, Adecco fined for racism” 2007; Sage 2009). Garnier, a division of L’Oréal, had given “coded instructions” to the Swiss employment agency Adecco “to find only young, white women for its [sales] counters in the capital” (“Garnier, Adecco fined for racism” 2007). The “code” that Garnier used was “BBR,” which stands for “bleu, blanc, rouge” (blue, white, red)—the colors of the French flag and a way to insinuate that Garnier was looking to hire only “authentic” French women. Compare this with the celebratory expression “Black-Blanc-Beur” (black, white, Arab) used to hail the ethnically diverse winning World Cup soccer team in 1998.

The prosecutors, arguing on behalf of SOS Racisme, which initiated the case, argued that “BBR” was a “racist code for excluding black, Arab or Asian women” (“Garnier, Adecco fined for racism” 2007; Sage 2009). Before the memo was
issued indicating that sales-counter workers should be “BBR,” nearly 39 percent of the candidate pool included racial minorities; in the end, though, just over 4.5 percent of the people hired for the jobs were racial minorities (Sage 2009).

When discussing employment discrimination, the CCIF focused on government agents investigating Muslims in their place of work. This was framed in terms of Islamophobia:

The most recent example is this famous agent of the RG who addressed an e-mail to the Regional Council of Rhône-Alpes, in which he asked, “Can you tell us if you have salaried employees, personnel in your workplace who are of a religion other than Christianity?” By “other than Christian,” we understand clearly that he was intending to target Muslims. What confirms this is that there was another question—“If you do indeed have such employees, thank you for indicating to us if they asked for work schedule arrangements to practice their religion.” They wanted to refer to what? Probably Muslims who want to say their Friday prayers in their little corner.

This indeed happened. On September 16, 2008, the Regional Council’s Department of Human Resources received such an e-mail, which the RG claimed was sent as part of a study being conducted “at the request of the Association of Mayors of France,” which the association has since “formally denied” (Durand-Parenti and Daniez 2008). A group of Muslim leaders, including Kamel Kabtane, rector of the Grande Mosquée de Lyon, responded, “We firmly condemn a discriminatory initiative that is totally illegal, contrary to republican values and the principle of laïcité” (quoted in “Enquête des RG au conseil régional” 2008). This response criticizes the actions of the RG as religious discrimination while reclaiming the “values of the republic”—values that, in the interpretation of this group of Muslim leaders, pair the fight against religious discrimination with laïcité.

But not all Muslims agree that laïcité in France is a partner in the fight against religious discrimination. For some of the women I spoke to, the issue of employment was complicated by attitudes toward the hijab in France, especially following the legislature’s determination in 2003 that wearing the hijab, in certain settings, is contrary to the French tradition of laïcité. As noted earlier in this volume, one Muslim interviewee claimed that when she starts looking for a job as a school instructor, she will need to take off her hijab. A different respondent who has already made the move to take off the hijab reiterated this view. The woman, who is French, Muslim, and the child of Algerian immigrants and who works in the field of education policy, explained what her life was like when she wore the hijab and what it is like since she stopped wearing it:

When I wore [the hijab], I lived Islamophobia. But now I am considered “integrated”—because of a meter of tissue. The person is the
same, but the appearance is different. There is intolerance, true intolerance.

Why did you decide to take [the hijab] off?
Because I could not have found work.

Really?
Yes, it is impossible. . . . Professionally, it is the end. I needed to make a decision between [the hijab] and my professional life.

Is it because you work in education policy?
No. Even a cleaning woman would be asked to take it off. It is not a question of what you do; it is a question of fear.

For all of the discrimination this interviewee claimed Muslims face, she went on to suggest that practicing Christians are even more likely to be ridiculed by coworkers. In her view, Islamophobia is only one part of the “fear” she is discussing: the French, she feels, are leery of religion in general:

I was friends with a professor of law . . . and he was a practicing Christian. He told me, “As soon as I tell people I practice, it is the end. They take me for a fool.” Because he was Christian. I remember that because the difficulties that Muslims face—intolerance, a wariness of those who believe in anything that is invisible. . . . It is not just Muslims! . . . Another student at the Sorbonne who seemed to be a practicing Christian expressed shame. She did not show [her religion or] speak of it, as if it were something one must hide. If we have a hobby or if we love soccer, we can talk about it easily. But if we go to church on Sunday, we are not going to say much about it, because people will ridicule you. In fact . . . it is easier to show that you are a Muslim than a practicing Christian, because that makes people look at you as if you’re an idiot.

This response highlights a second problem Muslims identify in the workplace: the response of other employees to Muslims. Sometimes this was expressed as hostility, as seen in the quote above. According to this respondent, Muslims, and the religious in general, are seen as somehow “foolish” and are made to feel ashamed for believing in anything supernatural. The fact that the respondent said it is even harder for a Christian suggests that Islam is somehow a forgivable mistake but that Christianity is insupportable.

Why might this be? The view that both Christianity and Islam are somehow aberrant could simply stem from distaste for religion in general. Figure 5.2, a photograph of an Anarchist Federation sticker, suggests that antireligious sentiment is present among some in France. The image shows a young man clutching his stomach and vomiting symbols that represent Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The caption reads, “Down with all religions!” But the interviewee suggested that some French people find greater fault specifically with those who practice Christianity than Islam. Given the declining rate of religiosity
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(especially Catholicism) in France, this view could be tied up in assumptions that religion is a thing of France’s past and that Muslims are still religious only because they are relative newcomers to the country.

Following this logic, another respondent, who converted to Islam later in life, stated that “the sanction can be more difficult” for those who convert because unlike those who grow up with Muslim parents, their religious affiliation “is not an accident. . . If I say, ‘I do not eat pork,’ since I am a convert, that is an explicit decision. It is something I choose, and that makes people more scared. It is not an accident. I do not do it to make my mom happy. I do it because I believe it.” The additional hostility this respondent describes suggests that purposeful religious practice, more evident in those who have converted than in those who (perhaps stereotypically) are assumed to be religious because of their

FIGURE 5.2 Anti-religion Anarchist Federation advertisement.
(Photograph by the author.)
family or immigrant background, is viewed with greater suspicion in France than casual membership in a religion.

But is the Muslim convert’s abstention from eating pork likely to be an issue in the workplace? Actually, this does become an issue for some Muslims in France. The response of other employees to Muslims is not always hostile. Sometimes it is expressed as anxiety, or nervousness and unease, concerning the presence of Muslims—or, in the terms used by the respondent who spoke about her Christian friends, “wariness.” Seemingly inconsequential rituals of everyday French life, from food in the company cafeteria to daily greetings, are not inconsequential for some Muslims, depending on how they practice their religion. This can produce moments of unease in the workplace. A leader of the JMF in Paris noted, “When people ask questions, they weigh their words—‘Do you want . . . coffee?’ . . . They’re trying to not hurt us; they are embarrassed. Some people are direct. That is better. But often there is that hesitation, that nervousness.” A fellow member of the association added that he is asked “lots of questions about fasting or Ramadan.” Some French people, it seems, are just not sure how Muslims eat and drink, and that can become awkward when food or drink are being shared.

A representative of the UJM in Lyon, an engineer, spoke about his difficulties in the company canteen. “What kind of meat is it? How has it been butchered?” he said, adding that such information is not provided in France. For a Muslim trying to eat a halal diet, this sort of information is important. “It becomes difficult when people want to drink and eat foie gras at company parties,” he said. “But why [won’t you eat it]?” they will ask me. ‘You’re educated; you’re modern!’” Calling Muslims uneducated or unmodern because some of them do not eat foie gras or drink alcohol is an indirect slight, and it is not part of the “company line.” The respondent indicated that such awkward moments of informal, worker-to-worker interaction were present even in greetings: unlike many French Muslims, the engineer was not comfortable sharing *bises*, the traditional kiss on each cheek performed as a greeting throughout France, with women. He shook their hands instead, which some women took as an insult or a sign that the man did not like them. His attempts to explain, such as, “The only woman I give *bises* to is my mother,” he said, did not always persuade women that he did not dislike them.

The third problem Muslims spoke about in regard to employment was both related and unrelated to being Muslim. Many respondents were keenly aware of how issues of class and race could play a role in employment difficulties and were occasionally impossible to disentangle from difficulties that arise from religious affiliation. As discussed in Chapter 4, French Muslims recognize the challenges of intersectionality. Think of the journalist at *Respect Mag* who sent in a CV with a “de-Arabized” first name. What was the exact reason for the expected discrimination? In other words, what are potential employers concerned about when an Arab-sounding name appears on a CV? Arabs? Muslims? Something they associate with either or both of those categories?
When asked whether Muslims have a harder time getting jobs than the rest of the French, a representative from the PMF said yes. His response, however, included a self-conscious assessment of the continued influence of the immigrant experience on the lives of Muslims in France:

You're a sociologist. You know. The parents arrive in France—it takes two, three generations to get to the middle class. When you're in a *foyer,* do not speak the language—it is true that there are quite a few Muslims in France who are not graduates, so already they have difficulties on the market. And this scratches at the ethnic problem. To be black is not a bonus, unless you play soccer. So there is that in addition. And if you are Muslim, that adds a black mark. It makes things harder.

It is important to end the stereotype that all Muslims are immigrants, but it would be an analytical mistake to ignore the immigration question when considering Muslims in France. Even some of those who did not personally live the immigrant experience continue to be affected by it. One Muslim respondent, born in France to Algerian immigrants, talked about growing up in a house with no books. Her parents did not read, but fortunately they understood the value of reading. The respondent’s mother took her and her siblings to the public library, where they could check out books, and a librarian read stories to them. Not all immigrant parents might think to do that or have the time to do it. (The respondent’s mother did not hold an outside job.) And it can be difficult to find a place to study in a small apartment, especially if the family is large. The response from the PMF member tied religion to immigration, class, race, and inferior education—not as a stereotype but as an attempt to explain the challenges Muslims face when it comes to employment. It is not religion alone that makes employment difficult for Muslims. The social positionality of many Muslims in France is inextricably tied to other groups that face their own challenges in the field of work.

The Muslim woman who took off her hijab to find a job made a similar remark: “The problems of certain immigrant families are the same as those of some other families, because they are at the same socioeconomic level. . . . It is more . . . There are problems that are relative to social class rather than immigrant origins.” Just as the problems that Muslims face cannot be reduced to their religious affiliation, the problems of immigration cannot be reduced to immigrant identities. Class continues to have an impact across these identities, and blaming employment problems solely on religion or immigration ignores this important social factor that Muslims and immigrants share with the rest of France’s working class.

For all of this discussion of discrimination, workplace unease, and the additional hurdles posed by racism and class inequality, some Muslims claimed not to have experienced discrimination in the workplace or hiring. Caitlin Killian’s interviews with North Africans and Muslims in France suggest two
potential reasons for this. First, they might refuse to identify racist discrimination as such as a way to maintain control; people cannot control the racism of others, but they can “refus[e] to let it bother them” (Killian 2006, p. 192). Second, Muslim and North African women often view themselves as privileged compared with their male counterparts, as Arab men may be seen as dangerous, as a threat to French women or the job security of the rest of France (Killian 2006, pp. 71–72). These women may view their workplace difficulties as less serious by comparison or even discount them entirely.

There are additional reasons that some Muslims claim not to have experienced racism in hiring or in the workplace (and perhaps more than one of these explanations may be present in any given case). The leader of the JMF who talked about his coworkers’ delicacy because of his religion said that “for scientists, it is a bit different. Working in a bank, it is another thing. For scientists, when your job is very specific, you are not really visible to society. To those working in marketing, it must be very, very different. I did not have a problem, I got a job immediately after finishing school.” His comments suggest an awareness that jobs that entail being seen by clients (as opposed to, for example, working anonymously in a lab) tend to include more discriminatory practices in hiring. The Garnier trial confirms this notion, particularly the accusation by the prosecution that Garnier assumed most French people would not want to buy hair-care products from an Arab, black, or Asian salesperson (Sage 2009).

And for all the difficulties female Muslim respondents have when it comes to the hijab, one female member of the EMF, a convert to Islam who wears a hijab, said that she had never experienced a problem in the workplace:

I used to work in the summers in Haute-Savoie. When the immigrants went back home to their home countries, the students picked up the slack. It was factory work. Did you ever have problems in the factory because you were Muslim?

Oh no. My name is [a common French name], which does not say much, and I wore my foulard as a bandana. For them, it was legitimate. I had my shirtsleeves rolled up (laughs). So, no, but because it did not really show.

In this instance, the respondent acknowledged that her untroubled experiences at work were due to the “invisibility” of her religious affiliation. Because of her pale complexion and, as she pointed out, her French name, no one suspected she was Muslim, and the factory workers’ typical outfit permitted her to cover her head inconspicuously, without any questions (which was probably also due to the fact that few realized she was Muslim in the first place). This illustrates common assumptions in France about who is Muslim and the ability of those who do not fit the description to pass under the radar in the workplace.

This respondent’s awareness of her different status as a white French person with a French-sounding name, coupled with her efforts to manipulate the identity
assumptions of others (i.e., that they would not think she was Muslim, that the “bandana” would be read as “factory worker”), is reminiscent of the “passing” that Kitty Calavita (2000) discusses in her work on Chinese immigration into the United States. Calavita highlights how savvy Chinese immigrants who were aware of the U.S. preference for upper-class Chinese migrants carefully constructed a look that matched confusing, ignorant, and prejudiced bureaucratic instructions about what a merchant or other upper-class Chinese person supposedly looked like. “Such ‘impression management’ was central to the efforts of the Chinese to pass inspection, as they not only sought to control expressions of their identity but also sometimes consciously appropriated and displayed the ‘identity tags’ that inspectors had come to rely on” (Calavita 2000, p. 10). The JMF leader simply did not appear before clients; the EMF member, meanwhile, managed the impressions others had of her to appear neutral to them—in other words, she muted her outward appearance as a Muslim and had no trouble in the factory.

Finally, one Muslim respondent maintained that immigrants are “all employed,” regardless of religion. As such, there was no discrimination problem against immigrants, even if they are Muslims. This respondent, who was also a student member of the EMF, had immigrated to France from Algeria six years earlier. As he described how he saw the employment situation, the EMF member who had so carefully managed her appearance in her summer job occasionally interrupted to disagree:

**Student 1**: Look at the numbers. When you look at immigrants, they are rarely unemployed!

**Student 2**: (Groans.)

**Student 1**: They all have jobs. They are not like the French, who have difficulties finding work. They get all sorts of social assistance. Their children, they are educated. So what I think is that at the end of the month, a good portion of immigrants have full pockets. Full of money.

**Student 2**: Oh, full. ([Speaks in a sarcastic tone and utters faint sounds of disagreement.]) . . . These people, at the end of their lives, they are going to have completely broken backs.

**Student 1**: No, but that, no, what we need to say is . . .

**Student 2**: Excuse me for interrupting, but . . . I agree with him that the people who come to this country do OK for themselves. But their children, the generation that comes after them, . . . We need to avoid generalities, but they are less motivated to work as their parents worked. There really is a difference between those who are born in France and those who are considered to still be immigrants. They know where they are from, and they know the opportunities that come with that.

This spontaneous debate is fascinating for three reasons. The first is that it displays disagreement among Muslims on the subject of employment. The
second is that the female EMF member is constantly thinking of the term “immigrant” as a social construction, aware that many French people will talk about “immigrants” when they are in fact referring to the children and grandchildren of immigrants. The third is that it highlights different expectations that Muslims have when it comes to employment. These expectations are not simply limited to employment, and I argue that there are generational patterns in these expectations.

I argued in Chapter 1 that young Muslims have a different notion of French citizenship—thoroughly convinced of their Frenchness, they do not want to hide their religion in the private sphere and feel entitled to claim a plural identity. It is not necessarily their youth that breeds this new interpretation of French citizenship. It is their association with a generation of Muslims who were born in France or even born of French parents. This generation of Muslims feels thoroughly French and therefore entitled to all of the rights and liberties they associate with that—rights that sometimes extend beyond the contemporary dominant discourse on French citizenship. These French Muslims also expect the quality of life that they believe comes with being educated in France: not just fluent but native in the language, culture, and history of France and bearing degrees from French institutions of higher education, these Muslims expect good jobs. As the female EMF respondent argued, the children of immigrants “are less motivated to work as their parents worked.” In other words, they are unwilling to do the kind of “back-breaking” manual labor that many of France’s immigrants do. Her comment that the children of immigrants “know where they are from” echoes this notion that Muslims born in France feel entitled to a better life and greater equality: knowing that one is from France means knowing that one should be treated like the rest of the French. If someone has a French education, she implies, of course she or he will be unwilling to work the same jobs her or his parents did—immigrant parents who potentially had no education. While the male respondent who was a recent immigrant thought immigrants to France regardless of religion had a good life overall, earning more money than they ever would in their home countries, the female respondent, a “française de souche” (see Chapter 4), refused to accept such menial conditions as “good.” For her, there was no backdrop of comparison to how things would be in another country. There was only comparison between the potential one has as a French citizen and the reality one lives. In this light, it is not surprising that she would be less quiescent about the employment conditions of immigrants, and of Muslims.

Conclusion

It is difficult to sum up Muslims’ views on employment in France, given their diversity. As Chapter 3 indicated, some French Muslims believe in fighting directly against discrimination, while others believe they need to “wait it out,” or rely on the power of liberal entrepreneurialism to bring about greater equality. Some Muslims even blend their responses, maintaining that both are necessary.
Stated differently, some Muslims prefer to synthesize the values of political equality and economic liberalism.

This synthesis is interesting for a number of reasons. First, Brouard and Tiberj (2005) tell us that most French people oppose the values of economic liberty and political equality, seeing the two as mutually exclusive options pursued by the right and left, respectively. It is peculiar, then, to see these values combined. Second, this combination of the values of economic liberty and political equality that we find among some Muslims is based on traditional French values, but with some unique twists. Equality, after all, is part of the liberté-égalité-fraternité triad that is supposed to drive all French politics. And “being independent, making it on one’s own” is considered a socioeconomic value by 84 percent of the French (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 73).

Yet this synthesis of political equality and economic liberty is also based on some values that are not typically “French.” The connection some Muslim respondents make between hard work and success is not a thoroughly French value, as only 55 percent of the French believe that “ambition” and “working hard to succeed” are important (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, p. 73). And some Muslim discussions about employment in France suggest a rhetoric of respect, which is not exactly the same thing as equality. For Muslims who know formal legal equality yet face ridicule and unofficial discrimination in employment, this distinction is not one of irrelevant minutaie.

This distinction brings us back to Marx’s persistent complaint that rights liberate the abstract, public citizen while perpetuating social and economic inequality. Is it possible to respect the public citizen while reviling the private citizen—and is it possible to keep up the charade when the reviled citizen begins to bring elements of that which is “private” into the public? The notion of fraternity is an important French value. Yet fraternity is based on commonality (from the Latin frater, implying a common mother), whereas respect challenges people to find worth in that which may be different. And the pursuit of respect potentially begets discussions about subjects the French traditionally prefer to keep out of the public sphere—specifically, religion. In short, on the subject of employment, Muslims are of many minds, and some combine very French values in an unusual way, yielding subtle modifications that ask us to rethink, but not reject, the terms of French public coexistence.