

THE CRISIS OF MUSLIM IDENTITY IN SECULAR FRANCE: CHALLENGES AND A WAY FORWARD

Sidra Ahmed

ABSTRACT

Contemporary Europe is primarily identified as one of the heterogeneities inserted into a multicultural, secular mega state. The transformation of a culturally intact Europe into a multicultural and multiethnic entity began during 1950s with the immigration of workers and labors, largely from Muslim countries of Africa and Asia, took place. The article specifically inquires about the case of France where the second largest religion is Islam. In France, the word Muslim and Islam often referred to a collective identity which is not limited to the mosque attendance and rituals only, but rather projected as a threat to the secular identity of France. France introduced two ideals of integration, i.e. Universalism and the French model of Secularism 'Laïcité' to absorb the immigrants into social and public spheres. The French populist leaders, scholars, and media view Muslim community as a challenge to the secularist ideal because of its reluctance to espouse the secular values. Incidents and law-making specific to the use of Islamic symbols, association of young/ indigenous Muslims with terrorist network like ISIS, involvement of French Muslims in Paris attack and the economic dispossession of Muslim community are the main reasons for Muslims failing integration in secular France.

Keywords: Identity; Secularism – Laïcité; Universalism; Assimilation.

INTRODUCTION

The population of 739.495 million European people (De Wulf, 2016) has made this region a beautiful combination of vibrant and dynamic languages, ethnicities, and religions. The multiethnic, multilingual, and multi religious blend of the region is a source of pride as well as disputation for European nation. Previously these various communities from various cultures and faiths were considered as a strength and hope of Europe's future, but now it has become a reason for clash of identities within its safest political realm. This amalgamation of identities and culture is not just a reason to celebrate but also haul a serious concern to the conception of multiculturalism, cultural assimilation and above all the secularism.

Europe's unique silhouettes 'whiteness' and 'Christian club' has daunted its non-white and non-Christian segments of population, particularly to the France which is hosting the largest pool of Muslim residents and immigrants both. The prevailing assertiveness of Muslims in public and social sphere is a challenge to the French notion of secularism on the basis of which France's abandonment of religion was inculcated. The Muslim population in France is around 4.7 million which makes only 8-9 % of its entire population (Hackett, 2017). Islam is regarded as "second religion" next to Catholicism, and it has more devotees than the next three non-Catholic minorities, which are a total of 600,000 Jews, 800,000 Protestants, and 150,000–500,000 Buddhists (World Population Review, 2019). Muslims hailed from a wide range of nations speak various languages and follow different cultural practices and despite of the numbers, the Muslim community is not culturally homogenous as well as not well-observed into its own network in France. There is an escalating tension between the native population and the Muslim community, as established by different surveys and evidences from last few years, a large number of French citizens (especially French born and aged between 16-25, get motivated to leave their native land to become ISIS fighters.

Background of the Problem

In order to understand the problem, the resurgence of ethnonationalist forces and the rise of Right-Wing politics in France must be taken in account. The significant yet unexpected triumph of the France National Front (recently re-named as National Rally) in European Union elections in the year 2014 brushed away the leftists, and, strengthened the anti-immigrant and anti-European Union narrative nationwide (The Economic Times, 2014). Moreover the involvement of Muslim citizens in terrorist attacks in Charlie Hebdo in Paris (Jan 7, 2015), Paris attack (Nov 13, 2015) and Nice (July 14, 2016) further supported the fact that the model of French secularism and assimilation has failed to respond to the problem of assimilation and absorption of Muslims into the mainstream (Foster, 2017). Another reason to defy could be the dual testing of Muslims' loyalty towards France when they not only had to prove their loyalty to the state but also whenever some anti-state activity was done by their Muslim fellows they have to subjugate their religious identity to the French version of Secularism which requires the absolute withdraw from religiosity (Laurence & Vaisse, 2016).

Governments in France seem hesitant to recognize the need for improving Muslims' integration and assimilation process. French policymakers, politicians and media quickly deplore the failure of Muslim

community despite of reviewing the policies of making them up a productive part of their society (Laurence & Vaisse, 2016). The situation is a bit complex because on the one side the leftist political analysts, as a spokesperson of cultural assimilation, support the multiculturalism and socio-political fusion, but on the other side, the expansion rate of Muslim minority and its perceived ratio is a subject of much speculation and political maneuvering for the extreme rightists. A very baffling and astounding prediction that “France will be a Muslim country by 2020” was once printed on the campaign posters of the leading Far-Right party, France National Front. Tahir (2005), asserts that this campaign attracted much intimidation from French natives for whom secularism is sacred and absolute.

The discourse of incompatibility of Islam to the liberal values in France turned out more serious. Though National Front’s Marine Le Pen was defeated in 2017 presidential elections, the anti – Islamic, anti-Muslim, and anti- immigrant rhetoric is still significant in French political discourse Cesari and Casanova (2017). Some studies show that nearly 2,000 French citizens (Waters, 2016), were left to fight in the Middle East on behalf of the Islamic State during the period of past three years. McLoughlin and Cesari (2016) assert that those who left for ISIS were primarily indentified as young French citizens from first- or second-generation immigrant families, mostly men from middle class background. Reacting to these findings the leading far-right political parties demanded to expel all Muslims immigrants from France and has fervently declared this goal in public speeches and policy statements through Marine Le Pen, the second runner up of presidential election 2017. Previously the attacks on Charlie Hebdo in January 2015 (Waters, 2016) and the terrorist attacks in northeastern Paris in November 2016 further intensified Le Pen’s anti-Muslim oratory as well as the fear of radicalization of French society (ibid).

In overall struggle of preserving the liberal, secular profile of France three most important factors have been figured out: The war on terror, *salfanization* of Islamic thinking and use of Islamic symbols in public life, and the third factor is about France’s own version of secularism ‘*Laïcité*’. All three reasons seem interconnected, deemed as an enduring threat to France’s secular identity. In order to offset the growing influence of Islam and Muslims, some hasty initiatives were taken through the policy making and court rulings, including the ban on hijab /niqab, expulsion of imams, limitations on the building of mosques, and others. In order to justify the immigration policies and to avoid the notion of religious equality, the

French political debates make out the Muslim question as a cause of problem, not the victims. Secularism is the idiom used by all political actors to mention the Islamic problem whereas Islam is perceived as a challenger to the shared history and national memory of the France.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Due to the constant changes in the nature and structure of contemporary societies it is difficult to integrate their members. Ethnic groups have to respond in an active or passive way either by adoption or through isolation, segregation, and alienation. In any case, social integration remains a challenge for the government of host societies. The process of social integration is a way to incorporate the minorities and the newcomers into the social setup. Early theorist in the field of sociology Durkheim in his classic work *Social Integration* concluded that the suicide rates are higher in case of social alienation and divorces in marriage (Durkheim, 1897). Members who are least integrated into and out of their groups cause and/or experience the problems in building up their association and loyalty to wards state and at the community levels. The three folded social integration, economic integration, and identity integration usually shapeup the socio-political movements as well as conflicts, in the societies which are comprised of immigrants. Higher social integration brings together the various ethnic groups from different race, religion, and cultures, it leads to assimilation and consistence and reduce the chances of social judgment, alienation, and identity crisis. The governmental policies and state structures have a great deal in the integration process. Here in the case of France, the level of Muslim integration, assimilation, and the problem of having a Muslim identity will elucidate the reasons behind the crisis.

Identity in Defy

Europe in its absolute phase of modernity and cultural connectivity seems more entrapped into an acute kind of Identity crisis. Besides many subsidiary reasons, globalization and multiculturalism are identified as the major reasons behind this problematic state of identity which is difficult to shut down. The ideological borders have been dissolved, the cultural identities are swapped, and the thought process has been molded and modified. Apparently, no signs of reversal, alteration or even halting are observed in this process of cultural dissemination. Bauman quoted this as innate tendency of Europe to assume the rest of the world as its “playground” (Bauman, 2004). Because of the grand cultural evolution and massive intellectual transition Europe has transformed into a dynamic

region which is a dream destination for emigrants, immigrants, and other out-groups. Numerous factors contributed to Europe's confusion; for many, the globalization and its actors have brought new economic openings and opportunities, at the same time it is compelling the weaker nations and groups within Europe in a vague state of anxiety and insecurity. European borders have been dissolved physically, politically, and economically because of the adaptation and reinforcement of European Union's integration policies. The process further brought mixed results by encouraging people to sacrifice their national, ethnic, or religious identities and to put European identity first rather than a British, French, Christian, Jews, or even as non-European.

The situation has become more obscured because of the continuous and irregular growth of immigrant population. The incidents of terrorism in France and the rise of far-right politics divulge the truth that identity confusion, racism and social anxiety has been penetrated into the most diversified society like France where the debate of national identity erosion has remain as a matter of great concern. This further coupled with economic challenges like; economic insecurity, unemployment, and economic saturation because of the presence of immigrants. The constant and heavy influx of immigrants from war torn Middle Eastern countries and poor economies of Asia and Africa further intimidated the French citizens, as their state is already hosting immigrants from different eastern European countries. The whole scenario expound that not only France has trouble adjusting to global pluralism, but also the non-rooted people who are displaced from their native lands, combating fear, hatred, and socio-cultural alienation in their host country (Bauman, 2004).

The amalgamation of indigenous and foreign cultural groups in a single country has become an unavoidable reality of contemporary fractured societies. In the midst of hatred and marginalization the familiarity, similarity and integrity are seeking through the assemblage of diverse groups in their distinct dominions. Balibar (2013), opined about the policy and system of segregation on racial and cultural grounds in the process of globalization, it clearly and powerfully manifests the shift of traditional narrative of the *external enemy* in Europe being replaced by that of the modern time's *internal enemy*. The level of uncertainty and insecurity has investigated in accordance to the level of incapability of Muslim (immigrants, natives, or long-time settlers) integration into wider European society to the degree set by European natives. France is considered as a

unique test case out of all European countries for this identity malfunctioning. Several incidents have been reported during a decade long period that could verify the fearful supposition of internal enemy, importantly the French ban on *Hijab* in public schools in 2004, the riots in 2005 in the banlieues, the gearing up of ethnonationalist politics, the heated public debates over the migration and citizenship matters and now the recent wave of ISIS recruitment from young French born Muslim citizen. All these recent developments caused an absolute rampant over Muslims for their inability to integration and assimilation. Consequently, France has been viewed by the rest of the world as a trend-setter or a decisive factor for such issues may instill anywhere in Europe. The case of France is extraordinary because here the French identity clashes directly with the Islamic & Muslim identity of non- secular, non-European outsiders from Muslim countries of Africa and Asia. The intense discourse surrounds the two-fold description:

- The absolute French identity (i.e. universal and secular in nature)
- Explicit Muslim identity (which is in a constant pursuit of public recognition and approval) (Webster, 2007).

The Stumbling Block to Integration and Assimilation:

The Western countries have adopted various policies in order to deal with the challenges of diverse cultures and identities. Each approach for assimilation and integration is unique in one way but offering a lot from its own horizon. Various models have been implemented for cultural and political absorption and assimilation to deal with the exigent phase of globalization where the identity and individuality of natives and immigration tumbled. The most debated ideas of assimilation have been British, Dutch and French because of their strict and to some extent consummate kind of merits, yet they still present good examples of difference of European approaches towards assimilation. Some major approaches are highlighted below:

- Canada adopted the policy of *cultural mosaic*
- The Germans favored the *leitkultur* (i.e. core culture)
- Norway assumed a more multihued policy *fargerik fellesskap* (i.e. colorful community)
- Americans put forward with the metaphor *melting pot*

The pragmatic Multiculturalism approach in Britain, has historically originated from the Anglo-Saxon tradition of individual rights. It is a

traditional approach based on the merit of individual rights further extended to the collective choice and the rights for minority in order to safeguard them from oppression and subjugation of majority. The public space is regarded as a free space in Britain where people are free to maneuver their fair share of political and social weight on government. People would circumspect the rules & regulation that may affect the minority or individual rights. The Muslim Council of Britain is a well-known and powerful minority network which actively participates and influences the national politics.

Bruce Bawer in his book *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam is Destroying the West* (2007) stated that in Holland, “*Verzuiling*” or pillarization is the system which secures the right of the individual. The idea of societal division in Holland is based on religious and ethnic subgroups, they emphasized on the observance of *separate but equal* approach for integration (Bawer, 2007). Because of the pillarization of Dutch society and the internal division of ethnicity and religion the people would interact truly little with the members of other groups. The Dutch public space is also considered as a *free space* just like the British model of integration, endorsed rule of freedom and tolerance, numerous freedom spheres have been created without much overlapping. The assessment of the traditional pillars of Dutch society is mainly constructed on people’s religious and political affiliations. Catholic, Protestant, liberal, and social democratic, each division has its reserved hospitals, schools, political association, and even separate Print and Electronic Media channels. With more pillars inclusive to the system the more it is strained, making it almost impossible to ensure the provision of “*separate but equal*” for everyone (Waters, 2016).

Contrary to the British and Dutch ideals, the French approach is unapologetically “assimilationist”. It manifests assimilation as the absolute way for safeguarding the universal rights from the dominance of the minority. The supremacy of Universal rights is unquestionable, and all the individuals and groups are subjugated to this principle. Bowen (2007), accentuates the citizen’s mutual agreement on basic values while living together in a culturally and ethnically diverse society like France. In order to operate and assimilate well in public sphere the basic values and code of conducts must be enforced and obliged. The public space is the prime space mutually and indiscriminately shared by all citizens, the general interests and common ideals are valued and practiced solely for collective

diversity. Looking close to this model one could understand the clear conditions and powerful checks on acceptable and unacceptable expressions within that free space. The unchallengeable models of human rights and secularism crafted a more tightened public space in France than its other European counterparts.

Universalism and Laïcité: The French ideals of Integration and Secularism

To understand the entire crisis, one has to understand the merits of integration France possess and why such an idea seems having a stern failure in marking a success. Universalism and Laïcité are the two ideals on which French states bolsters its policies. Universalism sounds like a French way to say “*My way or the highway*” as its core values advocate the French tyranny, while laïcité is considered as French Civil Religion. There is a need to understand both separately.

The French politics of integration regarded as a systematic framework of public values, social institutions, and political merits. The non-rooted groups are believed to conform, subjugate, and then assimilate through the specified mechanism. The problem in assimilation arises due to the lack of a definitive benchmark. Because of the frequent addition of new actors and expressions in public space the process of alterations in the presumed system as well as in the set of values always persist, which further baffled the situation. Furthermore, the French model of universalism is not ample and effectual enough to provide a workable and acceptable framework for other ethnicities. Specifically, some set of values to deal with differences with the Islam is neglected and that entails more of individual and public demonstrations. The French Republic guarantees equality of universal rights for all citizens, but also demands for voluntary submission to the secularism. This blindness to the religious and cultural differences sets a high risk of assimilation failure; hence lead the people from powerful cultures to the politics of denial, social alienation, and cultural bewilderment. The declaration of universalism (i.e. equality of universal rights for individual citizen) requires the people of faith to be value-free. The compulsion of submitting to the French secular values manifest a kind of tyrannical mode in a free, secular, and liberal France.

In her book “*The crisis of French Universalism*”, Naomi Schor defends universalism by declaring it as opposite of particularism, e.g. particular ethnicity, religion, nation. She explains that Universalism is constructed on a principle that rational human nature was universal, that is why it is

unreceptive to religious, cultural, and historical incongruities. Extending through all human culture and history Universalism proposed as identical, ahead of particularity of distinct cultures & identities (Schor, 2001). Sociologist Veit Bader explained the reasoning, equality, and universal human liberty as the epitome of French Universalism which supersedes supremacy of languages and identity of dominant cultures (Bader, 1997).

Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Hagendoorn in their award-winning book, *“When life ways collide: Multiculturalism and its discontents in Netherlands”* argued about the conflicts of Western made multiculturalism with the non-European values. There is Universalism which offers anyone who adheres to the State’s values of universality and equality can become French. On surface this seems simple because through recognizing the dominant cultural values and political ideals of French State, immigrants opt for French citizenship. Underlying reason of disagreement is that majority in France embrace the historically shared universal values, not considering the cultural and religious dissimilarities and expectation, left the minority with a feeling of being uncared and unrecognized. This is how the French approach of assimilation is unique from British or Dutch model of multiculturalism which gives much consideration to the diversity and dissimilarity. The French immigration policies tend to assimilate difference in the name of a single French nation (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Hagendoorn, 2007). Eschewing the private identity into public place is an exclusive French thing, forcing the Muslim minority to assert and affirm their individual Identity on the basis of their ethno-religious basis.

Besides universalism being hard and unapologetic on religious expression in public spheres, the French notion of secularism *Laïcité* is rather a serious predicament. Explained by Bowen in his book *Why the French don’t like headscarves: Islam, the State and Public Space* that *laïcité* is actually the direct corollary of the France’s final conquest over the absolute source of power and truth i.e. the religion, church and clergy (Bowen, 2007). All over the course of history Europe had contested with the religiosity of society and the supremacy of church and clergy. Its political muddling and high length wars had mainly rooted out of religion. *Laïcité* as a unique yet stern concept of secularism has been considered by many critics as a reactionary product of France’s troublous history. The French thinkers designed the law of *Laïcité* in 1905 to keep religion entirely out of public life, not even a slightest silhouette. *Laïcité*, a framework adopted after the violent struggle to rule out the tyranny of Roman Catholic

Church, is an emblem of State subjugation of religion and the exclusion of faith from every level of public space (The Economist, 2004).

The French ambassador to London Sylvie Bermann in an interview to BBC Radio 4 in 2016 regarded the secular system as bedrock of France national identity (Evans, 2016). The law of *Laïcité* deciphers a permanent disconnection of religion with the matters of the state and public life both. Now this disconnection of church and society has become totally incorporated with the French society and its governance mechanism. The constitution of 1958 referred *Laïcité* as the absolute secular form of the governance extent to public education and the general public sphere, to limit the religion in private life. Because of Muslims innate religious assertiveness, as well as, the ethnonationalist drives this community has become a big deal for governments. More attention and efforts are made to balance religious and secularism now drawn to Islam and Muslims. The governments in France favor the existence and coexistence of Muslims on their land under the banner of *Laïcité*. The dispute among Islam and the West does not only involve two different modes of life, but also the clash of two powerfully different identities and their different orientations toward modernity (Gole, 2006).

The identity clash in reality is a collision of two opposite faiths; religion (divinity) and secularism (profanity). Unlike the Muslim and Jewish societies, the public demonstration of faith has never been obligatory in Europe and this is the reason that secularism worked well in neutralizing the division between secular and religious forces. The Muslims and Jews engross public expression of their faith favored and supported by the state's ruling; therefore, it is impossible to organize and integrate them on nonreligious basis. *Laïcité*, culturally accustomed with Christian forms of précised and organized religion that does not entail public demonstration and validation. As per Islamic teachings the faith is not all about meditation, the explicit public action and constant reinforcement of such actions is also a mandatory part of Islamic belief. This is the point where the major conflict between *laïcité* and Islam begins. The various bans on the use of Islamic symbols and the laws made to restrict Muslims public outlook did not bring much success. Islam has entered into French public realm in the midst of hardcore confrontation with secularization.

The Clash of Faith and Identity

It appears that *Laïcité* is a fundamental ruling to maintain the value-neutrality of the federal and civic spheres, but when analyzing its historical evolution the cracks within its façade of impartiality would reveal. As discussed above that the model was originated as an outcome of century's

long religious upheavals and power struggle among Christian groups in France. Therefore, the meticulous Christian religious traditions and political concepts were fashioned with the same strength of religious neutrality in the matters of State. But the interesting thing to be noted is that *laïcité* in France is more associated with Christianity than is apparent at initial coverage. Jytte Klausen, in his book *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe* stated that apart from the fact that a major decline reported in active practicing Christians and the church attendance among Europeans, many recent polls validates a reasonably higher level of religious belief, identifying oneself with religion and using religious idioms in daily life, exhibits Europeans' passive inclination towards Christianity (Klausen, 2005).

Apparently, it seems that the role of religion in European societies, including France, has been reduced to the low. Religion has lost the pedestal in the institutional power and political representation and the people encode more secular values to their collective life. But the facts are different; meanwhile the younger Muslim generation in France has been raised as force to assert its personal and collective identity to endorse its individuality. Islamic radicalism is not just extension to religious orthodoxy, but a new way of interpreting the religion and religious lifestyle. Muslims deprived of rooted-cultures demands for well crafted connection between religious faith and collective identity as a substitute of their cultural deficit. For one devotee the religion is name of submitting to Muslim faith, not really a way forward to uphold an identity for some social or political purpose. Whereas there might be another devotee who opted for extremism based on the personal choice or for the desire of collective identity. This later version is termed as politicization of faith when one person is rationally convinced to become Islamist by means of a socialization process and seminal practices in the society, he is member of. As observed in modern day France, Islamic explanation are taken into account into three different directions: (i) fueling up ethnonationalist sentiments so that the majority may feel vulnerable, not just the Muslim minority, (ii) the socio-political and cultural manacles to confirm and conform the ideals of universalism and *Laïcité*, (iii) Muslim community may remain futile to receive mainstream approval for its distinct identity.

The Challenges and a Way Forward

Just like any other political ideology secularism has to deal with the quandary. The scholarships on secularism contain both pro and anti statements but this article exclusively look for the contesting and contradicting areas and aspects of secularism. The principal question is

about the myth of *value neutrality* which often got disapproved by the anti-secular forces, especially by the people who assume their religious identity as a lifeline for their socio-political survival. Sometimes a minority group feels more threatened of losing their identity and become uncounted in an alien society or being victimized for holding a certain identity to which the majority itself is scared of. Some of the challenges are discussed briefly to understand the whole twisted scenario.

- France's own version of secularism inherited its own kind of contradictions. In a pursuit of detaching the faith from all public spheres it has made religion even more blazing talk of the town. The religious obligations including prayers, diet, dress, socialization, are considered as crisis of the universality of *Laïcité* as well as the political observance of secularism. Only because Muslims are more passionate about asserting their power through religious posture, they are more under fire than any other minority. Just like Islam is for the Muslims, *Laïcité* is for the French people. This law is more than just a matter of law and legality; it is rather morphed into the identity marker of the France and for which the whole nation entailed to observe as an abiding citizen.
- Before the influx of Muslim immigrants to the French land, *Laïcité* was one successful secular model that had educated the diverse in-groups to coexist without bothering the faith. The contradictions began to rise with the frequent and out of nowhere contact with an alien civilization. Increasing number of Muslims raise the law and order and the security issues combine with xenophobia and Islamophobia. Eventually *Laïcité* transformed the Muslims from aliens into enemies inside and outside the France. Muslims are contemplated as a threat to the hard-core liberal values of France. They are further blamed for the downgrading socio-economic order, like; the rise of reactionary far right politics, radicalization of youth, xenophobia, unemployment, alienation, or ghettoization of some major urban areas including Paris. Outside France the un-integrated Muslims are viewed as a threat to ponder because of the rise and spread of violent Islamic activism that may fly to other countries of the European region.
- The duo rift and the externalization of Muslim ethnic group from the mainstream deeply mitigated the process and policies of amalgamation in France. The norm of universality befalls under a question when the cultural diversity and the acquisition of citizenship are doubted (Piser, 2018).

- The law of 1872 has been interpreted by many analysts as a set of rules for making the minorities invisible as it does not allow to collect the details of French people based on their ethnic, racial, or religious belonging. Further in an affirmation to *Laïcité* the French Republic is prohibited to apply any official distinction of race and religion therefore it is not easy to analyze the data available on minorities. This law is not applicable on surveys and polls and a marketing company named *Solis' indicators*, according to the world population review report. Though the census and other polls do not ask about people's race and religion some groups including Muslims, Romans, Blacks, and others still believe that they have been discriminated for their faith or race.
- Another big challenge is how to accommodate the large number of Muslim youths in France. The community is basically a self-segregated among ethnic or religious lines, low-skilled, and less-educated. Young Muslims with such a frail social profile and low self-esteem are vulnerable enough to betray from the common loyalty to French state and the secular system. Formerly an almost invisible and inactive minority of a larger society is now a visible reality of France metropolis. The task of assimilating Muslims into secular France is a stumbling block on the way of French national myth i.e. *the colorblind society* (ibid.).

RESEARCH SUMMARY AND POLICY SUGGESTIONS

With reference to the theory of social integration, one may safely conclude that the crisis of identity among out-groups and the challenges associated with the process of integration depends very much up on the political and social framework of the society. Some suggestions are formed in the light of the theoretical framework as well as the discussion part.

- One of the problems is absence of commonly accepted definition of French *laïcité*. The book *Les sept laïcités françaises. Le modèle français de laïcité n'existe pas*, authored by Jean Baubérot in 2016 has listed seven different interpretations of it. This book reveals that the changes and evolution in the society demands the changes in the meaning and function of *Laïcité* (Baubérot, 2016; Zwillling, 2017). It is suggested that due to the change in the religious landscape in France and the presence of Islam as second religion, *Laïcité* needs to be evolved and redefined its principles.

- As discussed earlier that in France it is legally forbidden to question about religious affiliation during demographic studies, that is why official religious data is not available. The only medium to collect the data is through survey conducted by specialized private institutes. With increasing immigrant population from Muslim countries, it would be helpful to the government and the ministry for integration and social welfare to get official statistics for making provision in immigrants' policy of rehabilitation and integration.
- As the important traditional religious groups of French politics are diminishing, much attention is being shedding to minority groups including the religious ones. Among all Islamic groups are emerging as more active, famous, and vibrant. Therefore, the relationship and incorporation of religion and politics could enhance the social and political integration.
- Despite of Laïcité as the legal framework, the civil organizations still operate upon Christian schema. The bank holidays fall on catholic feast, the official holiday is Sunday, hospitals often restrain chapel of monarchial times, many restaurants offer fish on Fridays. Christianity is removed from constitution, but it is visibly or invisibly penetrated into local organizational structure, yet the French society only debate and raise objections on the public practices of other religions. This duality needs to be addressed in a society recently competing with the effects of religious diversity.
- Though the awful anti- immigrant, anti-Islamic movement and the inciting statements from French Right-Wing politicians put much suspicion and negativity, one positive thing could come out of it; attention drawn to sufficient rise of Muslim population and their participation into French political process. This could motivate the French state officials and policy makers to accept the freedom of conscience and its applicability on Muslims as well. Steps like inclusive *laïcité* introduced by French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve in 2015 could further broaden the scope of dialogues on French Islam; Emanuel Macron also shown his commitment to create a *Islam of France* that could save the national value of Laïcité as well is immune to radicalization of Islam (Piser, 2018). But creating a French version of Islam itself could be a negation of State's official policy 'the state is not permitted to interfere in the

management of religion or in theological questions. President Macron must need to check with the consuming condition of Laïcité to manage the religion without taking in to state affairs.

- Few important steps must be taken from the government, like; catering the marginalized immigrant population through economic opportunities, special efforts should be made for Muslim social integration through education, counseling and policy-making, serious initiatives must be taken to counter anti-Muslim French mindset through mainstream media.

CONCLUSION

The statements mentioned above are not easy to accept or to refuse. One point is explicitly understood that in a group life, people need some degree of collective identity as it is necessary for their cultural consistency, social cohesion, and political integration, not to conflict but to embrace all at once. However, to determine the merit and criteria for an identity that could transpire or cease to be *French*, is never clear. Theoretically the French notion of identity affirms universalism, but in practice it is inflexibly enlarging only as far as the basic identity. In a well written book “*Your People, My People; Your God, My God: French and American Troubles Over Citizenship*” by Norman Ravitch where he reminds French historical origin from religious monarchy. He said that unlike any other European identity, the French identity has not exclusively fashioned a fantasizing ideological outset that had been taken out from the traditional societies of eighteenth century. A much more deep, promising, and mystic vigor is involved, which is most possibly none other than “*religion*”. Religion has the greatest strength to safeguard the epitome of national identity, surely not without creating the controversies, dilemmas, and hypocrisies (Ravitch, 1997). The French model for integration and assimilation; *Universalism and Laïcité*, had never succeeded in establishing an exemplary system that could entirely abundant the politicization of religion, removal of faith-based public expression and the reduce in clash of a fixed national identity with the subsidiary identity which is equally powerful. The gist of the case of France is that secularism is not a value-neutral ideology, hence needed a review and reconsideration.

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