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ISLAMOPHOBIA AND RISE OF POPULISM IN FRANCE A POST-COLONIAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: The issue of extremist Islamist separatism remains problematic to secular France. France has been the target of terrorist offensives and extremist activities since the 2015 terrorist offensive on Charlie Hebdo. French leadership viewed France as the target of extremist ideology due to its different culture, identity, values, Laicite and Freedom of Speech and labelled it ‘Islamist Separatism’. France hosts the largest population of Muslim origin in Western Europe that is an un-integrated society, named as ‘Muslim Challenge’. Whether, it is the fear of Islam, racism against Muslims or Muslims’ failure to assimilate in French culture and identity by rejecting Republican values and French model of integration. The French rooted people think increasing Muslim population as the emergence of parallel society and a cultural threat in France. In order to counter this threat, French President Macron declared a plan to reform Islam with the objective to create a new version of French Islam by regulating the religious practices of French Muslims as a necessary condition of integration. French Muslims considered this idea as an intervention in the practice of faith. Moreover, the French state is failed to distinguish between Islam and Islamist extremism. This study is an attempt to unravel the phenomenon that French Muslims are considered out group and assimilation and integration of Muslims in secular France remains problematic by employing a post-colonial perspective of Frantz Fanon. The main argument of the study is that French leadership wants to transform France into homogenous society and not a multicultural, multiple racialized and a diverse society.

Keywords: Islamophobia, France, Muslims, Integration, President Macron.

Introduction

The issue of post-colonial and post-imperial migration in France created cultural conflicts between the Muslim immigrants and French population and they both remained unable to breach these cleavages. Initially the labour migration paved way for succeeding chain of migration. Currently, French state is unsuccessful to “integrate” its multicultural polity. Muslim immigrants refused to adapt French culture and values. Moreover, new French laws are discriminatory towards Muslims that obstruct the Muslims’ assimilation in French society and intensify the already existing Muslim Problem.

As per Hackett, France hosts the largest population of Muslim origin in Western Europe (Hackett, November 29, 2017). There are 4-5 million Muslims in a total population of 61 million in France in which roughly half of those individuals are French rooted people. Islam is the second major religion in France followed by Catholicism. Islam’s adherents are accounted for more than the three non-Catholic minorities combined: Jews (600,000), Protestants (800,000), and Buddhists (150,000–500,000). Muslims’ religious adherence is in divergence with mainstream French secular culture and society. The National Front party once printed on its campaign posters the startling and inaccurate prediction that “France will be a Muslim country by 2020.” (Laurence, & Vaisse, 2006)

France has a long history of assimilating foreign immigrants. The foundation of French colonialism is laid when France invaded North Africa and, in the next decades, occupies Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. Integration of Muslim immigrants remained a major concern which has their roots to former French colonies in North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa and to Turkey. These immigrants have posed the daunting challenges to France’s secularism and its all-encompassing definition of citizenship aimed at integrating other racial, ethnic, or previous national identities into French culture (Laurence & Vaisse, 2006).

France colonized Algeria in 1830 overtly aiming to assimilate and westernize Algeria. The colonization caused the migration of large scale Muslim population in France that sets the tone for decades of complicated and often tense relations between France and its former colonies. In 1962, Algeria fought the War of Independence terminating 132 year of French colonial rule. During 1954-62, in 65 months long war, 1 million Algerians and 26,000 French died.

France has always been an immigration country (Barou, 2018). France’s colonial invasion on Maghreb countries allowed the immigrants flow in France that inevitably created a shared past. The contemporary Muslim identity crisis in France is rooted in its colonial history. Currently, there is a deep sense of fear of a turnaround whether France will be transformed into a

colony by a foreign cultural invasion. France's concept of Laïcité is in conflict with Islam brought by immigrants. In this regard, France needs to change the homogenous society to multiculturalism that favours unity in diversity (Semotiuk, 2018 Jan 17).

The labeling of Islam to fundamentalism initiated a stark debate in Europe and France that whether Islam is a mainstream religion with small minorities of fundamentalists or it is a blatant exposition of discord between Muslims' general masses and extremists (Kilby & Lennon, 2018).

Interaction of Muslims with the mainstream French society and Muslims' adherence to religion Islam reveals that it is incompatible to French Laïcité. The legal understanding of laïcité as codified in French law does not pretend to know the religious beliefs of citizens. Rather, it simply demands acceptance of the French values. As per the French state view, Muslims' religious sentiments necessarily lead to a lack of national identity and ethnic separatism.

Literature Review

The representation of enormous entities, "the West" and "Islam" has been recklessly affirmed in Bernard Lewis' "The Roots of Muslim Rage". Islam, like other religions, has also known for periods when it inspired in some of its followers a mood of hatred and violence. The entire Muslim world has gone through this period of hatred and a number of times that hatred is directed against West. Bernard Lewis describes a "surge of hatred" rising from the Islamic world "becomes a rejection of Western civilization that gained influence. It posited a crisis within a global Islamic community that made conflict with the United States and Europe inevitable (Lewis, 1990).

Huntington's hypothesis in 'The Clash of Civilizations and the remaking of World Order' is built on Bernard Lewis argument. Huntington argued that in this new world, the fundamental source of conflict will neither be ideological nor economic. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. Huntington hypothesized civilizational conflicts between "Islam" and the "West" (Huntington, 1996).

Said's book 'Orientalism' marked the beginning of the postcolonial studies that means the study of the Eastern culture from the Western perspectives or Western representation of the East. The west has always defined the east. Said averred that the cultural bifurcation divided the world between Western and non-Western, "the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')" and for assuming the inherent superiority of the former to the latter. During the cold war, the world was polarized between "East" and "West" and the "Orient" and the "Occident" on ideological basis rather "the West and the rest", the

domination of one culture over the other. 'Oriental other' is the construction of western consciousness (Said, 1978).

Assimilation and xenophobia exist simultaneously in France and they both obstruct and contribute to an inclusive definition of citizenship. In France, the prevalence of xenophobia requires the integration/assimilation of 'others' and transforming immigrants into Frenchmen/citizens. However, the immigrants do not want inclusion that is attributed to their "right to difference". The current international debate is that Islam is incompatible with West in every respect. Therefore the Muslim immigrants cannot be integrated into French values. On the other hand, French nationals having immigrant background are faced with exclusionary policies in employment sector, and in social relations too. French ways cannot tolerate Islamic dress code for Muslim women (Ozcan, 2015).

There are two models of integrating immigrants that are functioning in Europe, the French and the British. The French model is based on assimilation that Frenchness in collective understanding of France dating back to French Revolution's ideals 'Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité' while the British favored laissez-faire multiculturalism in which people are free to follow their own culture and are bound to follow British laws and norms. Both models have confronted Islamic radicalism which reveals a few are reluctant to absorption even after generations (Greenway, 2007 May 3).

A study was conducted to identify and understand the rooted French perception about Muslim population in France based on quantitative survey questionnaire among forty-eight rooted French citizens. For this purpose, four surveys were also analyzed to provide insights into French perception focusing on numerous questions such as Muslim integration, Laïcité, Islam and immigration. Currently in France there is an increasing tension between French people and Muslim community because National Front became victorious, increasing terrorist offensives in France and more and more French citizens have joined ISIS (Islamic State) terrorist outfits. This study examined what constituted French identity by examining the principle of laïcité, citizenship model, public opinion, and stance of National Front on perceived Muslim threat to French national identity. The findings suggest that French rooted perception about Muslims is negative because Muslims denied adapting French identity. Their growing presence as out-group has been perceived as a threat due to their lack of adherence to French Laïcité- a central tenet of French identity (Waters, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Frantz Fanon (1925-61), an African origin philosopher, and psychiatrist whose insights about colonization inspired decolonial liberation movements for over five decades. He threw light on his own experience of psychological effects of colonial racism. The leitmotif of 'Black Skin, White

Masks' is that Europeans have developed the sense of 'Self vs. Other'. The black people faced multifarious obstacles predominantly run by and for white people. The people of colour must adorn 'white masks' in order to survive and, succeed in a white world. However, the natives try to adopt Western culture and reject their own culture. However hard, the colonized Algerians try to accept education, values and language of France, this phenomenon is called putting on white masks over black skins (Fanon, 1986). This argument is resonated with W.E.B. Du Bois' idea of a 'double consciousness' - a requirement that black people must inhabit two realities at once, that, indeed, life under a white power structure gives rise to an existential internal conflict for African-Americans. "Both the ideas of 'white masks' and 'double consciousness' aim to capture the ways in which identity for the people of colour is always fractured, divided and negotiated in a colonial world" (Manchanda, 2018).

Fanon expounded the idea of cultural nationalism in "The Wretched of the Earth". Cultural domination of the West has three stages; 1) the native under the influence of colonizers tries to integrate and assimilate with colonizer by neglecting his own culture 2) the native differentiates between the whites and his own culture 3) then comes the stage when the native has become anti-colonial.

For Fanon, 'colonialism is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence'. Fanon does not endorse anticolonial violence but rather conceives of it as a necessary evil, the only choice left for those shackled by the murderous chains of colonialism (Fanon, 2004).

French Revolution & Laicite

Since centuries, there was a monarchic rule in France. Discontentment with Louis XVI led towards unrest in Paris. The 16th century was full of religious conflicts that developed out of the reformation. The Estates-General in France was divided into three bodies: First Estate or clergy, Second Estate or nobility, and Third Estate or commons. During French Revolution (1789-99), the third estate overturns the French monarchy and establishes a revolutionary government based on the principle of popular sovereignty. It seizes the properties owned by Church and nobility and distributed them in peasantry (Tackett, 1989). The revolution based on the slogans of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity became the slogan and an inspirational model for future democratic revolutionary movements. The origin of secularism is also rooted in the French Revolution (Bickford, 2014).

Prior to the French Revolution, the Catholic Church had been the official state religion of France. France was being called as "the eldest daughter of the Church" (Williamson, 2020 June 16). Catholic Church was dominant in France and interfered with state affairs. 19th century saw the battle between two Frances with secular republicans trying to contain the

power of dominant Catholic Church. French Revolution paved the way for idea of secularism (Kumar, 2006). The concept of secularism is a French invention but it came into effect with French Laïcité. In 1905, French laïcité is established that requires separation of religion from the state and endorses freedom of speech. Currently, there is no state religion of France. All religions went into private sphere and France established secularism in public sphere. Practicing religion is considered a private matter and that must be limited to private sphere. As per the French Constitution, state is a secular entity but it does not clearly define the boundaries of secularism. “Article 1 of French Constitution does not encourage religion to involve in government affairs, especially its influence on state policies” (Colosimo, 2017). Secularism in France does not preclude a right to free exercise of religion. Therefore, secularism is employed to discriminate between people with French roots and people with immigrants’ background. The enforcement of strict secularization of French society paves way to Islamist separatism and threatens the future of secular French Republic.

Freedom of Speech or Islamophobia

Visual securitization is a framework developed by Lene Hansen in 2011 in order to describe the images rather than speech act can place issues on security agenda. The publication of offensive caricatures of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten sparked anti-government protests resulted in protestors’ physically storming the main government building and was criticized by diplomats from varied countries with large Muslim populations (Nyman, 2018). “Hansen’s framework develops an inter-visual/intertextual model to analyze the process of visual securitization based on four components: the image itself, its immediate intertext, the wider policy discourse, and the texts ascribing meaning to the image” (Hansen 2011: 53). The drawing and publication of these caricatures actually caused, and indeed constituted, the crisis itself (Nyman, 2018).

In 2006, Charlie Hebdo, a French iconoclastic, satirical magazine reprinted a series of Danish newspaper disparaging caricatures of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Kilby & Lennon, 2018) which sparked the tension between the French state, rooted French population and the Muslim population. Charlie Hebdo features cartoon, reports, polemics and jokes. The publications of this magazine have been described as anti-racist, non-conformist and secular. The magazine publishes articles about politics: National Front (far-right party), religions (Catholic, Islam, Judaism) and culture. Publications of disparaging caricatures of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ offended French Muslim groups and Muslim countries around the world. In response to the publishing of offensive iconography of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, two armed men attacked and opened fire on Charlie Hebdo’s offices in Paris on January 7, 2015. Twelve people

were killed in these attacks including Charlie Hebdo staff (Abdelkader, 2017). Again on Sep. 1, 2020, Charlie Hebdo declared the republication of provocative caricatures depicting Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that provoked violent protests in France, ahead of a trial of alleged perpetrators of terrorists' offensive in January 2015 in France that was scheduled the following day (ALJAZEERA, 29 October 2020). Later on, a French teacher Samuel Paty showed his students the satirical cartoons of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in his freedom of speech class. A few days later, on October 16, 2020, Paty was attacked and beheaded by Abdoullakh Abouyedovich Anzorov, an 18-year-old Muslim Russian refugee of Chechen ethnicity (Amnesty International, 2020 Nov. 03).

The French defended the publication of insulting cartoons under the slogan of Freedom of Expression. The publication of cartoons was justified in the name of Freedom of Expression without estimating the impact and reaction of Muslim world. The Freedom of Expression needs to be limited when it disturbs the public law and order situation. French law prohibits "hate speech," inciting hatred, discrimination and violence against individuals or community because they do or do not belong to a certain nation, ethnicity, religion or race. On the other hand, the publication of such images must not create terror and violence (Amnesty International, 2020).

In 1905, French laïcité is established that requires separation of religion from the state and endorses freedom of speech. Currently, there is no state religion of France. All religions went into private sphere and establish secularism in public sphere. Practicing religion has become a problem in France. French President Macron considers the necessity of reforming Islam as a condition of integration. Due to increased inflow of Muslim populations in the late 20th century, Nicolas Sarkozy, the then Interior Minister started the policy of integrating Muslims into French identity similar to Judaism and Christianity. A similar plan is proposed by the French President Macron on October 2, 2020 in his speech that Islam is "in crisis globally" and formulated a plan "to reform Islam" to make it compatible with French values (Tisdall, 2020 Nov., 1).

The perception of French rooted people regarding the perceived causes of poor integration of Muslims in France due to government's policies is very low but the results of other data sources are divergent. The international debate over the issue of Muslim headscarves; to cover or not to cover and to veil or not to veil is not a novel phenomenon. The strife between Muslims and non-Muslims led France to impose ban on veiling on February 10, 2004. This caused similar laws which are under consideration in other European countries as well (Hamdan, 2007). After the approval of 2004 Law in France, Muslims are trying to construct and negotiate their identity. Muslim women are not allowed to wear veil which is a "conspicuous" religious symbol. In response to

the protests, the French government tried to eliminate religious symbols from schools, firstly due to laicite and second, France tried to integrate and assimilate Muslims into French values and culture (Croucher, 2008). By banning headscarf, the French government aims at eliminating the formation of a Muslim identity in France, and instead encourage Muslims in France to adapt French culture and values and adopt a solely “French” identity (Ganley, 2004). As per Huntington, France is more culturist than racist in any strict sense. French state has accepted black Africans who can speak perfect French in their legislatures but they cannot tolerate Muslim girls who wear head scarves in schools (Huntington, 1996). Recently, the government has announced crackdown of 76 mosques suspected of separatism and encouraging extremism. In 2011, French government banned street prayer and restricted Muslims’ right to religious expression in public (Dalhat, 2015). Moreover, now French government would train *Imam* (religious leader) in French mosques (Willsher, 2020, Dec. 3).

Due to the continued immigration and higher fertility ratio, the Muslim population is expected to constitute an increasing share of total population in the West giving rise to Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments. As per the Pew Research Center, Muslim population will be expected to increase one-third in next two decades, rising from 6% of the region’s inhabitants in 2010 to 8% in 2030. As reported by Pew, in US as well, the population is projected to be more than double in the next two decades. Due to these demographic trends, the anti-Muslim prejudice will evolve in the eyes of rooted Westerners (Adida et al., 2014).

Muslim Problem of Integration

This study is based on a survey conducted by IFOP Company (2012) that is considered the most comprehensive survey in France. It was published in the newspaper Le Figaro. The survey titled, “L’image de l’Islam en France”. The survey took the sample of 1736 persons, representative of French adult population based on quotas of gender, age, profession and regional demographics.¹

The poll highlights the negative perception of Islam in France. The first question posed was “How would you describe the presence of the Muslim community in France?” As per the results of the survey, 43 per cent French view Muslims as a threat to their national identity. 17 per cent respondents believe the immigrants enrich their country. However, 40 per cent are of the view that they are neither a threat nor a benefit.

Figure 1: Perception of French rooted people about Muslim Immigrants

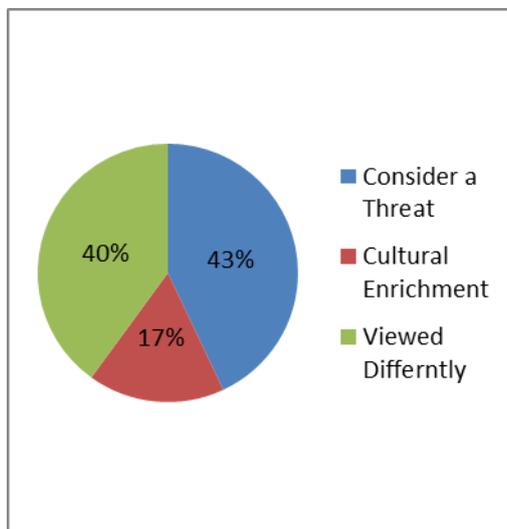


Figure 1 is made by the author.

The next question of the survey was “Would you say the Muslims are well integrated into French society?” 67 per cent of the respondents say “No” means that the French population has the perception in their minds that Muslims are not well integrated. The 33 per cent viewed it differently.

Figure 2: French Perception on Muslim Integration in France

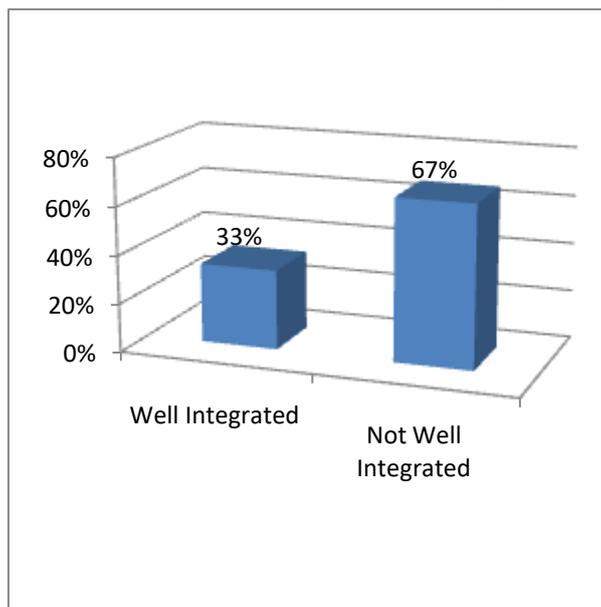


Figure 2 is made by the author.

The next question surveyed was regarding “reasons of Muslims’ poor integration into French society?” Of all the respondents 68 per cent are opinionated that Muslims are unable to integrate while 52 per cent opined that there are cultural differences, 47 per cent viewed that they are grouped in specific schools and neighbouring, 25 per cent believed that reasons remained economic in nature, 21 per cent pointed out racism and inclusiveness of French society and 3 per cent specified the government’s policies. The percentage is more than 100 because each respondent selected two options. Majority of the respondents believed that Muslims refused to integrate.

Figure 3: Perceived Causes of Poor Integration of Muslims in France

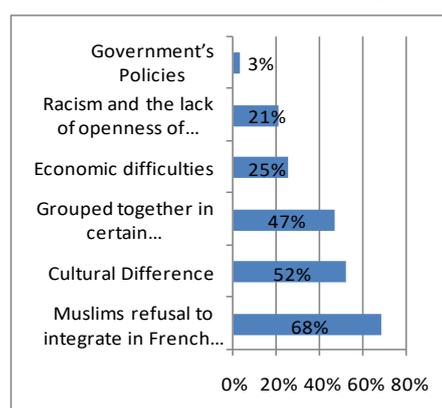


Figure 3 is made by the author.

The fourth question was about “Would you say that French society is sufficiently open and welcoming to Muslims?” Of all respondents 69 per cent said “Yes”. The majority of the respondents think that they are welcoming to Muslims. Rather 31 per cent believe that they are not sufficiently open and welcoming to Muslim minority.

Figure 4: French Perception on Openness of French Society for Immigrants

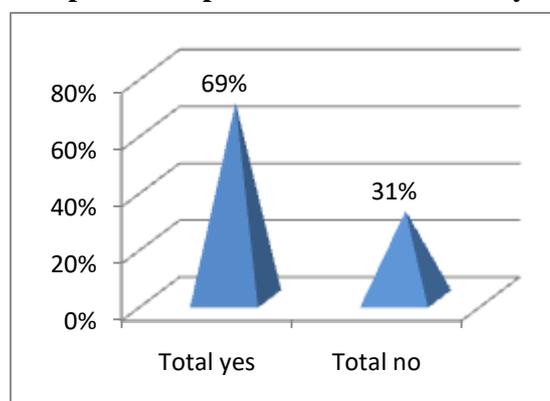


Figure 4 is made by the author.

The next question in IFOP survey was about the “Image traits associated with Islam globally” 63 per cent answered that Muslims rejected western values. 57 per cent selected “Fanaticism”. 46 per cent viewed it “Submission”, 38 per cent “Violence” and 14 per cent “Tolerance”.

The other part of the same question “Image traits associated with Islam globally” shows the following results, 7 per cent chose Freedom, 7 per cent Justice, 5 per cent protection of women, 4 per cent democracy, and 14 per cent do have any idea. The total percentage of interviewees is greater than 100 because the interviewees were asked to choose three options.

Figure 5: Image Traits Associated with Islam Globally

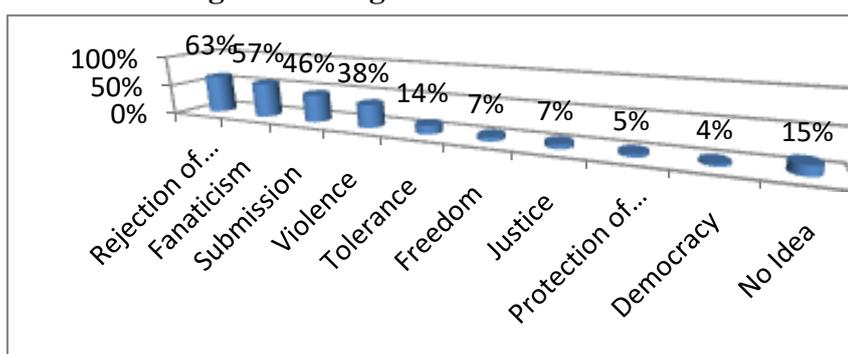


Figure 5 is made by the author.

The next question of the survey was about “The influence and visibility of Islam in France”, of all respondents, 60 per cent say “Too important” while 35% replied “Not too important” and only 5% answered “neither too important nor not important enough.”

Figure 6: Influence and Visibility of Islam in France

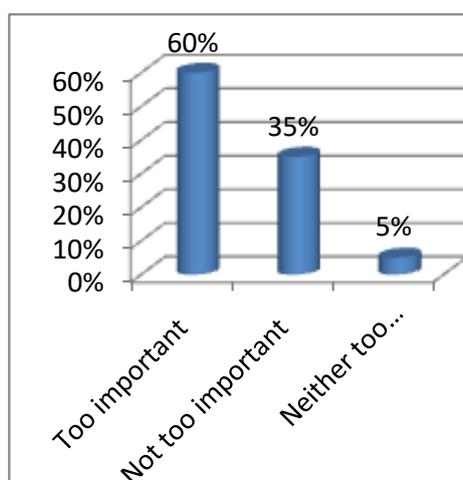


Figure 6 is made by the author.

The next question is about building mosques in France, 43 per cent opposed the idea, 18 per cent showed favourable approach, 34 per cent showed indifference and 5 per cent did not speak about it.

Figure 7: French Perception Regarding Building Mosques

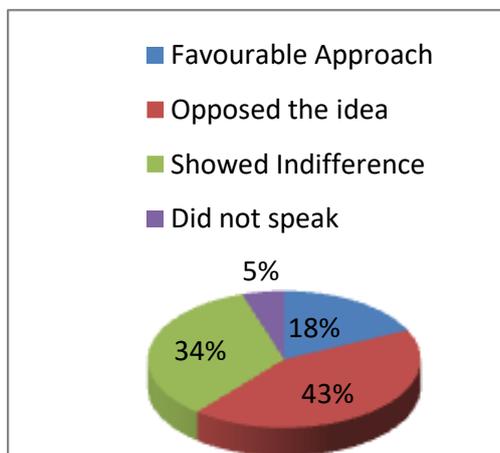


Figure 7 is made by the author.

On the question “The decision on the veil or headscarf for Muslim women in the streets” 63 per cent opposed the Muslim women headscarf in streets, 7 per cent showed favourable approach, 28 per cent showed indifference and 2 per cent did not give any answer. On the question of decision on the veil or headscarf for Muslim women in public school classrooms, 89 per cent opposed the Muslim headscarf in schools, 3 per cent were in favour of Muslim headscarf, 6 per cent showed indifference and 2 per cent did not give any answer.

Figure 8: The decision on the veil or headscarf for Muslim women in the streets and school classrooms

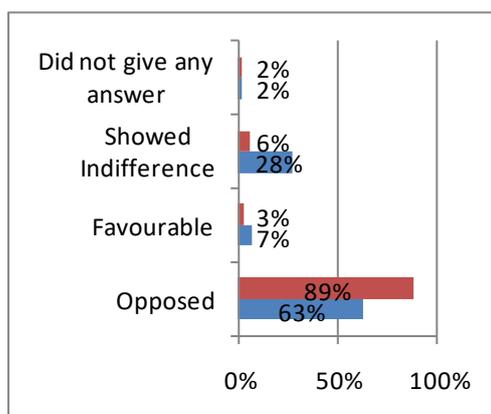


Figure 8 is made by the author.

It is the French people's negative perception about the Muslims because they are perceived as a threat to French collective identity due to Islamic radicalization, leading towards Islamophobia. French President Macron's idea of reforming Islam will increase the already existing gap between the French society and Muslim minority.

Conclusion

The heightened fear of increasing Muslim immigrants is initiated due to country's experience with extremism and the perception that Muslims do not want to integrate with the French culture. France has seen a Long period of radical political change towards liberal Democracy. In past the state did not set the Islamophobic trends in the country but recently the Islamophobic attitudes are infused in French society. Muslims, who follow the beliefs and practices of religion Islam, are perceived as out group and a threat to unity by French rooted public. Muslims religious adherence is in opposition to French values shaped by Laicite. Due to their attachment to religion Muslims do not want to integrate in French culture that is in compliance with the Laïcité. It resulted in discriminatory policies from French society banning the conspicuous religious symbols including head scarves that is creating more cleavages between French sate and Muslim immigrants. This tension has created negative image of Muslim and Islam, growth of right wing politics in France and Islamophobic attitudes.

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¹ The French survey is employed to measure the opinions of French rooted people about the integration of Muslim immigrants. The survey was translated using google translation.