

HIJAB IN PUBLIC SPACE AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN CONTEMPORARY FRANCE

Since the 1980s due to the growth of the Muslim community, its insufficient integration into French society, the processes of re-Islamization, more and more women in Muslim headscarves began to appear in the streets of French cities. Hijabs have become a visible marker of Muslim identity, at the same time symbolizing processes that are very disturbing for French society — gender inequality, a departure from the principle of secularism, an Islamic threat to democracy, etc. The internal socio-cultural dynamics in France turned out to be such that it was in the issue of secularism where a whole knot of urgent problems related to the problems of integration of Muslim migration was concentrated. The outward manifestation of these problems was the struggle over the issue of wearing Islamic symbols in public space, which began with the “headscarf case” in French schools, where secular education is traditionally given great importance. However, this issue soon went beyond educational institutions, the topic of hijabs found itself at the center of a tense socio-political struggle, in which representatives of different beliefs clashed — supporters and opponents of bans on wearing hijabs, who understand the principle of secularism in different ways.

The topic of Muslim headscarves turned out to be an integral part of highly politicized discourses: about migration in general, about the meaning of the republican principle of secularism and freedom of religion; about gender equality and the victimization of Muslim women; about the principle of the unity of the nation and the prevention of “communitarianism”; about discrimination and “cultural racism” in relation to the cultural norms of Muslims, about the inadmissibility of diktat regarding clothing issues, including coercion of the policy of removing women’s veils, etc. Being one of the most visible symbols of Islam, the hijab is on the border of social norms of different spaces: it is seen as normative in the Muslim traditional community and as marginal for the majority of the French, who share the values of secularism. The article attempts to outline the complexity of political and scientific discussions on the “hijab case”, to explain the fact that it has gained such a great resonance in French society, causing the adoption of strict legislative measures against Muslim veils; and also to compare the attitude towards the hijab of those who support and oppose wearing it in everyday life.

Keywords: *hijab, French society, Islamic clothing, political discourses*

Author Info: **Lyubart, Margarita K.** — Ph.D. in History, Senior Researcher, Center for European Studies, the Russian Academy of Sciences N. N. Miklouho-Maklay Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology (Russian Federation, Moscow). E-mail: margarita_lyubart@mail.ru ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3781-4422>

For citation: Lyubart, M. K. 2022. Hijab in Public Space and Political Discourse in Contemporary France. *Herald of Anthropology (Vestnik Antropologii)*. 4: 123–145.

Funding: The study was carried out as a part of the research plan of the Russian Academy of Sciences N. N. Miklouho-Maklay Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology.

References

- Abouddrar, N. B. 2014. *Comment le voile est devenu musulman* [How the veil became Muslim]. Paris: Flammarion. 256 p.
- Abu-Lughod, L. 2002. Do muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others. *American Anthropologist* 104 (3): 783–790. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2002.104.3.783>
- Al-Saji, A. 2008. Voiles racialisés: la femme musulmane dans les imaginaires occidentaux. Les ateliers de l'éthique [Racialized Veils: Muslim Women in Western Imaginaries]. *Les ateliers de l'éthique* 3 (3): 39–55. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1044595ar>
- Al-Saji, A., and S. Dayan-Herzbrun. 2017. Hésiter et interrompre la vision racialisante. Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, Fanon [Hesitate and interrupt the racializing vision Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, Fanon]. *Tumultes* 48 (1): 51–70. <https://doi.org/10.3917/tumu.048.0051>
- Baubérot, J. 2015. *Les 7 laïcités françaises* [The 7 French secularities]. Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, coll. «Interventions». 397 p.
- Baubérot, J. 2012 (rééd. poche avec une postface / reissued in paperback with an afterword 2014). *La laïcité falsifiée* [Falsified secularism]. Paris: Éd. La Découverte, coll. «Cahiers libres».
- Baubérot, J., D. Bouzar, J. Costa-Lascoux, and A. Houziaux. 2004. *Le voile que cache-t-il?* [What is the veil hiding?]. Paris: Les Editions Ouvrières. 119 p.
- Baubérot, J., M. Milot, and Ph. Portier. 2015. *Laïcité, laïcités. Reconfigurations et nouveaux défis* [Secularism, secularisms. Reconfigurations and new challenges]. Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, coll. «54». 397 p.
- Billaud, J., and J. Castro. 2013. Whores and Niquabées: The Sexual Boundaries of French Nationalism. *French Politics, Culture and Society* 31 (2): 81–101. <https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2013.310205>
- Bourdieu, P. 2001. *Masculine Domination*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 133 p.
- Bowen, R. J. 2008. *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 304 p.
- Cahon, J. 2019. Laïcité et signes religieux à l'école: quelle histoire! 1882–2019 [Secularism and religious signs at school: what a story! 1882–2019]. *Cahiers pédagogiques* 09.12.2019. www.cahiers-pedagogiques.com/
- Chakraborti, N., and I. Zempi. 2012. The veil under attack: Gendered dimensions of Islamophobic victimization. *International Review of Victimology* 18 (3): 269–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269758012446983>
- Cohen-Almagor, R. 2022. *Republic, Secularism and Security: France versus the Burqa and the Niqab*. Hull: University of Hull. 63 p.
- Cohen-Almagor, R. 2021. Indivisibilité, Sécurité, Laïcité: the French ban on the burqa and the niqab. *French Politics* 20, 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41253-021-00164-8>
- Costa-Lascoux, J., and J.-L. Auduc. 2006. *La laïcité à l'école. Un principe, une éthique, une pédagogie* [Secularism at school. A principle, an ethic, a pedagogy]. Champsigny-sur-Marne: iufm et crdp de l'académie de Créteil. 176 p.
- Entwistle, J. 2001. The Dressed Body. In: *Body Dressing*, ed. by Entwistle, J. and E. Wilson. Oxford: Berg Publishers. 33–58.
- Ferhat, I. (ed.). 2019. *Les foulards de la discorde: Retours sur l'affaire de Creil, 1989* [The scarves of discord: Feedback on the Creil affair]. Paris: Editions de l'Aube. 168 p.

- Fredette, J. 2015. Examining the French Hijab and Burqa Bans through Reflexive Cultural Judgment. *New Political Science* 37 (1): 48–70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2014.995396>
- Galembert, C. 2008. Le voile en procès. Dossier thématique [The veil in lawsuit. Thematic file]. *Droit et Société* 1 (68): 11–31.
- Galembert, C. 2009. Cause du voile et lutte pour la parole musulmane légitime (Cause of the veil and struggle for legitimate Muslim speech). *Société contemporaine* 2 (74): 19–47. <https://doi.org/10.3917/soco.074.0019>
- Hajjat, A. 2010. Port du hijab et «défaut d'assimilation». Étude d'un cas problématique pour l'acquisition de la nationalité française [Wearing the hijab and “lack of assimilation”. Study of a problematic case for the acquisition of French nationality]. *Sociologie* 4 (1): 439–455. <https://doi.org/10.3917/socio.004.0439>
- Hopkins, T. 2015. Social reproduction in France: Religious dress laws and laïcité. *Women's Studies International Forum* 48: 154–164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.09.002>
- Khiabany, G., and M. Williamson. 2008. Veiled Bodies — naked racism: culture, politics and race in the Sun. *Race and Class* 50 (2): 69–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396808096394>
- Kosrokhavar F., and F. Gaspard. 1995. *Le foulard et la République* [The scarf and the Republic]. Paris: La Découverte. 214 p.
- Lorcerie, F. 2008. La lois sur le voile: une entreprise politique [Headscarf Laws: A Political Enterprise]. *Droit et Société* 68: 53–74. <https://doi.org/10.3917/drs.068.0053>
- Lorcerie, F. 2004. *Politisation du voile en France, en Europe et dans le monde arabe* [Politization of the veil in France, Europe and the Arab world]. Paris: Harmattan. 266 p.
- Lyubart, M. K. 2021. Faktory i triggery sovremenogo terrorizma. Razmyshleniia na primere sobytii vo Frantsii [Factors and triggers of modern terrorism. Reflections on the French events]. *Tsivilizatsiia i varvarstvo* 10: 79–102.
- Lyubart, M. K. 2006. Araby-migranty v sovremennoi Frantsii [Arab migrants in modern France]. In *Meniaiushchiasia Evropa. Problemy etnokul'turnogo vzaimodeistviia* [A changing Europe. Problems of ethno-cultural interaction], ed. by M. Yu. Martynova. Moscow: Institut etnologii I antropologii RAN. 234–260.
- Mahmood, S. 2001. Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic revival. *American Anthropological Association* 16 (2): 202–236. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/656537>
- Mayer, T. 2000. Gender ironies of nationalism: setting the stage. In *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the nation*, ed. by T. Mayer. London: Routledge. 22–37.
- Ramírez, Á. 2015. Control of female ‘Muslim’ bodies: culture, politics and dress code laws in some Muslim and non-Muslim countries. *Identities* 22 (6): 671–686. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2014.950972>
- Safran, U. 2011. Natsional'naia identichnost' vo Frantsii, Germanii i SShA: sovremennye spory [National identity in France, Germany and the USA: modern controversies]. *Politicheskaia nauka* 1: 64–97.
- Scott, J. W. 2007. *Politics of the Veil*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press. 224 p.
- Shakhov, M. O. 2014. K voprosu o pravovom sootnoshenii printsipa svetskosti gosudarstva i printsipa otdeleniia ot nego religioznykh ob"edinenii v sovremennoi Frantsii [On the question of the legal relationship between the principle of Secularism of the State and the principle of separation of religious associations from it in modern France]. *Religiia i pravo* 2. http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION_ID=389&ELEMENT_ID=5702
- Tersigni, S. 2003. «Prendre le foulard»: les logiques antagoniques de la revendication [“Take the headscarf”: the antagonistic logics of claiming]. *Mouvements* 5 (30): 116–122. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mouv.030.0116>
- Tévanian, P. 2005. *Le voile médiatique. Un faux débat: «l'affaire du foulard islamique»* [The media veil. A false debate: “the affair of the Islamic headscarf”]. Paris: Raison d'agir. 144 p.

- Thylin, J. 2017. *The Burkini as a Symbolic Threat: Anthropological Perspectives on the Ban of the Burkini on French Beaches 2016*. Ph.D. diss., Lund University.
- Yuval-Davis, N. 1997. *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage Publications. 168 p.
- Yuval-Davis, N. 1993. Gender and nation, "*Ethnic and Racial Studies*" 16 (4): 621–632. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1993.9993800>
- Zempi, I., and N. Chakraborti. 2014. *Islamophobia, Victimisation and the Veil*. London: Palgrave Pivot. 109 p.