The secular identity of French territory and the identities of Muslim migrants in France: The phenomenon of islamophobia

Bruno Mendelski de Souza
Universidade de Santa Cruz do Sul – Santa Cruz do Sul – RS – Brasil
ORCID: 0000-0001-6814-5749

Abstract
The present work aims to investigate Islamophobia in France. Starting from the understanding of Islamophobia as "indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed towards Islam or Muslims" (BLEICH, 2012), the phenomenon was examined through three elements: (i) French laws that (indirectly) restricted the use of the Islamic veil; (ii) the support of French public opinion for the aforementioned legislation; (iii) empirical data on Islamophobic acts. Methodologically, the French case study was used, and the data collection instruments were: (i) Bibliographic review of the specialized literature (including French surveys and opinion polls); (ii) Documentary research in the primary sources of laws and in official documents; (iii) Field research in France, which resulted in obtaining information and empirical data on the phenomenon, obtained from the two main databases on Islamophobia in France (CCIF and CNCDH). The research problem can be summarized in the question: "How is Islamophobia construct and how does it evolve in France?" As main results, it was found that Islamophobia in France develops from two interconnected axes: the association of Islam with terrorist violence; the connection of religion with female oppression, symbolized by the use of the veil. The finding of a correlation between large-scale terrorist acts and the rise of Islamophobia is evidence of the first axis. The finding that Islamic women wearing the veil represent the vast majority of victims of Islamophobia constitutes evidence of the second axis.
Keywords: Islamophobia. Migrations. identities. Muslim minority. France

A identidade secular do território francês e as identidades dos migrantes muçulmanos na França: o fenômeno da islamofobia

Resumo
O presente trabalho tem como objetivo investigar a islamofobia na França. Partindo do entendimento de islamofobia como "atitudes negativas indiscriminadas ou emoções dirigidas ao Islã ou aos muçulmanos" (BLEICH, 2012), examinou-se o fenômeno através de três elementos: (i) as leis francesas que (indiretamente) restringiram o uso do véu islâmico; (ii) o apoio da opinião pública francesa às referidas legislações; (iii) dados empíricos sobre os atos islamofóbicos. Metodologicamente, empregou-se o estudo do caso francês, e os instrumentos de coleta de dados foram: (i) Revisão bibliográfica da literatura especializada (incluindo *surveys* e pesquisas de opinião francesas); (ii) Pesquisa documental nas fontes primárias das leis e em documentos oficiais; (iii) Pesquisa de campo na França, que resultou na obtenção de informações e dados empíricos sobre o fenômeno, obtidas junto aos dois

principais bancos de dados sobre a islamofobia na França (CCIF e CNCDH). O problema de pesquisa pode ser resumido na questão: "Como se constrói e como evolui a islamofobia na França?" Como principais resultados, constatou-se que a islamofobia na França se desenvolve- a partir de dois eixos interligados: a associação do Islã com a violência terrorista; e a conexão da religião com a opressão feminina, simbolizada pelo uso do véu. A descoberta de correlação entre atos terroristas de grande porte e o aumento da islamofobia, é uma evidência do primeiro eixo. Já a constatação de que as mulheres islâmicas portando o véu representam a grande maioria das vítimas da islamofobia, constitui-se como uma evidência do segundo eixo.

Palavras-chave: Islamofobia. Migrações. Identidades. Minoria muçulmana. França

La identidad laica del territorio francés y las identidades de los inmigrantes musulmanes en Francia: el fenómeno de la islamophobia

Resumen

El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo investigar la islamofobia en Francia. Partiendo de la comprensión de la islamofobia como "actitudes o emociones negativas indiscriminadas dirigidas hacia el Islam o los musulmanes" (BLEICH, 2012), se examinó el fenómeno a través de tres elementos: (i) las leyes francesas que (indirectamente) restringían el uso del velo islámico; (ii) el apoyo de la opinión pública francesa a la referida legislación; (iii) datos empíricos sobre actos islamófobos. Metodológicamente, se utilizó el estudio de caso francés y los instrumentos de recolección de datos fueron: (i) Revisión bibliográfica de la literatura especializada (incluyendo encuestas y encuestas de opinión francesas); (ii) Investigación documental en las fuentes primarias de leyes y en documentos oficiales; (iii) Investigación de campo en Francia, que resultó en la obtención de información y datos empíricos sobre el fenómeno, obtenidos de las dos principales bases de datos sobre islamofobia en Francia (CCIF y CNCDH). El problema de investigación se puede resumir en la pregunta: "¿Cómo se construye la islamofobia y cómo evoluciona en Francia?" Como principales resultados se encontró que la islamofobia en Francia se desarrolla a partir de dos ejes interconectados: la asociación del Islam con la violencia terrorista; la conexión de la religión con la opresión femenina, simbolizada por el uso del velo. El hallazgo de una correlación entre los actos terroristas a gran escala y el aumento de la islamofobia es evidencia del primer eje. El hallazgo de que las mujeres islámicas que llevan velo representan la gran mayoría de las víctimas de la islamofobia constituye una prueba del segundo eje.

Palabras clave: Islamofobia. Migraciones. Identidades. Minoría musulmana. Francia

1 Introduction

Islamophobia can be understood, synthetically, as fear, hostility and discriminatory practices against Muslims and Islam. These negative actions and perceptions against Muslims are at the heart of current discussions about the complex relationship and integration between Muslims and liberal European host states. Although Islamophobia is historical in Europe, dating back to the period of the Crusades and Colonialism, the study of the phenomenon entered the academic radar only from the late 1990s. The events of 9/11, and the ensuing War on Terror[1], spurred the investigation of Islamophobia.

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[1] Islamophobia in the context of the War on Terror was, in part, driven by the narrative constructed by the George W. Bush administration, based on terms such as the "axis of Evil", weapons of mass destruction, rogue states, etc.

In fact, the expansion of the phenomenon is connected with the diffusion of negative representations of Islamists by the political elite, media and intellectuals, legitimized from the trauma of terrorist attacks associated with Islam. This point reveals one of the complexities of Islamophobia: it means, at the same time, indiscriminate speeches and practices against Muslims.

Islamophobic discourses and practices are present both at the governmental and societal levels. Rhetorically, in the public sphere, Islamophobia can be noticed in statements, speeches and pronouncements of public representatives; in the social sphere, it happens through demonstrations, verbal attacks and prejudiced attitudes against Muslims.

In its practical competence, Islamophobia carried out by public entities can be seen in legislation that restricts or withdraws the rights of Muslims, and in discriminatory behavior carried out by public officials directly against members of this faith. In civil society, the phenomenon takes the form of insults, physical assaults, or attacks on mosques, Islamic centers or Muslim property[2].

Among the States that, historically, have Islamophobic disputes, France stands out. The country has the largest Muslim community in Western Europe, with around 5.72 million individuals, representing about 9% of its population (PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2017). Muslims have been settled in France for at least three generations, most of them coming from the former French colonies[3] (KAYA, 2009). These communities face difficulties in adapting to a society with core values different from those of origin, in addition to a difficult insertion in the job market.

Added to this problem are rooted orientalist views of Muslims by society, inherited from the French colonial period (SAID, 1979; LOUATI, 2017). Colonial France also included several Muslim-majority territories. In the current period (post-independence of the countries of North Africa and the Middle East), Paris constantly intervenes, politically and militarily, in its former colonies[4] and in other scenarios in the region[5]. This interventionist behavior, in turn, is used by extremist groups as one of the justifications for carrying out terrorist attacks on French soil.

The discussion of Islamophobia in France is of great importance, especially when taken into account the weight of the State for Europe. In demographic terms, between a quarter and a fifth (22.25%) of the entire Muslim population in the European Union reside in the country[6] (PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2017). These individuals inhabit the largest nation by land area in the European Union, and the second largest economy in the bloc[7]. Furthermore, the topic of Islamophobia, despite its frank investigation in other international centers, is still minimally studied within the Brazilian academy. In addition to the small number of studies, there is a

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[2] It should be noted that the observation of Islamophobia manifestation does not ignore the existence of religious extremism that occurs in a small portion of Muslims.

[3] Among the mostly Muslim-populated territories colonized by Paris are: Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Senegal, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Syria.

[4] Between 1960 and 2010, France intervened (unilaterally or as a member of coalitions) thirty times in countries on the African continent (GRIFFIN, 2009). In the present decade, Paris has been involved in military actions in Libya, Mali and the Central African Republic (TIRITILLI, 2017).

[5] France has taken part in military actions in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq since the early 2000s.

[6] In this study, Pew considered, in addition to the 28 countries of the European Union, Switzerland and Norway. The total Islamic population of the bloc is estimated at 25,770,000 people.

[7] Excluding the United Kingdom.

lack of research on the phenomenon of Islamophobia in France in the Brazilian context.

Moreover, the theme is part of the current debates on studies of identity, migration, security, and territories, stimulated by the inherent transnational and multi-territorial logic of religions, which contributes to the increasing fluidity of relations between the domestic and international spheres of States. In this sense, Islamophobia constitutes one of the great challenges for European societies. By marginalizing Muslims and Islam, Islamophobic acts and rhetoric attack not only the human rights of these individuals, but also the very roots of the democratic rule of law and, in a broader context, the foundations of the European liberal ideal.

That said, the main objective of this paper[8] is to investigate Islamophobia in France. The research problem can be summarized in the question: "How is Islamophobia constructed, and how does it evolve in France?"

To this end, the article is divided into five sections, in addition to this introduction. It begins by discussing the concept of Islamophobia, which is fundamental for this work. Afterwards, it highlights the research methodology. Subsequently, sections 4 and 5 investigate, respectively, the manifestation of Islamophobia in the French public power and its general and historical aspects. Then, it presents the main conclusions of the research.

2 Conceptual notes: Understanding Islamophobia

The use of the word Islamophobia to describe discursive and practical violence against Muslims does not present a consensus, although its use is widespread among specialists[9] (MENDELSKI, 2019). In France, the terms *racisme anti- maghrébin*[10] and *racisme anti-arabe* are used, which indicates that the problem is perceived, essentially, as a form of racism against Arab-Maghrebian immigration (KAYA, 2016).

For Bleich (2012), one of the reasons why Islamophobia (besides the lack of a universal definition) has taken root in public, political, and academic discourses is the desire to understand the reality of a society in which Islam and Muslims emerged as objects of aversion, fear, and hostility in contemporary liberal democracies. The author also highlights that "currently, Islamophobia has evolved from a fundamentally political concept to become, increasingly, an analytical category" (2012, p. 180).

This article uses the conceptualization proposed by Bleich (2012) as a starting point for furthering this conceptual discussion. The author defines Islamophobia as

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[8] This paper derives from the doctoral dissertation "Islamophobia in France: a case study (1996-2019)", defended by the author at IREL-UNB in 2020, under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Antonio Jorge Ramalho da Costa. The research received a CAPES doctoral grant, and the author did doctoral internships at Istanbul University, in Turkey, and Sciences Po, Paris, in France.

[9] Allen (2010), Bleich (2012), Cesari (2010), Esposito and Kalin (2011), Geisser (2003, 2010), Kaya (2009), Modood (2002), Mondon and Winter (2017), Richardson (2012), Schiffer and Wagner (2011), Semati (2010), Vertovec (2002), Werbner (2005), and Zempi and Chakraborti (2014).

[10] The very use of these terms contributes to impoverishing the study of the phenomenon, since not all Maghrebi are Arabs or Muslims, and not all Arabs are Muslims or Maghrebi. Furthermore, the French context in which the majority of French Muslims are of Arab and Maghrebi origins also contributes to this misunderstanding.

"indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed towards Islam or Muslims" (BLEICH, 2012, p. 1581). According to Helbling (2012), Bleich's characterization acts as a "guiding definition," mainly because it emphasizes that Islamophobia does not denote rational criticism. Bleich (2012) also highlights that to criticize aspects of Islamic doctrine or practices is not Islamophobia, unless this criticism is unequivocal and the negative discourses are fixed, immutable, and indiscriminate.

Furthermore, the proposed definition is very close to that used by the two French institutions that act as the main databases for the study of Islamophobia for this work: the *Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme* (CNCDH) and the *Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en France* (CCIF). The first understands the phenomenon as an "attitude of systematic hostility to Muslims or people perceived as such and/or to Islam" (2019. p. 24). The second defines the word as: "all acts of discrimination or violence against institutions or individuals because of their membership, real or supposed, in Islam" (CCIF, ONLINE).

It should be noted that Islamophobia, as a phenomenon that generates acts of violence and discrimination against Muslims, represents a violation of the human rights of these individuals (MENDELSKI, 2019). This view is supported by the Council of Europe, which states that "regardless of whether it takes the daily forms of racism and discrimination or more violent forms, Islamophobia is a violation of human rights and a threat to social cohesion" (2004, p. 6). The European Union, through its Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), also supports this argument, maintaining that "the right to equal treatment and non-discrimination is associated with the rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion" (FRA, 2017, p. 12).

In addition, the understanding of Islamophobia as a restriction of human rights also exposes its relations with racism, as attested by the conceptualization proposed by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC): "(...) contemporary form of racism and xenophobia (...) unlike classical racism and xenophobia, Islamophobia is primarily based on the stigma of a religion and its followers" (2011, p. 5).

In the same direction, Kalin (2011) argues that Islamophobia has become a form of racism because it does not limit itself only to religion. Through it, hatred towards a group of people is incited, also considering cultural traditions and ethnic experiences. For the author (2011), the old racism centered on biological inferiority reappears with Islamophobia, through ethnic, cultural, and religious segregationism. Furthermore, understanding Islamophobia only through the religious framework not only ignores the issue of racism but also allows for greater legitimation of these practices and discourses in secular societies (such as France), where criticism of religion is seen as healthy and as an exercise in freedom of expression (MONDON and WINTER, 2017).

Likewise, Garner and Selod (2014) argue that Islamophobia is a specific form of racism, because the acts and rhetoric are constituted not only by references to religion, but also because they cover cultural aspects, such as physical appearance (including, but not limited to, clothing) (ibidem). In this way, Islamophobia materializes in the perceptible discrimination and exclusion of individuals based on physical attributes, one of the axes of racism (MENDELSKI, 2019).

Given the racist and illiberal character of Islamophobia (insofar as it violates human rights in their liberal sense), it is possible to advance the analysis of its

discursive and ideological aspects. The action of Islamophobia depends on the construction of an essentialist and distorted vision of Islam, capable of positioning it as the "other". Negative representations allow and legitimize discrimination against Muslims (MENDELSKI, 2019).

The conception of Islam as "other" is carried out through its opposition to two sets of European values: liberalism-secularism and Christianity. The point that unites both perceptions is a reductionist, monolithic, and immutable conception of Islam as a religion. In other words, *orientalism*, in the terms presented by Said (1979), will be the element that unites different perspectives in the opposite direction to Islam. That is, liberal arguments of secularism and gender equality, as well as illiberal positions that place Muslims as inferior to Christians, coalesce into the *orientalist* view of inherent Western superiority over Islamists.

Allen (2010) states that Islamophobia is a contemporary ideological position in Western societies that negatively frames the Islamic religion and Muslims as the "other," as a problem for "us," and that this ideological position assumes different forms and effects. Islamophobia, built on the antithesis between Islam and liberal and secular European values, is based on the exacerbation of an unconditional incompatibility of the Muslim creed with such values. According to Bezirgan (2011), this view argues that Islam is incapable of acquiescing to European assumptions of secular public space and progressive social issues.

After presenting the main conceptual issues of the paper, the following section will deal with methodological considerations.

3 Methodological notes: Sources, methods, and data collection

The study of Islamophobia in France will cover the period from 1996 to 2019. This timeframe is justified for two reasons. First, the year 1996 marks the beginning of the availability of systematic data on acts of violence and prejudice against the French Maghreb community, by the CNCDH. Although its scope refers more to the immigration status of a group (Maghrebi) than to the religious one (the Muslims), these data are pioneers within the context of the investigation of Islamophobia, since information about the phenomenon has only just begun to be disseminated in 2003, by the CCIF. Second, the period from 1996 to 2019 encompasses the enactment and entry into force of the three legislations examined by this paper: law 2004-228, law 2010-1192, and the *burkini* municipal laws (2016).

Some considerations are necessary about the main sources for the empirical analysis of Islamophobic acts, the CCIF and the CNCDH. The first presents information on the phenomenon since 2003, and, annually, since 2005. The second presents the numbers since 2010. From 1996 to 2010, the CNCDH grouped the occurrences aimed at the Muslim community in the item of *anti-Maghrebian racism*, situated in the category of racism and xenophobia.

Regarding the CCIF, the entity in operational terms is characterized as an NGO *engaged* in the subject: composed of Muslim individuals, it not only collects information on Islamophobia but also has a system of psychological and legal support for citizens who are victims of Islamophobia, militating against Islamophobia. However, the organization's work is widely appreciated internationally, symbolized by recognition from Amnesty International and Human

Rights Watch (CCIF, ONLINE). In addition, the CCIF also collaborates with other institutions involved in the defense of human rights such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the European Union (EU) through the Fundamental Rights Agency (CCIF, ONLINE).

The CNCDH is an independent state organization linked to the prime minister, made up of government officials and members of civil society, as well as human rights experts (CNCDH, ONLINE). It has a permanent dialogue with various sectors of French society, including collaborating with the CCIF in the fight against Islamophobia, with the function of monitoring respect for human rights in France and advising the French government on the matter.

In terms of methodology, CNCDH and CCIF adopt different procedures regarding the collection of data related to Islamophobia and the understanding of the types of Islamophobic actions. This difference results in divergent numbers regarding the totality and modalities of Islamophobic acts. The CNCDH includes, in its statistics, only the facts that gave rise to a complaint or police intervention, followed by a record by security agents[11].

The CCIF, on the other hand, includes in its materials, in addition to the data recorded by the police, the reports of victims or witnesses that are forwarded to the organization. Complaints are verified by the CCIF before entering the statistics on Islamophobia (CNCDH, 2014). For Najib and Hopkins, the CCIF option of also including the complaints made by individuals to the institution provides a rich database on the subject of Islamophobia in France (2020, p. 4).

Another distinction lies in the inclusion by the CCIF of the item *discrimination* as a specific category in its databases, unlike the CNCDH. The entity linked to the French government limits itself to exposing cases of *discrimination* within the broad scope involving discriminatory incidents that took place "because of race, origin, ethnicity or religion." Furthermore, the incorporation of the sphere of *discrimination* by only one of the two institutions causes a significant statistical difference between the data put forward by the two entities, since traditionally, the item *discrimination* represents the vast majority of occurrences of Islamophobia reported by the CCIF (CNCDH, 2014; CCIF, 2018).

Having stipulated the timeframe, and the considerations about the nature of the sources, it is possible to proceed to the explanation of the research methodology. The main method consists of the *case study* of France (1996-2019). Through this approach, it is possible to specifically examine an object of study, ensuring a determined focus. Furthermore, this methodological choice, by focusing on only one investigative piece, warrants a deeper and more detailed analysis of the object (YIN, 2005). Thus, a study of nearly a quarter of a century of the phenomenon of Islamophobia in France is undertaken, examining its occurrence both in society and in public power.

Once the methodological framework is delimited, it is important to highlight the data collection instruments for carrying out the case study: (i) Bibliographic review; (ii) Documentary research; (iii) Field research. The first explores the

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[11] An additional difficulty in recording and counting Islamophobia in France lies in the fact that Islamophobia is not typified as a crime in the French penal code. Unlike, for example, what happens with the crime of anti-Semitism.

theoretical literature on Islamophobia, human rights, migration, the integration of Muslims in France, secularism, religion, and identity. In addition, surveys carried out by French institutes were used in order to identify public opinion about Muslims, such as the *Institut d'études opinion public* (IFOP), Ipsos France, *Institut national d'études démographiques* (INED), and *Institut Montaigne*.

The documentary research relied on primary sources referring to legislation 2004-228, 2010-1192, and laws on the *burkini*. Official documents from the French government were also investigated regarding the aforementioned laws and issues related to Muslims, made available by the *Conseil d'Etat*, *Ministère de l'intérieur français*, and in the National Assembly and Senate.

The field research took place during the period the author spent as visiting scholar at Sciences Po (2019-20). The period of study in Paris made it possible for the researcher to carry out work visits to the two main entities that systematize information on Islamophobia in France: CNCDH and CCIF. The stay at Sciences Po also allowed for a new immersive experience: the personal experience in a distant country, in the permanent condition of a *foreigner* (with all the difficulties and implications that this status presupposes), expanded the researcher's perceptions and understandings of the sensation of *feeling foreigner*.

Having made these considerations about the sources, methodology, and data collection, it is possible to move forward with their investigation in quantitative and qualitative terms.

4 Muslim migrants, the French public sector, and Islamophobia

One difficulty in studying the Muslim minority in France is the absence of official statistics on religiosity and ethnicity in the country (MENDELSKI, 2019). According to the Pew Research Center (2017), 8.8% of French people belong to the Islamic creed. They represent around 5.7 million French people, making France the European state with the largest absolute number of Muslims on the continent (PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2017).

The massive migration of Muslims from Islamic territories to France began in the post-World War II period (MENDELSKI, 2019). Most individuals came from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco (KAYA, 2009). Most French Muslims originate from this migratory wave (INSTITUTE MONTAIGNE, 2016). In the late 1960s, workers from sub-Saharan Africa began to emigrate in large numbers (NIELSEN, 2016). Thus, the main origins of French Muslims are: Algeria (38%), Morocco (25%), Sub-Saharan African countries (9%), and Turkey (8%) (INSTITUTE MONTAIGNE, 2016).

However, historically, relations between migrants and French people are tense. According to Louati (2017), French elites, supported by the colonial heritage, French elites have been manipulating the Muslim question for decades, confining the French Islamic community to the position of foreigners within a nation. Even third and fourth generation Muslims are viewed with suspicion (LOUATI, 2017). This problematic relationship was enhanced with the occurrence of 9/11, the War on Terror, and the Syrian refugee crisis (2014-16) (MENDELSKI, 2018).

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Furthermore, the integration of Muslims has been instrumentalized in the fight against terrorism: between 2015-17, France was the European country that suffered the most terrorist attacks, being also the one with the highest number of deaths from these actions (MENDELSKI, 2018; EUROPOL, 2016). It is also noteworthy that, in the same period, Paris has been the European country that has carried out the most arrests of suspects (largely Muslims) of committing terrorist acts (MENDELSKI, 2018; EUROPOL, 2015; 2016; 2017).

Returning to the demographics of French Muslims, approximately two-thirds are reported to be affiliated with a specific denomination of Islam: 52% are Sunni, 4% are Shia and about 1% are Alevis (BERTELSMANN FOUNDATION, 2017). This classification, as well as the plurality of places of origin, attest to the complexity and diversity of the Muslim community in France. The Montagne Institute (2016, p. 22), when investigating the practices of French Muslims, presents interesting conclusions. It classifies the Islamic faithful in France into three broad categories, according to the degree of religiosity and adherence to French values:

Table 1: Religiosity and adherence to French principles by Muslims

Secularized	Partially secularized	Values contrary to French republican values
46 % of French Muslims	25 % of French Muslims	29 % of French Muslims
Individuals totally secularized or in the process of it.	Intermediate position: proud to be Muslim, but accept secularism.	It is the most problematic group. Mostly suburban young, not very well-placed in employment.
Although they did not deny their religion.	Express their religious affiliation in the public space; but reject the niqab and polygamy.	They are defined more by the use they make of Islam to signify their revolt than by their conservatism.

Source: Institute Montagne (2016, p. 22)

The relationship between the level of adherence to French values and the Islamic faith, as explained above, represents one of the most important elements in the group's integrative process in France. Sarter (2012) highlights the problematic vision of integration as assimilation to French values, defended by a large part of the French political class and by public opinion. In this conception, integration represents the full adoption of the way of life perceived as specifically French, resulting in the abandonment of most cultural and religious practices of Islam. These religious ties to Islam are, above all, associated (due to their distinctiveness and visibility) with the use of the Islamic veil[12] by Muslim women.

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[12] Generally speaking, there are three types of Islamic veil: the *hijab*, the *niqab*, and the burqa. The first is the most used by Muslim women in Europe and consists of a veil that covers the neck and hair.

Thus, at the state level, the regulation of the Islamic veil constitutes the main source of tension between the French state and its Muslim minority. According to Kastoryano (2002), the case of the veil in France has placed Islam at the center of identity negotiations, challenging the relationship between State and religion. In this debate, French secularism, traditionally constructed in opposition to religion in general, is being restructured today against Islam in particular (ROY, 2005).

Kastoryano claims that the veil has become linked to a balance of power between French perceptions of national identity (focusing on the principle of *laïcité*) and the identity of the latest waves of immigrants (based on Islam) (2004, p. 1239). The visibility of the Islamic religion in heavily secularized France has contributed to what Roy (2005) qualifies as a crisis of French national identity. In this context, Islam appears not as the cause of the problem, but as the mirror in which society sees itself, projecting onto the "other" the identity elements it disapproves of (ROY, 2005).

That said, this section examines the occurrence of Islamophobia in three French public policies: law 2004-228, law 2010-1192, and municipal laws on the *burkini* (2016). These measures had a direct impact on the Muslim community, through the ban on the public use of certain clothing (*hijab*, full veil, and *burkini*) and the restriction of certain individual freedoms in the context of the state of emergency. The investigation focuses on: (i) the legal text of the legislation, and (ii) the support of French and Muslim public opinion for the measures.

The argument of this paper is that the public policies in question disproportionately affected the fundamental freedoms of French Muslims. Although the legal texts are neutral and do not specify the Muslims, it is empirically and discursively observed that this community was the main target of the measures. The weakening of French democracy, due to the deterioration of the individual freedoms of the Muslim minority, as indicated by Freedom House (2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020) and by The Economist Democracy Index (2016; 2017; 2018; 2019), is an important reflection of the impact of these legislations.

4.1 The law 2004-228

In the late 1980s, the discussion and enactment of laws regulating religion in public spaces became a topic on the rise. The topic gained momentum with the so-called *veil case* in 1989 when three teenage girls arrived at their public schools wearing the Islamic veil (KASTORYANO, 2004, p. 1238). The topic generated debates at all levels of French society, becoming connected with matters of immigration and integration, and remaining to this day as a major source of tension (KASTORYANO, 2003, p. 284).

Part of the French perceives the use of the veil as a symbol of the lack of social integration of Muslim immigrants and their refusal to adopt the secular values of the country (ASAD, 2006). This negative perception is confirmed by surveys and

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The second is a veil for the face that leaves only the area around the eyes exposed. Finally, the burqa covers the entire body, leaving only a mesh screen for the female vision, being the type of Islamic veil least used by Muslim women in Europe. When mentioning the terms "veil" or "Islamic veil" in this work, reference is made to the *hijab*. When you say "full veil", you are alluding to the *niqab* or burqa (BBC, online).

opinion polls. In 2009, Gallup identified that considerable parts of French society associated the use of the veil with fanaticism (46%), oppression (53%), and the subjugation of women (52%). In another study, Gallup (2011) concluded that more than a third of French people (39%) agree with the statement that women wearing the veil are threats to European culture.

The level of distrust about the adornment and its symbolism remains in contemporary times. In July 2019, the IFOP identified that 47% of French respondents felt personally uncomfortable seeing a woman on the street wearing the Islamic headscarf (IFOP, 2019a). Zempi and Chakraborti (2014, p. 24) explain that the stereotyping and demonization of Islam, through its intimate connection with terrorism, fundamentalism, and gender oppression, provide fertile ground for public expressions of Islamophobia, such as verbal abuses, threats, and intimidation, harassment, physical assault and violence, property damage, and hate speech.

In the public sphere, in March 2004, law 2004-228 was enacted, stating that "in public primary and secondary schools, the use of signs or uniforms by which students, ostensibly, manifest a religious affiliation is prohibited" (LOI 2004-228, free translation). If such happens, the legislation stipulates that educational institutions must implement a disciplinary procedure against the student (LOI 2004-228).

The matter generated controversy and was criticized by French academics (GEISSER, 2010; LOCHAK, 2004; ROY, 2004; TÉVANIAN, 2005), international, (ASAD, 2006; FEKETE, 2009; JOPPKE, 2007a; LACORNE, 2019; LOUATI, 2017). ; LETTINGA and SAHARSO, 2014), NGOs (CCIF, 2005; 2015), INGOs (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2004, ANISTIA INTERNACIONAL, 2012) and UN bodies (COMISSÃO DE DIREITOS HUMANOS, 2006; 2015, COMISSÃO DE ESPECIALISTAS EM ASSUNTOS DE MINORIAS, 2008, and COMISSÃO PARA OS DIREITOS DA CRIANÇA, 2004). The central point raised by critics is the discriminatory effect of the legislation on Muslim students who wear the veil. As a consequence, they understand that the students are deprived of their freedom of religious expression and are likely to suffer marginalization from the school environment.

Empirically, it is noted that, although it covers all creeds, the legislation mainly affected Muslim students who wore the *hijab* (MENDELSKI, 2018). In the first year after the enactment of the law, 639 instances of the use of religious symbols in French public schools were reported. In total, 97.96% (626 cases) involved the use of the veil, 1.72% (11 cases) the Sikh turban, and 0.31% (2 cases) the use of crucifixes (RAPPORT HANIFA CHÉRIFI, 2005). The impact on Jewish students was not significant as the vast majority of those who wear religious symbols are enrolled in private Jewish schools (ANISTIA INTERNACIONAL, 2012). It is also noteworthy that only a single official quantitative assessment of the impact of the legislation was carried out by the French government (ANISTIA INTERNACIONAL, 2012).

The CCIF (2009) warns that the legislation also indirectly fostered two types of discrimination. First, an excessive interpretation of the law has justified numerous cases of segregation by public or private agents. At the public level, many schools have refused that veiled mothers accompany on school trips citing the law as justification (CCIF, 2013). Also in the public sphere, discrimination against Muslims

is operationalized by state officials who often refer to laws or regulations connected to the principle of secularism to support their approach (CCIF, 2013).

Zempi and Chakraborti (2014, p. 9-10) add that the veil is stereotypically seen as a symbol of the oppression of women against which the West prides itself on being emancipatory. This approach is structured along the lines of colonial reasoning: the assumption is that women in Islam are incapable of self-determination and autonomy. Seen in this light, a veiled body is necessarily a victimized body, insofar as veiled Muslim women are incapable of autonomy or agency (ZEMPI and CHAKRABORTI, 2014, p. 10). This patriarchal and colonial logic is also observable in the 2010-1192 law, which indirectly banned the wearing of the full Islamic veil in public.

4.2 The law 2010-1192

In June 2009, on the initiative of the National Assembly, a parliamentary commission was appointed to investigate the use of the full-face veil (burqa and *niqab*) in French territory (JOPPKE, 2013). The working group was supported by the then French President, Nicholas Sarkozy, and after five months of the investigation concluded that the full veil is totally contrary to French republican values and must be fought (MISSION D'INFORMATION SUR LA PRATIQUE DU PORT DU VOILE INTEGRAL SUR LA TERRITOIRE NATIONAL, 2009).

The document supported the parliamentary discussions that took place in the following months, culminating in the enactment of law 2010-1192 by then President Sarkozy on October 11, 2010. The measure had broad popular support. In the year of its proclamation, an IPSOS/Le Point survey found that 74% of respondents were in favor of an anti-burqa law (IPSOS/LE POINT, 2010). In 2019, almost a decade after its publication, the percentage of French people who supported the government's restriction on the full veil rose to 89% (IFOP, 2019b).

Containing seven articles, the legislation states in its first article that "in any public space, no one should wear clothes designed to hide the face" (LOI 2010-1192, p. 1, free translation). The text in its second article exempts individuals from covering their face for health reasons, professional reasons, practicing sports, festivities or artistic events. Failure to obey the law will be considered a second-class offense, punishable by a fine (LOI 2010-1192). A French government circular issued a posteriori explained that the face could only be covered inside private cars, residences or places of worship, but not in private places open to the public (parks, beaches, hospitals, libraries, museums, stadiums, shops, restaurants and cinemas) (CIRCULAR LOI 2010-1192, May 31, 2011, free translation).

The article received several criticisms from experts, entities and international organizations, who highlighted the restriction of the freedom of expression and belief of Muslim women who use the adornment. According to Human Rights Watch (2014), the 2010-1192 law has a disproportionate impact on Islamic women, violating their right not to be discriminated against on the basis of religion and

gender. The ban on the full veil caused by the law interferes with the right of women to express their religion and belief freely in the exercise of their personal autonomy (MENDELSKI, 2018). Furthermore, the legislation does little to protect women who are required to wear the full veil by their family and/or community (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2014). Similarly, Amnesty International "believes that general prohibitions on the full veil violate the freedom of religion and expression rights of those women who choose to wear the veil as an expression of their religious, cultural or personal identities or beliefs" (2012, p. 93).

On a practical level, the available data regarding the implementation of the law show that the measure directly impacted Muslims. From the beginning of its implementation until April 30, 2013, the French State carried out 705 verifications, including 423 on veiled women. Some citizens were verified several times (OBSERVATOIRE DE LA LAÏCITÉ, 2014, p. 91).

The study *After the Ban: The Experiences of 35 Women of the Full-Face Veil in France*, by the Open Society Foundation (2013), presents interesting notes on the effects of the 2010-1192 law. All interviewees reported that the law had significant negative effects on their lives and that the legislation did not empower or free them. In the scope of the study, 70% of the women surveyed continued to wear the garment. Among those who stopped wearing the veil, none of them framed their decision in terms of a positive liberating action (OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION, 2013).

Zempi and Chakraborti (2014) state that the 2010-1192 law stigmatizes veiled Muslim women as potential "criminals," justifying acts of violence against them when they are seen in public. In this sense, the ban "increases the sense of vulnerability of Muslim women dressed in *niqabs* in the public sphere. Even if it does not explicitly incite violence motivated by hate, the law in its application contributes to a climate of intolerance and the growing tension between Islam and the West" (ZEMPI and CHAKRABORTI, 2014, p. 21).

Empirically, it appears that women are historically the main victims of Islamophobic actions in France, as shown in graph 1:

Graph 1: Targets of Islamophobia in France by gender
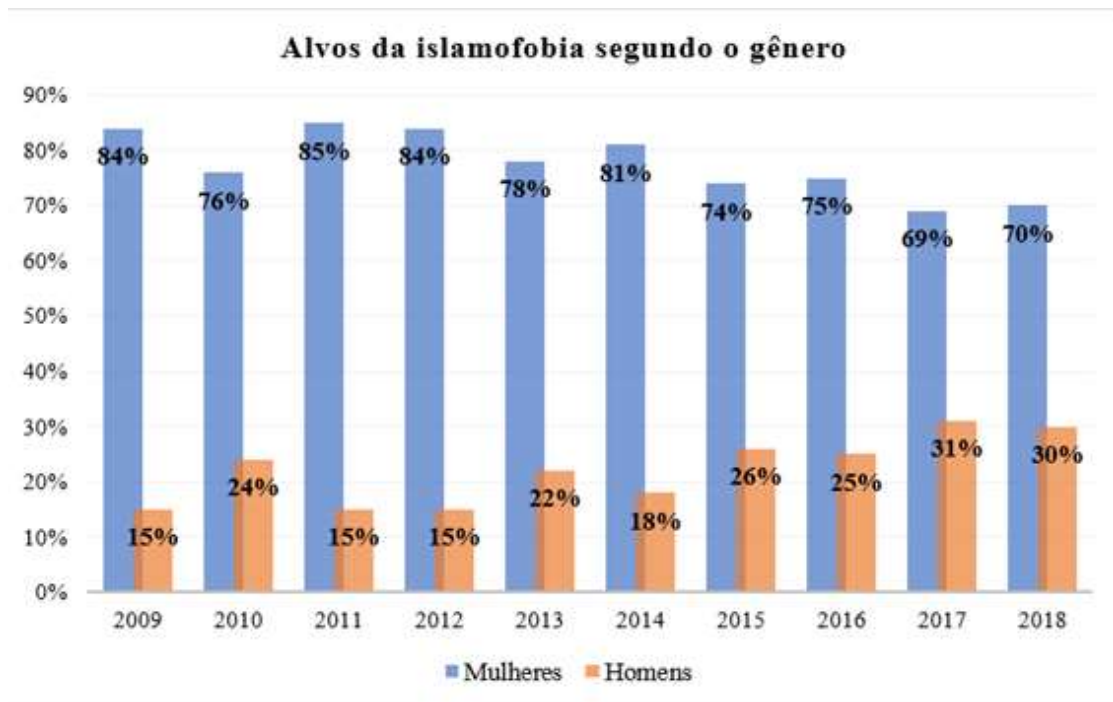
Source: annual reports by CCIF (2009-2019).

Among women, most victims of Islamophobic acts were wearing a *hijab* or *niqab* at the time of the assault (CCIF, 2016). More than just a religious adornment, the veil is understood and constantly constructed as a symbol of Muslim otherness, reinforcing the visibility of religion (ZEMPI and CHAKRABORTI, 2014). In 2009, among the attacks on individuals (aggressions and threats/verbal attacks) mapped by the CCIF, 99% of the attacked women were wearing a *hijab* or *niqab*. In 2015, 80% of women who suffered physical attacks of an Islamophobic nature wore some type of veil (CCIF, 2009; 2016). Hostility to the Islamic veil has also gained momentum since 2016 with the laws of some French municipalities that banned the use of the Islamic bathing suit, the *burkini*, on their beaches.

4.3 French municipal laws concerning the burkini (2016)

Before analyzing the *burkini* laws, it is necessary to return to the French context of the period. Between the beginning of 2015 and the middle of 2016, France was shaken by a sequence of major terrorist attacks (MENDELSKI, 2020). On January 7, 2015, two men carrying rifles and other weapons broke into the Paris office of satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* and murdered 12 people (EUROPOL, 2016). Two days later, an accomplice of the terrorists murdered 4 individuals in a Jewish grocery store in the French capital. The day before, the extremist had murdered a municipal guard (LE FIGARO, 2015). The Al-Qaeda group in the Arabian Peninsula claimed responsibility for the assault on *Charlie Hebdo*, declaring that it was revenge for the newspaper's satirical cartoons about the Prophet Muhammad (AL JAZEERA, 2015). DAESH, in turn, claimed responsibility for the attacks on January 8 and 9 (LE FIGARO, 2015).

Subsequently, on 13 November, a series of coordinated attacks in Paris, including gunfire, and suicide bombings in cafes, restaurants, a concert hall, and other public places, resulted in 130 dead and 494 injured (EUROPOL 2016). The action represented the worst episode of violence in France since World War II (CASTILLO et al, 2015). The DAESH organization claimed responsibility for the attacks, blaming the "war against Islam in France" and the country's bombing of territories controlled by the group in the Middle East (SHARMA, 2015, p. 1). Immediately after the incidents, French President François Hollande declared a state of emergency (MENDELSKI, 2020).

Eight months later, during celebrations of Bastille Day (14 July), a man driving a truck launches it into a crowd in the city of Nice, killing 85 people and injuring 201. The crime was claimed by DAESH (EUROPOL, 2017). The insecurity caused by yet another terrorist event was used by French leaders as a justification for maintaining the state of emergency. The period of legal exceptionality was extended six times until October 2017, when it was replaced by the new anti-terrorist law (FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO, 2017; MENDELSKI, 2020).

It was then, in the scenario of great instability and distrust towards Muslims, due to terrorist actions, that the laws against the *burkini* were implemented. The controversy surrounding the piece emerged and gained national attention with the ban on the use of religious clothing on the beach in the city of Cannes, through a municipal decree of July 28, 2016, less than two weeks after the terrorist attacks that took place in the neighboring city of Nice (LE MONDE, 2016a). The measure was followed by another 30 French cities[13] (LE FIGARO, 2016).

Below is a transcript of the main points regarding the Cannes decree:

> **Beachwear that manifests a religious affiliation, while France and places of religious worship are currently targets of terrorist attacks, are likely to create risks of disturbances in public order (fights, crowds, etc.), which need to be avoided.**
>
> **Access to beaches and swimming is prohibited** from the signing of this decree until August 31, 2016, **to anyone who is not wearing the correct clothes, respecting morals and secularism, respecting the rules of hygiene and bathing safety** adapted to the public maritime domain.
>
> It is also forbidden to wear clothes during swimming with a connotation contrary to these principles (...) **any offense will be the subject of a complaint and will be punished with a first category fine, that is, 38 euros** (LE MONDE, 2016b, p. 1), free translation, emphasis added).

Analogously to the laws 2004-228 and 2010-1192, the decree of Cannes and the other cities does not specify the Muslim religious dress that it will restrict in practice. The other decrees on the *burkini* are also justified by the need to protect public order, hygiene or French laws on secularism (THE GUARDIAN, 2016, p. 1).

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[13] Le Rayol-Canadel-sur-mer, Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, Vallauris-Golfe-Juan, Cassis, Cagnes-sur-Mer, La Ciotat, Le Lavandou, Mandelieu-la-Napoule, Cavalaire-sur-mer, Cap d'Ail, Menton, Cogolin, Sainte-Maxime, Villeneuve-Loubet, Fréjus, Nice, La Londe-les-Maures, Saint-Laurent-du-Var, Cagnano, Beaulieu-sur-Mer, Sisco, Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, Ghisonaccia Villefranche-sur-Mer, Leucate, Èze, Le Touquet, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, Oye-Plage Théoule-sur-Mer (LE FIGARO, 2016).

Similar to other legislations investigated in this work, it is possible to observe, in the speeches of the political leaders involved in the elaboration of the law, its direction to Islamic adornments. According to the general director of services for the city of Cannes, Thierry Migoule, after the decree was issued, no *burkini* was seen on the beaches of Cannes (LE MONDE, 2016b). Migoule also reveals that it is necessary to ban "ostensible clothing that refers to loyalty to terrorist movements that wage war against us" (LE MONDE, 2016b, p. 1, free translation). Furthermore, the mayor of Cannes himself, Davis Lisnard, stated that "we do not ban the veil, nor the kippah, nor the crosses, **I simply ban a uniform that is the symbol of Islamic extremism**" (LE MONDE, 2016b, p. 1, free translation, emphasis added).

As Migoule and Lisnard underscore, the representation of the *burkini* as a symbol of Islamic extremism and its direct association with terrorism contribute to the feeling of stigmatization of the French Muslim community. They also help to maintain the negative perception of the majority of the French population towards Muslims. Furthermore, "discourses can help to sustain and reproduce the status quo, as well as transform it" (FAIRCLOUGH and WODAK, 1997, p. 258).

Similar to the 2004-228 and 2010-1192 laws, the *burkini* ban had great popular support: in 2016, 64% of French people were against the dress; in 2017, 77%; and in 2018, 78% oppose the clothing (IFOP, 2016; 2019c, and IPSOS, 2017).

Despite widespread popular support, the anti-*burkini* municipal decrees were strongly criticized by academics, civil society institutions, INGOs and multilateral bodies. In the eyes of critics, the decrees attack the freedom of expression and religion of Muslim women who wear the *burkini* and also foster a dangerous association between terrorism and the clothing, contributing to social tensions and discrimination against French Muslims. According to Amnesty International, the *burkini* bans are "an attack on women's freedom of expression and religion, as well as the right to non-discrimination" (2016, p. 1). Human Rights Watch, through its director, Bénédicte Jeannerod, has a similar understanding: "the ban on the *burkini* stigmatizes women practicing Islam, excluding them from public spaces and depriving them of their rights to autonomy, leisure activities, to wear whatever they choose and, of course, to practice their faith" (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2016, p. 1).

In practical terms, it was found that the bans on the *burkini* contributed to the marginalization of Muslim women who wear the garment, in addition to fostering tension between Muslims and non-Muslims. For Almeida, "by prohibiting *burkini*-style clothing, municipal decrees issued in the summer of 2016 contributed to strengthening the discursive barriers between being a Muslim and being a full citizen of a secular Republic" (2018, p. 31). The distance between different religions in France is also highlighted by Amnesty International (2016), which states that the ban on the *burkini* is both encouraging and fueled by prejudice and intolerance.

After discussing the relationship between French legislation and Islamophobia, the next section will focus on the investigation of empirical data on the phenomenon in the European country.

5 Conflicting territorial identities: The evolution of Islamophobia in France

In this section, the evolution of the number of Islamophobic acts and anti-Maghrebian racism over the years will be discussed, highlighting the moments of

significant increases in their incidence, and relating the phenomenon to the main events associated with Muslims and Islam. Graph 2, below, illustrates these points:

Graph 2: Total Islamophobic acts and anti-Maghrebian racism in France
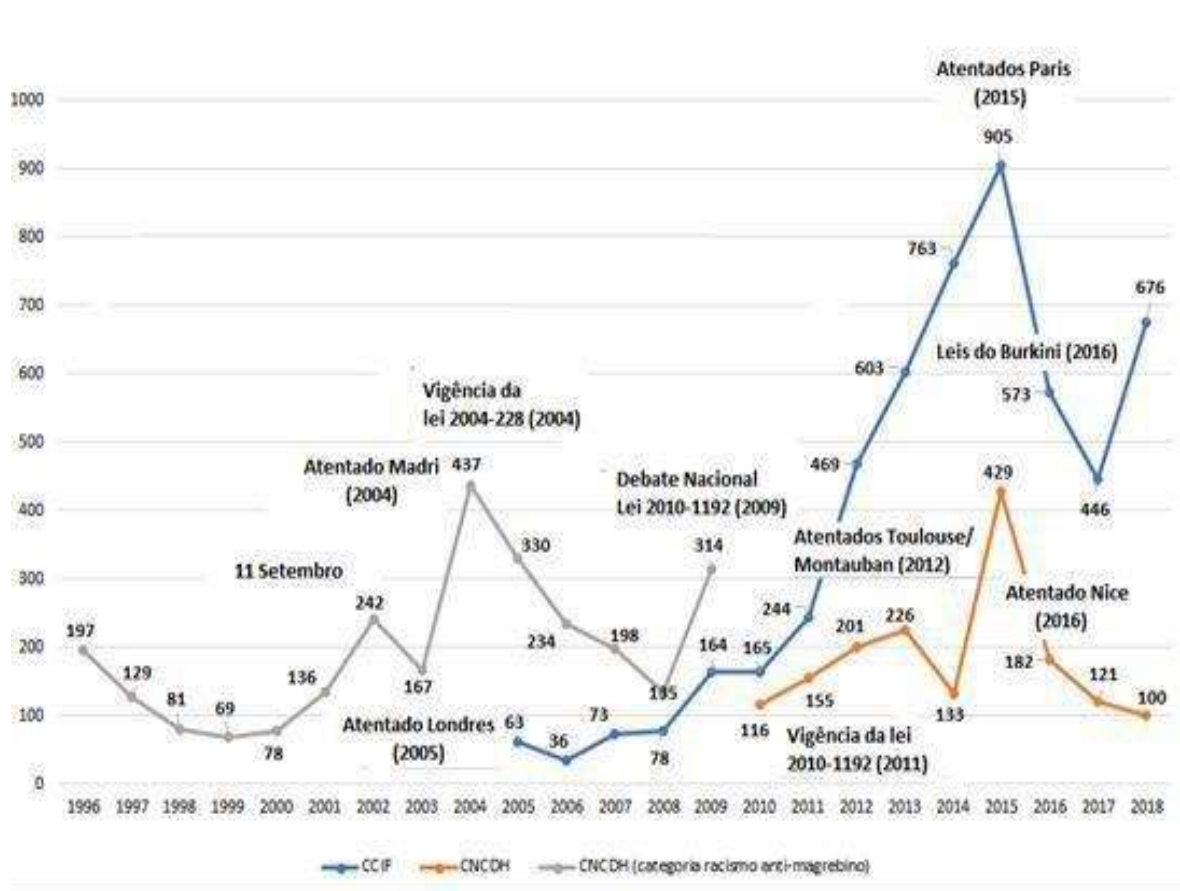
Source: annual reports by CCIF (2005-19) and CNCDH (2002-2019).

Regarding the temporal development of the occurrences, two points stand out. First, it is observed that the oscillation of the numbers referring to anti-Maghrebi racism is greater than the Islamophobic incidents. These changes may be related both to the broader scope of the category (encompassing episodes also characterized by xenophobia towards Maghreb immigrants), as well as to the impact of important events, such as the bloody terrorist attacks of 9/11 and Madrid and the entry into force of the law 2004-228. The second point refers to the difference between the CCIF and CNCDH data: the adoption of different methodologies in the collection of Islamophobic occurrences significantly alters the CCIF occurrences. According to the CNCDH, the main difference between the data from the two institutions resides in the use of the *discrimination* category (CNCDH, 2015, p. 418).

Returning to the considerations made at the beginning of this subsection, it is important to reflect on the relationship between the heights of anti-Maghreb violence and large-scale terrorism. The graph shows that, of the four peaks of violence against the French Maghrebi, three coincide with the occurrence of far-reaching terrorist attacks: 9/11 in the USA (about 3,000 deaths), the Madrid attack in 2004 (about 193 deaths) and the London attack in 2005 (about 56 dead) (EUROPOL,

2007). Between the years 2000 and 2002, the number of actions against Maghrebi tripled, while during the years 2003 and 2004, the episodes increased by 261%.

Once the terrorist attacks did not take place on French soil, what explains this expressive increase in violence against the Maghrebi? For Najib and Hopkins, Islamophobia has intensified since 9/11 and the War on Terror, mainly due to the frequent association of Islam with terrorism by the media and politicians (2020, p. 2). Since that period, the orientalist imagery of Islam, traditionally marked by negative representations associated with the oppression of women and the colonial past, also began to include the terrorist identity.

Wolfreys (2018) argues that, since 9/11, French Islamophobic discourse has merged external security elements from the War on Terror with internal identity debates about the veil (present since the 1990s). With this, the representation of Muslims as threats combined security and identity aspects, building Islam as a danger to French secular values (WOLFREYS, 2018). As discussed earlier, the narrative of constructing Muslims as a threat intensified during the state of emergency. In this period, French rulers reinforced the stereotype of Muslims as terrorists, opposing them to the French secular national identity (MENDELSKI, 2020).

This rhetorical effort fits into what Wolfreys (2018) and Zragua (2018) call the *radicalization of secularism*, instrumentalized by French politicians, intellectuals, and the media in order to control the Muslim minority. The *radicalization of secularism*, and its related demonization of Islamic identity, has contributed to increased discrimination and violence against institutions and/or individuals perceived as Muslims (WOLFREYS, 2018, p. 4).

The institution of the 2004-228 law seems to have played a fundamental role in this process of construction of opposing identities. Commenting on Islamophobia in France, Beydoum argues that the phenomenon "is also a movement in which state policies aimed at Muslims endorse prevailing stereotypes, in turn encouraging individual animosity towards Muslims" (2018, p. 32). In this way, the 2004-228 law led to an exacerbation of secularism, as opposed to a supposed retrograde Muslim identity, symbolized by the veil. Precisely, liberal and secular rhetoric function as fundamental mechanisms for sustaining Islamophobia, as this paper advocates. Thus, for the CCIF, Islamophobia in France is

> based on a license to discriminate, on a license to hate, made possible by the euphemism of a racism that is legitimate and that manipulates republican values. The deviation from secularism is a clear example of this. To politically justify their racism, many do not hesitate to exploit secularism in ways that it generates exclusion and rejection (2019, p. 5, free translation).

The period following the enactment of the 2004-228 law is important evidence of the strong growth of acts of violence and intolerance against the Maghrebi minority.

It is inferred, therefore, that the existence of deadly terrorist attacks in the West acts as a fundamental element of the Islamophobic discourse present in France and Europe, as they exploit and exacerbate the panic and revolt caused by terrorism, associating them with the Muslims.

Considering only the data on Islamophobia, according to the CCIF, the phenomenon, after a period of low elevation between 2005-2008, grew dramatically over the following years, reaching its peak in 2015, as shown in graph 7. Subsequently, the years 2016 and 2017 show a reduction. In 2018, there is a new increase in occurrences. According to information from the CNCDH, the incidence of Islamophobia remained more stable, except for the peak in 2015.

In this timeline, it was found that the significant increases in Islamophobia correspond to the emergence of events associated with Muslims/Islam. Thus, it can be seen that the first large increase in the number of Islamophobic actions took place between 2008 and 2009, with an increase of 130% (CCIF, 2010). The same goes for anti-Maghrebi registrations, which grew by 235% (CNCDH, 2010). The year 2009 is marked by debates over the 2010-1192 law, with its emphasis on banning the *niqab* and the burqa.

According to the CCIF (2010), the overexposure of the topic by the media, added to an Islamophobic stance on the part of politicians, intellectuals, and the press itself, contributed to the increase in society's negative perception of Muslims. Specifically, the two months with the highest incidence of Islamophobic acts in 2009 coincided with the controversial speech by then-President Nicolas Sarkozy, in which he harshly attacked the burqa (June), and with the official launch of the debate on national identity (November). Also according to the CCIF: "Islamophobic words and acts are two links in the same chain of contempt and intolerance" (2010, p. 9, free translation).

Another important rise in cases of Islamophobia took place in 2011. This is the year in which the 2010-1192 law came into force. As previously mentioned, the legislation has fostered an increase in intolerance and discrimination against Muslims who wear the clothing, or simply the *hijab*. The finding (also expressed earlier) that veiled women (with *hijab* or *niqab*) represent the greatest victims of Islamophobia attests to the strong correlation between the 2010-1192 law and the rise of Islamophobia carried out by civil society.

In the following year, 2012, the unfolding of two events must be considered in the examination of the Islamophobic incidences. In the first, a terrorist murdered four French soldiers and wounded another in the cities of Toulouse and Montauban, respectively, on March 11 and 15, 2012. Then, on March 19, in Toulouse, he fatally killed a teacher and three students, in a Jewish school, also injuring four other people (BBC, 2012a). The gunman, who was killed by police shortly afterwards, presented himself as a member of al-Qaeda and justified the killings because of Palestinians, the French military presence in Afghanistan, and the French ban on the full veil (BBC, 2012b).

In September, the release of the short film "Innocence of Muslims" provoked controversy for presenting a caricatured and offensive image of the Prophet Mohammad. For CCIF (2013), the peaks of Islamophobia in 2012 coincide with high-impact news related to Islam/Muslims, such as the terrorist attacks in Toulouse and Montauban and the release of the short film "Innocence of Muslims." Investigating the data (CCIF and CNCDH), it can be observed that the months related to the short film's release (September and October) witnessed a considerable increase in Islamophobic incidences, with a 100% increase in

occurrences according to CNCDH (2013) and about 25% according to CCIF (2013), compared to the monthly average.

The CCIF points out the existence of a historical correlation in France between the media representation of events related to Islam/Muslims, the political treatment of the fact, and the rise in Islamophobic acts (CCIF, 2013, p. 6). Similarly, Cesari (2011, p. 24) argues that public discourse about Islam by politicians, intellectuals, and the media contributes to an environment that can result in Islamophobic practices.

The year 2015 saw the most significant increase in cases of Islamophobia in the entire historical series of France. There were 905 cases registered by the CCIF and 427 cases registered by the CNCDH. This peak is clearly observable in Graph 7. This increase of Islamophobic occurrences coincides with the deadliest year caused by jihadist terrorism in France. That year, the country suffered two traumatic attacks: the attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, resulting in twelve deaths and eight injured, on January 7; and the coordinated assaults in Paris on 13 November, resulting in 130 deaths and 368 injuries.

Analyzing the monthly history, it can be seen that the terrorist attacks of January and November 2015 converge with the highest monthly records of Islamophobia: in January 2015 there were 178 cases according to the CNCDH and 162 according to the CCIF, while November 2015 presented 74 cases (CNCDH) and 88 cases (CCIF). Comparing these months with their 2014 pairs highlights the magnitude of the explosion of Islamophobia notifications: between January 2014 and January 2015 the incidence of Islamophobia increased by 1,100% (from 14 to 178 cases), while between November 2014 and November 2015, the increase was 3,600% (from 2 to for 74 cases) (CNCDH, 2015; 2016).

The CCIF and CNCDH recognize the influence of the 2015 terrorist attacks on the growth of Islamophobic occurrences. The first states that the Islamophobic acts of 2015 fit directly into the context of the 2015 terrorist attacks. The organization highlighted that, after the January assaults, in three weeks there were 120 cases of Islamophobia, the highest number ever recorded by the CCIF (DEBAH, 2016). The CNCDH notes that the effect of the January and November attacks on the increase in violence against Muslims was particularly pronounced (CNCDH, 2019, p. 49).

As of 2016, however, there has been a consistent drop in Islamophobia. For Louati (2017), it is important to consider the problem of non-recording of Islamophobic acts by victims within the context of the state of emergency. Nevertheless, an apex of Islamophobic occurrences can be seen during the month of July 2016. Similar to the other two peaks (January and November 2015), it can be noted that the growth of Islamophobic incidents accompany violent terrorist attacks (Nice attack in July 2016). Accordingly, the CNCDH maintains that the existence of the peak of Islamophobia in the wake of the Nice attacks reveals the continuous need to fight against amalgamations between religious affiliation and terrorism (2019, p. 49).

In addition, there are also controversies about the *burkini* that also emerged in July 2016. According to Louati (2017), hysteria about the clothing normalized racist rhetoric against Muslims, making identity politics central in the 2017 presidential campaign. Stereotypes and prejudiced visions against Islamists were common to the vast majority of presidential candidates (LOUATI, 2017). Given that

the year 2015 witnessed the highest peaks of Islamophobia in the entire historical series, it is pertinent to investigate it in detail, comparing it with the previous and subsequent years. The graph below brings the monthly records of Islamophobia between 2014-16, in order to show the connection between the peaks of Islamophobia and the existence of terrorist attacks:

Graph 3: Monthly Islamophobic occurrences between 2016-14 in France

Source: CNCDH (2015; 2016; 2017).

As shown in the graph, the connection between terrorism and the rise of Islamophobia is relevant. However, the data seem to indicate that there is a difference with regard to the lethality of the attacks and its correlation with Islamophobia. In the wake of terrorist attacks, record Islamophobic data were seen only in the context of assaults that resulted in a significant number of deaths. This inference is also corroborated when considering terrorist acts of great magnitude that occurred in other Western countries, as previously explained.

The drop in the number of Islamophobic incidents in 2017 and 2018 coincides with the existence of low-lethal terrorist violence. This issue is also raised by the CNCDH (2019), which highlights that the reduction in Islamophobic incidences in 2017 and 2018 is in line with the absence of major terrorist attacks resulting in deaths, unlike in 2015 and 2016. In addition, the number recorded in 2018 is the lowest since the institution started mapping anti-Muslim actions in 2010 (CNCDH, 2019).

Nevertheless, if we consider the CCIF data that include the item *discrimination*, it is noted that the numbers still remain high and that the decline in 2016 and 2017 is interrupted in 2018. But even taking into account the full CCIF data, it is possible to see that the peaks of Islamophobia (year 2015, and months of January and February) coincide with the occurrence of the deadliest year in terms of terrorism in French history.

Furthermore, it is not possible to say that the trend is towards stabilization of the number of Islamophobic acts. However, there is a clear correlation between high-profile events linked to Islam/Muslims – such as the discussion and implementation of the 2010-1192 law, controversial films, debate about the burkini, and terrorist actions – and the growth of Islamophobia. An element that adds complexity to the discussion of Islamophobia in France is the use of liberal rhetoric to legitimize racist acts against Muslims. As Bouamama points out: "contemporary Islamophobia, presenting itself as the strong defense of liberal values (democracy, women's rights, freedom of expression, respect for minorities, etc.), makes it possible to give a form of 'respectability' to racism" (2018, p. 28).

6 Conclusions

Focusing on the scientific debates about the integration of Muslims in European liberal societies, this paper investigated Islamophobia in France during the period from 1996 to 2019. Starting from the understanding of Islamophobia as indiscriminate negative attitudes and emotions against Islam or Muslims, the examination of the phenomenon was guided by the following research question: "How is Islamophobia constructed, and how does it evolve in France?"

It was observed that Islamophobia in France develops from a complex association and co-constitution between discourses and practices hostile to Muslims. It was found that the negative representation of Muslims and Islam is based, above all, on discursive constructions of security and identity matrix. The first refers to violence, symbolized by terrorism; while the second, to the oppression of women, identified by the use of religious clothing such as the veil, burqa and *burkini*. Both are fed by the existence of Orientalist thought in France, which refers to the colonial period.

The research showed that the two sets of representations (security and identity) are hegemonic, disseminated by the political elite and the media, and also supported by French public opinion. These negative representations not only reflect societal prejudices and hostilities against Muslims, they also fuel these perceptions in society. In this process, the Muslim identity, conceived as a fundamentalist terrorist, is opposed to an idealized French identity, that is, civilized and secular.

Starting with the investigation of terrorism in France, empirical data revealed a correlation between the occurrence of large-scale terrorist acts and the significant increase in cases of Islamophobia. The months that witnessed the three deadliest attacks carried out on French soil were also those that experienced the greatest spikes in Islamophobia. In governmental terms, the discursive ambiguity of political leaders regarding the (non) association of Muslims with terrorism and the selectivity of the state of emergency measures towards Muslims also contributed to the linking of the Islamic community to terrorist violence. Furthermore, empirically it was found that a considerable part of the Islamophobic cases is related to the association of Muslims with terrorism. Discursively, it is noted that between a third and 40% of the French population traditionally associate Islam with violence and terrorism (IPSOS, 2019).

The other element that builds and promotes Islamophobia in France is the demonization of the Islamic veil, whether in its hijab or niqab/burqa version. The

clothing is the main marker of Muslim otherness in the face of secular French society. Not by chance, the analysis of the data revealed that women wearing the veil represent the vast majority of victims of Islamophobia. About 75% of individuals who are victims of Islamophobia are women.

As in the case of terrorism, the demonization of the Islamic veil is embedded in a constant articulation between Islamophobic discourses, perceptions, and practices. The legislation that indirectly banned the *hijab*, niqab/burka, and *burkini*, exposed a liberal and neutral guise, as they never mentioned Islam as a target of their provisions. However, discursive and empirical examination revealed that they were indeed intended to deal with the visibility of Islam in public. The indirect ban on the veil in schools, the niqab/burqa in public, and the *burkini* on beaches represented an attack on the individual rights of Muslims to religious freedom. As a result, the measures are both illiberal and Islamophobic.

It was also found that the continued existence of Islamophobia in France contributed to the weakening of democracy in the country, by violating the human rights of the Islamic minority. As evidence, we have the French democratic deficit, exposed by Freedom House and The Economist Democracy Index.

Islamophobia and its impacts on the individual liberties of Muslims and on the very quality of democracy in States is a current and complex topic that requires additional studies. The specific role of the press, as a driver of societal tensions and Islamophobic positions, constitutes an interesting possibility for studies in the area. Especially considering the limits of freedom of expression in the face of indiscriminate criticism of Muslims and Islam. Another research suggestion resides in the discussion of the role and behavior of political parties in the context of Islamophobia. How are they structured regarding the Muslim integration? What are the similarities and differences between them in the European democratic context? These are relevant questions that demand a careful look from the academy.

Finally, this paper sought to present new insights for the study of the integration of Muslim migrants in France, from the theoretical framework of Islamophobia. The problematic integration of Muslims into liberal democracies threatens not only the fundamental rights of this minority but also the very democratic foundations of states. The strengthening of the ideal of equality in the liberal spectrum, guided by the premises of Human Rights, is a fundamental piece in the construction of less intolerant and less Islamophobic societies.

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Bruno Mendelski de Souza. Doutor em RI pelo IREL-UNB.Professor Assistente do curso de Relações Internacionais (RI) da UNISC.

Bruno Mendelski de Souza. Doutor em RI pelo IREL-UNB.Professor Assistente do curso de Relações Internacionais (RI) da UNISC. bmendelski@unisc.br