

ITP final report

Name: Moedeb Ouael

Institution and mentor: School of oriental and African studies (SOAS), University of London, Dr. Paru Raman (Chair, Centre for Migration and Diaspora Studies).

Period or research: from May 19th through July 18 2009.

Research theme: Ethnic and race relations and their impact on the integration of immigrants in host societies: the case of Maghreb/Muslim Immigrants in France.

Thesis statement: This research aims at investigating three main points: First, how identity and religion interact with ethnic and race relations which may result in conflicts and instabilities. Second, clarify which definition of race and ethnicity the French society is using and third, to analyze basic notions within the French society and see their implications on the integration of Arab/Muslim immigrant population in France. These notions are “Frenchness”, “laïcité”, citizenship and “public space”. This research also assumes that both British and French models of ‘integration’ have further fostered the segregation and fragmentation of their religious and ethnic minorities including their Muslim population. As far as the French model is concerned, the problem lies in the way this model is deployed and not in the essence of the model itself.

What has been achieved during research period: During the research period at SOAS the following tentative paper was initiated. This paper will be published as one of the PhD requirements. The title is the following: “From Social Discrimination to Islam-phobia 9/11 and Maghreb Muslims in France an interpretive approach”. This paper is developed from my MA dissertation. The main purpose of the research is to study the effects of September 11 incidents in the USA had on the perceptions of Muslim population in France. The aim of the research is to understand how Muslim immigrants’ perceptions changed in the aftermath of the events. The main research question is how does immigrant population (Arab/Muslims) perceive their identity and integration in the host society (France) in the aftermath of 9/11? The study pursued an interpretative approach in which perceptions of Maghrebi Muslim immigrants in France are to be analyzed. The paper is still under review and will be published this coming October under TUFS academic journal entitled *Language, Area and Culture Studies*.

The primary findings of the paper are the following:

- The most remarkable change can be seen as Maghrebi immigrants think or feel in the French government's reconsideration of its Muslim population. The Arab immigrants mainly from North Africa are no longer seen as Arabs but as Muslims.
- The Muslim immigrants from Maghreb think that the French media has played an important role in the transformation of racism into Islam phobia through its stereotyping and manifestations of Islam phobic acts.
- They also think that the French public has a feeling of fear towards Muslim immigrants.
- They moreover think that there is no equality between the different religions in France i.e. Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Jewish people can establish their own courts on the French land whereas Muslim girls can not wear the Hijab in public schools.
- They believe that there is an increase in police harassment and identity checks among Muslim immigrants following the incidents.
- They also believe that in its attempts in dealing with the riots of the late 2005 the French government stressed issues of republican values and French secularism instead of tackling the core of the problem which lies, as they think in: stat racism, inequality, and poverty in the land of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Remaining issues: This research is based on case study in which filed work is more than essential to achieve the expected results. Hence, a field work in France is more than important to accomplish the aim of the study. The aim of this research is to understand people's perceptions. Abundant literature on Arab/Muslim migrants in France focuses on statistical data, legal and institutional aspects. Although these studies are very important, it is very important also to note that such studies alone are not enough to capture the situation and further understand its meanings. People's perceptions are very critical as reality, by its common sociological ascertain, is not important if something is real or not, it is the fact the

people believe in its reality that makes it real in its consequences¹. This research is anti-fundamentalist as it assumes that reality is a social construction.

This research will follow a most dominant combined approach in which both quantitative and qualitative methods will be used with qualitative as the dominant. Long Interviews followed by questioners to validate them will be conducted. A random sample of non immigrant French citizens from: A) a moderate size city of France where small numbers of different ethnic minorities reside; B) a big urban centre such as Paris will be selected. Moreover, a random sample of French Muslim immigrants will also be selected and interviewed.

¹ Allievi, Stefano, "*sociology of a Newcomer: Muslim Migration to Italy-religious visibility, cultural and political Reactions*" cited in AL-SHAHI, A., & LAWLESS, R. (2005). *Middle East and North African immigrants in Europe*. London [u.a.], Routledge.