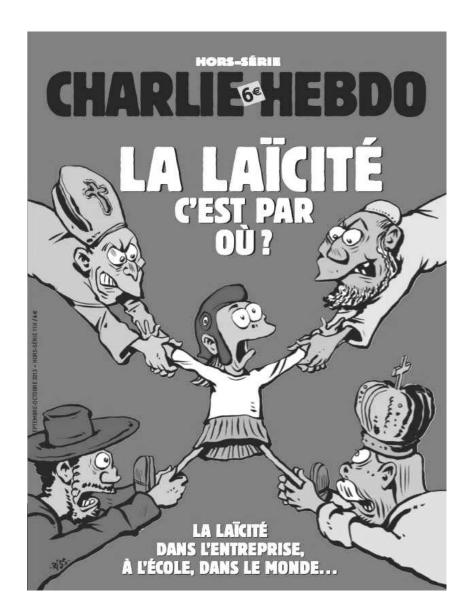Bachelor Religious Studies Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies
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Introduction

The year 2015 was a difficult one for France, because the country had to deal with several terrorist attacks in the city centre of Paris and in the area nearby the city. First the attack on the office of the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in January 2015 and in November 2015 another range of attacks in the city centre of Paris.

France is one of the most secular countries in Europe and this means that political organisations are not allowed to interfere with religious institutions. It also means that the state should be neutral towards religion and that a strict separation between the religious sphere and the political sphere is necessary from the point of view of *laïcité.* The concept of *laïcité* is used as an ideology that holds on to French secular values and excludes certain Muslim communities.

The debate about *laïcité* suggests that there is a relation between radical Islam and *laïcité* in contemporary France.[1] Therefore, the research question of this thesis is: *"What arguments and data support the assumption that there is a relation between laïcité and the rise of radical Islam in today's France"?*

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[1] Steven Erlanger and Kikomo de Freytas-Tamura, "Old tradition of secularism clashes with France's new reality, " *New York Times*, February 5, 2015, accessed June 8, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/06/world/old-tradition-of-secularism-clashes-with-frances-new-reality.html?_r=0.

To answer the research question, I will first give an outline of the theories in chapter one of dominant scholars in the academic discussion on *laïcité* in the context of France, focusing on the effects of 'othering' by *laïcité.* In the second chapter, I will examine how this affects Muslims in particular, focusing on the situation of radical Islam in France and *laicist* assumptions affecting the Muslim population. Finally, I will conduct a critical discourse analysis of six opinion articles published in Le Monde and Le Figaro respectively, discussing *laïcité*, Islam, and the Muslim community in France.

The sub-questions that I use to answer the main research question in this thesis are the subject of each chapter. The sub questions are:

- ***What is laïcité in the French context?***

- ***What is the situation regarding radical Islam in France?***

- ***What do public comments in the French newspapers Le Monde and Le Figaro reveal about the relationship between laïcité and radical Islam in France?***

- ***What additional research or alternative theoretical and practical approaches can contribute to enhancing our knowledge on laïcité and radical Islam in France?***

For the first two sub questions, I will use academic literature and popular literature to strengthen my arguments. The third sub question is the main focus of this thesis, because I will analyse the two newspapers of Le Figaro and Le Monde to explore the relationship between *laïcité* and radical Islam in France. In the conclusion of this thesis, I will answer the last sub question.

The aim of this thesis is not to discuss *laïcité* as a concept on its own, but to explore in what manner *laïcité* and radical Islam are interweaved in France. I will argue that *laïcité* generates an environment in which religion in general and Islam in particular are 'othered', subordinated and marginalized.

In recent years much has been written about radical Islam in France, but the relationship between *laïcité* and radical Islam has not yet been examined in detail. The fact that there have been several attacks within one year in France is a reason to analyse this connection more deeply. These attacks are apparently somehow religious-motivated in a country that prides itself on its neutrality and equality with regard to religion. This suggests that there is a need to analyse this issue more deeply.

In this thesis, I assume that there is a connection between *laïcité* and radical Islam in France. The main reason for this assumption is that France does its utmost to keep religion private and out of the public sphere, and yet has more citizens who are joining militant Islamic movements than any other European country. This suggests at least that *laïcitë* is not succeeding in privatizing religion and possibly that *laïcité* may actually contribute to this phenomenon. Currently, France has a higher-percentage of French born citizens who are turning to radical Islam than any other European country.[2] Numerous scholars argue that a link exists between *laïcité* and radical Islam. Yet, the rise of radical Islam

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[2] Andrew Hussey, *The French Intifada: The long war between French and its Arabs* (London: Granta, 2014), 5-9.

in today's France is not only a 'Muslim problem', but also a problem of France dealing with Muslim immigrants and radical Muslims in prisons. [3]

A discussion about the relationship between *laïcité* and the rise of radical Islam in France is even more important to reveal underlying tensions in today's France. I am going to use critical discourse analysis as a research method in chapter four, because it will give insight in the underlying arguments and assumptions that are being made by different actors in public comments. I will focus on the implicit meanings of specific words and phrases, to find new or meaningful information about a relationship between radical Islam and *laïcité* or not.

For the discourse analysis I will analyse three opinion articles per newspaper, six opinion articles in total. I chose the newspapers Le Monde and Le Figaro, because these two newspapers have a different political colour. Le Monde can be described as a centre to left oriented newspaper in contrast to Le Figaro which is a right-centre to right oriented newspaper. The criteria that I use for the discourse analysis of these six articles consists of five different themes, namely *laïcité,* Frenchness, *laïcité* & Muslims and radical Islam. I chose these themes, because they are key themes throughout the articles. I want to investigate in the discourse analysis, how *laïcité* is present in public opinion articles and if there is a relation with radical Islam in today's France.

Chapter 1

Laïcité in the context of France

This chapter will provide an overview of the scholarly discussion on *laïcité* in the field of religious studies to outline the area of research in which this thesis is positioned. The aim of this chapter is to discuss *laïcité* as a mechanism of exclusion, by discussing different theories and academic perspectives on *laïcité* in the context of France. To understand this context, I will first give a theoretical outline of the definition of *laïcité*. Then I will discuss *laicité* as a form of French secularism and as an ideology. In the last subparagraph, I will discuss how *laicité* is studied. *Laïcité* is a complex concept; It can only be understood in the context of the historical background of *laïcité* and French politics.[4] *Laïcité* is used as a law in France and nowadays as an ideology that influences other domains in society such as education, culture and politics. Today the discussion is more centred around the ideological character of *laïcité*. It is still an important concept in academic and public debates about religion and to be more specific, the public discussion of Islam in France.[5] In the first subparagraph, I will explain how *laïcité* is defined by different scholars.

Defining *laïcité*

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[4] Hussey, The French Intifada, 6.

[5] Jansen, June 7, 2011 (13:32 p.m.), "Secularisme, scheiding van kerk en staat en islam," *Republiek Allochtonië blog*, accessed June 10, 2016, http://www.republiekallochtonie.nl/secularisme-scheiding-van-kerk-en-staat-en-islam.

The main argument I will make in this thesis is that *laïcité* in France is used by different scholars as an ideology to restrict Muslims in France and to make them 'othered' in opposition to 'French citizens'. This argumentation is based on a definition of the academic scholar Olivier Roy and in the critical discourse analysis of opinion articles in chapter four of this thesis, I will further expand this. Olivier Roy views *laïcité* as an ideology of exclusion that often counts for Muslim communities in France. [6] First, however, it is necessary to give an outline of scholarly literature on *laïcité*. Therefore, I will discuss the main scholars who define *laïcité*.

Talal Asad is an anthropologist and a leader in the debate on secularism, the secular and secularity. In *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity,* he argues that *the secular* in a society is in fact an ideology, already present before the concept of *secularism* occurs in politics. Asad states: *"the concept of 'the secular' today is part of a doctrine called secularism"*. [7] Thus, if we want to understand the roots of *secularism* and *secularisation* used in political doctrines and societies today, it is necessary to go back to the concept of *the secular*. It is important to note that *the secular* cannot be viewed as a successor to religion, or be viewed as a rationalist concept. He concludes that *the secular* is a category with a multi-layered history related to a lot of other concepts such as democracy, modernity and human rights. [8] This work of Asad is still

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[6] Yolande Jansen, "Laïcité or the politics of Republican Secularism', *Political Theologies* (2006): 475, accessed June 10, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/2961852/La%C3%AFcit%C3%A9_or_the_Politics_of_Republican_ Secularism_Political_Theologies_2006.

[7] Talal Asad, *Formations of the the secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Broadway: Stanford, 2003), 191.

[8] James K.A. Smith, "Secularity, religion, and the politics of ambiguity," review of *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity,* by Talal Asad, *Journal for Cultural and Religious*

meaningful in the academic discussion of the secular state and secularism in political ideologies and doctrines.

Asad also tries to understand French secularism as a political doctrine, in the historical and cultural context of France and in the headscarf debate in contemporary France. According to the historical description of Asad, *laïcité*, together with the three principles of the French state: *liberté, egalité* and *fraternité* are rooted in the French Revolution of 1789. The French state introduced these principles to create one nation-state, where people sense a feeling of universality and brotherhood. [9]

According to Yolande Jansen, *laïcité* is in its origin a juridical principle used to insist on the separation between church and state. She discusses *laïcité* as a French version of secularism, which insists on the strict separation of church and state in France or religion and politics. She argues that it is insightful to view *laïcité* in the context of the struggle between Catholics and Republicans in the Third Republic between 1870 and 1905 in France, because in this period the Republicans developed an ideology to spread secular citizenship throughout France to replace the Catholic moral values in France. [10]

Raphaël Logier also discusses *laïcité* as a principle of the separation of church and state, introduced in 1905 in France. This juridical principle can be understood as the main legal basis for *laïcité*. For Logier, *laïcité*

Theory, Fall, 2005, JCRT 6.3, www.jcrt.org/archives/06.3/smith.pdf. You should refer to the book itself, not a review of it.

[9] Talal Asad, "Trying to understand French Secularism', *Political Theologies* (2006), accessed June 9, 2016, doi: 10.5422/fso/9780823226443.003.0026.

[10] Yolande Jansen, "Laïcité or the politics of Republican Secularism', *Political Theologies* (2006): 475, accessed June 10, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/2961852/La%C3%AFcit%C3%A9_or_the_Politics_of_Republican_Secularism_Political_Theologies_2006.