

**Marianne goes Multicultural:
Ni putes ni soumises and the Republicanisation of Ethnic Minority Women in
France**

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On July 12, 2003, Jean-Louis Debré, President of the National Assembly, inaugurated a Bastille Day exhibition with a difference: on the columns of the Palais Bourbon, home of the Assembly, was displayed a series of fourteen photographs of young French women of a variety of ethnic backgrounds, incarnating “Les Mariannes d’aujourd’hui”. The exhibition, organised by the high-profile association *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* (NPNS), by ethnicising the Republic’s female symbol, gave a supposedly “multicultural” and “feminist” aura to the celebration of the anniversary of the French revolution that took place two days later. NPNS’s proposal proved very timely for the government, which had good reason for wishing to portray both itself as pro-feminist and pro-multicultural, and, conversely, racialised minority women—especially of Maghrebian (North African) background—as champions of Republican values. Some ten days earlier, on 3 July, French President Jacques Chirac, prompted by the resurgence of a fourteen-year-old controversy over the wearing of the *hijab* (Islamic headscarf) in schools, had set up a “Commission to Reflect on the Application of the Principle of Secularism in the Republic,” which became known as the Stasi Commission, after its chair, Bernard Stasi. The Stasi Commission’s report, handed down on 11 December, contained a number of key recommendations, one of which

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was to become the 15 March 2004 law outlawing the wearing or display of “conspicuous” religious insignia in schools.¹

The message conveyed by “Les Mariannes” was thus multi-layered, in terms of its imagery, its underlying discourse (both explicit through the words of the young women and tacit through the symbolism of Marianne and the political position of NPNS) and the context in which it was produced. This article will peel away the layers of the Mariannes message and, in doing so, point to some ongoing concerns about the representation of both “feminism” and “Maghrebian women” in public discourse in France.

La préposée au charme: Marianne’s career as a symbol

Marianne has no constitutional or statutory status as a symbol of the Republic: only the French flag has that role.² She is nonetheless the Republic’s commonly acknowledged and more or less official human figure. Dressed in her *bonnet phrygien* (“cap of liberty”) and wearing her tricolored *cocarde* (rosette), incorporating the colors of Paris and royalty combined, she is the figure of Liberty and Reason, as strongly engraved in the Republican psyche as on its coins. She is the creation of the Republic, but her antecedents go back further, as her adoption in September 1792 by the Convention, government of the newly-declared Republic, makes evident. In Ancient Greece and Rome, that classical period to which the philosophers of the Enlightenment and the revolutionaries looked for inspiration, as had the writers and artists of the preceding century, it was common for concepts to be given allegorical or mythological personification. During the Revolution and the century that followed it, many personifications of Liberty and Reason appeared (one of the most famous being Delacroix’s 1930 painting *La Liberté guidant le peuple aux barricades*, although ironically, this painting commemorated not a revolution or a republic but the July monarchy, in a honeymoon portrait before the love affair soured). This imagery was finally merged into the female figure that appears on the French State seal, wearing garments reminiscent of the classical period and carrying a staff or spear topped with a Phrygian cap.

Marianne even has her own celebrated historian: Maurice Agulhon, the author of three books on the subject and whose *œuvre* is the focus of a recent Marianne anthology.³ I will draw briefly on this work to set the historical and political scene for the 2003 exhibition.

Marianne, so named for her “popular” appeal,⁴ became concretized as the moniker for the Republican’s human face around the time of the Second Republic. This was also the time of the first so-called Marianne competition in 1848, launched

¹ Bronwyn Winter, “Secularism Aboard the Titanic: Feminists and the Debate over the Hijab in France,” *Feminist Studies* 32, no. 2 (2006): 279-98, and *Hijab and the Republic: Uncovering the French Headscarf Debate* (Syracuse, NY, 2008).

² Article 2 of the 1958 Constitution.

³ Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au combat. L’imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1789 à 1880* (Paris, 1979); *Marianne au pouvoir. L’imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914* (Paris, 1989); *Les métamorphoses de Marianne. L’imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1914 à nos jours* (Paris, 2001) and Maurice Agulhon, A. Becker and E. Cohen, eds., *La République en représentations: autour de l’œuvre de Maurice Agulhon* (Paris, 2006).

⁴ Agulhon, *Marianne au combat*, 18.

by the Ministry for the Interior (although the competition was officially for “figures of the Republic”).

Authorized Marianne imagery that emerged from this competition took two versions: a calmly classical earth-mother figure adorned with various classical, pastoral or French symbolism (Grecian robes, sheaves of wheat, lictor’s fasces and so on) and with *Ancien Régime*-inspired rays of sun emanating from her head. She thus combines the idea of the Roman Republic, the French ruling class and the imagery of *la semeuse*, Ceres. The other is the combative Athena-style figure, frequently with the single Amazonian bared breast, fist in air, and adorned and surrounded by Republican imagery (*bonnet phrygien, cocarde, tricolore*), such as that depicted two decades earlier by Delacroix. A helmeted Marianne even appears on coins at that time.

Yet many representations contained elements of both. One entry to the 1848 competition, displayed today in the Musée Carnavalet, the Museum of Paris, in the capital’s Marais district, is of particular interest for our discussion here as its classically-attired standing female subject proudly displays a Gallic rooster on her arm. This imagery is picked up in the 2003 exhibition, as we will see presently. One of the most famous and controversial Marianne representations is Daumier’s 1848 painting *La République*, where a Marianne of Rubenesque proportions is shown breastfeeding Romulus and Remus: earth mother meets warrior. The tensions between different versions of Marianne continue to this day.

With the birth of the Third Republic came the officialization of a series of revolutionary symbols, all put to the service of nation building. In 1879, the Marseillaise was made the national anthem, and the following year 14 July became the *fête nationale*. The same year—1880—Marianne, wearing her Phrygian cap, took up residence in the Paris *Hôtel de Ville*; her name has been synonymous with the Republic ever since. In 1883, another “Marianne competition,” this time for a statue in the Place de la République, was won by the Moricet brothers with another hybrid version: a Phrygian-cap-wearing, classically-draped and fully clothed Marianne with the typical right arm raised in combat, but carrying an olive branch (one of the elements of the lictor’s fasces). Six years later, for the centenary of the revolution, Aimé-Jules Dalou won the competition for the statue at Place de la Nation: his Marianne had the lictor’s fasces, the Phrygian cap, a bare breast, and was accompanied by Labor (representing The People), Justice, Peace and Education.

It is also from that time, as Marianne became increasingly identified with the French nation and, by extension, its ruling class that we start to see the development of Marianne jokes, Marianne caricatures and Marianne polemics that have become familiar in recent decades.⁵ More on this presently. We even see the development of popular representations of group Mariannes and Mariannes from popular classes, such as a 1928 group performance “Les Mariannes de Paris” by Mistinguett, then queen of the musical hall, leading a group of women in a song that she co-wrote.⁶ The song combined Republican rhetoric, everywoman popular appeal and the entertainment-industry aura and star status of one of their number and, as such, was a precursor of things to come. In particular, this performance and other moments like it marked important steps in the mainstreaming of a feminized *petit peuple* that was to characterize NPNS’s collective Mariannization of minority women three-quarters of a century later.

⁵ Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir*, 271 ff.

⁶ Agulhon, *Les métamorphoses de Marianne*, 79.

But why a female figure to represent the Republic, especially one that did not even give women the vote for another 150 years? The first and most obvious answer is that it is a practice that goes back through Western European tradition, finding its origins in Ancient Greece and Rome, as noted earlier. This does not, however, satisfactorily address the gendered aspect of such symbolism. Force of habit or tradition is certainly a persuasive explanation of the continuation of a practice, but does not shed light on its ideological and cultural basis and function. Agulhon does raise the question from time to time, but mostly does not linger over it. For example, in the second paragraph of his introduction to his first book on the subject, *Marianne au combat*, he asks, in addressing the question “why a woman?”:

...serait-ce, plus profondément, qu’une séquence millénaire de cultures fondées sur la prépondérance masculine vouait la femmes aux rôles subalternes « d’objets », le support allégorique étant en somme un mannequin de l’abstraction?⁷

He also, in the same book, discusses at some length and with significant insight the idea of the Republic as the fantasized lover and goddess, without ever really going further into the male supremacist logic of this than he did in his introductory sentence cited above. In his third “Marianne” book, *Les Métamorphoses de Marianne*, he does, however, recall his comments of book number one in relation to the Marianne of 1792, reminding his readers in an endnote, “L’allégorie féminine du Pouvoir ne prouve pas que la femme a le pouvoir, mais seulement qu’elle est la préposée au charme.”⁸ Indeed. It is nonetheless a pity that this comment is consigned to an endnote in the third of three books devoted to Marianne’s history.

Yet, throughout history, and not only Western history, women have, in their incursions into the public sphere, invariably been political and cultural *symbols* rather than political and cultural *actors* in their own right or, at least, rather than being recorded for posterity as such. For, even when women have contributed to philosophical and cultural production and the construction or transformation of power relations, this contribution has been hidden in the shadows in various ways, only to be very recently restored to the light of day by the work of feminist historians.⁹

Women’s perceived or allocated role through history has thus been not to enact liberty or reason or justice or the arts through writing, speaking, legislating or otherwise occupying positions of power or influence in their own right, but to represent them as their fanciful embodiment in some male artist’s eye, as their muse or indeed—as demonstrated by Daumier’s *La République*—as their mother. If she is often shown to lead, as she is in Delacroix’s *La Liberté guidant le peuple*, she does not lead as a woman but as a symbol of the values of the Republic: its aspiration to freedom, equality and, ironically, fraternity, for the French and its *mission civilisatrice* for the colonized. She is also a symbol of its government, the flesh-and-blood form of which is male: Marianne is the cherished and strangely “othered”

⁷ Agulhon, *Marianne au combat*, 7.

⁸ Agulhon, *Les Métamorphoses de Marianne*, 285, note 2 to Chapter 2; see also Michelle Perrot, *Les Femmes ou les silences de l’Histoire* (Paris, 1998).

⁹ See for example Joanna Russ, *How to suppress women’s writing* (London, 1984); Dale Spender, *Women of ideas and what men have done to them* (London, 1988); Michèle Dœuff, *L’Étude et le rouet. Des femmes, de la philosophie, etc.* (Paris, 1989); Perrot, *Les Femmes ou les silences de l’Histoire*.

incarnation of Man's conception of his nobler self. At the same time, and paradoxically, she is the idealized beloved, at once owned and unattainable, that political candidates set out to court.¹⁰

Marianne's popularization and personification as an often tongue-in-cheek and just as often either overtly or implicitly sexualized political metaphor—and a much-discussed one at that—has increased markedly since 1970. She now has several books and two current affairs magazines (one right-wing in the 1980s, one left-wing since 1997) named after her and fights in the corner of secularism in the boxing ring with religions (Marianne vs Marie or Marianne vs the Prophet).¹¹ But 1999 perhaps marked the year that Marianne finally “made it” as the official consort of government, when her profile in reverse-silhouette became the white in the middle of the new blue-white-red “flag” logo, incorporating the national motto *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*, created for the Government Information Service by the then socialist government led by Lionel Jospin. Most recently, at the beginning 2005, a *Charte Marianne* initiative was established whereby all state administrative services published a service and quality charter available to the general public.

It is, however, her association with icons of entertainment, fashion and media that has most decidedly assured Marianne's rise to stardom as the ubiquitous and glamorous personification of the French Republic, and this *starisation*, as Agulhon has termed it, along with the populist collectivization of Marianne à la Mistinguett's 1928 group, was to strongly inform the success of the 2003 exhibition.

In 1970, actor, singer and sex-symbol Brigitte Bardot was the first Marianne *starisée* to find her way into a Town Hall, in a process that started somewhat informally, when a newly-elected friend of Aslan, the sculptor of Brigitte-Marianne, placed the bust in the Town Hall of his municipality. The idea caught on (but not without polemic about the solemn function of Marianne being trivialized by this incursion of a film star into her sacred space), and the rest, as they say, is history. The idea of Bardot as Marianne, especially in retrospect, can appear somewhat ironic, given “BB's” not only very Catholic but very *Front National* persuasions and her obvious preference for seal cubs over Muslims (between 1997 and 2004 she was ordered four times by French courts to pay damages for racial vilification). But then, Bardot and her successors also incarnated, and continue to incarnate, the ideal of simultaneously attractive yet unattainable, larger-than-life yet perfectly ordinary, successful yet submissive, white Franco-French womanhood and, as such, have served the Republican ideal every bit as much as Daumier's and Delacroix's representations and third Republic statues.

BB's successors were the less controversial Mireille Mathieu (1978) and Catherine Deneuve (1985). Subsequent unofficial proposals for Marianne, journalist Anne Sinclair and fashion model Inès de la Fressange, were the subject of minor media polemics, the first candidate being opposed by the *Front National* because of her “foreign and Jewish” background.¹² In 1999, supermodel Laetitia Casta, from the Republic's troublesome rebel province of Corsica, was chosen to be the Marianne for the new millennium. She was the first Marianne to be chosen by a general vote—not by universal suffrage, as Republican values might warrant, but by the country's more

¹⁰ Agulhon, *Les Métamorphoses de Marianne*, 152.

¹¹ Soheib Bencheikh, *Marianne et le Prophète: L'Islam dans la France laïque* (Paris, 1998)

Agulhon, *Les Métamorphoses de Marianne*, 152-160.

¹² Agulhon, *Les Métamorphoses de Marianne*, 200-201.

than 36,000 mayors. Like other French elections, voting was not compulsory and, also like the 2002 French presidential election, voter participation was low at 15,000 or 41%. On being elected, Casta stated that it was “a hell of a responsibility” being elected to “represent France, liberty and *a certain idea of what a woman is.*”¹³ Clearly, in the minds of her Fifth-Republic human models and those who choose them at least, Marianne is definitely *both* a female symbol *and* a symbolized female: the very modern model of modern French womanhood.

In October 2003, chat-show host Evelyne Thomas was chosen¹⁴ in an election that was controversial for two reasons. First, she was chosen, not by the *Association des Maires de France* (AMF), whose role it had become to approve of Marianne models, but “undemocratically” by the *Mariannes d’Or* committee, comprising 400 mayors according to the BBC, 350 according to “Stars News” website Actustar, and 320 according to the daily *Libération*.¹⁵ The AMF protested against the usurpation of its role in Marianne-selection, ruling it out of the question that “Alain Trampoglieri come and present Evelyne Thomas at our next conference.”¹⁶ (cited in Aeschimann, 2003). The *Mariannes d’Or* were set up in 1984 by Senator Edgar Faure and municipal councillor Alain Trampoglieri as the “Municipal *Césars*.” The miniature busts of Marianne, designed and made by the famous jeweler Cartier, are handed out every year for exploits in areas such as public transport, parity, new technology, culture, town planning, local fiscal management and local development.

According to a spokesperson for the *Mariannes d’Or* committee, cited by Actustar, the choice of Thomas was unanimous because of her “Republican qualities,” “personality” and “dynamism”.

Second, Thomas was reputed to be insufficiently intellectual (presumably in contrast to the intellectual stature of Bardot, Deneuve and Casta), and certain members of the political elite deemed her show too “trashy.”¹⁷ An independent media site even called for a petition against the choice of Thomas.¹⁸ A public opinion poll conducted for TV magazine *Tele 7 jours* by the market research company Ipsos, and

¹³ Cited on Casta’s website, “Just a Little Laetitia Casta.” (My italics) <jarle.eltelevest.no/Laetitia_Casta/Sub_Pages/Marianne.htm>.

¹⁴ <www.actustar.com/actualite/200310/20031017a.html>

¹⁵ “Chat show host is France’s new Marianne,” <news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3200840.stm>, 17 October 2003; <www.actustar.com/actualite/200310/20031017a.html>; and <www.liberation.fr/actualite/politiques/46047.FR.php>.

¹⁶ Cited in Eric Aeschimann, “Evelyne Thomas, la Marianne d’un club sélect de 320 édiles: Colère de l’association officielle des 36 000 maires de France,” *Libération*, October 20, 2003.

¹⁷ “Chat show host is France’s new Marianne,” <news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3200840.stm>, 17 October 2003; and “Marianne challenges French elite”, <news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/3230569.stm>, 2 November 2003.

¹⁸ “Pétition contre le buste d’Evelyne ‘Marianne’ Thomas,” <nantes.indymedia.org/article.php3?id_article=1486>. See also “Evelyne Thomas, nouvelle Marianne : tout le monde en parle !” <www.surlering.com/article.php/id/3337>.

published on its website on October 24, 2003, found, however, that most respondents had no objection to the choice of Thomas.¹⁹

All this polemic is somewhat bizarre, given the decades-old *starisation* of Marianne and populist precedents set by her predecessors. Moreover, one has some difficulty imagining that any prominent intellectuals would agree to be mariannised. Perhaps, at a pinch, Elisabeth Badinter, champion of the Republic and harsh critic of feminists, might have accepted the role, but could one have imagined Simone de Beauvoir exchanging her turban for a *bonnet phrygien* as she smiled demurely for Aslan? Marianne may once have been the symbol of rebellion, but never of feminist rebellion and even less of female intellectualism.

Thomas was chosen from a field of candidates that ranged from teen pop idol Lorie (described by *Wikipedia* as a Gallic Britney Spears²⁰) to, for the first time, a woman associated with politics: Cecilia Sarkozy, then wife of then Minister for the Interior. There appears to be a dynastic trend set here as in 2008 rumours were flying about the possible mariannisation of the second wife of the now President, Carla Bruni-Sarkozy.²¹ Such a choice would for the first time combine the political class with the entertainment industry in the history of Marianne imagery.

It is a choice being discussed in the wake of the Thomas controversy and in the middle of the *pipolised* politics for which Sarkozy and those close to him have become notorious. It is also, however, a choice that has been made possible by the evolution of Marianne's fortunes throughout her 220-year history. Marianne remains the Republic's symbolic consort, at once its human female face and the lofty values it woos and espouses, but she has also become the paradoxical combined symbol of *le petit peuple*, *les classes populaires*, supposed to epitomise the Revolution, and its elite ruling class, the leaders of the Republic. Her *starisation* is part of this double process of pseudo-popularisation of the elite's message, at the same time as, conversely, popular culture is promoted to the elite. Marianne is today, more than ever, the Republic's Everywoman, the lowest common denominator of idealized yet well-trained womanhood.

For some, the NPNS exhibition disrupted this comfortable space of a starised, white, normative Marianne put entirely at the service of the ruling class. But did it?

Enter the *Mariannes musulmanes*: Ni Putes Ni Soumises

Ni Putes Ni Soumises (NPNS) was formed out of a nationwide mobilisation of *femmes des quartiers* around violence against women in working-class suburbs largely populated by North African-background racialised minorities. A focal point for the rally was the brutal burning to death of seventeen-year-old Sohane Benziane on 4 October 2002, in Vitry-sur-Seine. Following the model of the first nationwide "Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme" (1983), the women—a number of whom had been activists with SOS-Racisme (formed in 1984 by some of the organizers of the 1983 march) and had been meeting in local women's groups since 2001—held a nationwide "marche des femmes des quartiers contre les ghettos et pour l'égalité" from 1 February to 8 March 2003. Using Vitry as its starting point in memory of Sohane, the march visited twenty towns throughout France to finish in Paris for a

¹⁹ "Evelyne Thomas en Marianne, c'est leur choix !" <www.ipsos.fr/CanalIpsos/articles/1204.asp>, 24 October 2003.

²⁰ <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorie>.

²¹ See for example "Actualité de Stars," <<http://www.actualite-de-stars.com/people/03275453-carla-bruni-sera-t-elle-la-prochaine-marianne.html>>, 27 March 2008.

30,000-women-strong International Women's Day march. Under the slogan "Ni putes ni soumises", the name adopted by the association created at the end of the march, it rallied women around the objectives:

Dénoncer le sexisme omniprésent, la violence verbale, physique, la sexualité interdite, le viol organisé en "tournantes", le mariage forcé, la fratrie en gardien de l'honneur de la famille ou des quartiers en prison.²²

In a style reminiscent of SOS-Racisme (including close links with the Socialist Party in particular), NPNS has managed to mobilize thousands of young women and some men around an issue that is rightly perceived as needing the urgent attention of both feminists and governments. At the same time, the focus on violence of *beur* men against *beur* women (rather than male violence more generally) has conveniently fed the postcolonial complacency of a nation that was the inventor of the colonialist *mission civilisatrice*. In fact, despite the media success of NPNS, the organization has increasingly alienated feminists generally and the "women of the ghettos" they ostensibly represent in particular, including Kahina Benziane, Sohane's older sister, who in an interview with Radio Beur at the time of the trial of Sohane's murderers, spoke of the political exploitation of her sister's death and the co-optation of her own grief.²³

Things came to a head in 2005, when a split between NPNS and most of the rest of the feminist movement resulted in two Women's Day marches, NPNS on March 6 and most of the rest of the movement on 8 March. While the press represented this split as largely "generational,"²⁴ the real reasons lay elsewhere. NPNS had falsely accused the Collectif National pour les Droits des Femmes (CNDF), which groups a large number of feminist organizations throughout France, of being in league with cultural relativists and Islamists who opposed the 2004 law on "conspicuous religious insignia," while CNDF criticized NPNS's connections with political parties, its overly narrow focus on secularism at the expense of other social issues affecting women, and its attempt to rewrite feminist history by ignoring the movement's decades-long fight against both religious fundamentalisms of all kinds and against male violence against women.²⁵

In fact, the cozy relationship between NPNS and the French State, and the association's attachment to French national(ist) values, was already in evidence as early as July 2003 when the *Marianne d'aujourd'hui* graced the façade of the Palais Bourbon. The fourteen Marianne photographs, of which thirteen, including the photograph accompanying the exhibition's title, remain visible on the National

²² "La marche des femmes des Quartiers : 2003," <8mars.online.fr/article.php3?id_article=127>.

²³ Interview, <www.beurfm.net/forum/showthread.php?t=10258>, dated 31 March 2006. See also Winter, *Hijab*.

²⁴ See Blandine Grosjean, "Ni putes ni soumises tourne une page du féminisme." *Libération*, 5 March 2005 and "Le voile s'invite au second défilé féministe," *Libération*, 9 March 2005.

²⁵ Suzy Rotjman and Maya Surduts, "Femmes, la luxe est complexe," *Prochoix* 32 (2005): 21-24; Sanhadja Akrouf, Nadia Chaabane, Fouzia Adel and Meriem Zeghidi, "Pourquoi nous n'avons pas défilé avec NPNS et nous ne voulons pas défilé avec le CMF," *Prochoix* 32 (2005): 25-26; and Winter, *Hijab*, and "Secularism Aboard the Titanic."

Assembly website (Isabelle having disappeared in image but her words remaining),²⁶ feature young (22-34 years old), slim and attractive women of a variety of ethnic backgrounds (Western European, Eastern European, North African, sub-Saharan African, Caribbean—but no Asian, a telling omission), although over a third are of North African background. All of them are artistically posed in head or head-and-shoulders shots, draped in Republican imagery: *bonnet phrygien* trimmed with mini-French flag and/or *cocarde* (one model, Awa, wears tricolor net rosettes as a ruff around her neck). One of them, Linda, is even clutching to her bosom a gallic rooster as she looks calmly and resolutely at the camera, her lips slightly apart, in a pose vaguely reminiscent of the 1848 painting hanging in the Musée Carnavalet, while another Riva, is a latter-day version of the “classic” Marianne/Marianne *la semeuse*: her face is painted with the pastoral imagery of crops and sun, and like most of the models, she wears a Phrygian cap.

Most of the women are smiling, and most are looking at the camera; one, Gladys, has her hand cutely in front of her mouth as if she is saying “oo!”, although the smile is apparent in her eyes. Alice is looking proudly into the distance, Awa, smiling radiantly, is looking up, and Riva *la semeuse*, smiling contentedly, is in profile with her eyes closed, chin on clasped hands, showing off her face painting. All women are photographed against a dark or sky-blue background, with the exception of Samira B (the late Samira Bellil, author of the autobiographical *Dans l’Enfer des tournantes* [2002], about her experience of living rough, of gang-rapes in the ghettos, survival and healing),²⁷ who is featured against a background of Parisian apartment buildings.

Each photograph is accompanied by a caption featuring the first name, age and city, town or suburb of residence of each Marianne, as well as a few sentences ostensibly authored by each model about what Marianne means to her. For Alice, she is a “protective mother turned towards the future,” proud to be French and with “timeless” ideals, while for Awa of the tricolor ruff, she “asserts herself through the Republican ideal” and earns respect “because she gives of herself to build a fairer France.”²⁸ For red-haired Caroline, she is someone who gets involved in politics and society to advance the cause of women and the Republic, while for African-background (or Afro-Caribbean background) Clarisse, she is any citizen: “it’s not a question of background or looks, but of Republican commitment.” For Gladys, also of African/Caribbean background, in her feminine “oo!” pose, Marianne is “gentle and reassuring” because she is Republican and democratic: “above all, she is a woman: she doesn’t manage human relationships through violence.” For fair, blue-eyed Ingrid, Marianne’s main quality is “perseverance”: she represents the difficult daily battle of women for their rights. For rooster-cuddling Linda, she’s “a woman with heart”, open and warm towards others, while for face-painted Riva, she’s “the opposite of selfish individualism,” “still believes in Progress” and gets involved to make it happen on a daily basis. Sihem and Samira (not Bellil) both see Marianne as a modern woman: for Sihem she adapts her Republican values to the needs of the moment, combining

²⁶ <www.assemblee-nationale.fr/evenements/mariannes.asp>.

²⁷ Bellil died of stomach cancer on 7 September 2004, at the age of 32—a death rendered all the more tragic by the closing lines of her autobiography, in which she affirmed her triumph over pain and victimhood, her attachment to life and her hope for happiness. Samira Bellil, *Dans l’Enfer des tournantes* (Paris, 2002), 277.

²⁸ All quotes are from the National Assembly website: <www.assemblee-nationale.fr/evenements/mariannes.asp>.

“courage, energy and will,” while for Samira she is the similarly energetic and eternally young “woman of today”, who has the qualities of a leader. Isabelle, whose photograph has been withdrawn from the website, goes further: she sees Marianne as a somewhat Napoleonic or Gaullian female figure of a “Commander”: a woman of rectitude, rigor, sincerity and justice. She is no mythological fairy or princess, “disconnected from reality, too nice to be efficient,” but a model for all to follow. Not “every one of us,” then, as Clarisse would have it. Samira Bellil, no doubt fittingly, recalls the original role of Marianne as the emblem of the revolution: “she’s a rebel opening the way,” who is “not afraid to express herself, even in danger.” It is no doubt Safia who most clearly conveys the combined NPNS and State message: “I fear that Marianne is today in danger.... I have the impression that she no longer represents anything for too many French people.... *La laïcité*, justice, equal rights, we must make an effort to defend them.”

How these women were chosen, and how carefully their captions were scripted, is a matter for conjecture, but there is no doubt that considerable care was put into the choice of women (young, slender, good-looking, mostly sub-Saharan African, Afro-Caribbean or North African background) and the choice of their words. The philosophers of the Enlightenment and the politicians who forged the Republican nation-state, from the Montagnards to de Gaulle, make their presence felt in the captions: the ideas of the Republic, of leadership, of citizenship, of social involvement and collective coexistence, and of the rights and duties of all, recur in some form in most of the captions. As does an idea of modern womanhood: Marianne is tough but gentle, firm but just, combative but caring. She is France’s mother, its leaders’ consort and its citizens’ sister. Marianne remains, in short, resolutely Marianne.

Some see the *Mariannes d’aujourd’hui* as a sign of marked progress, symbolising an up-from-below passage from “postcolonial exclusion” into “Republican integration.”²⁹ On one level, this is perfectly valid, as “integration” is indeed a reality for most postcolonial citizens: many Samiras and Safias and even their parents (and increasingly, their grandparents) have only ever lived in France and often speak only French. Moreover, they are almost as indifferent to religion as their “Catholic” fellow citizens: survey data indicate that over half of “French Muslims” may in fact be “French agnostics or atheists”.³⁰ Why not, indeed, a collection of multicultural Mariannes to reinforce the point that the Republic has many faces and one does not have to be *français de souche* to adhere to its values? Why not have the former *barbares* and *indigènes* turn the tables by becoming exemplars of the Republic’s *mission civilisatrice*, in a *plus-français-que-moi-tu-meurs* fashion?

On the other hand, there is another reality of “integration”: integration into systemic and structural discrimination. Studies conducted by France’s *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques* (www.insee.fr) and others show that those of North African background in particular, both immigrant and born in France, are overrepresented among the unemployed and the less highly qualified.³¹

²⁹ Alec G. Hargreaves, “Marianne musulmane: de l’exclusion (post-)coloniale à l’intégration républicaine,” in *La République en représentations*, eds. M. Agulhon, A. Becker and E. Cohen, 59-67.

³⁰ Michèle Tribalat, *Faire France. Une enquête sur les immigrés et leurs enfants* (Paris, 1995); Jeanne-Hélène Kaltenbach and Michèle Tribalat, *La République et l’Islam. Entre crainte et aveuglement* (Paris, 2002); Gérard Mermet, *Francoscopie* (Paris, 2006); Winter, *Hijab*; and Winter, “Secularism.”

³¹ Tribalat, *Faire France*; Jean-Luc Richard “Une approche de la discrimination sur le

These studies, combined with a significant amount of anecdotal evidence provided to me over the last fifteen years by individuals of North African background and spokespersons for women's groups such as Les Nanas Beurs, active in the 1980s and early 1990s, and Rajfire and Afrika today, indicate that people of North African background, including women (contrary to popular mythology about women as the driver of integration) are still more likely to be oriented into technical rather than professional careers at school, to be unemployed when they leave, to be turned down for professional jobs for which they are perfectly qualified because of their name or their looks, to have more difficulty finding accommodation and so on. The riots of late 2005, while largely criticized by Maghrebian-background feminists for their male violence,³² are an indication that the wounds of such discrimination continue to fester.

Even if they include the intense gaze of *Marianne l'insoumise* personified by Samira Bellil and, as such, carry the weight and force of her personal testimony against male violence in the *quartiers*, as well as of her affirmation as a North-African background female French citizen, the *Mariannes d'aujourd'hui* are a universe away from the realpolitik and real socioeconomics of daily life for large numbers of consistently stigmatized and racialized French citizens, whatever their socioeconomic class, their attachment to Republican values or the number of generations of "Frenchness" in their families. Add to this the aforementioned concerns about the relationship of NPNS with the party-political elite and their co-optation of the combat of women in the *quartiers* against violence and social exclusion to serve other political ends, and the Mariannes that smiled blue-white-red and brown from the columns of the Palais Bourbon in July 2003 more closely resemble Mistinguett and the pseudo-working-class Mariannes de Paris of 1928, the Corsican supermodel Marianne of 2000, or even Carla Bruni-Sarkozy of today, than they resemble "every one" of Maghrebian-background or African-background women in France. This message of identification with both the cultural mainstream and a political elite has been reinforced by former NPNS president Fadela Amara's acceptance, in 2007, of a junior ministerial post with the newly-elected right wing government headed by François Fillon. This action, along with the 2003 exhibition, are seen by many, not as a postcolonial female disruption of white male Republican space, but as an assimilation of certain members of the postcolonial female population into the French elite.

They convey a similarly co-opted, diluted and sanitized message of feminism, harnessed to the needs of nation-(re)building, as is made clear by the speech made by Debré at the inauguration of the exhibition. He stated:

Ces jeunes filles ont choisi de manifester leur confiance dans la République et de proclamer leur adhésion à ses valeurs.

marché du travail," *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, 16:3 (2000): 53-83; Manon Domingues Dos Santos, "Travailleurs maghrébins et portugais en France. Le poids de l'origine," *Revue Economique* 56 (2005): 447-464; and Mermet, *Francoscopie*.

³² Union des Familles Laïques de France (UFAL), Africa 93, SOS Sexisme, 20 ans Barakat, Collectif de Pratiques et de Réflexions Féministes, Association du Manifeste des Libertés, Réseau Féministe «Ruptures», Association Genre et Cultures, "Choisir la cause des femmes", et al. "Non aux violences: l'appel des femmes," 4 November 2005. www.ufal29.infini.fr/article.php?id_article=393.

La République est seule capable de rassembler autour des principes de tolérance, de liberté, de solidarité, de laïcité, des hommes et des femmes de différentes origines, de différentes couleurs de peau, de différentes religions.³³

Just as Jules Ferry, in the 1880s, argued for girls' schooling so as to bring them away from the Church and towards Science, and in doing so draw their future husbands and children more firmly into the Republic (indeed, he argued for the training of women as primary school teachers as this was a "natural" extension of their mothering role³⁴), the State has endorsed the *Mariannes d'aujourd'hui* as the integration of "postcolonial" womanhood into the Republican ideal. They may be fighters for equality and justice, but they carry on their fight in high heels and makeup as they smile prettily for the national cameras: the difficult, messy and often ugly day-to-day realities of most women's lives leave no stain on the columns of the Palais Bourbon. No fat Mariannes, no older ones, no plain ones, none that are tired or harried or angry or in pain (Bellil's fiery gaze notwithstanding). None that look like the women of the *quartiers* might look after their day's "commitment and combat." None, in fact, that would look out of place on the catwalk with Laetitia, on the big screen with Catherine, or by the president's side with Carla, Fadela or Rachida (Dati, Justice Minister with the Fillon government).

Whether *au combat* or *au pouvoir*, to borrow from the titles of Agulhon's books on the subject (1979, 1989), Marianne has never stood for the combat (or the power) of real women in the real world, where humanity is male, a given from birth, and women are something Other (Beauvoir 1949), their recognition as human only obtained through constant struggle. Certainly, in presenting themselves as Mariannes, the young women of NPNS have brought their own human presence as social, political and cultural actors to Marianne symbolism, and in doing so, have most probably felt a sense of personal empowerment and connection with a wider sociopolitical project. They have also, however, conversely and perhaps paradoxically, transformed themselves into dehumanized symbols. Safia, Samira, Awa, Alice are no longer women, but ideas and images—all the more because, with the exception of Samira Bellil, they are *only* known to the public as Mariannes, contrary to BB or Deneuve or any of the other chosen or proposed Fifth Republic figures of Marianne. BB's and Deneuve's mariannisation is relatively peripheral to their personae, a byline in their biographies. For the *Mariannes d'aujourd'hui*, their mariannisation is the sum total of their public personae. They *only* exist as symbols. And what they symbolise is less a radical transformation of the Republic into something more feminist and more truly able to accommodate diversity, than a tailoring of "feminism" and "diversity" to fit the national mould.

As I write final edits to this article, the world has its eye on the US in the wake of the election of the Western world's first black leader, in a country that half a century earlier still practiced legal racial segregation in many states. Even if Barack Obama's politics seem middle of the road to many, the symbolic importance of his election is lost to none. One can, however, be excused for remaining pessimistic on what this means for the future of African Americans. Just as the enfranchisement of

³³ Speech made on 12 July 2003, <www.assemblee-nationale.fr/evenements/mariannes.asp>.

³⁴ Françoise Mayeur, "La femme dans la société selon Jules Ferry," in F. Furet, ed., *Jules Ferry: fondateur de la République* (Paris, 1985), 79-87.

black South Africans has not led to the poverty of most black South Africans being eradicated, it is unlikely that structural and systemic discrimination against African Americans, statistically the United States' poorest ethnic group (with African American women being poorer again), will come to an end. For which we cannot, of course, hold Obama uniquely responsible, any more than we can hold Colin Powell or Condoleezza Rice, whatever we think of their politics. It is unwise and indeed unfair to charge single members of sexual or radicalized minorities, however powerful, with all the weight of our expectations of representation.

What, then, can we expect of an exhibition of "postcolonial" Mariannes on the columns of the Palais Bourbon in a context that included renewed controversy over gender, ethnicity and religion in Republican space via the hijab debate? If the NPNS exhibition had truly been disruptive of white male Republican space, it would not, after all, have made it to such a privileged symbolic site of the political elite.

What can we expect of the exhibition's authors, who incarnated the assimilated and upwardly mobile "good girl" class, the daughters of the "drivers of integration" of the 1980s? What can we expect of the members of that class who have since become a part of the Republic's political elite, including its racist right wing? (Not that its left wing is not racist, all being a question of degree.) And why, after all, should they not aspire to professional and political success, even on what for some may appear to be the "other side" of politics, just as Rice has done in the United States? As a feminist colleague quipped during a conversation about Rachida Dati in Paris in June 2008, "Even minority women have the right to be right wing, just like anybody else."³⁵ One may well retort to those disappointed with NPNS and the *Mariannes d'aujourd'hui*, "Well, what did you expect?"

For, symbolically important as the (as yet ephemeral) changes to Marianne's skin color may be, the legacy of the 2003 exhibition is primarily an orchestrated performance of ethnicity. If what Marianne has come to represent—the white and masculinist French state—could so easily be subverted, then that state would look different indeed.

³⁵ Claudie Lesselier, personal communication, 26 June 2008.