



The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism

Mayanthi L. Fernando

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In 1989 three Muslim schoolgirls from a Paris suburb refused to remove their Islamic headscarves in class. The headscarf crisis signaled an Islamic revival among the children of North African immigrants; it also ignited an ongoing debate about the place of Muslims within the secular nation-state. Based on ten years of ethnographic research, *The Republic Unsettled* alternates between an analysis of Muslim French religiosity and the contradictions of French secularism that this emergent religiosity precipitated. Mayanthi L. Fernando explores how Muslim French draw on both Islamic and secular-republican traditions to create novel modes of ethical and political life, reconfiguring those traditions to imagine a new future for France. She also examines how the political discourses, institutions, and laws that constitute French secularism regulate Islam, transforming the Islamic tradition and what it means to be Muslim. Fernando traces how long-standing tensions within secularism and republican citizenship are displaced onto France's Muslims, who, as a result, are rendered illegitimate as political citizens and moral subjects. She argues, ultimately, that the Muslim question is as much about secularism as it is about Islam.

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