Understanding religious diversity: implications from Lebanon and France

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to argue that national history plays an important role in formulations of workplace religious diversity strategies and practices. It builds on a discussion of the organization of religion in the workplace in two countries, namely, France and Lebanon.

Design/methodology/approach – This is a conceptual paper that provides an analysis into how national history plays an important role in formulations of workplace diversity strategies and practices.

Findings – The paper shows how religion has historically been organized and deployed in contemporary France and Lebanon by the same colonial power, albeit in different ways. While the workplace in France remains religiously neutral in the context of its national labor market, the colonial power has largely contributed to organized religion in contemporary organizations in Lebanon. In analyzing the Lebanese and French cases, it is argued that the use of religious diversity has weakened the process of adopting equal, diverse, and inclusive managerial strategies.

Practical implications – Experiences in both countries suggest a failure of "blind neutrality" in the case of France, and another failure of a form of positive discrimination in the case of Lebanon. The authors draw lessons from those two experiences and propose future directions of how policy makers/legislators and organizations can advance and capture more equal, diverse, and inclusive diversity strategies.

Originality/value – The above two cases offer rich lessons for religious diversity scholarship and practice. The paper contributes to the literature on diversity in the workplace by questioning the organization of religious diversity in two countries that are under researched in management and organization studies.

Keywords Religion, Diversity, France, Lebanon, Colonialism, Positive discrimination

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

This paper offers an analysis of the organization of religion in the workplace in Lebanon and France. Choosing these two countries presents two interesting and contrasting cases of how diversity is tackled. On the one hand, French laws implement no positive action rules for religious diversity in the workplace. On the other hand, Lebanon has a form of quota system for religious representation in senior public sector positions and also has implicit norms for such representation in other lower level positions. The paper discusses how both approaches do not adequately serve diversity objectives. The paper contributes to the literature on diversity in the workplace by questioning the organization of religion in two countries that are under researched in management and organization studies. Furthermore, it proposes future directions as regards to how organizations can adopt more effective diversity strategies.

The paper starts with a review of the literature on religious diversity in the workplace. Following that, a contextualization of the historical relations between France and Lebanon is presented where the colonial (i.e. mandate) past is argued to be central to this relation. The national contexts are furthermore shown to impact religious diversity in the workplaces in these two countries. Next, the Lebanese and French positions regarding the case of religious diversity in corporate organizations are explained. In France, "blind neutrality" has not facilitated the case of religious diversity in the workplace. In Lebanon, a country formally colonized by France, a form of "positive discrimination" is not helping in the creation of more inclusive workplaces. We elaborate on the dynamics of those two contrasting systems and we also discuss theoretical and managerial implications.

Understanding religious diversity in the workplace

There is growing interest among academics and business practitioners in the relevance of religion and religious diversity in the workplace. This has been motivated by several factors including the emergence of a more diverse workforce because of global competition, immigration, and societal and political changes (e.g. Hicks, 2002; Kelly, 2008; Shen *et al.*, 2009). Employers are exploring ways to accommodate religious expression while at the same time stay sensible to the specific contexts in which they operate. Measures that organizations take to accommodate religious expression are always intertwined with broader social and legal contexts. This is why aspects of religious diversity vary if one compares a country like Canada (Sossin, 2009) and Australia (Syed and Pio, 2010) to European countries (Alidadi *et al.*, 2012). Comparing the particular cases of Lebanon and France is illuminating at an international level for reasons that we explain below.

Identifying general rules by which to understand diversity in corporate organizations seems to be a difficult if not an impossible task (Nkomo and Stewart, 2006; Richardson, 2014). Our contemporary world is characterized by religiously diverse societies (Turner, 2007). The public dimension of religion, and more generally of diversity, in social life and in the workplace is being increasingly considered in scholarship, practice, and policy making (Koenig, 2000). Nevertheless, the literature on religious diversity in the workplace remains limited in the context of diversity studies (Al Ariss, 2010; Syed *et al.*, 2009). Past research has considered religious diversity in the context of migration in developed countries. Some studies on European policy making suggest that recognizing religious diversity would encourage people from different religions to participate to a greater extent in public life (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2004). This has led to increased calls in countries such as Norway, for example, to reformulate equal opportunity policies that would take into account immigrants' religious diversity (Furseth, 2000). On the organizational level, the literature suggests that promoting religious diversity improves teamwork among diverse workers (Rosenzweig, 1998; Hicks, 2002).

Our quest to understand religious diversity seems to suggest that some former colonial powers maintained the colonial mindset when dealing with religious minorities within their own borders. Some authors blame colonialism for the creation of "some social identity groups lacking the skills, confidence and institutional support to enter into and advance within work organizations" (Prasad *et al.*, 2006, p. 8). Literature on religious diversity – especially in relation to migrant religious minorities – seems to oscillate between two divergent positions. At the one extreme, there is the view that almost justifies exclusion noting that some religious minorities adopt a value system and way of life that cannot possibly be reconciled with western lifestyles. Morey and Yaqin (2010) describe such discourses that paint some religious minorities as "unenlightened outsiders

who, while they may live and work in the West, still have an allegiance to values different from those recognized in Europe and North America" (p. 145). On the other extreme, there are arguments – edging toward a conspiracy theory – that accuse western countries of operating within a colonialist frame of mind whereby "other" religions are systematically demonized. While there are other more moderate perspectives on diversity (Özbilgin, 2009), the case remains that discussion on religious diversity in the workplace pales in comparison to diversity at the more macro social and political levels.

Prior research has highlighted the importance of studying diversity across countries. Klarsfeld (2010) and Klarsfeld *et al.* (2014) explain how different countries cope with diversity issues, not through a binary classification, but through a continuum of measures. Those range between a "strict equality of treatment" to a "constrained outcome" approach. To a large extent, France and Lebanon are good examples of opposite ends on this continuum. What is interesting, we argue, is that both systems are not ensuring more inclusion of diverse constituencies which results in organizations missing out on key talent. On the one hand, France, originally, established its system on a denial of any differences among its citizens (Bender *et al.*, 2010). In the specific case of religion, French laws contain no form of "positive-action" laws (Bender *et al.*, 2010). Lebanon, on the other hand, presents a case at the other extreme, where there is some form of quota system that governs the selection criteria of employees for certain jobs in the public sector, though not in the private sector. Both cases, we argue, have resulted in failure. We investigate why this is the case and whether there is an alternative way ahead.

Religion in the Lebanese workplace

Our main argument in the case of Lebanon is that "positive discrimination" as implemented is not working. It is actually leading Lebanese organizations to miss on attracting and retaining local talent. Lebanon is a small Arab country located in Western Asia but has unique characteristics differentiating it from its Arab neighbors (Sidani and Gardner, 2000). In Lebanon, there are 18 religious communities officially acknowledged by the government (Nelson, 2013). Religious communities (confessions) include Christians, such as Maronites and Greek Orthodox, and Muslims such as Sunnis and Shiites (Haddad, 2002). These confessions are also reflected in geographical divisions of the country: the south is known to be a Shiite area, the capital Beirut multi-confessional, the eastern part of the country Christian, and the northern part Sunni. Confessionalism in Lebanon distributes institutional powers among various religious communities. The claim of this scheme is to secure balanced power sharing. In this way, the government formally acknowledges the rights of religious groups, majority and minorities, by securing a supposedly equitable sharing of institutional, political, economic, and social power among them. Hence, confessional diversity is defined by power distribution among different religious groups.

Before any French soldier set foot in Lebanon, there had historically been a confessional problem in Lebanon with the various confessional groups vying for power (Tibawi, 1969). However, the institutionalization of the contemporary confessional scheme in Lebanon found its roots during the French colonization (Maktabi, 1999). Some scholars argue that the roots of the confessional problem could be traced compromises made between the French and some indigenous elites (Makdisi, 1996). Lebanon which was part of the Ottoman Empire till the First World War was then put under the French mandate until it got its independence in 1943 (El-Solh, 2004). The French distributed public positions of power on a confessional basis. Maronite Christians got the right to assume presidency of the republic, and Muslims got the two remaining prime positions, Prime Minister (Sunni Muslim), and Head of the Parliament (Shiite Muslim) (Maktabi, 1999).

Furthermore, positions in the parliament and in public institutions were distributed among confessional groups (Seaver, 2000). Through this scheme, the French controlled Lebanon by giving key governmental positions to Christians rather than Muslims (Maktabi, 1999). Moreover, the French divided institutional powers in the country among different religious groups rather than construct a powerful secular state. In 1975, the lack of policies promoting equality among all Lebanese was one of the reasons that led to a civil war that extended for 15 years. In 1989, the warring Lebanese factions reached an agreement to balance Muslim and Christian representation in power, thus putting an end to the civil war but reconfirming distribution of public positions among confessional groups (Hudson, 1999; Kabbara, 1991; Picard, 1997).

To blame uniquely the French for the confessional problem is not reasonable as the sectarian divisions, manifested in historic struggles and violence, long predated their entry to Lebanon. Religious affiliations in Lebanon have always been contentious, comparable to the tensions around race in the USA. The history of Lebanon has necessitated a form of legally sanctioned positive discrimination in the public sector for certain upper level jobs (Aoun, 2007), but not for middle and lower level positions. However, because of the persistent confessional divisions and political tensions, any perceived imbalance in confessional representation at any managerial level is almost always challenged. Thus social norms have forced this type of positive action to extend to lower level jobs. According to Klarsfeld's (2010) typology, Lebanese legislations – as applied in the public sector – present a case of compulsory positive action where strict quotas for religious denominations have to be met. Where legislations are silent, norms force a system of strict positive discrimination that often directly impact human resource (HR) decisions at various managerial levels. The result is mostly an irrational HR exercise that is conducive to neither effective nor efficient organizational functioning, and has been, thus far, crippling real HR development.

In the private sector, the story is somewhat different but with similarly negative consequences. Positive discrimination in Lebanon does not, by law, apply to the private sector. Most Lebanese organizations are small family businesses typically belonging to a single religious sect (Mikdashi, 1999); religious diversity is accordingly limited. While some large institutions, such as those in the banking sector, enjoy a certain level of religious diversity, they remain limited and constitute an exception. Additionally, most private schools and universities, student unions, professional associations, sports clubs, and media outlets have a confessional character. Such a strict attachment to confessional grouping in the workplace has detrimental effects on organizational performance (Sidani, 2002). A Lebanese businessman views this attachment to confessional grouping as nonsensical, saying, "If you have five carpenters who are the right religion and you need a plumber, but the plumber isn't the right religion, you get one of the carpenters to do your plumbing. That's what is happening, and it's ridiculous" (Philip Skaff in Thomson, 1999, p. 19). In an examination of the patterns of religious diversity management in Lebanon, Al Ariss (2010) shows how such a scheme in Lebanon bars fair access to employment and work promotion opportunities. Along Klarsfeld's (2010) typology, HR in the private sector represents a clear case of absence of any legislation or guiding action. This is similar to the presumed "equality of rights" approach found in some countries, yet with dire consequences. There are no requirements to show, or report on, religious diversity in private entities. Such absence of any positive mechanism has led to widespread discrimination and lack of accountability in the private sector.

The issue of religion in the workplace does not limit itself to confessional demarcation lines. Despite the fact that Muslims comprise more than 50 percent of the

Lebanese population, veiled women are not welcome in many institutions. Some banks, for example, seem averse to the idea of hiring veiled women (Hamad, 2003). Given the fact that the banking sector is the most vibrant sector in the Lebanese economy, women who choose to wear the Islamic veil are barred from a significant proportion of employment opportunities. A senior official of one of the largest Lebanese service companies stated that the company only hires veiled women in back offices, such as call centers, namely, positions which require no customer contact (MEHRF, 2009). This practice seems to be common among employers, both Muslims and Christians, for purely utilitarian reasons, and has been gaining some media attention (Sandels, 2010).

While the political institutionalization of religion happened during the times of French mandate, the Lebanese society itself is laden with structural problems that predate the mandate. The French have facilitated the birth of a system that the Lebanese have therefore not been able to break out of. Some may blame the French mandate of the earlier twentieth century for not creating an impetus for structural changes in the Lebanese society and not steering the political and administrative systems away from confessional divisions. It is fair to note, however, that such changes require, in many cases, generations to materialize. In all cases, the overall impact of the institutionalization of religion on Lebanese HR development has been devastating. In the public sector the practiced form of positive discrimination has proven to mostly attract the less qualified. In the private sector, the absence of any relevant laws has resulted in widespread inability to accommodate religious diversity.

Religious diversity in France

While the French facilitated the institutionalization of religion in Lebanon as a means of ensuring the representation of the different confessional groups, in France, under laws based on the Republican values of equality, it is illegal to discriminate – negatively or positively – against people based on their religion or ethnicity. This section offers a nuanced understanding of the French Republic's model and its paradoxes.

Osler and Starkey (2005) explain the position of the French state concerning its religious neutral policies by stating, "In fact, statistics based on 'racial' origin were collected by the Vichy government during the Nazi occupation of 1940-1944 and then used to discriminate systematically against religious minority groups. The Vichy government participated actively in Nazi projects of genocide of the Jewish and Roma populations of Europe" (Osler and Starkey, 2005, p. 211). Nevertheless, an in-depth historical examination of the French diversity model offers a more nuanced understanding. For instance, the French republican model, historically built on France's colonial past, stipulates that religious minorities must assimilate French culture (Camus, 2006). While mainstream scholars in France defend this model, it is highly criticized by others. For example, while assessing the historical role of France in the slave trade, Camus (2006) shows how the French state sees minority groups as an obstacle to the French common culture and national identity. Silverman (2007) suggests a similarity between recent and earlier attempts to assimilate minority groups into a homogeneous "Frenchness." After the French Revolution, the state attempted to strip Jews of their attachment to Jewish collective identity so as to become more like other French citizens. By doing so, the republican model deepened the divide between Jews and native Frenchmen who did not have to assimilate citizenship values (Trigano, 1985). Sartre (1948, p. 20) describes this homogenization process as racist humanism.

In the same way, through colonization, France attempted to transform the people in its colonies "into the same" identity so as to be more like French citizens (Silverman, 2007,

p. 630). It took France almost 30 years to revise the universalism myth and reassess the motives underling its war on Algeria (Stora, 1991). It was only in 1999 that the French state recognized its military operations in Algeria as that of war (Camus, 2006; House and MacMaster, 2006). This was a major achievement toward equality in France's history. Nevertheless, Silverman asserts that this colonial past still emerges in the present day. For instance, on February 23, 2005, France introduced a law by which the positive role of the French colonial power, especially in North Africa, should be highlighted in national history textbooks (Silverman, 2007, p. 637). Silverman (2007) states:

> The process of "decolonizing mentalities" – Henri Giordan cited in Lebovics (2004, p. 125) – is not always easy. However, the fact that France has been able to re-visit its national stories about the past at least demonstrates an ability to confront difficult truths, no matter how divisive this can be. Perhaps the confrontation with some uncomfortable truths about the republican model is the final (and most difficult?) confrontation of them all as part of France's ongoing "duty of memory" (Bancel *et al.*, 2005, p. ii) (Silverman, 2007, p. 637).

In his book, *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon (1967) argues that colonialism imposed degrading conditions upon the colonized as it demanded their conformity to its values. For example, the French colonizer tried to Europeanize Algerian women forcing them to remove their Islamic veil. "To the colonialist offensive against the veil, the colonized opposes the cult of the veil. What was an undifferentiated element in a homogeneous whole acquires a taboo character, and the attitude of a given Algerian woman with respect to the veil will be constantly related to her overall attitude with respect to the foreign occupation" (Fanon, 1967, p. 47).

In contemporary France, some scholars have found that members of religious minorities in France are sometimes discriminated against (Al Ariss *et al.*, 2013). For example, it is reported that some French mayors use various administrative tricks to avoid the construction of mosques in their regions, thus ignoring the December 9, 1905 law, which guarantees the right of worship in France (Maillard, 2005, p. 74). Consequently, the state interferes, and not always successfully as suggested in the literature, to regulate certain aspects of minorities' lives. According to Osler and Starkey (2005), "[…] in 2003, leading political figures from the right and the left, including the Prime Minister, made speeches in favor of legislating against the right of Muslim girls to wear headscarves in schools. Such proposals fail to acknowledge the multiple identities of students. In effect, the school – a Republican institution – is promoting sameness, rather than equity, as an ideal. Integration is privileged over pluralism" (p. 210).

By giving the example of how Muslim headscarves and beards are unaccepted in France, Silverman (2007) shows how secularism in France can contribute to a denial of cultural differences. Silverman (2007) asserts that "[…] the regulation of cultural difference in the public sphere is really a symbolic, and largely superfluous, side-show concealing far more serious problems about the French nation-state in a postmodern and postcolonial era" (p. 637) (see Klarsfeld *et al.*, 2012 for a discussion on social regulation and diversity management in France compared to Canadian and UK contexts). Accordingly, the state imposes the majority's "universal" cultural values on minorities, often ignoring their cultural differences. The author gives a clear example of such situations:

> For example, while his government was reinforcing the ban on headscarves in schools to protect the neutrality of the public sphere from the threat of cultural diversity, Jacques Chirac was lobbying UNESCO to support a worldwide charter to protect cultural diversity in an attempt to safeguard the French language and cinema from the global dominance of American English and the Hollywood blockbuster (Silverman, 2007, p. 629).

In 2010, this topic has led to a law prohibiting wearing full Islamic veil publicly, subject to a fine of 150 euros (Amiraux and Mohammed, 2013). The effect of such a law was controversial. On a repeated basis, abuse by the French police force has been reported against women wearing full Islamic veil, making it impossible for them to simply accompany their children on school daytrips or walk for shopping (Amiraux and Mohammed, 2013). On October 10, 2010 a law was drafted in France proposing that the concealment of the face in public be banned. Six months later, on 11 April 2011 it came into force. This law (Law No. 2010-1192) contains seven articles. Article 1 sets out the general principle that "no person shall, in the public space, wear clothing intended to conceal his face." The Official Journal dated Tuesday, October 12, 2010 published the law and thereby extended the definition of public space to cover public highways, train stations, educational establishments, post offices, clinics, courts, public parks, cinemas, shops and shopping centers, government buildings, etc.

Maillard (2005) analyzed the issue of the Islamic veil in France and came up with a conclusion that "the legal and legislative row over the Islamic veil covering up an inch of flesh in a society that has pushed back the limits of sexual permissiveness and exhibitionism by the use of nakedness in marketing may seem surprising – even somewhat ridiculous. Yet the veil comes as the symbolic statement of an unacceptable *communautariste* (or in other words, ethnic) demand for the recognition of a shared and different identity within France, which is seen by some as a challenge to the perspective of the republic as a one unique whole and definitely not a 'community of communities'" (Maillard, 2005, pp. 77-78).

In France, the issue of diversity is linked to that of positive discrimination. However, positive discrimination is forbidden on the basis of either religious or ethnic identity. Calvès (2004) explains that in France, positive discrimination is practiced primarily in the case of people with disabilities and of war victims (the first measure of positive discrimination came into effect in 1924 for those who had been disabled by war injuries, requiring that they make up 10 percent of the workforce in any given business) in the name of national solidarity. It is implemented in the form of quotas applied to companies of a certain size (over 20 employees). If the company does not abide by these discrimination measures in their recruitment, they can subcontract companies specialized in working with people with disabilities, or pay a financial penalty. The policies of integration primarily target young people in fragile economic circumstances (without qualifications, or of immigrant background, for example). In fact, the increase in these "assisted" contracts – contracts partially subsidized by the government, remain relatively ineffective. Monitoring is carried out as a means of checking for any discriminatory practices and to ensure transparency. Employers of over 50 workers are, for example, obliged to provide indications that show any possible gaps between how men and women are treated, based on precise statistics that take into account years of experience and levels of qualification. However, monitoring of ethnicity is faced with the problems over filing people according to their ethnicity or their religion (Maillard, 2005). More recently, political parties are recruiting members who represent ethnic minorities within the community in order to enlarge their electorate (Réa and Tripier, 2008), without, however, referring directly to these practices. In the French context, the aim is to fight against discrimination and to fit in to a universalist republican ideal (Bender, 2004).

Hill (1994) argues that equal citizenship is in practice not complete if part of the population lives under imbalanced conditions. The French system is in reality built, albeit implicitly, on particularities rather than universalism (Silverstein, 2004). For example, bias can be easily seen in poor Parisian suburbs, where ethnic minorities constitute the majority

of inhabitants, and in the use of implicit ethnic criteria in immigration policies that are – in theory – blind to ethnicity (Al Ariss *et al.*, 2013). Thus, these studies indicate that, in many cases, religiously neutral policies in France are politicized and contribute to the exclusion of minorities from the accumulation and deployment of capital.

In summary, under current French republicanism, exclusion hinders the careers of minorities in the contemporary French labor market. The management of minorities working in France requires a reframing of their contributions to the labor market in more supportive ways. This can take the form of advancing inclusive legislative reforms that are more inclusive leading to better integration of migrants into the French job market. At the organizational level, this could be put within the contexts of HR policies that are more tolerant in terms of diversity. We acknowledge the difficulty of this in the wake of terrorist attacks, some committed by migrant Muslims, which make certain elements of the French society wary and suspicious.

Where do we go from here?

Although, historically speaking, religion has been institutionalized by the French in France's ex-colony, Lebanon, our analysis shows two opposing religious diversity models in Lebanon and France. In Lebanon, the country completely relies on a confessional scheme in the public sector ("Constrained outcome," Klarsfeld, 2010). In the private sector, there is lack of proper legal apparatus to promote religious diversity. All of this has proven to be counterproductive. In France, neither organizations nor institutions are allowed to refer to religious diversity in employment practices ("Equality of rights," Klarsfeld, 2010; Klarsfeld *et al.*, 2014), and in practice, exclusion of religious minorities continues to be found in the context of work in France (Tatli *et al.*, 2012). Two questions become relevant here. First, how can the contrast between the French institutionalization of religion in Lebanon and practices in France itself be explained? Second, what other alternatives do organizations have in navigating the institutionalization of religion and constructively managing their HRs? Based on our previous analysis, we attempt to answer these two questions.

One possible answer to the first question can be found in Said's (2000) writings. Said (2000) analyzes the invention and creation of geographical places. For example, he challenges the way traditions were invented in France as a part of France's colonial domination: "the invention of tradition was a practice very much used by authorities as an instrument of rule in mass societies when the bonds of small social units like village and family were dissolving and authorities needed to find other ways of connecting a large number of people to each other. The invention of tradition is a method for using collective memory selectively by manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others, and elevating still others in an entirely functional way. Thus, memory is not necessarily authentic, but rather useful" (Said, 2000, p. 179). For Said, part of the postcolonial project is to challenge western material dominance (Özkazanc-Pan, 2008). Said asserts that "the interplay among memory, place, and invention can do if it is not to be used for the purposes of exclusion, that is, if it is to be used for liberation and coexistence between societies whose adjacency requires a tolerable form of sustained reconciliation" (Said, 2000, p. 191).

In their efforts to emphasize a common identity among the French, French legislators have fallen into the trap of compromising basic rights that pertain to the freedom of association with one's ethnicity or religion either through observed practice or through dress code. The question of ignoring the religiously diverse society in France is no small matter; the implications for the French (and by extension European) societies are great. To some outsiders, France represents a society that, in its effort to protect its traditional values and nationalistic attachments, has compromised the very essence of the ideals on

which it was based after the French Revolution. For example, with a very sizable Muslim minority in France, it is doubtful that the alleged objectives of banning the veil will lead to fruitful results. Actually, this would push Muslim women and men to self-select jobs with which they are comfortable thus deepening the isolation between the majority and minority sections of the population. Accordingly we recommend:

R1: Legislators in France need to consider the human resource management implications of their religious-diversity interventions.

The situation in Lebanon is not all that different. There are diversity issues based on religion, confessionalism, and espoused religiosity (such as through religious dress code). There are no easy solutions or recommendations for Lebanese organizations apart from the changes needed at the national, educational, and social levels. However, changes in societal opinion and value systems are not likely to materialize any time soon. Recent events in Lebanon have only shown that attachment to religious identity and confession, at the expense of national allegiance, is becoming more entrenched than ever before. Real change in the long run will only occur if people's mindsets change and this will happen if there is a movement to inculcate a new mode of thinking early into the educational system. Accordingly we recommend:

R2: Policy makers in Lebanon need to integrate religious diversity awareness into the school and university curriculum to ensure early attentiveness regarding the importance of such diversity.

Changes need to also happen at the legislative front. Accordingly we recommend:

R3: Explicit legislation in Lebanon should be passed to outlaw religious discrimination in both the private and public sectors.

We also argue that there is a need to draw on international experiences in positive action in the private sector to promote religious diversity. Racial and gender integration in many parts of the world would not have progressed without affirmative action programs and/or quotas. For example, in France, it was only until very recently that a form of quota was imposed on large companies to have more women included in their boardrooms. Accordingly we recommend:

R4: In both France and Lebanon, legislators need to entertain the idea of an affirmative action scheme that cuts across diversity lines and that could extend to intersectional forms of diversity (e.g. religious, disabilities, gender, among others).

Organizations do not have to wait for comprehensive legislative changes before they act. They can take the lead in promoting environments that reflect progressive levels of religious diversity. This could be done through an effort to increase awareness among HR and other managers about the importance of those issues. To accomplish that we recommend:

R5: Organizations in Lebanon need to consider the possibility of collecting data and reporting on religious diversity to reflect positive organizational efforts in that direction.

This recommendation cannot be implemented in France as it is forbidden to collect and report such data (Klarsfeld *et al.*, 2014). However, there are other tools available to managers to ensure that an "equality of rights" mechanism does not end in implicit discrimination. Having cultures that are friendly to all qualified people, irrespective of their religious affiliations, is a first step in that direction. Accordingly we recommend:

R6: Organizations in both France and Lebanon need to work on fostering corporate cultures that are tolerant of various religious affiliations and religious practices.

Finally, waiting for changing mindsets at the educational level could prove to be a long process. Business organizations can take the lead in educating their own personnel on issues of diversity, including religious diversity:

> R7: Organizations in both France and Lebanon need to run recurring tolerance training programs on diversity, where differences in religious affiliation are deemed an integral and important aspect of diversity.

Following list shows the recommendations categorized into two parts. The first set represents recommendations at the legislative and policy-making front. The second set represents recommendations at the organizational front.

Legislators and policy makers:

- R1: legislators in France need to consider the HR management implications of their religious diversity interventions;

- R2: policy makers in Lebanon need to integrate religious diversity awareness into the school and university curriculum to ensure early attentiveness regarding the importance of such diversity;

- R3: explicit legislation in Lebanon should be passed to outlaw religious discrimination in both the private and public sectors; and

- R4: in both France and Lebanon, legislators need to entertain the idea of an affirmative action scheme that cuts across diversity lines and that could extend to intersectional forms of diversity (e.g. religious, disabilities, gender, among others).

Organizations:

- R5: organizations in Lebanon need to consider the possibility of collecting data and reporting on religious diversity to reflect positive organizational efforts in that direction;

- R6: organizations in both France and Lebanon need to work on fostering corporate cultures that are tolerant of various religious affiliations and religious practices; and

- R7: organizations in both France and Lebanon need to run recurring tolerance training programs on diversity, where differences in religious affiliation are deemed an integral and important aspect of diversity.

Conclusion

The above two cases offer rich lessons for religious diversity scholarship and practice. Three are particularly salient.

First, there is need to approach religious diversities within their own contexts. The importance of religious diversity at a universal level should not obscure the fact the substantial progress cannot be realized without taking the surrounding factors into consideration. The French case, for example, offers an interesting window into a society that is in transition. On the one hand, this is a Western European society that is open to change and development and welcoming of new ideas. On the other hand, the waves of immigration over the past few decades have posed some serious challenges. France cannot escape from its attachment to values of freedom and equal opportunity. At the same time, it finds itself faced with the dilemma of how to preserve its traditional values and national character in the face of what some French constituencies perceive

to be an external threat. The solution does not lie in excluding minorities, neither in letting these groups exclude themselves. The French policy makers need to work out a system whereby respect for individual liberties and loyalties is safeguarded, and at the same time, make sure that the immigrant population is able to adopt what it needs of these values to share with its fellow citizens.

Second, religious diversity schemes and measures need to be continuously updated. In Lebanon, the agreed-upon division of power among various religions worked, albeit not very effectively, for a specific period of time. Much has changed over the past few years which warrant a revision by policy makers and organizations of the initial measures taken. The same goes for France where changing societal considerations necessitate that a strict "equality of rights" needs to be revisited. France has recently moved into this direction as far as gender diversity is concerned, i.e. quotas for female representation on boards (see paper by Klarsfeld, 2014 for a self-reflection on gender privileges in France). So why not consider the same for religious diversity?

Third, our work contributes to the important discussion that is breaking taboos and promoting serious considerations around religion and religious diversity in the workplace. In France, there needs to be a transparent discussion about whether the existing system can survive and flourish toward the advancement of organizational functioning. "Blind impartiality" as far as religion is concerned has not met with success; this needs to be addressed. In Lebanon, discussions about religious isolationism in the private sector, and organizational failures in the public sector, need to be openly tackled. Institutionalized confessionalism in the public sector has proven to be counterproductive resulting in failures to make full use of Lebanese HRs. What happens in the Lebanese private sector is a systematic process of exclusion based on religious affiliation. The practice of excluding certain groups from the workplace based on confessional affiliation or espoused religiosity leads to organizations potentially missing out on a larger pool of skills.

Blinding oneself to race, sexuality, and other socially significant differences cannot erase the consequences of many lifelong discriminations (Prasad *et al.*, 2006, p. 9). In such a context, the republican diversity model and other institutionalized systems demand "a considerable amount of cultural sacrifice in return for inclusion and acceptance in the broader society and organization" (Prasad *et al.*, 2006, p. 4). Religious affiliation and religious expression would then be viewed as features that enrich, not divide, societies. When this happens, people would seize the opportunity of having a multitude of backgrounds to increase cultural exchange and intellectual development leading to healthier organizational functioning.

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