Unveiled: France's Inability to Accept Islam

by

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ABSTRACT

The thesis I have written aims to investigate the underlying reasons why France has considered Islam as unassimilable and why it has targeted Muslim women's bodies to force assimilation. In the first section of the thesis, I examine the colonial relationship between France and Algeria. I conclude that Algeria's independence from France significantly influenced the negative treatment towards immigrants in postcolonial France. I then study the racist discourse that dominated French politics in the 1980s; and clarify how this has laid the foundation for the first attempt to ban the headscarves in public schools during the 1980s. The final section explores the 2004 ban on conspicuous religious symbols, a ban that significantly targeted the headscarf. I conclude that the prohibition of the headscarf undermined the rights of Muslim women and symbolized France's inability to accept Islam, since France feared Islam's visibility weakened a dominant French identity.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The veil is a piece of cloth that covers the hair and is worn in many regions across the world to represent modesty or devotion to God. However, post 9/11 the veil has become a symbol exclusively associated with radical Islam and/or a symbol of Muslim women's oppression and subjugation. The thesis I have written will exclusively focus on France's relation to its Muslim citizens and/or residents since they have been at the center of ongoing political debates. I will use the term Muslim, Arab and Immigrant interchangeably; while the terms may not be synonymous, politicians and the media have used it synonymously in the hijab debates. However, the thesis will particularly focus on the Algerian community living in France since they share one of the longest and most brutal colonial histories with France. I will also use the terms hijab, headscarf, and veil interchangeably since the terms are synonymous.

The two key concepts that I would like to clarify are assimilation and communalism. Brubaker explains that "assimilation is a process of becoming similar, making similar or being treated as similar" (2001, p. 543). However, the concept of assimilation has not been positively perceived in multi-ethnic societies, and many argue that assimilation lacks appreciation for diversity. The policies that aim to encourage assimilation also do it at the expense of people's will, as evident in the ban of hijabs in French public schools. Communalism is often seen as a threat to assimilation since individuals place a small subset of their identity, such as their race, ethnicity, or religion above the national community. Communalism reinforces differences whereas assimilation reinforces sameness, and therefore communalism is seen disrupting French values of a shared civic life, which France emphasizes is crucial to realize the common

1

good (Fredette, 2014).

Through the course of this thesis I will employ postcolonial feminist theory and argue that the veil was banned not to alleviate Muslim women from oppression as it is often argued, but due to the visibility of Islam in France; which has blurred French identity. The French state has maintained a patriarchal position by telling Muslim women how to dress while using an argument of women's rights to justify this position. I will also argue that it is not Muslims who are failing to integrate into France; instead negative stereotypes that have been prevalent since colonialism has created a barrier between France and its Muslim immigrant community. It is second-generation immigrants who have now fallen victims to discrimination based on their "Arab" heritage which has demeaned their French identity, and resulted in a rejection of being accepted as equals in France.

Many politicians have argued that Muslims in France are refusing to assume a common French identity; instead, they are adhering to communalism, a notion the French Republic does not recognize since it views citizens in terms of individuals instead of a community. Communalism is feared as encouraging Muslims to place their religious or ethnic identity above a secular French identity. Bowen explains that, for the French, communalism separates "citizens by valuing their affiliation to communities over their collective participation in the nation" (2007, p. 156). Politicians have argued that Muslims who place their Islamic identity above their French identity have failed to assimilate and have dismissed the Republic's values, which can result in the formation of fundamentalist communities. The segregation of Muslims from mainstream French life has been viewed as a threat and grounds to harvest fundamentalist ideologies. "Arab-

2

Muslim Culture" has also been blamed for the high rates of poverty and crime that has become prevalent in immigrant dominated communities (Bowen, 2007, p. 163).

The *banlieues* are low-income neighborhoods located in the suburbs of major urban agglomerations in France; the majority of the occupants in these *banlieues* are immigrants, and France has accused them of segregating themselves from the wider society. However, the clustering of Muslims in these areas is not due to Islam but rather to the discrimination and limited financial resources these inhabitants have to relocate. The *banlieues* in France have become a poverty trap for Muslims who are unable to escape, due to the lack of opportunities available to them; and instead of France tackling the issues of the *banlieues* such as improving the living conditions, and creating jobs to serve the communities, French officials have shifted blame on Islam as the main reason for Muslims failures. (Favell, 2001). The hardship experienced in the *banlieues* has ties to colonialism, and can be traced back to when the first Algerian migrants arrived in France and were discriminated based on popular Orientalist stereotypes of Arabs, such as lazy and violent (Said, 1979). Many European natives did not welcome Algerians into their communities due to the negative stereotypes that surrounded them. Many also feared that allowing Algerians to integrate would lead to a fight for valuable resources that should be reserved for the native French and European migrants (Macmaster, 1997).

As a strategy to forcefully assimilate Muslims, France has attempted to ban the hijab from public schools on numerous occasions dating back to 1989; The French argued that the hijab created a barrier to assimilation. Muslim girls who were affected by the hijab bans were never given a voice in the debates instead they were portrayed as victims in need of saving. In 2004, France banned all conspicuous religious symbols in

public schools, a ban often referred to as the "hijab ban". While the ban includes all religious symbols such as the Jewish Kippa, Sikh turbans, and large crosses, it was evident that the primary target was the hijab (Scott, 2007). In the 1980s the hijab became the center of public debates due to the increase of anti-immigrant policies that dominated society; Jean-Marie Le Pen a far-right politician feared that native French were diminishing (depopulation fears) and would be overpowered by immigrants. Therefore, it was key for France to reinforce strict immigration laws and eradicate visibility of foreign cultures such as the headscarf (Favell, 2001). Yet France's struggle to unveil Muslim women can be traced back to France's conquest of Algeria; where colonizers felt this was a backward practice that trapped women. Unveiling Muslim women became significantly important during the Algerian war of independence, where colonizers enforced the notion that Algeria was still not civilized, and by focusing on Women's issues, France attempted to legitimate their colonial rule to the rest of the world (Shepard, 2006).

The key three questions I will be examining in the thesis are: (1) how has France's colonial rule of Algeria shaped postcolonial relations in France; (2) why are Muslims considered unassimilable in France; and (3) how have efforts to construct and defend French identity altered the position of/and, consequently, undermined the rights of Muslim women?
France has failed to move away from colonial power relations as its Muslim residents are viewed as second-class citizens; France has also accused Muslims of resisting assimilation, when in reality France has rejected them due to the fear of Islam's visibility in the Republic. In order to maintain colonial power relations, France has banned the hijab in public schools, this decision has taken the voice away from Muslim women to act

as free agents, and has forced them to live in daily confrontations between their religious beliefs and Republican values.

The thesis is divided into three key sections relating to the research questions I intend to explore. The thesis will follow a narrative chronology dating back to the issues of colonial France and concluding with the hijab debates in postcolonial France. In the first section, I will use a historical materialist framework that provides a profound look at how history has shaped social issues in France. I will particularly focus on the shifted identity of Algerians, who went from being considered citizens during the colonial regime, to being considered foreigners after Algeria's independence. The second section of the thesis will look closely at the 1980s, an era where racist discourse towards immigrants became most prevalent in France. I will also show how Islam's visibility in the 1980s led to a target of the hijab in public school. The final sections of the thesis will focus on how contemporary France has rejected second-generation Muslims, and how the hijab bans in public schools have limited the rights of Muslim girls.

POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST THEORY

       The term postcolonial typically refers to the period after European colonial rule, however postcolonialism does not have a fixed meaning; instead the term has been used to describe a "diverse range of experiences, cultures, and problems" (Bahri, 1995, p. 51). Therefore, postcolonialism has often been viewed as a broad study of the power relations between the colonizer and the colonized. Postcolonialism aims to investigate the impact colonization has had on colonized societies, and how this has influenced cultures in terms of literature, sciences, and arts (Bahri, 1995). First, I will cover postcolonialism through a review of Said, who examined the relations between Europe and the Middle East. Then I will analyze the postcolonial feminist writings of Mohanty who criticized Western feminist depiction of third world women, and Spivak who argued third world women's struggles have been ignored throughout history.

       Edward Said's book *Orientalism* is often referred to laying the foundation for postcolonial theory. Said argues that:

> The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. Now it was disappearing; in a sense it had happened, its time was over. (1979, p. 1)

Orientalism was most prevalent during the colonial regimes, which dominated the late 18th century and ended in the mid-20th century, however decolonization has made colonialism less visible, but the Orient has not entirely disappeared. In France, Algerians or those from postcolonial territories still experience systemic discrimination based on their identity. Said explains:

6

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing

with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views

of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as

a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the

Orient. (1979, p. 3)

Said analyzed a range of Orientalist writers who all view the Occident and the

Orient in terms of binary oppositions; A "them" versus "us" ideology, where the Orient

represents everything the Occident does not. This level of thinking allowed the Occident

to legitimize colonialism since the Orient was viewed as "uncivilized", hence making it

the Occident's "responsibility" to civilize them. The idea of viewing the Orients and

Occident in total opposition has also fueled the rise of modern identity politics:

For identity, whether of Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while obviously a

repository of distinct collective experiences, is finally a construction — involves

establishing opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the

continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us'. Each

age and society re-creates its 'Others'. (1979, p. 332)

Said's main concern in Orientalism, is the production of knowledge about the Orient. The

Orientalist writes about the Orient without engaging with the people of the Orient; thus,

the knowledge they circulate is not authentic as it is often influenced by biases of the

dominant culture. The knowledge produced is also political since the Occident has the

power to determine how others view the Orient. This reproduces cultural domination,

especially since Oriental cultures are often portrayed as being inferior to Occidental

cultures. The Orient is often viewed as a monolithic passive being who are not capable of

representing itself, due to not being aware of what is good for it, and "representations of 'the Orient' increase misrepresentation and misinterpretation" (Said, 1979, p. xii).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, a postcolonial feminist, has also paid significant attention to the high level of misrepresentation, especially among third world women. Mohanty in her article *Under Western Eyes*: *Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, is interested in the gender dynamics of colonial power relations. Mohanty argues that due to their gender women have always been subject to oppression; however, while patriarchy may unite the experiences of women around the world, women's experiences also differ based on what part of the world they come from as well as their race and class. Therefore, this does not legitimize Western feminist to speak on the needs of third world women; especially since Western women are writing from a position of power, and often fail to acknowledge the differences among third world women who they categorize as monolithic. Mohanty understands the term colonization is both fluid and structured as it characterizes:

> Everything from the most evident economic and political hierarchies to the production of a particular cultural discourse about what is called the 'third world'. However, sophisticated or problematical its use as an explanatory construct, colonization almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination, and a suppression often violent of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question. (1984, p. 333)

Third world women have fallen victim to "double colonization", where on the one hand they are oppressed due to native patriarchy and on the other due to imperialism, which also has marginalized women. Due to this "double colonization" third world

8

women have been unable to escape from being portrayed as victims. Western feminists are culturally privileged and have exercised power over third world women by producing knowledge on behalf of them since they are viewed as unable to represent themselves (Gandhi, 1998).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who is considered a pioneer in postcolonial feminist theory focuses extensively on the depiction of the subaltern in her article *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Antonio Gramsci introduced the term subaltern to describe individuals who are considered an "inferior rank"; these include peasants, workers and those who have no authority and denied access to power. Due to the colonial power structure, the subaltern often falls victim to the hegemonic ruling group, which has access to means such as cultural and social institutions to influence how the subaltern is represented, and often disregards a true representation of the subaltern (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2006). For Spivak, the subaltern does not have a fixed meaning since historically subaltern has excluded the experiences of women and focused on the struggles of men. Therefore, Spivak includes the experiences of third world women to redefine the meaning of subaltern.

Spivak criticizes the neglect of women's struggles. In fact, when one thinks of colonial oppression, accounts often relate to the experience of colonized men who are viewed as the primary gender. However, for Spivak the subaltern does not only include third word men but also women who, Spivak argued, are exposed to the worst form of oppression, since their voices are silenced, and their struggles were forgotten. Spivak draws examples from the British colonial rule in India where the British outlawed the practice of *Sati,* (widow sacrifice). She explains the British believed that they were

"White men saving brown women from brown men" (1988, p. 296). The ideology of saving the women has been used to legitimize the colonization of India by Britain. It has also categorized all Indian women as wanting to be saved, and it has failed to acknowledge the reason why Indian women committed such an act, for instance by arguing that "The women actually wanted to die" (1988, p. 297). In this sense, the women were portrayed as being oppressed by Hindu patriarchal practices (Gandhi, 1998). Yet the British expressed that they did not interfere with native custom/Law, however Spivak examined remarks made by J.D.M. Derrett in a colonial letter he read, which revealed:

> 'The very first legislation upon Hindu Law was
>
> carried through without the assent of a single Hindu'. The legislation is not named
>
> here. The next sentence, where the measure is named, is equally interesting if one
>
> considers the implications of the survival of a colonially established
>
> 'good' society after decolonization: 'The recurrence of sati in independent India
>
> is probably an obscurantist revival which cannot long survive even in a very
>
> backward part of the country'. (Cited in Spivak,1988, p. 298)

While the abolishment of *sati* may have saved Indian women, it also portrayed them as individuals who are unable to represent themselves, and need to be represented by the British, since their native culture had failed them. In this sense, Indian women were objectified and portrayed as prize possessions to represent the "achievement" from colonialism. Their voices were silenced since no one bothered to question the practice of *sati* from their perspective, and a law was passed on their behalf without consulting them.

Said, Mohanty, and Spivak are all very important theorists who I will reference throughout the thesis. Said's emphasis on how the "other" is constructed is important, since France has constructed Muslims as the "other", whose identities oppose everything French universalism represents. Mohanty's argument on Western feminist representing the needs of third world women as a monolithic group is also evident in the hijab debates in France, where the majority of French feminist viewed the hijab as oppressive. Spivak's claim that the subaltern is silenced can also be seen in the hijab debates where Muslim women who veiled were not given a platform to speak, since they were seen as too oppressed to be aware of their own subjugation.

METHODOLOGY

Yin explains that "cases studies are pertinent with a research that address either a descriptive or explanatory question" (2012, p. 4). For this reason, I have chosen to employ case-study since my thesis centers on answering three key questions, (1) how has France's colonial rule of Algeria shaped postcolonial relations in France; (2) why are Muslim's considered unassimilable in France; and (3) how have efforts to construct and defend French identity altered the position of/and, consequently, undermined the rights of Muslim women? The thesis I have written is interdisciplinary in orientation and has combined literature from women's studies, history, religious studies, sociology and political science, which has enabled my thesis to be applied to all these fields. Also, I have relied solely on secondary academic resources and have analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data. Case studies benefit from a combination of sources and evidence, and it encourages the use of a variety of methods to strengthen one's research (Yin, 2012). The specific method I used for data collection was narrative reviews; which tend to be "comprehensive and cover a wide range of issues within a given topic" (Collins & Fauser, 2005, p. 104).

Due to the fact that I chose postcolonial feminist theory for my thesis, I had to examine the historical relationship between France and its Muslim colonies, since I am interested in understanding why Muslims have been considered unassimilable in France. This required gathering evidence from monographs which focused on French colonial history, and in order to fulfill this task I used search engines such as Google scholar and academic search engines. I then read the abstracts of the most cited books, and decided to

focus significantly on France's colonial relationship with Algeria; since most of the historical books referred to it as being key for shaping Muslims postcolonial relationship in France. I also contacted academic professionals in the field who kindly provided a list of articles related to the research questions. One of the key historical books I have read was *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France,* written by Todd Shepard. This book discussed the events related to the pre and post Algerian revolution, which was important since it helps one understand how Algerian identity has shifted and been comprised in contemporary France.

The second step of the data collection involved finding articles related to the treatment of the earliest Muslim immigrants in France. I once again used academic search engines, to locate scholarly articles. One of the key books I reviewed was *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain,* written by Adrian Favell. I read the sections relating to France's policies on integration; the book dates back to the 1980s, a time when immigration debates and policies dominated French politics. I summarized key events of both the 1980s and 1990s, which revealed a high intolerance towards Muslim living in France, and laid the foundation for the first attempt to ban the headscarf in public schools in the 1980s.

During the third step of data collection, I also read a variety of academic articles which focused on the issues surrounding Muslim women living in France post 9/11. One of the books I examined was *Hijab and the Republic: Uncovering the French Headscarf Debate,* written by Bronwyn Winter. This book allowed me to understand the type of discourse that is often inflicted upon Muslim women; such as how the media has

criminalized them, and the way their voices were silenced throughout the headscarf debates.

The benefit of doing a narrative analysis is that it provides an opportunity to connect a broad range of empirical research that has already been conducted. Not only does this enable scholars to generate an interdisciplinary and broad-based understanding of current social issues, but it also provides one with the ability to produce new understanding without the time and expense of fieldwork. However, there are also many limitations when relying on narrative analysis to collect data. For one, existing studies may be biased and written from the researcher's perspective. Another limitation I faced was the fact that I do not speak French, and a variety of case studies were published in French, which meant I was not able to use them. However, to overcome this issue, I searched for a translated version or relied on research conducted by foreign scholars who had published their work in English.

The thesis I have written is grounded in postcolonial Feminist theory which pays significant attention to the power of representation. Therefore, relying on research from scholars who are not French and/or Muslim meant that I had to be aware of the possible personal biases. For instance, I have referenced the book *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves,* which was written by Bowen, a Caucasian, male, and American professor. His race, gender, and status puts him in a position of power over Muslim girls in France whose experiences he may not be able to comprehend.

As a student living in the United States, I also have power over how I represent the Muslim community in France and have to be aware of my own biases and privileges. However, I am also a Somali, Muslim women who wears the hijab. I feel that I can

14

sympathize with the experience of Muslim girls in France. While I have not been

expelled for wearing the hijab; I have come in contact with discrimination based on my

dress code from the general public.

This section of the thesis will explore the research question: how has France's colonial rule of Algeria shaped postcolonial relations in France? I will provide a historical overview of the colonial relationship between France and Algeria, and discuss the Algerian fight for independence to provide a foundation for understanding current issues. Next, I will cover how the French used the excuse of liberating Algerian women to justify their colonial rule, and how the native Algerians manipulated the veil during the war of independence. Finally, I explore how France stripped French citizenship of Algerians, and the consequences this had on those who moved to France post-independence.

*France's Colonial Relationship with Algeria*

France shares one of its longest colonial histories with Algeria, which was colonized in 1830. The very first mission of the French colonies in Algeria was, how to cultivate and dominate the land they had just "inherited". The French colonizers displaced native Algerians from the lands they owned by privatizing and granting it to the *pieds noirs* (People who moved from Europe/France). This led to many Algerians becoming refugees in their country and working for wages on the lands they once owned. Algeria also had different ethnic groups living in the country, and France organized these groups according to a hierarchy of "superiority". Jews were viewed as the most superior, followed by Berbers and specifically Kabyle Berbers who had Caucasian features, and

then the Arabs who were seen as the lowest and racially inferior group, due to their darker skin and religion of Islam (MacMaster, 1997). Algerians are still discriminated based on these negative stereotypes from the colonial regime, however France no longer separates Berbers and Arabs, instead they are now clustered under the "Muslim" label (Fellag, 2014).

In 1904 France's demand for cheap labor intensified, and the French state granted Algerians free movement to France, this lead to an influx of Algerian men in particularly Kabyle migrating to France. The reasons for this were manifold: First, the Kabyles were highly encouraged to migrate due to their Caucasian features which French colonizers believed would help them readily assimilate. Second, the "Kabyle Myth" presented this group as hardworking individuals who were not lazy, in contrast to their Arab counterparts, who endured all the negative stereotypes of colonialism. For instance, MacMaster (1997) explains that negative comments about Arabs were typical of colonial discourse, and many were labeled as dishonest, sensual, stupid and lechery. The agenda to divide the Kabyles and Arabs as two separate groups were that it would make it easier to rule Algeria; this was a strategy many colonizers used to gain the loyalty of one group, while significantly oppressing the other. The Kabyles were also favored in the hopes that one day they would be the ones to encourage "the transformation of Algeria into a pure embodiment of French civilization" (MacMaster, 1997, p. 44). Finally, the influx of Kabyles was also due to their natural migration; many lived in the mountains and traveled and/or traded to make a living; therefore, a move to France for them was viewed in terms of their natural migration for work (MacMaster, 1997).

Once the Kabyles arrived in France, they were not treated as a superior race. In fact, many migrants in France were from neighboring Europeans countries (Italy, Poland, or Portugal) and were viewed superior to the Kabyles who became viewed as inferior Arabs along with Tunisian and Moroccans who many found difficult to distinguish between. The Arabs were seen as cheap foreign labor ready to be exploited; they worked in the most dangerous jobs with the lowest pay as these were jobs neither French natives nor European migrants wanted to fulfill. However, tensions rose when Algerians were used as the reserve pool of labor, replacing Europeans migrants who went on strike for better wages. This caused European migrants and Algerians to start competing for the same jobs, a concern the French natives did not have since their employment was prioritized in the Republic (MacMaster, 1997).

The Algerian Kabyles who first traveled to France did not do so for the purpose of permanent migration; instead, they were there strictly for business and focused on generating income to send back home. Many longed for the day they could return to Algeria and after three years most men returned home and replaced their current position with a member of their family. Therefore, when Algerians were required to find accommodation, many did not prioritize living in permanent residencies, and most were interested in finding the cheapest rent, which was often located in the *banlieues*. This resulted in overcrowded living spaces, and due to the nature of their employment such as being exposed to harmful chemicals combined with poor living conditions, this created a stereotype of Arabs as disease carriers and unhygienic individuals (MacMaster, 1997).

Landlords also preferred to rent to Arabs since they explained they could put three to four in one room and generate an extensive amount of profit; however, this caused

tensions with French working-class families who started to become displaced due to this. The fight for resources created heightened suspicion of Arabs, whose presence in urban areas such as Paris became visible, as most did not speak French and brought with them a foreign culture and clothing (MacMaster, 1997, p. 30). There was also a huge disparity between the male to female ratio of Algerians in France with 98% male and 2% female in 1932.  Due to this news articles exaggerated crimes committed by Arabs reinforcing colonial stereotypes of Arab men as sexually frustrated, homosexuals or sexual predators. These depictions of Algerians created the fear that they would infect France's racial purity by raping white women and children, and also spread disease in communities. Colonial and administrative lobbies feared the consequences of having a huge North African population living in France, and requested a block on their arrival. While their request failed, their campaigns were successful in putting immigration control on the agenda.  (MacMaster, 1997).

The French officials explained it was crucial to surveil Algerians arriving in France for it was easy for them to go astray and not understand French culture, which was argued to offer too much freedom, making Algerians lose their morality. France's colonial agenda was to civilize Algerians and fix their "backward" culture; therefore, in Algeria it was important to reinforce French authority by punishing Algerians for the simple act of disrespect. However, Algerians who arrived in France were able to escape this method of punishment and were able to receive the "same" treatment as everyone else, since France did not have an established policing system that specifically targeted Algerians or colonial migrants (MacMaster, 1997). So as a solution French officials decided to implement colonial policing inside France by requesting Algerians to carry

identification cards in order to surveil them and make the process of arrests easier. The notion of identification cards was a foreign concept to most Algerians who did not know their dates of births, and who were suspicious of police officers as such, Algerian immigrants retaliated by swapping ID cards, withholding information from officers and keeping themselves to themselves. Pierre Godin who was a former police officer and a member of the Paris city council proposed the creation of a special police force in France, called the *Rue Lecomte* which was dedicated to colonial migrants. The forces key responsibility was to administer North Africans. Their tasks included keeping tabs on North Africans living in France, maintain a record of North Africans entering France and ensuring that North Africans were provided the services they required. By having a separate police force dedicated to North African migrants, France believed that it would be easier to surveil them (MacMaster, 1997).

During 1949-50 Algerian migration had significantly shifted to family reunification of women, children, and the elderly who were all travelling to France in significant numbers, with about 100 people arriving per month. The main reason for family migration was due to drought in Algeria, which increased poverty and hunger. Many French officials were concerned with the increased migration, but agreed that it was necessary due to the social and political tensions related to incipient calls for Algerian independence as well as to high levels of unemployment and severe hunger problems in Algeria. France had to step in and act as a safety-valve (MacMaster, 1997). Louis Chevalier who was a demographic historian, argued that in order for any emigration to be considered 'worthwhile', it was crucial for minorities to totally assimilate. However, he concluded that this would not be possible among Algerians since

Islam has a dominant power over them that will not allow integration (MacMaster, 1997). Although family reunification was encouraged due to the belief that it may help integrate Algerians into France, a variety of factors influenced the difficulty Algerians faced in relation to their integration. For instance (1) the racist discourse about "Arabs" had started to resurface in the media, (2) Algerians were discriminated when they tried to rent houses leaving them isolated, (3) the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), an Algerian nationalists party also encouraged Algerians to stay separated from the French since their agenda was to gain independence by proving the two nations were completely different, and (4) many French natives grew hostile towards Algerians due to the FLN whose discourse towards the French started becoming violent (MacMaster,1997).

The relationship between Algerians and Europeans worsened during the interwar years, when European's started moving out of areas where Algerians started moving into, taking their children out of schools Algerians attended, and when public officials began to reject the construction of hostels or social housing programs intended for North Africans. The rejection of Algerians laid the foundation for the social problems they face in contemporary France, such as being segregated to the *banlieue* (MacMaster, 1997).

*Algeria for Algerians*

*The Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) and the *Mouvement National Algérien* (MNA) were both Algerian political groups that supported and reinforced the importance of Algeria's independence. The FLN won against the MNA over the control of the Algerian community in France. The FLN was more militant and thereby used violence to

reinforce the idea that Algeria was not part of France. On November 1954, the FLN

bombed *pieds noirs* living in Algeria, and this signified the beginning of the Algerian

War. The FLN argued that "Algerians formed a nation defined by Arab culture, Berber

roots, and Islamic tradition, that needed an independent state" (Shepard, 2006, p. 6). This

was a notion that French officials found difficult to accept since all Algerians were

officially considered French citizens since 1944, and Algeria was more broadly viewed as

an extension of France and not a colony. Prime Minister Pierre Mendes-France argued in

1954, that "Algeria is France, and not a foreign country", an idea that remained dominant

throughout the 1950s among French officials, but became exhausted during the upheavals

of the War (Shepard, 2006, pp. 6-7).

The fight for independence centralized the issue of identity as France had to

decide what it meant to be French, and determine who held citizenship rights. In 1962

The Évian Accords were signed, and Algeria was granted its independence, France

recognized that all those living in Algeria would now become Algerian. This worried

*pieds noirs* who wanted Algeria to remain part of France, and also continue to be

considered French in Algeria since this secured their dominant status. While it was not

possible for France to claim Algeria, it ensured that Algerian's could not claim to be

French, a right they had since 1944, and in 1963 all Muslims living in Algeria had their

French citizenship revoked. However, this did not affect the *pieds noirs* who lived in

Algeria, nor did it affect Algerian Jews, who were allowed to keep their French

citizenship, which granted them the rights to migrate due to fears of what might happen

to this minority population in a Muslim dominated country (Shepard, 2006). France's

decision to revoke citizenship from Muslim Algerians, but allow *pieds noirs* to maintain

their citizenship, demonstrated that citizenship in France had reverted to the old ways of being tied to one's ethnicity or descendant, since the *pieds noirs* were either native French or from another European country. This is also one of the earliest examples that demonstrates a rejection of Muslims as French.

During the colonial rule of Algeria (1830-1962), "Muslim" was considered a legal term in France and did not have any religious significance. However, this shifted post-1962, when the term Muslim implied a racially and ethnically different group of people; and it also became a justification to why Algerians could not assimilate into France or remain French citizens (Shepard, 2006, p. 12). Indeed, Charles de Gaulle argued that "you cannot possibly consider that one day, an Arab, a Muslim, could be the equal of a Frenchman?" (Cited in Shepard, 2006, p. 75). He also believed that Algeria should never be part of France, instead referring to it as a colonial project that had expired. While racist discourse was prevalent in France, the French did not take the step to legally codify Muslims into a specific race or ethnic categories. In fact, the French avoided doing this for all the migrants residing in France, and instead decided to remain colorblind. The reason for this is rooted in the French Revolution, which birthed the Republic and emphasized the idea of individual rights, whereby all men are seen to be equal, and also are viewed in terms of being an individual and not part of a group. While the notion of French citizenship did not extend to Arab peoples, the French paradoxically felt confident that they had the ability to convert any man from a different race into a French individual (Shepard, 2006).

The main motive for France to deny the existence of other races was also to blur France's growing immigrant population, and to ensure that by having them adopt a

French identity their loyalty would remain with France and not with their country of origin. However, for France, the loss of Algeria as a colony represented its biggest failure in convincing people in French territories to identify themselves as French.

*Manipulation of the Veil*

For French colonizers in Algeria, the veil had many negative connotations. For one, it symbolized an attachment to a native culture that rejected French superiority. The veil was for the French a barbaric and medieval practice, which isolated and dehumanized women. The French colonizers believed that the veil reinforced Muslim men's control over Muslim women's bodies and made a Muslim identity visible. In the 1930s the French colonial administration enforced French identity and dominance in Algeria and encouraged Muslim women to unveil or forcefully removed the veil. The belief was that if Muslim women adopted a French identity, these women would come to appreciate the liberties France grants, and the rest of the family would follow. This colonial move was also meant to symbolize to Algerian men French dominance, since it demonstrated the ability to destroy Arab culture (Fanon, 1965).

As the veil was often a central issue during the 1930s, it instantly resurfaced during the lead to the Algerian revolution of 1954. At that time, French officials wanted to sway international opinion and convince the United States that their presence in Algeria was crucial for Algerian women's liberation. The key argument was that the veil was a backward tradition and the French were needed to modernize the country. This allowed French officials to deflect questions related to colonial oppression, since their

24

mission was still incomplete. To ensure that the world understood France mission of saving Algerian women, they released a film called *The Falling Veil* in 1958. This was a propaganda film, were French women were emancipating their Algerian sisters by showing them shops, and how to use the post office (Shepard, 2006).

President Charles de Gaulle was also persistent on emancipating Algerian women, and emphasized educational programs for them. This significantly increased Muslims girl's enrollment in primary education, from only 1,984 in 1889 to 76,610 in 1954, Female enrollment continued to grow, so that by 1958, 118,000 Muslim girls were enrolled in school (Shepard, 2006, p. 190). French officials were keen to relate to local Algerian women, and formed "Feminine Solidarity" centers run by French military spouses who were dedicated to emancipating native women. Once again education was emphasized as a way to convert native Algerian women to embrace France's cause and in exchange show their loyalty. "Brigadier General Jacques Massu's wife, who led the movement in the capital city of Algiers, stated: 'Nourish the mind and the veil will wither by itself'" (Cited in Scott, 2007, p. 63). On May 16, 1958, Muslims gathered along with French natives in Algeria to rally their support for Algeria to remain French. However, what made this event epic was the public unveiling of Muslim women on stage by European women. According to Shepard (2006) "the Muslim women chanted, '*Kif, Kif les françaises'* ('let's be like the French women'), this was a clear representation of Algerian women looking to the French women for guidance from backward patriarchy to modernity" (p. 187). The FLN denounced the allegiance of Muslim women at the demonstration by arguing that these women had been manipulated to attend by the French, for many were servants afraid of losing their jobs, or prostitutes. Most of the

women present at the event were from the Women's Solidarity Movement; however, it does not change the fact that they could have also been manipulated or coerced to attend, given their vulnerable circumstances as many historians have explained. The purpose of this event was "to show the world that the French were not colonizers but liberators and that the natives supported *L'Algérie française*" (Scott, 2007, p. 63).

Fanon (1965) notes that during the Algerian revolution, the veil had become significantly manipulated. Until 1955 the revolutionaries had been exclusively men. However, the FLN's militant behavior became predictable by French officials, and in order to remain anonymous, the FLN made the difficult decision of incorporating women. The women who participated during the first years of the revolution did it unveiled. The reason for this was to fit in with the Europeans who lived in Algeria and not become a suspect; for they were required to enter bars carrying grenades in their handbags, and/or go to the bank to collect money intended to aid the revolution. The French intelligence later caught on, and the women in the FLN retailed by wearing a *Haik* (a veil that covers the entire body), which they could disguise packages with. This strategy was also discovered and some Europeans had sided with Algeria in the revolution, leading French officials to be suspicious of everyone and search anyone with a package regardless of their age, gender, or race.

Given these events, the veil became a political tool for the FLN to demonstrate French resistance, and women who had once unveiled decided to veil again to show their support for an independent Algeria. For them, this was a revolutionary statement with a political message which spelled the rejection of France in Algeria. For example, after the public unveiling in May of 1958, Fanon (1965) notes that the connotations of the veil had

significantly shifted in Algeria. At first, women had worn it due to the Islamic tradition of separating the sexes, but during the revolution, it came to signify an opposition to French occupation, who were set on unveiling Algerian women.

Mohanty (1984), has criticized Western feminists for constructing the image of third world women as a homogenous group who are subject to oppression, in comparison to Western women who are portrayed as liberated. The French also tried to reinforce the idea of Algerian women as oppressed and Western women as liberated. For instance, the establishment of "Feminine Solidarity" centers, public unveiling, and the creation of propaganda films where French women liberate Algerian women; all portrayed that Algerian women were in need of protection from their culture. However, the French women failed to acknowledge how colonialism double oppressed Algerian women, and failed to ask what Algerian Women wished to accomplish. Instead, they assumed Algerian women wished to unveil and wanted an education so that they could mirror French women. However, the participation of Algerian women in the Algerian revolution demonstrated that Algerian women were not victims who needed protection. In fact, they were strong, independent women who embraced the veil and wore it to portray their identity as proud Algerian women; they did not want to be liberated by French women; instead they wanted liberation from the French.

*Identity Crisis Post Algerian Independence*

After the Algerian independence, France wanted the *pieds noirs* to continue living in Algeria, for they believed this would create a healthy relationship between the two

countries. However, the *pieds noirs* did not feel comfortable to live in a country run by Algerians and decided to migrate. French officials believed that the best way to integrate *pieds noirs*, who became referred to as repatriates (returning to their native land), back to French society was for 400,000 to arrive over four years. This would provide the French state time to slowly integrate this large demographic. However, after Algerian independence 400,000 *pieds noirs* migrated to France within four weeks, an event referred to as the Exodus. This increased tensions in France where native-born French viewed the *pieds noirs* with suspicion, and not any better than the Arabs due to their socialization and violent, rebellious behavior in Algeria. France also had the added stress of assimilating the *pieds noirs* economically and politically so that they could feel at home (Shepard, 2006).

Algerians living in Algeria were no longer French citizens and had now officially become Algerian, meaning that restrictions were placed on their entrance to France. *Harkis (*Algerian natives who fought on the side of the French during the War), did not feel safe in Algeria and also wanted to migrate to France. However, de Gaulle wanted to block their entry into France which violated the Evian Accords that the French and Algerian state had signed, which granted some rights for Algerians to travel to France (Scott, 2007). Algerians who wanted to travel to France had to be granted permission by high commissioners, who placed them on a list that prioritized *pieds noirs* migration (Shepard, 2006). The *Harkis* were also systemically discriminated against and any Muslims seen as "undesirable", were denied travel. This list of people included single women, whom many feared would turn to prostitution, as well as the elderly and the disable, whom it was believed would not benefit the economy. France's fear of Algerian

women turning to prostitution is a very Orientalist view. Said (1979) explains that many writers depicted Oriental women as promiscuous, and portrayed the idea that "the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe" (p. 190), and hence France "feared" such experiences coming to Europe.

De Gaulle disregarded the *Harkis* as repatriates; instead, they were refugees fleeing for safety. Many of the *Harkis* soldiers who were allowed to enter France had to plea to bring their families with them and prove that they could easily assimilate and make model citizens, for example by explaining that their families already spoke French and their wife could work as a maid (Shepard, 2006).

Muslims who lived in France were no longer viewed as French citizens as they had now acquired the title of Algerian citizens. However, companies still needed the cheap labor they provided so many were able to stay in France. The change in citizenship had many negative consequences for French Muslims who were now vulnerable to deportation and stripped of the limited rights they had previously enjoyed. For example, elderly workers who were considered unproductive were targeted and deported (Shepard, 2006). France was also not keen on integrating Algerians anymore, and the focus shifted to assimilating the *pieds noirs*. The next section of the thesis will focus on the post-independence assimilation of Algerians and Muslim living in France.

In this section I will examine the research question, why are Muslims considered unassimilable in France?  I will discuss how after Algerian independence, France felt rejected by the Algerians and thus rejected Algerian presence in France. Next, I will cover the racist discourse that dominated French political life during the 1980s, and discuss how it led to a target of Muslims living in the county. Finally, I will explore the first attempt to ban the hijab in public schools, and examine the reason it was not successful.

*Muslims "Temporary" Status in France*

Muslims who were living in France pre- and post-Algerian independence, including the *Harkis* were seen as a temporary case. It was believed that Muslims would return home once the French economy no longer needed them or once the political situation in Algeria improved. Many French natives felt displeased and insulted with the Muslims presence in France, especially since France was defeated in the Algerian War, by Algerians who they considered inferior. Therefore, Algerians who moved to France were viewed as trying to colonize "the land of the civilized 'master'" (MacMaster, 1997, p. 2). *Pieds noirs* felt robbed of Algeria, and frustrated with seeing Algerians who they insisted were privileged to live in France. As a result, the *pieds noirs* and police officers often targeted Muslims, their behavior was mobilized by the far-right, who later formed the right-wing populist party, the National Front. Which fueled the marginalization towards Muslims living in France (Scott, 2007).

The 1950s family reunification continued to grow till the 1970s and was highly encouraged. But Muslim migration was still considered temporary, and the services provided to Muslim children significantly differed from European children; for instance, public schools offered Muslim children Arabic and religious classes, so that when they returned home, they could easily assimilate. However, this emphasis on difference became the foundation for discrimination in France (Scott, 2007). Algeria and France had maintained a business relationship after independence, for Algeria relied on France for imports and loans. During the early 1970s, Algeria was becoming financially independent and started cutting business ties with France, Algerians were encouraged not to migrate to France in order to benefit Algeria's economy. France again felt rejected by the Algerian government especially in 1971 when Algeria nationalized its oil and gas production. France retaliated by neglecting Algerians living in France by halting rehousing programs intended for them, and when Algeria finally had the opportunity to cut labor migration in 1973, this resulted in racist violence and killings towards Algerian's living in France (Macmaster, 1997). The French borders eventually closed in 1974 (although family reunification continued) for Algerian migrants, and many Muslims residing in France feared they would not be able to return to France if they left, which led to many making their residence permanent. French officials questioned the consequences of having Muslims live in France permanently. In particular, the state that this would lead to Islam colonizing and overtaking France.

France's inability to view Algerians as citizens is a retaliation to Algeria's independence, a notion the French found hard to accept since they believed they were superior and Algeria was an extension of France. The French tried to make the Algerian's

like them by instilling French values, and when Algeria was not "grateful", France felt rejected. On the other hand, the Algerians wanted to distance themselves from the French for they felt colonization had stripped them of their autonomy and identity. However, the Algerians who continued to live in France experienced one of the earliest identity crisis, especially since a large majority were *Harkis* who supported France, and due to their religion of Islam were considered the enemy in France who were not entirely foreign nor citizens (Scott, 2007).

The ascendancy of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, 1979, caused the French state to place its Muslim population under the microscope. It did not matter that Iranians were Shi'ites, who follow a different branch of Islam; in comparison to the majority of Muslims living in France who derive from North Africa and are Sunnis. Indeed, the French media failed to acknowledge this distinction and fueled ignorance and fear by categorizing all Muslims as a homogenous group with the same ideologies. Analyzing newspaper coverage from 1975 to 2005, journalist Thomas Deltombe, notes that French media correlated events that happened in Iran with crimes that individual Muslims committed, such as cases of forced marriage, enforcing the idea that Muslims have an alien culture. This led to a resurgence of colonial representations of Arabs as violent and out of control. Crimes committed by youths in the suburbs were also linked to their immigrant identity. In this way, "immigrants were equated with North Africans (especially Algerians), who were equated with Arabs, who were equated with Muslims, whatever the religious belief of a particular individual" (Scott, 2007, pp. 70-71).

Muslim women, on the other hand, were viewed as victims who could not escape the patriarchal nature of their religion. Those who wore the veil were either seen as

oppressed by male members of their families or were viewed as a threat to Western

modernity since the French saw the veil as signifying an alien culture, religion, and

political belief.  Bilge (2010) explains that the paradoxical portrayal of veiled Muslim

women as either a victim or a threat is deeply rooted in colonial subjugation; where

colonizers viewed veiled women as victims of a backward cultural practice or as

signifying colonial resistance. Fanon (1965) has discussed the manipulation of the veil

during the Algerian War, an era where Muslim women who had once unveiled started to

veil in order to show their allegiance to an Independent Algeria, and a rejection of French

rule or identity. Therefore, in France, Muslim women who veil are viewed with great

suspicion. Indeed, many French officials have also argued that the veil is a symbolic

representation of Islamic domination in France (Scott, 2007).


*"Failed" Integration*


The Iranian revolution dominated the media and centralized concerns of Islam's

place in France, since events that occurred in Iran were correlated with the actions of

Muslims living in France. This also made immigration a central topic of political debate

in the 1980s, and the treatment of ethnic minorities became politically influenced by the

racist views of Jean-Marie Le Pen, a far-right politician. In the past, the integration

process of immigrants focused on insertion*,* which emphasized socio-economic

independence for migrants, such as finding homes, jobs and registering at their local

home office (Favell, 2001). Any issues immigrants faced were often linked to economic

difficulties, and their contribution was valued since it stabilized the French economy.

However, during the 1970s, France experienced a recession which led to welfare cuts and many fighting for limited resources, this resulted in a negative view towards immigrants (mainly Algerians), who were perceived to have easy access to resources that native French people needed. In the 1980s Le Pen, capitalized on social tensions by centralizing immigrants as the underlying cause of the issues France faced. The concern for far-right politicians more broadly centered on Islam's place in the Republic and its threat to Western values.

The racist discourse of the 1980s put Muslims in the spotlight as if they had just arrived to France, when in reality immigrants had been present in France, dating back to the early 20th century guest workers described earlier in this thesis. Muslims were not seen as full French citizens, and whereas integration previously prioritized economic conditions, it now shifted to an assessment on one's "Frenchness" (Favell, 2001). Le Pen argued that Muslims had easy access to French citizenship. This was a problematic statement since he lumped all Muslims into one category, including undocumented immigrants and those who had the right to citizenship through birth. Le Pen wanted stricter measures to be put on citizenship before it was granted, such as "loyalty to French territory, culture, and history, and impose a strong cultural assimilation as a condition for political incorporation" (Favell, 2001, p. 54). Algerians felt extreme pressure since their independence represented a rejection of French universalism, so they had to prove that they were more French than the natives as a way to exemplify their assimilation to the Republic (Favell, 2001).

Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux who was an academic adviser to the *Haut Conseil à l'intégration* formalized the requirements that were needed to transform the immigrant

into a citizen. This included a refusal to recognize minorities, in terms of their race, religion, culture and so on. This policy has also led to a rejection of collecting data based on one's ethnicity, and the only mention of difference in a census is whether one had a grandparent who was of non-French origin, but does not state that origin (Favell, 2001). The argument in favor of colorblindness is that the collection of ethnic data serves to segregate people, and by avoiding it, can prevent prejudice and discrimination (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012). However, postcolonial scholars have noted that the failure to acknowledge ethnic differences serves to reinforce the domination of ethnic French culture and identity. "The Le Chapelier Law of 1791 restricted freedom of association, institutionalizing the Republican skeptics of partial attachments and identities intervening between individuals and the state" (Chapman & Frader, 2004, p. 192). Hence France's emphasis on a dominant French identity makes it easier to control citizens since they are being dealt with as individuals instead of ethnic and religious groups.

The *Haut Conseil* Report, which was produced by the French state in the 1980s, called for an approach to cultural diversity that encouraged assimilation through education, and it also highlighted the importance of defining Islam's place in France. The ideas of 1905 legislation resurfaced, and education was seen as a socialization mechanism, to create French citizens who become aware of their civic duties. The report also highlighted the importance of *laïcité* (French secularism, separation of church and state), as a way to ensure moral order and equality for individuals. Islam was also viewed as a religion that must be kept away from influencing the Republic, and due to *laïcité* must not be funded by the Republic. The report accepts that religion may provide comfort

for immigrants. However, religion should not be placed above the Republic since it can threaten secular principles (Favell, 2011).

*The Headscarf Affair of the 1980s*

The 1980s was a decade when the far-right gained popularity, and thus concerns about immigration heightened, and assimilation was encouraged to ensure that French identity remained dominant in a multiethnic and multicultural society. It should be no surprise that the hijab came under attack in this era, particularly as it is a visual symbol of Islam. On September 1989, three Muslim girls were "expelled from their high school, Gabriel Havez in Creil, for refusing to remove their hijabs" (Winter, 2008, p. 129). The incident was referred to as *affaires des foulards* (headscarf affair) and generated extensive media attention. The school was located in an area with a high "immigrant" population, and the school was considered to be in a priority educational zone (ZEP), meaning that the majority of students were economically disadvantaged, or at high risk of dropping out, and that the school experienced high staff turnover. "The Principal Ernest Chenière, had once referred to it as '*une poubelle sociale* ('a social garbage pail')" (Scott, 2007, p. 22).

Winter (2008) explains that the expulsion occurred due to systematic absences from students based on their religion; however, it was not Muslim students but rather ten Jewish students who did not attend school on Saturdays due to their Sabbath. On June 1989, Gabriel Havez high school gathered the families and made a ruling that it was compulsory to attend public school on all the days it was in session. Through this

controversy, the issue of the headscarf was raised, and hence the three Muslim students were later told that headscarves were no longer permitted in school. However, they continued to wear it, arguing that it was part of their religion. Chenière justified expelling the Muslims girls as a way ensure and protect secularism. He explained that the public school is the foundation of *laïcité*, which cultivated the values of the Republic; it is a place where students learn and appreciate what it means to be French. Therefore, public schools must prevent negative influences, such as "the insidious jihad" (Scott, 2007, p. 22). Major news outlets in France reported the incident, and this led to many schools following in the same footsteps by attempting to ban students who wore the hijab.

Union of Islam organization (UOIF) leaders got involved in finding a solution to resolve the issue, and communicated with the girls and the wider community, which led to a demonstration on October 22, where hundreds of Muslims gathered in Paris to repeal the decision. The incident became a media frenzy that captured the nation's attention (Winter, 2008). The gathering of Muslims to protest the ban on the hijab in schools confirmed that Muslims wanted their religious identity to co-exist with their French identity. This was a notion that the French could not accept due to the fact that Islam does not have historical roots in the West.  Indeed, the French view Islam as an Oriental religion that represents everything the Republic opposes, such as Muslim women veiling in public spaces and the separation of gender; hence the two cannot co-exist since they are in binary opposition to each other.

The official commentators of the hijab affair often discussed the importance of women's rights. However, these commentators were all men, and women's voices were silenced in the debates; which was surprising since France had argued since the colonial

era that women were the tool for integration in Muslim communities, and influencing them would also influence their households (Fanon,1965). The lack of women's voice made visible the patriarchal dynamics involved in French media coverage of the affair, particularly as men were given the power to discuss and influence the outcome of an issue that affected women. However, out of respect for religious and cultural differences, the commentators did include men of Muslim background such as the rector of the Paris mosque, who supported wearing the hijab in schools, due to its religious ties (Winter, 2008).  The fact that Muslim women were not given a platform to speak, but rather native men or French men were given that platform, reinforced the double oppression Muslim women face. Also by involving the leader of a Mosque who argued in favor of veiling, the media actually reinforced the Western idea that Muslim men make women veil. In other words, the media maintained patriarchy by failing to bring women into the discussion (and allowing them to speak for themselves), and then shifted the blame for patriarchy onto Islam by having Muslim men say that Islamic values require veiling.

The final decision regarding the hijab's place in public French schools was left to the Socialist Council and Minister of Education, Lionel Jospin who decided to refer it to the Conseil d'Etat (highest administrative court in France). On November 1989, the Conseil ruled that wearing visible religious symbols was compatible with *laïcité*, as long as the symbols were not ostentatious and did not influence the behavior of students who wore it or those around them, such as disrupting class or pressuring other students to convert their liberties. The Conseil ruled that teachers still had the right to evaluate a case by case scenario and exclude students who they believed to be disruptive in relation to their religion. Jospin later explained that this decision prohibited expelling girls who wear

head scarves to school, since this would deprive them of their education. (Scott, 2007; Winter, 2008).

The 1989 headscarf affair generated a lot of indignation from right-wing politicians who wanted to ban the hijab in public schools. Many argued that the hijab corrupted women's freedom and that it was a representation of Islamic power in the socially deprived areas of France. The veil also symbolized the reason why Muslims could never assimilate into France; and right-wing politicians further argued that in order to be accepted as full citizens Muslims would have to accept that the hijab was a symbol that conflicted with French identity (Favell, 2001). Although the hijab case of 1989 settled the issue over the short-term, the issue was put on the agenda of many right-wing politicians and thereby resurfaced in subsequent decades. In 1993, Jospin was replaced by Francois Bayrou (centrist politician) as the Minister of Education. In 1994, Bayrou issued a ban on all ostentatious religious symbols in schools. This required local education officials to expel students who failed to comply with the rules (Winter, 2008). However, many found the task problematic since it was not an established law, and for the following five years the Conseil supported all students who wanted to wear a headscarf. Reinforcing the 1989 ruling that hijab was not incompatible with secularism (laïcité), Bayrou reasoned that a ban was necessary because the veil separated young people from each other; he argued the veil signified a difference of identity which would break up the national community (Winter, 2008). While Bayrou's position is problematic from a postcolonial standpoint, his point regarding the threat to the national community is valid in the sense that efforts to prevent the wearing of religious symbols served to generate considerable national discord. Indeed, the vitriolic media coverage on this issue hindered

understanding of the hijab's true meaning, causing French people to view one another with distrust. In my view, exposure to religious symbols are very important in diverse societies, with a high immigrant community, such as France, since these symbols allow students to become culturally aware and gain an understanding of religious difference. If religious symbols are suppressed, then this may heighten religious and ethnic insensitivity, fueling societal conflict. The next section of the thesis will focus on how France more recently has instituted legislation that legally infringes on the rights of Muslim women.

This section of the thesis will explore the research question; how have efforts to construct and defend French identity altered the position of/and, consequently, undermined the rights of Muslim women? I will analyze the events that led to the hijab ban in public schools in 2004, and clarify how secularism was used to ground this legislation. Next, I will explore why France felt the hijab could not be compatible with the Republic due to its foreign connotations. Finally, I will examine the negative stereotypes towards Muslim youths, and explore how this has influenced the construction of their French identity.

*Banning Religious Symbols in Public Schools*

During the 1990s, as with the 1980s, issues of French identity and Islam's place in the Republic continued to dominate public discourse; the cuts in public welfare negatively affected immigrant-dominated communities such as the *banlieues*. The French state and media had often expressed the difficulties of assimilating its immigrant population, when in reality assimilation was never encouraged, since Muslim's residency was seen as temporary. The *banlieues* in France often refers to the suburbs outside major metropolitan areas. The *banlieues* are dominated by government-sponsored housing, which was originally built for poor French workers, and was intended to be a transitional stage until one could afford to purchase a home. Many native French have since moved to urban areas, which has resulted in the *banlieues* to be concentrated with a high immigrant

population. Cesari (2005), explains the *banlieues* have become a poverty trap for immigrants, since they lack the financial means to leave, and those who do have the opportunity to move experience a significant amount of discrimination based on their race, ethnicity or culture making it difficult to relocate. Many young Maghrebian immigrants have felt France has turned its back on them and not given them opportunities to succeed. Indeed, many of the youth have continued to encounter the stereotypes of Orientalism, such as notions that Arabs are lazy or thieves.

In the past immigrants had a close connection with their communities based on regional or ethnic ties and that these connections provided relief from the discrimination they faced. However, second-generation immigrants have not enjoyed such privilege since they were born in France and have themselves experienced an identity crisis related to their sense of rejection by their society. This feeling of stigmatization has led many to form allegiances based on their ethnic heritage or religious backgrounds, which has provided them with a sense of belonging and created the notion of "them" versus "us" (Cesari, 2005). In 1995, Khaled Kelkal a second-generation migrant of Algerian origin was believed to have partaken in Paris metro bombings and was shot by the police. In an interview recorded three years prior to the incident, Kelkal discussed his childhood in the *banlieues* of Lyons, in which he explained that the children of these areas did not have opportunities and needed jobs, and discussed how the police were negatively targeting them instead of dealing with the deeper issues of the community such as poverty. Kelkal was arrested for theft, and in a jail cell, he met a guy who introduced him to Islam. For the first time, he felt a sense of belonging, a brotherhood in the Muslim *ummah* (community). After he was released from jail, he experienced difficulty finding

42

employment due to his criminal record, and eventually turned to radical Islam (Hargreaves, 2007).

The 1995 bombings in Paris increased fear towards Muslims, and French politicians viewed the *banlieues* as grounds for harvesting radical Islam and encouraging communalism. Bowen (2007), explains that communalism is when one closes themselves off from the wider nation into groups based on their ethnic or religious identity, which separates citizens, and encourages one to place their communal identity above the national identity. The 1789 revolution in France passed legislation that permitted only the state to shape French identity. It denounced alternative organizations that attempted to form their own identity, such as guilds or religious groups, since these were seen as infringing on the freedom the state had fought for during the revolution. The presence of Islam in the *banlieues* has thereby been criticized as a Muslim rejection of French values.

The issue of the hijab did not receive additional media attention from 1995 to 2000, apart from minor stories related to the wearing of veils in school gym classes. However, the September 11th, 2001 (9/11) attacks which were committed by Muslim terrorists on the World Trade Center in the United States negatively influenced media portrayals of Muslims in France, fueling fear and a new wave of Islamophobia. 9/11 also intensified the view that the *banlieues* were harvesting fundamentalism in France. Muslims were once again put in the spotlight, and the hijab became a symbol of radical Islam that posed a danger to the Republic (Bowen, 2004).

As previously discussed, associating the hijab as a symbol of radicalism also has colonial ties to the Algerian war of independence, at which time Muslim women manipulated the veil in order to hide explosive devices to attack the French, or wore it as

a symbol to reject French Identity. In 2002 the hijab was put back on the political radar as "French journalists, intellectuals, and officials increasingly linked the problem of scarves in schools with three other problems of society: communalism, Islamism, and sexism" (Bowen, 2007, p. 155). In 2003 Nicolas Sarkozy a center-right politician insisted that women remove their headscarves for pictures in order to get accurate facial recognition, this ruling was justified by the concern of terrorism (Scott, 2007). Also in 2003, Jack Lang the Socialist Deputy presented a bill to the National Assembly to ban all religious symbols in public schools; he did not single out the hijab and used *laïcité* as a supporting argument, allowing him to remain neutral and not be accused of targeting Muslims. This divided the views of the Socialist Party, those who approved of a ban argued that it would prevent Islam domination, whereas those who disagreed with the ban argued that it would reopen colonial wounds for Arabs, who have felt the Republic has continuously denied their self-determination (Scott, 2007). In July 2003, French President Jacques Chirac wanted to investigate whether religious symbols (the hijab in particular), were compatible with secularism, and to investigate upon what grounds could a law that banned religious symbols be passed. Chirac appointed Bernard Stasi who created the Stasi commission which investigated the matter.

The news to ban religious symbols, and in particular the hijab, in public schools reached the mainstream media, and generated a lot of press attention and scholarly discussions. The main concern was the connotation of the hijab in Islam, and its effect on Women's status. Views towards the hijab were identical to that of the colonial regime, where some commentators argued that it was a major setback for women's emancipation. The far-left party Lutte Ouvrière expressed that the veil was an oppression of women,

44

and many viewed it as symbolizing patriarchy. On the other hand, those who opposed the law argued that banning the hijab would not emancipate girls but rather isolate them, since many girls may feel rejected by mainstream France and forced to attend private schools, or enter early marriage due to the limited options they have (Scott, 2007).

Bowen (2004) explains that many native French view veiled Muslim women as individuals who have refused to assimilate. However, while this assumption has been negatively reinforced by the media, the scholarly evidence does not support this claim. Keaton, an anthropologist, conducted an ethnographic study in the *banlieues* of France; she focused on how Muslim girls construct their identity. Her study was longitudinal dating from 1995 to 2004. The research is interesting since it was conducted prior to the headscarf ban. Keaton engages with different girls who live in the *banlieues* and concludes that it is not Muslim girls who have rejected France, but rather France who has rejected them via a process of social exclusion. Muslims in France are taught to embrace a "national identity" at school; however, they are segregated in neighborhoods that dismiss such teachings (Keaton, 2006), and it is Muslim youths in France that are most likely to experience an identity crisis. Aïcha from Keaton's research expresses that "when I am in Morocco, people call me French, and when I live in France, they call me a dirty Arab. So I prefer to identify myself as 'Aïcha a'" (2006, p. 35). Aïcha's statement shows that while in her home country she is considered French, but France has rejected her identity as French, by using colonial stereotypes to portray her in pejorative ways.

While the hijab ban in public schools was a strategy to forcefully assimilate Muslims; Keaton explains that the motive behind the hijab was not that Muslims girls were unassimilated to France or that the hijab's visibility was dominating schools. In fact,

Muslim girls wearing the hijab had significantly declined through the years, and in 2003 it was documented that roughly 1,200 wore the veil to school in France, in comparison with a country that hosts roughly around 4-5 million Muslims. A survey conducted by *Le Monde* (French Newspaper) reported that:

> 91 percent of teachers polled had never been confronted by a veiled student in the school in which they taught, while 65 percent indicated never having seen a veiled girl in their classes throughout their career. And yet 76 percent of teachers polled favored the law banning these ostensible religious symbols. (Cited in Keaton, 2005, p. 417)

The Stasi Commission which was created by the French state, released its report in December, and highlighted concerns that many Muslim girls were being "pressured to wear the hijab from parents, relatives or the environment, and some Muslim girls had directly or indirectly admitted to being pressured" (Ulusoy,2007, p. 427). The Stasi Commission had supported the ban on the basis of it violating public order and not civil rights. They argued that it was the responsibility of "public authorizes to protect public order by eliminating any kind of threat or external unlawful imposition towards individuals" (Ulusoy, 2007, p. 428). For them, this meant banning the hijab in all public schools. European laws regarding human rights only accept a ban on religious expression if it is for the purpose of protecting public order (Killan, 2007). Therefore, it was key for the Stasi commission to address the hijab as a violation of Muslim girl's autonomy in order to make the ban legal. As the Stasi Commission limited the ban to public schools, the ban did not include university students who were assumed to be old enough to make their own decision. The ban was also not extended to private schools, which makes the

ban ineffective in dealing with parental pressure, since parents can enroll their child in a private school as an alternative (Ulusoy, 2007).

The Stasi Commission failed to acknowledge the voice of Muslim women who veiled, during the hijab debates, since they were seen as being blind to their own oppression (Bilge, 2010). However, native French feminists were invited to give their input during the debates. The majority of the French feminists argued that the hijab was a symbol of oppression, and a representation of the gender inequality in Islam. Bilge (2010), explains that in order for the native French feminists voice to be viewed as a reliable source, a cultural insider is key, however, the cultural insider views must be reflective of dominant discourse in order to gain the support required. The cultural insiders that French feminists used were French women of Muslim background who did not veil. The French were interested in hearing the views of Muslim women who did not veil and who opposed the hijab in public schools, since it was believed that these women had become aware of the oppression the veil represented. Muslim women who veiled, and supported the hijab in public school were not given an opportunity to speak since their views conflicted with the dominant discourse.  All the Muslim women who were invited to give a testimony condemned veiling to the Stasi Commission, and their reasoning were reflective of Orientalist discourse, where they portrayed the veiled women as oppressed and Western women as liberated (Mohanty,1984). Djavann, who was used as a "cultural insider", spoke of her horrific experience in Iran. She explained that she was forced to veil for ten years, and every day was confronted with the fact that not veiling meant death. She concluded her statement that her experience made her an expert on the topic.

Amara, another "cultural insider", was the leader of a feminist movement *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* (neither whores nor submissive)*, and also gave her testimony to the Stasi Commission. Amara as with other French feminists expressed the veil as being oppressive. She released a book at the beginning of 2004, a time which correlated with the heightened public hijab debates, where she focused on the high rate of violence in the *banlieues.* Amara's central argument was that sexism was responsible for the violence. As such, she failed to acknowledge that the violence could have been linked to the high level of discrimination experienced by immigrants such as lack of job opportunities. Bowen explains that framing her argument in terms of discrimination would require costly policies to resolve it, whereas linking the issue with "Arab sexism called for denunciation and a law affecting Muslim women" (2007, p. 216).

Bilge argues that it was common among feminists to link their opposition of the veil with the fundamentalist regimes in Afghanistan and Iran. For instance, Élisabeth Badinter a famous historian, philosopher and feminist expressed that by accepting the hijab in public schools, France had failed to confront gender equality for the purpose of religious tolerance. Banditer viewed the hijab as symbolizing women's submission, further arguing that one could not reject the events in Afghanistan while accepting the presence of the veil in Europe, regardless of the fact that women wish to wear it (2010, p. 17).

Mohanty (1984) has explained that Western feminists have often misrepresented the needs of third world women due to a failure to recognize their own racial and ethnic privilege or to critically examine how Western notions about gender influence their perceptions about third world women. The Stasi Commission failed to create a platform for Muslim women to give different perspectives on veiling. Instead, the Commission

turned to native French Feminists and "cultural insiders" who portrayed Muslim women as a monolithic group with the same needs, when in reality the experiences of Muslim women in France drastically differ from the experiences of those in Iran and Afghanistan who are subjected to regimes that force them to veil.

The problem with the banning the hijab is that young Muslim girls do not have the ability to make a choice of their own, their actions are continuously being dictated to them by a patriarchal state which refuses to allow them autonomy. On the one hand, the state is arguing that it is protecting them from parental oppression, and while this may be true for some; the decision to ban the hijab is also a violation of human rights for others, since it is forcing girls to remove their hijab if they wish to receive a "free" public education; a right that has been limited to them based on their dress code. In this sense, the French state actively oppresses Muslim girls who wish to veil, which is an irony since France has grounded their argument is alleviating gender oppression.

France's idea of "saving" Muslims girls is a continuation of colonial ideology. Spivak became famous for her sentence "white men are saving brown women from brown men" (1988, p. 296). As she explains, this was the argument the British used to justify the colonial invasion of India. This argument is also reflective of the French state's reasoning for banning the hijab since it proposes that it is saving Muslim women from Muslim men. As I have previously demonstrated, this is not the first time France has used this argument, and can be traced back to the colonial regime where France used the argument of "saving Muslim women" to legitimize their colonial rule in Algeria. The hijab ban in contemporary France was not was not initiated due to secularism, but rather has a hidden meaning, that indicates France's fear of losing its identity. The hijab ban in a

sense was a way to send a message to Muslim immigrants and in particularly to Muslim men who were viewed as enforcing fundamentalism, that a universal and secular French identity is a prerequisite for citizenship.

*Secularism*

The law to ban conspicuous religious symbols was passed on 15th March 2004. This legislation banned large crosses, Jewish kippah, Sikh turbans and Muslim headscarves from French public schools. While this was a controversial law, it was successfully able to pass in France due to the country's history. The Ferry Laws of the 1880s made primary education compulsory for all children regardless of gender; it also banished religion being taught in schools and religious figures such as nuns and priests from becoming school teachers. The purpose of this was to create a secular education and prevent children from being controlled and influenced by the Catholic Church, which was viewed as the enemy of France at the time (Scott, 2007). However, the law did not expel children who identified as Catholic, wore crosses, or other religious symbols to class.

A secular education was one of France's earliest attempts to make religion part of the private sphere. On 9th December 1905, France passed the law of *laïcité*, which officially separated the influence of religion from all public spheres. One of the main reasons schools became the target for *laïcité*, was that schools have always been viewed as an agent of assimilation whereby one would come to value and learn a French identity by developing, "a shared language, culture, and ideological formation—and so a nation one and indivisible was to be the *outcome* of the educational process" (Scott, 2007, p.

50

99). Religious symbols such as the hijab were seen as preventing students from assimilating into the school system and also restricting girl's behavior; for instance, many girls who wore the hijab would not participate in physical education, due to the hijab having to be removed (Winter, 2008). Such incidents reinforced the idea that Muslims were an unassimilable immigrant group; the headscarf represented resistance to the Republic and a violation on *laïcité*. Secular schools were created to transform children into French citizens; yet the ban on religious symbols expects students to have adopted a French identity before entering school, which defeats the purpose of *laïcité* as a socializing mechanism (Scott, 2007). While France claims that its public school system is uniformly secular, it is clear that the school calendar is significantly influenced by Catholicism, the dominant religion that controlled the state before the French Revolution. For instance, the school holidays are in sync with Christian occasions such as Christmas, and Wednesdays are half-day which gives Catholic children the opportunity to attend catechism classes. The state also funds private church schools in the promise that they implement the national syllabus (Hargreaves, 2007, p. 106). The Stasi Commission wanted to remain religiously neutral, and thereby recommended the recognition of the Jewish holiday Yom Kippur, and the Islamic Eid's to be incorporated into the national holiday. They also encouraged that alternative options be provided in school's cafeteria for students who do not eat pork for religious reasons. Accommodating such changes, they argued would show respect for France's religious diversity, and allow Muslims to be part of the wider society (Winter, 2007). The recommendations put forward by the Stasi Commission contradicted the new interpretation of *laïcité*, since it would bind the state and religion. However, it is clear that France is not as secular as it claims and that

Catholicism is intertwined in the school system, so it would also be fair and only right to accommodate other religions.

In addition, the French state does not think that secular education is the only route to produce good French citizens, since it funds religious schools in exchange for these to abide by the national curriculum. The majority of these schools are Catholic private schools, although some are Jewish, and 20% of all French high school students are enrolled in religious schools. It is clear that France does not question the "Frenchness" of the majority enrolled in religious schools since Christianity is seen as a religion compatible with the Republic (Asad, 2006). Islam has not been accorded such a privilege as the French state has made it extremely difficult to allocate funds for private Muslim schools, limiting the choice of Muslim girls who are often forced to attend public schools that do not accept the display of their religious identity.

President Chirac rejected the Commission's recommendations for Jewish and Muslim students arguing that this may encourage communalism. For him, Christian holidays did not violate secularism (Scott, 2007). This proves that secularism in France favors a Christian heritage, and thus associates "Frenchness" with Christianity whilst rejecting other religions, complicating the idea of an authentic secular identity. Chirac reinforced the notion that the ban on conspicuous religious symbols was based on ensuring national unity and by abiding the rules of secularism this would be achieved (Killian, 2007). Chirac's view on the hijab ban as a mechanism for national unity demonstrates that he feared French identity was becoming blurred, especially since many Muslims were French citizens and were portrayed in the media as a foreign threat. The hijab represented that immigrants were not in favor of abandoning their cultural heritage

for French culture (Killian, 2007), and therefore the ban served to reinforce that Islam could not be compatible with French identity.

*No Room for Hybrid Identity*

Scott investigated the language of Bernard Stasi and his colleagues she argues that they expressed:

> The headscarf ban was necessary to prevent a takeover of the school by 'the street'. The battle was cast as a veritable 'crisis', a war to the death between polar opposites: in abstract terms, between the Republic and religion, modernity and tradition, reason and superstition; in concrete terms between contemporary France and Islam. (2007, p. 98)

Viewing the hijab in these terms is very Orientalist. Said (1979) explains that the Occident viewed the Orient in terms of binary oppositions; hence the Orient represented everything the Occident did not, with the Occident in a superior position. In this sense, Islam is viewed as the Orient in France and Muslims are seen as representing everything the Republic does not, giving France the leverage it needed to reconstruct the identity of Muslim citizens in France according to French worldview.

Scott's reference to Stasi's comments of the street taking over the school is related to the fear communalism presence in the school. Bowen analyzed the book *The Lost Territories of the Republic,* which was produced by a school teacher. The book was released in 2002, and addresses concern of Muslim students whose religion and culture alters the way they behave at schools, such as breaking their fast during Ramadan in school, being disruptive during history lessons, female students refusing to work with

male classmates and Arab students discriminating against Jewish students. The author

argues that all these behavioral traits are inherited by Arab-Muslim culture (2007, p.

163). By linking student's behavior to communalism, the book insinuates that these

students have rejected assimilation into France, and are placing their communal identity

above the nation, thus legitimizing their disruptive behavior in class. It fails to

acknowledge that students who are disruptive may not be due to communalism but rather

due to the failed school system in their communities, which has failed them by not

addressing problems such as high staff turnover, or by failing to acknowledge the

systemic discrimination that perpetuates poverty among French Muslims. The book was

also released a month after it had been reported anti-Semitism increased in France.

Despite the fact that neo-Nazis were the main sources of these attacks, the book led many

French people to blame Muslims for the violence, a pattern France has developed to

divert attention from the deeper issues of the situation (Bowen, 2007). The book is also

believed to have justified Chirac's decision to encourage a ban on headscarves in public

schools. Since it provided an alternative reason that would not violate freedom of religion

expression, which required proof of disruptive behavior to legitimate a ban. Instead, it

provided a link between the hijab and communalism in school, where wearing the veil

symbolized separation of the sexes, and a refusal to intermix with the opposite sex; which

is a violation of Republican values which encourages equality between the sexes and

citizens mixing with each other in order to promote assimilation. Many politicians and

public officials denied the existence of communalism in their schools; however, the book

raised public concern, and influenced the creation of the Stasi Commission.

*Are Muslim Youths the Problem?*

France has often accused Muslim youth of failing to assimilate and viewed the hijab as a threat; however, it is clear that the hijab did not pose a threat to secular education as the majority of teachers who favored the ban had never seen a veiled student in their class (Keaton, 2005). It can be argued that these teachers may have been influenced by negative stereotypes of the hijab in the media, where the hijab routinely has been portrayed as a source of oppression. French media also has portrayed Muslim boys "as their sister's oppressors" (Cesari, 2005, para. 15).

This view of Muslims is very typical of Orientalism where women were often portrayed as victims of male patriarchy, and men portrayed as aggressive oppressors (Spivak, 1988).

Muslim boys in France are also seen as unassimilated, Silberman, Alba and Fournier's (2007) study on second-generation immigrants in France revealed that the largest disadvantaged immigrant group in France are those of Maghreb origin. They argue that this group is headed towards a "downward assimilation" (p. 23), something which they encounter at school and the labor market. While second-generation immigrants leave school at a younger age than native French, the high level of unemployment this group experiences is not exclusively related to the different level of educational attainment, but also racism they encounter. Many of Maghrebins are aware of this and have attributed their difficulty of finding employment to the color of their skin or their ethnic names (p. 25).

In 2005 riots broke out in the *banlieues*, many American commentators linked the riots to Islam extremism; however, European commentators acknowledged that economic deprivation was a primary cause for rioting. The majority of the rioters were of immigrant Muslim background; however, the riots were not perpetuated by Islam (Laachir, 2006) and the rioters were not against France, but rather made a desperate plea to be assimilated into France. The youth of the *banlieues* have often been treated as second-class citizens and remain profoundly excluded from the opportunities available to French natives. Immigrant youths have been stereotyped as a social problem due to their heritage, and France has neglected their needs with poorly funded schools, and by failing to address workplace discrimination. One strategy used to stop the riots was aggressive policing, which reflected 1955 policing in France towards Algerians who wanted independence. Police officers were given permission to stop and search, place suspects under house arrest, and enforce curfews (Laachir, 2006). France's permission to grant police unlimited power over the rioters is rather ironic since the riots sparked due to the accidental death of two boys who were being chased by the police, and who died from hiding in a power substation. This incident angered the youth of the *banlieues* due to continuously being targeted by the police (Scott, 2007). It is clear that second-generation immigrants continuously face the same level of racism their parents faced since their arrival in the Republic. France has failed second-generation immigrants by treating them as foreigners regardless of the fact that most were born in France, causing immigrant youths to riot in order to gain the recognition they deserve.

CONCLUSION

France has used Muslim women's bodies to reinforce a rejection of Islam in France. The 2004 ban on conspicuous religious symbols in public schools, mainly targeted the headscarf worn by Muslim girls. While the number of girls who wore the hijab in public schools was declining, France still pushed for a ban. The purpose of this was that French identity had become blurred due to the influx of immigrants. France had always viewed immigrants as guest workers who were destined to return home. However, the family reunification programs and closing the French border in 1974, led to many immigrants settling and making France their permanent home. The newly arrived immigrants were mainly Muslims from former colonies whose culture and religion was foreign to the Republic. The fact that Algeria had also defeated France in the war for independence, created an atmosphere of rejection and hostility towards Muslims arriving in France.

Muslims living in France experienced hardship during the 1970s economic crisis since they were fighting for the same resources as French natives and European migrants, which led to a high level of unemployment and poverty. The consequences of the 1970s economic crisis in France are still felt today, and has negatively affected immigrant youth who have been raised in poverty, and who are unable to escape due to the high level of marginalization they face in society. France's relation towards its Muslim population is a continuation of Orientalism, and Muslims are treated as second-class citizens who can never be equal to native French citizens due to their foreign heritage. Viewing Muslims as a binary opposition to French natives has also solidified Orientalist stereotypes that portray Muslims as threatening and backward.

The *banlieues* in France have often been accused of harvesting extremism and influencing the youth to rebel; in order to control the perceived Islamization of France. Muslim women's bodies have been used as a political tool by the Republic: by banning the hijab in public schools, the French state sends a clear message that Islam is not welcome. This usage of women's bodies as a political tool can be traced back to the era of the Algerian war of independence, where Muslim women were publically unveiled to symbolize French authority and denounce an independent Algeria. These events demonstrate that France has associated the veil with a foreign culture that denounces French identity. Moreover, women who veil are usually excluded from public debates concerning their dress code; instead, arguments are made on behalf of them by their Western sisters who wish to liberate them, "cultural insiders" who are Muslim women that condemn veiling, Muslim brothers who wish to secure their dignity or Western politicians. Failing to create a platform for Muslim women who veil reinforces the double oppression they face from their native culture and western culture (Gandhi, 1998). Muslim women who veil are seen as victims who are too weak to represent themselves and thus need protection, when in reality Muslim who veil women are capable of being politically active. However, the media is not interested in their insights as these are overpowered by the discourse of the dominant culture.

Arab-Muslim culture has often been blamed for the failure of assimilating both Muslim boys and girls into wider society; however, Muslims have not failed at assimilating into France, Scholarly evidence suggests that the majority of Muslim French youths are eager to embrace their French identity, but it is France who has failed them. Muslim youths predominantly attend underfunded schools where dropout rates are high

increasing their rates of dropout, are criminalized based on their appearance, and are discriminated against when they enter the labor market. Thus, France must stop blaming Muslims for their failure and take responsibility for treating them as second-class citizens who have been neglected by the state. The state may play a more effective role in terms of assimilating French Muslims by introducing legislation that improves schools and expands immigrants access to jobs.

France emphasizes a secular state where all individual adhere to a national identity; However, France is not as secular (separation of church and state) as it claims, instead the education system and public holidays are intertwined with Catholicism. France rejects the idea of difference and encourages assimilation, but they are encouraging an assimilation that favors Christianity and a European culture which conflict with Islam, failing to meet Muslim needs. The biggest consequence of enforcing assimilation to a secular identity is that it has silenced France's religious minorities, especially since France is not an authentic secular state. France refuses to recognize religious, cultural or ethnic differences which have led to the neglect of acknowledging racism and discrimination that are commonly encountered by most second-generation immigrants. It is clear that France colorblindness approach has drastically failed, and in order for Muslims assimilation to be considered successful, France must stop viewing them in the context of Orientalism. Instead, France needs to learn to embrace their country's cultural and religious diversity, where Muslim girls are made to feel welcomed and protected from the double oppression they face at "home" and by the state. Only by embracing differences and focusing on the success of Muslims integration, instead of their "failure" to assimilate can France accept that Islam is compatible with the Republic,

until that point, France will always be in conflict with a community that has felt rejected since its arrival.

Writing a thesis on France's relation to its Muslim residents has also allowed me to reflect on my experience as a Muslim Women who veils and lives in the United States. I have been subject to a significant amount of discrimination based on my dress code. The general public has often made remarks such as "go back to your country" or have stared at me while I walk with my family, and when I have asked for help in stores they have spoken to me in patronizing ways, and have asked if I understood what they have said. Regardless of the fact I have asked the question in English, a language I speak more fluently than my mother tongue. However, due to my dress code, and the color of my skin, I was perceived as a foreigner who could not be considered a citizen, and must have language difficulties. This demonstrates that America's view of Muslims is no different from France, since Muslims are viewed as foreigners who can never be accepted as citizens. Muslim have also become the center of American politics after the succession of Trumps presidency in 2017. Trump's attempts to ban Muslims entrance to America has also increased hostility towards Muslims, where a few American's feel their discrimination towards Muslims has been legitimized. America, as with France, views Muslims as the "other", and are seen as representing an identity in opposition to theirs.

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