

EXAMINING VEILED MUSLIM WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN EDUCATIONAL
INSTITUTIONS IN FRANCE AND THE UNITED STATES AND
DECOLONIZING THE CURRICULUM TO REFLECT THEIR STORIES

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines through qualitative data how the dominant narrative shapes the experiences of women in France who wear hijab and in the United States who wear hijab or niqab at educational institutions. This research focuses on what roles cultural symbolism, colonial ideology and political propaganda play in continuing the dominant narrative in this context in both France and the United States. This study further advocates based on its findings that educational institutions should promote more cross-cultural dialog and a larger representation of accurate depictions of Muslim women. This research shows that this can be achieved through “decolonizing” the curriculum and having more curricular flexibility in regards to reading choices.

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INTRODUCTION

How does the dominant narrative shape the experiences of women in France who wear hijab¹ and in the United States who wear hijab or niqab at educational institutions? Furthermore, what roles do cultural symbolism, colonial ideology and political propaganda (in a general sense) play in continuing the dominant narrative in this context? This study looks at educational institutions with two very different systems in the United States and France to triangulate qualitative data and highlight the different dimensions of the same phenomenon of the demonization of Muslim women that is going on in both countries.

An important reason to specify the use of school contexts as a focus point is because schools function as a mirror of what is happening in the rest of a society. Schools represent the mainstream values and ideas of the regions they serve, and also reflect these ideals back onto their communities. Examining veiling in schools offers an insight into how veiling is viewed on a broader scale in both America and France. Moreover, there is a level of irony that calls to be examined when Muslim women who veil are allegedly being oppressed in a school environment by their religious culture, at the very point when they are studying or working in the public sphere in order to be independently successful. What larger cultural factors are at work for this type of argument to be potentially

¹ There is no universal source for describing all of the types of dress Muslim women wear. This thesis will most frequently use the general word “veil” when speaking in broad terms. Please refer to the glossary and Figures 1 and 2 for more details on hijab, niqab, burqa or burkini.

accepted? Western countries seem to have a preoccupation with Muslim women and the symbol the veil presents in all of its various meanings. In her book, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*, Amina Wadud writes, "Over the past several decades, the hijab has been given disproportionate symbolic significance both within and without Muslim communities. Like a sixth pillar, we cannot discuss Islam and gender without discussing the hijab. While overloaded with multiple meanings, it is often the single marker used to determine community approval or disapproval (219)."

Finally, this study seeks not only to present a problem, but to examine the tangible ways educators and schools can in small ways help stop the demonization of Muslim women and create a counter-narrative to the veil being oppressive. Furthermore, this study does not seek to place the burden of telling this story of discrimination on Muslim women, but rather aims to provide a place to share the viewpoints of the Muslim women I interviewed and embed them into the academic research of Muslim women scholars. For too long, either Muslim men (and usually conservative ones) or non-Muslims have spoken for Muslim women. Therefore, Muslim women need to have the opportunity to have their voices heard, and this should be a collaboration between Muslim women who wish to speak and other people who are interested in moving anti-discrimination social policies forward.

This research came out of the four months I spent in France in 2010 and six months there between 2015 and 2016. During this time I conducted direct interviews with Muslim women who veil as well as read the news, watched television, had conversations and observed veiled women in a variety of public environments. Similarly, I have been

following the experiences and media portrayals of women who veil in the United States since 2009 when I took an undergraduate class on women and Islam. I completed my undergraduate studies in the San Francisco Bay Area and thus had the opportunity to regularly interact with veiled Muslim women at Mills College where I attended school and nearby UC Berkeley, both of which have a substantial population of Muslim students.

I have become particularly interested in studying the experiences of veiled women in Islam, because I view them as one of the most misunderstood minority groups in Western society of this current era. I believe that since World War II a general belief in religious tolerance in both the United States and Europe has come to be more universally accepted. However, Muslims and especially veiled Muslim women seem frequently to be excluded from this progression in thinking. The veil as a cultural symbol in the United States and Europe is often viewed as an extension of either oppression or extremism as promoted by political rhetoric or media representations due to the very strict dress codes instituted in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran for women. However, textual analysis of the Koran and interviews with women who veil in France and the United States reveal that popular rhetoric and beliefs about veiled women in these countries appear to be lacking in facts and are, rather, the convenient tools of propaganda that help perpetuate a dominant narrative. In the French case, this might come a surprise to many Americans who think of France as being a very free country, especially for women. They think of iconic images of famous French women such as Brigitte Bardot. Indeed, this is a great irony when it comes to France. Women have the right to be nude at the beach, but not to

be veiled at school. Greater treatment of this issue is explored further through the lens of post-colonial feminism in the theory section. What is evident is that the dominate narrative surrounding veiled women in the West in turn bolsters the rationale given to the public for certain political choices such as war (i.e. the war in Afghanistan in the American case) and conservative immigration policies.

The United States and France are both democracies where Islam is a minority religion compared to Christianity, but simultaneously where the percentage of Muslim residents and citizens is quickly growing. This provides a background for examining policy differences within the demographic similarities. A key difference between the United States and France is that there are no type of veiling bans in place in the U.S., whereas France has banned the burqa and niqab completely and made it illegal for primary and secondary school students and teachers to wear hijab at school. This restriction, however, regarding hijab does not apply to universities except for employees.

Many other researchers have conducted inquiries into different aspects of this topic, such as the history and law behind the veiling bans in France or comparisons between French law regarding this subject and laws of other Western democracies. In the United States, different researchers have also investigated the social or psychological challenges facing Muslims in a post 9/11 world. My research builds upon all of these other sources to examine comparatively the role of the veil specifically in educational institutions in America and France and takes a significantly qualitative approach, which is not present in most of the research pertaining to France. Additionally, my research hinges upon understanding the veil not only as a religious and political choice, but

primarily as an important cultural symbol. The common public perception that surrounds the veil that fits into the dominant narratives of both France and America is that the veil subverts Western values. Further arguments put forth in this thesis, however, will pose the question: Is the veil a subversion of Western values meaning liberty and equality or is the veil a subversion rather of colonial thinking simply couched in the terminology of Western values?

It is evident that both France and the United States are at a political crossroads in terms of perceptions and acceptance of Muslim residents and citizens. Political rhetoric of what can be considered the “extreme right” as represented by political figures such as Donald Trump in America and Marine Le Pen in France has the potential to influence both social opinion and public policy. Many citizens belonging to the dominant culture in both America and France are currently reacting and potentially voting based on emotional reactions to recent terrorist events in both countries.

Trump and Le Pen have built their careers on blaming “outsiders” and “others” for the main problems of their own respective countries. This rhetoric uses Muslims among other groups as classic scapegoats. This tactic should be alarming to listeners who have background knowledge of World War II or other historical events that used minority groups as the general justification of major problems. However, many people seem persuaded by this type of propaganda that claims if the “outsiders” could be either barred from entry or changed so that they could fully emulate the dominant culture, then many national problems would disappear. Muslim women who veil seem to be at the center of

this propaganda pitch, because the veil has become such a widespread symbol of Islam and difference in Western culture.

Due to this fact, Muslim women who veil are often targets of xenophobia and discrimination. Therefore, it is imperative current research be conducted to examine what ways discrimination and inequality may target Muslim women in both of these countries. My focus on educational institutions has been selected based on France's previous legislation of restricting hijab for students in primary and secondary schools in France and the inability for employees working in public institutions to wear hijab. This type of legislation potentially limits Muslim girls from attending school or many Muslim women from working in education and research. Although The United States does not have these types of restrictive laws, this research will examine any more subtle forms of discrimination that may be taking place in American educational institutions. A 2017 poll conducted by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding reported that more than 42% of Muslims with children in K-12 schools in America reported bullying of their children because of their faith. According to the same poll, a school staff member was also reported to be involved in one in four bullying incidents involving Muslims (American Muslim Poll 2017). These statistics present a clear case to further analyze the experiences of Muslim women in educational institutions in America. An additional focus of this research will also be to analyze any positive aspects of equality promotion taking place at educational institutions in either country to present as an example for how to improve policies.

The heart of the issue centers around the fact that the veil is a longstanding symbol of Islam to the West that is often interpreted as oppressive. The veil is frequently viewed as a visible representation of fundamentalist Islam, such as in the infamous examples of post-revolutionary Iran and Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, where women are forced to adhere to strict dress codes. However, an expression of extremism is just one of the veil's many significances. The veil holds many other meanings often overlooked by the West. Based on my field notes, I found that some of these reasons may include, but are not limited to: individual spirituality, a demand for respect and privacy, feminism, a call to for ending Islamophobia, and even fashion. It is evident that in this point in time the veil is particularly misunderstood in the Republic of France, where bans against girls wearing headscarves in elementary and high schools, burkinis in public pools and the beach (in certain regions) and the niqab and burqa in any public space have been instituted and enforced (Veiling Ban Controversy). These prohibitions have been created by the French government and accepted by the general public under the premises of *laïcité* (the French conception of secularism) and gender equality (La Commission Stasi).

This paper will illustrate the possible flaws with using these two ideas as justifications for restricting various forms of the Islamic veil in France, and will instead explore an alternative theory of the bans that stem from a need to maintain hegemony over former colonial subjects through Muslim women's bodies and the social ramifications of these policies as evidenced through qualitative research. Equally as important is an exploration of how similar hegemonic views in the United States perhaps

do not shape policy regarding Muslim women's attire in the U.S., but influence social beliefs and treatment of Muslim women in educational settings. Certainly, the media and popular culture have documented the recent rise in anti-Muslim rhetoric during the 2016 presidential campaign cycle, much of which strongly resembles the disturbing rhetoric in France that supported the multiple restrictions imposed upon how Muslim women could dress.

Background on Islamic Veils and Veils in Religion

So, why do Muslim women wear a veil? This is a complex question with no single answer. However, it needs to be examined from the perspective of religious texts and Muslim women scholars' interpretations of those texts. Instead of conservative Muslim men telling women why they should veil or non-Muslims telling women why they should not veil, it is crucial to see what primary texts in Islam say on this subject and the role of women as a whole in Islam. We must hear the thoughts of Muslim women who are exercising their own agency to interpret Islamic texts in a Muslim feminist way and live their religion the way they see fit in their lives.

In general, veiling in any religion is comprised of a complex system of values, cultural norms and often social or political expression to an outside group. However, veiling in Islam is particularly complicated, because Western politics and the Western media have made it so. This section focuses on dispelling common myths about Islam, as well as positioning veiling within the context of women in other religions. This is done primarily through the research of devout female Muslim academics such as Asma Barlas

and Amina Wadud. This type of textual analysis is important to include, because it gives a voice to Muslim women to express the religious rationale for wearing the veil in a public format. In regards to public discourses on veiling, the voices of non-Muslims in the United States and France can be heard frequently, but there is a lack of opportunity normally otherwise for believing Muslim women to share their viewpoint on a large scale. In her book, *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood writes, “Over the last two decades, a key question has occupied many feminist theorists: how should issues of historical and cultural specificity inform both the analytics and the politics of any feminist project? While this question has led to serious attempts at integrating issues of sexual, racial, class and national difference within feminist theory, questions regarding religious difference have remained relatively unexplored. The vexing relationship between feminism and religion is perhaps most manifest in discussion of Islam (1).” A Muslim feminist reading of the Koran and Islamic texts is therefore imperative when examining the relationship between gender equality and Islam and I believe this act can be thought of as a feminist project to reuse a term from Mahmood.

A popular misconception is that the Koran or an official doctrine of Islam mandates women to wear a head covering. This is not true except for when Muslim women pray or go into a mosque; they are required to cover their hair out of respect for God. In this aspect, dressing in a certain manner in a religious setting is a common practice in many faiths. It helps the practitioner transition into a specifically spiritual mindset by his/her clothing visibly marking the difference between the profane and religious world. However, many Muslim women do wear a veil outside of strictly

religious practices. But this is not so much because of a religious law, but rather out of a cultural interpretation of religious values. The Koran says that both men and women should be modest, but what “modest” means in everyday life differs greatly from person to person, because the Koran does not specifically define the type of garments that fulfill this demand. Instead it simply states, “Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty...And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms...(Koran 24:30,31).”

The other two other passages in the Koran that are often cited as support for veiling are Sura 33:53 and 33:59. However, once both of these passages are contextualized in history, it becomes clearer that they simply refer to the privacy of the Prophet’s wives and daughters who hold a special place in society, and are not necessarily meant to be setting universal doctrines for all Muslim women.

Sura 33:53 says, “ O believers, enter not the dwellings of the Prophet, unless invited... And when you ask of his wives anything, ask from behind a hijab. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts.” According to scholar Fadwa El Guindi in her book titled, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, this sura dealing with hijab was probably revealed during a time when many members of the growing Muslim community were coming to the home of the Prophet to ask questions or requests. Since his wives also lived in the home with him, the Prophet wanted to guard their privacy and protect their special

status by allowing outside men to talk to them only with permission and by putting a curtain or partition “hijab” between them (153, 154).

In addition, Sura 33:59 states, “O Prophet, tell thy wives and thy daughters, and the women of the believers to draw their jilbab close round them ... so that they may be recognized and not molested.” In this case, El Guindi says the emphasis here is again on the special status of the Prophet’s wives and daughters and the dress prescriptions are still confined to the jilbab and not hijab or niqab (155).

Another question that may arise for non-Muslims is what is the difference between the various types of “veils.” El Guindi writes, “In Arabic (the spoken and written language of two hundred and fifty million people and the religious language of one and a half billion people today) “veil” has no single equivalent. Numerous Arabic terms are used to refer to diverse articles of women’s clothing that vary by body part, region, local dialect, and historical era. The Encyclopedia of Islam identifies over a hundred terms for dress parts, many of which are used for ‘veiling’ (6, 7).” Even though “veil” is not the most precise term, it is used the most frequently in this paper. This is because this essay deals with more than one type of clothing impacted by the bans, and therefore is the most universal word when trying to draw a link between the garments and also the most commonly understood word to those who are not Muslim or religious studies scholars. This paper includes a glossary with a description of the relevant types of Islamic clothing discussed. To my knowledge, there is no single source that compiles all of the clothing styles of Islamic “veils” with descriptions, histories and geographic information. Much of

the variation with veiling is based upon the diversity of locations where Islam is practiced.

Up to this point, only the veil in Islam has been discussed. However, as Leila Ahmed states in her book *Women and Gender in Islam*, veiling was not something unique to Islam in the ancient Middle East and the practice actually was more widely adopted by Islam from other cultures (especially Christian and Jewish) during the expansion of the Islamic Empire. “Converts brought traditions of thought and custom with them. For instance (to give just one example of how easily and invisibly scriptural assimilation could occur), in its account of the creation of humankind the Quran gives no indication of the order in which the first couple was created, nor does it say that Eve was created from Adam’s rib. In Islamic traditionalist literature, however, which was inscribed in the period following the Muslim conquests, Eve, sure enough, is referred to as created from a rib. The adoption of the veil by Muslim women occurred in a similar process of seamless assimilation of the mores of the conquered peoples. The veil was apparently in use in Sasanian society, and the segregation of the sexes and use of the veil were heavily in evidence in the Christian Middle East and Mediterranean regions at the time of the rise of Islam. During Muhammad’s lifetime and only toward the end at that, his wives were the only Muslim women required to veil. After his death and following the Muslim conquest of the adjoining territories, where upper-class women veiled, the veil became a commonplace item of clothing among Muslim upper-class women, by a process of assimilation that no one has yet ascertained in much detail (4, 5).”

As Ahmed suggests, there is much diversity within what Westerners consider to be the “veil,” because of geography and the intermixing of many religions and cultures. As she also states, veiling was not a uniquely Islamic phenomenon in the ancient Middle East or Mediterranean.

It is at this point it is important to discuss comparative examples of veiling in other religions to better understand the practice not as something exclusive to Islam, but rather in the larger context of the anthropology of dress in religion. Editor Jennifer Heath writes in the Introduction to *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore and Politics*, “Veiling – of women, men and sacred places and objects – has existed among people of countless cultures and religions from time immemorial (1).” She continues to state that: “In ancient times, there was evidence of the connection between religion and veiling with women in Mesopotamia, the Iberian Peninsula, Greece and Rome through visual representations of female deities. “Inanna, Sumerian goddess of heaven, Ishtar, chief goddess of the Babylonians and Assyrians, and her Phoenician counterpart, Astarte, as well as Isis, Egyptian goddess of fertility and motherhood, are often found veiled...(Heath, 8)” And as previously discussed by Ahmed, Jewish and Christian female practitioners had already started wearing the veil pre-Islamic contact. In modern times, there still remains a large contingent of religious women other than Muslims who wear some type of head covering. To list a few: Hasidic Jewish, Amish and other Anabaptist groups, Eastern Orthodox nuns and Russian Orthodox laywomen (during prayers), Catholic nuns and laywomen (during prayers until Vatican II in the 1960s) and Anglican nuns also fit into this category.

By momentarily looking away from the subject of simply Islam and veiling, it is clear that there are many other instances of women veiling in religion. As Heath states, there are even instances of places, objects or men being veiled as well. The importance of realizing that veiling is not just Muslim is enormous when analyzing modern, Western commentaries that claim the veil is solely Islamic, and therefore needs to be scrutinized, because it is against “Western” ideals.

Once again, the focus comes back to the phrase “Western ideals.” Is it a code word for colonial values and racial supremacy? A prime example that supports the reading of the phrase “Western ideals” as code for colonialism and racism is the example of which recommendations the French government took from the Stasi Commission, which was tasked with examining the overall role and implementation of *laïcité* (secularism) in public institutions in France and how to help put Arab and Muslim citizens on more equal footing in French society. In the end, the French government took the recommendation to ban headscarves for girls in public primary and secondary schools, since the Commission deemed headscarves to be “ostentatious” religious symbols along with yarmulkes and large crosses (La Commission Stasi). However, the government’s acceptance of the headscarf bans in schools appears to be focused very strongly on Muslim girls when the government rejected the vast majority of the other recommendations of the Commission. There were twenty-six recommendations proposed in total, of which there were proposals that included making the Muslim holiday Eid al-Adha a public holiday and teaching the indigenous North African language of Berber in public schools (Silverstein). The reality of how the recommendations were cherry-picked

and implemented resulted in the fact that most of the individuals impacted by these veil policy changes were young girls with cultural ties to North Africa or Sub-Saharan Africa, regions that colonial France controlled for decades.

In the American case, there is no public policy banning the veil. However, the recent travel ban created through executive order by Donald Trump raises a similar question about the racialization of Islam through speech and propaganda. Trump's goal is to try to convince the general public that somehow in the American case keeping people of a certain national identity or ethnic origin physically out of America will halt Islamic radicalization's impact on the United States and regain a sense of homogenous national identity (i.e. Eurocentric and Christian-centric). In the French scenario, former President Jacques Chirac was trying to sell the general public on the idea that keeping Muslim religious symbolism out of public schools and institutions via veiling bans targeted at mostly girls of North-African and Sub-Saharan African origin would restore France's homogenous national identity (i.e. also Eurocentric and Christian-centric). Somewhat ironically, the Stasi Commission created its report before any Islamist terror attacks occurred in France. However, based on field research, I frequently heard terrorism and religious radicalization being used to support veiling bans in public schools as well. In reality, this probably has the opposite desired effect and further alienates Muslims in France. But excluding the veil from public institutions plays well with capitalizing on people's fear and continuing to push a dominant narrative.

Literature Review

This paper draws upon both previous scholarly works based in the field of anthropology as well as history, education, literature, gender, ethnic and religious studies. The works of Leila Ahmed, Fadwa El Guindi, Fatema Mernissi, Asma Barlas, Leila Ahmed. Amina Wadud and Saba Mahmood create the central framework for understanding how women inside the religion of Islam view questions of gender parity and veiling from an academic standpoint. *Orientalism* by Edward Said provides an important context for arguments put forth in this research that refer to post-colonial theory to question the historical biases linked to the critique of non-Western cultural practices. However, none of these sources have specifically examined the daily experiences of women who veil in French and American educational institutions.

In the books, *Hijab and the Republic* by Bronwyn Winter and *Politics of the Veil* by Joan Wallach Scott, both authors discuss in depth the history of French secularism and the events that led to the veiling bans in France. Wallach Scott also certainly compares French and American legal systems. Winter and Wallach Scott's texts serve as an important source of information in this paper for understanding French history and institutions and the context out which the veiling bans were created. But neither work compares the first-hand experiences of Muslim women who veil in France and the United States nor the steps educational institutions in both countries can take to try to promote higher levels tolerance for Muslim women.

Strangely, there is very little scholarship about the veiling bans in France being produced by independent French scholars. This can be attributed to the interpretation of French secularism that currently discourages for the most part religious scholarship even from an objective standpoint in French higher education. Based on my field research, there are some history of religion courses and programs that are offered, but they tend to focus on religion mostly in ancient and medieval history. That is not to say there is zero research on modern religious studies in France, but it is limited and not a widely promoted focus. A suggestion from the Stasi Commission actually was that France should create more university programs that have an Islamic Studies track, but that suggestion was ignored by former President Chirac (La Commission Stasi).

Theory

Central to this investigation of this paper's topic is post-colonial theory, which will be further explored in this section. Post-colonial theory presents an alternative explanation to why so many Western countries take offense at the veil. It is not a question of gender equality, but rather a question of continued control over the bodies of perceived colonial subjects. Since the Crusades, the "West" has used Islam (which is not really possible to disentangle at this point from "Eastern") as its foil. If the "West"/white/European" is "civilized," then the "East"/dark/non-European is "uncivilized," and Christianity is "good" and Islam is "bad." The founder of postcolonial studies, Edward Said wrote in his groundbreaking book *Orientalism*, "I have begun with the assumption that Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely *there*, just as the

Occident itself is not just *there* either. We must take seriously Vico's great observation that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities – to say nothing of historical entities – such as locales, regions, geographical sectors as “Orient” and “Occident” are man-made. Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history, and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other (132).”

Muslim women have been placed in the middle of this dichotomy. In post-revolutionary Iran and Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, women must wear chadors or burqas to avoid imitating Western women, because the West is the colonizer. Looking at the other extreme, in France and a growing number of other European countries, and in American political rhetoric, the veil is a symbol of women's oppression by “uncivilized” Muslims. Negative stereotypes and discrimination of Muslims are at an unprecedented high in the Western world right now, and French policies and the 2016 American presidential campaign trail are strong examples of the conflict that especially Muslim women are in right now, and how a non-Western (meaning state of mind and not location) analysis of the situation is necessary.

Two other key elements for exploring the subject of this paper are Islamic feminism and post-colonial feminism. The question still remains in many Western minds, “can there be Islamic feminism?” Based on the emerging work of many female Muslim scholars, such as Leila Ahmed, Fadwa El Guindi, Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas and Lila

Abu-Lughod (to name a few) it is clear this is absolutely possible. These writers examine women in Islam not only from a traditional academic standpoint, but also from an insider's view. They bring to light many points that were often overlooked by academics who were either outsiders to the religion or did not have the unique experience of being both a woman and Muslim. They are merging principals of theology, philosophy and women's studies to create a new non-Western feminist understanding of Islam. They are doing this mainly through two modes: hermeneutics and postcolonial feminism.

Hermeneutics is the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation, especially of religious or literary texts. In her book, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, Asma Barlas, especially employs hermeneutics as being imperative to reaching a feminist consciousness in Islam. According to Barlas, understanding that interpretations of the Koran are subjective, depending on who interprets this sacred text and when, is the key to unlocking the true teachings of this holy book, often clouded by historically patriarchal control of exegesis. Barlas writes, "I read the Qur'an as a 'believing woman,' to borrow a term from the Qur'an itself. This means that I do not question its ontological status as Divine Speech or that God Speaks, both of which Muslims hold to be true. I do, however, question the legitimacy of its patriarchal readings, and I do this on a basis of distinction of Muslim theology between what Gods says and what we understand God to be saying. In the latter context, I am especially interested in querying the claim, implicit in confusing the Qur'an with its patriarchal exegesis, that only males, and conservative males at that, know what God really means (19)." Through this reinterpretation of the Koran, Barlas highlights the idea that it is not

the Koran or Islam itself that is patriarchal or sexist, but rather those who have interpreted it in the past.

This understanding of Islam not being inherently sexist fits well into post-colonial feminism, which is the umbrella term for a movement that critiques European and North American feminism for “universalizing” the conditions of women. Western feminism for many years has misunderstood Islam to be essentially misogynistic either through a lack of cultural understanding of specific practices such as veiling or through viewing “Islam” as a simple answer to explain complicated sexist laws in Muslim-majority countries, such as girls not being allowed to attend school in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, despite these rules often going against the actual teachings of the religion. In contrast to thinking that all women are collectively oppressed in the same ways worldwide, post-colonial feminism rejects this notion, understanding differences of race, class, nationality and other factors among women. Amongst these different identities, it further realizes privileges and inequities within feminists, and the potential for some feminists to reproduce and enforce other forms of political dominance over fellow women. In the case of Islam, many white Christian, Jewish or secular European and North American feminists see Islam as being “backwards” and “sexist,” but these ideas come from years of historical bias and racism towards the regions of the world where there are majority-Muslim populations. It has very little to do with striving for equal gender relations and much more to do with enforcing imperialism.

Based upon this context, when evaluating women’s status in Islam (which is often quite contested) it is very important to return to primary sources and to consult feminist

scholars inside the religion for answers to gendered questions. Like its predecessors, Judaism and Christianity, Islam is a religion with many egalitarian ideals and values, but often has been historically interpreted in a patriarchal manner. It is thus furthermore important to conduct an exploration of the parts of the Koran that treat men and women in the same way.

In the Koranic story of human creation, men and women are made the same way. Although this may change in oral narratives and cultural Islam later due to an influence from Genesis II in the Hebrew Bible as stated by Ahmed, but in scriptural Islam it is clear that Eve is not created from Adam. "...The entire process of human creation was in three steps: 1. the initiation of creation, 2. the formation of perfection, 3. the bringing to life (Wadud 16)." This interpretation is in reference to the following passage. "Just recall the time when your lord said to the angels, 'I am going to create a human of clay: when I perfect it in every way, and blow into it of my ruh, all of you should bow down before it.' (Koran 38:71-72)." Although Eve or Hawwa in Arabic is not mentioned by name, nor her creation described in detail, it is apparent that a mate was created with Adam from the same nature and soul. "It is He Who created you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her in love (Koran 7:189)."

Additionally, in the Garden of Eden, it is Adam who first eats the apple and disobeys God, not Eve as in the Hebrew Bible. "And verily we made a covenant of old with Adam, but he forgot, and We found no constancy in him... And the devil whispered to him saying: 'Oh Adam! Shall I show you the tree of immortality and power that does

not waste away?’ Then the two of them (Adam and his wife) ate of the fruit (of the forbidden tree)... And Adam disobeyed his Lord, so went astray (Koran 20: 115-21).”

The significance of this passage is not that man is now evil and woman is good, but rather to show the gender neutrality of the Koran in regards to women and men having the same religious duties when juxtaposed with the Jewish/Christian account. The purpose of the story in both the Hebrew Bible and in the Koran is to warn humans against disobeying God. However, not because of intent, but because of interpretation, Judaism and Christianity have often attributed women with being extra sinful. However, it is the Koran that contradicts this interpretation and reiterates the original meaning of the story, which is one of honoring God’s commandments regardless of gender.

Moreover, Muslim women must also obey the Five Pillars of Islam, which are the five main religious requirements of all Muslims. They include: The Shahada, the testimony of faith that states, “there is none worthy of worship except God and Muhammad is the messenger of God,” Salah (prayer 5 times a day), Zakah (giving at least 2.5% of one’s annual capital to charity), Sawm (fasting, especially during the holy month of Ramadan, and Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca once during a Muslim’s life if he/she is financially and physically capable). These obligations are the foundation of Muslim life and demand the exact same requirements from women as from men (Esposito 89). Additionally, if any Muslim (regardless of gender) upholds them, he or she will receive the same rewards in the afterlife. The Koran says, “You who have believed Our revelations and were self-surrendered, Enter the Garden, You and your azwaj, to be glad (Koran 43:69-70).” Extrapolating on this concept, Amina Wadud, explains in *Qur’an and*

Woman that individuals in Islam are not judged by gender, but rather on their faith and deeds, especially in regard to the hereafter. “Recompense is distributed with complete equity among individuals with no regard to gender. The potential to attain the best reward or receive the ultimate punishment lies equally before women as before men. The Qur’an is emphatic and explicit about this (58).”

Thus, the Story of Creation, the Garden of Eden, the requirements outlined by the 5 Pillars for all Muslims and the equal rewards and punishments in the afterlife for following or not following these prescriptions all contribute to an understanding of women not being second-class citizens in Islam, at least from a scriptural point of view. Spiritually, women and men are equal. However, in Islam, many followers believe there are often “public” and “private” or “male” and “female” spheres, but this does not mean that women are less than men, and is often unfortunately interpreted that way by Western audiences. It simply emphasizes the idea that women and men were created as two different compliments of the same human race.

American and French Secularism Compared and Their Role in Public Schools

To wrap back around to how Muslim women who veil are treated in schools, ostensibly, the fight in France over Muslim women’s ability to veil or not to veil is based upon the conception of *Laïcité*, the French word for secularism. However, it should not be translated as having the exact same connotation as the American version of secularism. Secularism in general, means a separation between church and state, which

both France and the United States uphold. But because of the historical differences between these two nations, there are two varied interpretations of the same ideal.

In the United States, secularism is generally interpreted as freedom of religion. America was home to religious minorities who fled persecution in Europe. The first amendment of the United States Constitution is supposed to protect religious individuals from unnecessary government interference (Wallach Scott 91). In France on the other hand, the principle dates back to the French Revolution, which sought to overturn a reign of kings that claimed a divine right to rule. Because of this, it became understood that the laws of the people and not the laws of God should govern the Republic, and in 1905 “laïcité” was codified (Young, Muslim and French).

Public schools play an extremely important role in upholding values of secularism in France. It is not only where students come to learn core subjects, but also a symbol of republican values, and where students learn to be good citizens. By itself, that is not a bad thing, but “good citizens” is increasingly coming to mean endorsing the dominant narrative’s cultural views. This belief is expressed by the reaction to the veil in public schools.

In the name of “laïcité” on March 15, 2004, France passed legislation that banned wearing “conspicuous” religious signs in public elementary and secondary schools based on a recommendation from the Stasi Commission’s findings. And for those who did not comply, disciplinary procedures to enforce this rule would be preceded by a discussion with the student (Wallach Scott 1). Generally, these punishments resulted in expulsion if the student refused to comply with the dress code. This law included the prohibition of

large crosses, Jewish skullcaps, Sikh turbans and Islamic veils (Wallach Scott 1).

However, it was arguably targeted specifically at Muslim girls and was not an equal measure instituted to uphold just secularism. It can be seen as a discriminatory policy aimed at France's large and growing Muslim population, of which many members, their parents or grandparents have emigrated from former French colonies, especially Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. Furthermore, school is where children learn cultural values, but one must question if racial and religious bias is a mainstream value if that is trying to be taught to students by instituting such a ban.

To contextualize how the 2004 ban came into being, it is useful to look back to two previous events in 1989 and 1994 that lead up to the prohibition. On October 3, 1989, three girls were expelled from their middle school in Creil (about 30 miles outside of Paris) when they refused to stop wearing their headscarves at school based on Eugène Chenière, the principal's, interpretation of *laïcité*. However, there was much controversy and so the Socialist Minister of Education tried to calm the situation by referring the case to the Conseil d'Etat, which is the highest administrative court in France that deals with the legal actions of public bodies. The court ruled that the wearing religious signs in public schools is not necessarily incompatible with *laïcité* as long as these signs were not ostentatious and did not constitute acts of pressure, provocation proselytism or propaganda that would interfere with other students' liberties (Wallach Scott 22, 24). Due to this ruling, the controversies surrounding headscarves temporarily died down until 1994 when they reemerged. On September 20, 1994 François Bayrou, Minister of Education, declared that "ostentatious" religious signs would from then on be prohibited

in all schools (not including universities). Students' behavior was not taken into account, because the signs themselves were blatant proselytizing acts, according to Bayrou. Some girls who had been expelled challenged his decision and the Conseil d'Etat upheld its original 1989 ruling. Cases were evaluated on a case-by-case basis after 1994 and some girls were allowed to wear bandannas to school or drop their scarves to their shoulders when entering the classroom itself, but could wear a veil in the halls or other areas of the school (Wallach Scott 27, 28, 29). Concerns about terrorism after September 11th opened up many discussions about Islam in France and once again reopened the door to the headscarf debate in 2003 when Socialist Deputy, Jack Lang presented a bill to the National Assembly that banned religious signs in public schools. To explore the possibility of enacting the law, then President Jacques Chirac appointed the Stasi Commission lead by former Government Minister and Deputy Bernard Stasi. A few months later it released its findings in a report called "Laïcité et République" (Secularism and the Republic). One of its conclusions was what would become the law enacted in 2004 that outlawed "conspicuous" religious symbols in public schools (Wallach Scott 33). However, the Stasi Commission made twenty-five other recommendations to try to put Muslims on equal footing in French society. These included policies such as teaching Arabic in public schools, creating national holidays for Muslims and eliminating ghettos. However, Chirac only took the one suggestion to ban religious symbols (mainly headscarves) from schools and ignored the others (Young, Muslim and French).

More recently in France the niqab and burqa have been entirely outlawed outside of one's home as of April 11, 2011. The BBC reports, "Any woman caught wearing the

burka or niqab faces a fine and will be asked to take citizenship lessons. She can also be subject to an investigation (Ban on Muslim women covering faces).” The same article goes on to state that, “If police find her husband is forcing her to cover up, he could face a fine of 25,000 euros and a possible jail sentence.” The second function of the law might be legitimate to protect women’s rights, but the flat-out banning of the niqab and burqa in general overlooks individual women’s autonomy and right to choose to wear these garments. It presents the niqab and burqa (and therefore the women that wear them) as being incompatible with French society. This point is especially emphasized by the citizenship classes that are a punishment for being caught wearing these kinds of clothing. This highlights the point that the French government does not see the niqab and burqa simply as security threat, but also as a cultural one.

The reasons put forth for the passage of the ban included worries about national security, the preservation of laïcité and protecting women’s rights. However, the latter was pushed as the primary reason for the passage of this new legislation. In 2009 following an appeal by many MPs for a parliamentary commission to examine if Muslim women covering themselves fully in public should remain legal, President Nicolas Sarkozy was quoted by BBC as saying, “We cannot accept to have in our country women who are prisoners behind netting, cut off from all social life, deprived of identity. That is not the idea that the French republic has of women's dignity. The burka is not a sign of religion, it is a sign of subservience. It will not be welcome on the territory of the French republic (Sarkozy speaks out against burka).” It is this kind of reasoning and language that underscores the French government’s ignorance of Islam and the women who

practice it. This culturally insensitive type of thinking not only appropriates and distorts feminism and women's rights, but also drives a wedge further between many Muslims and non-Muslims in France.

Interestingly, according to MSNBC, The Interior Ministry estimates the number of women who fully cover themselves at some 1,900, with a quarter of them converts to Islam and two-thirds with French nationality (Ganley). To put this into context, BBC reports that France's Muslim population is between five to six million, roughly about 10% of the country's entire population (Muslims in Europe: Country Guide). France does not keep strict data on religious populations after the Holocaust. Ironically, not keeping religious statistics was a policy France enacted to protect religious minorities. However, in recent decades, the policy might be hindering legitimate social science research that could help reduce discrimination and promote a higher level of religious and cultural tolerance in modern France. The figures put forth by MSNBC and BBC bring to light the oddity of passing a ban that relates to such a small percentage of people, and also dismantles the argument that niqabs and burqas do not belong in France, because "immigrants" who do not understand French customs and laws wear them.

In stark contrast to the French cultural and legal interpretations of how religious freedom should function, the United States tends to believe that its citizens should have extensive latitude in order to fulfill their religious duties even when public institutions are involved. This is evidenced by the 1972 Supreme Court case, *Wisconsin v. Yoder*. The State of Wisconsin argued that all children were obligated to attend school until the age of sixteen. However, members of the Old Order Amish religion and Conservative Amish

Mennonite Church believed that school attendance beyond 8th grade violated their religious beliefs and way of life (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*). The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Yoder and concluded that the State's interest in universal education is not absolute and must take into account the fundamental rights protected by the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*).

Historical differences between France and the U.S. have clearly led to opposite ways of interpreting religious freedom in both countries. The French version might be summed up as freedom from religion and the American version as freedom of religion. The veiling bans and *Wisconsin v. Yoder* exemplify the vast contrast in interpretation of how religious freedom is addressed in public schools in both nations.

METHODS

In addition to theory and historical and archival research, qualitative research methods play an essential role in the research for this paper. The specific methods I used for this paper include: informal interviewing, structured surveys, field notes from when I lived in France and coding. In the chapter, “Coding and Analyzing Qualitative Data” in *Researching Society and Culture* edited by Clive Seale, Carol Rivas describes coding as analyzing data produced in ethnographic work or other qualitative methods. She writes: “It is easier to make sense of the data when they are divided up into themes, or patterns ... (367).” I certainly found Rivas’ advice to be true and relied upon coding to make sense of all the data I collected through the various methods previously discussed.

One method that has proved to be very useful in data collection is informal interviewing. This means that the researcher informally talks with people in the field without the use of a structured guide. The benefit to this method is that it allows the researcher to observe a social setting and uncover new topics of interest.

Both conversations that have taken place in France and the United States have contributed to a deeper understanding of the research topic and revealed the cultural climates and challenges that surround teachers and students who veil in the U.S. and France. On the whole, life can be challenging for any woman in an educational setting that veils in either of these countries. Even though there is no prohibition placed upon women or girls veiling in the United States, it is still often culturally misunderstood and those who choose to carry out this cultural and religious practice often face various forms

of discrimination. The U.S. has never had a law that challenged the right for students to veil and the U.S. Supreme Court recently upheld that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects a Muslim woman's right to wear a headscarf at work under the framework of protection from religious discrimination in hiring practices. This clarification came in 2015 from a lawsuit that a Muslim woman brought against the clothing retailer Abercrombie and Fitch for not hiring her, because she did "not meet the chain's dress code standards" by wearing hijab (Liptak). This same decision of course would extend to protecting teachers in the workplace and eliminate the potential for explicit hiring bias for women who veil. However, despite these legal protections for Muslim girls and women in the U.S., what informal interviews revealed is that there can still be subtle forms of discrimination targeted at Muslim girls and women in educational settings.

The most striking conversation in my own work that reflects this reality comes from a conversation with a young woman in her mid-twenties who has lived her whole life in the Bay Area. She started wearing hijab again while she was studying economics at Mills College, but said that was not the first time she had worn hijab. She grew up in San Jose in a community with many families of Persian origin (she herself is of Persian origin) and she decided when she started puberty at around the age of twelve to start wearing hijab, as was the custom for many women in her family and community. She said that after wearing a headscarf for several days at school she was verbally attacked by several other students who repeatedly called her racial slurs, despite going to a school that was ethnically diverse. She said that after that event she stopped wearing hijab until she was around nineteen in college and was re-inspired to wear a headscarf after taking

several college classes on the topic of Islam and gender. At the college-level, she said her choice was not met with any negativity, but she still clearly recalls her experience with veiling in middle school and the personal and mental impact it had on her. This interview revealed that even though Muslim women may have more legal protections in the United States in regards to veiling, they are still vulnerable to discrimination on a personal level that can have a deep psychological impact.

Conversations with French Muslim women showed that they felt discriminated against based upon the veiling bans imposed in France that to them had no logical rationale other than exclude Muslim girls and women from certain parts of French society. Both women I interviewed on this topic were in their twenties and had obtained the equivalent of a B.A. or higher from universities in Aix-en-Provence, France and said they would have liked to have started wearing hijab in high school, but it was not possible for them, because otherwise they would have been expelled from school. They started wearing hijab as soon as they started college, where it is permitted for students to wear a headscarf as long as their faces are not covered. They were happy with their decision to veil at the college-level, but still were upset with the fact that they had to wait until that point to be able to wear hijab and found it discriminatory that despite being good students, they would have been expelled from high school if they had tried to veil sooner. Their choice to veil in college was met with relatively little hostility on the campus, but one of the women did state that she remembered another student stopping her one day on campus after hearing her speak, and told her that she spoke French very well for a foreigner. The woman I interviewed was rather taken aback by this, since even

though her parents are from Morocco she was born in France and has lived there her whole life. She said that many people in France still associate the veil with ideas of being “foreign” or “other” and that it is difficult for them to accept the fact that there are women in France who are equally French and equally Muslim who choose to wear the veil of their own accord.

Another interesting conversation that also shed more light on this research topic was one that occurred with a researcher at the University of Burgundy who focused on issues of gender and equality. Despite her research focus, she discussed the fact that women who veil are essentially barred from working at public universities in France, because under France’s laws and interpretations regarding secularism (*laïcité*), anyone who works for a public university is a government worker and government workers cannot wear religious attire to work and that is just how things were in France in her opinion. What was striking about this information is that even though a student who is a Muslim woman who wears a headscarf can complete a B.A. through a Ph.D. at a public university in France, when she is done if she wants to work in an academic position she must choose between a form of how she practices her religion and a career. It should also be noted that most universities in France are public. There are very few private universities and those that exist are usually Catholic. Furthermore, it is doubtful that many women are willing to stop practicing their religion in the way they see fit. This essentially creates a type of intellectual censorship that eliminates Muslim women who veil (or most Muslim women at all) from producing research and teaching. Eliminating the viewpoint of Muslim women who veil in academic scholarship entails the silencing of

a significant and growing group of people in France. Hence, this policy really underscores the question of whether the French government is essentially censoring the type of academic scholarship that is disseminated to students and the public by barring Muslim women who veil from working in public universities. In my opinion, French institutions would benefit from greater curriculum flexibility and more varied research and teaching viewpoints.

In her book, *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood writes: “The ongoing importance of feminist scholarship on women’s agency cannot be emphasized enough, especially when one remembers that Western popular media continues to portray Muslim women as incomparably bound by the unbreakable chains of religious and patriarchal oppression (7).” Mahmood is advocating for more research on Muslim women who are independent and make their own choices to reflect the reality of actual women’s lives instead of the television and magazine portrayal of how the West wants to see Muslim women as being victims or oppressed, essentially part of the harem mentality, even if that is perhaps a Western invention that originated from colonial era paintings and later Hollywood films (Hollywood Harems). However, I emphasize again that French institutions would benefit from greater curriculum flexibility and more varied research and teaching viewpoints, because it is hard to conduct the type of feminist scholarship on women’s agency that Mahmood suggests, if most Muslim women are essentially kept away from working at universities in France and issues surrounding Muslim women are low research priorities.



Figure 1. Mannequins wearing a burkini. Source: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37026002>

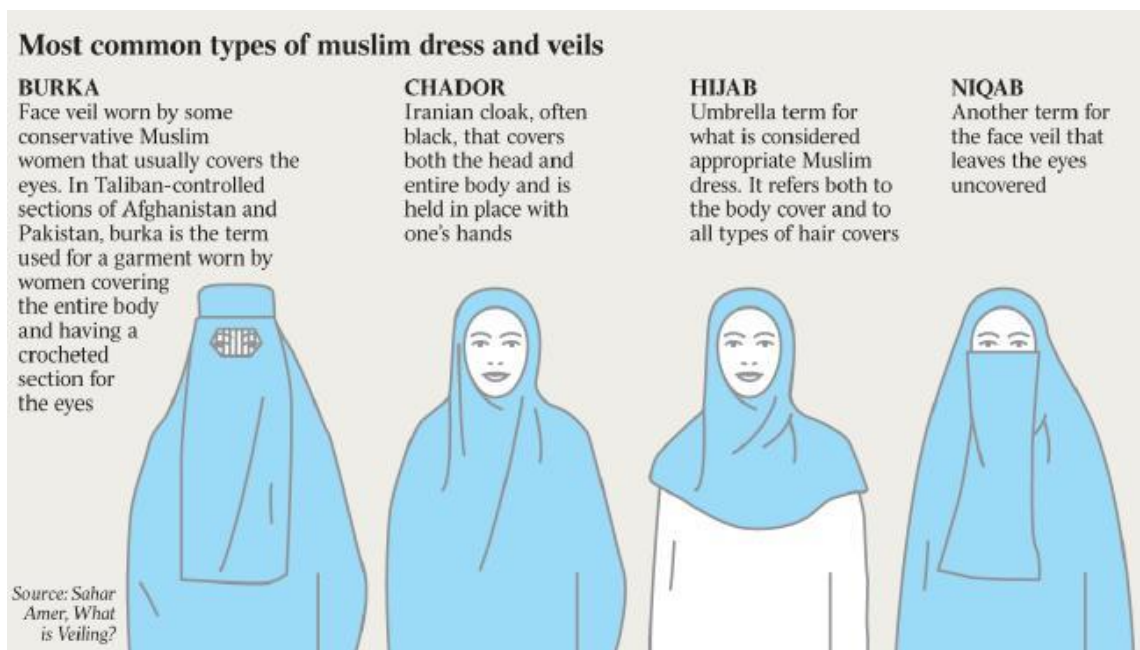
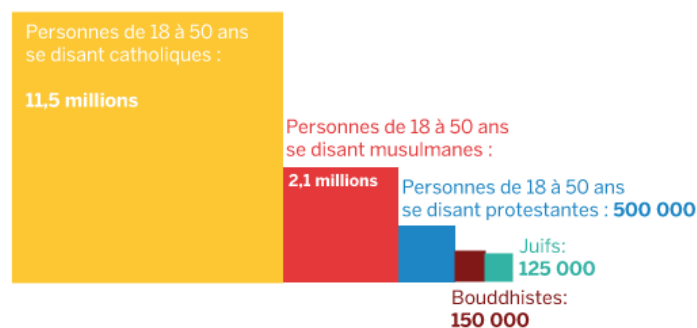


Figure 2. Types of Muslim Veils. Source: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/reasons-behind-the-veil-as-calls-grow-for-ban-on-burkas/news-story/3e72fbc3dde8bc96ae9f90ce0>



Figure 3. Political satire cartoon from unknown artist. The cartoon text is a play on words for the French motto of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. "Liberty, Equality, Take Off Your Clothes." Source: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37197701>

Combien de musulmans en France ?



Sources : Enquête "trajectoire et origine
Insee/INED, 2008

LeMonde.fr/lesdecodeurs

Figure 4. How Many Muslims Live in France? Catholic 11.5 million, Muslim 2.1 million, Protestant 500,000, Buddhist 150,000 and Jewish 125,000. Source: http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2015/01/21/que-pese-l-islam-en-france_4559859_4355770.html

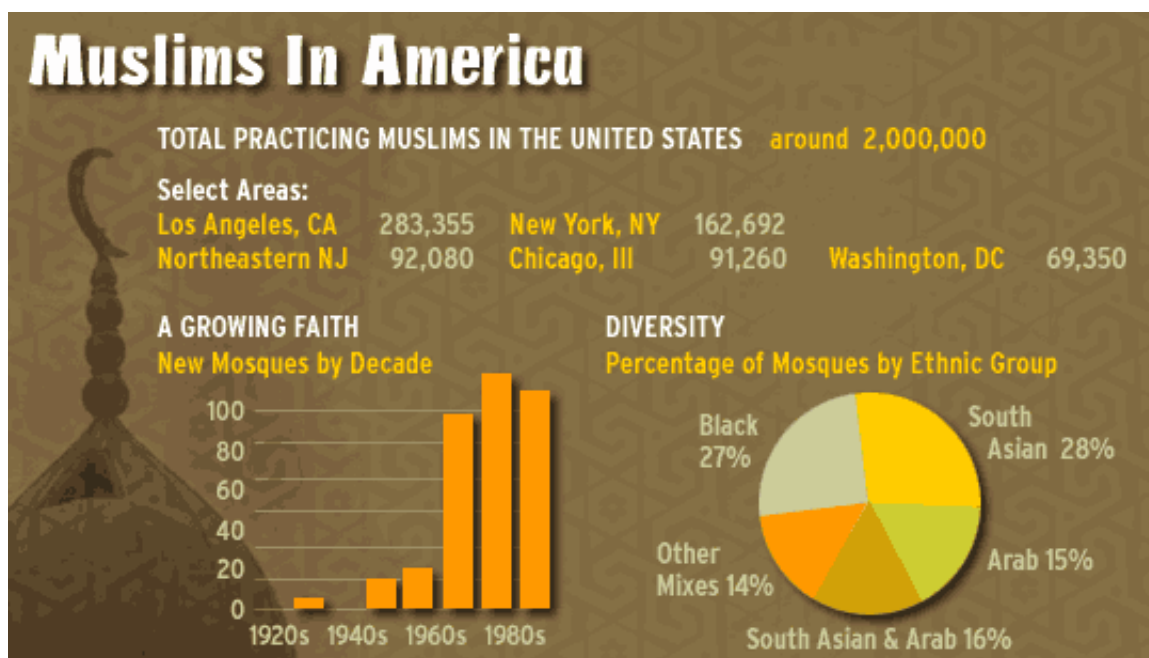


Figure 5. Statistics on Muslims in America. Source:

http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/religion/islam/framesource_inamerica.html

RESULTS

I received responses from nine survey participants. Survey participants were female and 18-years-old or above and were either currently enrolled in college as an undergraduate or graduate student, had graduated from high school or college within the last ten years or worked as a teacher or professor. All participants were practicing Muslims. Eight were born into the religion of Islam and one converted to Islam. Six currently wear a veil on a daily basis and three used to wear a veil on a daily basis but no longer do except for during prayers. At the time of the survey, three participants lived in France, one lived in Canada, one lived in Arkansas and four lived in California. The participant who lived in Canada had attended high school and college in the United States. Five of the participants were born in the country in which they resided at the time of the survey. Four of the participants were born in foreign countries that include: Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen. Eight participants wore hijab and one wore niqab. The range of age from when participants starting wearing hijab or niqab ranged from age five to twenty-two. The average age of when participants started to wear hijab or niqab was 13. All participants were either enrolled in a B.A. program or had completed a B.A. One participant had already obtained an M.A. Three participants were currently enrolled in M.A. programs. One participant was interested in obtaining an M.B.A. in the future, three participants were interested in pursuing a Ph.D. in the future and one participant already held a Ph.D. Participants identified with following ethnicities as written using their own terms: Somali, Arab-American, Arab, Syrian Arab, Afghan, North African, North African of Moroccan origin, Iranian, and French. Six participants were currently enrolled in

degree programs, one worked as a teacher, one worked as a college professor and one worked in business.

Five themes emerged from coding the survey data. Veiling as a personal choice is the first theme that became apparent. Only two survey participants were originally obligated to veil, because they came from countries that required it. However, both of these participants later chose in the United States to veil of their own accord. One of these participants has always worn the veil, because for her it is a reminder to herself of her faith. The other participant mentioned started to wear hijab in America after September 11th to show solidarity for other Muslims and Muslim women that were targets of xenophobia. All three participants from France wished that they had been able to veil before they were university-level students and very much felt it was a personal choice to show that they were proud to be Muslim by wearing hijab. However, all of them noted it certainly was not an easy choice after they started wearing hijab as adults and that it was sometimes met by negative comments and stares.

The second theme that emerged was the desire to be perceived as an individual human that can be seen by others beyond her veil. Participants responded that at least on one occasion they met someone who did not know them well and was unable to see her individually because of assumptions about Muslim women who veil. One participant responded that when she wore hijab on a daily basis, people would think that they saw her at a certain place. But in fact it was simply just other women who also wore hijab. The same participant wrote: "I think that people in general, whether they are Muslim or not, should approach women who wear hijab or niqab as individuals, without assuming

that they know anything certain about their views, personalities, family relationships, abilities, or histories. I say ‘whether they are Muslim or not’ because people with a Muslim affiliation can also hold assumptions about women who wear hijab or niqab.”

The third theme that appeared is that Muslim women are not oppressed contrary to that popular stereotype. All of the women I interviewed were highly educated, motivated and successful. They did not receive opposition from their families to pursue higher education or have careers. Rather, if any of them received negative reactions to them wearing hijab and going to school or having careers, it came from non-Muslim people that held their own stereotypes and ideas about what it meant to be a Muslim woman and where Muslim women “belonged.” One participant wrote: “There is an expression that the veil covers the head and not the brain. Therefore, women wearing hijab should not be seen as oppressed. It is the personal choice of the majority of women, and everybody’s rights and freedoms should be respected.”

The fourth theme that emerged is that schools, universities and communities need to encourage cross-cultural dialogues and promote accurate information about Islam. Many people do not have an opportunity either in France or the United States of have real and meaningful dialogues with Muslim people about the religion and customs of Islam. Rather, Islam is often perceived as foreign and strange and people rely upon stereotypes to inform their understanding about Islam and Muslim people. These misunderstandings also seem to be disproportionately placed upon Muslim women’s bodies through the frequent negative rhetoric that surrounds women who veil. One participant wrote: “Adding a personal narrative truly hits heart strings and allows a humanization of us

[women who veil]. Also, more comprehensive classes on Islam and Islamic history would be a good start.”

The fifth theme that was uncovered is that schools and universities should accommodate students and teachers/professors who veil. Most of the students that had veiled at a university-level in the United States reported that they had no major issues on campus. Nevertheless, they thought that increased cross-cultural dialog would be beneficial. Students who discussed wearing a veil in middle or high school in the United States often noted that there was moderate room for improvement in terms of cross-cultural dialog, cultural awareness and making accommodations for students during physical education classes. The American professor that I interviewed did not have any specific negative experiences to share regarding veiling on campus when she used to veil full-time. In contrast, all of the French participants wished that France would change its laws in regard to not letting middle and high school girls veil in public schools and not allowing teachers and professors to veil at public schools and universities. They view the laws as nonsensical and based in a historic Islamophobia that exists in France that is tied to racism. One participant wrote: “To promote religious tolerance, one has to understand that religion has its place in the educational system in France. At this time, it has no place at all, since it is totally outlawed. In regards to my work as a teacher in a public middle school, I have to take off my veil each time I step on the campus, because my veil is banned. I am obligated to never talk about my religion at work or with my colleagues. It is very difficult for me, because I have the impression that I am telling a kind of lie. In

order to promote religious tolerance, one has to talk about religion so that ignorance and fear can be stopped.”

DISCUSSION

Despite having a limited amount of research and teaching coming from Muslim women in France or Muslim women being very restricted in their ability to discuss Islam in academic settings, perhaps in France there are still ways to change not always what material is taught, but how it is taught to open a dialogue that reflects multiple viewpoints. Schools have a tremendous amount of influence over shaping how students view the world. If schools normally function as dominate culture microcosm to reflect the mainstream values and ideas of a region or county, maybe consciously and purposefully changing how the curriculum is taught and/or the curriculum itself, especially through reading choices can create a counter-narrative that supports an inclusive, culturally diverse environment. Students in America, and particularly K-12 students, could also most likely benefit from learning with a curriculum that is taught to reflect multiple views in regards to Islam. According to a Pew Research Center study conducted in 2010, most Americans say they know hardly anything about Islam. Among those surveyed, “55% say they do not know very much (30%) or know nothing at all (25%) about the Muslim religion and its practices; 35% say they know some about the religion, while just 9% say they know a great deal (Public Remains Conflicted Over Islam).”

In the 2010 Pew Research Center study referenced above, researchers also found that college graduates were more likely to respond that they knew at least something about Islam (Public Remains Conflicted Over Islam). However, clearly, many American and French schools appear to be lacking in providing an adequate place in the curriculum

for learning about the world's second largest religion. But how then do educators go about changing how the curriculum is taught to reflect multiple viewpoints? In her essay, "Ickity- Ackity Open Sesame: Learning about the Middle East in Images," Ozlem Sensoy writes: "To study cultural or social 'others' is no easy task. In fact, as schools become increasingly pluralistic, and the formal and societal curricula continue on relatively mainstream, Eurocentric, and white, the work of teachers becomes more challenging.

Educators often are unclear on what to look or aim for in the study of other peoples, and that can unwittingly settle on approaches and content that reinforces the exotic, quaint, or romantic view about the other. This may lead to the superficial, trivial, or stereotypical studies of cultural others, thus reinforcing problematic patterns of stereotypes (52)." In the same essay, Ozlem Sensoy presents three recommendations for educators to use in their classrooms in regards to analyzing the representation of people from non-European cultures. She recommends that teachers with their students study the accuracy of a representation, the context of a representation and the motivations for a representation (49). By incorporating these three elements into an existing curriculum, teachers can change not necessarily what materials they are teaching, but how they are teaching and how students discuss a text with new viewpoints.

In addition to Sensoy, Binaya Subedi writes about reevaluating how the traditional curriculum can be taught, so students can gain new and non-European perspectives about the material they are learning with. In her article, "Decolonizing the Curriculum for Global Perspectives," Subedi criticizes what she refers to as the "deficit approach" in teaching, which continues to paint a picture of the "Third World" as disorderly, exotic,

and violent through the inaccurate portrayal of non-European societies and cultures (628). Instead, she advocates that educators use the “decolonization approach” in their teaching. Subedi writes, “The decolonizing curriculum is invested in the politics of changing social norms so that it can work toward developing a more equitable global society (636).” She states that the decolonizing curriculum is achieved through students doing contrapuntal readings, where they explore the relationships and connections in a text in regards to questions of power and knowledge, and hence analyze political questions relating to voice and authority (634). The idea of contrapuntal readings comes from *Orientalism* by Edward Said. Said advocated that when reading colonial texts [often what Western audiences know as classics] the reader has to analyze the text from both the perspective of the colonizer and the colonized. For example, understanding the role that the sugar plantation in Antigua plays in Jane’s Austen’s book, *Mansfield Park*, when reading from the perspective of the colonized instead of simply the colonizer (Ferriter).

Sensoy and Subedi give concrete examples of ways teachers can incorporate new methods of examining traditional texts without changing the curriculum or reading list. This is helpful for all teachers at different grade levels to incorporate in order to teach to reflect multiple viewpoints. However, for teachers and schools looking to further expand the dialogue and reexamine teaching from non-European viewpoints, multicultural literature presents an additional step in reevaluating not just how schools teach, but what they teach.

Multicultural literature presents an interesting opportunity for both American and French students to learn more about the people living in the world around them that do

not fit into the dominant culture, many of whom can often be found in local neighborhoods and schools. Although the American educational system gives more control to teachers to select required reading books for classes, school libraries in France can still offer and promote a wide variety of books that discuss multicultural literature. Books are a gateway into understanding the lives and experiences of other people. In her article, "Promoting Multicultural Education through a Literature-Based Approach," Elaine Mindich Bieger explains that children cannot be sensitized to the existence of people that are not like them by only being told to like others. Attitudes are hard to change, but if educators want to break down barriers of bias, reading can be used to effect multicultural understanding (308). Mindich Bieger states that literature appeals to the heart and every time a person reads a story, he/she shares in the lives of others and the feelings of the characters instead of just being told facts (309).

Because of this unique effect that reading has to assist people to see other viewpoints, it would be useful for both French and American elementary, middle and high schools to develop a way of teaching and promoting multicultural literature that deals with Islam and Muslim characters and still fits into the national and regional education standards schools must abide by. As stated earlier, carefully selecting and promoting school library collections, might be the best way to go about this in France. However schools go about incorporating multicultural literature into learning, it is arguable that students will greatly benefit and learn to become more tolerant and knowledgeable global citizens because of it. In their article, "It's Not on the List: An Exploration of Teachers' Perspectives on Using Multicultural Literature," Joyce

Stallworth, Louel Gibbons and Leigh Fauber state, “Promoting mutual respect, self-reflection, and empathy is an important goal as well, and multicultural literature can serve as a mirror of students’ own cultures and a lens through which they can view the cultures of others (479).”

Stallworth, Gibbons and Fauber continue on in their article to analyze the evolving nature of the “the classics.” They pose the question: what titles belong in the canon? Based on a study they did, their results showed that American teachers’ idea of what constituted “a classic novel” that should be read in school changed over time (483). A 1932 list of top ten books listed titles such as *Beowulf* and *The Iliad*. Whereas, a 1996 list had removed those titles and instead listed books such as *To Kill A Mocking Bird* and *The Great Gatsby* (483). Which books make up the canon of a country’s literature clearly change over time, and thus there is room for updated reading that has a multicultural lens. However, this is a little easier to incorporate in the American educational system, where educational changes and choices are set up to take place on a more local level. French education is completely standardized and nationalized and therefore tends to be more unbending in implementing curriculum changes. However, the discussion about changing the canon taught in schools is starting to happen in France. The most famous example of this might be when former French President Nicolas Sarkozy very openly criticized the 17th century classic novel, *The Princess of Clèves*, which is required reading in French schools and questions about this text appear on the cultural knowledge exam required to become a public functionary (Zerofsky). This shift in thinking about classic literature, may broaden the ability for teachers to explicitly teach with multicultural materials in the

future in France, but in the meantime, school library collections are a good way to ensure students have access to books on multicultural topics.

However, what quality multicultural texts exist on Islam in both French and English for teachers and schools to use? Since there was no universal and synthesized data on this topic, I conducted my own research and compiled my own annotated bibliography and annotated webliography that are available to reference in Appendix D. I broke my search up into four categories for the bibliography: 1) Children's Books on Islam in English or with Positive Portrayals of Stories about Muslim People, 2) Young Adult Books on Islam in English or with Positive Portrayals of Stories about Muslim People, 3) Children's Books on Islam in French or with Positive Portrayals of Stories about Muslim People, and 4) Young Adult Books on Islam in French or with Positive Portrayals of Stories about Muslim People. Some titles fit in both the young adult and children's categories that are non-fiction books that might be acceptable for upper elementary school and secondary school. Some books appear on both the English and French lists and are simply a translation. The books are written by a mixture of Muslim and non-Muslim authors whose nationalities range from American, to English, to French. The books were selected through Amazon.com and Amazon.fr searches and then by reading text summaries and reviews or through recommended reading lists compiled by the Bibliothèque nationale de France, *The School Library Journal*, and the American Library Association on the topic of books for young adults and children on Islam. I believe this bibliography I made can serve as a valuable resource for educators to use to help expand students' knowledge of Islam, especially in regards to dispelling the

stereotypes about Muslim women that are frequently circulated in Western society. A note on the word “quality literature,” Stallworth, Gibbons and Fauber state, “Caution should be taken in the selection process of multicultural works. Some texts considered multicultural contain racial stereotypes (487).” With this in mind, I carefully chose the books in the bibliography in Appendix D to reflect what I believe are both positive, accurate and authentic images of Islam and Muslim people and do not simply just contain Muslim characters that perpetuate stereotypes.

My own analysis of the books I found for children and young adults that have accurate and positive portrayals of Islam or Muslim characters revealed that there were limited resources in this category in both English and French. There appears to be a serious need for more books written for elementary school and secondary school readers to be published in both languages that address the topic of Islam and include realistic depictions of Muslim people. It is rather curious that so few texts in this genre exist, when there is a plethora (at least in English) of accurate and informative texts on Islam for adults. If a junior version of a book like, *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam* by John Esposito were to be published in multiple languages, it would be a tremendous resource for grade school teachers to help students distinguish myth from fact about Islam and Muslim people. Currently, there are some good books younger students can read about Islam and Muslim people (in both English and French), but there are not an abundance and there is nothing quite like Esposito’s book written for adults, which does such an excellent job of unraveling all the stereotypes and confusion that often surround the religion of Islam and its adherents.

CONCLUSIONS, SUMMARY OR RECOMMENDATIONS

Both the United States and France have similar problems with demonizing Muslim women. In the case of the United States, the vilification of veiled Muslim women tends to be transmitted on a more subtle social level rather than a blatant policy level, but nevertheless it persists. It continues through negative looks, comments and gestures Muslim American women are confronted with. One woman that I interviewed said that when she wore hijab people would always move away from her on the subway and not want to sit next to her. She said there was never any explicit reason given for this, but when she later stopped wearing hijab full-time, she found that people would no longer move away from her and would want to sit by her.

In terms of comparing Muslim girls and women in French and American educational institutions, it appears that more women in American schools tend to have more positive experiences because of the difference in interpretation of religious freedom and less rigid curriculum mandates. However, because the educational systems of each country function so differently, it is hard to draw a black and white comparison. To a degree it is essentially comparing apples and oranges.

However, what is very concrete are the feelings the women I interviewed from both countries expressed. What is clear from conversations, observations and surveys, is that Muslim women who veil in both countries have a desire to be viewed as individual human beings that should be judged on their own personal merits and not pre-judged by their religion or how they dress. Through research that came from France and the U.S. it

was apparent that women who veiled were stereotyped and lumped together automatically. This is the very root of the veiling bans in France. The French government has made an assumption that women who veil are inherently the same and inherently a threat to French society and culture. This is also the case in the United States as evidenced through stories like the woman from Arkansas who stated that whenever people saw a veiled woman in the supermarket they just assumed it was her. The grocery store instance is more subtle on the surface, but both examples speak to the same issue that Muslim women who veil are seen as cultural symbols themselves, lacking personal identity. The dominant narrative in both countries somehow paints veiled Muslim women as all being the same in both the U.S. and France and as being devoid of agency.

In *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood writes, “Drawing on work in the humanities and social sciences since the 1970s that has focused on operations of human agency within structures of subordination, feminists have sought to understand how women resist the dominant male order by subverting the hegemonic meaning of cultural practices and redeploying them for their ‘own interests and agendas.’ A central questions explored within this scholarship has been: how do women contribute to reproducing their own domination, and how do they resist or subvert it (6)?”

The actions of all the women that I surveyed represent a subversion of both dominant male order and colonial ideas. These women who are educated and independent are consciously choosing on their own how they want to express their religion and cultures. They are exercising their own agency through their choice to veil. I have often heard the bizarre phrase that veiled women do not need to be veiled in public, but can do

what they like in private. That goes against the reason these women veil. It is to create a level of privacy for themselves in the public sphere, while at the same time making a very conscious, public statement that they are Muslim and they are confident and proud of that fact. Being Muslim does not strip them of their personal identities. Rather, it challenges the reductivist notion that women can only have one layer of identity. These women are saying that they can be both an individual and a Muslim at the same time.

Mahmood again writes, “When the focus on locating women’s agency first emerged, it played a crucial role in complicating and expanding debates about gender in non-Western societies beyond the simplistic registers of submission and patriarchy. In particular, the focus on women’s agency provided a crucial corrective to scholarship on the Middle East that for decades had portrayed Arab and Muslim women as passive and submissive beings shackled by structures of male authority (6).”

What schools and educational institutions must do is promote more cross-cultural dialog and a larger representation of accurate depictions of Muslim women. Accurate depictions do not mean that negative images are just replaced number for number with positive ones to socially indoctrinate people into just a different but manipulated way of thinking. Rather, it means that a diverse set of true images and portrayals are accessible and shared, so that Muslim women who veil can be seen beyond the veil and judged on their own actions and choices. This creates a type of counter-narrative to combat the propaganda against Muslim that is so prevalent in Western society today. To contribute to this counter-narrative, educational institutions need to work towards having more open conversations and presenting a balanced amount of portrayals of veiled Muslim women

as to eliminate not only stereotypes but also tokenism. French and American societies must start looking at Muslim women who veil as entire individuals that should not be defined by only one aspect of their identity.

To sum up this thought, in her article, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Others,” Lila Abu-Lughod writes: “Again, when I talk about accepting difference, I am not implying that we should resign ourselves to being cultural relativists who respect whatever goes on elsewhere as ‘just their culture,’ I have already discussed the dangers of ‘cultural’ explanations; ‘their’ cultures are just as much part of history and an interconnected world as ours are. What I am advocating is the hard work involved in recognizing and respecting differences—precisely as products of different histories, as expressions of different circumstances, and as manifestations of differently structured desires. We may want justice for women, but can we accept cultures, who do not accept that being feminist means being Western, will be under pressure to choose, just as we are: Are you with us or against us (787-788)?”

Based upon what Abu-Lughod is saying: how can educational institutions work towards having more open conversations and presenting a balanced amount of portrayals of veiled Muslim women? I argue like Binaya Subedi that the curriculum should be decolonized by a process where students do contrapuntal readings to explore the relationships and connections in a text in regards to questions of power and knowledge, and hence analyze political questions relating to voice and authority. Although this seems like a highly advanced skill, it can be introduced to students starting in elementary school just through the books that are chosen by a teacher to read and how the class discussions

around the readings are structured. However, this requires a fairly flexible curriculum to achieve its maximum potential. This does not mean that all “classic books” need to disappear from class reading lists, but rather that class reading lists should be revised on a regular basis to reflect a balance between the “classics” and the diverse nature of the United States and France and their school communities. The United States generally has more school curriculum flexibility than in France, but that does not mean teachers are taking full advantage of it. Creating relevant reading lists that address cultural differences and thoughtful ways of discussing reading within that framework needs to be a priority for all school in the United States. Furthermore, I argue that the French national educational system in a time when so many other areas are changing in schools (e.g. technology, etc.) needs to review its reading lists and reading discussion questions to reflect the diversity of the students now in French schools.

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APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

Burqa: - A loose enveloping garment that covers the face and body and is worn in public by certain Muslim women. *

Hijab: - The traditional covering for the hair and neck that is worn by Muslim women from the Arabic word that means screen. *

Jilbab: - A piece of clothing worn by Muslim women that covers their whole body but not their hands, feet, or head. **

Niqab: - A veil for covering the hair and face except for the eyes that is worn by some Muslim women. *

Ruh: - Spirit, essence. ***

Sura: - Chapter of the Koran. ***

Zawj (pl. azwaj) –Mate, spouse, one part of a pair. ***

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APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONS AND IRB APPROVAL



MEMORANDUM

Date: 3/27/2017

To: Mary L. Scoggin
Katherine Ruprecht

From: Susan Brater
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

IRB #: IRB 15-169

Subject: A Qualitative and Comparative Exploration of Veiled Muslim Women's Experiences in Educational Institutions in France and the United States

Thank you for submitting your proposal to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research. After reviewing your renewal request, determining that you have no unanticipated problems or adverse events, and no changes or modifications to the approved proposal, I am able to extend the Exempt status of your proposal.

The Exempt designation of this proposal will expire on **3/26/2018**. By Federal Regulations, all research related to this protocol must stop on the expiration date and the IRB cannot extend a protocol that is past the expiration date. In order to prevent any interruption in your research, please submit a renewal application in time for the IRB to process, review, and extend the Exempt designation (at least one month).

Important Notes:

- Any alterations to your research plan must be reviewed and designated as Exempt by the IRB prior to implementation.
 - Change to survey questions
 - Number of subjects
 - Location of data collection,
 - Any other pertinent information
- If Exempt designation is not extended prior to the expiration date, investigators must stop all research related to this proposal.
- Any adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately to the IRB (irb@humboldt.edu).

cc: Faculty Adviser (if applicable)
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

The California State University

Bakersfield • Channel Islands • Chico • Dominguez Hills • East Bay • Fresno • Fullerton • Humboldt • Long Beach • Los Angeles • Maritime Academy • Monterey Bay
• Northridge • Pomona • Sacramento • San Bernardino • San Diego • San Francisco • San Jose • San Luis Obispo • San Marcos • Sonoma • Stanislaus

Survey/Interview Questions

- 1) What is your age?
- 2) Where do you live?
- 3) Where were you born?
- 4) Where did you spend the majority of your childhood and adolescence? Please list multiple cities, if applicable.
- 5) What ethnicity do you identify with?
- 6) What is your citizenship?
- 7) Are you currently a student or teacher/professor? Where, if applicable? What degree are you studying for, if applicable?
- 8) What is the highest academic degree you have obtained?
- 9) Would you like to obtain any other degrees? Please specify if your response is yes.
- 10) What was your average annual income for 2015? Please specify in USD or Euro.
- 11) Do you currently wear a veil? Please specify the type (e.g. hijab, niqab, burqa, etc.). Feel free to include descriptive details.
- 12) If you no longer wear a veil, but did before when was this and why did you stop?
- 13) When did you start wearing a veil and why?
- 14) How is veiling for you personally related to your relationship with your religion?
- 15) Were you born into the religion of Islam or did you convert?
- 16) What is it like wearing a veil in the United States or France? Please pick applicable country.

17) Have you ever faced any instances of discrimination in an educational environment because you wore a veil? Please describe the circumstances if applicable.

18) What would you like non-Muslim people to know about wearing a veil?

19) Have you been at an educational institution that does a good job of promoting religious tolerance for women who veil? If so, what steps did the institution take to ensure this?

20) What ideas do you have for increasing religious tolerance, especially for Muslim women who veil at educational institutions?

21) Do you have anything else you would like to add?

22) Are you willing to be contacted for any follow-up questions? If so, please list your contact information.

APPENDIX C: STASI COMMISSION REPORT IN ENGLISH AND HIGHLIGHTS OF
THE FRENCH PARLIAMENTARY REPORT ON WEARING THE FULL VEIL

Commission Report in English: <https://www.wshein.com/media/samples/12876.pdf>

Highlights of the French Parliamentary Report on Wearing the Full Veil:
<https://www.loc.gov/law/help/france-veil.php>

APPENDIX D: BIBLIOGRAPHY OF TEACHING RESOURCES AND CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG ADULT BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR BOOKS ON ISLAM

This webliography presents a list of sites that students and teachers can use to learn more accurate information about Islam in both French and English. There were more sites available in English than in French and some English sites specifically focused on critically analyzing stereotypes of Muslim women. The French sites were more general.

"Muslim Women Beyond the Stereotypes." Muslim Women Beyond the Stereotypes. Islamic Networks Group (ING), n.d. Web. 01 May 2017. <[https://ing.org/muslim-women-beyond-the-stereotypes/?gclid](https://ing.org/muslim-women-beyond-the-stereotypes/?gclid=)>.

This is a great resource for teachers on seven lessons that can be used in the classroom at different grade levels to truly understand the diversity of Muslim women, what the Koran says about women and why some women veil and others do not. Users must register to download the lessons, but they are otherwise free for non-commercial use.

"Women in Islam." PBS LearningMedia. PBS, n.d. Web. 01 May 2017. <https://ca.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/islam08.socst.world.glob.lpwomen/women-in-islam/#.WQo2UFPys_U>.

This lesson published by PBS focuses on teaching students what the daily experiences are like of Muslim American women. It gives a general background on the religion of Islam to go with the lesson and highlights the complex nature of being A Muslim woman in the U.S.

"Debunking Stereotypes About Muslims and Islam." Debunking Stereotypes About Muslims and Islam | Teaching Tolerance - Diversity, Equity and Justice. Teaching Tolerance: A Project of The Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d. Web. 01 May 2017. <<http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/debunking-stereotypes-about-muslims-and-islam>>.

This webpage is produced by the Teaching Tolerance Project that was created by the Southern Poverty Law Center. It provides multiple lessons and handouts for students to learn the real facts about Islam and addresses common stereotypes about Islam and Muslims that are not true.

"Expansion of the Early Islamic Empire." Stanford History Education Group. Stanford University, n.d. Web. 01 May 2017. <<https://sheg.stanford.edu/expansion-islamic-empire>>.

This website that is sponsored by Stanford University has multiple lessons and handouts teachers can download to teach students about the history of Islam and the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

"ReOrienting the Veil." Center for European Studies. University of North Carolina, n.d. Web. 01 May 2017. <<http://veil.unc.edu/>>.

This website that is sponsored by UNC has several interactive pages that compares the Islamic veil around the world and compares it to other religions. Students can look at it on their own and learn from it or teachers can easily create a classroom activity to go with the website. The text would be easy to understand for most students in 6th grade and up and there are many photographs.

"Teaching Resources." Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies. UNC-Duke University, n.d. Web. 01 May 2017. <<http://ncmideast.org/outreach/teaching/>>.

This website has dozens of quality resources for middle and high school teachers for lesson plans on Islam and the Middle East. History, Art or English teachers can easily find interdisciplinary teaching materials and lessons to use in their classrooms that relate to the topics of Islam or the Middle East.

"Textes Et Documents Pour La Classe." Institut Du Monde Arabe, n.d. Web. 01 May 2017. <<https://www.reseau-canope.fr/tdc/tous-les-numeros/lislam/videos/article/sciences-arts-et-islam-institut-du-monde-arabe.html>>.

This website provides a video and other materials available on the history of science and art in the Islamic Empire in French that are provided by the Arab World Institute located in Paris.

"Religion." Resources Et Collections. Institut Du Monde Arabe, 12 July 2016. Web. 01 May 2017. <<https://www.imarabe.org/fr/decouvrir-le-monde-arabe/religion>>.

The Arab World Institute is the premier and one of the few establishments in France that provides regular research and exhibitions on the Arab and Muslim world. This webpage gives a simple but accurate overview of Islam in French.

This bibliography outlines the children's and young adult books previously referenced that positively and accurately portray Islam and Muslims.

Children's Books on Islam in English or with Positive Portrayals of Stories about Muslim People:

Khan, Hena, and Mehrdokht Amini. *Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns: A Muslim Book of Colors*. San Francisco, CA.: Chronicle, 2015. Print.

This picture book illustrates Muslim customs, clothing and religious tenets and connects them to a color used throughout each scene. Arabic terms are embedded into the story and the Islamic pillar of zakat, giving to charity is emphasized in the story.

Khan, Hena, Margret Rey, H. A. Rey, and Mary O'Keefe Young. *It's Ramadan, Curious George*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016. Print.

This book explains the story of Ramadan to readers who otherwise might be familiar with other religious holidays such as Christmas or Hanukah, but not Ramadan. This is done by using the familiar Curious George monkey cartoon that many young readers may already be familiar with.

Rahim, Yasmeen, and Omar Burgess. *Hassan and Aneesa Go to Masjid*. Markfield, Leicestershire, United Kingdom: Islamic Foundation, 2016. Print.

This book follows the story of a little girl and boy going to a mosque to pray. It explains all the different parts of the mosque and what Muslims do there.

Whitman, Sylvia, and Sue Williams. *Under the Ramadan Moon*. New York, NY: AV2 by Weigl, 2013. Print.

This book tells the story of fasting during the holy month of Ramadan through beautiful images and mostly poems. The book has an introductory page parents or teachers can read first with children and discuss to contextualize what Ramadan is, why Muslims observe it and what happens during that month.

Khan, Rukhsana, and Patty Gallinger. *Muslim Child: Understanding Islam through Stories and Poems*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman, 2002. Print.

This collection of stories and poems introduce children to Islam and practices other children might adhere to who are Muslim. One example is a story in the book about a girl who buys candy, but cannot eat it because it has pork by-product in it.

1001 Inventions & Awesome Facts from Muslim Civilization. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Kids, 2013. Print.

This book is good for both elementary and middle school students. It gives a non-fiction overview of the accomplishments and history of Islamic Empires during the Middle Ages.

Barnard, Bryn. *The Genius of Islam How Muslims Made the Modern World*. Random House Children's, 2013. Print.

This book is good for both elementary and middle school students and covers the scientific and cultural achievements of Muslim people during the Islamic Empires of the Middle Ages. The author references that many things Americans use today come from the Islamic Empires, such as Arabic numerals.

Mair, J. Samia, and Craigh Howarth. *Amira's Totally Chocolate World*. Markfield: Islamic Foundation, 2010. Print.

This is the story about a little girl named Amira that prays every night to God that he will turn the world into chocolate, because she loves it so much. One day she wakes up to a chocolate world, but then she realizes that God actually knows best and the world is better the way he made it. The book focuses on a common desire any child might have, but weaves in ideas about Islam and highlights that Muslims are like people of other faiths in regards to their desires.

Gilani-Williams, Fawzia, and Shireen Adams. *Cinderella: An Islamic Tale*. Markfield, Leicestershire: Islamic Foundation, 2010. Print.

There are hundreds of cultural variations of the classic Cinderella story. This version highlights Islamic values of faith, goodness and prayer that are rewarded in the end.

Abouraya, Karen Leggett., and L. C. Wheatley. *Malala Yousafzai: Warrior with Words*. Great Neck, NY: StarWalk KidsMedia, 2014. Print.

This an elementary school level biography of the story of the young Pakistani girl named Malala Yousafzai who stood up to the Taliban in order to go to school. She is an example of Muslim girls and women that believe in God, but reject fundamentalist interpretations of Islam.

Khan, Hena, and Julie Paschkis. *Night of the Moon: A Muslim Holiday Story*. San Francisco: Chronicle, 2008. Print.

This book tells the story of a young Pakistani-American girl celebrating Ramadan and Eid. The book has an Arabic words glossary and beautiful illustrations.

Mobin-Uddin, Asma, and Barbara Kiwak. *My Name Is Bilal*. Honesdale, Pa: Boyds Mills, 2005. Print.

This book highlights the story of two Muslim children that move to a new school. As the only Muslim children at their new school, they are bullied and must reconcile the intersecting identities they hold of being Muslim and American.

Winter, Jeanette. *The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2005. Print.

This children's book is based on the true story of a female librarian in Iraq that preserves her library as a place to read, study and be safe even during the war. She cites a

quote from the Koran to support why Muslims should read and the library should stay open.

Ruelle, Karen Gray, and Deborah Durland, DeSaix. *The Grand Mosque of Paris: A Story of How Muslims Rescued Jews during the Holocaust*. New York: Holiday House, 2009. Print.

This true story is retold in a children's book. It follows the history of Jews trying to escape the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied France that sought refuge in the Grand Mosque of Paris.

Robert, Na'ima Bint, and Valentina Cavallini. *Going to Mecca*. London: Frances Lincoln Children's, 2013. Print.

This story is about an English Muslim family that participates in the hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca). The story describes the journey and its role as one of the five pillars of Islam with beautiful illustrations and text.

Wilkinson, Philip. *Islam / DK Eyewitness Guides*. New York: Dorling Kindersley Limited (DK), 2002. Print.

This is a wonderful non-fiction book that describes the history, religious beliefs and cultures of Islam. It is appropriate for both elementary and middle school students. It has nice photographs that accompany informational text.

Dicker, Katie. *I Belong to the Muslim Faith*. London: Wayland, 2014. Print.

This book allows young students to learn about followers of the Muslim faith who are their own age. It is narrated from a child's perspective and includes the customs, beliefs and practices of Islam.

Young Adult Books on Islam in English or with Positive Portrayals of Stories about Muslim People:

Aslan, Reza. *No God but God: The Origins and Evolution of Islam*. New York: Delacorte, 2011. Print.

This is a youth edition of Aslan's book, *No God But God*. Aslan is a well-known comparative religions scholar and goes through the history and beliefs of Islam in detail in this book, but in a length and style that is appropriate for most students in 7th grade and up. It is available only as an e-book now.

Abdel-Fattah, Randa. *Does My Head Look Big in This?* Scholastic, 2008. Print.

This is a young adult novel about a teenage girl that decides to start wearing hijab. The book covers the challenges she faces in a coming-of-age story with a Muslim-American twist.

Yousafzai, Malala, and Patricia McCormick. *I Am Malala: How One Girl Stood up for Education and Changed the World*. New York: Little, Brown, 2016. Print.

This is the true story of Malala Yousafzai, a very brave teenage girl that stood up to the Taliban in order to go to school. Since being attacked by the Taliban and undergoing a major process of recovery, Malala has become an international advocate for girl's education and has won a Nobel Prize. This edition is aimed at middle and high school readers.

Sharif, Medeia. *Bestest Ramadan Ever*. Woodbury, MN: Flux, 2011. Print.

This young adult novel provides a humorous look at the ups and downs of fasting for Ramadan from a teenage point of view. The book is written in a modern way so that most teenagers could relate to a lot of the subject matter, even if they are not Muslim.

Budhos, Marina. *Ask Me No Questions*. New York: Atheneum for Young Readers, 2007. Print.

This young adult novel follows the story of a 14-year-old girl and her family living in New York City on expired visas during the 9/11 attacks. Suddenly, their lives change because they are Muslims.

Children's Books on Islam in French or with Positive Portrayals of Stories about Muslim People:

Wilkinson, Philip, Batul Salazar, and Steve Teague. *Histoire De L'Islam*. Paris: Gallimard Jeunesse, 2010. Print.

Translation of *History of Islam*, previously reference in the bibliography.

Frier, Raphaele, and Aurelia Fronty. *Malala: Pour Le Droit Des Filles A L'Education*. Voisins-Le-Bretonneux, France: Rue Du Monde, 2015. Print.

This book details the events and bravery of Malala Yousafzai's life in French. It is has nice illustrations for primary school readers to go with the text.

Ruelle, Karen Gray, Deborah Durland. DeSaix, and Monique Briend-Walker. *La Grande Mosquée De Paris: Comment Les Musulmans Ont Sauvé Des Juifs De La Shoah*. Paris: Salvator, 2010. Print.

French version of *The Grand Mosque of Paris: A Story of How Muslims Rescued Jews During the Holocaust*, previously referenced in the bibliography.

Young Adult Books on Islam in French or with Positive Portrayals of Stories about Muslim People:

Yousafzai, Malala, Patricia McCormik, and Michel Laporte. *Moi, Malala: En Luttant Pour L'Education, Elle a Changé Le Monde*. Paris: Hachette, 2014. Print.

French translation of *I Am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World*, previously referenced in bibliography.

Seddik, Youssef, and Olivier Tallec. *Sur Les Traces Des Arabes Et De L'islam*. Paris: Gallimard-jeunesse, 2007. Print.

This book provides a detailed overview of the Islamic and Arabic Empires and their achievements.

Jelloun, Tahar Ben. *L'islam Expliqué Aux Enfants: Et A Leurs Parents*. Paris: Le Seuil, 2012. Print.

This book provides an insightful overview of Islam for children and their parents, as the title suggests.

Chebel, Malek. *L'islam Pour Les Nuls Juniors*. Paris: First, 2011. Print.

This is part of the French "For Dummies" series and gives a basic overview of Islam in a youth edition.

Chambaz, Bernard, and Barroux. *Je M'appelle Pas Ben Laden!* Voisins-le-Bretonneux: Rue Du Monde, 2011. Print.

This book is a French young adult novel about two boys living in America after the 9/11 attacks who are close friends. One of the boys is Muslim and the other is Christian. The book follows their friendship amidst the political chaos following the attacks.

Desbordes, Astrid. *Des Religions Dans L'histoire: Bouddhisme, Judaïsme, Christianisme, Islam, Vodou*. Paris: Autrement, 2003. Print.

This book provides an objective overview of the history of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Voodoo. It is aimed at teenage readers.