

Western Treatment of the Muslim Veil:

French and American Sociopolitical Constructions of Hijab

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Spring 2011

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Introduction

I could feel their stares as I swiftly navigated the crowded streets on my way to class. With each step, I made a careful effort to exude self-assurance, standing as tall as I could stretch myself and maintaining a forward-focused gaze through my movie star sunglasses, to prevent inadvertent eye contact. “I know where I’m going, I don’t need any help, and I am confident enough without your compliments, come-ons, and catcalls,” I tried to tell them with my body language. It took two months of living in Egypt for me to realize that no matter how much poise I projected or disregard I feigned, my bright blonde hair would instigate incessant street harassment wherever I walked in Cairo. As an unveiled woman in Egypt, I was a minority.

I wondered how different my daily expeditions into the Cairean chaos would be if I made a greater effort to blend in with a headscarf or even completely disguise myself with a burqa or niqab, but I never bothered to find out. In part, I felt it would be disrespectful to pretend I was Muslim by donning a hijab or other traditional Islamic clothing. My attitude towards hijab was also colored by my American upbringing, and while I respected Muslim women who chose to veil, I found it difficult to disassociate the veil from the gender inequality I witnessed and experienced in Egypt. It was as though I was asserting my freedom by not veiling, convincing myself I was strong enough to face sexism without relying on any superficial protection a hijab might provide. Lastly, I was reluctant to wear hijab for practical reasons because, unlike Egyptian women, I was not accustomed to the oppressive heat; wearing conservative Western clothing was enough of a burden. I often pitied hijabis for such reasons, unable to imagine enduring hundred-degree weather wearing a tightly wrapped headscarf, or having to lift the cloth of a niqab in order to take a bite of food at a restaurant.

As open-minded and immune to stereotyping as I believed myself to be, I couldn't help but feel initially more comfortable around non-veiled Egyptian women. Whenever I met someone new, I was always relieved when their hair was uncovered, like mine. I assumed we must have more in common besides hair, that the absence of a veil meant she identified more with Western ideals. I also felt just slightly uncomfortable around veils, even if I was close to the women who wore them. Next to a veil, I felt exposed, as if compared to a hijabi not only was I less modest, but I was less moral. A veil had the power to make me feel both liberated and inferior in comparison.

As my time in Egypt passed, I grew increasingly more accustomed to everything that had seemed so starkly different to me upon my arrival. I could barely smell the pollution in the air or the chlorine in the water, or hear the catcalls on the street or the traffic that once kept me awake at night. Women in hijabs were just women. However, the intrigue of this pervasive article of clothing never really diminished for me. I would admire the elaborate hijab styles of teenage girls in my neighborhood, some so garish they seemed to defeat the purpose of ensuring modesty. I appreciated how perfectly my Arabic professor's hijab matched the rest of her outfit each day, and it was fun to see my friend Nour all dolled up for her brother's wedding, wearing elaborate makeup and a shiny gold hijab. I saw how fun, stylish, and beautifying hijabs could be. There was a whole culture surrounding them, and it wasn't one necessarily marked by oppression and radicalism, as has the prevalent impression in the West. I felt like I was like living in a fashion show.

When I knew I was about to meet an Egyptian woman, I would wonder whether she covered or not. My architecture and Egyptology professors did not, and neither did the upper class American University of Cairo students I had met. I disassociated the hijab with wealthy,

educated women, and was then surprised when a prominent Islamic feminist came to speak at my school wearing a hijab, and when I met my parliamentarian professor's wife and daughter, a doctor, wearing hijabs. I was also surprised when my friend's fourteen-year-old sister, whose beautiful long waves I had admired when we met, had one day decided to don a hijab because all of her friends did. Conversely, another friend's mother had gone her whole life with her hair uncovered, until when, in her 50s, she grew more spiritual and decided to wear a hijab as an expression of her increased devotion. It became clear to me that the hijab was important to many Muslim women, for many reasons, and it was simply not important to others.

A month after I left Egypt, I embarked on another semester abroad, this time in France. I looked forward to an experience I knew would be completely different from the one I had just lived in Egypt. It was a relief knowing I was headed somewhere there would be less of a language barrier, where I could wear whatever I wanted, and that shared the Western values and amenities I was accustomed to. The differences between the two countries were even starker than I had anticipated, and they were not all welcome. During my time there, not a day passed without a reminder of how incredibly opposite France is from Egypt. I am fairly certain the only thing the two cultures have in common is a smoking addiction.

I developed a new appreciation for certain aspects of Egyptian culture that had bothered me while I was immersed in them, such as its sexually repressive nature. In Cairo, my female friends and I would receive judgmental glares from the doormen after visiting our male friends, who sometimes weren't allowed past the doormen to visit me. By holding hands with a member of the opposite sex who is not a spouse or fiancé, one risks being fined for public indecency. In France, however, I quickly grew bothered, at times appalled, by the shameless nudity of posters for erotic magazines at newspaper stands, men exposing themselves urinating when I went

running in the park, and couples engaging in passionate public displays of affection on the metro, on park benches, and just about everywhere else.

In addition to being sexually unabashed, the French are also known for strict secularism and their controversial treatment of Arab immigrants. While I was in France, a law was passed that prohibited the “dissimulation du visage,” or concealment of the face, in public spaces. Like the 2004 ban on wearing ostentatious religious symbols in public schools, it was accompanied by a debate that focused on Islamic dress far more than any non-Islamic religious symbols.¹ It was so strange to go from one country, where I was surrounded by the veil and had gained an understanding of its meanings and importance, to another country, where it was being attacked. I felt protective of the veil and of women’s right to express their religion and dress however they wish, I was upset by the lack of tolerance and understanding displayed by lawmakers, and I simply could not get passed the apparent connection between the headscarf debate and the veil of Islamophobia many French seemed to be wearing.

My experiences compelled me to further explore the culture clash over the hijab. Clearly the veil represented very different ideas to the French than it did to Egyptians, and I wanted to understand the roots and implications of these contrasting views. What follows is an examination of French and American attitudes toward the hijab as demonstrated through policies and media representations. Analysis reveals that the veil is used as a political tool in both countries. In the United states it is used to both provide legitimacy to American policies in the Middle East, as well as to help repair relations with Muslim countries and Muslim Americans. In France it is used to promote a resolute construction of French identity which revolves around laic values.

¹ Wing, Adrien Katherine and Monica Nigh Smith. “Critical Race Feminism Lifts the Veil?: Muslim Women, France, and the Headscarf Ban.” The University of Iowa College of Law. June 2008.

Veils have been worn by people of different religions, ethnicities, genders, and ages for a multitude of diverse reasons throughout history. Today still, veils of various styles and purposes are found throughout the world. Head-coverings have been a part of Christian and Jewish traditions for centuries; the Catholic nun's habit, the Hasidic woman's *tikl*, even the yarmulke, are all types of veil. Headscarves are commonly seen in South Asian women's fashion, such as part of the sari. In Mali, Tuareg men wear head-coverings that only reveal their eyes. Sikh men often wear turbans. Veils are an integral tradition at weddings around the world, and were required for women attending Catholic mass for much of the twentieth century.² The veil is pervasive across cultures, and yet an inordinate amount of attention is given to the Muslim veil. It has become a polarizing force, "a locus for the struggle between Islam and the West," representative of incongruous values, political ambitions, and feminist ideals.³

This paper will address attitudes towards and uses of hijab in the United States and France. The term "hijab" alone and the word "veil" refer to Islamic dress in general, encompassing all styles. When qualified, as in "a hijab," "the hijab" or "hijabs," this refers to the traditional scarf covering a woman's hair, ears, and neck. A hijabi is a woman who wears a hijab. A niqab is a piece of cloth worn over the face that leaves only a woman's eyes unhidden. Niqabs are often worn with two loose outer garments, called the jilbab and the khimar. A niqabi is a woman who wears a niqab. A burqa covers a woman's entire body and face, with a screen covering her eyes that she can see through, but others cannot⁴

For centuries, veiled Muslim women have been represented as oppressed in the West, and the veil has been a symbol of sexism, objectification of women, backwardness, and recently,

² Heath, Jennifer. *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*. University of California Press. Berkeley, California. 2008.

³ Ibid, p. 1

⁴ Ali, Lorraine. "Behind the Veil." *The New York Times*, Fashion and Style. June 11, 2010.

extremism and fundamentalism.⁵ In some places across the Middle East, this oppression of women was and still is very real. In some societies, patriarchal political and social structures still prevail. Women have been discouraged or prevented from obtaining jobs, or even going out in public alone. They endure sexual harassment, economic inequality, and limited freedoms and educational and professional opportunities. Women have been given inhumane punishments for minor crimes and suffered an atrocious array of injustices. Some of these cruelties are related to the veil, from forced veiling in Iran to the murders of unveiled women in Algeria. Overall, however, the veil is mistakenly associated with oppression of women in the Middle East.⁶ The purpose of this paper is in no way to downplay the wrongs some women face in the Middle East, but rather to understand why, when Muslim women around the world face real discrimination, the United States and France dedicate so much attention to the veil. The widespread misunderstanding of the veil not only detracts from the real injustices women face, but exacerbates points of disagreement between the U.S. and France and Muslims Middle Eastern countries, preventing the dissolution of a deeply rooted clash of civilizations.⁷

History

In order to understand why the veil is represented so narrowly in the West today, it is necessary to understand the history of the veil itself and its role in West-Middle East relations. The story behind the veil illustrates its implications in terms of politics, cultural values, and gender roles, as well as the manifold meanings this powerful symbol has come to hold.

⁵ Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. Yale University Press, New Haven.1992.

⁶ Slyomovics, Susan. "Hassiba Ben Bouali If You Could See Our Algeria: Women and Public Space in Algeria." *The Afhad Journal* Vol. 22, No. 1. Spring 2005

⁷ Heath, Jennifer. *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*. University of California Press. Berkley, California. 2008.

The tradition of veiling predates Islam and extends beyond the Middle East, with ancient roots as a practice of the aristocracies of India, Byzantium, Greece, and biblical Palestine, Judea, and Babylon. Two of the veil's primary functions were providing protection and conveying identity, in that it "hid the townswoman from the gaze of strangers and also distinguished her from the rural woman."⁸ Traditionally veiling was more common among urban women who were supposedly in need of greater protection from gawking men. Urban women who veiled were typically among the higher classes, so veiling has traditionally been a marker of class, although whether the veil denotes high class or low class has changed over time. In the veil's original era it denoted upper class. Veiling was also practiced to provide protection from winter cold and summer wind, to prevent disease by covering a woman's mouth and protecting her from germs, and to provide coverage for nursing mothers. Veiling was also a way to exercise principles of modesty and establish gender roles, and was adopted by Islam, which also emphasized modesty, had established gender roles, and aimed to deemphasize materialism. It has been suggested that the practice of veiling was forced upon Islam, in a way, because in the regions of Islam's development veiling was already a tradition, some even requiring women to wear headscarves. Although the Qur'an does not specifically stipulate that women wear hijab, it does stress the importance of modesty on behalf of both men and women, and says that women should wear over garments so that "they may be known, and thus not given trouble," also translated as "recognized and not annoyed."⁹

After the adoption of the veil by Islam, its next historically significant moment was not until the seventeenth century, when increasing numbers of Europeans travelled to the Middle

⁸ Rakhimov, R.R. "Veil of Mystery." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia*. Vol. 45, No. 4. Spring 2007. pp. 67–92.

⁹ Ibid; Wing, Adrien Katherine and Monica Nigh Smith. "Critical Race Feminism Lifts the Veil?: Muslim Women, France, and the Headscarf Ban." *The University of Iowa College of Law*. June 2008. p. 10

East and European countries began to colonize Middle Eastern countries. European colonial rulers used the veil, along with the prevalence of women's seclusion, to attest to the assumption that women in the East were exploited as sex objects. They saw the veil as an embodiment of the degradation of women and proof of Eastern inferiority, and unveiling became part of their "civilizing mission" in the Middle East. It became a trend that in colonized countries, Arabs who benefitted from the colonial presence adopted the opinion that the veil was representative of women's oppression.¹⁰ During the British occupation in Egypt, the Egyptian aristocracy advocated modernization and the liberation of women through the removal of the veil. This introduction of Western, modernist thought into the upper ranks of a Muslim society marked the establishment of a historical trend that has persisted through the present day: the interpretation of the hijab by the West as a symbol of female oppression and need for civilization in the Muslim world, and the exploitation of women's liberation (synonymous with unveiling) to legitimize their own values and actions.¹¹

During the Enlightenment in the 18th century, "Europe became fully convinced of its superiority over the rest of the world" and "the Muslim woman was projected as the counter image for the ideal Western female."¹² Where the ideal Victorian woman was pure and proper, the Muslim woman was "bizarre and sexually perverse" and "unhappy in her harem."¹³ Such notions were partially the result of faulty translations that bred misconceptions of Muslim women in Europe, and partially a deliberate portrayal of Middle Eastern societies as needing to be enlightened by Western values.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. Yale University Press, New Haven.1992.

¹¹ Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. "The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon." *Sociology of Religion*. Vol. 68, No. 3. 2007.

¹² Ibid, p. 6

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. Yale University Press, New Haven.1992.

While the British and other European colonizers claimed to be freeing Muslim women from oppression, members of lower classes felt oppressed by colonization. In Egypt, lower classes formed anti-British political movements, the most well-known and long-lasting of which was the Muslim Brotherhood. In response to economic inequities resulting from British occupation, the Muslim Brotherhood sought to return to pure Islam and the morality and equality that existed before the colonial period. They believed the West “exploited women in the service of capitalism,” so they promoted veiling as a means to prevent such exploitation and as a symbol of political opposition.¹⁵ Thus emerged a “culture contest” at this time, which centered on the hijab as a symbol of traditional Islamic values and protest of British occupation for Arabs, and a symbol of backwardness and barbarism for British.¹⁶

Turkey, Iran, Algeria, France, and the United States are countries in which the hijab has assumed particularly significant sociopolitical symbolic value in modern history. In Turkey in 1925, the hijab was outlawed in public sector places of employment, government buildings, and government schools and universities. Along with changing the Turkish alphabet from Arabic script to the modern Latin alphabet, banning the hijab was among Mustafa Kemal’s efforts to Westernize Turkey. Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt and the countries of the Maghreb are examples of countries that have had social bans or official legal bans on hijab at different points during the twentieth century.¹⁷

In 1936 Reza Shah abolished the veil and instituted reforms that benefitted women in an effort to appeal to the Western world and gain Western allies. Like the United States, the shah and his modern Iranian followers had adopted the view that “the image of veiled women was

¹⁵Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. Yale University Press, New Haven.1992.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Kahf, Mohja. “From Her Royal Body the Robe was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveilings in the Middle East.” (Heath 2008)

synonymous with backwardness [and] had to be removed from the Iranian stage.”¹⁸ His son, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, also instituted reforms that benefitted women, but established policies that led to “uneven economic development, social disparity, and growing gaps between rich and poor.”¹⁹ Such policies led the Iranian people to associate modernization and Westernization with oppression, as had been the case during the British occupation of Egypt. Many women began to wear hijab again out of protest, outwardly opposing the shah.²⁰ The anti-shah movement grew into the Iranian Revolution and led to the replacement of the shah with the Islamic fundamentalist leader Ayatollah Khomeini.²¹ To the outrage of the U.S. and the women of Iran, Khomeini instituted forced veiling, specifically the wearing of the chador, a particularly long and shapeless Iranian version of a traditional hijab, and simultaneously took deliberate measures to undo the rights and freedoms the shah had established, including those that benefitted women. The black chador is still mandatory for women in Iran, and the law is opposed by many women.²² Iran is one of the many examples throughout history of women’s rights being used to determine the civility and legitimacy of a government, and whether or not women wear hijab as primary signifier of whether or not they have adequate rights.

The choice to veil or not to veil was also one of political statement and identity in Algeria during the French occupation and later under the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front). During French occupation and the Algerian revolution, many women wore veils to publically display their

¹⁸ Zahedi, Ashraf. “Concealing and Revealing Female Hair: Veiling Dynamics in Contemporary Iran.” (Heath 2008; p. 254)

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 256

²⁰ Zahedi, Ashraf. “Concealing and Revealing Female Hair: Veiling Dynamics in Contemporary Iran.” (Heath 2008)

²¹ Shannon, Kelly J. “Veiled Intentions: Islam, Global Feminism, and U.S. Foreign Policy Since the Late 1970s.” Temple University. UMI Dissertation Publishing, August 2010.

²² Ibid.

opposition to French colonial rule.²³ Hijab was even used strategically by female revolutionaries, who used loose-fitting traditional clothing to conceal revolvers, bombs, and hand grenades.²⁴

After the Algerian revolution and successful replacement of the French by the FLN (National Liberation Front), the FIS, a fundamentalist Islamic party was elected. The FIS enforced strict gender segregation and veiling policies, so strict that some women received death threats and were even murdered for not veiling. Although the FIS did establish women's groups in mosques where they were free to discuss political and social issues, in general women's freedoms were severely limited and some took to unveiling as a sign of protest. Most however, were too afraid for their own lives to remove their veils. Other Algerian women felt freed by the veil because it gave them increased mobility in public spaces. They felt safer and more comfortable under their hijabs than they did under the FLN.²⁵

While the practice of veiling is most prevalent in predominantly Muslim countries, there are many Muslim countries where it is not a widespread practice, some of which even have laws against veiling. Turkish and Tunisian bans on the wearing of veils in government buildings and public schools and universities have been in place for decades, and Syria announced the prohibition of the niqab in public universities in 2010.²⁶ Hijabs are decreasing in popularity in Lebanon and Jordan, particularly among younger generations, and in Morocco hijab is discouraged by higher socioeconomic classes and is often a source of harassment for hijabis.²⁷ In

²³ Masood, Maliha. "On the Road: Travels with My Hijab." (Heath 2008)

²⁴ Slyomovics, Susan. "Hassiba Ben Bouali If You Could See Our Algeria: Women and Public Space in Algeria." *The Afhad Journal* Vol. 22, No. 1. Spring 2005

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Abdelhadi, Magdi. "Tunisia attacked over headscarves." BBC News, Tuesday, 26 September 2006.; BBC. "Syria bans face veils at universities." BBC News: Mid-East. July 19, 2010.

²⁷ Hamilton, Richard. "Morocco moves to drop headscarf." BBC News, Rabat. October 6, 2006.

Indonesia, on the other hand, hijabs are increasing in popularity, but primarily as a fashion trend rather than a statement of piety.²⁸

Outside of Middle Eastern and Muslim nations, hijabs can be found on the heads of women across the United States and Canada, as well as throughout Europe. Although the hijab has been the greatest source of controversy in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, it is worn by Muslim women in most European countries, although it is not popular and frequently represents tensions surrounding immigration and integration.²⁹

Just as the French opposed the veil in Algeria, they also opposed and continue to oppose it in France. The headscarf ban, implemented on March 15, 2004 as an application of laic principles, was passed with the intention of upholding France's deeply rooted secularist policies. The Muslim headscarf is just one example of the many visible signs of religion that were outlawed, yet the law is frequently referred to as the "headscarf ban" and has led to accusations of discrimination and Islamophobia.³⁰

The role of the hijab as a symbol grew in importance around the world, particularly in the United States, after September 11, 2001. The discourse that emerged surrounding the hijab in the West was "hauntingly familiar" to Muslims and is reminiscent of other times in history when the hijab emerged as the symbol of a clash between the Western and Muslim worlds.³¹ After the Islamist extremist terrorist attacks, a wave of Islamophobia swiftly spread across the United States and parts of Europe. In response to reinforced anti-Islamic sentiments, an acceleration of re-Islamization occurred, championed by an increase in hijab wearing. Yet again,

²⁸ Niessen, S.A., et al. *Re-Orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress*. Berg Publishers. Oxford, UK. 2003.

²⁹ Slyomovics, Susan. "Hassiba Ben Bouali If You Could See Our Algeria: Women and Public Space in Algeria." *The Afhad Journal* Vol. 22, No. 1. Spring 2005

³⁰ Lyon, Dawn and Debora Spini. "Unveiling the Headscarf Debate." *Feminist Legal Studies*. Vol 12, pp. 333–345, 2004.

³¹ Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. "The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon." *Sociology of Religion*. Vol. 68, No. 3. 2007. p. 10

women put on their hijabs in political defiance, as a public statement that they would not be defined by “Western media and war propaganda” and the “Western demonization of Islam.”³²

Soon after 9/11, the United States waged war in Afghanistan and Iraq, legitimizing its actions in part with the argument of women’s oppression. In Afghanistan, this argument was valid as women were subjected to horrible injustice and abuse under the Taliban. Surprisingly to Americans, though, the liberation of Afghani women by the United States did not entail the removal of hijab, and many women continued even to wear burqas.³³ In Iraq, however, despite the Saddam Hussein’s repressive dictatorship, there existed a “socialist gender policy of equal employment and education for women, and women in Iraqi cities were mostly unveiled”.³⁴ After Hussein’s removal from power, a previously suppressed Islamist force surfaced in conjunction with an upsurge in veiling, which was the result of fear in the anarchist environment and “women’s beliefs long prevented from public expression.”³⁵ Upsurges in veiling influenced by changes in political climate demonstrate that the Muslim veil is about so much more than Islam. In its simplicity, the common assumption that the veil is solely to do with religion, whether religious piety or religious extremism, hinders understanding of the sociopolitical function of the veil.

Why Women Veil

As has been the case for hundreds of years, since before eighteenth century colonialism, the predominant view of the Muslim veil is as a symbol of women’s oppression and what is believed to be the extremist, backwards nature of Islam. Women who wear hijabs or other forms of Islamic traditional dress in many Western countries, such as the United States, France,

³² Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. “The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon.” *Sociology of Religion*. Vol. 68, No. 3. 2007. p. 2

³³ Kahf, Mohja. “From Her Royal Body the Robe was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveilings in the Middle East.” (Heath 2008)

³⁴ Ibid, p. 37

³⁵ Ibid

Germany, and Spain, are often made to feel pitied or face contempt, even hostility, by fellow citizens or through policies.³⁶ The hijab is misunderstood today as it was three hundred years ago. There are ample instances in which a hijab is a direct manifestation of women's oppression, such as women who are pressured to cover by their husbands, and obey out of fear of divorce or abuse. There are still countries that, in the twenty-first century, have required by law that Muslim women cover, such as Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Bangladesh. Women's hair has been assigned a variety of symbolisms throughout history and across cultures, from the elaborate hairstyles of marking a proper Japanese woman, to the shaved heads of Indian widows.³⁷ Indeed, the concealment of women's hair has been a tool for men to subjugate and exercise power over women, allowing them to control women by controlling their sexuality.³⁸ Thus there is a degree of validity to the traditional Western view of the veil. It is in no way arbitrary and is sometimes legitimate, but it is also limited. While some women do not wear the veil out of choice, many do. There are myriad reasons women veil, are unknown to Westerners.³⁹

Some Muslim women veil out of pure piety; the veil is "the single most obvious marker of faith."⁴⁰ Although the Qur'an does not explicitly mandate hijab, or even cover their hair, it does require modesty of both men and women and can be interpreted as recommending over-clothes. The hijab is an example of coalescence between religion and tradition; it began as a tradition and has become a meaningful religious practice.⁴¹ Sanctity, reserve, and respect are three fundamental ideals of Islam which the veil protects and enforces. Both symbolically and

³⁶ Bullock, Katherine. "Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes." The International Institute for Islamic Thought. Herndon, Virginia. 2002.

³⁷ Zahedi, Ashraf. "Concealing and Revealing Female Hair: Veiling Dynamics in Contemporary Iran." (Heath 2008)

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Bullock, Katherine. "Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes." The International Institute for Islamic Thought. Herndon, Virginia. 2002.

⁴⁰ Taylor, Pamela. "I Just Want to Be Me: Issues in Identity for One American Muslim Woman." (Heath 2008)

⁴¹ Rakhimov, R.R. "Veil of Mystery." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia*. Vol. 45, No. 4. Spring 2007. pp. 67–92.

literally, the veil safeguards the sanctity of womanhood, a woman's role, and a woman's privacy, it is a signifier of respect and reservation, and as such it is a practice of Islam.⁴² One anonymous Muslim woman contends, "It's not about politics, or tradition for that matter: It's about religion. I veil to show my commitment to God's law. It's the Qur'an and Sunna, plain and simple!"⁴³

While the veil is both an application of tradition and religion, and while two are intertwined, they are also distinct, and for some women, the tradition of hijab is particularly important. The veil was a tradition before it was Islamic, and now it is Islamic tradition.⁴⁴ One Emirati woman declares, "So what if it's not religion, it's tradition. Those are our customs, here, in my tribe, my place...Fine, times change, but stretch your hand to *my* burgu and I'll break your arm for your insolence."⁴⁵ For some Muslim women, the value of tradition is a sufficient to compel them to veil.

Some women veil for the purpose of expressing their identity—religious, political, or social. In the past fifty years, there have been waves of Muslim women putting on what is referred to as "the new veil."⁴⁶ Contemporary Muslim women have adopted new styles of veiling as a statement that they are proud of their Muslim identity and adhere to modesty requirements, but do not adhere to societal traditions of the past.⁴⁷ Most recently after September 11, 2001, an increasing number of adolescents and young adult daughters of Muslim immigrants became hijabis. For them, the hijab is "a symbol of solidarity and resistance to efforts to eradicate the

⁴² El Guindi, Fadwa. *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*. Berg. New York, New York. 1999.

⁴³ Kahf, Mohja. "From Her Royal Body the Robe was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveilings in the Middle East." p. 39

⁴⁴ Rakhimov, R.R. "Veil of Mystery." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia*. Vol. 45, No. 4. Spring 2007. pp. 67–92.

⁴⁵ Kahf, Mohja. "From Her Royal Body the Robe was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveilings in the Middle East." p. 33

⁴⁶ Pedwell, Carolyn. "Tracing 'the Anorexic' and 'the Veiled Woman': Towards a Relational Approach." *LSE Gender Institute. New Working Paper Series*; Mar 2007; 20; GenderWatch (GW) p. 3

⁴⁷ Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. Yale University Press, New Haven. 1992.

religion of Islam.”⁴⁸ Thus hijab can be an expression of one’s identity as a proud modern Muslim.

Immediately following the September 11, the United States saw an upsurge in anti-Islamic sentiments in conjunction with the upsurge in veiling. Many Americans saw the hijab as a symbol of Islamist terrorism, even if for many American Muslim women, the hijab was worn as “a public affirmation of trust in the American system that guarantees freedom of religion and speech.”⁴⁹ For other Muslim women outside the United States, their veils represent an opposite identity, an anti-American identity. A tension between Western and Muslim values, politics, and ways of life has existed for centuries, and women who identify with Islamic fundamentalist thought veil in defiance of American policies and values they see as threatening to their own.⁵⁰ An example of this occurred in the 1980s, when a noticeable amount of women in Egypt replaced Western dress with traditional Islamic dress as an expression of their alliance with fundamentalist groups and opposition to their American ally president, Anwar Sadat.⁵¹ The hijab is an expression of diverse identities, depending on the wearer’s political, religious, and moral inclinations.

The veil can also be a way to hide identity. Women of lower socioeconomic classes may wear different styles of hijab, such as an abayya or burqa, to conceal the fact they are unable to afford expensive clothing. This use of hijab facilitates the entrée of lower classes into modern society. Even prostitutes may veil in an effort to blend in and not make their occupation completely conspicuous.⁵²

⁴⁸ Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. “The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon.” *Sociology of Religion*. Vol. 68, No. 3. 2007. p. 2

⁴⁹ Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. “The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon.” *Sociology of Religion*. Vol. 68, No. 3. 2007. p.1

⁵⁰ Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. “The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon.” *Sociology of Religion*. Vol. 68, No. 3. 2007

⁵¹ Shannon, Kelly J. “Veiled Intentions: Islam, Global Feminism, and U.S. Foreign Policy Since the Late 1970s.” Temple University. UMI Dissertation Publishing, August 2010.

⁵² Heath, Jennifer. *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*. University of California Press. Berkley, California. 2008.

As previously discussed, the veil can also be used as an expression of political identity. In nineteenth century Egypt, women veiled to show their opposition to British occupation, or to identify their support for the Muslim Brotherhood in the twentieth century. In Iran, women wore the veil in protest of the shah regime and in Algeria in protest of French colonial rule.⁵³ Women have also worn the veil as a symbol of defiance in response to Westernization and modernization efforts, marking their refusal to accept ideals of materialism and the objectification and hyper-sexualization of women.⁵⁴

Some women cover for the exact opposite reasons the Western discourse assumes they do. These women see the veil as a demonstration of feminist ideals. Whereas the veil is often thought to epitomize the objectification of women by reducing them to, and reducing, their sexuality, many women see the veil as a rejection of objectification. By diminishing the attention given to their bodies, hijabs place greater importance on women's personalities, intelligence, and voices. Scholar, Muslim, and hijabi Pamela K. Taylor writes, "As a feminist, as a humanist...I reject the objectification of women's bodies," explaining that she "donned the scarf to get beyond what women look like [and] what their clothes imply."⁵⁵

There are still many more reasons women veil, but the final common reason of notable importance is fashion. The hijab is an article of clothing, after all, and many women treat it as simply that. In some places, such as Cairo, and among certain demographics, hijab is trendy. One twelve-year-old girl says, "Duh, of course I wear it. All my friends wear it."⁵⁶ The prevalence of hijab in girls' social groups often determines whether or not they decide to veil. A hijab "may be

⁵³ Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. Yale University Press, New Haven. 1992.

⁵⁴ Heath, Jennifer. *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*. University of California Press. Berkeley, California. 2008.

⁵⁵ Taylor, Pamela K. "I Just Want to Be Me: Issues in Identity for One American Muslim Woman." (Heath 2008; pp. 122-123)

⁵⁶ Kahf, Mohja. "From Her Royal Body the Robe was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveilings in the Middle East." (Heath 2008; 37)

worn to beautify the wearer much the way western women wear make-up.”⁵⁷ Women often pair their veils with elaborate make-up, carefully coordinate their veils with the rest of their outfits, wear the veil with chic, modern clothes, or all of the above, clearly making a fashion statement and displaying their personal styles.

The fashion value of the hijab reveals an irony in its role. One of the fundamental purposes of the veil is as a display of modesty. Female hair is traditionally seen as a source of sexuality and sexual power across cultures, and in turn the covering of the hair seen as an act of decency by Muslim women, much like the wearing of scarves or hats by Christian women while in church.⁵⁸ Veils are also used to enhance women’s beauty and display their femininity. Some Muslim women wear veils so elaborate and garish they are anything but modest.⁵⁹ Such veils still fulfill their function of diminishing a woman’s sexuality by covering her hair, yet in their colorful decoration, they enhance her beauty. Rather than duplicity, this use of the veil provides a “dual function: on the one hand it is meant to hide her sexuality, on the other, it is meant to beautify and enhance her attraction.”⁶⁰ What is more likely to be looked down upon instead of a loud hijab is one that is accompanied by skin-tight clothing. In other words, Islam denounces immodesty, not beauty.⁶¹

French and American Treatment of Hijab

The myriad meanings of hijab are diverse and deeply rooted in history, culture, and politics. For many hijabis, whatever style they choose to wear is profoundly important to them, a

⁵⁷ Hoodfar, Homa. “The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Images of Muslim Women.” *RFR/DRF*. Vol. 22, No. 3/4. 2003. p. 7.

⁵⁸ Zahedi, Ashraf. “Concealing and Revealing Female Hair: Veiling Dynamics in Contemporary Iran.” (Heath 2008, p. 252)

⁵⁹ Joppke, Christian. *Veil: Mirror of Identity*. Polity Press, Malden, MA. 2009.

⁶⁰ Zahedi, Ashraf. “Concealing and Revealing Female Hair: Veiling Dynamics in Contemporary Iran.” (Heath 2008, p. 252.)

⁶¹ Joppke, Christian. *Veil: Mirror of Identity*. Polity Press, Malden, MA. 2009

symbolic garment they would feel naked or incomplete without.⁶² For centuries, veils have been worn by women of various ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and political stances, and yet, the depth of the Muslim veil's diversity and meaningfulness has been difficult for the West to understand. During the European colonial era, the veil became a symbol of the backwardness of Muslim societies. Today, the notion of the veil as inconsistent with Western values persists in Western society and has been a driving force behind acts of discrimination, sociopolitical movements, foreign policy decisions, and the reconsideration of domestic laws.⁶³ Western societies have exhibited an obsession with the veil. It receives a disproportionate amount of attention in political and social affairs, to the point that "'veil' has come to replace 'crescent' as a symbol of Islam in the West" and evokes a "public sexual energy" that is challenging for Western cultures to "come to terms with, comprehend, or tolerate."⁶⁴

The following is an analysis of policies, political rhetoric and discourse, and media representations regarding the veil in the United States and France, two countries in which the veil has been the source of obsession and controversy. The goal of this analysis is to answer the questions of how the veil is depicted through political and media representations and why is it represented in such a way. The first section discusses treatment of the hijab by the United States government and media, highlighting changes in the role of hijab as related to September 11 and the double standard with which the U.S. government treats hijab, as well as the multiple attitudes towards the veil presented in the American media compared to the one-sided depiction in French media. The second section discusses French government and media treatment of hijab,

⁶² Kahf, Mohja. "From Her Royal Body the Robe was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveilings in the Middle East."

⁶³ Hoodfar, Homa. "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Images of Muslim Women." *RFR/DRF*. Vol. 22, No. 3/4. 2003

⁶⁴ El Guindi, Fadwa. *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*. Berg. New York, New York. 1999.

specifically the priority of French identity and laic values in the steadfast opposition of the veil dictated by policymakers and reflected by media outlets.

Hijab in the United States

For decades, political and media treatment of the veil in the United States has been guided by an attempt to either reinforce or reduce a fundamental bias toward hijab as incompatible with Western values and representative of extremism. It is widely asserted among scholars that the hijab is “central in the construction of the radical difference of the Arab or the Muslim as ‘other’” and illustrative of a “continuing ‘clash’ of civilizations, pitting western secular values against fanatic religious fundamentalism.”⁶⁵ This assertion is evident in widespread discrimination towards and negative representations and stereotyping of Muslims, particularly hijabis both pre and post-9/11. Muslims have been victims of racism and stereotyping since the arrival of Islam to the United States, and Islam has received particular criticism in the U.S. since the 1970s, instigated by the Iranian Revolution.⁶⁶ Prior to September 11, Arabs and Muslims were habitually represented through an Orientalist perspective in American films and cartoons, with men portrayed as villains, women as submissive, and Muslim culture in general as uncivilized and violent. Jack Shaheen’s *Reel Bad Arabs* and Lina Khatib’s *Filming the Middle East* are two examples of scholarly works that chronicle Hollywood’s vastly negative, Orientalist-inclined portrayal of Muslims and Arabs.⁶⁷ Shaheen and Khatib determined that subordination of women and the representation of Muslim women as “the silent, veiled figure” are pervasive themes.⁶⁸ As Shaheen contends, “Hollywood’s celluloid mythology

⁶⁵ Moore, Kathleen M. “Visible Through the Veil: The Regulation of Islam in American Law.” *Sociology of Religion*. Vol. 68, No. 3 pp. 237-251. 2007.

⁶⁶ Behdad, Ali. “Critical Historicism.” *American Literary History*, December 7, 2007 pp. 286-299.

⁶⁷ Shannon, Kelly J. “Veiled Intentions: Islam, Global Feminism, and U.S. Foreign Policy Since the Late 1970s.” Temple University. UMI Dissertation Publishing, August 2010. p. 70.

⁶⁸ Shannon, Kelly J. “Veiled Intentions: Islam, Global Feminism, and U.S. Foreign Policy Since the Late 1970s.” Temple University. UMI Dissertation Publishing, August 2010. p. 69.

dominates the culture,” influencing, even dictating, the opinions and perceptions of viewers.⁶⁹

The demotion of women in Muslim culture, as depicted by American filmmakers, led viewers to internalize the connection between oppression and Muslim women. Such representations inevitably caused many Americans to associate Muslims in the United States with Hollywood’s portrayals, leading to vast amounts of discrimination and stereotyping.⁷⁰ One of the most common stereotypes of Muslims has been as terrorists, even before the 2001 terrorist attacks. After the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, for instance, Muslims were immediately and erroneously blamed.⁷¹

The events of September 11 mark a turning point in the continuum of American misconceptions of Muslims. An Islamist terrorist attack on American soil led to a drastic surge in the association of Muslims with extremism and violence, and widespread discrimination and racial profiling on the part of civilians and government officials alike. The aftermath of September 11 had a particularly significant negative impact on hijabis in the United States. One psychological research study indicated that fear among women who wore hijabs was higher than other subgroups of Muslims, and that fear among Muslim women in general was double that of Muslim men.⁷²

A 2009 study by the Pew Research Center revealed that 38% of Americans believe Islam is more likely than other religions to promote violence, a slight decrease from 45% in 2007, but an overall increase from 25% in 2002, just one year after September 11. The study also revealed that two thirds of non-Muslims consider Islam very different from their own religion, and that

⁶⁹ Shannon, Kelly J. “Veiled Intentions: Islam, Global Feminism, and U.S. Foreign Policy Since the Late 1970s.” Temple University. UMI Dissertation Publishing, August 2010. p. 71.

⁷⁰ Shannon, Kelly J. “Veiled Intentions: Islam, Global Feminism, and U.S. Foreign Policy Since the Late 1970s.” Temple University. UMI Dissertation Publishing, August 2010.

⁷¹ Smith, Jane I. *Islam in America*. Columbia University Press. New York, NY. 1999.

⁷² Bakalian, Anny and Mehdi Bozorgmehr. *Backlash 9/11: Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans Respond*. University of California Press. Berkeley, CA. 2009.

Muslims are seen as facing discrimination more than any other religious group and most other demographic groups, second only to homosexuals.⁷³ Another Pew Center study reported that in 2007 six out of ten Muslims felt discriminated against, and one out of four Muslims had actually experienced discrimination.⁷⁴ A 2006 USA Today/Gallup poll reported that 39% of Americans harbor some prejudice against Muslims and think Muslims should carry special identification cards, and one third of Americans believe that Muslims sympathize with Al-Qaeda.⁷⁵ This data suggests the continuing existence of notions of Muslims as “other,” and potentially threatening, and their persistent discrimination, in the United States.

Many cases of discrimination specifically towards women who veil have been reported. For example, two Disney employees’ jobs have been threatened in the past few years because they’re hijabs clashed with the Disney aesthetic.⁷⁶ In 2008, two Muslim women were refused jobs at a Michigan McDonald’s,⁷⁷ and in 2009 a teenager was refused employment with Abercrombie & Fitch because her hijab was not compatible with their strict “Look Policy.”⁷⁸ In 2002 nurse Karen Crisco was told she had to remove her hijab because she was frightening patients, and rental car company customer service representative Bilan Nur was fired for refusing to remove her hijab. There have also been numerous instances of female student athletes not being allowed to participate unless they removed their hijabs.⁷⁹ It is relevant that in most of these

⁷³ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. “Muslims Widely Seen As Facing Discrimination: Views of Religious Similarities and Differences.” Pew Research Center. Washington, DC. September 9, 2009.

⁷⁴ Moore, Jina. “Post 9/11, Americans say Muslims face most discrimination.” *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 11, 2009.

⁷⁵ Hampson, Rick. “Fear ‘as bad as after 9/11.’” *USA Today*, December 12, 2006.

⁷⁶ Hiltzik, Michael. “Disney should lead the way on acceptance of Muslim clothing and customs.” *The Los Angeles Times*. October 17, 2010

⁷⁷ McClatchy Newspapers. “Women file discrimination suit against McDonald’s over hijab.” *The Guardian*. Friday, July 25, 2008.

⁷⁸ Netter, Sarah and Lindsay Goldwert. “Abercrombie and Fitch Accused of Discrimination by Muslim Teen.” ABC News. September 18, 2009.

⁷⁹ Moore, Kathleen M. “Visible Through the Veil: The Regulation of Islam in American Law.” *Sociology of Religion*. Vol. 68, No. 3 pp. 237-251. 2007.

instances, the underlying cause for discrimination was concern for customers' impressions. Companies are not necessarily prejudice against the hijab itself, but rather they are worried customers' discomfort with hijab will cost them business.⁸⁰ Although these incidents of discrimination do not prove bias against the veil is as widespread as it was before and immediately after 9/11, they do suggest that there remains some prejudice, or at least ignorance, in the United States with regard to the veil.

For the purposes of this paper, discrimination and the prominence of stereotypes toward Muslims, fueled by their negative, Orientalist representation in film and cartoons, are used as evidence of the pre- and post-9/11 association of oppression, extremism, "otherness," and incompatible values with the veil in the United States. While this is in no way a seamless form of proof as it primarily applies to all Muslims, not just women who don hijab, it is a helpful indicator because the hijab is identified as the most visible and well-known symbol of Islam for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Although the tradition of veiling is only one difference between the Muslim and Western worlds, it has become an instant marker and widespread symbol of all that is conflicting between the Muslim world and the United States.⁸¹ Ideas associated with the Islam are easily represented by the veil, and vice versa, so if there is a tendency among Americans to associate Islam with gender inequality or Islamism, the veil is also associated with these notions.

Hijab in U.S. Government

As the most immediately recognizable symbol of Islam, and in turn the conflict between Islamic and Western values, the veil has played an integral political role in times of political tension between the United States and Muslim countries. The CIA-backed overthrow of Iran's

⁸⁰ Moore, Kathleen M. "Visible Through the Veil: The Regulation of Islam in American Law." *Sociology of Religion*. Vol. 68, No. 3 pp. 237-251. 2007.

⁸¹ El Guindi, Fadwa. *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*. Berg. New York, New York. 1999.

democratically elected prime minister, Muhammad Mossadegh, in 1953 led to the rule of Reza Shah. As the United States supported the Shah's regime militarily and financially, the Iranian people associated the U.S. as well as the shah's secular, modernizing, anti-veil policies, with economic instability, torture of dissidents, and other forms of brutality they experienced under the shah.⁸² The veil of protest worn by women in opposition to the oppressive regime was poorly received in the United States, where the media depicted veiled Iranian women as "others" with perplexing objectives.⁸³ Inverse protests of the shah's fundamentalist successor, Khomeini, were much better received in the U.S., as women were unveiling in protest. Much to the dismay of the American government, Khomeini reversed the shah's secular policies and reforms geared towards women, and instituted forced veiling.⁸⁴ Although in both instances women were protesting an oppressive regime, when they were doing so by veiling to protest a U.S.-supported government, the U.S. disapproved, but when they were refusing to veil in protest of an American adversary, the U.S. commended them. The example of Iran clearly illustrates the role of the veil as a symbol of Islamist fundamentalism, threatening extremist governments, and oppression of women to the U.S.

Egypt under Anwar el-Sadat provides another example of the veil's role in U.S.-Muslim state relations. Sadat's secularist regime and participation in the Camp David accords helped put him in the U.S.'s favor, but his administration was being threatened by a fundamentalist resurgence in Egypt. One of the primary markers of this politically ominous Islamic revival was a noticeable increase in the number of women sporting hijabs, both in support of fundamentalism

⁸² Shannon, Kelly J. "Veiled Intentions: Islam, Global Feminism, and U.S. Foreign Policy Since the Late 1970s." Temple University. UMI Dissertation Publishing, August 2010.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

and in opposition to westernization and capitalist imperialism.⁸⁵ Both the American government and media responded worriedly to the rise of the veil in Egypt. The government was concerned about the overthrow of Sadat and the detrimental impact it would have on democratization and secularization in Egypt as well as Egypt-Israeli relations, and journalists portrayed the transition from Western to Islamic dress as an unfathomable phenomenon and a warning of potential forced veiling and fundamentalist takeover, as had been the case in Iran.⁸⁶

In 1998, President Clinton officially refused to recognize the Taliban in Afghanistan, a policy decision partially driven by the Taliban's abhorrent treatment of women. Among the brutal injustices women faced under the Taliban was forced veiling, specifically in the form of the burqa. Afghan women endured gross human rights violations, the most obvious of which was the burqa. Thus the burqa became a symbol of what was most intolerable about the Taliban.⁸⁷ Less than ten years before this, however, the United States had supported and funded the Mujahedeen, a deeply misogynistic group that was equally cruel towards women in Afghanistan as the Taliban. The U.S. sympathized with the Mujahedeen's goal of ousting communist Soviets from the country, and remained uninfluenced by the Mujahedeen's abuse of women.⁸⁸ It is not a coincidence that the U.S. supported a group with a shared interest that received little publicity about its inhumane treatment of women, and denounced a group that had no shared interest and was infamous for its inhumane treatment of women, specifically in the form of forced veiling. Rather, this is an example of the U.S. using the veil to its best interest.

⁸⁵ Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. Yale University Press, New Haven.1992.

⁸⁶ Shannon, Kelly J. "Veiled Intentions: Islam, Global Feminism, and U.S. Foreign Policy Since the Late 1970s." Temple University. UMI Dissertation Publishing, August 2010.

⁸⁷ Ibid.; Heath, Jennifer. *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*. University of California Press. Berkley, California. 2008.

⁸⁸ Shannon, Kelly J. "Veiled Intentions: Islam, Global Feminism, and U.S. Foreign Policy Since the Late 1970s." Temple University. UMI Dissertation Publishing, August 2010.

Although since the 1990s women's rights have officially been at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy, American policies in the Gulf during the 1990s hardly took women's issues into consideration. Like in Afghanistan under the Taliban, forced veiling in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait was a primary marker of extensive unjust treatment of women. Nevertheless, the United States maintained an alliance with Saudi Arabia and defended Kuwait during the Gulf War. Unlike the case of the Mujahedeen, the U.S. government did receive criticism for prioritizing interests in oil over interests in women's rights.⁸⁹

The aforementioned interactions between the United States and Muslim Middle Eastern countries, as well as other incidents and prolonged circumstances, such as the Iran hostage crisis, U.S.-Israel relations, U.S. disregard of human rights violations in Turkey, Tunisia, and Israel, terrorism by Islamist extremists in Western countries, and mutual conflicts of interest and values, have been sources of on-going political tension between the United States and Muslim countries in the Middle East.⁹⁰ These tensions were exacerbated by the events of September 11, 2001, a distinguishing, pivotal moment with regard to the role of the veil in U.S. policymaking. Since then, the political use of the veil has change dramatically. While it has still been used to legitimize American values and policies and reinforce the notion of the Islamist oppressor, it has also been used to promote American values in a softer manner and to help improve impressions of the U.S. in the Middle East and relations with Muslim countries in the Middle East.

Immediately following 9/11, President Bush used the veil as a tool to further U.S. interests at home and in the Middle East. He pursued efforts to garner support among the American people for war in Afghanistan, efforts which “identified ‘the veil,’ ... with Islamic

⁸⁹ Shannon, Kelly J. “Veiled Intentions: Islam, Global Feminism, and U.S. Foreign Policy Since the Late 1970s.” Temple University. UMI Dissertation Publishing, August 2010.; CATO Institute. “The U.S. Alliance with Saudi Arabia: Policy Recommendations for the 108th Congress.” Article 53, CATO Handbook for Congress.

⁹⁰ Bullock, Katherine. *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes*. The International Institute of Islamic Thought. Herndon, Virginia. 2002.

militancy, extremism, jihadism, and oppression of women”⁹¹ Bush and his wife, Laura, both emphasized forced veiling in Afghanistan and the general abuse of women to validate U.S. occupation of Afghanistan. Although women were genuinely subject to gross human rights violations under the Taliban, including forced veiling, Bush used this to the U.S.’s interest and also validated a common assumption among Americans, that all women in the Middle East are forced to veil, when most women in Afghanistan chose to veil before and after forced veiling under the Taliban.⁹²

At the same time, Bush publicly welcomed the veil in the United States. In a speech given at a mosque on September 17, 2001, Bush praised Islam and emphasized that women should feel comfortable and accepted wearing hijabs in public. This endorsement of the hijab was part of his efforts to calm anti-Islamic sentiments and suppress the alienation of Muslim Americans.⁹³ It was also an effort to divert attention from racial profiling and Islamophobia on the part of the U.S. government. Thousands of Arab-Americans were being detained for no reason, privacy infringements granted by the Patriot Act were imposed primarily on Arabs and Muslims, and many politicians would refuse to meet publicly with groups of Muslims. Such “double-talk” led Muslims in and outside the United State to distrust the American government.⁹⁴

Since the immediate aftermath of September 11, the U.S. government has continued to use the veil as a political tool to improve relations with Muslim Middle Eastern countries and

⁹¹ Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. “The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon.” *Sociology of Religion*. Vol. 68, No. 3. 2007. p. 3

⁹² Bakalian, Anny and Mehdi Bozorgmehr. *Backlash 9/11: Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans Respond*. University of California Press. Berkeley, CA. 2009; Bullock, Katherine. *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes*. The International Institute of Islamic Thought. Herndon, Virginia. 2002.

⁹³ Bullock, Katherine. “Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes.” The International Institute for Islamic Thought. Herndon, Virginia. 2002.

⁹⁴ Bakalian, Anny and Mehdi Bozorgmehr. *Backlash 9/11: Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans Respond*. University of California Press. Berkeley, CA. 2009

American Muslim communities. One variation has been speeches reminiscent of Bush's September 17, 2001 speech. In his speech at Cairo University on June 4, 2009, President Obama emphasized that the United States' commitment to accepting Islam and accommodating Muslims is so fervent that the government "has gone to court to protect the right of women and girls to wear the hijab and to punish those who would deny it."⁹⁵ On May 20, 2010, Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference Rashad Hussein echoed Obama's message during his speech in Tajikistan. He said, "In the United States, women wear the hijab freely and we gather for prayers and religious discussion without any restrictions" as part of an explanation of how religiously tolerant the United States is, how President Obama promotes interfaith engagement, and how the United States, like Tajikistan and other Middle Eastern countries, "has seen first-hand the discrimination and violence that can be exacerbated by intolerance towards and fear of persons with different religious faiths."⁹⁶ This speech is an example of how U.S. acceptance of hijab is used to emphasize similarities between the U.S. and Muslim states, regions that have been consistently marked by their differences, in an effort to improve foreign relations.

Whereas the U.S. uses forced veiling to legitimize policies, the State Department also condemns forced unveiling in the Middle East. International Religious Freedom Reports on Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Tunisia discuss hijab bans as imposed by oppressive regimes and as depriving women freedom of religion. One Congressional Research Services report makes connections between the hijab and freedom of religious expression and between the hijab and religious extremism.⁹⁷ By condemning both veil bans and forced veiling, the U.S. government

⁹⁵ Obama, Barack. "A New Beginning." U.S. Department of State Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. June 4, 2009

⁹⁶ Hussain, Rashad. "Remarks at the 37th of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers." U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Organization Affairs. May 20, 2010

⁹⁷ Nichol, Jim. "Central Asia's Security: Issues and Implications for U.S. Interests." CRS Report for Congress, April 26, 2007.

sends the message that it is not the veil itself that is inherently backward; it is the lack of freedom associated with it.

The State Department-sponsored newsletter *Voices*, as in voices of American Muslims, features the writings of Muslim women discussing the importance of hijab in many Muslim women's identity constructs.⁹⁸ One of these is Ainee Fatima's poem, *Graceland: Part I*, which, as a poem about a burqa-clad Elvis fan's visit to Graceland, starkly contradicts the stereotype of the demure, submissive Muslim woman. The line "I'm a Muslim woman who must be / covered; I accept that, /But I'm also American, baby: You accept / that" underscores the government's effort to promote the incorporation of Muslims into American society and the idea of the American Muslim, as opposed to Muslim in American.⁹⁹ As was the case in Hussein and Obama's speeches, the veil is used to emphasize a similarity between Muslim and American cultures and to communicate that it does not have to be an expression of anti-Americanism as it sometimes is and has been in places like Iran and Egypt. The government is saying that the veil is Muslim, but it can also be American, in an attempt to subdue anti-Americanism or mistrust of the U.S. government.

The U.S. government's reports, publications, and sponsored speeches all use the hijab to promote the United States as tolerant, multi-cultural, and accepting of Islam. The U.S.-sponsored wars in the Iraq and Afghanistan, in addition to conflicts in the latter half of the twentieth century, have created sociopolitical tensions, and now, in an effort to ease these tensions, the U.S. is advertising itself as a friend of Muslims and welcoming of Muslim traditions. The hijab,

⁹⁸ United States Department of State Office of the Special Representative to Muslim Communities. *Voices*. The Inaugural Newsletter, 2011

⁹⁹ Fatima, Ainee. *Graceland: Part I*. United States Department of State Office of the Special Representative to Muslim Communities. *Voices*. The Inaugural Newsletter, 2011.

once a symbol of why Muslim countries are in need of an American democratic, civilized influence, is now used to convey our acceptance of Muslims in the United States and abroad.

American laws reflect a similar double standard. There has been some public controversy over whether Muslim women should be allowed to veil in public institutions, such as schools. Various incidents, before and after September 11, 2001, involved students or teachers being told they were no longer allowed to wear hijab. A 1990 case over a Pennsylvania public school teacher's right to wear hijab and a 2004 case over that of a sixth grade Oklahoma student, resulted in the upholding of religious garb statutes, protecting Americans' right to wear clothing for religious purposes.¹⁰⁰ When schools have threatened a students or teacher's right to religious freedom, the government typically defends this right.¹⁰¹ The main area where acceptance of hijab has become an issue is photo identification. In general, the allowance of hijab and even niqab in women's driver's license photos has increased since September 11, 2001.¹⁰² This trend reflects an effort by the government to outwardly accommodate Muslims to prevent buildup of tensions with Muslims and Muslim countries and to counter pre and immediately post 9/11 impressions of the United States as Islamophobic.

One state that has not adhered to the vast accommodation of religious practices is Florida, which, after being sued by Sultana Freeman in 2006 for not allowing her to wear her niqab in her driver's license photo, declared that "an individual's religious beliefs do not outweigh the state's need to properly identify everyone who holds a Florida driver's license."¹⁰³ Another reason the state claimed for prohibiting veils in license photographs was that veils could

¹⁰⁰ Byng, Michelle. "Symbolically Muslim: Media, Hijab, and the West." *Critical Sociology*. Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 109-129. 2010.

¹⁰¹ Moore, Kathleen M. "Visible Through the Veil: The Regulation of Islam in American Law." *Sociology of Religion*. Vol. 68, No. 3 pp. 237-251. 2007.

¹⁰² Byng, Michelle. "Symbolically Muslim: Media, Hijab, and the West." *Critical Sociology*. Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 109-129. 2010.

¹⁰³ Dickinson, Fred O. "Legal Bulletin." Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. Vol. 2006, Iss. 1. January/February/March 2006.

help terrorists conceal their identities. This rationale clearly communicates a construction of the veil as a manifestation of extremism. A similar situation occurred in Minnesota in 2009 when Republican representative Steve Gottwalt proposed a bill that would mandate full exposure of the head and face in driver's license photos. Although it did not explicitly prohibit hijabs, the fact that Muslim women would be forced to remove their hijabs for their license photos immediately became a pressing issue. The bill was accused of being discriminatory because it allowed for exceptions for medical but not religious reasons, and because although it claimed to be for the insurance of accurate identification, women who wear a veil in daily life would look unlike their license pictures if photographed without a veil. Ultimately, after receiving much pressure and media attention, Gottwalt amended the bill to include exceptions for religious purposes.¹⁰⁴

Freeman v. Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles and the 2009 Minnesota controversy represent an ongoing tension between the ideals that American laws endorse. Identification regulations are influenced by a motivation to respect religious freedom, as well as a practical need for proper identification and an emphasis on the absolute importance of homeland security. U.S. passport photo regulations also reflect this tension. The State Department maintains that headpieces should be worn in passport photos if worn daily for religious purposes, but should not obscure any part of the face.¹⁰⁵ This is confusing because, depending on the style, a hijab may obscure the edges of the face or part of a woman's cheeks or forehead. A woman who wears a niqab daily for religious purposes is not allowed to do so because part of her face will be obscured, so she is not included in this rule that attempts to oblige religious practices. Despite efforts on behalf of the State Department, political leaders, and lawmakers to promote religious tolerance, and specifically to accommodate hijabis, when

¹⁰⁴ Chang, Bea. "Dispute over hijabs on drivers' licenses resolved." Kare 11 Local News. March 6, 2009.

¹⁰⁵ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs. "Passport Photo Requirements."

religious freedom conflicts with security surrounding the hijab, an uncertainty regarding which of these values is superior surfaces. Security and tolerance of Islam are two issues that have become of increased importance since September 11, and the enforcement of both is difficult for the government to balance with regard to photo identification regulations.

While the U.S. military implicitly discourages hijab in its foreign policy and to a degree still view it as inconsistent with American ideals and modernization, it encourages hijab among its own troops. American women stationed in countries where the majority of women veil, or where veiling is enforced, are required or strongly encouraged to wear a hijab or abayya when they leave base, and in places like Saudi Arabia, are discouraged from driving in highly populated areas.¹⁰⁶ This is particularly interesting because even though religious headgear is technically allowed in the military, it must adhere to certain requirements, namely that it must be completely covered by the standard uniform, so a hijab that covers the neck would not be acceptable.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the reasoning behind this practice is cultural sensitivity and safety. By covering at least their hair, the idea is that American occupying troops are showing respect for the local culture and the people they are working with. Some view it as essential to safety and diplomacy and the acceptance of Americans in host countries, and others view it as completely contradictory to the American rights and values they are fighting to protect.¹⁰⁸ In this situation, the hijab represents a tension between two U.S. foreign policy goals: spreading American values and liberating oppressed women, and encouraging diplomatic cultural sensitivity, at the cost of conforming to the values of the oppressor.

¹⁰⁶ McSally, Martha. "Why American troops in Afghanistan shouldn't have to wear headscarves." *The Washington Post*. Friday, February 18, 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Department of the Army. Excerpts from Army Regulation 670-1: Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia."Headquarters of the Department of the Army, Washington, DC. February 3, 2005.

¹⁰⁸ McSally, Martha. "Why American troops in Afghanistan shouldn't have to wear headscarves." *The Washington Post*. Friday, February 18, 2011.

The Muslim veil has been used by the United States government as a political tool to help them pursue national and foreign interests, both before and after September 11. There has been a tendency among Americans to assume women who veil are submissive, oppressed, or affiliated with terrorism, a stereotype that was instigated by representations of Muslims in films and that has led to widespread discrimination against Muslims. With the development of conflict and unstable relations between the U.S. and Muslim Middle Eastern countries, the hijab has been an increasing obsession in the West which the American government has persistently used to its advantage. Before and immediately after September 11, 2001, policymakers used the veil as a representation of treatment of women and validation of policies toward Middle Eastern countries, equating the veil with oppression and unveiling with freedom.¹⁰⁹ These values often conflict with those of Middle Eastern countries, and so the hijab represents this clash of values; the less women veil, the more Western values are present.

In the aftermath of September 11 and up to the present, the accommodation and outward acceptance of the veil has been used to promote better relations and relax tensions with Middle Eastern countries and improve the U.S.'s global standing as a religiously accepting, multicultural country. The acceptance of hijab is strategic for U.S. foreign and domestic policy, because recognition that the United States welcomes Islamic customs facilitates diplomatic relations with Muslim countries and improves relations with American Muslim communities. However, this promotion of religious freedom as a core American value comes into conflict with other priorities the U.S. views as equally, if not more, important, such as strong homeland security and the spread of democracy. In certain instances, hijab-related policies must preference one priority

¹⁰⁹ Heath, Jennifer. *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*. University of California Press. Berkley, California. 2008. ; Bullock, Katherine. "Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes." The International Institute for Islamic Thought. Herndon, Virginia. 2002.; Shannon, Kelly J. "Veiled Intentions: Islam, Global Feminism, and U.S. Foreign Policy Since the Late 1970s." Temple University. UMI Dissertation Publishing, August 2010.

or value over another. For instance, Florida driver's license laws imply the prevalent importance of security over religious freedom. The hijab in America also is an example of the difficulty the government faces in balancing the differing American values it promotes. Essentially, whether the U.S. government defends or criticizes hijab depends on what they are striving to achieve and whether being pro or anti hijab will help them achieve it.

Media

An analysis of stories and images featuring the hijab in the American media reveal a similar divergence in how the veil is viewed by Americans as is revealed by the American political discourse regarding hijab. The media portrays a connection between veiled women and terrorism and Islamist extremism, but it also portrays veiled women as average American women. There are conflicting efforts among media outlets to underscore the extremist nature of hijab and to promote an understanding of the veil and the women who wear it as anything but the extremists they are often assumed to be. This divergence is accompanied by a distinct difference in the presentation of hijab by conservative and liberal media outlets, with, for the most part, conservative media maintaining an unwelcoming attitude towards hijab, and liberal media promoting understanding and acceptance as well as perpetuating stereotypes.

There are three clear trends in the U.S. media's portrayals of hijab. The first is the attacking of hijab as an assault on American values, the second is a representation of unveiling as integral to immigrants' assimilation, and the third is the trend of portraying hijabis as misunderstood and illustrating that hijab and other forms of Islamic dress can be and are American. The trend of criticizing hijab is predominantly exhibited by conservative media outlets, such as Fox News. In her article, "Should the West Ban the Burqa?," Phyllis Chesler, a feminist psychologist and writer, claims that the practice of veiling is a form of gender apartheid

the U.S. is forced to tolerate by Islamist leaders. She applauds European veil bans and feminist and secularist condemnations of the veil as a violation of women's human rights, and denounces President Obama's public declaration of the U.S.'s commitment to protect a woman's right to veil. Chesler also brings up a rarely mentioned argument against Islamic dress, which is that the burqa and niqab are health hazards because they can cause eye damage and diseases related to sunlight deprivation.¹¹⁰ In another article, "Islamic Face Masks: Banned in Michigan Courtrooms," Chesler uses pejorative terminology as early as the title, saying face masks instead of niqabs, and goes on to discuss niqabs as if they were a deliberate effort to hinder security.¹¹¹ These are examples of conservative media's depictions of the veil as threatening to American values of freedom and secularism, contending that the veil is inherently inconsistent with these values and so it has no place in the United States.

The issue of *The Economist* that came out a week after the September 11 terrorist attacks featured a photograph of a Muslim woman wearing a black niqab accompanied by the heading, "Can Islam and Democracy Mix?"¹¹² There is also a tendency in the media to legitimize the link between hijab and terrorism. One example is a 2001 article titled "The Rifle and the Veil," which, although it calls attention to the issue of forced veiling as a human rights violation, it presents the hijab strictly as a tool of terrorists, which was an assumption already prominent so soon after 9/11.¹¹³ Another 2006 *New York Times* article acknowledges the difficulty in differentiating between a veiled Muslim and a terrorist, saying "As the war on terror enters its sixth year, its longest battle – over how to define the enemy – rages on. That there is a large

¹¹⁰ Chesler, Phyllis. "Should the West Ban the Burqa?" Fox News. foxnews.com, Opinion. June 5, 2010

¹¹¹ Chesler, Phyllis. "Islamic Face Masks: Banned in Michigan Courtrooms." Pajamas Media, Chesler Chronicles. June 29, 2009.

¹¹² Bullock, Katherine. "Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes." The International Institute for Islamic Thought. Herndon, Virginia. 2002.

¹¹³ Goodwin, Jan and Jessica Neuwirth. "The Rifle and the Veil." *New York Times*, Op-Ed. October 19, 2001.

difference between Muslims wearing veils and those wearing suicide belts may be obvious, but a clear understanding of that difference remains elusive.”¹¹⁴

These are all examples of media depictions that reinforce stereotypes of the veil as oppressive and extremist. They assert that the hijab has no place in a free, democratic America. As a result of such depictions, the notion of the hijab as a symbol of Islamic backwardness and of the cultural divide between the Western and Muslim worlds is perpetuated, as is the divide itself. This is only one tendency in the media, however, and it is becoming less and less prevalent.

Another common depiction of the hijab is as unnecessary in the United States. A Muslim woman’s unveiling has been implicitly described as an integral component to her assimilation into American culture. The September 2006 *New York Times* article, “More Muslims Arrive in U.S., after 9/11 dip,”¹¹⁵ and the June 2008 *Los Angeles Times* article “Me Without my Hijab”¹¹⁶ are two examples of depictions of Muslim immigrants removing their veils when they move to the United States because they can; unveiling is a statement that women are liberated upon arrival to the U.S. In “More Muslims Arrive in U.S., after 9/11 dip,” Andrea Elliot tells the stories of different Muslim immigrants, one of which is a Pakistani woman, Nur Fatima. In the first sentence Fatima is mentioned, Elliot says she “moved to Brooklyn six months ago and promptly shed her hijab.”¹¹⁷ The removal of Fatima’s hijab is apparently the most important element of her immigration to the U.S., because it represents her newfound freedom. For the male immigrants featured in the article, Elliot describes their new lives in the U.S., their jobs, aspirations, and how they incorporate Islam into their American lives. Elliot’s telling of Fatima’s

¹¹⁴ Byng, Michelle. “Symbolically Muslim: Media, Hijab, and the West.” *Critical Sociology*. Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 109-129. 2010.

¹¹⁵ Elliot, Andrea. “More Muslims Arrive in U.S., after 9/11 dip.” *The New York Times*. September 10, 2006.

¹¹⁶ Mineeja, Zainab. “Me without my hijab.” *The Los Angeles Times*. June 8, 2008.

¹¹⁷ Elliot, Andrea. “More Muslims Arrive in U.S., after 9/11 dip.” *The New York Times*. September 10, 2006.

story, however, is all about her hijab: “Five days after she came to Brooklyn, Ms. Fatima removed her head scarf, which she had been wearing since she was 10. She began to change her thinking, she said. She liked living in a country where people respected the privacy of others and did not interfere with their religious or social choices.”¹¹⁸

While articles such as these do not attack the hijab as a manifestation of oppression, they do represent the hijab as a symbol of oppression by asserting, for example, that the veiled Pakistani woman was oppressed, but the unveiled, Pakistani-American woman is not. Portraying de-veiling as integral to Muslim immigrants’ adoption of American values and the American way of life makes a statement that the hijab is, or at least represents, about Muslim culture conflicting with American culture.¹¹⁹

The third trend in American media representations of the hijab is marked by an effort to promote understanding of the veil as not necessarily the result of oppression or extremism, but rather as a product of personal and religious freedom and feminist ideology. Some articles do this by telling the stories of American women who veil. The *New York Times* article “Behind the Veil” talks about Hebah and Sarah Ahmed, two sisters who did not grow up in a religious family, but became more dedicated to Islam and decided to wear the niqab and jilbab as adults. The author, Lorraine Ali, describes them at their jobs as engineers, cheering their children on at soccer practice, going grocery shopping, exercising, and simply being normal, American working mothers. Sarah and Hebah make comical, sarcastic comments about their lives as niqabis and equate the initial discomfort of their dress with that of wearing high heels or a bra. They also discuss how, while some are understanding and accommodating, such as the staff at the Curves they are members of who cover the windows with paper whenever they are

¹¹⁸ Elliot, Andrea. “More Muslims Arrive in U.S., after 9/11 dip.” *The New York Times*. September 10, 2006.

¹¹⁹ Byng, Michelle. “Symbolically Muslim: Media, Hijab, and the West.” *Critical Sociology*. Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 109-129. 2010.

exercising, many people make prejudice comments such as fellow Curves members who claimed that “Islamists were taking over,” a co-worker of Hebah’s said, “You need to wrap a big ol’ American flag around your head so people know what side you’re on,” and a stranger who said he killed a woman in Afghanistan “who looked just like” Sarah.¹²⁰ The article is also accompanied by a slideshow of images of Hebah and Sarah engaging in day-to-day activities such as grocery shopping, dining with friends, and taking their children to the park, the zoo, and the library. The sisters are portrayed as normal, fun-loving American working mothers who are regularly subjected to ignorant judgment, but are strong enough and have the religious conviction to handle it.

In “Finding a Place in Bahraini Society,” James Estrini interviews Hazel Thompson about her project documenting women’s roles in modern Arab society. The emphasis in this piece is that women in Bahrain are ambitious and successful, just like American women. Thompson says, “I didn’t realize was how ambitious the women are. They run their families *and* are extremely successful. They’re doing really well . . . They are having a choice in career. They’re so determined — anything they can get their hands on to become more educated, to up their skills.”¹²¹ Thompson’s photographs are included, which depict a fashion designer, a veterinarian, a business woman, a youth activist, and a grandmother, all veiled and busy at their respective jobs and day-to-day activities.¹²² This piece provides Americans with an inside look at the real Muslim women in the Middle East as a way to demonstrate that Muslim women in the U.S. are not the only driven, independent Muslim women in the world.

Liz Goolek’s article, “Finding Sales in Islamic Wear,” takes a different approach to defying stereotypes of the veil. This piece describes a Muslim-friendly line of clothing designed

¹²⁰ Ali, Lorraine. “Behind the Veil.” *The New York Times*, Fashion and Style. June 11, 2010.

¹²¹ Estrini, James. “Finding a Place in Bahraini Society.” *The New York Times*, Lens. March 1, 2011.

¹²² Estrini, James. “Finding a Place in Bahraini Society.” *The New York Times*, Lens. March 1, 2011.

by a non-Muslim Malaysian fashion designer, Melinda Looi. The article portrays traditional Muslim fashions, such as the abayya, as elegant, modern, and even edgy in its exoticism. While women flaunt a wide variety of hijab fashions in the Muslim world, to Westerners, Islamic clothing is rarely thought of as fashionable, so for Islamic-inspired styles to be championed in the world of high fashion is ground-breaking. Goolek also mentions that “taste varies greatly among Muslim women,” contradicting assumptions that Muslim clothing is uniform.¹²³ This article contributes to the inclusion of Muslim women in high fashion, makes Muslim dress intriguing, even appealing, to Western readers, and communicates the message that non-Muslims should not fear hijab, but rather embrace it.

The aforementioned articles are examples that represent the variety of attitudes the media takes towards the veil. Depending on the political leanings of the outlet, media both reinforces stereotypes and also contradicts them. There is no dominant trend, but recent years have shown an increased publication of stories that educate readers about the veil. American media representations of the hijab reflect mixed perceptions and indecision as to how to regard the veil. This is because the veil can be interpreted as both the epitome and antithesis of American values of democracy and freedom of religion. The government uses both constructions of the veil to further U.S. interests, whereas the media uses them to call attention to an assortment of issues. American identity is also a factor in the media’s portrayal of hijab. There is no standardized idea of American identity, and so the media prescribes to multiple—The U.S. as a protector of women’s rights, the U.S. as a propagator of democracy and secularism, and the U.S. as a welcoming multicultural society.

¹²³ Goolek, Liz. “Finding Sales in Islamic Wear.” *The New York Times*, Fashion & Style. February 17, 2011

Hijab in France

The United States and France are two Western nations that have been arguably the most obsessed with the hijab. Both of these countries use the hijab as a tool to promote their respective values, but they do so quite differently. While U.S. policy and rhetoric varies depending on what the government is trying to achieve and who they are aiming to please, France's political position on the veil is unshakably decided. One seemingly minor but significant difference in the French and American attitudes towards hijab is actual word each country uses to describe it. In the United States, it is almost always referred to by the Arabic word for veil, hijab. It is often qualified for the uninformed American as the Muslim headscarf, or sometimes it is used to refer to Islamic traditional dress in general, including the niqab, burqa, jilbab, abayya, and khimar. When there is a need to specify what type of hijab, the Arabic words are used. The French, on the other hand, sometimes use the word hijab or niqab, but most often they use the word *voile*, (veil), or *voile intégral* (full veil) to describe the niqab or the burqa. This difference in language makes a statement that encompasses the difference in the French and American attitudes towards hijab: in the U.S., an effort is being made to incorporate hijab into American culture, but in France, there is an effort to conform hijab to French culture. For the French, if it is going to exist, it at least must be referred to by a French name.

Hijab and French Government

Laïcité, which essentially means secularism, is a founding principle upon which French government and society are built. It is *laïcité* that has driven and defended French laws against the veil. Controversy surrounding the hijab in France formally began in 1989 when two female middle school students were suspended for wearing hijabs at school.¹²⁴ In 2004 law no. 2004-228

¹²⁴ Wing, Adrienne Katherine and Monica Nigh Smith. "Critical Race Feminism Lifts the Veil?: Muslim Women, France, and the Headscarf Ban." The University of Iowa College of Law. June 2008.

was passed, prohibiting all visible religious symbols in public institutions, namely public schools and government institutions.¹²⁵ While this law indeed applies to all religious symbols, controversy has surrounded the most visible, difficult to conceal, and politically contentious: the hijab. In September, 2010, a much-debated law banning anyone from wearing anything that would obscure his or her face in public was passed, accompanied by €150 fine as punishment. Although technically the law prohibits the “concealment of the face,” in general, it is always discussed as being a prohibition of the *voile intégral* and usually accompanied by a specification saying that anyone who forces a woman to veil will be liable to serve a year in prison or pay a €30,000 fine.¹²⁶ Although laws surrounding hijab formally include either all religious symbols or all face coverings, they are talked about most often as directed specifically towards hijab. Lawmakers have a tendency to emphasize the dreadfulness of forced veiling, a legitimate human rights violation, as exemplified by its hefty punishment. The way policymakers discuss the forced veiling, however, gives the impression they assume, or are trying to give the impression themselves, that all women who veil are forced to do so.

The laws in France regarding Islamic dress in passport and driver’s license photos also vary greatly from those in the United States. The French regulations are set and straightforward. Everyone must be bareheaded for identification photographs, including Muslim women who veil, Sikh men who wear turbans, and Catholic nuns who wear habits. The purpose of the headwear ban is to ensure that the photos are true and faithful to the likeness of each person and that people can be quickly identified.¹²⁷ The argument against this justification, specifically with

¹²⁵ Lyon, Dawn and Debora Spini. “Unveiling the Headscarf Debate.” *Feminist Legal Studies*. Vol 12, pp. 333–345, 2004.

¹²⁶ *Le Monde*. “Voile intégral : Jean-François Copé annonce la saisine du Conseil constitutionnel.” *LeMonde.fr*, Politique. July 13, 2010.

¹²⁷ *La République Française*. « Passeports biométriques : quelles règles pour les photos d’identité ? » *service-public.fr*. February 17, 2009.

regard to hijabis, is that if a woman wears a hijab every day in public but not in her passport or driver's license photo, she realistically will look less like herself in the photo than if she had taken it wearing a hijab.¹²⁸

French policymakers cite a variety of ideals for their on-going campaign against Islamic dress: security, secularism, national identity, women's liberation, and the prevention of radicalism. All of these different ideals are connected. Although security is indeed considered a legitimate reason to outlaw the covering of the face in public, and it is at the center of debates in the United States over the niqab, security is arguably the least important and least discussed argument in the French veil debate. When security is discussed by policymakers, it is discussed in connection with the prevention of extremism, as well as with national identity. The logic is that "Muslims must be integrated into French society to avoid a culture clash that could contribute to terrorism."¹²⁹ Veil bans are an integral component to a whole strategy of the French government's that was aimed to give Muslims in France what they refer to as "a place at the table," while simultaneously supervising their actions.¹³⁰ Other elements of the strategy included the formation of an Islamic council led by a moderate mosque rector, only allowing French-trained imams, who are as well –versed in French culture as they are in the Qur'an, to lead prayer in French mosques, and having French intelligence officers monitor mosques and prayer centers.¹³¹ The ideal for the French government is that Muslims in France consider themselves French first and Muslim second, which is a common ideal between France and the United States. By monitoring activities and leadership in mosques and by modifying Islam in France to accord

¹²⁸ Chang, Bea. "Dispute over hijabs on drivers' licenses resolved." *Kare 11 Local News*. March 6, 2009.

¹²⁹ Sciolini, Elaine. "Letter from Europe; France Envisions a Citizenry of Model Muslims." *The New York Times*. May 7, 2003

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ Sciolini, Elaine. "Letter from Europe; France Envisions a Citizenry of Model Muslims." *The New York Times*. May 7, 2003

with French cultural standards and *laïc* values, political leaders hope to protect the country through the prevention of Islamist extremism and to galvanize a sense of national identity among French Muslims. Thus the goals of hijab policies to strengthen security and to protect and promote national identity are closely linked, with the emphasis on the maintenance of French identity.¹³²

Whatever the intentions of policymakers, however, the headscarf ban is often construed as an effort to expel Islam, rather than integrate it. It is significant that the headscarf ban was enacted in the midst of the War on Terror. The timing of the law has caused many in France and around the world, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, to view the law as discriminatory. It has had the effect of making the French government appear Islamophobic, and the law is often seen as the culmination and legitimization of French Islamophobia.¹³³

The protection of national identity as rationale for hijab policies in France is also connected to the protection of secularism. Secularism is one of the most highly esteemed and prioritized principles for the French, and it is considered a defining characteristic of national identity. *Laïcité* encompasses the protection of individual rights and statist unity, but is also marked by a tension between these two ideals.¹³⁴ While *laïcité* could be used to both defend and reject the veil, based on preservation of religious freedom and protection of secularism for the sake of national unity, policymakers in France use it purely for the latter.¹³⁵ In fact, French leaders have gone as far as to purport that the veil threatens secularism and individualism,

¹³² Sciolini, Elaine. "Letter from Europe; France Envisions a Citizenry of Model Muslims." *The New York Times*. May 7, 2003

¹³³ Wing, Adrien Katherine and Monica Nigh Smith. "Critical Race Feminism Lifts the Veil?: Muslim Women, France, and the Headscarf Ban." The University of Iowa College of Law. June 2008.

¹³⁴ Joppke, Christian. *Veil: Mirror of Identity*. Polity Press, Malden, MA. 2009.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

because it is construed to detract from an individual's identity and ability for self-expression.¹³⁶

On these grounds, the 2004 headscarf ban was considered "a reaffirmation of republican principles," according to Sarkozy.¹³⁷

The abolition of veils is often discussed by French leaders as a fight for *laïcité*. In fact, there are two sides of *laïcité*, *laïcité* of pluralism, which focuses on religious rights, and *laïcité* of combat, which has been reinvigorated with the headscarf debate and is favored by politicians. An influential letter in the 1989 Foulard Affair, written to the prime minister at the time, Lionel Jospin from a group of self-described republican intellectuals, read "Laicity is and remains in principle a struggle, much like the public school, the republic, and liberty itself. Their survival requires from all of us discipline, sacrifices, and a bit of courage."¹³⁸ Much more recently, in response to an assertion that *laïcité* does not combat or prohibit any religion, but rather it protects and respects them, Brice Hortefeux, France's minister of the interior, said, "The truth is very simple, our Republic cannot accept of course that freedom of expression and teaching is hijacked by extremists. That means we must fight relentlessly against preachers of hate. It is a just fight, it is a legitimate fight. And it's a necessary fight."¹³⁹ At the peak of the headscarf controversy, the fight for laicity and French national identity was so urgent that "liberal laicity was a luxury that could no longer be afforded," and policymakers opted for laicity of combat.¹⁴⁰ In this way, state leaders are not only framing hijab restrictions as crucial to defending the people of France against terrorists, but also, and perhaps more imperatively, defending the essence of France against ideological threats.

¹³⁶ Wing, Adrien Katherine and Monica Nigh Smith. "Critical Race Feminism Lifts the Veil?: Muslim Women, France, and the Headscarf Ban." The University of Iowa College of Law. June 2008.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 33.

¹³⁸ Joppke, Christian. *Veil: Mirror of Identity*. Polity Press, Malden, MA. 2009. p. 37.

¹³⁹ Republique Francaise, Ministere de l'Interieur, de l'Outre Mer, des Collectives Territoriales, et de l'Immigration. « Réponse de Brice Hortefeux à une question de la députée Delauney sur la laïcité. » March 12, 2010.

¹⁴⁰ Joppke, Christian. *Veil: Mirror of Identity*. Polity Press, Malden, MA. 2009. p. 48.

In addition to *laïcité*, the maintenance of unadulterated French culture is an essential component of French national identity. The French government not only wants to prevent the accommodation of hijab because it may lead to the unwanted influence of Islamic or Arab values, but also because it may lead to the integration of other foreign values, specifically American. While the United States government advertises accommodation of hijab to promote American multiculturalism, France resists its accommodation in resistance to American multiculturalism. To be American is to be Chinese-American, Mexican-American, Haitian-American, Irish, Italian, Iranian, but to be French is to be French, to fully embrace and integrate into French culture. To the state, the veil represents a rejection of French culture and French national identity, and such a rejection is simply unacceptable in France, where national identity is so highly valued. It is so important that former president Jacques Chirac has even declared that France would “‘lose her soul’ if she succumbed to Anglo-American multiculturalism.”¹⁴¹ For policymakers, opposition to the veil is integral to defending French national identity, specifically through the preservation of laic values and the resistance of American multiculturalism. The U.S. is unable to take such a committed stance, because, unlike the French, American policymakers are not committed to a set notion of American identity.

If prevention of Islamist radicalism, upholding of laicity, and protection of national identity are not sufficient justification to convince French to support anti-veil policies, women’s liberation is. This is the last most common rationale present in the French political discourse surrounding the hijab. Hijab is seen by many, including many French, as infringing upon women’s rights. They view Islamic dress as subordinating women and a paternalistic tradition used to suppress women. Such a manifestation of gender inequality would never be supported by

¹⁴¹ Wing, Adrien Katherine and Monica Nigh Smith. “Critical Race Feminism Lifts the Veil?: Muslim Women, France, and the Headscarf Ban.” The University of Iowa College of Law. June 2008. p. 14.

the liberal, democratic state of France. Head of France's ruling party the UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) Jean-Francois Copé declared the niqab prohibition "an intelligent law for the protection of liberty and of women."¹⁴² This line of thinking is so powerful and ubiquitous, it has been enough to convert non-supporters of anti-veil policies.¹⁴³ One example of these converts is historian, political scientist, and immigration specialist Patrick Weil, who claims that "wearing the scarf or imposing it upon others has become an issue not of individual freedom but of a national strategy of fundamentalist groups using public schools as their battleground."¹⁴⁴

Weil's change of heart was the result of heavy discussion of women's rights during the 2003 Stasi Commission, which produced a report and laid the foundation for the 2004 headscarf ban, its primary grounds being that "objectively the veil stands for the alienation of women."¹⁴⁵ The Stasi Report represents the fervent views and goals of the French government in its hijab policies, and it also represents France's habit of not considering the opinions of the Muslim women these policies affect. Out of a 150 witnesses to testify before the Stasi Commission, only one, one of the last, was a hijabi.¹⁴⁶ This is one area where French hijab policy is marked by counter-intuition. Women's liberation is used as justification for anti-hijab policies, but the process by which they are passed reeks with the political disempowerment of Muslim women.¹⁴⁷

During the Stasi Commission, the one veiled witness called attention to the other counter-productive flaws in hijab policy. She expressed her conviction that the headscarf ban would further isolate Muslims in France, not integrate them, and would instigate extremism, not stoke

¹⁴² Le Monde. "Voile intégral : Jean-François Copé annonce la saisine du Conseil constitutionnel. » *Le Monde*, lemonade.fr. July 13, 2010.

¹⁴³ Joppke, Christian. *Veil: Mirror of Identity*. Polity Press, Malden, MA. 2009.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 49.

¹⁴⁵ Joppke, Christian. *Veil: Mirror of Identity*. Polity Press, Malden, MA. 2009. p. 14.

¹⁴⁶ Wing, Adrienne Katherine and Monica Nigh Smith. "Critical Race Feminism Lifts the Veil?: Muslim Women, France, and the Headscarf Ban." The University of Iowa College of Law. June 2008.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

it.¹⁴⁸ Hers was only one of a number of voices expressing concern that anti-veil policies would have the opposite effect they intended, voices which have been largely ignored. Female students who veil may go to private Islamic schools rather than remove their veils and niqabis may remain secluded indoors rather than venture out in public uncovered, resulting in an increased prominence in what the anti-veil laws intended to prevent, seclusion of women and consolidation and segregation of Islamic thought that could foster radicalism.¹⁴⁹ As put by British scholar Anthony Giddens, French hijab policy “has an echo of the very fundamentalism that it wishes to oppose.”¹⁵⁰

Hijab in French Media

The French media echoes and perpetuates the anti-veil political discourse, adding drama and swelling obsession. The controversy over the veil has been a highly publicized issue in French media for the past decade, and nearly all news stories reflect, emphasize, or legitimize the dominant view of politicians that the veil is not welcome in France. The media has taken full advantage of the controversy and successfully elevated its status to one of the hottest of topics, adding to the sense of urgency policymakers emphasize and increasing the polarizing effect of the policies themselves on the Muslim community.¹⁵¹

As argued by scholar S. Begum, “images of Islamic dress are increasingly used in the media as a visual shorthand for dangerous extremism.”¹⁵² At least, veiled women are depicted as alien and to be avoided, a notion legitimized by the fact that the media themselves tend to avoid them, interviewing women in headscarves but never women in niqabs or burqas.

¹⁴⁸ Wing, Adrienne Katherine and Monica Nigh Smith. “Critical Race Feminism Lifts the Veil?: Muslim Women, France, and the Headscarf Ban.” The University of Iowa College of Law. June 2008.

¹⁴⁹ Giddens, Anthony. “Beneath the Hijab, a Woman.” *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. Vol.21, No. 2. Spring, 2004.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Posetti, Julie. “Media Representations of Hijab.” *Journalism in Multicultural Australia*, Australian Government Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. November 21, 2006.

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 5.

Niqabis are referred to pejoratively as “the women without faces” and “ghosts.”¹⁵³ Islamic dress has even been almost directly correlated with terrorism by the media, for example a 2006 article in the French newspaper *Liberation* about terrorist attacks at Heathrow airport was accompanied by a photograph of a veiled woman with her children, of all photographs that could have been used.¹⁵⁴ The media validates stereotypes of Muslim women as extremists, and also promotes stereotypes of Arabs as unfavorable additions to France. One stereotype of Arab youths is as “voleur, violeur, et maintenant voileur,” meaning “thieves, rapists, and now veilers.”¹⁵⁵ The veil is depicted as a symptom of Muslim crime committed at both the local and national, terroristic level.

Another common depiction of veiled Muslims in France is as submissive, victims of Islamism, or forced to veil. The media presents an urgent need felt by politicians to enlighten them, to convince them to adopt the French way of thinking.¹⁵⁶ Additionally women who do not veil are presented as the ideal French-Muslims and the only appropriate intermediaries between Muslim and French cultures.¹⁵⁷ However, if veiled women demonstrate French solidarity, they are depicted more similarly to unveiled Muslim women, as exemplified by a story covering a protest by hijabis in response to the taking hostage of French journalists by Iraqi terrorists demanding the repeal of the headscarf ban. The women were making statements such as “Take me instead” and “I don’t want my hijab stained with blood,” and immediately their image as

¹⁵³ Arête Sur Image, arretsureimages.net

¹⁵⁴ Navarro, Laura. “Islamophobia and Sexism: Muslim Women in the Western Mass Media.” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*. Vol. 8, No. 2, p.p. 95-114 Fall 2010.

¹⁵⁵ Navarro, Laura. “Islamophobia and Sexism: Muslim Women in the Western Mass Media.” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*. Vol. 8, No. 2, p.p. 95-114 Fall 2010.

¹⁵⁶ leMonde.fr. « Le doute subsiste sur le nombre de femmes portant le voile intégral. » *Le Monde Politique*. April 28, 2010.

¹⁵⁷ Navarro, Laura. “Islamophobia and Sexism: Muslim Women in the Western Mass Media.” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*. Vol. 8, No. 2, p.p. 95-114 Fall 2010.

presented by the media went from “sinister symbols of Islamic extremism to brave heroines of the republic.”¹⁵⁸

Despite their claims about Muslim women—that they are submissive, forced to veil, or victims or perpetrators of radical Islam—the media rarely seeks the opinion of these women themselves. The absence is not merely of Muslim women’s voices, but of women’s voices in general. A study of three French newspapers, *Le Monde*, *L’Express* and *Le Point* revealed that in articles concerning the veil, the opinions were exclusively from men, except one article that featured the wife of former president Francois Mitterrand.¹⁵⁹ Since the study was conducted before 2008, there has been an increased presence of women’s, even Muslim women’s voices in French media coverage of the hijab controversy, but it is still lacking and, like the political scene, is dominated by men. The women’s voices that are featured are often affirming the popular view, that the veil contradicts the values of the republic. One example is an article by Judith Bernard entitled, “How can one be feminist...and veiled?” that discusses the (apparently outrageous) concept of a veiled woman considering herself feminist.¹⁶⁰ One television feature discussed Muslim women in the region of Trappes. It followed niqabis shopping at an outdoor market, but did not interview a single one. A man was interviewed, saying he was not bothered by women who veiled, and an unveiled woman was interviewed, saying women in full niqab were a shocking sight. Another television news story reported on a young hijabi who was asked by her boss at the grocery store she worked at to remove her veil. She speaks very briefly in the video, only telling what happened and not how she felt about the situation.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Posetti, Julie. “Media Representations of Hijab.” *Journalism in Multicultural Australia*, Australian Government Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. November 21, 2006. p. 5

¹⁵⁹ Wing, Adrien Katherine and Monica Nigh Smith. “Critical Race Feminism Lifts the Veil?: Muslim Women, France, and the Headscarf Ban.” The University of Iowa College of Law. June 2008.

¹⁶⁰ Bernard, Judith. “Comment peut-on être féministe...et voilée ? » *Arret Sur Images*. November 2, 2010.

¹⁶¹ Brabant, Justine. “Avant la burqa, vingt ans de débats médiatiques sur le voile. » *Arret Sur Images*. July 30, 2010.

While most articles and news features tend to agree with and add legitimacy to the government's stance on hijab, such as on *Le Monde* article declaring the voile integrale ban as evocative of "living together, public order, brotherhood, human dignity and equality between men and women," some question the forceful policies and opinions of the government.¹⁶² There are a few issues proposed by French journalists regarding the niqab ban only. One is that they predict potential difficulties in the application of the law, because some women may simply refuse to remove their veils.¹⁶³ Another issue is that the law was passed despite opposition from the Muslim community, who deemed it stigmatization.¹⁶⁴ In no way was this fact presented as detracting from the law's legitimacy, however. The one factor made known by the media that does seem to encourage questioning of the niqab ban's legitimacy is that the fact that there are so few women who wear niqabs, and even headscarves. Approximately 2,000 women in France wear the *voile integrale*, a sufficiently trivial number for some to question whether the battle against Islamic dress is really worth it, and whether it really would be so detrimental to allow these women to veil in public.¹⁶⁵

Political and media treatments of the veil in France are overall quite similar. Both are marked by intolerance and a lack of effort to understand the perspectives of the Muslim women who veil, the women who policies affect and who media outlets exploit and ostracize. There is a deep obsession in the government with the veil, and the media takes full advantage of this obsession, exacerbating and legitimizing it. Policymakers express extremely strong beliefs that Islamic dress is a serious threat to the Republic of France and the essential values that make it nation it is so proud to be. Media validate the adamancies of the government and go to great

¹⁶² Le Bars, Stephanie. "Burqa : "Le gouvernement risque de se heurter à un problème d'application de la loi." *Le Monde*. May 19, 2010.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ leMonde.fr. "Le Parlement vote l'interdiction de la voile integrale. » *Le Monde*, Politics. September 14, 2010.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

lengths to make a dramatic spectacle of the hijab controversy, but not to question the rationale of the government.

Conclusion

The veil, a mere piece of cloth worn by women around the world for centuries, has become a potent symbol of a global divide: the divide between the United States and France and the Muslim world. These societies have found themselves in conflict over social, political and cultural differences various times over the course of the past half-century. For many Muslims, the veil represents piety and devotion, modesty and dignity, pride, feminism, identity, solidarity or self-expression. For many Americans and French, the veil represents religious extremism, oppression of women, terrorism, repression or a threat to secular, individualist, democratic and republican values. The veil has been at the frontlines of wars both cultural and literal and at the forefront of foreign and domestic policy.¹⁶⁶ For many of the women who actually wear it, the veil is simply another article of clothing they wear every day, without which they feel exposed. It is normal, it is what they are accustomed to, and it is what they believe. For many in the U.S. and France, however, it is nothing if not a fascination, an obsession, a mysterious entity not to be trusted.

To more completely understand the way the United States and France see and treat the veil, this paper analyzed government attitudes and media depictions in these two countries with differing but prominent stances on the veil. The U.S. is arguably the most influential Western state and the sight of a significant turning point in Western attitudes towards Muslims and the veil, September 11. France is the Western state the most obsessed with the veil, infamous for its headscarf controversy and Islamophobic attitudes.

¹⁶⁶ Heath, Jennifer. *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*. University of California Press. Berkley, California. 2008.

The analysis revealed that, while these two countries criticize each other for their respective policies and views of the veil, the United States accusing France of being discriminatory and limiting freedom of religion, and France accusing the United States of unfavorable Anglo-American multiculturalism and weak values, they share meaningful commonalities.¹⁶⁷ The most significant of these is that both have used it, a symbol of conflicting values, to promote their own values and policies. The U.S. does this by advertising accommodation of the hijab to promote itself as accepting of Islam, simultaneously contradicting former policies that criticized hijab. France's rejection of the veil emphasizes its laic values and the importance it places on republicanism and equality. Both countries also use the veil to promote policy goals. The United States has used the veil as a representation of women's oppression as a way to legitimize its occupations of Middle Eastern countries, and it has also used an outward acceptance of the veil to boost relations with predominantly Muslim nations. France uses veil policies to promote a unified, national identity, as well as for security, to protect the nation from radicalism.

Regardless of their opposing policies and depictions, both the United States and France strive for their citizens' national identity to take priority over their religious identity. In other words, Muslims should be American or French first and Muslim second. Political and media references to hijab reveal an irrefutable obsession with the veil in both France and the United States. One way this is revealed is through the prominence of articles and news stories with titles such as "Behind the Veil," or another pun or common phrase consisting of the word, that in reality have very little to do with the veil at all and are only loosely related to Muslim women.

¹⁶⁷ Wing, Adrien Katherine and Monica Nigh Smith. "Critical Race Feminism Lifts the Veil?: Muslim Women, France, and the Headscarf Ban." The University of Iowa College of Law. June 2008.

The veil is a sexy, attention-drawing subject that politicians and the public alike are fascinated by across the West.¹⁶⁸

Naturally, there are differences as well in the attitudes towards the veil displayed by the American and French governments and media outlets. One is that France believes so firmly in its values, policymakers are willing to risk domestic and foreign relations with Muslims and non-Muslims alike with alienating policies. France values its particular national identity and laic principles, essentially, its own opinion of itself, more than it values others opinions. The United States is far less stubborn. Lawmakers are willing to twist their perception of the hijab to conform to American values and visa versa in order to reach their ultimate goal of boosting internal and foreign relations with Muslim communities and promoting values of democracy, liberty, and equal opportunity.

French policies and news stories refer very infrequently to public opinion and perception of French non-Muslims, except to assert that all of France supports anti-veil laws.¹⁶⁹ American media, on the other hand, emphasizes instances of ignorance among American people, and the discrimination hijabis face not from policies, but from other Americans. In the United States the problem of misunderstanding lies predominantly the public and some policymakers, whereas in France it is largely the government leaders who do not accurately understand or welcome the hijab.

Clearly the veil is much more than a piece of cloth or an article of clothing; it is a politically and socially charged obsession of a symbol. If the United States and France can transform their obsession with the veil into a positive interest, if they allow themselves to be educated rather than prematurely judge, and if a more complete comprehension of the many

¹⁶⁸ El Guindi, Fadwa. *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*. Berg. New York, New York. 1999.

¹⁶⁹ *La Croix*. "Conclusions sur la voile intégral de la mission parlementaire." » la-croix.com. January 21, 2010.

meanings and long-standing history behind the veil can be conveyed, than the relations among American, French and Muslim communities can be strengthened and marked by peace and understanding rather than opposition and skepticism, and the clash of civilizations can harmonize. Understanding the veil allows us to understand Muslim women, Muslim societies, and the Muslim faith, and to eliminate cultural prejudices that influence political and social relations.

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