SEXUAL POLITICS, RACE AND THE NORTH AFRICAN OTHER IN FRANCE:

THE BEURETTE AND THE VEILED WOMAN (1980-2004)

By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

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Abstract

In this thesis, I survey the history and evolution of dominant representations of French-Maghrebi women primarily in printed media, selected cases of public political debates and hegemonic feminist discourses from the 1980's until 2004. I observe two dominant trends in the construction of the image of French-Maghrebi women: the *beurette* and the Muslim woman who wears the Hijab. First, I follow the emergence of the *beurette,* which was commonly used to refer to the second-generation French woman of North African descent in the 1980's. I argue that a contradictory stance was assigned to this figure. She was construed as a victim of North African-Muslim patriarchy, a retrograde gender system and an oppressive domestic life. At the same time, she was depicted as a heroine who can benefit from assimilating into French society and who could effectively lead to the elevation of her community into the modern, secular and gender progressive French society. Second, I follow the evolution of this representational figure in feminist discourses during the early 2000's by using the self-defined secular Maghrebi feminist collective "*Ni Putes Ni Soumises"* as a case-study. I demonstrate that the circulation of the highly mediatized and celebrated figures of the collective were mobilized for racist ends by hegemonic feminism and the state apparatus alike. Thirdly, I trace the representation of French-Muslim women who wear the Hijab in the public media. Through the three controversial headscarf affairs in 1989, 1994 and 2003 which sought to discuss the right of young Muslim girls to wear the Hijab in public schools, I argue that the veiled woman was portrayed as a threatening figure that transgresses and offends the foundations of the French republic. I demonstrate that the two ambivalent figures of French-Maghrebi women loomed large in French public and political lives and were mobilized against each other. I assert that the production, circulation and reception of these representational figures constitute a pivotal site in understanding the French construction of a Muslim difference with reference to gendered and sexualized repertoires. I also demonstrate the hyper-visibility of this gendered-racialized other can be a pivotal site to unravel the history of French republicanism as a process operating on dynamics of exclusion and othering of a post-colonial immigrant community.

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Introduction

In 2016, I moved from my home country Morocco to France in order to pursue a university degree. Arriving in Paris, I settled in with family members in a working-class suburb (*banlieue*), commonly housing post-colonial immigrant communities, many of which are Muslim. I shared the room with my youngest cousin, Sabrina, a sixteen years old high-school student with big curly hair and even bigger ambitions. Sabrina was a second-generation French citizen, born and raised in the outskirts of Paris, barely spoke any words of Moroccan Darija yet would never self-identify as French: "I'm a Muslim woman." She answered when the much-dreaded question "where are you *really* from" was asked with a hint of subtle racism.

During that school year, Sabrina had decided to wear the Hijab. A decision that sparked controversial debates in the family, and concerns of her ending any hope of having a successful future in France. In 2004, the French government passed a law which prohibited all *conspicuous* religious symbols in public schools. The law defined conspicuous "as a large cross, a veil, or a skullcap."[1] While its language referred to many religious symbols in order to avoid charges of discrimination, the law targeted primarily Muslim girls who wear the Islamic Hijab. Albeit the controversy, Sabrina started wearing the Hijab. At her high-school entrance, Sabrina would take off the headscarf (*foulard*) to join her classmates.

In early spring, her science teacher was organizing a field trip to a nearby village. Sabrina wrote a letter to the teacher and to the school principal requesting permission to wear the Hijab during the field trip since no laws regulated her right to wear the headscarf in public. Her request was denied by the school administration and Sabrina had decided not to join the field trip. This incident lead to an endless cacophony between the school administration, Sabrina and our family and the involvement of local institutional actors. Shortly after the field

[1] Translated by Scott, Joan Wallach, *The Politics of the Veil*. (Princeton University Press, 2007), 2.

trip, the principal started scrutinizing the behavior and the apparel of Sabrina in school. He argued that the skirts she wore to class were "too long" and "too modest" indicating her path to religious "radicalization." After the November 2015 terrorist attacks which targeted multiple cafés and restaurants in Paris, the security and surveillance approach to French Muslims was at its highest. The principal alerted the school social worker who in turn alerted the police.

The entire family, including myself, were interviewed by the school social worker who wanted to make sure Sabrina had a normal family life and was not at risk of becoming a fundamentalist. My aunt made sure to wear a short skirt and make-up to the rendez-vous while her husband felt the need to say, "we're not even that Muslim, it's all cultural traditions." The absurdity of the situation was striking; Sabrina was guilty of wearing a long skirt! How did we get here? How did the apparel of sixteen-year-old high school student become a threat to the Republic? Why did my aunt feel the need to perform and embody a certain femininity to disprove claims of fundamentalism? These questions motivated my interest in this thesis topic.

In this thesis, I survey the history and evolution of dominant representations of French-Maghrebi women primarily in printed media from the 1980's until 2004. I observed two dominant trends in instrumentalization, reception and circulation of these representations in political discourses from the 1980's until the mid 2000's: the emancipated, modern and feminine Beurette construed as a model integrated citizen which was juxtaposed to and mobilized against the Muslim Hijabi who offended and threatened the foundations of a secular Republic. I begin my research in the 1980's because it marked the rise of the second generation of French citizens of Maghrebi origins, the Beur generation, which captured the attention of the public media and political discourse as a liminal community that is part of the French body politic yet remains fundamentally other. I end my thesis with the 2004 law which marked the beginning of a state approach to an institutionalized anti-Muslim exclusion targeting visible Islamic apparel.

While the Maghrebi man was cast as a violent and traditionalist patriarch, incapable of integrating into French society, the Maghrebi woman emerged as an ambivalent figure: both quintessentially a victim of her family's culture, traditions and religion and a potential agent of integration. Taking this conundrum as a starting point for my research, I retrace the emergence and development of the two representational figures of French women of North African origins: la Beurette and the veiled Muslim woman. La Beurette in the early 1980s designated the docile, the good "Arab" that could potentially be assimilated and integrated into French society, unlike the violent and dangerous Arab man from whom she must be saved. The way for the Beurette to become truly assimilated and emancipated is through the adoption of a white, middle class, femininity that claims to be neutral and universal. On the other hand, since the notorious first headscarf affair of 1989, the figure of the submissive veiled Muslim woman became central to the discourse on the incompatibility of Islamic values (and thus the people who supposedly adhere to them) with French society. I argue that the two dominant and confining images of French women of North African descent constitute a pivotal site in understanding the historical construction of the French national identity as a process that operates on dynamics of exclusion and othering through race, sexuality, and religion.

I explore the following questions:

How do dominant representations of North African women in France function as a discourse of exclusion, boundary-making, and membership in post-colonial France? How have the figures of the beurette and veiled woman evolved and shifted since the 1980's?

Literature Review

My thesis topic expands on existing literature that studies the history of the North African diaspora in France. There has been an increasing rise of critical scholarship that scrutinizes dominant political, cultural and media discourses about France's North African immigrants and their descendants. Fewer gender and sexuality studies scholars have landed their attention to the intersection of racialized sexual difference, gender and wider political trends in contemporary France. In this literature review, I survey some of the important contribution to this growing field, looking specifically at the literature on French-North African women.

For the purposes of my research, I highlight scholarship that discusses the figure of the veiled woman and the figure of the beurette. The headscarf debates have received a significantly wider attention in both francophone and anglophone academic circles.[2] Nonetheless, I bring forth two of the widely discussed publications and the ways in which my own research builds on and challenges their findings. On the other hand, the beurette as a figure has not received the same attention. I highlight the most relevant articles and ones that present different forms of analysis around this ambiguous figure.

[2] See B. Winter, *Hijab and the Republic: Uncovering the French Headscarf Debate*, Gender and Globalization (Syracuse University Press, 2008); S. Bouamama, *L'affaire Du Foulard Islamique: La Production d'un Racisme Respectable* (Geai bleu, 2004); P. Tévanian, *Le Voile Médiatique: Un Faux Débat, l'affaire Du Foulard Islamique*, Raisons d'agir (Raisons d'agir, 2005); Trica Danielle Keaton, *Muslim Girls and the Other France: Race, Identity Politics, & Social Exclusion* (Indiana University Press, 2006).

***The Politics of the Veil* by Joan Scott & *Why the French Don't Like the Headscarf* by John R. Bowen**

In her book *The Politics of the Veil*, the historian of France, Joan Scott examines the political debates surrounding the 2004 official French ban on headscarves for girls under the age of eighteen in public schools. Taking the question "why the veil?" as a starting point, Scott inspects the French republican discourse around the headscarf affair and the broader domestic issues that it I infused with. Through the cacophony around the veil ban in 2004, Scott unpacks French republican discourse around Secularism, Sexuality, Individualism and Racism.

The Politics of the Veil stresses the importance of historicity in unraveling the politics of the present. Scott retraces and establishes continuities between the French civilizational mission in colonized North Africa and the anxieties on what it meant to be French in the postcolonial republic. She adds that colonial assimilationism and racism; laïcité ; individualism, and gender equality have been mobilised to justify the ban on headscarves in 2004. So symbolic was the veil for the French, Joan Scott suggests, that after decolonization it survived as a potent reminder of Algeria's stubborn backwardness and France's humiliation: 'It was the piece of cloth that represented the antithesis of the tricolore and the failure of the civilizing mission.' Scott argues that the discourse of this particular post-colonial historical moment inverted the language of conquest, the question became "whether Islam would colonize France." The Historian concludes that "The headscarf law, then, was not so much a solution to a problem as a symptom of France's inability or unwillingness to face racism... that has characterized its dealings with North Africans for so long."[3]

[3] Joan Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*. (Princeton University Press, 2007), 181.

Particularly acute in The Politics of the Veil is its commitment to a historical reading of the headscarf ban as part of a multi-layered and longer history rather than simply a removed contemporary controversy. Scott's methodological approach is particularly useful for my thesis project as I attempt to bridge multiple historical moments and untangle the roots of contemporary controversies. In addition, The Politics of The Veil presents a lucid analysis of how this seemingly neutral ban reveals the political tensions underlying the postcolonial moment in France and its unease with French Muslims.

In a similar fashion, Bowen's *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the state and Public Space* sets to present an "anthropology of public reasoning" to unravel how the headscarf came to occupy the forefront of French politics. He dedicates a significant chunk of his work to the political philosophy behind the laicité which in turn shapes Republican institutions and politics that scrutinize Muslim women's apparel. The headscarf is a centerpiece for Bowen's book that ties together his interest in the history of ideas, such as secularism and equality and his attention to minority-majority relations in France. Bowen adds, "it is never just about headscarves" but about a conjuncture of events: "war in Algeria, the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, problems in the poor suburbs."[4] He pays attention to how the media contributed in public fears that "Arab Muslim culture" in the working-class suburbs was fomenting ghettoization, anti-Semitism, the breakdown of inter social "mixing", Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, and the submission of and violence against young women. I refer to his attention to the global and national forces shaping the context of the headscarf debates in France to show how the anxieties around French North African women is to be contextualized as part of the wider political scene. Additionally, his reference to media's

[4] John Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton Press, 2006), 66.

complacency is central to my methodology. I use some of the primary sources that he refers to in order to build up my argument.

The Beurette

"Foulard or cocarde? Gendered Imagery of Racialized Women in Postcolonial France" By Bronwyn Winter

Allison Moore, a historian of modern Europe, prefaces the introductory chapter of *Sexing Political Culture in the History of France* by stressing that "gender and sexual imagery have played a uniquely symbolic role in the modern French history of politics, religious struggle, and nationalism." From the Marianne to the Mauresque, the female body occupied the center stage upon which ambivalent, changing and often contradictory foundational myths of Frenchness and otherness have played out. In this collection of historical essays, the authors contribute to nationalism studies by presenting a far-reaching analysis of how gender and sexual metaphorics converged with national, racial, religious propaganda throughout French history.

Of particular use for my thesis is the concluding chapter entitled "Foulard ou Cocard?" by Bronwyn Winter. Winter explores the gendered imagery of racialized women in postcolonial France. She presents a historical analysis of the imagery surrounding three generations of North African immigrants in France: from the *trentes glorieuses* to the 2000's. Winter argues that there is a persistent representation pinning North African women as "the good girls" and the North African men as the "bad boys" of the fifth republic. Since the 1980's beur generation, she argues, the bad boys were perceived as delinquent and overbearing machos threatening the security of republic while the good girls were construed as the "drivers of integration" and the potential agents of emancipation. Foulard ou Cocard is one of the rare contributions that expands the history of the political representations of North African women in France beyond the image of the veiled woman and brings into light the image of the beurette and the tensions it translates.

"Save the Muslim Woman, Save the Republic: Ni Putes Ni Soumises and the Ruse of Neoliberal Sovereignty" by Mayanthi L. Fernando

In her article, Fernando uses the feminist collective Ni Putes Ni Soumises and its investment in French-Maghrebi sexuality as a case study to illustrate the political stakes underpinning the republic's interest in sexual freedom and sexual equality of its minorities. The article's central contribution is linking the state's investment in immigrant sexual normalization to the French republic's attempt in reinstating the neoliberal power of the state. Fernando argues for the importance of historicizing the rising interest in immigrant sexuality in the 2000's within the neoliberal moment that the state is traversing in an era of "waning sovereignty." She centers "the feedback loop" between neoliberalism as a state practice and feminism in presenting the Muslim woman in the public housing projects as a scapegoat for the republic to assert its lost authority. In concrete terms, this reassertion of authority happens through the increase of surveillance, security measures and incarceration of the populations in the banlieues rather than investing in political and economic alternatives.

Fernando adds that the state's self-narrative on the loss of sovereignty serves as a "neoliberal ruse" for the state to disavow the very political and economic decision that lead to the "degradation of social and sexual life" in the French banlieues. The anthropologists' article provides me with the tools to bring in political economy into the discussion on representation. While her analysis is limited to the 2000s, she provides a blueprint to expand the linkages between racialization, sexual normalization and politics of neoliberalism. Additionally, she brings into light an important component of my research: the complicity of neo-feminism in the pathologizing, marginalization and exclusion of North African descendants via the rhetoric on sexual liberation.

"Marianne d'aujourd'hui?: The Figure of the Beurette in Contemporary French Feminist Discourses." Kemp, Anna.

In a similar light, Kemp centers the figure of the Beurette as a cultural stereotype in French dominant feminist discourses and in autobiographical "beur women's" writings during the headscarf affair of 2004. The beurette, Kemp adds, becomes the protégée of French universalism because it sustains an assimilationist model of integration in the name of saving Muslim women from their oppressive families. She argues that this highly celebrated figure is not an emancipatory model but one that translates Islamophobic, racist and regressive notions of French femininity.

Kemp brings into light the notion of universalism implicit in the project of French feminism which construe an ideal French woman based on essentialist understandings of femininity. Femininity is hereby defined through sexual desirability which automatically exclude and stigmatizes those who do not abide: "Whereas, the beurette is seen to embrace a 'normal', 'natural' femininity, the voilée, in an echo of colonial discourses, is often imagined to possess a grotesque or perverse female sexuality."[5] Kemp presents a thorough analysis of multiple mainstream feminist writings and beur women's autobiographies in order to illustrate how feminism is complicit in the exclusionary politics of the republic. Her article brings into direct tension the "beurette" and the veiled woman and explores the inclusion of one through the exclusion of the other, an argument that is at the core of my research. I will use kemp's notions of regressive femininity to analyze discourses on North African women's sexual and racial difference.

Theoretical Framework

Rich and thorough theoretical interventions by many feminist and post-colonial scholars have highlighted the intersections of gender, race, sexuality and national belonging that guide my research. In 1989, the pivotal collection of essays edited by Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya

[5] Anna Kemp, "Marianne d'aujourd'hui?: The Figure of the Beurette in Contemporary French Feminist Discourses," *Modern & Contemporary France* 17, no. 1 (February 1, 2009): 24.

Antias entitled *Women-Nation-State,* attempted to systematically explore how nations and nationalism have been gendered concepts. The authors located five major ways in which women participate in ethnic and national processes: as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectives, as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups, as participants in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and transmitters of its culture, as signifiers of ethnic/national differences, and as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles. Building on this classification, I ask the question: what position do racialized women, those marked in the margins of the nation-state, occupy in the process of national boundary-making?

In order to explore this question, I rely on literature that scrutinizes citizenship as a sexualized, racialized and gendered project. By citizenship, I do not refer simply to the legal status and the rights that come with it, but rather to the access to national belonging and the recognition as co-citizens -- a status that postcolonial and labor migrants and their descendants rarely attain.

In *Sexing political culture in the history of France* Alison Moore observes that feminine and gender sexuality have appeared frequently as symbols of religion, nationalism, colonialism and identity in the long history of France. Their enduring power, she argues, is due to their power in "personalizing mass political ideals."[6] Easily constructed as threats to selfhood, these sexualized symbols can rally behind them passionate masses. The sensational media coverage, political rallying and cultural mediums that center questions of sexuality and gender among the North African diaspora suggest that this is not simply about sex. What mass political ideals do these debates capture, is the wider question that my thesis contributes to.

[6] Alison Moore, ed., *Sexing Political Culture in the History of France* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2012), 11.

In “Sexual Democracy and the New Racialization of Europe,” the French sociologist Eric Fassin discusses the development of sexuality as a central process of border making in Europe. The rhetoric of sexual democracy (equality between the sexes, sexual freedom) has been used recently to draw a line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Muslims, immigrants, etc.). The racialization of European societies is thus justified in the name of a sexualized ‘clash of civilizations. In this discourse, sexual liberties, liberal democracy and secularism merge together in what Scott terms “sexularism.” This narrative deems Europe as the cradle of modernity and a privileged site of sexual freedom. I argue that this phenomenon is not a recent one in the history of France. Examining the public anxieties around women of North African origins in France since the 1980’s reveals that the links between sexual difference, secularism, race and governance is not simply a contemporary shift.

Adherence to dominant interpretations of norms, values and cultural practice are at the core of what it means to belong. This static and essentialized understanding of culture has been deconstructed by postcolonial and poststructuralist theorists. Uma Narayan asserts that cultural essentialism “often equates the values, worldviews, and practices of some socially dominant groups with those of "all members of the culture.”[7] Uma Narayan points to the process through which discourses on difference serve to conceal their role in the production and reproduction of difference.

The post-colonial feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty, is essential in deconstructing and unsettling Western feminist knowledge production by questioning its reductive homogenizing of racialized women’s difference. Accompanied by the work of Rita Felski in the chapter “Modernity and Feminism” of her publication *The Gender of Modernity,* I unpack the complacency of hegemonic French feminist discourse in consolidating a Muslim

[7] Uma Narayan, “Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism,” *Hypatia* 13, no. 2 (1998): 88.

difference by casting Muslim women who wear the Islamic headscarf as anti-modern, unfeminine racialized bodies in addition to being non-agentive subjects in need of elevation in emancipation by white feminist actors.

In his comprehensive publication *Sexagon: Muslims, France and the Sexualization of National Culture,* Mehammed Mack takes this argument further. He explains that there is a process of queering heterosexual Muslims for "their nonalignment with nationally approved sexual normativities" he also presents a queer reading of virility of "outlaws" subjects such as female gang members in the banlieues and homosexual thugs as a "form of nonnormative performance." He highlights the formations of queer gender embodiment in the stigmatized banlieues: nongendered virility and chosen homosexual clandestinity as examples of "queer of color backlash against homo and sexual nationalisms"[8] I argue that the veiled woman occupies a similar position in queering dominant norms of femininity and non-alignment with normative embodiments of gender.

[8] Mehammed Mack Amadeus, *Sexagon: Muslims, France and the Sexualization of National Culture* (Fordham University Press, 2017), 21.

Chapter 1: "The second Generation Beurette: A French Heroine or A Muslim Victim?"

In this chapter, I first outline the historical frameworks that have come to bear on my subsequent analysis: the centrality of Algerian decolonization and North African immigration in the construction of post-colonial sexual, gendered and racial anxieties. Second, I refer to selected resources from popular and public media in order to survey the representation of the beurette, commonly used to refer to the 1980's second generation of French women of North African descent. I identify a contradictory stance assigned to the Beurette: A Victim-Heroine. She was construed as a victim of North African-Muslim patriarchy, a retrograde gender system and an oppressive domestic life. At the same time, she was depicted as a heroine who can benefit from assimilating into French society and who could effectively lead to the elevation of her community into the modern, secular and gender progressive French society. I argue that the figure of the beurette as it first emerges in the 1980's is a pivotal site in unraveling processes of racialization of French-North Africans and Muslims through references to gender and sexuality.

1.1 Historical Overview

1.1.1 "The neurosis of French Algeria"

For over a century, Algeria was politically, administratively and legally a part of France. The Algerian revolution which culminated in the independence of Algeria in 1962, had lasting consequences for the social and political life in France. The amputation of Algeria from the French body politic, explained the historian Todd Sheppard, posed fundamental questions about "who was French and how the country must be governed."[9] This break point between "empire" and "after", he added, transposed debates over assimilation,

[9] Todd Shepard, The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France (Cornell University Press, 2006), 2.

identity, and citizenship from the Algerian colony to the metropole which continue to underline the racial and religious tensions in contemporary France. Sheppard qualified the Algerian revolution as "the most traumatic case of decolonization in the French Empire" — some went as far as identifying a "neurosis of French Algeria" persistently haunting the fifth republic.

Since the end of the Algerian war and the arrival of millions of Algerians and North Africans to France in 1962, the historian Joan Scott observed: "immigrants were equated with North Africans (especially Algerians) who were equated with Arabs, who were equated with Muslims."[10] Similarly, in *Europe After Empire*, Elizabeth Buettner argued that debates about immigration, integration, and French national identity perceived as under threat have revolved overwhelmingly around Algerians and their descendants: "Just as Algerian independence had altered France by contracting its territory, so too did many in France fear that Algerians who had crossed the Mediterranean and become permanent residents might further 'reduce' the nation."[11]

In addition, the historian Julia Clancy-Smith insisted on the centrality of sexuality in the French imperialist discourse on North Africans as a way to demark these *indigène*" as fundamentally different and infused with an immutable otherness. While this otherness provided a justification for the crimes of colonialism and the paradoxes of the civilizational mission during the nineteenth century, a similar discourse persisted in debates around post-colonial immigration in the fifth republic. It is primarily France's relationship with North Africa that has informed the gendered-racialized imagery of the Fifth Republic.[12]

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[10] Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*. (Princeton University Press, 2007), 68.
[11] Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe after Empire Decolonization, Society, and Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 331.
[12] Bronwyn Winter, "Foulard or Cocarde? Gendered Imagery of Racialized Women in Postcolonial France," in *Sexing Political Culture in the History of France* (Cambria Press, 2012), 311.

1.1.2 The Second Generation: The Beurs Generation (1980)

During the *Trentes Glorieuses* known as an era of economic prosperity which lasted from 1946 until 1974, France recruited temporary workers from its colonies in North Africa: Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Through the law of family reunification enacted in 1974, comes a new wave of female immigration from North Africa to France. This meant that North African male immigrant workers who were already present in the metropole as temporary laborers settled down in France and brought their spouses along. Shortly after, French borders were closed due to a growing economic crisis.

Since the 1980's, the family settlements led to the rise of a sizeable young generation of French citizens of North African origins. The Beur Generation is commonly used to refer to this demographic. Etymologically, the word *beur* is a reversal of the syllables of Arabe, a common linguistic trait of the *verlan* which is a French slang associated with immigrant communities and working-class suburbs. This linguistic reversal indicated the Beur generation's assertion of an identity different from that of their parents (referred to as Arabs) and from other ethnic groups in France alike. The Beur generation received public attention through the 1983 March for Equality and Against Racism which came to be known as "the March of the beurs." Sparked by the rise of police violence against Arab youth, the protestors marched peacefully from Marseille to Paris. The first of its kind, this march of the second generation had attracted 10000 protestors when arriving in Paris. The March was inscribed within the moral/ humanist anti-racist trend which appealed to the republican tradition of equality by demanding to be "French first" and to dissolve difference for the sake of a universalist embrace of diversity. Summarized succinctly by Jennifer Fredette, the author of *Constructing Muslims in France*: "The beurs of the 1980s epitomized ideal French fighters

for equality, largely difference-neutral and seeking to redress the problem of racism by celebrating Frenchness."[13]

Even though the difference-neutral politics of the beurs were becoming "ethnic hip", the racial tensions in France heightened. The economic crisis sparked debates on the sources of immigrant poverty in France: "was it something in their culture that made them poor or were they victims of discrimination?" Scott remarked. The increase in violent racist attacks towards migrant communities, coupled with the rise in popularity of the National Front in the 1980's led to a decade of contentious political debates on the place of immigrants from the former colonies and their descendants. This finally culminated in the 1993 nationality law which limited the acquisition of French nationality. It demanded that youth born in France of foreign parentage request the French nationality and gave the right to the authorities to deny them citizenship for petty crimes or threatening the public order.

1.2 The Beurette: A Success Story?

For decades, North African immigration was sexed as male: from the labor migrants throughout the twentieth century to the soldiers deployed by the French army in World War II. With the second generation of the 1980's, a new figure emerges. The beurette, etymologically stands for the feminine variation of the beur, describing the second generation of French-North African women. As representational categories, the beurettes of the 1980's came to the forefront of French public, popular and academic discourses as the successfully integrated North African descendants, as Nacira Guenif Souilamas argued in her sociological study *Des Beurettes*. Souilamas explained, the 'beurette' of the second generation, raised in France, alluded to a good, docile migrant girl, who will agree to free herself from the retrograde and patriarchal cultural practices and traditions of

[13] Jennifer Fredette, *Constructing Muslims in France: Discourse, Public Identity, and the Politics of Citizenship* (Temple University Press, 2014), 53.

her community, in order to fully integrate into French society. Simply put, she was a "good girl" if she accepted to free herself from "her own kind." In other words, the prevalent image of the beurette was that of an emancipation-seeking woman who was striving towards assimilation into French society as an escape from an oppressive domestic life. The beurette was subject to the imperative of breaking her ties with racial, cultural or religious affiliation in order to become both French and emancipated. The sociologist Souilamas highlighted the alienation that this imperative of assimilation implicated for young women of North African descent. It often dictated "renouncing ties to family, community and men of the same background" in order to reach an individual self-actualization.[14]

As "studious and emancipation-seeking"[15] the beurette was supposedly offered the pathway of public education as a liberation from the confinement of a traditional male-dominated household and a passage towards French emancipation. Since the third republic, public schools held a sacred mission in producing French citizens, completely loyal to their civic national identity at the expense of other loyalties, including religious or ethnic affiliations. Young girls of African descendance and Muslim girls, were (and continue to be) seen as the most in need of the public school's republican sanctuary. An article published in the newspaper *L'Express* in 1988 reiterated this rhetoric: "School is the only space where she (the beurette) can breathe. The alternative of her confinement. This is where she is initiated to her second culture. (…) She learns the virtues of secularism, without a veil, she learns the utility to participate and to speak up."[16]

In other words, the private sphere spearheaded by a traditional and conservative culture was a site of repression while the public sphere represented through public schools was a site

[14] Nacira Guénif-Souilamas, *Des Beurettes*. (Paris: Hachette Pluriel, 2003), 60 quoted in Mehammed Mack Amadeus, *Sexagon: Muslims, France and the Sexualization of National Culture* (Fordham University Press, 2017).
[15] Bronwyn Winter, "Foulard or Cocarde? Gendered Imagery of Racialized Women in Postcolonial France," in *Sexing Political Culture in the History of France* (Cambria Press, 2012), 325.
[16]Marylène Dagouat, "La Beurette", *L'Express*, May 13, 1989, All French to English translations are mine.

of liberation and elevation from an inferior status. References to the oppressive customs confining women to an inferior status in the private sphere echoed in the sensationalist coverage of the working-class suburbs, that predominantly house post-colonial immigrants and their descendants. The poetic portrait painted by *L'Express* recalled the unfortunate position that the beurette occupied:

"Inside, she lives through hell. She submits to the firm rules of her father, she helps her mother, takes care of the kids, makes couscous instead of doing her math homework. She has to keep her eyes down, cover her knees. She leaves the room when there is a kissing scene on TV (…) She lives in the fear of a forced marriage, a sequestration, a return to the homeland and a confiscated passport. She is the conjunction of all the pressures. The pressure of a retrograde Islam becoming radicalized. She is under the pressure of the older brother; he is often the guardian of her prison. He watches her, follows her, slaps her and denounces her." What this narrative achieved was to naturalize an opposition between the "domestic" and "traditional" space which is associated with a race and a religion deemed backward by virtue of patriarchal traditions, in contrast to the "public" and "modern" space reserved for the modern, secular individual. As a result, the North African community is racialized as one that is essentially "out there" and "back there" somehow inevitably removed from the clear confines of what is deemed public, modern and universal.

Polygamy, forced marriages, female genital mutilation, honor crimes, Islamic patriarchy and of course the Hijab, have all been at the forefront of the public debates on the impossible integration of France's North African immigrants and their descendants since the 1980's. In his article "Sexual Democracy and the New Racialization of Europe," French sociologist Eric Fassin discussed the development of sexuality as a central process of border-making in Europe since the 1980's. The rhetoric of sexual democracy (equality between the sexes, sexual freedom) has been used to draw a line between 'us' and 'them' (Muslims, racialized immigrants). The racialization of European societies is thus justified in the name of

a "sexualized clash of civilizations." This opposition conditioned inclusion to sexual modernity through the free expression of public (hetero)sexuality, sexual liberalism and a specific understanding of gender equality. The motivation behind the "sexualization of ethnicity" explained Mehammed Mack in *Sexagon: Muslims, France and the Sexualization of National Culture* is that it allowed "anti-immigrant and anti-minority forces to keep the threat of Arab, African and Islamic difference persistent" especially as with the rise of the beur generation, "differences between the descendants of immigrants and French citizens of European origin" were becoming negligible.[17] The persistent references to the insurmountable difference of the sexual politics of these outsiders reflected what Etienne Balibar termed the dominant theme of French neo-racism when dealing with post-colonial immigrant communities: "A racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but "only" the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions."[18] In post-colonial France, the sexualization of national membership and belonging was and continue to be employed to mark the inner borders of national culture according to cultural, racial and religious markers.

An article published in the left-of-center newspaper *Le Monde* in 1989 articulated the beurettes as both victims and success stories: "They're characterized by success in school, and in civic society" this renders them agents for the "evolution of their community and the secularization of Islam in France."[19] The beurette is assigned the role of the "driver of integration." Not only did she personally benefit from the modern, republican values of French culture, she was also potentially a leader of the integration of her community. In *La France d'Intégration*, published in 1991, the sociologist Dominique Schnapper exemplified how this

[17] Mehammed Mack Amadeus, *Sexagon: Muslims, France and the Sexualization of National Culture* (Fordham University Press, 2017), 43.
[18] Quoted in Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe after Empire Decolonization, Society, and Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 325.
[19] « Après l'assassinat d'une lycéenne à Suresnes Fragiles beurettes », *Le Monde*, March 17, 1989

rhetoric manifests within academic knowledge production. She claimed that the attractions of a modern secular French society will push the desire of Maghrebi women to integrate and assimilate. She implied that these women will be easier to integrate because they have a lot to gain through the rupture with their traditional communities. Schnapper notes that: "Women, who have every interest in challenging tradition, accelerate the acculturation process."20 The prevalent discourse illustrated that the role assigned to racialized women in the Republican imaginary was not that of "bearers of tradition" but that of breakers of tradition.

The aforementioned article by *Le Monde* reassured its readers that since these young women are becoming increasingly more "westernized" they will marry and form "westernized families." He called this process "integration through sexuality." This process translated a two-fold argument on the integration of North African alterity into Frenchness. First, sexuality emerged as the terrain on which the French North-African woman can be elevated from her inferior status. She can only be included in the national community through adherence to the imperatives of sexuality à la Française. "Doing sex the French way" is understood to be sexual liberality. As Scott described: "Those who do not share this value are not only different, but inferior—less evolved, if capable at all of evolution. The ultimate proof of the inassimilability of Islam thus comes down, or adds up, to sexual incompatibility."[21] Second, the remark on "forming westernized families" revealed the popular belief that intermarriage between North African descended women and *les Français de Souches* meaning non-Muslim white men accelerated these women's assimilation and by extension the assimilation of their communities. Intermarriage is therefore offered as the only way for these racial outsiders to join national collectivity and to claim membership in the strictly designated boundaries of the French imagined community. Since national collectivities are formed through the family unit, the role

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[20] Dominique Schnapper. *La France de l'integration: sociologie de la nation en 1990* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 173 quoted in Geesey Patricia, "North African Women Immigrants in France: Integration and Change," *SubStance* 24, no. 1/2 (1995), 143.

[21] Scott, Joan Wallach, *The Politics of the Veil*. (Princeton University Press, 2007), 174.

of women as reproducers of the nation is here linked to the institution of marriage and through their biological role as bearers of children.

1.3 The Good Girl and the Bad Boy

In her book *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Avtar Brah reminds us that gender and sexuality are not peripheral but rather central to processes of racialization: "it is necessary to reiterate explicitly that racism is always a gendered and sexualized phenomenon. First the idea of 'race' is essentially an essentialist narrative of sexualized difference (…) The figure of woman is a constitutive moment in the racialized desire for economic and political control."[22] The figure of the emancipated beurette was necessary to mark the racial boundaries of the French nation by establishing a firm exclusion of those who espouse tradition (retrograde, anti-modern, illiberal) and thus to justify political and economic control of racialized collectivities. The image of the emancipation seeking beurette was mobilized against two racialized figures: the traditional, delinquent and dangerous male beur heavily policed for his supposed excessive virilism and the traditional, backwards, unfeminine veiled woman. While the image of the latter will be unpacked in the coming chapters, I want to briefly draw attention to the mobilized tensions in the representations of the beur and the beurette.

As discussed previously, the family unit and the imagined domestic life of the beurette played the role of undeniable proof of the incompatibility of French *values* and North African/Muslim *traditions*, and served as a confirmation of the superiority of the first. From this description, the beurette emerged as the antithesis of the boy of North African background, who is impossible to integrate and is essentially a violent threat. Women from North African and Muslim communities emerged as prime candidates of cultural assimilation because they're perceived as antagonistic to the virilism and machismo associated with the men of the Muslim and North African communities. Violent, and out of control, the "Arab boy" became the face

[22] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2005), 154.

of the immigration threat that the victimized beurette was facing and that necessitated the intervention of the Republic.

The tensions between the victimized daughter of immigrants and the "guardian of her prison" has been a consistent trope across different mediums in dominant French discourse. In her article "*L'image de la Maghrébine dans le Cinéma Français* 1970-2007" the French scholar Manach analyzed cinematic representations of Maghrebi women in France from the 1970's until 2007. She presents the 1987 film "Pierre et Djamila" as a case study that captured the rise of the figure of the beurette. In this film, Manach explains, Algerian men are depicted as violent and radicalized. In opposition, the beurette is painted in a positive while at the same time being a victim of "patriarchal oppression."[23] The plot employed a familiar trope[24] in French cinema: an impossible love story between Djamila, referred to as "Arab" in the film, albeit being born in France, and Pierre a "*Français de souche*" (White, non-Muslim, born of French parents).

Pierre attempted to save Djamila from an arranged marriage with her cousin and from the strict surveillance of her brother, Djaffar. The later ends up killing Pierre which drove Djamila to suicide. Manach argued that the film presented a simplified and reductive narratives that reinforced an image of the radical difference of French-Maghrebis. The sharp opposition between the figures of Djamila, the well-adjusted and integrated beurette and her brother Djaffar, the violent threat to her successful assimilation is striking. In the film, Djamila spoke only French and did not understand Arabic, while her brother only spoke Arabic and repeatedly claimed to be "proud of being Algerian." Djaffar's lack of integration into French society is depicted as an individual choice: it was his insistence on referring to his Algerian roots, his

[23] Tiphaine Manach, "L'image de « la Maghrébine » dans le cinéma français (1970-2007)," *Genre & Histoire*, no. 20 (December 1, 2017), 3.
[24] For more on this see: Leslie Kealhofer (2013) Maghrebi-French Women in French *Téléfilms*: Sexuality, Gender, and Tradition from *Leïla née en France* (1993) to *Aïcha: vacances infernales* (2012), Modern & Contemporary France, 21:2, 183-198,

attachment to religiosity and his essentially violent nature that precluded the process. His social and economic precarity were essentially his fault.

On the other hand, Djamila chose to fight her way into assimilation. She was yet another example of "integration through sexuality": she *becomes* French through her romantic relationship with Pierre. Once again, the messy and tangled questions of the irreducible alterity of France's Muslims are negotiated through the Muslim woman's sexuality. While young Muslim men are to be feared because of their delinquent sexuality, Muslim women must be liberated and protected. The role of Pierre translates the anxiety that Spivak eloquently describes as "white men saving brown women from brown men." He interfered to save her from a patriarchal domestic life, a violent brother and a forced marriage. This narrative depoliticized the woman racialized as Muslim by establishing her as a subject of moral intervention rather than a subject of political and economic rights. In the case of the French-North African woman who occupied a liminal position of being an outsider within, this gendered narrative effectively racialized and created "the Muslim community."

Chapter 2: The Beurette as a Feminist Protégée: Ni Putes Ni Soumises (2002-2005)

In 2005, Nicolas Sarkozy commented on the case of a French-Maghrebi woman who was attacked by a French-Pakistani man in a region of Paris. Sarkozy's comments on French identity belie the underlying assumptions about gendered nationalism/secular nationalism of his then-government: "I believe in national identity. France is not a race, nor an ethnic group; France is a community of values, an ideal, an idea." He then went on to explain, "In France, women are free, just as men are, free to circulate, free to marry, free to get a divorce. The right to abortion, equality between men and women, that too is part of our identity."[25] Sarkozy thus attributes the violation of the principles of gender equality, on a violent culture that came from "outside France."

For the president of a right-wing government to insist that the essence of the French republic cannot be conceptualized without gender equality and women's emancipation might seem somewhat out of character. Nonetheless, the unlikely alliance between the rhetoric of feminism, nationalism and anti-Muslim racism in the consolidation of the French national identity has been well established in French public discourse from the early 2000s onwards. Sarkozy's observation brought to the forefront new tactics of the 'othering', and the exclusion of France's racialized communities, and all this in defense of the so-called progressive ideals of sexual equality, sexual freedom coalescing with the determination of freedom on the basis of a separation of church and state. The French sociologist Eric Fassin observed that since the 2000's the French republican motto has been symbolically redefined from its long standing "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" which is constitutionally the symbol of sovereignty of the

[25] Quoted in Scott, Joan Wallach. *The Politics of the Veil*. The Public Square Book Series. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2007), 162.

Republic and the cornerstone ideals of French nationalism. The new motto, Fassin explained, included "sexual liberty, sexual equality, while the third term has generally been replaced by *laïcité*."[26] In other words, sexuality has become the means through which the French nation defined itself, controlled its borders and indicated the alterity of the Muslim other. At the same time, Republican *laïcité* (secularism) was seen as the sole guarantee of the principles of gender and sexual equality.

In the middle of this holy triad stood the figure of the new beurette — the sexually liberated, unveiled, secular Muslim woman.[27] In the words of the anthropologist Mayanthi Fernando, these beurette were construed as "exceptional" and "exemplary"[28] citizens in French public and political lives. While much has been written on the figure of the veiled woman in historical and contemporary France, I want to point towards the acclaimed figure of the "secular" Muslim woman of the 2000's. In this chapter I trace the emergence of the figure of the neo-beurette as a spokesperson on behalf of Muslim women about the patriarchal sexism within their communities. In doing so, I question the success and hyper-visibility of the French-Maghrebi feminist movement *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* (NPNS, Neither whores nor submissive)[29] mainly during its early inception in France from 2002 until 2005. I argue that the circulation of highly mediatized and celebrated figures of the secular Muslim woman were mobilized for racist ends by hegemonic feminism and the state apparatus alike. I do not intend to scrutinize the organization's claims but rather the discursive and institutional circulation of these figures. I expose how the NPNS were instrumentalized in designating and consolidating a Muslim difference in France. In this chapter, I ask the following questions: What is behind the

[26] Éric Fassin, "Sexual Democracy and the New Racialization of Europe," *Journal of Civil Society* 8, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 288.
[27] The members of the organization that I refer to defined themselves as "*Musulmanes Laïque*" meaning secular Muslims as opposed to those that they referred to as "fundamentalist Muslims" which included women who were *visibly* Muslims such as those who wear the Hijab and the Niqab. In my usage and juxtaposition of secular Muslim and religious Muslim I am simply referring to a dominant discourse in order to analyze it.
[28] Fernando, Mayanthi L. The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 187.
[29] Sometimes translated as Neither Whores Nor Doormats.

unprecedented success of *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*? And how did one movement of secular Muslim women from a working-class background become the emblem of French feminism in the 2000's?

In the first section, I introduce a brief account of the formation and rise to fame of the movement *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* not simply as a singular phenomenon but one interlinked with the increasing popularity of the "oppressed Muslim women narratives" in the West since the events of 9/11. I conclude that casting these narratives and the women who espoused them as the only legitimate representations of the experiences of racialized women in France had the effect of consolidating a homogenous image of a repressed, submissive oppressed Muslim woman whose agency can only be facilitated by her rupture with and denunciation of the unique patriarchy of Islam. In the second section of this chapter, I argue that the success of the NPNS was mobilized and instrumentalized by the French state to further police and surveil racialized Muslim communities in housing projects and to defend French universalism as a project rooted in inclusion of racial outsiders rather than their exclusion. In the third section, I survey the unequal yet complementary relationship between hegemonic French feminism and the NPNS movement. I highlight how this relationship served state feminism to reiterate regressive notions of femininity which were then mobilized to exclude Muslim women who opted for the Hijab during the debates around banning the headscarf in public schools in 2003-2004.

2.1. Ni Putes Ni Soumises (Neither Whores nor Submissive): Native Informers?

Ni Putes Ni Soumises was a secular Muslim feminist collective of French-Maghrebi women that successfully captured the French public from the early to the mid 2000's. The organization first caught the eye of the public following a staged march that passed through over 20 cities in France before culminating in Paris on the 8th March, 2003. "The March of Women from the Public Housing against Ghettoes and for Equality" was the start of the most celebrated feminist collective in the history of contemporary France. During the first

constitutive general assembly in 2003, the collective issued a statement defining their movement:

> We women who are living in the banlieues and who come from many origins and faiths, believers and nonbelievers, appeal for our rights to liberty and to emancipation. We are socially oppressed by a society that confines us in ghettos of poverty and exclusion. We are crushed by the machismo of our neighborhood men, who in the name of 'tradition' deny our most fundamental rights (…) We affirm our will to conquer our rights, our freedom and our femininity. [30]

The NPNS have gained political support from many political parties ranging from the Socialist Party to the right-wing government of Sarkozy. They were championed by both leftist feminists, Republican "cultural guardians" and popular media. The new "media darlings" accessed new political positions, previously unattained by French North African women. As the organization gained visibility and political notoriety, the founders quickly abandoned references to the socio-economic marginalization of the housing project. They warned the public against the rise of what they coined "green fascism" (green being the color of Islam) in the housing projects and its potential threat to the secular foundations of the Republic. At the same time, the activists denounced the sexism and violence of the "big brothers" against racialized women, mostly of North African and West African descent, living in the housing projects in the outskirts of big cities. As a result, they called for the state's intervention in the banlieues to ensure sexual and gender equality, to strengthen the values of secularism and "mixity" in order to protect the young girls of the ghettos. Their involvement in the anti-veiling and anti-Niqab campaigns in 2004 and 2010, was key for the state to justify both bans as feminist laws originating "from below" and aiming to protect young Muslim girls from the pressures of patriarchal Islam.

[30] "Ni putes ni soumises." *Confluences Méditerranée* 45, no. 2 (2003): 157–63. All French to English translations are mine.

The founders of the organization translated the mediatic success to political positions: Fadela Amara was made minister for urban policy under the Sarkozy presidency in 2007, and inspector general for social affairs in January 2011. Loubna Méliane, another co-founder, became an official in the Socialist Party; and Sihem Habchi, became the spokesperson for Socialist Arnaud Montebourg's presidential campaign and was appointed to the "French Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discrimination Commission."[31]

In her article "*Marianne d'aujourd'hui?:* The Figure of the beurette in Contemporary French Feminist Discourses" Anna Kemp noted the growing interest in discussing the plight of the Muslim woman during the debates around the hijab in 2004. In France, many autobiographies and personal narratives of women who had escaped the veil or denounced Muslim patriarchy have gained significant attention and were mobilized to legitimize anti-veil measures by the state. Based on the variety and number of autobiographies produced during this period, it is evident that the contentious figure of the beurette had gained significant attention in the French public by the early 2000's. The most prominent examples of these works include Loubna Méliane's *Vivre libre* (2003), Fadela Amara's *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* (2003), *Bas Les Voiles* by Chadhortt Djavann (2003), *Brûlée Vive* (2003) by Souad and Samira Bellil's *Dans l'enfer des tournantes* (2003). In 2003, Fadela Amara's autobiography won the "Political Book Prize" a prestigious title awarded by the national assembly every year. The autobiographies were not merely a French phenomenon; books on the topic travelled from Europe to North America, where they also became popular and manifested insistently since the events of September 11, 2001. Dominant discourses about and from Muslim women that have turned some memoirs into international best-sellers and their authors into acclaimed public figures share some topical similarities. Arranged marriages, honor crimes, compulsory veiling

[31] Fernando, Mayanthi L. "Save the Muslim Woman, Save the Republic: Ni Putes Ni Soumises and the Ruse of Neoliberal Sovereignty." *Modern & Contemporary France* 21, no. 2 (May 2013): 148.

and the narratives of escape (literal and figurative) from Muslim patriarchy into European modernity are at the heart of these testimonies. Dohra Ahmad has pointed out in a review of popular early 2000's "oppressed Muslim women narratives" in the United States, even when an individual book disrupted dominant discourse about Muslim women and revealed a variety of experiences, it "ultimately weaved into a seamless blanket of discourse" which participated in the prosecution of Muslim religious/cultural practices and those who espouse them.[32]

The privileging of certain testimonies whilst undercutting others has the effect of casting the Muslim woman's experience as one rooted in the image of the quintessential victim of a backwards and barbaric culture, who is turned heroine by speaking up against (not from within) her cultural or religious affiliations. The plight of *the* Muslim woman both in France and abroad was and continues to be depicted as fixed, eternal and incapable of changing because it is attributed to essentialist interpretations and decontextualized interpretations of *culture*. By collapsing all possible interpretations of women's status or gender inequality and centering on the women's religious affiliations, this rhetoric immediately defined Islam "as a self-contained and flawed belief system impervious to change"[33] The result is first the construction of one homogenous "Islam" and then identifying it as a singular and monolithic source of oppression, which facilitates the construction of Muslim women as a homogenous group differentiated only by their position vis-à-vis Islam. Simply put, the agency of the Muslim woman can only be defined through and is enabled by her break with tradition — and that's what the accounts of the secular beurette successfully translated. At stake here is the liberal theorization of agency that underlines feminist politics. Saba Mahmood scrutinized the association of human agency with the subversion or resistance to patriarchal norms.[34] Mahmood critiqued this progressive-

[32] Ahmad, Dohra. "Not yet beyond the Veil: Muslim Women in American Popular Literature." *Social Text* 27 ii / 99 (January 1, 2009): 124.
[33] Lazreg, Marnia. "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria." *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988): 84.
[34] Mahmood, Saba. "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival." Cultural Anthropology 16, no. 2 (2001): 202-36.

liberal normative understanding for equating agency to teleological emancipatory politics. Only giving a political platform to the NPNS and the narratives they espoused while silencing other Muslim women, has contributed to casting secular Muslim women as the only agentive, self-realizing political subjects.

2.2. The Republic and Its Reformed Others

The function of these "native testimonials"[35] in France was to legitimize and authenticate the "sexualized clash of civilization" and to provide the grounds on which the Republic must intervene to "restore" the values of secularism and sexual democracy. In the case of the United States, Eric Fassin explained that sexual politics have legitimized military operations abroad and served an "offensive" strategy of expansion. Meanwhile, in post-colonial Europe, the sexual clash of civilization has been mobilized "defensively" in order to protect, surveil and secure borders.[36] In France, it concerned not only those migrants "out there" who are attempting to cross the borders and "grand replace" French values; it was about the threat from within. Debates about the clash of civilization in France, especially during the 2000's with the contentious hijab controversies, revolved primarily around French Muslim citizens rather than incoming migrants. At stake here is an internal boundary-making that marks second and third generation French citizens as a liminal category that can never fully belong to the national community by virtue of sexual, gendered and "civilizational" incompatibilities attributed to Islam. The discourse on French Muslim citizens and their incommensurate difference informed and legitimized policies of integration and immigration of incoming migrants from Muslim countries. Therefore, the internal symbolic boundaries were mobilized to police the country's borders. The visibility of the NPNS is to be situated within this particular historical and political moment of the 2000's: marked by the debates surrounding the veil in the French context, shaped

[35] Fernando, "Save Muslim Women,"151.
[36] Fassin, Eric. "National Identities and Transnational Intimacies: Sexual Democracy and the Politics of Immigration in Europe." *Public Culture* 1 September 2010; 22 (3): 510.

by global trends of post 9/11 anti-Muslim racism and framed through the questions of gender and sexual equality. The NPNS drew from and contributed to the political trends of the time that attributed the problems of the Republic to the young men of the banlieue and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism.

One area in which *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* has facilitated a "law and order" approach in managing, regulating and incarcerating populations, is with regards to government-run housing projects. Mayanthi Fernando argued that the success of the NPNS and it being embraced by the state must be historicized within the neoliberal moment of the 2000's and the state's attempt to "save" its sovereignty by "saving the Muslim woman." She explained that the feedback loop between the feminism championed by the collective and the neoliberal state is the reliance on a carceral rather than a welfare apparatus. By advocating for incarceration and increased policing of young men in the banlieue as a way to ensure gender equality, rather than changing socio-economic policies, the French state "disavowed" its responsibility for the social disintegration in the banlieue. The discourse on "sexual deviance" and "insecurity" in the banlieue, authenticated by the NPNS "allowed the state to proclaim the reassertion of sovereignty in certain spaces (the banlieues) while disavowing it in others (the economy)."[37]

What appears to be a case of colonial mimicry, borrowing from Homi Bhabha's definition, is instrumentalized by these much-praised public figures who aim to create "a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite."[38] Mimicry for Bhabha disturbed the narrative underlying the civilizing mission: the colonial subject must be civilized "but not quite." Bhabha added that mimicry mocked the power of the colonial project, a power defined through a claim of universality. Universality continued to be the raison-d'être of French republicanism within which the exceptional beurette

[37] Fernando, "Save the Muslim Woman," 161.
[38] Fernando, The Republic Unsettled, 218.

played an ambivalent role. Referring to her difference is necessary to illustrate the civilizational potential of the universalist state while at the same time, this difference is a threat to universality.

The modern state's reiteration of this strategy can be seen through the photography project *"Mariannes D'aujourdhui"* exhibited on the façade of the national assembly in 2003. The fourteen portraits of NPNS's members showed these women dressed as *Marianne*, the symbol of Republican France, aiming to "pay homage to the republic" and the values it stands for. The description explained that these young *Mariannes* were "the incarnation of a perpetually rejuvenated Republic: open, tolerant, and loyal to its values of unification."[39] In other words, a republic that is "open" to difference while being loyal to its universalist claim. The inclusion of these "reformed" women of color was essential in indicating that the universalist aspiration of Republican citizenship is based on inclusion rather than exclusion. Without these exceptional cases of embrace, the project of French citizenship will be exposed as one built on an ethnocentric universalism. One based on norms that privileged "whiteness, Christianity, maleness and heterosexuality"[40] which then presumed a universal, abstract individual citizenship.

The inclusion of the beurette as the successfully integrated secular subject is necessary to prove the benevolent nature of nationalism and to assert that it is built on attainable and democratic "values" rather than race, culture or religion. Paradoxically, the descriptions of the neo-Mariannes constantly referred to them as "women of the projects" and "women of immigration origins" therefore reiterating their racialized and classed difference. In order to

[39] « Mariannes d'Aujourdhui », l'Assemblée Nationale, http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/evenements/mariannes.asp
[40] Fernando, The Republic Unsettled, 37.

establish its universalist reach, this discourse perpetuated the particularity of these mimics: almost but not quite the same.

2.3. Feminist-Feminine Subjects and their Racialized Protégées

In her groundbreaking publication *The Gender of Modernity,* Rita Felski drew attention to Western feminists' historical appropriation of "traditionally male-centered notions of evolution, revolution, equality, liberty, and citizenship in their fight for emancipation." While drawing from these existing repertoires, feminists established narratives of progress that "render woman rather than man the dynamic subject of history." As a result of this alliance and appropriation of a specific register, the white European middle-class feminist emerged as "a political and intellectual vanguard at the forefront of history." In order to do that, she needed to establish raced and classed women as "backward" and "primitive," to be "awaken by feminist consciousness."[41] This has been historicized by post-colonial feminists who illustrated that European women's movements negotiated their status in the metropole through their involvement in the empires. The language and politics of imperial feminists depended on references to the "inferior" status of indigenous women as a marker of pre-modern, barbaric civilizations.

Many scholars have pointed out the complicity of feminist politics in reinforcing the boundaries between "progressive" and "regressive" communities by equating women's emancipation with liberal modernity. The underlying evolutionary understanding of modernity and the self-positioning of the western self as an avant-garde of emancipation struggles has also operated and continue to do so in this duality between the progressive white feminist and the passive Muslim victim. The beurette of the 2000's occupied a position of the "indigenous informant" for hegemonic Republican feminism, one that exposed and reported from the inside what happened behind the walls of the *cités.* Marked by asymmetry and benevolence, the

[41] Felski, Rita. *The Gender of Modernity*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 149.

relationship between the white feminist subject and the aspiring feminist of color is another manifestation of the "white woman's burden" in post-colonial France. The French sociologist Sylvie Tissot noted in her article "Excluding Muslim Women: From Hijab to Niqab, From School to Public Space" that "Women of foreign origin, specifically those living in housing projects (*cités*)— and, more specifically, Muslim women— have replaced the traditional housewife as the symbol of female subservience." The contentious bond between dominant strands of white feminism and these feminists of color breathed new life into the history of feminist complacency in racist politics.

Firstly, the celebration of these women's native testimonials by hegemonic feminists mirrored what Mohanty critiqued in her seminal text "Under Western Eyes." These narratives of exceptional women are served to further consolidate the image of an average Muslim woman that mirrored the image of the "Third World Woman" one that "leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained)" and at the same time is "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc." Curiously, these autobiographies were never read as evidence of the different trajectories taken on by women within this monolithic category of "Muslim victims" but rather as exceptions that proved the rule. Additionally, the image of the victimized other was tangential to the construction of white French feminist subjectivity. In Mohanty's words, the beurette of the banlieue was to be read against "the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions."[42]

These cultural insiders, who are paradoxically depicted as both exceptional trajectories yet speaking for all North African and Muslim women in France legitimized and exemplified

[42] Chandra Talpade Mohanty. 1984. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." Boundary 2 12/13, 337.

the benevolence of dominant feminisms. In a sense their presence disproved the racism of the women's movement, particularly at a moment where feminists were being critiqued for their anti-veil stances, and reasserted that sisterhood is well and alive. The comments made by the infamous feminist and public intellectual Elizabeth Badinter in an op-ed published in 2005 made this clear: "Listen to the NPNS they are saying: liberate us from the confines of family, culture and religion. Our hope is to become French women like others are. Hold on to the values of the republic: No veil in the school."[43] Badinter clearly reinstated a certain hierarchy between herself both as a white feminist and a white woman and these other women that "we" need to save. Albeit being themselves proclaimed feminists and public figures, championed and celebrated by political institutions; she did not perceive the feminists of NPNS as making a political intervention but simply issuing a call for rescue. Even if they have achieved the pre-requisite for agency, meaning to leave behind religion, they did not ascend to the ranks of white feminism and remained "protégées." Simply put, they can be the objects of feminist politics but not an equal interlocutor. Interestingly, the socio-economic aspects of the NPNS's initial call for action, which referred to the state's abandonment of the housing projects, were completely absent from Badinter's reading. She reduced their plight to their "family, culture and religion", all culturized spaces of oppression where an intervention targets the cultural, ethnic and religious pathology of racialized communities.

Not only did Badinter not consider the NPNS feminist actors, but she also casted them as outside the definitions of French womanhood and femininity. Even though they are French citizens, Badinter saw them as aspiring to become French women "like the others." Anna Kemp has unpacked the "regressive" conception of womanhood championed by dominant French discourses in the 2000's and exemplified by the new figure of the beurette. She explains that the imperative of assimilation into an idealized French womanhood is reminiscent of colonial

[43] Quoted in Kemp, "Marianne d'aujourdhui ?" 23.

categorizations of women according to "a ladder of civilization which places European women on the top while black slave women were left languishing at the bottom." Whereas colonial discourses relied on the moral superiority of chaste European women, Republican feminism referred to a new paradigm. The headscarf debates of 2003-2004 coupled with the rise of the beurette as a figure, Kemp adds, breathed a new life into this hierarchy of womanhood, which was measured through sexual freedom and sexual desirability. For example, in her autobiography *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*, the founder of the organization Fadela Amara judged the young girls of the housing projects according to their physical appearance and conformity to or failure in performing dominant expressions of femininity. She classified women of the projects into three groups: "the submissive, the mannish, and the invisible." Amara opposed "those who wear the headscarf" to "those who offer daily resistance" [44] The latter, added Amara, resisted by "affirming their femininity: wearing tight clothes, chasing the latest fashion and putting on makeup." She concluded: "make up has become a warrior's face paint, a sign of resistance."[45] Similarily, Méliane, a co-founder of the NPNS, commented during a discussion on the headscarf: "It's better to wear a skirt and take up one's femininity than to hide it behind a veil in order to avoid the gaze of others."[46]

The NPNS were not the only feminists joining make-up, heteronormative femininity and sexual desirability to women's emancipation. These statements clearly exemplified the hegemonic injunctions of Republican feminism that equated womanhood with essentialist performances of heterosexual desirability, then perceived resistance only in terms of heterosexual freedom. Fernando highlighted that these "neo-feminist" movements manifesting strongly in the 2000's rejected structural analyses of sexism and equated women's autonomy

[44] Quoted in Mack Amadeus, Mehammed. *Sexagon: Muslims, France and the Sexualization of National Culture*. (Fordham University Press, 2017), 40.

[45] Quoted in Kemp, « Mariannes d'Aujourdhui ?», 23.
[46] Quoted in Fernando, The Republic Unsettled, 210.

with "personal freedoms" dictated by a consumer culture of fashion and beauty.[47] The description of the National Assembly's *Marrianes D'Aujourdhui* has also complimented the "femininity" and "beauty" of these young women which rendered them "reference images for the new generation." The emancipated beurette in her quest to be included in the category of a deserving citizen had to first become re-feminized.

The naturalized image of French womanhood was then mobilized to stigmatize the deviant woman, in this case the Muslim woman who wears the hijab: "According to mainstream French feminist logic, the voilée is either de-sexualized, negating her 'natural' femininity, or hyper-sexualized as a downtrodden sex slave."[48] By insisting on equating femininity with womanhood and feminist emancipation, French Republican feminism was successfully posed as universal. It posited a particularly located white middle-class performance of femininity as a universal embodiment of womanhood that all "others" must aspire to. This automatically excluded all women in France who did not properly fit into these conceptions — mainly women who wear the Hijab or the Niqab, and as pointed out by many authors, butch lesbians, and women who exhibited gender non-conforming behavior.[49] Not only were these groups impossible feminist subjects they were also improper women.

When it comes to the *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*, their supposed grassroots feminism has served to further marginalize, exclude and police those very same subaltern women "of the ghettos" they claimed to defend. In fact, the name of the collective is itself built on a double exclusion: "neither whores nor submissive." The NPNS established their difference vis-à-vis other women by virtue of both their respectability when it comes to the "whores" and through secular modern femininity when it comes to the "submissive." The whores referred directly to

[47] Fernando, The Republic Unsettled, 213.
[48] Kemp, « *Mariannes d'Aujourdhui ?* », 24.
[49] See Mack Amadeus, Mehammed. *Sexagon: Muslims, France and the Sexualization of National Culture*, (Fordham University Press, 2017) & Guénif-Souilamas, Nacira, and Eric Macé. *Les Féministes et Le Garçon Arabe*, (Aube, 2004)

sex-workers, those deemed too sexual and too deviant to be included in the ideals of normal, healthy and respectable womanhood. The submissive, meaning the veiled women, are posited on the other end of the spectrum: sexually repressed, unfeminine and undesirable.

In his pathbreaking *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* Goerge Mosse established that public ideals of correct and decent manners as well as appropriate sexualities constituting 19th century European respectability were intertwined with the nationalist framework. He outlined the historical relationship between sexuality, nationalism and racism: The racialized outsiders who diverted from appropriate norms of sexuality were responsible of the decline of the nation. The interplay between appropriate sexuality, race and nationalism is evident in the embrace of one respectable exercise of femininity versus a denigrated and pathologized other. Republican feminism's self-identification built on a subjectivity of moderation as opposed to excess. The recipe dictated just the right amount of sexual desirability, sexual freedom and respectability — too much can render one another. The "Neo-feminist" approach to femininity became intertwined with nationalist exclusionary paradigms to create sexually deviant women who are also undeserving citizens by virtue of their deviance.

The hyper-visibility and success of the movement *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* cannot be divorced from both the local and the global moment of a post 9/11 anti-Muslim racism in the west coupled with national debates around the Hijab in France. The rights of women and gender equality were an instrumental rhetoric mobilized by the state in order to justify the exclusion of Muslims from national membership. Hegemonic feminist politics were complicit in the production of "Secular Muslim" women exemplified by the NPNS as exceptional subjects to be saved and protected by the French national embrace. The juxtaposition of the unveiled female body and the veiled female body was key to reiterate notions of femininity and sexual normality that underpin the dominant secular and sexual norms of French Republicanism.

Chapter 3: Forbidden Women of the Republic: The Headscarf affairs 1989-2004

In the two previous chapters, I followed the evolution in the representation of French-North African women in printed media and public political discourses since the rise of the Beur Generation of the 1980's. I first discussed the rise of the figure of the beurette as a victim of Muslim patriarchy and an oppressive domestic life that must be saved by the Republic's secular and sexual norms of emancipation. I then unpacked the rise to fame of the beurette as a neo-feminist figure in the 2000's championed and instrumentalized by the French state and hegemonic feminism in producing a Muslim difference with reference to gendered and sexualized repertoires. In this chapter, I point towards an equally hyper-visible figure of Muslim alterity in France: *La femme voilée* — "The veiled woman." In order to evaluate the construction of French Muslim women who wear the Hijab in French media, I follow the coverage of the three notorious "headscarf affairs" (*affaires de voiles*) that have captured the attention of the French public in 1989, 1994 and 2003. What came to be known as the headscarf affairs refer to the contentious debates around the right of young Muslims girls to wear the Hijab in public schools which erupted at three historical occasions and culminated in the 2004 law which banned the wearing of conspicuous signs of religious affiliation in public schools.

Unlike the beurette, which was assigned an ambivalent role; at times a victim and on others a heroine, I argue that the "veiled woman" was depicted as a threat to the French republic and to its foundational values. While the unveiled body was constructed as in need of protection from Muslim patriarchy, the veiled body was perceived as a threat to the French republic. In the first section, I follow the first headscarf debate (1989) in printed media which depicted visibly Muslim women as indicators of a growing threat of "Islam" taking over the West. I argue that the fear mongering war rhetoric used by public intellectuals and popular media alike exemplified the Foucauldian understanding of modern state racism. In the second section, I

examine the media coverage of the second headscarf affair (1994) which portrayed women who wear the Hijab as traitors of French republican universalism by reproducing an ethnic and religious cultural particularism. In the third section, I review the third headscarf affair (2003-2004) through which discourses of the media, politicians and intellectuals rendered women who wear the Hijab offenders of the neutrality of the French public space and therefore legitimized the state's 2004 ban against headscarf in the public schools.

3.1. 1989: Agents of the Muslim Threat

The image of the emancipation-seeking beurette was soon shattered when the first headscarf affair occupied the public debate in 1989. Since the end of the 1980's, popular media has played an undeniable role in the demonization of Muslims in France and in the construction of Islam as a threat to the national foundations of the republic. The French historian Yvan Gastaut surveyed media discourses on immigrants and immigration from the independence of Algeria in 1962 until the mid-1990's. He noted the increasing references to Islam in treating questions of immigration since the early 1980's. The anxiety around Islam manifested in alarmist references to an "Arab-Islamic conspiracy" against France with images of the Eiffel tower transformed to a mosque's minaret and the Marianne draped in a Tchador.[50] The media framed Islam in an eternal civilizational conflict against the West. The growing fear of Islam manifested increasingly in the public opinion. In 1989 and 1991 two studies asked the question "Are you afraid of Islam?" The poll results of the first study revealed that 45% of the respondents were afraid of Islam and 51% in the second study.[51]

These anxieties materialized through the media treatment of the first headscarf affair. In 1989, three Muslim girls of North African origins were expelled from their middle school in *Creil* after refusing to remove their Hijab in the classroom. These three teenagers will suddenly

[50] Gastaut, Yvan. *L'immigration et l'opinion En France Sous La Ve République*, XXe Siècle (Seuil, 2000), 504-511.
[51] Ibid, 505.

become entangled in a nation-wide political storm. Fatima, Leila and Samira's choice of attire, Joan Scott explained, became "the symbol of a challenge to the very existence of the republic."[52] Many public intellectuals, academics and politicians rallied to express the breadth and seriousness behind the "affair." In an article published by *Le Monde*, Ernest Chenière, the school principal responsible for the expulsion of the three young girls, explained that it is in the name of "fighting for secularism" and the neutrality of the public school that the he had acted. Chenière added that while the state's role is to protect the public order, his mission is to protect the "secular serenity" of the public school. The article reported "whispers and rumors" about the young girls. Some of the rumors noted that the young girls were seen crying in school when Ayatollah Khomeini passed away, mourning his death. The article added that the father of the two students forced the elder sister to repeat a school year so that she can be with the youngest in the same classroom: "This way they can monitor each other, and they can form a pole of resistance." The rumors amplified pre-existing worries about "a group of Muslim fundamentalists"[53] who are trying to plant the seeds of chaos in the neighborhood.

Referring to Ayatollah Khomeini when discussing the apparel of two teenage girls in a small-town French middle school might seem absurd but was not unusual. When covering the affair, newspaper's front pages talked of the "threat of fanaticism" and curiously illustrated with photographs of women wearing tchadors, most pictures taken from Iran. What these rumors revealed is that the anxieties were not simply about these schoolgirls or about French Muslims but were positioned within the general anxiety about Islam, at home and abroad. As noted by Bowen in his book *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves*, "it is never just about scarves."[54] Bowen posited the hypervisibility of the hijab since the 1989 in both the national French context

[52] Scott, *The Politics*, 23.
[53] « Trois foulards contre la sérénité laique », Le Monde, October 07, 1989. All French to English translations are mine.
[54] Bowen, John. Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space (Princeton Press, 2006), 66.

and the global trend of its historical moment. According to him, by the late 1980's Islam started appearing as a new threat because of two simultaneous developments: "the children of Muslim immigrants in France were proclaiming Islam as their identity, and political leaders in other countries were proclaiming Islam to be their guide."[55] The Khomeini fatwa against Salman Rushdie for his *Satanic Verses* along with the formation of the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria marked 1989 as the year of public attention to Islam in France. Scott argued that the press coverage of the affair tapped into a general uneasiness about the presence of North African immigrants in France in a time of rising anxiety about "Islam and Arab militancy."[56]

Le Nouvel Observateur published a letter in November 1989, written by five philosophers and public intellectuals, including the renowned feminist Elizabeth Badinter. Addressed to the former minister of Education Jospin and entitled "On the Islamic Veil: Teachers, Do not Surrender!"[57], the letter detailed the "anti-veil" position defended by the intellectuals. They first insisted that prohibiting the three girls from coming to school was not a matter of discrimination but a matter of discipline. Defending the role of the Republican school, they argued that all students "must experience the pleasure of forgetting about their communities of origin in school in order to truly think for themselves." In addition, the letter did not miss the opportunity to recall the undeniable misogyny of Muslim fathers and brothers, those forcing the Islamic veil on their daughters and sisters: "By authorizing the Islamic veil in school, this symbol of feminine submission, you are giving a carte blanche to their fathers and brothers, meaning to the strongest patriarchy on the planet." This was yet again an opportunity for the "secular and republican school" to rescue female descendants of immigration from their families and to be their "ally against the authoritarianism of the fathers."

[55] Ibid.
[56] Scott, *The Politics*, 23.
[57] « Foulard islamique : Profs, ne capitulons pas ! » (Le Nouvel Observateur, 2 nov. 89) accessed on https://www.laicite-republique.org/foulard-islamique-profs-ne-capitulons-pas-le-nouvel-observateur-2-nov-89.html

Therefore, for the teachers to "negotiate" with the schoolgirls meant a "total surrender" to fanaticism, fundamental Islam and the toughest patriarchy.

Firstly, the language of the letter is striking — the writers relied heavily on a war register. The schoolgirls wearing the Hijab were referred to as "agents" and secularism is a "battle" against "fundamentalists" and "enemies of tolerance." The "destruction" of the secular school will bring the "destruction of the Republic itself." The inflammatory abstractions contributed to the politics of fear against an imaginary Islam. A rhetoric of war-making made clear the nationalist undertones framing the first "headscarf affair" as a battle against those enemies from within who are attacking the French body politic. Framed as an internal war against Islam, many alarmist newspapers' titles issued warning calls: "Between France and Islam: Will There Be a War?"; "The Recruiting Sergeants of Khomeini"; "France: The Land of Islam."[58] A comment in the reader's mail section of the magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur* went as far as imagining a civil war: "In a hundred years, they (Muslims) will be a majority in France. Before that there will be a civil war which will cause hundreds of thousands of deaths. This will lead to the extinction of Christian and francophone society."[59]

The anti-Muslim rhetoric fueled by the language of war that cautions against the "Muslim threat facing the west" is reminiscent of the language of colonial subjugation of the Middle East. One can argue, the language of conquest and colonial subjugation employed in North Africa has been inverted in France, since decolonization. As illustrated in the anti-Muslim rhetoric surrounding the headscarf affair, Islam and Muslims are now invading the Republic and it must be defended at all costs. It is no longer a matter of a war against the natives in the colonies but a war to protect the boundaries of the metropole. The headscarf constituted a visible symbol of non-white and Muslim communities originating from an obliterated colonial

[58] Gastaut, *L'Immigration*, 509-510.
[59] Ibid., 509.

history, threatening to change the face of France. The threat of Islam was articulated not only as a threat to the republic's *values* but was a threat to the very racial composition of the French nation. "Will we still be French in Thirty Years?" asked Jean Raspail on the front page of le Figaro magazine in 1985. He expressed a fear that "France would no longer be a nation" but rather "nothing more than a geographical space." He identified the demographic threat designated by "non-European foreigners; 90 per cent being of the Islamic culture or religion."[60] Since the 1980's, "Muslims" began to slowly replace previous references to ethnic or national origins of France's North and West African immigrants and their descendants.[61] What Raspail's fear made clear, is the overtly racial undertones of the anti-Islam discourse.

Foucault discusses the birth of modern state racism as "a racism that society will direct against itself, against its own elements and its own products (…) the internal racism of permanent purification, and it will become one of the basic dimensions of social normalization."[62] Within the modern biopolitical state, war is no longer waged in the name of the sovereign but in the name of society. The rhetoric surrounding the affair insisted on the importance of protecting French values: secularism, republicanism, the neutrality of the school and even women's rights. The exclusion of Fatima, Leila and Samira was framed as a necessary step to defend French *society* against the threat of Islam, and of ethnic difference. The sensationalist usage of war rhetoric illustrated the mechanisms of modern state racism as a war waged by "the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm" against "those who deviate from that norm, against those who pose a threat to the biological heritage."[63] Their expulsion from their middle school was thus a necessary measure of discipline through normalization: only after they agreed to adhere to the dominant norms by unveiling could they

[60] Quoted in Buettner, Elizabeth. *Europe after Empire Decolonization, Society, and Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 322.
[61] Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled,* 18.
[62] Quotes identified by Rachel Adams "Michel Foucault: Biopolitics and Biopower." Last modified May 10, 2017. https://criticallegalthinking.com/2017/05/10/michel-foucault-biopolitics-biopower/
[63] Ibid.

be readmitted into the shared public space. In fact, Leila and Fatima, the two sisters of Moroccan origins re-joined their class after they were "convinced" to take of their Hijab at school. This came after French officials had sought the intervention of the Moroccan king Hassan II who personally got in touch with the two young girls and their parents in order to reason with them — a striking illustration of the alterity attached to these citizens: hyper-visible as Muslims and unrecognized as French.

3.2. 1994: Traitors of the Republic

In 1994, Eugène Chenière became a deputy representing the region of *L'Oise* where he was previously a school principal. He proposed a bill that bans all ostentatious signs of religious affiliation in public schools. The minister of education François Bayrou transformed the bill into a decree which led to expelling sixty-nine girls who wore the Hijab to school.[64] The decree was soon overturned by the Council of State and left the decision to allow or ban the Hijab in school to the administrators and teachers on a case-by-case basis.

Much like it was the case for the first "affair", there was an abundance of media coverage and public debate about questions of secularism, multiculturalism and French Islam, mediated through an obsession with veiling and unveiling. As noted by Rachel Bloul in "Victims or Offenders?: 'Other' Women in French Sexual Politics" these debates were monopolized by men, both Muslim and Non-Muslim, who laid their expertise on the rights of women in Islam and the socio-political meanings and consequences of wearing the Hijab.[65] While women who wear the Hijab were hardly heard, the Hijab was nonetheless a hyper-visible threat. The Hijab became an abstract symbol, one that is symptomatic of a threat to national cohesion defined through the neutrality of the public sphere. In other words, the presence of Hijab signaled the growing demand for the recognition of cultural difference which is in direct

[64] Scott, *The Politics*, 27.
[65] Bloul, Rachel. "Victims or Offenders?: 'Other' Women in French Sexual Politics," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 3, no. 3 (August 1996): 259.

opposition with the universalist aspirations of the Republic. Joan Scott argued in her article "French Universalism in the Nineties" that "Universalism was taken to be the defining trait of the French republic, its most enduring value, its most precious asset." As a result, to accuse someone of betraying universalism is to accuse them of treason.[66] In this context, women who wear the Hijab were casted as traitors of the Republic.

The threat to the universalist definitions of French national identity was articulated through the references and anxieties surrounding the American and Anglo-Saxon models of multiculturalism. Many commentators during the first and second "headscarf affairs" referred to the looming threat of transforming the republic into "multicultural ghettos" one where "each community applies its own rules in the public school."[67] "In the name of tolerance and the respect of others, should we accept excision and cannibalism on our land?" asked Max Clos in *Le Figaro.*[68] Allowing the Hijab into public schools would push the threshold of "tolerance" too far and compromise national unity.

Defending young girls 'right to wear the Hijab was seen as conjoined with defending the right to difference (*le droit à la différence*) of ethnic minorities and therefore preaching a multicultural state. Words like difference, ethnic communities or multiculturalism have come to signify "the actual or potential breakdown of French society."[69] The Hijab was therefore a challenge to the assimilationist model of integration by manifesting loyalty to a religious community over allegiance to the nation. Claiming a religious or "communitarian" particularity is a disqualifier from full citizenship. At the same time, as a public signifier of religiosity, the Hijab violated the secular distinction between the private and the public spheres by bringing what is ought to be private into the public. Through this transgression, the Hijab was no longer

[66] Joan Wallach Scott, "French Universalism in the Nineties," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 15, no. 2 (July 9, 2004): 33.
[67] « L'Islam dans l'école de la république : Les revendications des familles et la neutralité des établissements », *Le Monde*, October 07, 1989.
[68] Gastaut, *L'immigration,* 582.
[69] Fernando, *The Republic*, 71.

only a religious symbol but entered the public space of politics. Any visible sign of religiosity was immediately wrapped under the blanket of Islamism as a political project aiming to "reshape public life around Islamic norms."[70]

The paradox of French universalism lies in the fact that the very state that produced the inherent difference of non-normative subjects condemned them for embodying this same difference. The feminist philosopher Uma Narayan contended that discourses about "difference" often "conceal their [these discourses'] role in the production and reproduction of these differences." They masquerade as a mere description when in fact they are "constructing" and "perpetuating" difference.[71] As a result, marked as "un-abstractable" and "un-universal" and "anti-secular" visibly Muslim women and by extension all Muslims were placed outside the nation. In the words of Joan Scott, "Those who did not conform in advance, who were not already "French," fell outside the purview of the universal"[72] Simply put, Muslims could never become French.

3.3. 2003: Racialized-Gendered Pariahs

Many academics have highlighted the rise of a neo-orientalism in the treatment of Muslims and Islam in the west, particularly since 9/11. The global war on terrorism coupled with the rise of anti-Muslim racism has reinforced Orientalist approaches to the barbaric Muslim. While this has been a transatlantic trend, the French academic Tissot explained that in France the "new orientalism" went beyond shaping representations and into "judicial and repressive measures targeted at a racialized population."[73] In fact, France was the first country in Europe to criminalize visibly Muslim women: the headscarf ban in public schools in 2003

[70] Bowen, *Why The French*, 182.
[71] Uma Narayan, "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism," *Hypatia* 13, no. 2 (1998): 88.
[72] Scott, *The Politics*, 103.
[73] Tissot Sylvie, "Excluding Muslim Women: From Hijab to Niqab, from School to Public Space," *Public Culture* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 39–46.

followed by the ban on the full-face veil (Niqab) in 2010 and the more recent ban on burkinis in 2016.

In 2003, the minister of interior Nicolas Sarkozy required Muslim women who wear the hijab to pose bear headed for official identity photos, invoking security concerns about terrorism and referring to the 9/11 attacks. Similarly to the previous "headscarf affairs", the discussion quickly imploded and invoked the previous controversies around the supposed need to ban the hijab in public schools. As a result, the president Jacques Chirac appointed a commission of academics, politicians and education specialists to study the possibility of enacting a law that protects the principles of laicité in Republican schools nation-wide. While commentators who pushed for a law emphasized the widespread and alarming numbers of women who wear the Hijab, the evidence countered this assumption. In reality, teachers' complaints about students wearing the hijab in school dropped from 300 in 1994 to 150 in 2003.[74] French philosopher Pierre Tévanian argued that the "repressive law" voted by the senate was a result of a debate prompted by politicians and instrumentalized by the media. Just as it contributed to the inflation of the previous headscarf affairs, Tévanian added that public media "produced an Islamophobic consensus" making the "veiled schoolgirl a vector of all evils and threats" and an "outlet for a latent racism present in all social milieus and in all political camps."[75] At the same time, French public media only gave voice to the proponents of the law and disqualified its opponents. Tévanien explained that the public media was involved in the creation of a "sacred union" between "left-wing politicians, feminists, right-wing politicians, intellectuals" that represented a "white France" pinned against "the peril of Arab-Muslims." Just as Edward Said spoke of the Western expert on Islam and his role in consolidating and perpetuating the hegemony of Orientalism, the public intellectual played a similar role in producing a "respectable racism,"

[74] Ibid., 39.
[75] Marchand Pascal. Review of « Pierre TÉVANIAN, Le voile médiatique. Un faux débat : « l'affaire du foulard islamique » », Communication 25/1 (2006) : 362-368.

one that can rally both right-wing politicians and feminists against French Muslims. In a neo-orientalist formulation, the expert and the public media intertwined in creating and consolidating a schism between France and its Muslims. The authority to name, label and analyze was attributed to the experts: public intellectuals, politicians, feminists and lawmakers. Meanwhile the absence of Muslim women from the debate reduced them simply to objects to be studied rather than political subjects. The renowned French philosopher Etienne Balibar defined the term pariahs as: "Groups that find themselves denied, in principle or in fact, the right to have rights (that of having them or having the use of them, and above all that of claiming them)."[76] In this context, visibly Muslim women were and continue to be pariahs of the French nation: derived of the right to claim rights.

Invoking gender equality and women's emancipation was much more prominent in framing the new occurrence than in the previous cases. The Statsi Commission insisted that the veil stood for the alienation of women and that laicité cannot be conceptualized without gender equality. As noted in the previous chapters, the rhetoric of saving Muslim women from Islamic patriarchy was mobilized to stigmatize and exclude racialized communities. The new turn of events is the institutionalization and the consolidation of gender equality as a pillar of republicanism and as a part of state legislation. Culminating in the 2004 law, the discursive exclusion was institutionalized as a definitive rupture: "it was either Islam or the republic."[77] The commission refused to hear the evidence of Muslim women who wear the Hijab but admitted the evidence of Secular Muslim women who supported the ban. In a hearing before the commission, Fadela Amara expressed her support for the law insisting that the veil "had no religious connotation" and simply stood as "a symbol of the oppression of women."[78] She reiterated the common discourse that victimized visibly Muslim women as passive, oppressed

[76] Balibar Etienne, "Uprisings in the Banlieues," Constellations 14, no. 1 (2007): 32.
[77] Scott, *The Politics*, 35.
[78] « Délégation du sénat aux droits des femmes et à l'égalité des chances entre les hommes et les femmes, » December 2, 2003. https://www.senat.fr/commission/femmes/fem031208.html

and lacking agency. In his audition, Rachid Kaci, author of "Islam and Politics: unveil the Marrianne" argued strongly for the law explaining that the veil "is an ostentatious sign of political Islam."[79] Note here the other side of the argument: these women are presented as willing agents of a fanatic threat and public offenders. Privileging the statements of the "exceptional" other as discussed in the previous chapter was another way of mobilizing the *worthy good Muslims* to penalize the *bad ones* who refuse to cooperate. This double exclusion from the decision-making process and from the enacted policy in public schools unveiled a startling contradiction: in order to be emancipated, Muslim women must be excluded. In "Of Bodies and Burkinis: Institutional Islamophobia, Islamic Dress, and the Colonial Condition" Kimberley Brayson brings attention to how laws that Islamic Dress are implicate in the process of limiting the public space. The law that banned the headscarf in public schools does not only regulate and manage the bodies of the girls who wear it but also governs the public space: "law produces spaces where some subjects belong, and others do not by assuming that French public space is always already white and non-Muslim."[80] She explained that the bodies of Muslim women who do not correspond to the normative qualities (defined through whiteness and institutional islamophobia) "are unwelcome in that space, unable to function and attract hostile attention."[81] Therefore, the veil arises as a racial signifier and an inescapable marker of difference. Identifying these racialized-gendered bodies as breachers of the public space's neutrality unravels how this space is de-facto reserved to certain bodies and inaccessible to others. This exclusion can be interpreted as a mechanism of disciplinary power, aiming to correct deviant behavior and to reform its enactors. From a Foucauldian perspective, the disciplinary technology of normalization that accompanied unveiling produced these young

[79] Ibid.5
[80] Kimberley Brayson, "Of Bodies and Burkinis: Institutional Islamophobia, Islamic Dress, and the Colonial Condition," *Journal of Law and Society* 46, no. 1 (2019): 79.
[81] Ibid.

women as docile bodies. They had to be normalized by being unveiled then re-feminized, re-secularized and re-publicanized.

Moore prefaces the introductory chapter of Sexing *Political Culture in the History of France* by stressing that "gender and sexual imagery have played a uniquely symbolic role in the modern French history of politics, religious struggle, and nationalism."[82] Indeed, the coverage and the debates surrounding the headscarf affairs unveiled the French anxieties about the presence of Muslim post-colonial immigrant communities in its territory as threats to national harmony and integrity. The Hijab was perceived as a symbolic totem of the clash of cultures and the impossible co-existence of Islam with the French republic. Representations of women who wear the Hijab recalled the many dichotomies underlying the claims of a homogenous "West" and the threat of "the rest."

Throughout the mediatic construction and coverage of the three headscarf affairs, la femme voilée was characterized as a visible and public challenge to the Republic's neutrality, universalism and secularism. The Republic was then to be protected from this overt transgression by penalizing and restricting the access of French Muslim women to the public space.

[82] Alison Moore, ed., *Sexing Political Culture in the History of France* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2012), 2.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that gendered, sexualized and racialized imagery was constantly mobilized in the history of modern France to mark the boundaries of national belonging. Within this history, the figure of French-Maghrebi woman loomed large in dominant political and popular discourses as a symbol of the incommensurable difference and the impossible integration of France's post-colonial immigrant communities. The persistent mechanisms of singling and othering French-Maghrebis reveals that post-colonial racism is embedded in the fabric of the modern French nation.

The construction of the Fifth Republic cannot be separated from its imperialist history in North Africa and the unfinished business of decolonization which continued to inform immigration and integration policies in the two decades that I unpacked leading up to the contemporary moment. In the construction of the French imperial project, racialized gender and sexuality constituted overlapping matrices of domination and the exclusion of the colonized other. Unveiled, dispossessed, fetishized, violated and eroticized, colonized bodies were laboratories for imperialism both in literal and symbolic terms. The historian Joan Scott in Politics of the Veil recalls the justification of the French imposition in Algeria in 1830 in terms of "bringing republican, secular, universalist values to those who lacked them."[83] Nevertheless, she observes the inherent paradox of this mission: The French sought to assimilate the "Arabs, Muslims, North Africans" yet at the same time insisted on the impossibility of their elevation into civilization. The paradox of civilizing those who are fundamentally uncivilizable continued to inform the republic's treatment of the French-Muslim-Maghrebi collectivities.

The indigenous woman's body (*indigène*) in colonized North Africa was the terrain on which the civilizational mission was to occur. The pseudo-scientific manuscripts, postcards,

[83] Scott, Joan Wallach, *The Politics of the Veil*. (Princeton University Press, 2007), 46.

photographs and conflicting political campaigns about the "Arab woman" exemplified the colonial power to name, categorize and contain subaltern bodies. At the same time, the power of representation was mobilized for conflicting ends. In Frantz Fanon's words, the French administration defined a clear doctrine: "If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight."[84] On the other, it was the terrain through which the civilizational mission must occur. In 1931, Gautier, a French professor and orientalist scholar at the University of Algiers wrote: "We are filled with pity for the cloistered and tyrannized Muslim women, their emancipation is to us a humane duty and a law of progress."[85]

While the supposedly oppressive state of Muslim women provided a justification for the crimes of colonialism and the paradoxes of the civilizational mission during the nineteenth century, a similar discourse persisted in debates around post-colonial immigration since the independence of Algeria in 1962. Public debates, dominant discourses and politics of integration and assimilation of those who can never be assimilated center sexual and gendered imagery thus transforming a colonial racism into a post-colonial racism. The essentialization of Muslim cultural difference, negotiated through the sexual, gendered and domestic organizations of the beur, the beurette, the Arab, the Muslim and the veiled woman reveal the process of homogenization and amalgamation of post-colonial diasporas into one singular threat. I attempted to illustrate the construction of the cultural difference, backwardness and pathology occurring at different levels of the public French discourse which is then instrumentalized to justify the precarious social and economic landscape occupied by the "formerly colonized" of the hexagon.

[84] Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth: Frantz Fanon*. (Grove Press, 2004),58.
[85] Gautier, *Mœurs et coutumes des musulmans* (Payot, Paris, 1931), 42.

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