



**Universiteit  
Leiden**  
The Netherlands

**France's Islamophobia Unveiled**  
The Colonial Origin of French Contemporary Anti-Veiling Discourse

Zeineb Romdhane  
1823221  
Dr. C. Strava  
June 15, 2021  
Word Count: 20.565

## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIMS .....	7
RELEVANCE .....	8
METHODOLOGY .....	8
RESEARCH DESIGN AND OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS .....	10
<b>CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>11</b>
1.1 ON MEANING AND REPRESENTATION .....	11
1.2. ON ORIENTALISM.....	12
1.2.1 <i>Orientalism, Women and Colonialism</i> .....	14
1.3. COLONIALISM AND THE ARTICULATION OF DIFFERENCE.....	16
1.3.1. <i>Unveiling as Subjectification</i> .....	17
1.4. POSTCOLONIAL SOCIETIES .....	18
<b>CHAPTER 2. CASE STUDY I.....</b>	<b>20</b>
ANALYSIS OF THE OBJECT.....	20
2.1. <i>Description of the Object</i> .....	20
2.2. <i>Visual Analysis</i> .....	22
2.3. <i>Textual analysis</i> .....	25
THE CONTEXT .....	27
2.4.1. <i>French Algeria</i> .....	27
2.4.2. <i>Women in Algerian Society</i> .....	28
2.4.3. <i>Unveiling Algeria</i> .....	29
<b>CHAPTER 3. CASE STUDY II .....</b>	<b>31</b>
ANALYSIS OF THE OBJECT.....	31
3.1. <i>Description of the Object</i> .....	31
3.2. <i>Visual Analysis</i> .....	32
3.3. <i>Textual analysis</i> .....	36
THE CONTEXT .....	38
3.4.1. <i>Postcolonial Migration Patterns</i> .....	38
3.4.2. <i>Laïcité</i> .....	38
3.4.3. <i>Laïcité and Veiled Muslim Women</i> .....	40
<b>CHAPTER 4. COMPARATIVE CHAPTER .....</b>	<b>43</b>
4.1. COMPARISON OF OBJECTS.....	43
4.2. VISUAL ANALYSIS .....	43
4.2.1. <i>Representational Meaning</i> .....	43
4.2.2. <i>Iconographical symbolism</i> .....	43
4.2.3. <i>Iconological symbolism</i> .....	44
4.3. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS .....	46
4.4. CONTEXTS .....	47
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>APPENDIX I.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>APPENDIX II.....</b>	<b>56</b>

## Introduction

“In the name of our Republican and laic principles, I ask (President of the regional council) Marie-Guite Dufay to have the Islamic veil removed from a school counsellor present in the Chamber. We are in a public building; we are in a democratic institution. She can wear it at her home, in the street, but not here, not today. So please, in the name of our Republican principles, also in the name of women all over the world who fight to remove themselves from Islamic dictatorship, I ask you to ask this person to remove her veil” (Brut 2019).

The wearing of ostentatious religious symbols has been banned in France from public schools and government offices since 2004. Although the mother broke no law by wearing the garment while accompanying her son and other children on a school trip to a French local council – a public space –, far-right politician Julian Odoul ordered the veiled woman to uncover herself (Breedon, 2019). Nevertheless, France is not the only country to have adopted an official law limiting the freedom of religious expression. Such laws indirectly uphold the so-called anti-veiling discourse that has been taking place more and more in Western Europe, with the Burka-ban being adopted in France and Belgium in 2010, and in 2019 in the Netherlands. 2020 marked a continuation of this discourse in Belgium, on whether or not to prohibit the wearing of visible religious symbols – *inter alia* the headscarf – in higher educational institutions. While one would question whether such restrictions of fundamental freedoms should be allowed for at all, one finds various verdicts by national constitutional courts, the European Court of Human Rights as well as the Court of Justice of the European Union, contributing to a blatant bias with their rulings, favoring Christianity and failing to protect religious minorities (Liu 2011; Alkiviadou, 2020).

Whereas the favoring of Christianity over other religions stems from colonial times and is thus not a new pattern, government restrictions on religion in Western European countries come as a surprise since religion should be a ‘friend’ of democracy, in contrast to authoritarian regimes in which there is a strong tendency to restrict religion (Pew Research Center 2018). Following from a research conducted by the Pew Research Center, the countries that have a high level of social hostility towards different religions – which in turn can lead to the restriction of religion – are all European countries (2018). However, state-religion relationships in European countries remain an under-researched topic. Jose Casanova, along other scholars, claims that religiously drawn boundaries in Western European states are paradoxical since the mainstream is secular (1994, 25-30). Building on this statement, Richard Alba explains that

Christian religions have been institutionalized in Western Europe, and therefore constitute “who we are”, which makes it difficult for new citizens that deviate from this norm and adhere to other religions to achieve parity, and thus similar treatment in Western Europe (2005, 30-32). Religion – specifically Christianity in Western Europe – defines the majority, and by institutionalizing this a boundary is drawn between those who identify with the mainstream, and those who are religiously “Other” (Alba 2005, 32). Hence, Alba claims that religion forms an institutional site for the distinction between the indigenous and immigrant population in Western European societies (2005, 30-32). Jean Baubérot applies this same line of thought on the case of France, the focus of this thesis. The author explains that even though one of the most fundamental principles of the France state is *laïcité*<sup>1</sup>, a subtle institutionalization of Christianity did take place over time since Roman Catholicism has been the dominant religion (Baubérot 2000). This means that although France presents itself as a secular state, there are current practices, such as the recognition of Christian holidays and the exhibit of nativity scenes in public spaces in France, that confirm the paramountcy of Christianity as the religion of France.

Even though Casanova (1994), Alba (2005) and Baubérot (2000) offer a broad understanding of the secular and religious discourse in Western Europe and explain how this leads to a boundary between mainstream citizens and the “Other”, they fail to address how this exactly leads to “excluding” practices. Given the focus of this research on anti-veiling discourse, one needs to delve deeper into the concept of Islamophobia. The term Islamophobia is widely used in both public and academic domains today (Elman 2019, 145). Although Islamophobia is commonly defined as a dislike or prejudice against Muslims, such definitions overlook the state’s role in condoning and even authorizing Islamophobic practices (Beydoun 2018, 28). Alternatively, Miriam Elman defines Islamophobia as “...both a prejudice and hostility toward Muslims that manifests as a distorted simplification of Islam and the Muslim world, and as an irrational hatred, alarmism, dread, and fear of the faith and its followers” (2019, 145). While Elman provides a definition that disregards the state’s role, she still adds to the debate by referring to “...the simplification of Islam and the Muslim world...”, implying some sort of superiority-inferiority dimension (2019, 145). Similar to this rationale, Eugenio Chahuan explains in his work that the notion of Islamophobia stems from the necessity of “us” to develop an identity contrasting with and discriminating against “them” or the “Other” (2005, 48; Romdhane 2019, 13). Subsequently, he explains how the purpose of creating this notion is

---

<sup>1</sup> A French conception of the separation of church and state.

twofold. On the one hand, it upholds the xenophobic propaganda against the Orient, Muslims and Arabs in general (Chahuan 2005, 48; Romdhane 2019, 13). On the other hand, it presents a threat to the “security” of the West (Chahuan 2005, 48; Romdhane 2019, 13). Similarly, Khaled Beydoun offers the following understanding of Islamophobia: “the presumption that Islam is inherently violent, alien, and unassimilable, a presumption driven by the belief that expressions of Muslim identity correlate with a propensity for terrorism (2018, 9).” The latter stands in line with the security purpose mentioned by Chahuan (2005). Additionally, Beydoun also provides the reader with another insight, namely that Islamophobia is the new progeny of Orientalism (2018). With this, Beydoun defines Islamophobia as “...a worldview that casts Islam as the civilizational antithesis of the West...” (2018, 28-29).

Consequently, several scholars have examined Islam and Islamophobia in relation to Orientalism. In the book *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) laid the foundation for Beydoun’s (2018) and Chahuan’s (2005) conception of Islamophobia as “us versus them”. Among the many definitions Said offers, Orientalism in this paper refers to a “...Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (1978, 3). As a result, Said provides us with a better understanding of how this line of thought justified and prepared the ground for colonial rule and intervention (1978). The author also shows that European culture and identity became more defined by setting itself off against the Orient as “...a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (Said 1978, 3). While Said’s conception of Orientalism has been criticized by several scholars for presenting the “Orient” as a homogeneous and unmodulated construct, his work still contributes to a valuable understanding of how Orientalism caused the politicization of Islam, and more importantly for this paper: the veil (Clifford 1980, 204-224; Macmaster and Lewis 1998, 125).

Accordingly, Neil Macmaster and Toni Lewis build upon Said’s Orientalism and focus on the politicization of the veil in colonial times. Macmaster and Lewis state the following: “While indulging in erotic fantasy and possession of the “Other” female, it simultaneously underlined the inferiority and barbaric nature of Islamic society which enslaved women, through polygamy and force, to the odious lust of cruel sultans” (1998, 124). This quote perfectly demonstrates how the intersection of Orientalism, Islam and women’s bodies laid a groundwork for colonialism: unveiling essentially became a way of colonial domination. Yet, the other side of the same coin is that (hyper)veiling became a signifier of the rupture of colonial hegemony and was perceived as prospective political danger for the (ex)colonizer (Macmaster and Lewis 1998, 125-128). Similarly, Frantz Fanon states in his book *L’An V de la révolution Algérienne* that the French considered Algerian women “...the pivot of Algerian

society, all efforts were made to obtain control over her...” (1968). Undoubtedly, the ‘emancipation’ and use of women to humiliate the men of a colonized society was not a new practice. As Gayatri Spivak put it: “...imperialism used women, [freeing] her to legitimize itself” (1999, 244). Yet, in the Algerian case, the veil in particular becomes a battleground of colonial oppression (Fanon 1968). Fanon goes on to explain how the Algerian War<sup>2</sup> changed the role of the Algerian woman and the perception of the veil (1968). This war marked a crucial moment since the erotic discourse of unveiling was replaced by veiling signifying political danger, and in this particular case also terrorism since some Algerian women carried weaponry under the traditional *haik*<sup>3</sup>. The association between the veil, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism continued and became almost universal in Western Media since 1979 (Chioco 2017, 564).

The abovementioned association intensified in the aftermath of the immigration of many former-colonized subjects to Western European countries (Macmaster and Lewis 1998, 132). In the case of France, one finds a tremendous influx of North African migrants posterior to decolonization, making Islam the second-most widely professed religion in France today (Statista Research Department 2020). Consequently, as described elaborately in *The French Intifada: The Long War Between France and Its Arabs* by Andrew Hussey, the banlieues of France still represent this Otherness: “...the Otherness of exclusion, of the repressed, of the fearful and despised” (2014, 530). As explained before by Macmaster and Lewis (1998) and as also argued by James Cooke (1990), anti-Islam racism can be traced back to French colonization. Given the unequal treatment of Muslims under French colonial rule although it was stated by Charles de Gaulle’s Prime Minister<sup>4</sup> that “every person from Dunkirk to Tamanrasset<sup>5</sup> was a Frenchman,” one starts to wonder whether this is reflective of the current treatment of French Muslims in France. In that case, unequal treatment of Muslims moved itself from Algeria to the banlieues of France with the immigration of former-colonized subjects in the aftermath of decolonization (Gordon 1962, 57).

Two potential gaps can be identified in current research regarding anti-veiling discourse. The first gap concerns the lack of research on the colonial origin of contemporary Islamophobic practices in post-colonial societies, specifically anti-veiling discourse in France. Even though current literature addresses how unveiling colonized women was a form of

---

<sup>2</sup> Also known as the Algerian War of Independence, 1954-1962.

<sup>3</sup> A North African type of veil.

<sup>4</sup> Charles de Gaulle was president of France from 1959 until 1969.

<sup>5</sup> City in Algeria.

domination by the colonizer, it remains ambiguous whether this discourse still holds in post-colonial societies, and whether this prompts the restriction of religious freedom in the case of France. The latter brings us to the second gap: namely the lack of literature on contemporary state-religion relationships in secular European countries, and how the boundary between “mainstream” citizens and those who are religiously “Other” leads to practices of exclusion, of which anti-veiling discourse forms a prominent example. While understanding the historical origin of state-religion relationships seems to be fundamental to grasp contemporary Islamophobic practices, it has not yet found a prominent space in academia.

### Research Question and Aims

To address these research gaps, this thesis will consider the following research question: “How does the current ban on the veil in France find its roots in French colonial rule in Muslim countries?” To analyze this question thoroughly, the thesis will examine primary sources, namely two posters. The first poster was distributed in Algeria – a Muslim majority country and one of France's longest-held overseas territories – and the second one is a contemporary poster distributed in France in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By comparing these two posters, the thesis seeks to examine how anti-veiling discourse stems from colonial times, having laid a framework for how France copes with Islam and Islamic symbols nowadays. Given the unequal treatment of Muslims under French colonial rule, this research examines whether this same discourse still applies in France today, having moved itself from North Africa to the banlieues of France. The timeframe for this case study concerns a broad historical period from 1958 until 2020, which are the years of publication of the primary sources at hand. This period was chosen since the beginning of the timeframe describes a period of anti-veiling discourse under colonial rule, whereas the end of the timeframe concerns a period of anti-veiling discourse in the former-colonizer’s country. Additionally, a span of 62 years can reveal significant shifts and possible changes over time.

The criteria for the two case studies are threefold. First, the poster needs to be a form of propaganda, published by a French source supported by the French state. Second, the poster needs to show a woman with a veil, since the research question concerns them directly. Third, the poster needs to make some kind of statement that questions the purpose of the veil– at first sight – in a degrading way.<sup>6</sup> Following this line of thought, the first poster is a French propaganda poster distributed by the Fifth Bureau of Psychological Action, during the anti-

---

<sup>6</sup> The further purpose, messages and ramifications of the poster will be discussed in the case study chapters.

veiling campaign on the eve of the Algerian War. The second poster is published by Charlie Hebdo, which is a French satirical weekly.<sup>7</sup> This poster was published on World Hijab Day by Charlie Hebdo, propagating for a “No Hijab Day”.

### Relevance

The relevance of the research is twofold. First of all, this study investigates the question of freedom of religion and how this can be guaranteed in a secular state. Adopting a law that limits the freedom of religion and the expression thereof for the sake of secularism questions to what extent human rights and freedoms can be limited by a free state. Exploring anti-veiling discourse in France elucidates how secularism can lead to the exclusion of minority religions and their rights.

Second, the increase of culturally and religiously different immigrants goes hand in hand with the rise of extreme right-wing politicians who abuse Islam and veiled women for political ends, for instance by using the fear factor of terrorism for the creation of Islamophobia and fear of “the Other”. By focusing specifically on veiled women, the research takes an intersectional approach towards our understanding of Islamophobia, Orientalism and (Post)Colonialism.

Through the in-depth analysis of two visual objects, the research reflects on visual politics which has the power to influence the popular field significantly. By delving deeper into the origin of anti-veiling discourse and how this is visually expressed, the research sheds light on the abovementioned points and as such contributes to a better understanding of contemporary practices of exclusion, specifically vis-a-vis Muslim women in France.

### Methodology

To reach a well-founded conclusion, this essay uses a combination of secondary and primary sources. The primary sources are the two posters that serve as case studies. On the other hand, secondary sources will contextualize these posters in the already existing literature. Since there is a research gap with respect to how historical relations and colonialism have influenced the current French perspective on the veil, one needs to look for a methodology that allows for the temporal structuration of social actions and processes, and contrast these to draw conclusions (Hall 2007, 82). Hence, this thesis conducts a historical process research (hereafter: HPR) by

---

<sup>7</sup> Contrary to popular belief, the state has provided Charlie Hebdo with financial aid since 2015 and even prompts the weekly to conform to the *Aides à la Presse* guidelines in order to qualify for structural aid provided by the French state. As such, Charlie Hebdo is supported by the French state (Auguste 2015). Chapter 3 will elaborate on this.



considering two case studies from different periods and connecting them (Halperin and Heath 2017, 240). HPR enables social scientists to examine events that happened over a longer period of time in order to understand and uncover how certain processes change – or do not change – over time (Halperin and Heath 2017, 242). With HPR, one can thus order many cases – e.g., events, practices or language – over time, and use this data as a basis for a longitudinal analysis (Halperin and Heath 2017, 242).

In this research, the data consists of the visual symbols, lexis and discourse that the two primary objects produce and present. In order to derive the meaning behind these primary objects, this thesis will apply the two systems of representation. This refers on the one hand to the concepts and images that represent the world in our heads, and on the other hand to language which has the power to construct meaning (Hall 2013, 3). As such, in order to consider these systems of representation, the thesis will utilize visual and textual analysis. While the following paragraphs outline how these analyses will be conducted, a more comprehensive understanding of meaning and representation will be discussed in the theoretical framework.

With respect to the visual analysis, the research will apply iconography rather than visual semiotics. Whilst the latter discusses the question of representation and hidden meanings of images, the former also assigns importance to the context in which the visual object is produced and distributed, and how cultural meanings and visual expressions are historically developed (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004, 93). Additionally, iconography pays attention to individual bits and pieces within images, enabling the researcher to focus on the “lexis” - or vocabulary in the case of language (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004, 92). Since this research aims to shed light on changes and similarities vis-à-vis a certain visual object over time, iconography is the most suitable method as it incorporates a temporal element (Panofsky 1970, 60). Iconography differentiates between three layers of meaning: representational meaning, iconographical symbolism and iconological symbolism (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004, 100). As a result, each primary object is analyzed by unwrapping these three layers of meaning. First, the representational meaning will be examined by questioning what the image shows on the simplest level. In this case, representational meaning is similar to Roland Barthes’ denotation (Panofsky 1970, 53; Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004, 103). Secondly, iconographical symbolism enables the researcher to identify the image by looking at the motifs and symbols, and thus also focus on the ideas and concepts attached to these symbols (Van Leeuwen 2004, 105). Third, the research will move from simply identifying conventional meanings to grasping in-depth interpretation by contextualizing the object, seeking to ascertain the work’s original meaning

(Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004, 107). Utilizing iconography to examine the primary sources in a historical process research ensures that both the context in which the data was produced as well as an in-depth understanding of this data are covered in the research.

In order to examine the texts on the posters, the thesis will utilize close reading, which is "...the mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings" (Brummett 2019, 3). Close reading sheds light on the socially shared meanings that are supported by words, objects and messages (Brummett 2019, 7). Moreover, close reading takes into account both the historical and textual context. As such, doing multiple readings of the text as well as deconstructing the text while situating it in its social, linguistic, and historical context will ensure a thorough understanding of the poster.

While several scholars have argued that attempting to determine a fixed meaning can be a weakness of iconographical analysis since symbols can have multiple meanings, this research acknowledges the multiplicity of symbol's meanings, and as such does not aim to proclaim one correct interpretation of each poster. Hence, this limitation makes the research no less valuable as it seeks to shed light on the matter at hand by basing its interpretations on academic research and reasoning.

### Research Design and Outline of Chapters

This thesis consists of four chapters. Before delving deeper into the analysis, the main themes and theories that are inherent to the topic at hand will be explained in the theoretical framework. In this chapter, two central themes will be discussed: Orientalism and (post-)colonialism. As reviewed in the introduction – Otherness and/or backwardness of *inter alia* Islam as discussed in Orientalism are key to anti-veiling discourse. Accordingly, (post-)colonial studies enables this research to connect the anti-veiling discourse in colonial times to contemporary France through a discussion of persistent colonial supremacy notions. In both themes the role of women, Islamophobia, and population control remain central.

Subsequently, the second and third chapter consist each of a case study; a colonial poster and a contemporary poster. Both case studies have a similar set-up. Each chapter will foreground the poster and as such starts off with the visual analysis of the primary object according to the three steps of iconography. This will be followed by textual analysis. Then, the poster will be contextualized by embedding it in the historical background. In the fourth chapter the findings of each case study will be combined by comparing the visual and textual analyses of the primary objects, followed by a comparison of the two contexts. Finally, the findings of this thesis will be discussed in the conclusion.

## Chapter 1. Theoretical Framework

In order to examine anti-veiling discourse thoroughly, one needs to delve deeper into different themes essential to this research. The fascination with veiled women seeps through history. While Orientalism has laid the foundation for the belief that there is a binary division between the Orient and the Occident – in which the latter is the modern, superior power – colonial theory exhibits the practice of this belief through the control of colonial subjects. Consequently, focusing on the Oriental women in colonial society provides one with a framework of how veiled women became a reflection of Western hegemony, and helps understand the representation of veiled women in postcolonial societies today.

### 1.1 On Meaning and Representation

This thesis will utilize Hall's (2013) conception of meaning and representation to understand the meaning behind the primary objects and what they represent. According to Hall, "meaning depends on the system of concepts and images formed in our thoughts which can stand for or 'represent' the world, enabling us to refer to things both inside and outside our heads" (Hall 2013, 3). Yet, in order to interpret the meaning behind these visual signs, one needs to apply the two systems of representation. On the one hand, there is a system by which all objects and people are connected to a set of concepts of mental representations. As such, meaning depends firstly on the concepts and images that represent the world in our heads (Hall 2013, 3). This system of representation will be discussed in the visual analysis part of each case study. On the other hand, the second system of representation consists of language. Language constructs meaning: the first system of representation becomes valuable when translated into a common language consisting of signs. The relation between 'objects,' concepts and signs are fundamental to the production of meaning in language (Hall 2013, 5). As such, this system of representation will be covered in the textual analysis of each primary object. Combining these two systems in the analysis enables a thorough understanding of the objects.

Additionally, Hall explains in the chapter "The Spectacle of the Other" how people and places that are significantly different than that of a certain culture are represented. While Hall dedicates his chapter to the difference of race, he explains that it is as applicable to other dimensions of difference as well, such as gender, sexuality and class. Hall (2013) explains that difference matters because of four reasons. First, difference has the power to influence meaning. That is to say, without difference there could not be meaning (Hall 2013, 224). While one could argue that meaning depends on the difference between binary oppositions – e.g., black and white – Hall and Derrida explain that this is a rather reductionist and over-simplified

understanding that disregards all other distinctions than this two-part structure (2013, 225). Additionally, binary oppositions are never neutral as they exist within a power dimension. This means that one pole of the binary will naturally be the dominant one (2013, 232). The second reason refers to the fact that difference constructs meaning through dialogue with the “other.” Third, culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a certain classification (Hall 2013, 226). And fourth, the “Other” is fundamental to the composition of the self to us as subjects, and to our sexual identity (Hall 2013, 227). It is important to point out that these explanations of difference are not mutually exclusive, nor is difference only positive. Difference is ambivalent, and can therefore also lead to negative feelings, resentment and aggression towards the “Other” (Hall 2013, 228).

An “Othered” system of representation involves stereotyping. According to Hall, “stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature” (2013, 247). Stereotyping confirms the relationship between representation, difference and power. As a result, power in representation has to be understood in terms of culture and symbols: meaning the power to represent someone or something in a certain way, within a certain system of representation. Stereotyping is a key element in symbolic power (Hall 2013, 249). Moreover, stereotypes can refer to both reality and fantasy, since representation works at two different levels: a conscious or overt level, and an unconscious or suppressed level (Hall 2013, 252). Interestingly, Hall points out that the conscious or overt level is occasionally displaced for the unconscious one (2013, 252). The conscious level might in some cases be a concealment, meaning that there might be a more troubling fantasy, which would be improper or even racist to state out loud. Yet, this does not mean that the fantasy does not exist. Additionally, the alteration of representation by fantasy leads to fetishism. Hall defines fetishism as “... the level where what is shown or seen, in representation, can only be understood in relation to what cannot be seen, what cannot be shown” (2013, 256). In this case, both objects are embedded in a system of representation in which women who do not wear the veil have the upper hand. As such, both fantasy and fetishism are essential to the analysis of anti-veiling discourse of the two objects.

## 1.2. On Orientalism

A relevant example of the alteration of representation can be found in Orientalism. As argued by Said, Orientalism is based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the so-called ‘Orient’ – representing Arabs and Islam for the longest time – and the ‘Occident’ (1978, 2- 17). Amongst the many other definitions that Said offers in his work, one

can define Orientalism as a Western style of thought, involving controlling, reorganizing and having the authority over the Orient (Said 1978, 3). Similar to Hall's (2013) claim that representation works on a conscious and an unconscious level, Said (1978) also differentiates between manifest and latent Orientalism. Whereas manifest Orientalism refers to "the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history (...) and so forth," latent Orientalism denotes to "an almost unconscious (...) positivity" (Said 1978, 206).

Additionally, Orientalism also created what Denys Hay has referred to as the "idea of Europe" (1968). Similar to Hall's nuanced understanding of how othering is fundamental to the composition of the self, Said expands on Hay's thoughts, noting that European culture and identity gained strength by setting itself off against the Orient (1978, 3). A particular strength of Said's work is how he seeks to move away from the idea that Orientalism is merely an ideological instrument used by colonial powers to generate economic gains, but rather a discourse à la Foucault in order to thoroughly understand the discipline by which European culture was able to produce 'The Orient' (1978, 3). With this, Said aims to go beyond the superstructure model<sup>8</sup> in which ideology is merely considered to be a legitimization and reflection of economic power.

Moreover, Said argues in the same Foucauldian terminology that Orientalism should also be regarded as an apparatus of power (Mutman 1993, 167). Foucault's notion of power has a productive nature, meaning that power has the ability to construct forms of knowledge as well as discourses, a discourse akin to realism when it comes to Orientalism, according to Said (Yegenoglu 2005, 15-16). On this, Said states the following:

"... anyone employing Orientalism, which is the habit for dealing with questions, objects, qualities and regions deemed Oriental, will designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality. For all these functions it is frequently enough to use (...) 'is'" (Said 1978, 72; emphasis added by author).

This quote perfectly demonstrates how Orientalism reflects a reality and a power apparatus by the mere usage of the simple copula "is." As such, this copula essentially represents a boundary of 'sense' determined by the Occident. Mahmut Mutman (1993) discusses how this discourse has shaped the relationship between the West and Islam through a critical dialogue with Said's

---

<sup>8</sup> Base and superstructure are two linked theoretical concepts developed by Karl Marx.

conceptualization of Orientalism. Mutman (1993) explains how Orientalism as a power apparatus led to the production of Western hegemony, since Western entitlement of power is inherently based on the question of difference, constructing an absorption. In this case, absorption – as devised by Gramsci – does not only refer to the establishment of Western hierarchy, but also to the creation of a comparative framework of differences, in which the West aims to fulfill the central, universal position (Mutman 1993, 173-175). Mutman explains:

“The necessity that underlies this formation of power is not a full and clear identity, but a necessity of difference. Since centering, demarcating, and ordering are acts that are possible only by comparison with others and by a calculation or an account of differences, *otherness never leaves the hegemonic order*” (1993, 177; emphasis added by author).

As a result, Mutman argues that Westernization and modernization attempts as part of colonial practices have divided Third World societies into binary oppositions: modern and traditional, civilized and backward, making Third World subjects objects of transformative practice following the standard Western hegemonic rationale (1993, 176-177). The latter has mainly been shown by the case of the ‘Oriental Third World,’ where religious difference was one of the principal indicators of otherness and not conforming to the hegemonic practice. Islam as a deviant religion has always had a subordinate relationship to the hegemonic order (Mutman 1993, 166). Consequently, this historical process in which the West established its hegemony gave rise to a bifurcation between a modernist narrative and an Islamist one, characterized by an asymmetrical relationship between the two (Mutman 1993, 178). In the case at hand, this means that the way people behave, act, or dress is per definition inferior when it does not conform to the norm. Hence, Islamic practices such as wearing the veil are embedded in this power dynamic in which the modern, Western narrative forms the hegemony.

### 1.2.1 Orientalism, Women and Colonialism

Said’s Orientalism also lays the groundwork for questions concerning the representation of cultural and sexual difference (Yegenoglu 1998, 176). Whereas Said claims that the relationship between the Orient and sex is not his main field of analysis, Meyda Yegenoglu points out that this leaves us with a division between the representation of the Orient and Oriental cultures on one hand, and the representations of Oriental women and sexuality on the other (1978, 188; 2005, 26). Following this binary division, neither the images of women nor the images of sexuality are perceived as fundamental aspects of the Orientalist discourse.

Yegenoglu (2005) seeks to fill this gap by providing a more thorough understanding of the sexualized nature of Orientalism. Yegenoglu argues that the representation of Otherness is embedded in both sexual and cultural modes of difference (2005, 25). As such, the way Westerners have understood and dominated the Orient and its women are not two separate enterprises; rather, they are what Yegenoglu calls "...interwoven aspects of the same gesture" (2005, 26). Consequently, women have become an important subject on which hegemonic power is reproduced.

The role of women in Orientalist discourse was particularly confirmed by the increasing portrayal of veiled women, which significantly shaped European perceptions of Islam in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century (Lockman 2004). This alteration of representation included portraying Oriental veiled women as terribly oppressed and subjugated, and endlessly "... available for erotic gratification of the oversexed Muslim men," even though several European observers were aware of the fact that upper-class Ottoman women were rather free and socially empowered (Lockman 2004, 69-70). As a result, the images and paintings from this time were mainly based on 'imagination' since most Orientalist artists had never been in contact with Muslim women, nor had they been inside the family quarters. Zachary Lockman explains that the common narrative was: "Just as Ottoman sultans and other Muslim rulers were said to tyrannize their subjects, so Muslim men were said to tyrannize their wives and daughters" (2004, 70). These Orientalist depictions would give Europeans a socially acceptable way to express their own fantasies, while also confirming the West's moral superiority (Lockman 2004, 70).

Consequently, the representation of veiled women in the Orientalist discourse invokes a dual perception. On the one hand, it 'confirms' women's subjugation and the backwardness of Islamic societies. On the other hand, it also depicts the mysterious and secretive erotic nature of what is covered from the – European – gaze (Ardizzoni 2004, 631). Michela Ardizzoni explains that the cultural standardization and stereotyping of the Oriental veiled woman was strengthened with the rapid technological advancement, enabling photography and cinema to diffuse and enforce these Orientalist images (2004, 631-632). More than 2000 films were shot in North Africa between 1911 and 1962, which reinforced the Orientalist thought (Macmaster and Lewis 1998). Both manifest and latent Orientalism in these erotic images was reflected by the recurrent depiction of the unveiling of Oriental women, a spectacle that Macmaster and Lewis have labelled the *Scheherezade syndrome* (1998, 122). Consequently, the justification for European intervention and colonial rule found its foundation in these Orientalist narratives and depictions of the helpless, subjugated veiled woman (Macmaster and Lewis 1998, 124).

### 1.3. Colonialism and the Articulation of Difference

Whereas colonialism is not limited to Orientalism, the essentializing and dichotomizing discourse of Orientalism "... justified colonialism in advance as well as subsequently facilitating its successful operation" (Young 1990, 129). Similar to this line of thought, Mutman discusses in "The West vs. Islam" how colonialism is an institutional instance of power through which Orientalism is exercised (1993, 169). As such, Mutman claims that there is a so-called structural complicity between Orientalism and colonialism (1993, 169).

Yet, because colonialism is considered to be an economic, political and cultural phenomenon, certain unconscious processes that underlie these phenomena are disregarded (Yegenoglu 2005). These processes adhere to the unconscious and latent form of Orientalism, which do not refer "...to biologically or psychologically innate individual characteristics, but to a set of discursive effects that constitute the subject" (Yegenoglu 2005, 2). Similar to Yegenolu, Homi Bhabha explains that colonial discourse is dependent on the concept of fixity in the ideological creation of Otherness (1983, 18; Hall 2013, 249). As such, Bhabha argues that subjectification in colonialism is facilitated through stereotypical discourse (1983). Subsequently, he explains that the creation of the colonial subject and the exercise of colonial power through this discourse requires a continual articulation of racial and sexual difference (1983, 19). As a result, the colonial discourse also reinforces and displays the separation between the colonizer and the subject, creating a continuous dramatization of difference as colonial fantasy (1983).

This scene of fantasies and desires is already established by symbolizing the land that was to be conquered as the 'native, exotic' woman. Following this thought, the indigenous woman also came to represent the attraction and dangers of the foreign country. As such, the possession of native women by the colonizer becomes a "patriotic obligation" (Bancel et al. 2018, 280). Accordingly, this metonymy also led the colonial power to believe that controlling women equaled controlling the colony. Although colonialism has succeeded to infiltrate most facets of a society, including the military, economic and political domination of the indigenous people, there remained one final impediment which blocked the colonizer's attempts to completely subvert and control the colonized people (Macmaster & Lewis 1998, 126). This was the private and exclusive zone of the family and household, in which women played an incredibly important role. Consequently, the colonial agenda was also directed to the indigenous woman. Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur discuss the importance of France's colonial role in the development of French society and culture overseas, in which "propagender" – understood as the dissemination of gender ideology to colonies – played an



important role (2002). While Chafer and Sackur use the case of Cambodia as an example, the authors still highlight how colonial confrontation constricted indigenous ways of womanhood, shaping new gender identities in French colonies (2002). In addition to the fact that gender standards in the colonies jarred with the cultural norms and national imagery of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the need for the colonial society to adjust gender norms also illustrates the articulation of Otherness in which European powers considered themselves the “modern” force as opposed to “traditional” colonies (Chafer and Amanda 2002, 117).

### 1.3.1. Unveiling as Subjectification

In the book *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed discusses the role of women in predominantly Muslim colonies, touching upon the intersection of gender, race and religion (1992). According to Ahmed, colonial feminism – defined as the practice of using feminism as a legitimization for colonialism – was adjusted to the target culture (1992, 151). Essentially, colonial feminism was embedded in the belief that an improvement in the status of women meant abandoning misogynist practices of the native culture in exchange for the customs and beliefs of the hegemonic culture: the European one (Ahmed 1992, 129). Colonial feminism mainly focused on the *hijab* or veil in the Middle East, which in accordance with Orientalism was classified as a sign of oppression by the colonial powers (1992, 152). Similarly, Bourdieu offers a comprehensive understanding – specifically on Algeria – of how the veil used to be a traditional vestimentary detail in Islamic societies rather than having any special significance per se (1963, 156). Yet, colonial powers regarded veiling a practice that did not conform to the norm; rather, the practice of women veiling themselves confirmed otherness, inferiority, and justified colonial feminism.

Given that women have been considered to be gatekeepers of traditionalism throughout history – reproducing this through the socialization of children –, veiled women were now considered to be the backbone of cultural resistance to the hegemonic power (Macmaster and Lewis 1998, 126). Consequently, the failure of the annexation of colonies was considered a result of the impenetrability of the Muslim household, protected by veiled women (Ardizzoni 2004). Ardizzoni argues: “The previous stereotype of veiled women held captive in the confines of the harem and waiting for a European Prince Charming to free them at last could no longer be sustained. The image of the Muslim veiled woman has, since then, remained captive of this new politicized view that regards Islam as a threat to the cultural foundations of Western civilization” (2004, 632-633). As colonial powers began to target veiled women with alleged emancipative policies, the veil progressively became a symbolic metaphorical element

marking resistance to the foreign order while conforming to their Muslim identity that the colonizer wanted to suppress (Mutman 1993, 179-180). In Macmaster and Lewis' words: "... the veiled woman became the symbol or signifier for an entire social and religious order" (1998, 130). Macmaster and Lewis elaborate on this claim by stating that "hyperveiling" started to signify political and cultural danger to the colonizer – a symbol of resistance as Mutman puts (1998, 132; 1993, 179-180).

#### 1.4. Postcolonial Societies

Colonial legacy has nowhere been more visible than in the arrival of postcolonial subjects in Europe (Jensen 2020, 101). Racial and cultural hierarchies resulting from European hegemony are intrinsic to both European history and identity (Jensen 2020, 58). As such, European states as historical entities cannot be considered entirely neutral (Galeotti 1993, 592). While citizenship stipulates the equality of rights of all citizens within a certain political community, formal equality rarely leads to equality in practice (De Haas et al. 2013, 66). As Hall and Held (1989) have discussed elaborately in their work, questions concerning citizenship in the West mainly arise regarding immigrants. In this case, "citizenship" transcends the definition of simply carrying a certain passport. Rather, citizenship is understood as the overall concept which encapsulates the relationship between individuals and the state (Yuval- Davis 1991, 58). Citizenship falls short in practice as it does not recognize the different collective identities within a political community (Galeotti 1993, 595). This has to do with the fact that certain patterns of normalization and institutionalization have taken place in Western Europe, *inter alia* the institutionalization of Christian religions (Alba 2005, 30-32). Due to this institutionalization, a boundary is drawn between those who identify with the mainstream, and those who are – in this case religiously – "Other" (Alba 2005, 32). One can conceptualize the inconsistency of the application of equality as the "equality versus difference controversy," which asserts that collective identities within a political community that deviate from the norm are not guaranteed equal treatment. This is mainly a result of the fact that the common conceptualization of citizenship upholds a certain collective identity that does not require a change of speech, appearance, dress, behavior or religion for equality to be guaranteed (Galeotti 1993, 600).

In this model, equality is thus understood as "sameness," meaning that communities who identify with another ethnic, religious or cultural group than the norm are disadvantaged (Galeotti 1993, 600-601). Yet, culture continues to play a key role as a source of identity for ethnic minorities. As De Haas et al. explained: "Identification with the culture of origin helps

people maintain self-esteem in a situation where their capabilities and experience are undermined” (2014, 63). Simultaneously, the receiving society considers linguistic and cultural maintenance to be proof of the ethnic minorities’ backwardness and inability to adjust (De Haas et al 2014, 63). In this discussion, an important role is reserved for the immigrant women. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) shed light on how gender relations influence the construction of the postcolonial nation and ethnic community in these societies. Similar to the gendered colonial belief that women are the so-called gatekeepers of traditionalism, Anthias and Yuval-Davis explain that female migrants in receiving societies are not only considered to be the biological reproducers of an ethnic community, but also the cultural carriers (1989, 7-15). The latter refers to the fact that women pass on language and cultural traditions to the new generation growing up in a society with a different dominant culture (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989, 7-15). As a result, the dominant culture perceives ethnic cultural practices preserved by migrant women as a threat to the national identity. Consequently, many attempts to limit certain customary and religious practices have been justified under the guise of social unity (Yuval-Davis 1991, 62). As such, culture is becoming more and more politicized in most receiving countries (De Haas et al. 2014, 62-64). With the deterioration of evident racial or ethnic superiority arguments, exclusionary practices against minorities gradually focus on cultural difference, of which Islamic practices and clothing such as the veil are a salient example (De Haas et al. 2014, 64).

## Chapter 2. Case Study I



Image source: Contre-Attaqué(s), 2016. URL: <http://contre-attaques.org/magazine/article/le-devoilement> (Last accessed December 18, 2020).

### Analysis of the Object

#### 2.1. Description of the Object

The poster<sup>9</sup> was distributed in 1958 by the Fifth Bureau of Psychological Action. With the arrival of the Ministry of Armed Forces, the means of the French army to suppress the anticolonial forces took a turn to an ideological war with a “psychological weapon” (Géré 1997). As a result, the French installed several staff offices responsible for carrying out what was called ‘psychological warfare’. The French powers followed the belief that “...a revolutionary army must swim in the population like a fish in water” (Brown 1961, 263). That is to say that struggle is not just about the occupation of territories, but about the occupation of minds which ultimately will lead to gaining support from the populace (Brown 1961, 263). On

<sup>9</sup> Appendix I presents the poster in large format.

the one hand, psychological warfare was meant to explain the importance of the French mission in Algeria to the native population. On the other hand, it also served as a means to convince the French conscripts of the legitimacy of their mission in Algeria (McDougall 2017, 791-792). From the First World War onwards, the Fifth Bureau of Psychological Action was set up, and this office became responsible for conducting relations with the civil authorities and propaganda (Géré 1997). Interestingly, these staff offices were put into place to act on the mind of the adversary, either to deceive them or to induce them to renounce all resistance to the French power. As a result, the new way of conducting war against the indigenous population started to consist of psychological “weapons”, producing the effects of physical destruction (Descombin 1994). Both posters and photography were used in the colonial project as propaganda tools, to which this primary object conforms.

The poster at hand was distributed just before the French forces organized public unveiling events in multiple Algerian cities in 1958. The most elaborate and most impactful unveiling ceremonies took place during massive military protests in major cities starting May 18 in 1958. The leaders of the *Algiers putsch*<sup>10</sup> together with other generals and dignitaries embarked on a tour through the largest cities of Algeria, between May 18 and May 28 in 1958. On each occasion, an almost identical and theatrical performance was organized: groups of veiled women marched in parade to places traditionally dedicated to official ceremonies, such as central squares, town halls and war memorials. Upon arrival, a delegation of young women dressed in European style clothing or wearing the Algerian *haik*, shared the stage with the French generals and dignitaries, and delivered a long speech in favor of the emancipation of women before throwing their veils to the crowd. After unveiling the Algerian women, everyone present chanted *La Marseillaise* – the French national anthem – while the military sang the *Chant des Africains* – the unofficial anthem of the *pied-noir* community<sup>11</sup> in support of French Algeria (Lazreg 1994, 135).

---

<sup>10</sup> The Algiers Putsch took place at the beginning of April 1961, after President Charles de Gaulle announced that the French would soon relinquish control of the colony. This event refers to several French generals that did not want to relinquish power to the Algerian nationalists, and therefore committed a coup.

<sup>11</sup> *Pieds-noirs* means blackfeet, this term refers to the people of French and other European origin who were born in Algeria during the period of French rule from 1830 to 1962.

## 2.2. Visual Analysis

### 2.2.1 *Representational Meaning*

The black and white poster depicts four women. Three women appear to be wearing the *haik*<sup>12</sup>, a North African traditional veil which covers each woman from head to toe (Houtsma et al. 1987, 220). The woman in front to the right is wearing the veil loosely. The two women in the back are depicted smaller and further away from the beholder. As a result, the eyes of the two women in the back are not visible and essentially depicted as two black stripes. One can see that the two women in front have different appearances: whereas the woman on the left is fully covered and only presents her eyes to the stranger, the woman on the right shows her face and some of her hair. Additionally, the woman in front to the right is well-defined and smiling. One can also note that this same woman is wearing earrings and a necklace.

### 2.2.2 *Iconographical symbolism*

As established in the theory concerning meaning and representation by Hall, the power in representation has to be understood in terms of symbols. As such, this section connects the signs and symbols identified in the aforementioned paragraph to the underlying ideas and connotations. The first symbol is the combination of the North African *haik*, the dark eyebrows and the dark hair of the women, which denotes that the poster depicts four Algerian women. Moreover, the fact that the two women in the back are depicted smaller might suggest their insignificance. Similarly, showing people from a distance can also reduce their individuality, which in turn makes them “types” (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004, 94). In this case, the beholder will be less able to distinguish between individual features of those depicted and starts to see all veiled women as the same kind. Moreover, the portrayal of people in groups rather than individuals also endorses the ‘similar effect’, which can be enhanced by similar poses as one sees on the poster: the three completely veiled women are statically portrayed, laying the foundation for generalization (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004, 96). Additionally, the fact that one cannot see the eyes of the two women in the back also makes it harder for the beholder to be able to relate or connect to these women.

Differently, the way the two women in front are represented also reinforces the contrast between them. Whereas the woman on the right is smiling and accessible, the beholder cannot derive anything from the woman on the left. Moreover, the woman on the right is depicted as “beautiful” and seemingly content in contrast to the woman on the left and the veiled women

---

<sup>12</sup> Also commonly spelled as *hayek*, in Arabic: حايك.

in the back. This might signify that the woman became happy after starting to show parts – her hairline, ears and the rest of her face – of her appearance. Additionally, one also sees that this same woman on the right is wearing accessories, which might signify one of two things. On the one hand, it can mean that the woman was wearing this under her *haik*, and that the woman is thus ‘hiding beautiful and costly things’ under her traditional *haik*. On the other hand, it might also mean that the poster wants to show how women are supposed to look: by accessorizing the – partly – veiled woman the poster shows how a woman is supposed to give importance to her appearance and make herself stand out.

### 2.2.3 Iconological symbolism

While meaning depends on concepts and images that represent the world in our heads, a more thorough understanding arises when contextualizing these concepts and images. Consequently, this step will embed the identified signs and their underlying connotation in the context of the period in which the object was created. As such, this passage is meant to draw together the iconographical symbols of the representation at hand into a coherent interpretation.

The veil is undoubtedly the central element of the poster. Although women in Algeria wore different types and styles of headscarves, the veil or *haik* were both used to describe the multitude of headscarves Algerian women wore (Perego 2015, 360). This also stands in line with the ‘they’re all the same’ connotation: there was a desire to obscure Algerian women’s heterogeneity, since acknowledging the diverse and complex nature of the Muslim society would have thwarted the French’s ability to make generalizations about the Algerian population (Perego 2015, 360). Yet, the *haik* is a specific type of North African veil and knows many diversions: it is an invention introduced by the Andalusians in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Dar Aziza 2018). This traditional dress was worn by the North African woman to cover her form and her internal clothes when leaving her home, either by conviction of modesty or her religious beliefs (Dar Aziza 2018). The veil also made the bourgeois stand out because they could display their high social rank by wearing the veil. Nevertheless, during the period in which this poster was distributed, the veil became a point of controversy between the colonizer and the colonized. In addition to the cultural and religious meaning of the veil, veiling had now also become a form of protection from the French gaze as well as a symbol of resistance to colonial-*qua*-Christian domination (Lazreg 1994, 53; Flood 2017, 111). In fact, even women that did not wear the veil before started to veil voluntarily to show their support for the liberation of Algeria (Flood 2017, 111). Moreover, the veil was also used as a strategic device under which both women and men carried paramilitary assignments (Lazreg 1994, 135). As such, unveiling – the order of this

poster – signified political and psychic dominance over Algeria to the French colonial administration (Flood 2017, 111).

The poster, however, does not reflect the above ideas candidly. Rather, the poster is embedded in colonial feminism and as such uses the ‘subordinate’ position of indigenous women for their political agenda. Depicting the women in the back as smaller conforms to the generally accepted view of the French colonial power that Algerian women are insignificant, hidden and held back by Algerian men (Fanon 1968, 47). This interpretation is in line with the Orientalist belief that women are subjugated in ‘backward’ Islamic societies (Ardizzoni 2004, 631). In light of the colonial interpenetration campaigns containing policies targeted at the emancipation of women, this poster – by *inter alia* depicting several veiled women – confirms the belief that *all* veiled women are suffering and in need of the French power, therefore justifying the forceful unveiling campaigns organized by France in 1958. Moreover, the fact that the beholder cannot identify or see the women in the back except for the *haik* enforces the idea of cultural estrangement between the French and the Algerians. As such, the poster also underpins the belief that the Oriental woman is mysterious, always veiled, and dangerous (Ardizzoni 2004, 631).

Additionally, the fact that the woman on the right looks happy after starting to exhibit her “beauty” by being partly unveiled stresses public exhibition of psychical beauty as a fundamental element of French femininity. In line with the historical context in which the public unveiling of Algerian women was ordered by Frenchmen and executed by Frenchwomen, this poster attests to the fact that unveiled women – besides their political significance – are the beauty standard. Consequently, this point also reflects the power dynamic and should be related to the persistent unequal treatment of the Muslim population versus the French citizens residing in French Algeria. Transforming backward Muslim women to elegant French women would become the first assurance of equal treatment (Perego 2015, 350). Consequently, public visibility of beauty can also be seen as a prerequisite for citizenship here.

Putting the accessories in the context of the distribution of the poster, it is important to note that in particular gold jewelry was in great demand by the French. Since gold jewelry was worn by Algerian women in their everyday life, this poster assumes that the woman in fact is wearing gold jewelry (Fowler 2016). Yet, women only exposed their jewelry in the private sphere (Houtsma et al. 1987, 224). During the colonial occupation, troops were known for having cut off women’s ears and hands in order to get ahold of golden earrings and bracelets (Lazreg 1994, 43). As a result, the woman on the right is purposely depicted with her jewelry, exhibiting that she has something that the French want. Given that Algerian women serve as a



metaphor for the occupation of Algeria, this particular symbol might signify that Algeria has valuable things to offer France as soon as she *completely* subjugates herself.

### 2.3. Textual analysis

Following the visual analysis, this paragraph aims to interpret the text of the poster to ensure a thorough understanding of the object. First, one can note that the text is written in a “seductive” font. The poster reads “*N’êtes-vous donc pas jolie? Dévoilez-vous!*”, which translates as “Aren’t you pretty? Unveil yourself!”. Essentially, the seductive font reflects the compelling nature of the text (Kolenda, n.d.).

The first part of this text is very ambiguous. The question “Aren’t you pretty?” can mean two things. While this segment can exclaim “You are pretty!”, it can also imply “Are you hiding the fact that you are not [pretty]?”. The first meaning implies a certain form of “empowerment”. However, this alleged empowerment is embedded in a subjective context of power: the French want to empower women by unveiling them, yet this patronizing line of thought assumes that veiling equals depriving women of power or beauty. Moreover, the exclamation to unveil yourself because you *are* pretty, also takes away the agency of women. It would namely mean that as a woman, you do not have a choice with whom you want to share your prettiness. As such, this part of the texts accentuates the visual symbol of public exhibition of psychical beauty.

Similarly, the latter meaning – “Are you hiding the fact that you are not?” – implies a certain beauty standard: namely that “the Other” is per definition ugly, and uses the veil to hide their ‘ugliness’ from the stranger. Essentially, this means that the veil equals ‘ugliness’ and unveiling equals ‘beauty’. Remarkably, the religious and cultural meaning of the veil is – intentionally – neglected. Approaching the order to unveil from an aesthetic standpoint – namely that veiled women are not beautiful – is a way of disguising French interest in the unveiling of Algerian women. While the French were acutely aware of the underlying political and religious reasons for veiling – namely veiling being a form of resistance and a signifier of Islam –, embedding the poster in a framework in which the French are ‘worried’ about Algerian women and wish to empower them is a way to conceal their strategy. This interpretation of the text also corresponds to the visual depiction of several veiled women in a similar manner, confirming the belief that all veiled women are in need of the French power.

Additionally, when delving deeper into the meaning of “pretty”, one finds that pretty is defined as “pleasant to look at, or (especially of girls or women) attractive or pleasant in a delicate way” (Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. “pretty”). However, the definition of pretty does not

equal its representation: the meaning of pretty depends on the system of concepts and images formed in our thoughts which can ‘represent’ a certain thing. In this case, one can derive that “pretty” – following French standards – does not include women wearing a veil or “the Other” as such. As a result, the question “Aren’t you pretty?” demonstrates how beauty, a supposedly innocent and benign value, can be weaponized.

Moreover, the sentence “Unveil yourself!” – conjugated as an imperative – can refer to multiple things. First, the text plays on the double meaning of the word “unveil.” On the one hand, “unveil” can be defined as “to make something secret known” (Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. “unveil”). This meaning follows the Orientalist stereotype – as the visual symbols also signified – that Algerian women are a secret held captive in the confines of the harem (Fanon 1968, 18). Remarkably, the Arabic meaning of harem<sup>13</sup>, refers to multiple things. While harem denotes ‘wife’, it also refers to something too precious and holy to be touched, as well as something that is protected by the man (Almaany, s.v. “حَرَم”). Combining this with the veiled woman being a metaphor for the colonized country, the call to unveil then shows the interest of the French powers to uncover all secrets of Algeria, including those of the personal sphere. Similarly, to “unveil” can also refer to “showing or introducing something new or making it known publicly for the first time” (Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. “unveil”). The latter definition of “to unveil” would still build on the idea of the veil hiding some secrecy. However, the part of “making it known publicly for the first time” could entail that unveiling demands a great spectacle, in which the exposure of the appearance of Algerian women for the first time is celebrated – as had happened during the unveiling ceremonies. Alternatively, “unveil” might also refer to the simple act of removing a veil or some kind of cover. However, this meaning of unveil is inherent to the aforementioned two meanings. This definition also evokes a call to action: it calls on women who supposedly lack independence and are subdued under patriarchy to reclaim their “agency”. Yet, “Unveil yourself” as an authoritative command also means that women are once again forcefully ordered to do something according to certain expectations, and thus do still not use their own agency to decide whether they want to veil or unveil.

---

<sup>13</sup> Harem has multiple meanings, including campus, sanctuary, holy place, wife; that what is not violated, and what is protected and defended by the man.

## The Context

### 2.4.1. French Algeria

The invasion of Algiers in 1830 formed the beginning of French expansionism in Northern Africa. Nevertheless, Algeria is a unique case given its history as a colony and yet not a colony (Adamson 2002, 5). Kay Adamson described the way the French treated Algeria as “...part of one single common space in which the old world of metropolitan France and the new world of colonial Algeria existed not as two separate entities but as one in which the events of one impacted upon events in the other” (2002, 5). As a result, changes implemented in the character of France’s political regime influenced the ways in which Algeria was seen directly (Adamson 2002, 197). Although Algeria became an integral part of France by 1848, not all Algerians were French citizens (Adamson 2002, 247, 311; Tolan 2017, 43). Whereas French settlers and other Europeans residing in Algeria enjoyed voting privileges and Algerian Jews were entitled to full citizenship, Algerian Muslims had a separate and inferior legal status as declared by the *Code de l’Indigénat*<sup>14</sup> (Tolan 2017, 43). As such, the *mission civilisatrice*<sup>15</sup> reinforced the Franco-centric presupposition that French language and culture were superior to indigenous cultures, seeking to eradicate Algerian local culture and traditions. The French government adopted various colonial assimilation and cultural interpenetration campaigns and attendant linguistic Frenchification, of which propaganda formed an indispensable part (Benrabah 2013, xii; Edwards 2002, 117). Gender ideology made up a great part of colonial assimilation and cultural interpenetration policies in Algeria (Chafer and Amanda 2002, 117).

However, after realizing that the Algerians were also convinced of their superior Islamic civilization and resisted the French policies, governor-general Jacques Soustelle<sup>16</sup> began to doubt the efficiency of France’s assimilation strategy and revised it to a policy of integration and association (Le Sueur 2001, 23-25). The latter would make Algerians French, which on paper meant that an Algerian would become officially equal to a Frenchman while preserving their cultural and ethnic distinctions (Go 2013, 51). Yet, this new policy was essentially assimilation strategy in disguise, and as such still reinforced the superiority of French culture while not guaranteeing equal treatment (Go 2013, 51).

---

<sup>14</sup> Code of the Indigenous People, the systematic and layered oppressive French laws that set out an inferior legal status for natives of French colonies (Ondrus 2017, 266).

<sup>15</sup> *Mission Civilisatrice* can be translated as the “civilizing mission” and refers to the political rationale for colonization claiming to foster modernization and Westernization of the traditional and indigenous peoples.

<sup>16</sup> Governor-general of Algeria under President De Gaulle.

#### 2.4.1.2 *The Consecrated French Principle of Laïcité in Algeria*

Religion laid at the heart of the issues concerning the unequal treatment of Algerians in French Algeria. The Catholic Renaissance in France in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century shaped the occupation of foreign territories significantly (Burrows 1986, 117). In the case of Algeria, Islam was perceived as the foremost distinction between the colonizers and the colonized and became therefore the main target of colonial policy (Lazreg 1994, 51). This entailed the adoption of a progressive Christianisation policy through the establishment of the Catholic Church (Adamson 2002, 322-323). As a result, Islamic practices were hindered: mosques were occupied by colonial troops, lands trusted to mosques became property of France and the sanctified ritual of the Friday prayer became a propaganda speech for the French occupation (Lazreg 1994, 51). However, with the assertion of the Third Republic, a French law establishing the separation of church and state was adopted in France in 1905, known as *laïcité*.

Even though *laïcité* was adopted in France, the French were less concerned with guaranteeing the separation of church and state overseas. In fact, France found itself benefitting from the religious clergy in the occupied territories as they formed an important ally in the *mission civilisatrice* (Tolan 2017, 44). As such, the French claimed that the indigenous population would not understand a law separating state from religion in the case of Algeria. Consequently, Algeria – just like several other French colonies – was exempted from *laïcité*. (Lazreg 1994, 135). Simultaneously, French policy toward Muslims in French colonies remained ambiguous. Due to the fear of Islam becoming a uniting force against European rule, France made Islam the second religion of France as proof of her tolerance and dedication to equality (Tolan 2017, 43). By keeping Islam close and presenting herself as tolerant towards her Muslim citizens, France sought to avoid any kind of resistance. Forsaking her own values including the principle of *laïcité*, France manipulated religion – more specifically Islam – for political ends (Tolan 2017, 45).

#### 2.4.2. *Women in Algerian Society*

Yet, since the colonial policies of cultural interpenetration were unsuccessful, the political doctrine shifted to colonial feminism by ‘saving’ women. Remarkably, English and French travelers’ accounts attest to the fact that Algerian culture – including precolonial gender relations – was foreign to Europeans. In contrast to the stereotypical Orientalist image that the Muslim woman was uncultured and unskilled doing nothing but bearing children and pleasing her husband, precolonial gender relations in Algeria were rather modern for the time and stagnated after the French invaded (Lazreg 1994, 20-27). Although relations between women

and men differed per region, women fulfilled an indispensable role for Algeria's socio-political accomplishments (Lazreg 1994, 20-27). In addition to taking care of the household and raising kids, women produced foods and cosmetic products, girls were able to attend school, and most prosperous women were literate and taught to play instruments (Lazreg 1994, 25). Nevertheless, following the French invasion of Algeria, women's lives were significantly damaged by colonialism. While men were undeniably also affected by colonialism, women were agitated both by contradictory colonial policies and by native men's responses to these policies (Lazreg 1994, 35). The latter also had to do with the fact that in Algerian law, the woman was constantly placed under a male guardianship (Sambron 2009, 16). Nevertheless, whereas men lost their fascination to the French after the last tribal rebellions were defeated in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women never lost their appeal to French imagination rooted in Orientalism (Lazreg 1994, 39).

The combination of France's unfamiliarity with the indigenous culture and the objectification of indigenous women by Frenchmen led 'feminists' to use this discourse in favour of colonial policies by presenting the implementation of French culture as more liberating to women. As such, the Algerian occupation centered around colonial feminism, in which French policies and treatment of native women reinforced the belief that native women's 'emancipation' equals the adoption of French culture (Lazreg 1994, 39). The latter also followed the belief that France could not establish the full domestication of Algeria if women – making up half of the Algerian population and seen as cultural bearers – did not accommodate. Converting women, winning them over to foreign values, and wresting them from their status meant both gaining real power over men and possessing the practical, effective means of deconstructing Algerian culture (Fanon 1968, 20). As such, 'emancipating' women in order to reform the Muslim family became the new strategy of bringing the French and Algerian population together (Sambron 2009, 67). The focus on women was also rooted in the belief that controlling indigenous women equaled controlling the colony.

#### 2.4.3. Unveiling Algeria

France's manipulation of Islam for political ends intersected with colonial feminism, as shown by the many unveiling campaigns. The practice of veiling formed a crucial point of cultural difference between the French and the Algerians. The Algerian woman was in the eyes of the European observer "The one who hides behind the veil" (Fanon 1968, 18). Yet, one should note that in precolonial times the same women that only left their houses veiled, did not shy away from walking around unveiled in the presence of Christian European captives held at

their homes. This dynamic shows that veiling during this time was a practice women performed to show off their status as urban, well-to-do women and only when in presence of eligible men (Lazreg 1994, 22). Since Christian captives did not fall under this category, veiling was deemed unnecessary (Lazreg 1994, 22).

However, in colonial times the French purposely reinforced the Orientalist portrayal of Algerian women as helpless victims of Islamic patriarchal society in need of the French savior, thus justifying its presence in Algeria (Perego 2015, 350-355). In particular after *Front de Libération Nationale*<sup>17</sup> (hereafter: FLN) representatives began to push for their recognition as delegates of an independent Algeria in 1958, France knew it had to persuade the international community of the necessity of its presence in Algeria (Perego 2015, 553). Consequently, the French falsified representations of Algerian women as if they had been “modernized” for the international community (Perego 2015, 357). The French also started to spread anti-veiling discourse diligently by organizing mass unveilings and “women’s groups,” in which French women sought to convince Algerian women to “Westernize.” For this, France even distributed pamphlets which set out exact guidelines on how to convince Algerian women to unveil (Perego 2015, 359-364).

Another factor that led the French to focus more on veiled women was their growing awareness of the FLN which started to recruit women to serve as agents and to participate in military operations (MacMaster 2009, 98). Following this, many veiled women started to transport weapons and ammunition in addition to the usual nursing and domestic roles (MacMaster 2009, 98-100). As such, converting women and winning them away from “female oppression” also became a military strategy (MacMaster 2009, 262). Hence, the meaning of the veil changed from a characteristic of the affluent urban woman to an instrument for political action and resistance. Rather than veiling by tradition, women now started to veil against the occupier who seeks to *unveil* Algeria (Fanon 1968, 47).

---

<sup>17</sup> National Liberation Front, the Algerian nationalist movement during the Algerian War.

## Chapter 3. Case Study II



Image source: Charlie Hebdo, 2020. URL: <https://charliehebdo.fr/2020/02/religions/world-hijab-day-une-insulte-au-feminisme/> (Last accessed December 18, 2020).

### Analysis of the Object

#### 3.1. Description of the Object

The second object of analysis<sup>18</sup> was created by Charlie Hebdo. Charlie Hebdo is a French satirical weekly that was founded in 1970 after the passing of Charles de Gaulle. Charlie Hebdo is an independent weekly and relied entirely on subscriptions and single-copy sales until 2015. It is known for its many political cartoons and illustrations ranging from black humor to social criticism. The covers and illustrations of Charlie Hebdo – including the cartoons of the prophet Muhammad – are sometimes the source of intense controversy. An extreme example of this are the Paris Attacks in 2015, which led to the death of 11 of Charlie Hebdo’s staffmembers by two terrorists (BBC 2015). This attack sparked an international wave of reactions to defend press freedom around the slogan “*Je suis Charlie*”<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Appendix II presents the poster in large format.

<sup>19</sup> Translates as: I am Charlie.

However, while Charlie Hebdo is an independent French weekly magazine, it has received an enormous amount of support by the French state since 2015 (Auguste 2015). Posterior to the Charlie Hebdo shooting, donations have multiplied including contributions and financial support by the French government. Fleur Pellerin – the former Minister of Culture – declared the release of about one million euros for Charlie Hebdo and the possibility of providing structural aid, in order to ensure its sustainability (Auguste 2015). Even though the latter was criticized by the *Agence France-Presse*<sup>20</sup> because a satirical weekly is not considered to be a “publication of political and general information” and as such does not have the right to state funding, the French state’s commitment to still provide Charlie Hebdo with funding exhibits France’s endorsement of this particular weekly (Auguste 2015).

This particular poster was published on the 1st of February 2020. The 1st of February marks World Hijab Day, a day intended to recognize the millions of Muslim women who choose to wear the hijab and dress modest (World Hijab Day, n.d.). By doing so, founder Nazma Khan hopes to counter the dominant controversial stigma on the veil and seeks to shed light on why Muslim women choose to wear the veil. As such, the main mission of the organization is to fight discrimination against Muslim women through awareness campaigns and education (World Hijab Day, n.d.). Yet, Charlie Hebdo published this poster together with an article arguing to organize a “No Hijab Day” instead, since the practice of wearing the veil is considered to be controversial. According to Charlie Hebdo, wearing the veil should not be celebrated due to its un-feministic nature (Daussy and Shevchenko 2020). Moreover, the article describes how the veil is neither more nor less than “a tool of rape culture.” By covering the body of women, the hijab endorses that the woman who wears it is responsible for the desire she arouses and is therefore responsible for the attacks she would suffer by not wearing it (Charlie Hebdo 2020).

## 3.2. Visual Analysis

### 3.2.1. *Representational Meaning*

Three women are depicted on this poster. While looking at this poster, the first thing that strikes the beholder is the depiction of the female genitals on each face. As such, the female reproductive organ forms the center of attention. Additionally, the faces of the three women are unidentifiable. The remnants of each face that are not covered with the female sex organ are colored pink. Moreover, all three women are portrayed with a purple veil and a dark grey

---

<sup>20</sup> Agence France-Presse (AFP) is a leading international news agency.



under scarf. They all appear to be wearing a simple white shirt, as can be derived from the woman in front.

### *3.2.2. Iconographical symbolism*

Since the power in representation has to be understood in terms of symbols, this section aims to shed light on the underlying ideas and connotations in order to better understand the meaning of the object. The first symbol is the three veiled women presented on the poster: this depiction confirms that this provocative poster targets three Muslim women. Since the poster is a French production, one can assume that immigrant women are depicted here. As mentioned before, the portrayal of people in groups rather than individuals endorses the ‘similar effect’ (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004, 96-97). Thus, by portraying all three women in a similar fashion – even using identical colors – the belief that ‘all veiled women are the same’ is entrenched in the poster, as well as the idea that they represent ‘a type’ (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004, 94).

Since one cannot see the faces of the women, the beholder is unable to relate or connect to the women at all. When the beholder searches for the face or eyes of the women in an attempt to connect with them, the beholder automatically looks at ‘their’ genitals. As such, it appears as if the essence of these women centers around their reproductive organs. By depicting woman’s genitals in the middle of each face, all three veiled women are thus characterized by their genitalia or femininity so to say. Ultimately, the clear depiction of the female genital at the center of the poster denotes two things. First, by depicting the female sex organ, veiled women are limited to ‘their’ role as sex objects. On the other hand, the depiction of the female reproductive organ also limits veiled women to ‘their’ other role as ‘reproducers’. Yet, the depiction of the veil – normally symbolizing modesty – in combination with the female genital – symbolizing sexuality and procreation – establishes the mocking undertone of the poster. Mocking someone or something refers to the act of insulting a person or other thing, and by doing so the person or thing at hand is presented as foolish or inferior (Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. “mock”).

Another salient detail that attaches meanings to the signs and symbols identified are the specific colors used. For instance, the fact that the veils are colored purple also carries meaning. As a non-traditional color, purple denotes instability (Van Braam 2020). In addition, it is also assumed that purple provokes thoughts, creativity and imagination and as such has the power to express surreal feelings and trigger fantasy (Van Braam 2020). Differently, the dark grey under scarf creates a tone: dark grey denotes that something is depressing and neutral, but also conservative, secretive and withholding (Van Braam 2020). With regard to the rest of the

women's appearance, the white shirt signifies purity and innocence. Simultaneously, white can also represent emptiness and ignorance (Van Braam 2020). Lastly, one can see that the uncovered remnants of the face are colored pink. Evidently, pink is considered a female color in the West and thus denotes femininity in this case (Van Braam 2020). Moreover, pink also exhibits innocence while signifying inhibition and weakness (Van Braam 2020).

### 3.2.3. Iconological symbolism

Finally, the underlying meaning of the identified symbols will be embedded in contemporary France. The contextualization of concepts and images will elucidate the semiotic meaning of the poster. As such, this passage is meant to draw together the iconographical symbols of the representation at hand into a coherent interpretation.

First, the mocking undertone of the poster explicates that it aims to ridicule veiled women. As such, the poster can be seen as a criticism and parody of veiled women globally. In addition, since the object was published on World Hijab Day, it also propagates why we should *not* accept or support the veil. Consequently, the poster underpins the already adopted laws in France limiting the practice of veiling, supposedly in line with *laïcité*. In the French context, the poster depicts the tension between the French state and veiled women, in particular because it addresses a fair share of French citizens given that France is home to approximately 5 million Muslims<sup>21</sup> (Statista Research Department 2020). Accordingly, mocking the purpose of the veil and veiled women as such supports the agenda of the French state.

One should also note that mockery is mainly a tool of privileged groups, which also provides a level of social distance between the critic and those criticized (Raisborough and Adams 2008). As such, the parody of the veiled woman in this poster also exhibits the power dynamics at hand: the French state implementing restrictive policies – mainly affecting religious practices of marginalized groups – to ensure social unity, while veiled women have to adjust and hand in their freedom to do and wear as they like. This depiction of veiled women thus demonstrates how women are still an important subject on which hegemonic power is reproduced. More specifically, this case exhibits the response to women that do not conform to the hegemonic norm – in terms of religion, behavior and clothing. One should note here that the intersectionality of the women at hand – their sex, religion, and ethnicity<sup>22</sup> – attests to the demeaning message of the poster. Even though the poster provokes all three identities, women

---

<sup>21</sup> France's population counts approximately 67 million people, of which Muslims are a minority comprising 5 million inhabitants (Statista Research Department 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Given that the majority of French Muslims have a migratory background, ethnicity also plays a role.

whose identities consist of the intersection of the three aforementioned identities are triple disparaged.

When focusing on the symbols identified, the female genital particularly draws attention. Depicting the sexual organ so centrally – which is normally hidden as a private part of the body –, the poster essentially assigns the opposite meaning to the veil than the Islamic rationale (Houtsma et al. 1987, 1224). Whereas the Islamic veil is supposed to symbolize modesty and propriety and is rooted in the belief that genitalia have to be protected<sup>23</sup>, the poster endorses the Orientalist belief that veiled women are available for erotic pleasure (Martin et al. 2016, 480). Moreover, depicting all three women in a similar fashion – including the identical colors – transcends the stereotype that all veiled women are the same. This underlying connotation has to be understood in the Orientalist context that ‘all veiled women are oppressed’, and as such underpins the 2004 law which bans the veil in certain public settings.

In addition to the Orientalist belief that the veil is backward and anti-feminist, the fact that the faces of the women are centered around the woman’s genitalia signifies that these women are nothing more than objects for sexual pleasure and reproduction. The color pink surrounding the female genital reinforces this sexual message by emphasizing what makes these women so feminine. Moreover, it also underpins the existing view that veiled women – or one might argue women as such – are weak, which in the case of France is reflected by the subordinate position of the Muslim community (Hargeaves 2007, 106-120). Alternatively, depicting the women in white in combination with the portrayal of the female genital also confirms the Oriental stereotypes of innocence, purity and virginity. The poster is thus also a clear example of fetishism in which the veiled woman is perceived in relation to what cannot be seen or shown, namely female genitalia (Hall 2013, 256).

While the poster ratifies the ambiguous idea that veiled women are mere sex objects available for the pleasure of men, the poster also normalizes this belief. Although the French state declared with the adoption of the ban on ostensible religious symbols in public settings<sup>24</sup> that veiling makes the woman solely responsible for the desire of the man, the portrayal of the female genital in combination with a text asserting that “The veil frees the fantasy” endorses this belief (Stasi 2003). This message is reinforced by the colors used; the fact that purple supposedly provokes thoughts and triggers fantasy endorses the text. In this case, fantasy thus shapes the relationship between the French state and her citizens, but also between French

---

<sup>23</sup> For both men and women (Houtsma et al. 1987, 1224).

<sup>24</sup> Educational establishments.

citizens and veiled French citizens, as it reinforces superiority due to the stereotypes reinforced in this poster and its mocking nature.

Moreover, embedding the belief that veiled women are biological reproducers in the French context, one finds that veiled women constitute a minority and are therefore biological reproducers of an ethnic community (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989). This point also reflects on a broader controversial debate in which equality in France can only be guaranteed through assimilation, in the form of giving up distinctive linguistic, cultural and social features. As such, the role of veiled women as reproducers also intersects with their role as cultural carriers (De Haas et al. 2014). Combining this with the other connotation of purple – namely instability – which represents the veiled immigrant woman as instable, the veiled woman is also depicted as a threat to France. Putting this in the French context in which national identity is already considered to be threatened by immigration and Islam<sup>25</sup>, the veiled woman – over whom the French state cannot exert her power – in particular starts to carry the responsibility for the whole immigrant community as reproducer of this “threat” (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989, 7). Linking instability to “secrecy” – reinforced by the usage of the color grey for the under scarf – the poster also underpins the belief that the veiled woman can secretly be a threat herself. This belief can be traced back to the colonial idea that several veiled women hid weapons under the veil – as France had seen happen before in the Algerian War – and to the association of Islam with terrorism (Chioco 2017, 564).

### 3.3. Textual analysis

Having deconstructed the visual symbols, this paragraph will discuss the text in order to get a complete understanding of the meaning of the object. The poster reads “*Le voile libère le fantasme,*” which translates into “The veil frees the fantasy.” This is written in a simple font, which is used when conveying a direct and straightforward message (Kolenda, n.d.). Essentially, the text speaks for itself: the veil worn by Muslim women is said to free the fantasy of the beholder. Combined with the simplistic font, the text is presented as if it is a fact. When deconstructing the ‘fact’, one should note that both *foulard* and *voile* can be used in French to refer to the veil, the two terms differ in their connotation. On the one hand, *foulard* and its plural – as used in *l’affaire des foulards*<sup>26</sup> insinuate different types and colors of scarves. On the other hand, *voile* is nearly always used in the singular form, and can suggest a uniformity

---

<sup>25</sup> Following a report by the *Commission Nationale Consultative Des Droits de L’Homme* (CNCDDH) 44.6% of the country considered Muslims a threat to French national identity in 2019 (CNCDDH 2019).

<sup>26</sup> Literally translated: the scarf affair, but also the Islamic scarf controversy.

of clothing and a uniformity of thinking. Using the word *voile* over *foulard* thus also corresponds to the visual symbols, *inter alia* the portrayal of all three women in a similar fashion and the identical colors. Alternatively, the Arabic word for veil – *hijab* – has an underlying meaning in addition to simply denoting a ‘veil’. It refers to “something that protects from something else” or “something that covers, conceals, or separates” (Almaany, s.v. “حجاب”). Putting this underlying meaning of the veil in the same sentence with the word *fantasy*, the poster assigns the opposite underlying meaning to the word ‘veil’ by stating that it frees the fantasy. Fantasy, a stereotype as discussed by Hall, is when something is represented on an unconscious level (2013, 252). It refers to a more troubling idea which in most cases would be improper to state out loud. However, by stating that the veil frees ‘fantasy’ – a supposedly unconscious process – so clearly, the poster also challenges the word’s unconscious nature. Essentially, the poster normalizes these suppressed thoughts vis-à-vis veiled women. As such, the poster endorses the belief that women who wear the veil *allow* for this fantasy to be freed and thus transform it into something on the conscious level – a fact. The text thus also provokes women who wear the veil. Effectively, the text claims that because you wear the veil, you free the fantasy.

Yet, the word *fantasy* also carries a double meaning. While *fantasy* can be understood as “...a pleasant, exciting, or unusual experience that you imagine is happening to you,” one should note that it also has a sexual connotation (Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. “fantasy”). When looking into the meaning of “fantasy,” one finds that the most frequently used adjectives are erotic, romantic and sexual (Collin’s Dictionary, s.v. “fantasy”). Combining this meaning of *fantasy* with the depiction of the female genitalia, one can derive that the poster refers to *fantasy* in the sexual sense. Nevertheless, *fantasy* can also be defined as “a story that describes situations that are very different from real life” (Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. “fantasy”). Stating that the veil frees such fantasies stands in stark contrast with the Islamic meaning attached to the veil, which is to protect the women’s sexual energy (Houtsma et al. 1987, 1224). As such, the veil is supposed to protect from *fantasy*. Consequently, one could state that the cartoonist is well-aware of the false representation the poster reinforces by using the word “fantasy” in combination with the depiction of the female genital.

When focusing on the usage of the verb “to free,” it is an antithesis of the French conception of the veil. The veil is namely seen as restrictive, anti-feminist and a form of subjugation (Daussy and Shevchenko 2020). As such, the usage of “free” here might be used on purpose to emphasize that the *thing* the veil frees is *fantasy*. Putting this into the context of

World Hijab Day which celebrates the veil as a powerful image of freedom, the poster – in particular the vulgar representation of women combined with the provocative text – certainly seeks to debunk the importance of such a day.

## The Context

### 3.4.1. Postcolonial Migration Patterns

France is a salient example of a post-imperial society in which postcolonial subjects make up a substantial number of French citizens (Jensen 2020, 102). Yet, the arrival of such a high number of postcolonial subjects raised the question of how to reconcile the equality of rights, the promotion of individualism and the principle of tolerance while respecting cultures, identities and religions (Wihtol de Wenden 1998, 140). As a result, French politics has been centered around the tension between immigration and national identity in the past decades, while French citizens with a migratory background call on France's commitment to equality (Thomas 2013, 6; Jensen 2020, 102). Essentially, the persistence of discrimination and unequal treatment has its roots in colonialism (Blanchard 2005, 13). However, the unequal treatment of post-colonial subjects has been concealed for decades by *inter alia* calling attention to the fact that France follows a republican model. This model asserts that the French nation is a political community, based on a constitution, laws and citizenship (De Haas et al. 2014, 67). The main characteristic of the republican model is that it admits newcomers to the community on the condition that they adhere to the existing political rules and conform to the national culture (De Haas et al. 2014, 67). As such, to obtain French citizenship one has to become "French" through assimilation in the form of giving up distinct linguistic, cultural and social features, and thus becoming identical to the majority population (De Haas et al. 2014, 266). An important characterization of the French state is *laïcité*, which is considered to be "the cornerstone of the Republican pact" (Stasi 2003, 10).

### 3.4.2. *Laïcité*

*Laïcité* is based on three inseparable values: freedom of conscience, legal equality of spiritual and religious preferences, and neutrality of political power (Stasi 2003, 10-14). Neutrality of political power assures the exclusion and refrainment of political power from any interference in the spiritual or religious domain (Stasi 2003, 10-14). This means that particularly regarding religion, equality of citizens can only be guaranteed if citizens have the freedom to pursue their own ideals and practice in accordance with their culture and religion within the private realm, while disregarding their distinguishable features and act in adherence to the general will by

being ‘just’ citizens like everyone else in the public sphere (Galeotti 1993, 591). The latter belief is embedded in the conviction that citizens can fulfil their political obligation in the public realm when they have undivided loyalty to their fellow citizens (Galeotti 1993, 591). Distinguishable features such as religious symbols supposedly threaten this public realm as citizens will have the pressure of another loyalty (Galeotti 1993, 591).

Given France’s diverse population, *laïcité* has been an important point of controversy, in particular vis-à-vis those adhering to minority religions. While the French state claims to be neutral and thus does not favor any religion, a subtle institutionalization of Christianity has taken place in France (Baubérot 2000). Roman Catholicism has been paramount for centuries in France and as a result Christianity is engrained in the French state and its identity alike. While Catholics enjoy a privileged status, it is difficult for other minority religions to achieve parity (Alba 2005, 32; Hargreaves 2007, 106). Consequently, since the French state as a historical entity is not neutral, her commitment to *laïcité* – built on this principle of neutrality – is flawed (Alba 2005; Galeotti 1993; Baubérot 2000). As such, France exhibits the equality versus difference controversy by not guaranteeing equal treatment to collective identities within a political community that deviate from the norm (Galeotti 1993, 595).

In practice this means that while *laïcité* also follows the private/public domain division, it fails to recognize certain distinctive religious differences among individuals (Galeotti 1993, 594). The fact that the secular public sphere in France is built around the Catholic tradition rather than neutrality has two ramifications. First, the public sphere favors a particular collective identity in line with the Catholic tradition, namely the white Christian male (Galeotti 1993, 600). Effectively, this means that the identity of the white Christian male does not impair his role as a French citizen, nor does his personal belief make him disloyal to France (Galeotti 1993, 600). Essentially, his personal convictions align with the public good, therefore the public domain does not require this particular identity to change behavior, appearance or habits (Galeotti 1993, 600). The Christian citizen can thus be both an obedient Christian and loyal citizen in both the public and private domain. Consequently, the second ramification follows from the first one: because the white Christian male is engrained in French society and identity, Catholic religious symbols such as a crucifix necklace have lost their visibility in French society and are considered to be “normal” (Galeotti 1993, 593). Differently, the headscarf or veil is a very visible sign of a “foreign” religion in French society, even though it carries the same visibility from an objective perspective (Galeotti 1993, 593).

### 3.4.3. *Laïcité* and Veiled Muslim Women

The question of *laïcité* reappeared in 1989 at French schools with the headscarf debate. This debate arose after three veiled Muslim girls were expelled from a school in Creil because they refused to take off their veil when ordered to do so by the school authorities (Hargreaves 2007, 111). According to the school, the girls needed to unveil and dress like the other students (Galeotti 1993, 585). Numerous political and ideological debates raised questions about the veil in school and in French society as a whole given the principle of *laïcité* (Rocheffort 2002, 147). Consequently, the Minister of National Education<sup>27</sup> intervened and asked for advice of the *Conseil d'Etat*<sup>28</sup> on how to guarantee *laïcité* in schools (Galeotti 1993, 585). This governmental body declared that the Islamic veil is part of students' rights to express their religious beliefs and should therefore be allowed, on the condition that it does not obstruct the school order (Galeotti 1993, 585).

Nevertheless, the veil-controversy did not stop in 1989. In the years to follow, the veil turned into a religious-political statement and became at odds with the French principle of *laïcité* (Fasenfest 2010, 207). Since the veil became a symbol of Islamic fundamentalism after the 9/11 attacks, Muslim girls wearing the veil were seen as pawns advancing the political agenda of Muslim fundamentalist groups in French society (Fasenfest 2010, 207). Consequently, President Jacques Chirac<sup>29</sup> installed an investigative commission headed by Bernard Stasi<sup>30</sup> with the task of elucidating how secularism should apply in practice. The report declared that guaranteeing *laïcité* in school by prohibiting certain religious symbols is considered essential, as this is the environment in which knowledge is transmitted, critical thinking is taught, openness to diversity of cultures is encouraged, and personal development can be ensured (Stasi 2003, 10-14). As such, the state adopted law n°2004-228, which came to regulate the application of *laïcité* in public, middle and high schools by prohibiting the wearing of ostensible signs or outfits showing a religious affiliation (LégiFrance 2004).

With regard to the Islamic veil, law n°2004-228 is supposed to resolve the public debate centered on the wearing of the Islamic veil by young girls (Stasi 2003, 55). One should note here that the Stasi Commission did not want to hear from young women who had been expelled nor from any sociologists specialized in Islamic dress while compiling this report (Bowen 2007, 117). Yet, the report declared that the Islamic veil is in many cases imposed on young girls by their family and social environment and as such, the French Republic should not

---

<sup>27</sup> The French Minister of National Education of that time was Lionel Jospin.

<sup>28</sup> The French Council of State, a governmental body that acts both as legal adviser of the executive branch.

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Chirac served as President of France from 1995 to 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Bernard Stasi was a French politician who was the Ombudsman of the French Republic from 1998 to 2004.



“remain deaf to these girls’ cry of distress” (Stasi 2004, 128). This law is thus meant to save Muslim girls from their oppression and religious commitment. The document dedicates a special section to the Islamic veil, followed by these claims as to why the French state decided to prohibit the veil in the public setting:

“For those who wear it, the veil can have different meanings. It can be a personal choice or on the contrary a form of coercion [...]. Wearing the veil at school is a recent phenomenon. Affirmed in the Muslim world in the 1970s with the emergence of radical politico-religious movements, it did not appear in France until the end of the 1980s. For those who do not wear it, the meaning of the Islamic veil stigmatizes “the pubescent girl or the woman as solely responsible for the desire of the man,” a vision which fundamentally contravenes the principle of equality between men and women. [...] Many perceive the visible character of a religious sign to be the opposite of the school’s mission (...).” (Stasi 2003, 57)

As follows from this quote, the veil does not align with French values. While several scholars have made the claim that the adoption of law n°2004-228 is legitimate given France’s commitment to *laïcité* and due to the fact that the law does not differentiate between symbols of different religions, it is the French state’s bias towards Christianity and its inability to differentiate between distinctive religious differences that leads to the discrimination of minority religious’ identities when applying equal treatment in practice. If in this case Muslims – like followers of other religions – in principle have equal freedom to practice their worship in France, many social constraints to this freedom are opposed in practice (Blanchard et al. 2006, 141). Within this secular framework, only female Muslim students have to give up their religious identity in order to be respectful students, whereas Christian students can obediently be Christian and respectful students (Galeotti 1993, 600). The secular framework thus disregards that other religions than Christianity require to express a public dimension in their faith (Blanchard et al. 2006, 141).

This means in practice that veiled Muslims have to conform to the norm or be stigmatized as outsiders (O’Brien 2016, 105). France’s unsuccessful attempt to reconcile principles of universality and equality with tolerance for other religions – to which the aforementioned law °2004-228 conforms – tends to isolate veiled women further rather than

‘helping’ them<sup>31</sup> (Wihtol de Wenden 1998, 140). Veiled women are seen as cultural mediators between the culture of the home country – what the French refer to as the traditional culture – and the French ‘modern’ culture (Wihtol de Wenden 1998). As such, law n°2004-228 also has to be understood in this context: it is an outcome of the French’s fear of cultural annihilation, in which veiled immigrant women as foreign tradition-bearers play an important role (O’Brien 2016, 115). The latter also has to do with the alleged “proselytizing nature” of the veil, whether veiled women intend it as such or not (O’Brien 2016, 114). Law n°2004-228 ensures, in the words of Prime Minister Raffarin<sup>32</sup>, “the permanence of *our* values” that are “constitutive of *our* collective history”<sup>33</sup> (O’Brien 2016, 116). Hence, the entity that is being protected by the adaptation of the veiling ban switched from female Muslims to the French society (O’Brien 2016, 115). The practice of veiling is thus not limited because of its ‘subjugation of women’; rather it is restricted because it represents an unwanted “foreign” and Islamic practice that imperils the majority “way of life” and as such, banning the veil ought to be classified an Islamophobic practice (O’Brien 2016, 115).

---

<sup>31</sup> 60% of French veiled women reported experiencing discrimination due to their religion in 2019 (Lang 2021).

<sup>32</sup> A French politician who served as Prime Minister of France from 6 May 2002 to 31 May 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Emphasis added by author.

## Chapter 4. Comparative Chapter

This chapter aims to compare the findings of the case studies. This will be done by firstly comparing the visual analyses of the posters, which will be followed by a comparison of the textual analyses. Last, this chapter will also draw together the differences and similarities of each context. For the sake of simplicity, this chapter will refer to the colonial poster as poster I, and the contemporary poster as poster II.

### 4.1. Comparison of Objects

Each object was shared on different occasions. Poster I propagates for the unveiling of Algerian women on the occasion of the anti-veiling campaigns organized in French Algeria. Poster II was shared on World Hijab Day and propagates for a “No Hijab Day”. Moreover, while poster I was distributed by the Fifth Bureau of Psychological Action – an office installed by the French state in colonial times –, poster II was shared by Charlie Hebdo, an independent French weekly which receives financial support from the French state and is part of the French popular field shaped by state policies.

### 4.2. Visual analysis

#### 4.2.1. Representational Meaning

With respect to the representational meaning, the posters are very different. While both posters depict veiled women, the portrayal, details and colors used differ. Poster I presents a more “neutral” depiction by portraying three women wearing the *haik* and one woman who wears the veil loosely. Differently, poster II portrays three women wearing a purple veil, grey under scarf and white shirt in a more vulgar manner by depicting the female genital on each face. The remnants of each face is colored pink.

#### 4.2.2. Iconographical symbolism

Subsequently, the second step of the iconographic research framework was meant to shed light on the underlying ideas and connotations of the symbols identified in the first step. The research found that the two posters make use of similar symbolism and thus enforce similar underlying ideas and concepts despite having a different representational meaning. To start with, both posters use the veil as a signifier of the “Other.” In poster I, the veiled women represent Algerian women, and in poster II the veiled women represent French immigrant women. Yet, one should note that this representation also reflects on the Orientalist metaphor that ‘Other’, indigenous women represent an entire social and religious order.

Moreover, an ‘Othered’ system of representation – in this case Orientalism – also involves stereotyping. Poster I reinforces the stereotype that veiled women equal ugliness and are oppressed, while the symbols of poster II endorse the belief that veiled women are nothing more than their genitalia, and thus are limited to ‘their’ role as sex objects and reproducers. Yet, these stereotypes are part of binary oppositions, which are never neutral. This representation thus symbolizes that unveiled women, or ‘French femininity,’ is the way to go.

Yet, ‘Othering’ also makes it difficult for the French beholder to connect or relate to the women. In poster I, the eyes – as the only visible part – of the two women in the back are also disguised. In contrast, in poster II one cannot see the faces of the women at all; the faces of the women are presented as female genitals. Moreover, both posters seek to reduce the individuality of veiled women by presenting them from a distance, but also by depicting them in a similar manner. This was even reinforced in poster II through the usage of identical colors for each woman. As such, both posters underpin the belief that all veiled women are the same.

An important difference between the two depictions is the way they seek to contrast meaning. While poster I does this by portraying the woman on the right – who is partly unveiled or seems to be in the process of unveiling – as beautiful and happy, poster II makes use of different colors in order to juxtapose between the meanings of the different symbols. In the latter case, purple denotes instability, grey stands for something secretive and withholding, pink denotes femininity and the color white signifies purity and emptiness.

#### 4.2.3. Iconological symbolism

In this last step, the research sought to draw together the iconographical symbols of the representation at hand into a coherent interpretation by also contextualizing the signs and their connotation. Remarkably, even though the posters were 62 years apart and were thus produced in different contexts, the research found many similarities in the iconological symbolism.

When considering the veil, both posters intentionally disregard the religious and cultural meaning of the veil. Rather, they assign Orientalist stereotypes to the veil and use this for France’s political agenda. As such, both posters show how the articulation of [sexual] difference is used for subjectification. Poster I reflects this by focusing on the ‘subordinate’ position as indicated by the lack of public exhibition of physical beauty. This is reinforced by the contrast between the disguised veiled women and the beautiful and content woman in front who seems to be in the process of unveiling. When embedding these symbols and connotations in the context of the poster, one finds that the French wanted women to unveil because the veil had become a symbol of resistance to French domination. Furthermore, the veil was also used

as a strategic device in the Algerian War of Independence and was thus seen as a threat to French power. Alternatively, poster II endorses the Orientalist belief that veiled women are oppressed through the central depiction of the female genital. By doing so, the poster endorses the belief that veiled women are merely available for erotic gratification and biological reproducers. In the context of poster II, the veil is considered to be a threat to French national identity as a signifier of both immigration and Islam, even though the veil is a source of identity and is both worn because of religious and cultural reasons by veiled French citizens. Moreover, similar to poster I, the veil is also considered a security threat because the veil is connected to Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism in contemporary France. Although the significance of the veil to veiled women differed in both contexts, France's objective to make women unveil is rooted in the same fear: namely not being able to exert power over them. The latter point should also be connected to the fact that in both colonial and contemporary time, women represent an entire social and religious order as biological reproducers and cultural carriers and are thus indispensable when seeking to control a population.

Furthermore, as a result of the Orientalist nature of the posters, one can also detect fantasy and fetishism. In poster I this is reflected by the depiction of veiled women as mysterious and hidden, while portraying the woman that is partly unveiled as beautiful and wearing jewelry – which is traditionally only shown in the private sphere. Alternatively, poster II is more vulgar by depicting the sexual organ – which is normally hidden as a private part of the body – so centrally. As such, both posters are examples of fetishism in which the veiled woman is understood in relation to what cannot be seen or shown.

Contextualizing the semiotic meaning of the portrayal of veiled women in a similar fashion exhibits how the French benefit from obscuring veiled women's heterogeneity in both colonial Algeria and post-colonial France. Acknowledging the diverse and complex nature of the Muslim society in Algeria and the veiled women's community in France hinders the French's ability to generalize and thus confirms the necessity of French presence in Algeria, but also France's contemporary law which bans the veil in educational establishments. Additionally, both posters have the same objective: namely supposedly saving Algerian women (poster I) and French immigrant girls and women (poster II) from oppression.

Furthermore, the stereotypes reinforced in both posters also reflect the power dynamic. The imperative to unveil combined with the alleged emancipative character of poster I reinforces the belief that France is a 'superior and modern force' that the Algerians should follow. In this context the emancipation of women also became a prerequisite for equal treatment of the Muslim population in Algeria. Similarly, the mocking tone of poster II attests

to the power dynamics in contemporary France, where veiled women have to adjust and put aside their religious convictions in order to be treated equally. While the posters clearly exhibit the response to women that deviate from the hegemonic norm – in terms of religion, behavior and clothing, the posters also reflect on the subordinate position of the Muslim community in colonial Algeria and post-imperial France alike. As such, both posters confirm that public visibility of beauty or femininity is a prerequisite for citizenship and thus equal treatment.

### 4.3. Textual analysis

Having set out the findings of the visual analysis, this paragraph is aimed at elucidating the findings of the textual analysis in order to thoroughly interpret the meaning behind the primary objects. Remarkably, even though the two posters did not have the same text, they do endorse the same discourse by presenting the veil as something negative, restrictive and provocative that women should not wear. As such, in both objects the text reiterates the visual symbols identified.

With regard to poster I, the text – written in a seductive font – draws together empowerment and beauty standards. As such, the text<sup>34</sup> conveys multiple things. While it seeks to unveil women from an aesthetic standpoint by stating that the veil equals ‘ugliness’ and unveiling equals ‘beauty’, it also enforces a certain beauty standard. As such, the text shows how beauty, a supposedly innocent and benign value, can be weaponized. This claim is allegedly also embedded in emancipation, and the belief that the French power will save veiled women from oppression. Alternatively, the text<sup>35</sup> of poster II – in a simple font, which matches the simplistic nature of the text – claims that because you wear the veil, you free the fantasy. By doing so, it provokes the religious meaning of the veil and the women who wear it. The text also reinforces Orientalist stereotypes by understanding the veil in relation to fantasy.

Another similarity is the salient reflection of the power dynamics in the texts of both posters. Whereas poster I demonstrates this in the directive to unveil while also adverting the beauty standard set by the hegemonic power, poster II exhibits dominance through mockery, a tool used by privileged groups. Nevertheless, a clear difference between the two texts can be found in the directness of the message. While poster I clearly orders women to unveil and also uses the imperative “(...) Unveil!,” poster II conceals the message by ridiculing the veil and making a provocative claim.

---

<sup>34</sup> “*N’êtes-vous donc pas jolie? Dévoilez-vous!*” which translates as “Aren’t you pretty? Unveil yourself!”.

<sup>35</sup> “*Le voile libère le fantasme*” which translates into “The veil frees the fantasy.”

#### 4.4. Contexts

Although both contexts exhibit a similar pattern of anti-veiling discourse, it is important to highlight a defining difference. In contrast to popular belief, *laïcité* did not apply to colonial Algeria despite being a territorial extension of France. As such, Algeria was subjugated to Christian France, and anti-veiling discourse in French Algeria was a colonial objective to stay in control over the Algerian population, rather than an objective aligned with *laïcité*. In contrast, contemporary France is characterized by the state's declaration to safeguard *laïcité*. Consequently, the French state proclaims that contemporary anti-veiling discourse – as exemplified by law n°2004-228 – is a necessity that ensures the commitment to *laïcité*. However, since France has exhibited anti-veiling discourse already in colonial times, even though the French colonies were not subjected to *laïcité*, anti-veiling discourse is not necessarily a result of secularism, rather one should consider it a colonial legacy.

As such, there are also some important similarities with respect to anti-veiling discourse that one should draw together. To start with, both contexts demonstrated how anti-veiling discourse served political ends. More specifically, in both cases anti-veiling discourse is used as a form of population control. Whereas in French Algeria anti-veiling discourse was manipulated to guarantee French dominance over Algeria, anti-veiling discourse in contemporary multi-ethnic France is supposed to preserve French supremacy. As such, the context analyses also demonstrated how France was and still is focusing on controlling Muslim women, their bodies and their place in society. While women became an important subject on which hegemonic power is reproduced in colonial times because they were considered to be the backbone of cultural resistance – threatening Frenchification – the belief that veiled women are 'tradition-bearers' threatening the 'French way of life' still persists in contemporary France.

Furthermore, both French Algeria and contemporary France adhere to an assimilation strategy. In French Algeria, the French adopted this strategy towards the Algerian Muslim population, including cultural interpenetration campaigns aimed at the Frenchification, which would guarantee the equal treatment of the native population. Similarly, contemporary France is characterized by assimilation policies which form a requirement for the immigrant population in order to obtain French citizenship and thus be guaranteed equality of rights. Consequently, in both cases the practice of veiling is considered to be something that is at odds with modern, French culture.

## Conclusion

Given the persisting anti-veiling discourse in Western Europe, and more precisely in France, this thesis investigated the relation between contemporary Islamophobic practices and France's colonial history. By doing so, the thesis provided new insights that fill the gaps in literature on the colonial origin of contemporary anti-veiling discourse and the state-religion relationship in France. In chapter 1, the thesis discussed how the fascination with veiled women seeps through history and lies at the heart of the intersection of Orientalism and (Post)Colonialism. Consequently, in chapter 2 and 3 the research analyzed two visual objects concerning veiled women in colonial and post-colonial times. Both objects were examined following an iconographic framework consisting of three steps, and a close reading of the texts of these objects. Accordingly, the research question “How does the current ban on the veil in France find its roots in French colonial rule in Muslim countries?” can be answered with two main conclusions.

First, following from the in-depth analysis of the two case studies, both primary objects exhibit anti-veiling discourse through the usage of similar symbols, lexis and representation. Although both posters differ considerably with respect to their representational meaning, the underlying connotations and meanings that became apparent in both iconographical- and iconological symbolism were rather similar. In short, Orientalism, consisting of Othering and stereotyping, and colonial superiority notions are reinforced in both posters. Effectively, both posters propagate public visibility of beauty and femininity for political ends, namely exerting power over veiled women and the communities they represent. Similarly, the textual analysis revealed how both objects endorse the belief – from an Orientalist perspective – that the veil is something negative, restrictive and provocative that women should not wear. As such, both posters show how the articulation of [sexual] difference is used for subjectification.

Second, the research found in the context analyses that France is consistent with its application of anti-veiling discourse, having exhibited the latter already in colonial times even though Algeria was not subjected to *laïcité*. Therefore, anti-veiling discourse is not necessarily a result of *laïcité* as is often assumed, rather one should consider it a colonial legacy. More specifically, the context analyses showed how anti-veiling discourse is a candid example of the articulation of difference – as reinforced by the posters as well – used for subjectification and population control. As such, anti-veiling discourse was used in both the colonial and post-colonial society to serve political ends. Both contexts also demonstrated how France was, and still is focusing on controlling Muslim women, their bodies and their place in society.



Thus, the current ban on the veil in France finds its roots in French colonial rule in Muslim countries in the form of subjectification and population control. The in-depth analysis of the posters showed how contemporary anti-veiling discourse and the subordinate position of the Muslim community in France is concealed under *laïcité* when it actually finds its roots in colonialism. Comparative historical analysis provided a clear framework to consider changes and similarities regarding anti-veiling discourse over time. The combination of close reading and iconography – allowing for the incorporation of the two systems of representation – proved to be valuable to interpret the semiotic meaning of the two objects while taking into account the context.

The research showed that visual objects transcend mere representation. Visual objects are powerful tools and as shown by both case studies, they serve political agendas. The depiction of veiled women and veiling as such has to be understood as part of a broader popular field shaped by – historically developed – state policies. However, in order to consider anti-veiling discourse more comprehensively, upcoming studies could research how unveiling discourse manifests itself outside of the context of policies and cartoons, by for instance looking into microaggressions veiled women experience in France. Whilst the French Senate passed an amendment that would ban girls under 18 from wearing the veil in public in April 2021, there remain several ways in which academia can benefit from further research on this topic. Nevertheless, if France's power over the former-colonized community is based on the control of women like in colonial Algeria, one should remember that Algerian women were at the forefront of resistance.

## Bibliography

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2002. "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others." *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3: 783-90.
- Adamson, Kay. 2002. *Political and Economic Thought and Practice in Nineteenth-century France and the Colonization of Algeria*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Ahmed, Leila. 1992. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Alba, Richard. 2005. "Bright vs. Blurred Boundaries: Second-generation Assimilation and Exclusion in France, Germany, and the United States." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1: 20-49.
- Ardizzoni, Michela. 2004. "Unveiling the Veil: Gendered Discourses and the (In)Visibility of the Female Body in France." *Women's Studies* 33, no. 5: 629-49.
- Auguste, Cécile. 2015. "Qui soutient Charlie Hebdo?" *La Tribune*. January 9, 2015. <https://www.latribune.fr/technos-medias/20150109tribd8f64398f/qui-soutient-charlie-hebdo.html>.
- Bancel, Nicolas, Pascal Blanchard, Dominic Richard David Thomas, and Alexis Pernsteiner. 2017. *The Colonial Legacy in France*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Baubérot, Jean. 2000. *Histoire de la Laïcité en France [History of Laïcité in France]*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- BBC. 2015. "Charlie Hebdo Attack: Three Days of Terror." BBC. January 14, 2015. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30708237>.
- Benrabah, Mohamed. 2013. *Language Conflict in Algeria: From Colonialism to Post-Independence*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Beydoun, Khaled A. 2017. "On Islamophobia, Immigration, and the 'Muslim Bans.'" *Ohio Northern University Law Review* 43, no. 3.
- . 2018. *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- Blanchard, Pascal, Nicolas Bancel, Sandrine Lemaire. 2016. *La Fracture Coloniale [The Colonial Fracture]*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Blanchard, Pascal, Nicholas Bancel, Gilles Boetsch, Dominic Thomas, Corinne Taraud, Leïli Slimani and Jacques Martial. 2018. *Sexe, Race & Colonies: La Domination des Corps du XVe Siècle à Nos Jours [Sex, Race and Colonies: The Domination of Bodies from the 15th Century to the Present Day]*. Paris: Éditions La Découverte.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1983. "The Other Question." *Screen* 24, no. 6: 18-36.

- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1963. *Sociologie de L'Algérie [Sociology of Algeria]*. Paris: Presses Universitaires De France.
- Bowen, John R. 2007. *Why the French Don't like Headscarves, Islam, the State, and Public Space*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brown, Bernard E. 1961. "The Army and Politics in France." *The Journal of Politics* 23, no. 2: 262-78.
- Brummett, Barry. 2019. *Techniques of Close Reading*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Brut. 2019. "Right-Wing Politician Demands Woman Remove Hijab." Last modified October 16, 2019. <https://www.brut.media/us/news/right-wing-politician-demands-woman-remove-hijab-b6b19ca4-c788-4ba9-b175-925ad5d72cab>.
- Burrows, Mathew. 1986. "'Mission Civilisatrice': French Cultural Policy in the Middle East, 1860–1914." *The Historical Journal* 29, no. 1: 109-35.
- Casanova, Jose. 1994. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Chahuan, Eugenio. 2005. "An East-West Dichotomy: Islamophobia." *Palestine – Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 12, no. 2-3: 47-52.
- Chioco, Immanuel V. 2017. "Looking Beyond the Veil." *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 24, no. 2: 547-74.
- Clifford, J. 1980. "Edward Said, Orientalism." *History and Theory* XIX: 204-24.
- Cooke, J. 1990. "Tricolour and Crescent: Franco-Muslim Relations in Colonial Algeria, 1880-1940." *Islamic Studies* 29, no. 1: 57-75.
- Dar Aziza. 2018. "Le Hayek [The Hayek]." Histoire. Last modified October 5, 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20181005210607/http://www.daraziza.com:80/hayek/histoire.html>.
- Daussy, Laure and Ina Shevchenko. 2020. World Hijab Day: une Insulte au Féminisme [World Hijab Day: An Insult to Feminism]. *Charlie Hebdo*. February 1, 2020. <https://charliehebdo.fr/2020/02/religions/world-hijab-day-une-insulte-au-feminisme/>.
- De Haas, Hein, Stephen Castles, and Mark J. Miller. 2020. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. London: Red Globe Press.
- Descombin, Henry. 1994. *Guerre d'Algérie 1959-60: Le Cinquième Bureau ou "le Théorème du Poisson"*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Elman, Miriam F. 2019. "Islamophobia." *Israel Studies* 24, no. 2: 144-56.

- Fanon, Frantz. 1968. *Sociologie d'une Révolution: L'An V de la Révolution Algérienne [Sociology of a Revolution: Year V of the Algerian Revolution]*. Paris: Maspero.
- Firar, Z. 2016. "Le « Dévoilement » des Femmes, une Longue Histoire Française [The "Unveiling" of Women, a Long French History]." *Contre-Attaqué(s)*, March 16, 2016. <http://contre-attaques.org/magazine/article/le-devoilement>.
- Flood, Maria. 2017. "Women Resisting Terror: Imaginaries of Violence in Algeria (1966-2002)." *The Journal of North African Studies* 22, no. 1: 109-31.
- Galeotti, Anna Elisabetta. 1993. "Citizenship and Equality: The Place for Toleration." *Political Theory* 21, no. 4: 585-605.
- Géré, François. 1997. *La Guerre Psychologique [The Psychological War]*. Paris: Economica.
- Go, Julian. 2013. "For a Postcolonial Sociology." *Theory and Society* 42, no. 1: 25-55.
- Hall, Stuart, Sean Nixon and Jessica Evans, eds. 2013. *Representation*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications.
- Halperin, S. and O. Heath. 2017. *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hargreaves, A. 2007. *Multi-Ethnic France: Immigration, Politics, Culture and Society*. New York: Routledge.
- Houtsma, M.Th. 1987. *E. J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913-1936*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Hussey, A. 2014. *The French Intifada: The Long War Between France and Its Arabs*. New York: Faber and Faber.
- Jensen, Lars. 2020. *Postcolonial Europe*. New York: Routledge.
- Kolenda, Nick. N.d. "Font Psychology." Guides. Accessed June 6, 2021. <https://www.nickkolenda.com/font-psychology/>.
- Lang, Cady. 2021. "Who Gets to Wear a Headscarf? The Complicated History Behind France's Latest Hijab Controversy." *Time*, May 19, 2021.
- Lazreg, Marnia. 1994. *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*. New York: Routledge.
- Liu, Hin-Yan. 2011. "The Meaning of Religious Symbols after the Grand Chamber Judgment in Lautsi v. Italy." *Religion and Human Rights* 6: 253-56.
- Lockman, Zachary. 2010. *Contending Visions of The Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- MacMaster, Neil, and Lewis, Toni. 1998. "Orientalism: From Unveiling to Hyperveiling." *Journal of European Studies* 28, no. 109-110: 121-35.
- MacMaster, Neil. 2009. *Burning the Veil: the Algerian Women and the 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women, 1954–1962*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- McDougall, James. 2017. "The Impossible Republic: The Reconquest of Algeria and the Decolonization of France, 1945–1962." *The Journal of Modern History* 89, no. 4: 772-811.
- Mutman, Mahmut. 1992. "Under the Sign of Orientalism: The West vs. Islam." *Cultural Critique* no. 23, pp. 165–197.
- O'Brien, Peter. 2016. *The Muslim Question in Europe: Political Controversies and Public Philosophies*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Perego, Elizabeth. 2015. "The Veil or a Brother's Life: French Manipulations of Muslim Women's Images During the Algerian War, 1954–62." *The Journal of North African Studies* 20: 349-73.
- Pew Research Center. 2018. "Global Uptick in Government Restrictions on Religion in 2016." Religion. Last modified June 21, 2018. <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/21/global-uptick-in-government-restrictions-on-religion-in-2016/>.
- . 2020. "In 2018, Government Restrictions on Religion Reach Highest Level Globally in More Than a Decade." Religion. Last modified November 10, 2020. <https://www.pewforum.org/2020/11/10/in-2018-government-restrictions-on-religion-reach-highest-level-globally-in-more-than-a-decade/>.
- Raisborough, Jayne and Matt Adams. 2008. "Mockery and Morality in Popular Cultural Representations of the White, Working Class." *Sociological Research Online* 13, no.6.
- Rocheftort, Florence. 2002. "Foulard, Genre et Laïcité en 1989 [Veil, Gender and Secularism in 1989]." *Revue d'Histoire*, no. 75: 145–56.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Sambron, Diane. 2009. *Les Femmes Algériennes Pendant la Colonisation [Algerian Women During Colonization]*. Paris: Riveneuve Éditions.
- Stasi, Bernard. 2004. *Laïcité et République [Laïcité and the Republic]*. Paris: La Documentation Française.
- Stasi Commission. 2003. *Rapport au Président de la République [Report to the President of the Republic]*. Paris: Commission de Réflexion sur l'Application du Principe de Laïcité dans la République.
- Statista Research Department. 2020. "Forecasted Population in France in 2020, by Religious Affiliation (in 1,000)." Religion. Last modified May 12, 2020. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/459982/population-distribution-religion-france/>.

- Tolan, John. 2017. "A French Paradox? Islam and Laïcité." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 18, no. 2: 41-50.
- Tyler, David. 2013. *The Politics of Islamophobia: Race, Power and Fantasy*. London: Pluto Press.
- Van Braam, Hailey. "Gray Color Psychology and Meaning." *Color Psychology*. Last modified September 9, 2020. <https://www.colorpsychology.org>.
- . "Pink Color Psychology and Meaning." *Color Psychology*. Last modified September 9, 2020. <https://www.colorpsychology.org>.
- . "Purple Color Psychology and Meaning." *Color Psychology*. Last modified August 27, 2020. <https://www.colorpsychology.org>.
- . "White Color Psychology and Meaning." *Color Psychology*. Last modified September 9, 2020. <https://www.colorpsychology.org>.
- Van Leeuwen, Theo, and Carey Jewitt. 2004. *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. London: SAGE.
- Wihtol de Wenden, Catherine. 1998. "Young Muslim Women in France: Cultural and Psychological Adjustments." *Political Psychology* 19, no. 1: 133-46.
- Yeğenoğlu, Meyda. 2005. *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Young, Robert. 1990. *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. New York: Routledge.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira and Floya Anthias, eds. 1989. *Woman – Nation - State*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

## Appendix I

### Poster I



Image source: Contre-Attaqué(s), 2016. URL: <http://contre-attaques.org/magazine/article/le-devoilement> (Last accessed December 18, 2020).

Appendix II

Poster II



Image source: Charlie Hebdo, 2020. URL: <https://charliehebdo.fr/2020/02/religions/world-hijab-day-une-insulte-au-feminisme/> (Last accessed December 18, 2020).