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## Identity Negotiation of Young Arab Muslim Women Attending College in the United States and France

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION OF YOUNG ARAB MUSLIM WOMEN  
ATTENDING COLLEGE IN THE UNITED STATES AND FRANCE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN SOCIAL WORK

BY

DANIELLE DUNAND ZIMMERMAN

CHICAGO, IL

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For my daughters, Justine and Lauren

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EMF - Muslim Students of France

HCI - Haut Conseil à l'Intégration

MSA - Muslim Student Association

NSEERS - The National Security Entry-Exit Registration System

9/11 - September 11, 2001

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how young Arab Muslim women attending college, in the United States and France, negotiate their identity vis-à-vis multiple contexts of citizenship in secular state, gender, religion, culture, and race. Sixteen interviews were conducted, eight in Paris and eight in Chicago. Using the theoretical frameworks of social identity, cultural studies, and critical race feminism, this study approached identity negotiation in terms of integration and differentiation from others; influence of dominant culture and attempt to redefine identity; gender and specificity of the experience of women of color as well as interrelation of multiple identities.

The following themes were identified: hijab is central to the experience of being a young Arab Muslim woman in college; being Muslim is a way of life; there are strong similarities in college experience across sample; there are contextual differences in college experience between French and American samples. Based on these findings, this study supports a moderate secularism that takes religion into account as a minority identity with specific rights and protection. It objects to French bans on the veil, which single out veiling women and penalize them by politicizing an intention to present modesty. This study also supports alternative approaches to Western dominant discourse on women's rights; as such values are not necessarily compatible with young Arab

Muslim women's self-perception and personal context. Finally, this study finds that, as imperfect as it may be, the American model of multiculturalism initiatives offers young Arab Muslim women in college better opportunities in terms of identity negotiation, than the French model of assimilation does.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In France, a legal ban of the hijab (headscarf) in public schools in 2004, and a legal ban of the burqa (full face covering) in public spaces in 2010 exemplify the negative focus that young Arab Muslim women are subject to (Bowen, 2007). In the United States, racial and religious profiling by United States law enforcement agencies has increased since the September 11, 2001 attack and has been used to expand immigration proceedings against Muslims (Ghazali, 2008). Among the Muslim population, women are particularly targeted for discrimination, both in France and the United States (Caincar, 2009; Scott, 2007).

The United States and France handle integration issues differently, each referring to opposite theoretical models. France remains an example of the assimilation model, where maintaining exterior signs of cultural background and beliefs is perceived as resistance toward integration (House, 2006). The United States give preference to multiculturalism initiatives since the implementation of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abolished the national-origin quotas that favored European immigration, and encouraged a massive immigration of Asian and Latin American nationals to the United States. In the United States, the prevalent initiatives regarding integration of diverse groups are developed by communities (Sundar, 2009). Koser (2007) states, “the hands-off approach by the federal government... has fostered self-

reliance and leadership among immigrant communities” (p. 12). Based on these two approaches, wearing the hijab or the burqa is identified in the United States as belonging to a community with specific religious beliefs and cultural traditions. The right to express religious beliefs is protected by the United States Constitution. In contrast, France perceives wearing the hijab or buqa as signs of defiance to fundamental French values, as expressed by the legal bans of 2004 and 2010. Nevertheless, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks have led to a strongly negative focus on Arab Muslims in the United States. Caincar (2009) argues that hijabs represent to those opposed to it an evidence of foreignness and disloyalty to American values.

This study explores the identity negotiation of young Arab Muslim women attending college in the United States and France. Using a phenomenological methodology, interviews were conducted in Chicago and in Paris. The United States and France, both secular countries with distinct backgrounds and common issues, provide relevant milieus to study the relationship between religion, individuals and state. In both countries, young Arab Muslim women in college find themselves at the cross-section of their family and community’s cultural and religious values on one hand, and the secular and dominant college environment on the other hand. Interviewing young Muslim women attending college in France and the United States provided opportunities to explore national and global influences on these women’s individual experience, as well as the tensions that they encounter in terms of their identity.

## **Problem Statement**

Muslim identity presents common traits in the United States and France and at the same time faces distinctive historical and current contexts. In both countries, while state action is based on the principle of secularism, the notion of “Muslimness” as an identity prevails among second-generation Muslims (Mishra & Shirazi, 2010). Meanwhile, in the Middle East, the Arab Spring is still an unfolding process that has implications for Western Muslims as well, including in terms of how they perceive themselves.

### **Muslim Identity in the United States and France**

The United States and France share “the struggle to incorporate Muslim communities into secular societies whose values are often at odds with Islamic beliefs and whose members are often hostile to their presence” (Read, 2007, p. 231). Politicization of Islam globally, after the terrorist attacks, has reinforced the existing perception that Islam is not compatible with Western democracies’ values and that being a Muslim is often synonymous to being an Islamic fundamentalist. Read argues that although historical and cultural context are different in France and the United States, leading to a different approach in handling integration issues, both countries discourage veiling, by law in France and by lack of explicit legal protection in the United States. Nevertheless, Read also emphasizes fundamental differences in Muslim experiences between France and the United States: First, the French model encourages the abandonment of ethnic identity and adoption of a French civic identity while the United States model supports multicultural identities that include religious ones such as Muslim American. Second, the relationship between church and state is strictly implemented in

France, where religious difference is discouraged and religious expression is expected to remain solely in places of worship or at home. In contrast, the United States' religious freedom is promoted at all public levels and political leaders do not hesitate to state public declarations of faith. Third, the socio-economic backgrounds of Muslim communities in France and the United States tend to be different. In the United States, Muslim American immigrants come from various ethnic backgrounds, are usually better educated, with higher socioeconomic opportunities than their French counterparts, and they and their children have been able to establish successful political advocacy organizations. In France, the vast majority of Muslim immigrants are working-class laborers, originally from French colonized Maghreb countries of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, with relatively low level of educational attainment and low socioeconomic level. In France, "ethnic and religious tensions are often compounded by, and sometimes conflated with, class tension. In contrast to Muslim immigrants in the United States, Muslim immigrants in France typically lack the individual and community resources needed to challenge state policy" (Read, 2007, p. 233).

The aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack has led to an increased consciousness of "Muslimness" among the Muslim diaspora, and young Muslims in North America and Europe experience a heightened awareness of their Muslim identities (Mishra & Shirazi, 2010). Peek (2005) states that for both Muslims and non-Muslims, religious identity in the United States has become more central to an individual sense of self since the events of 9/11. Young Muslim women attending college in the United States negotiate their identity at the intersection of religion, race, and gender (Mir, 2007;



Naber, 2005). In addition, Mir (2007) states, “peer culture... exercises the most powerful normative influence upon [Muslim] students” (p. 71). Schmidt (2004) showed that the wearing of Islamic clothing such as the veil helps nurture a sense of community among Muslim students attending college.

Bowen (2007) states, that in France, second-generation Muslim girls who wore the hijab while their mothers would not wear it and would merely follow tradition achieved “an Islamic legitimacy and familial authority by adopting the veil” (p. 72). Keaton (2006) asserts that as they are living in an environment of opposing forces such as Eastern tradition and Western freedom, Muslim teenage girls might manage internal and external constraints by rearticulating an “idealized national identity” (p. 158). As young Muslim women’s decision to wear or not to wear the hijab is being scrutinized, their choice has implications beyond their own individual desire. In a college environment, young Arab Muslim women may experience conflicts between the image they end up giving of themselves and their actual sense of self.

### **History and Demographics**

In the United States, a Public Law from 1976 prohibits enquiries about religious affiliation on a mandatory basis. Therefore, the available data regarding the number of Muslims in the country is based on estimates: about three million Muslims live in the United States, of which immigrants make up about two thirds. Thus, approximately two million Muslim immigrants live in the United States, representing a little less than one percent of the total national population (Center for Immigration Studies, 2002). The Pew Research Center (2011b) expects the Muslim population in the United States to rise to 6.2

million in 2030, which will represent 1.7% of the population, making Muslims roughly as numerous as Jews are in the United States today.

Immigrant Muslims are ethnically extremely diverse; their three largest main areas of origin are South Asia, Iran, and the Arabic-speaking countries. Unlike the Muslim immigrants in Europe who tend to live in segregated areas, Muslims in the United States are dispersed throughout the major metropolitan areas of the country, including New York, Los Angeles and Chicago. The earliest wave of Muslim immigrants came as slaves from Africa in the 1500s, and the second wave in the late 1800s and early 1900s until the exclusive immigration law of 1924 (Center for Immigration Studies, 2002). The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 opened the country's doors to non-European immigrants and initiated the third wave of Muslim immigration, which continues to the present.

Based on a study by the Gallup Center (2009) in the United States, Muslim women are at least as likely as Muslim men to hold a college degree; they have a greater level of economic gender parity than any other main religious group (Protestants, Catholics, Mormons, and Jews); they are about equal to Muslim men in Mosque attendance, which is not the case in many Muslim countries; they and Mormon women are the only groups in which fewer women than men reported being treated with respect.

In France, a law dating from 1872 prohibits collection of data on people's religion and ethnic origin. In 2006, the French Ministry of Interior estimated the number of Muslim immigrants to be five million, representing six percent of the total population of France and ranked Islam as the second religion in France, after Catholicism. The

presence of Muslims in France is older than in other countries of Europe. The French occupied Algeria in 1830, eventually taking control over Tunisia in 1884 and Morocco in 1912. The emergence of powerful movements in the Maghreb in the 1950s and 1960s led to the Algerian war of Independence and the end of France's formal control over the region in 1962 (Scott, 2007).

Until the mid-1970s, France encouraged immigration from the Maghreb, which provided low-cost labor in the manufacturing and construction sectors. French governments continued to see Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians' presence in France as temporary and as the manifestation of a neo-colonial situation. Segregated temporary housing was provided in poor outer suburbs of France's major cities (House, 2006). Migration was organized within the framework of technical cooperation and as a regulated trans-Mediterranean labor market. Workforce immigration from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia was governed by a system of quotas. In 1975, as they were facing a severe economic crisis, France and other European countries unilaterally terminated previous agreements with countries from central Maghreb (Musette, 2006). Nevertheless, in the 1980s, a policy of family regrouping allowed spouses and children of immigrant workers to come to live in France and many families decided to stay in France. The current French context of Muslim immigrants' social and ethnic segregation originates in the post-colonial agreement that immigrants from The Maghreb would eventually return to their home country (House, 2006).

## **State Action**

With strong support from the general public, the media and most Feminist movements, secularism is now often invoked in Western European countries to confront Muslim female's dress code and public attitudes. In September 1989 in France, three Muslim girls were expelled from the middle school they attended when they came to class wearing a hijab and refused to remove it. The incident was followed by thousands of Muslims demonstrating in the streets of Paris in support of the three schoolgirls. The issue had taken such proportions that the King of Morocco intervened on Moroccan television to suggest that the two Moroccan girls agree to remove their headscarf. The girls' parents complied and authorized their daughters to do so; the two girls were readmitted in December 1989. The third girl, who was Tunisian, kept her hijab on and was never readmitted (Bowen, 2007). In 1993, two more schoolgirls were expelled for wearing the hijab in gym class and the schoolteachers went on strike arguing that wearing the headscarf was discriminatory and segregationist. In the meantime, Algeria had become the site of a war between the government and Islamist movements. The media made a parallel between the situation there and the risk of "Islamism" in France. In 1994, five French citizens were killed in Algeria. In addition to more schoolgirls being expelled from French schools, several key Muslim figures were arrested. In 2000, the new High Council on Integration<sup>1</sup> recommended a "soft" approach to the headscarf issue (Bowen, 2007). The events of September 11, 2001 fueled concerns and feelings of national threat

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<sup>1</sup>Haut Conseil à l'Intégration (HCI): created in 1989 and placed under the authority of French Prime Minister, HCI makes recommendations on all issues of integration.

among the general public. In 2003, a commission issued a report on the issue of secularity leading, in March 2004, to a law prohibiting the wearing of hijab in public schools. The law came into effect on September 2, 2004, the first day of the next school year (Bowen, 2007). In September 2010, a French law was voted to ban wearing the Islamic full veil (niqab and burqa) in public. The ban has strong public support but critics point out that only a tiny minority of French Muslims wears the full veil. Other European countries such as Spain and Belgium are considering a similar ban (BBC News, 2010).

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack, the United States Senate passed the USA Patriot Act in October 24, 2001. The measures described in the Act were directed almost solely against Arabs and Muslims (Cainkar, 2009) and they “sent a message to the American people that ethnic and religious profiling was acceptable, even necessary, so long as it was directed at these [Arab and Muslim] groups” (p. 111). Cainkar also states that even though it was found that the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks were visitors to the United States, the government actions and communication appeared to confirm that Arabs and Muslims leaving in the United States were a potential danger to other Americans.<sup>2</sup> The Council on American-Islamic Relations stated that, since the events of 9/11, the Federal government had been persistent in its implementation of ethnic and religious profiling and its use of immigration proceedings to get around Muslims’ constitutional rights (*New York Times*, 2005).

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<sup>2</sup>On April 9, 2005 two teenage Muslim girls wearing the hijab, one born in Bangladesh and the other in Guinea, were detained in New York on immigration violations. The FBI claimed the girls presented "an imminent threat to the security of the United States based upon evidence that they plan to be suicide bombers" before concluding that the girls had been wrongly accused (*New York Times*, 2005).

The National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) was launched in December 2002 in the United States. It required all male foreign visitors from 25 identified countries, already in the United States and over the age of 16, to register at designated immigration offices. This special registration was required from immigrants from almost exclusively Arab and Muslim countries. The Department of Justice presented this program as a tool to fight terrorism. Of the 77,000 non-citizen Arab men who registered, 2,400 were detained and 13,000 were put into deportation proceedings, mostly for immigration violations (Romero, 2004). Even though the Department of Justice announced in the Spring of 2003 that the Special Registration program would end, advocates estimate that hundreds of those cases are still unresolved, and that hundreds more men are fighting for immigration benefits denied due to not registering. The Department of Homeland Security suspended NSEERS on April 27, 2011, saying new methods of collecting information about all United States visitors, regardless of their nationalities, would be used instead (Dolnick, 2011).

### **The Arab Spring and Arab Muslim Identity**

On November 6, 2011, Muslims throughout the world celebrated the first Eid al-Adha (most important annual celebration in the religion of Islam) of the Arab Spring and some political leaders have referred to the “the Eid of the victory” (Agence France Presse, 2011). For Chebel (2011), the Arab Spring has demonstrated that Muslim values are indeed compatible with democracy; the fall of authoritarian regimes supported by the Western world frees Arab countries from Western influence and allows for “a real decolonization” (p. 2). Chebel also emphasizes the role played by women during the

Arab Spring and how they were able to contradict their traditional image of submissive and irresponsible women with no political project. He states, “now these liberated women restore the pride of the submissive men” (p. 2). Finally, Chebel points to similarities between the frustration experienced by suburban youth from immigrant families in France and that of oppressed populations in the Arab world: even though the contexts are different, both are seeking civic recognition in all areas of public life.

Ayari and Geisser (2011) describe how the role of women during the revolutions of the Arab Spring was not limited to that of educated Feminists: to the contrary, it massively included rural and working-class women. They assert that working-class women were instrumental in the mobilization and structuring of the protests. Ayari and Geiser stress that the feminization of anti-regime movements in the Arab world did not start with the Arab Spring, rather, it has been growing for years, particularly in Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain. Filiu (2011) states, that while the events of September 11, 2001 promoted a distorted image of the Arab world, perceived exclusively through the lens of Islam, the Arab Spring demonstrated instead its aspiration to democracy and its lack of focus on Islamism. He stresses that demonstrations during the Arab Spring were conducted in the name of free elections and fight against corruption, not Islamist leadership. Filiu also emphasizes that the issue of Palestinian territories remains at the forefront of the revolutionary preoccupations.

Roy (2011) also stresses that while the debate around the events of September 11, 2001 was centered on the single issue of Islam, the Arab Spring made Islam irrelevant as a political mobilization. For Roy, the West was wrong about the role of Islam in shaping

political mobilization in Muslim countries for three major reasons that developed over the past twenty years: first, there has been a profound demographic change in the Arab world, with a drastic fall of fertility rate (particularly in Tunisia), a broader access for women to both universities and the job market, children with higher levels of education than their parents, and access to technology such as the internet that allows the younger generation to connect and debate. Second, there has been a shift in the political culture, with the young generation turning away from Islamist or nationalist ideologies and giving preference to a more individualistic approach and democratic debate. Roy adds that it does not mean that Islamist parties are no longer present in the political arena, but that Islamist ideology is challenged by the younger generation who hopes for democracy and good governance. The Arab Spring's call for democracy "is not a consequence of the exportation of the concept of Western democracy... it is the political consequence of a process of social and cultural changes in Arab societies which, of course, is part of the globalization process" (p. 1). Third, a new religiosity has developed in Arab Muslim countries: the process of "re-Islamization" that Muslim societies have undergone over the past thirty years, with the spreading of the veil, growing mosque attendance and Islamization of daily life, has contributed to the diversification and the individualization of religiosity (the way believers experience their faith). Religion becoming a matter of personal choice, it is progressively disconnecting itself from the daily politics, and is settling in the private sphere. Roy insists that this does not mean that secularism is gaining ground, but rather that a deconstruction of Islam is taking place, from cultural identity to fundamentalism. "Interestingly, the debate on Islam in the West raised the



same questions as in the Middle East: Is religion first a faith or first an identity?" (p. 3).

Ayari and Geisser (2011) support the idea that Arab Muslim youths reject the paternalistic and authoritarian approach of traditional political Islam, but they also believe that Islamist movements will be strongly present in the new political arena of liberated Arab countries. In Tunisia, the final results of the October 2011 elections confirmed the victory of Ennahda, an Islamist party (*Washington Post*, 2011). Reasons for its success include a better organization than its competitors and a reputation for confronting the previous regime. Ennahda is much less conservative than other Islamists parties in the region and it has pledged to respect the current legislation supporting women's rights (*Washington Post*, 2011).

The legislative elections held in November 2011 in Morocco and Egypt also lead to the massive victory of Islamist parties (*Le Monde des Religions*, 2011). In Morocco, the Justice and Development Party are considered "moderate Islamist" and so is the "Muslim Brotherhood" in Egypt (Rubin, 2011). Roy (as cited in *Le Monde des Religions*, 2011) argues that Islamists were given the opportunity to occupy the political scene in the Maghreb and Egypt, as they were the only parties to be structured around a clear concept, strong leaders, and social roots. He believes that Islamist parties in those countries have entered "post-Islamism" as they have to integrate the process of democracy that brought them to power. For Roy, Islamist parties in the Maghreb are conservative in terms of civic society, culture and religion, and liberal in terms of economy; they may be compared to the American conservative religious right that refers to morality and religion in its political discourse: one can be conservative, even religious fundamentalist, and still

accept civic society and democracy. Regarding Egypt, in which the Salafists (very conservative religious movement) have gained political representation beside the moderate Islamists, Filiu (as cited in Le Monde, 2011) states that all Islamist movements, even the most conservative, understand that this time, their political existence is legitimized by a democratic process.

Tariq Ramadan (2012) states that as the presence of the Islamists in the countries of the Arab Spring is now well established, the polarization between secularists and Islamists has increased and Islam is becoming a central factor in domestic political debate. He emphasizes that secularism is perceived in most Arab countries as a model endorsed by the dictatorial regimes that were influenced by the West and colonialism, and sees the polarization between secularism and Islamism in Arab countries as “alienation” as if opponents “were speaking from abroad” (p. 80). Arab Muslim societies find themselves at the center of “the tension between principles, objectives, and the search for applicable models” (p. 117). Ramadan advocates for a mobilization of Muslim forces in Arab countries to define alternative models of society in which Sharia (Islamic law) may embody, beyond religious references, a higher goal for justice, freedom, pluralism and human rights, while factors such as language, culture and historical experience are also valued references.

Ramadan (2010) addresses “Muslim communities the world over, in the West and everywhere else” (p. 86) as he calls for a strategy of the “seven Cs” that elaborates the following priorities: building Confidence through education in order to resolve current identity crisis; applying Consistency in “critical loyalty” toward Islamic societies and

communities; referring to Contribution to rather than integration into Western societies; practicing Creativity and initiative in all areas of society; exercising productive Communication; retaining one's duty and right to Contest; reaching Compassion for oneself and others.

With respect to public opinion, the Pew Research Center (2011a) conducted a poll in Western countries as well as Muslim countries, following the events of the Arab Spring:

Muslim and Western publics continue to see relations between them as generally bad, with both sides holding negative stereotypes of the other. Many in the West see Muslims as fanatical and violent, while few say Muslims are tolerant or respectful of women. Meanwhile, Muslims in the Middle East and Asia generally see Westerners as selfish, immoral and greedy – as well as violent and fanatical. However, the latest Pew Global Attitudes survey finds somewhat of a thaw in the U.S. and Europe compared with five years ago. A greater percentage of Western publics now see relations between themselves and Muslims as generally good compared with 2006. In contrast, Muslims in predominantly Muslim nations are as inclined to say relations are generally as bad as they were five years ago. And, as in the past, Muslims express more unfavorable opinions about Christians than Americans or Europeans express about Muslims (p. 1).

As the Arab Spring's repercussions are continuing to unfold, literature is still limited on the influence of the Arab Spring on Arab Muslim identity, Muslim women's identity and on its perception by the Western world. Nevertheless, authors are already identifying themes such as the emergence of a new religiosity among the younger generation, linked to the rejection of traditional political Islam and a preference for a more individualistic approach of religion, and the active role of Arab Muslim women as citizens rejecting their traditional image of passivity and submission. In both worlds,

Western and Arab, young Arab Muslims, as immigrants or as natives, are engaged in the negotiation of a new Arab Muslim identity.

### **Literature Review**

Empirical studies on young Arab Muslim women in the United States and France identify five major themes that are common to both countries: the link between perceived oppression and stigmatization and accelerated Islamization of young Arab Muslims; generational differences in the experience of Islam between first and second-generation Arab Muslims; a gendered and racialized articulation of young Arab Muslim women's identity; the coexistence of identities as a strategy for integration; the diverse meanings of hijab as experienced by young Arab Muslim women. In addition, the theme of the veil as a tool of resistance is more predominant in the French context than it is in the American one.

### **Perceived Oppression and Stigmatization and Accelerated Islamization of Young Arab Muslims**

Peek (2005) emphasizes the importance of the first college years in further constructing a Muslim religious identity among Muslim students, which she describes as a three-step process: religion as ascribed identity, religion as chosen identity, and religion as declared identity. Right after the events of 9/11, from September 2001 to October 2003, she conducted 23 focus groups, which ranged in size from three to 15 participants. In addition, she used 83 one-on-one, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. The study took place in New York and Colorado, among college students recruited through the Muslim Student Associations (MSAs). Her research shows a strong relationship

between the crisis generated by the events and aftermath of 9/11 and the increase of Muslim students practicing religion as a declared identity. This study involved young Muslim men as well as young Muslim women, but findings regarding the effects of the aftermath of the events of 9/11 are consistent with other studies that focus on young Muslim women in college.

Haddad's (2007) findings is described by the author as the result of years of research and in-depth interviews, as well as two focus groups with 30 young American Muslim women attending college in several locations in the United States. She states that the process of re-Islamization among second-generation adolescent and young adult Muslims has accelerated in the United States as a consequence of the oppression sensed following 9/11. An increasing number of young Muslim women are taking on a public Islamic identity by wearing the hijab despite the fact that their mother have never followed Islamic dress requirement. This study shows how young American Muslim women appropriate the hijab as a "symbol of solidarity and resistance to efforts to eradicate the religion of Islam" (p. 253) as well as a symbol of American Islamic identity.

Santelli (2008) refers to three studies that she conducted in France between 2005 and 2007 with second-generation Arab immigrants, to analyze the effects of stigmatization in the construction of citizenship for young Arab Muslims. She links the effort to overcome stigma to the process of affirming a new Muslim identity. The first study involved 30 participants, men and women, from 25 to 55 years old, and was focusing on discrimination encountered at work. The second study, with 50 interviews of young Muslim couples, emphasized the discrimination against young Arab Muslims in

everyday life. The third study involved 30 interviews and 200 surveys of young Arab Muslim men and women between the ages of 20 and 30, living in segregated suburbs of Paris. Santelli shows how rampant racism and exclusion, reinforced by the negative focus of the media, leads to a process of Islamization at both the individual and national level. She emphasizes the contribution of the media, as they covered major events such as the attacks of 9/11 or the 2005 riots in France, to questioning and in some cases rejecting the legitimacy of young Arab Muslims' citizenship. The studies show how, at the individual level, Islam is perceived by some young Arab Muslims, especially those from the segregated suburbs, as a means to fight against social exclusion: defining oneself as Muslim provides feelings of belonging to a group that offers support and resources to fight those who oppress and stigmatize. At the national level, affirming a Muslim identity in French society helps its legitimization.

Beski-Chafiq et al. (2010) conducted a study on youth and Islamist radicalization in Lille, a large city of Northern France, as part of a collective and comparative study with other European cities in Denmark, the United Kingdom, and Italy. Lille has a history of immigration linked to industrial activity, and there is a strong presence of immigrant population in the city, mostly Arab Muslims. The researchers performed interviews with 32 young Muslims, 23 men and 9 women between the ages of 15 and 33; 7 parents; 20 social workers; 5 local elected politicians; and 3 religious leaders. Their aim was "to know to what extent the global process of re-Islamization involves youths in Islamism or, rather, makes them stop" (p. 12). They stress the fundamental difference between "individual and secular Islam experienced by a significant part of young people" (p. 10)

and Islamism that is “a doctrine that projects Islam as an ideology governing all spheres of individual and collective life and aims at mobilizing people of Muslim affiliation in building a society or community based on religious values and laws” (p. 12). The authors emphasize that communicating on the subject of Islamism with religious, political and social actors was particularly challenging as most of them feared that the study would feed stigmatization of Islam and Muslims. Before beginning the interviews, the researchers were often asked if they were “for or against Muslims” and interviewees expressed distrust when the notion of radicalization was mentioned, “for fear of slipping into racism and becoming an accomplice of the media that would stigmatize Muslims” (p. 16). The researchers also note that these issues were of lesser importance in their interviews with young people.

The study results show two ideologies of re-Islamization among some young Muslims: an attempt to apply the Islamic teachings to the letter, as a means to reclaim a learned Islam, different from that of their parents, which provides guidance and support for living within the religion; the desire to build an Islamic identity in France through the promotion of Islamic law that can preserve them from an individualistic modernity. In contrast, parents described Islam with a pragmatic sense, as a set of values that is transmitted naturally, through family rituals. Social workers pointed to feelings of social and economic exclusion, confinement, withdrawal, group effects and the internalization of victimization as major factors of radicalization of some Muslim youth. They also strongly denounced the media as promoters of racism and stigmatization. Local political actors emphasized that Islamic radicalization remained a minority among the Muslim

population of Lille and they denounced the lack of a clear and coherent national policy with respect to secularism and its application, as well as the socio-economic exclusion and the stigmatization of Islam. Finally, among the three religious leaders, the Imam emphasized the need to separate worship and politics and mentioned that he considered himself as a secular citizen. Two other religious leaders, both women, promoted the fusion of worship and politics which included the duty to respect Islamic order and to wear the veil, or the fusion of worship and culture, which moved away from Islam as a source of order.

In both countries, accelerated Islamization of young Arab Muslims is associated to oppression and stigmatization. While in the United States the oppression of Muslims is mostly linked to the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, socio-economic exclusion is identified as another major factor of re-Islamization in France.

### **Generational Differences in the Experience of Islam between First and Second-Generation Arab Muslim Women**

Williams and Vashi (2007) assert that second-generation Muslim Americans women negotiate social and religious identities as a reaction both to stereotypical assumptions from non-Muslims and to their immigrant families. This article emphasizes the implications of wearing the hijab for young Muslim women in the United States in terms of context, meanings for the young women, and consequences on their lives. Data was gathered in a Midwestern metropolitan area from two sources: one in-depth interview and one focus group interview of eight young Muslim women at a Muslim religious organization; interviews of 40 young Muslim women ages 18-25 attending



college. It is mentioned that most women were from South-East Asia and that half of them were wearing hijabs. The authors show how young American Muslim attending college perceived two distinct cultural messages: America is a country of equal rights; America is a country of cultural decadence. These conflicted messages produce “a contested space for ethnic, religious, and gender identity development” (p. 273). The authors stress that even though contested cultural space is not a new issue for immigrant populations or religious minorities, Islam’s controversial place in the West and the focus on hijab makes this dilemma particularly acute for young American Muslim women in college.

Ali (2005) worked with three sets of data gathered in 1999 to study second-generation Muslim women’s religiosity in the United States. She used 22 open-ended email interviews with second generation Muslim women nationally wearing the hijab, whose age ranged from 13 to 29; ethnographic field research in New York City among Indian Muslim women; and observations and interviews of second generation Muslim women wearing the hijab at the Islamic Society of North America (INSA) in 1999. She notes that the move toward wearing the hijab has only happened in the recent years and to answer the question “why hijab now?” she identifies four main reasons: the rise of multiculturalism has legitimated the public expression of ethnicity; the Muslim population in the United States has grown and second generation Muslims are becoming more politically involved locally and nationally; the events of 9/11 and subsequent stigmatization lead Muslims to self-evaluate and ask themselves what it means to be Muslim; there is a new trend among young American Muslims to seek out “true” Islamic

knowledge on their own, moving away from what their parents taught them.

Killian (2007) conducted audio taped in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 45 first-generation Muslim women in Paris and surrounding suburbs in 1999. She identified, even before the events of 9/11, a tendency for these women's daughters to seek visible symbols of religious identity such as the veil, suggesting "the emergence of generational differences in the experience of Islam in France" (p. 305). Based on her original study, she elaborated on the aftermaths of the terrorist attacks and subsequent Islamophobia in France, to confirm a link between feelings of rejection due to racism and discrimination and identity crisis of second-generation Arab Muslims: Young Arab Muslims often feel that despite their best efforts to integrate, they are perceived as Maghrebin rather than French, because of their appearance. Some young Arab Muslim women choose to fight rejection by asserting a non-French appearance as they wear the hijab. This article brings to light the generational differences between first and second- generation Muslim women in France, which the author asserts occurred before the events of 9/11 and may find their roots in the French context of social exclusion.

In both countries, second generation Muslim women seek to appropriate and assert a new form of identity that is a reaction to both Western stigmatization of Muslim women and their upbringing in families that blended cultural traditions and religion. Daughters of Muslim immigrants to the United States and France may wish to experience "true" Islam as a means to create space for personal and collective emancipation.

### **A Gendered and Racialized Articulation of Young Arab Muslim Women's Identity**

Mir's (2009) study provides interesting data on undergraduate Muslim women's construction of "gendered discourse" on campus. The study used ethnographic fieldwork conducted at two universities in Washington D.C., with a sample of 13 Muslim students at each university, from various ethnic backgrounds. The author, who specifies that she is a Muslim herself, shows how some young Muslim women both match their behavior with the Muslim image/expectations of non-Muslims on campus and, at the same time, fight stereotypes and try to assert their personal values regarding relationships with men in particular. The results of the study help one to understand the underlying tensions that young Muslim women in college experience throughout such a process: In a post 9/11 context of heightened visibility, surveillance from main stream society and also from friends and family; "orientalist" discourse that is used not only by the majority, but also by most "non-Muslim" Americans; perception from "non-Muslims" of liberal Muslims as marginalized by powerful conservative Muslims; and struggles of the conservative gatekeepers with "hegemonic liberal secularity in the Muslim and campus communities" (p. 241).

Hamzeh and Oliver (2010) emphasize that gender is a crucial factor in identity formation of second-generation Arab Muslim high school girls. Using a critical feminist framework, the authors focused on understanding the multiple subjectivities of Arab Muslim girls, as well as their practices of the veil as a means to negotiate normative body discourses. The data gathered during a 14 months process included audio recordings from group interviews of four Arab Muslim girls from a Muslim community located in the

southwest of the United States, as well as photographs and journal entries from the girls, emails exchanged with the girls, and field notes from the researchers. The study identified the need to embrace four aspects of the Arab Muslim culture, in order to gain best access to Arab Muslim participants: being Muslim, being modest, recognizing the prevalence of God willingness (that may lead to non-committing attitudes toward the scheduling of research interviews) and the prohibition by Muslim rules of certain practices related to eating, drinking, and socializing. This research focuses on Arab Muslim girls as opposed to young Arab Muslim women. Nevertheless, the authors' description of their methodology based on feminist critical theorists' work such as Michelle Fine's as well as on postcolonial feminism, provides very useful methodological recommendations in terms of how relations of power, authority, and difference are negotiated between researchers and participants, and the notion of researcher being the "stranger."

Some authors stress that in addition to gender, race is another central element in the articulation of second generation Arab Muslim women's identity. Naber (2005) conducted in 1999 and 2000 a study based on interviews with 35 young Arab Muslim American students in the San Francisco Bay area, among whom 15 self-identified as "Muslim first, Arab second." Her focus on this particular group of Muslim student activists helped her identify the intersection of race and gender in the process of identity negotiation of young Arab Muslim women who refer to Islam as strategic politics. Being "Muslim first" allows some young Muslim women "to maintain old allegiances with their immigrant communities while simultaneously transforming dominant racialized-gendered

regimes of power” (p. 480). Islam becomes a means to contest patriarchal authority through an ideological framework that is acceptable to parents, to resist gender hierarchies in dominant culture, and to create new social identities that challenge racism.

Alimahomed (2011) interviewed 60 young Arab Muslims living in Los Angeles. She explores “how the war on terror has shaped a new collective and individual racial consciousness of young adult Arab American Muslims” (p. 381). She argues that second generation Muslims, as they suffered from institutional and ambient racism, are more likely than previous generations to identify as non-white “racialized” individuals.

Keaton’s (2005) research over several years of intermittent fieldwork from 1995 to 2004 has allowed her to study pre- and post- 9/11 contexts of adolescent girls in high schools from depressed suburbs of Paris. Using snowball sampling from classrooms she was able to access, she identified 14 participants with whom she conducted individual interviews of one to three or more hours, at school, at her home, and in cafés where participants wanted to meet. Keaton asserts that even though her participants self-identified as French, they also recognized that they are not perceived that way in French society. They found themselves to be perceived as second-class citizens, with fewer opportunities at school and in professional life to access a better life than their parents. She adds Muslim girls struggle with “self-understandings of being French, asserted in a country in which the available self-representations are few and culturally constrained” (p. 406).

Mehta (2010) emphasizes the “hypocrisy of the French secularizing mission” leading to socioeconomic and political disenfranchisement of Muslims in France. Instead

of study results, the author bases her article on the autobiographic novel of a second-generation Arab Muslim woman, Faïza Guène, who is living in a Parisian housing project: “Kiffe kiffe demain” describes the experiences of a second-generation adolescent of Moroccan origin, who lives in an economically and socially disfavored Parisian housing project. Mehta demonstrates “how the negotiation of biculturalism exposes the hypocrisy of the French secularizing mission, in which all markers of difference are suspect until they are assimilated into a homogeneous ideal of sameness” (p. 173). She discusses how social oppression leads to a culture of contestation in the projects against second-class citizenship, racialization, and mediated representation. This research approach echoes phenomenological methodology using data gathered from other authors’ texts and manuscripts. It provides an interesting illustration of the use of external contributions such as literature.

Stigmatization and racism in France and the United States, scrutiny of the hijab in both countries as well, patriarchy within their own community and in the dominant discourse, and socio-economic exclusion mostly in France, lead young Arab Muslim women in the United States and France to negotiate a genderized and racialized identity.

### **The Coexistence of Identities as a Strategy for Integration among Young Muslim Women**

Zaal et al. (2007) conducted a study with 15 young American Muslim women in the New York metropolitan area, after the events of 9/11 and in the midst of the Patriot Act. Using mixed methods methodology, participants were asked to: complete surveys about identity, discrimination, and coping; draw identity maps to represent their multiple

identities; participate in focus groups conducted on several college campuses to investigate “their sense of hyphenated identities, their experiences of surveillance and their responses to scrutiny in families, communities, on the streets and in the political public sphere” (p. 165). Attentive to critical race feminism’s disapproval of dominant representations of research findings, authors used long quotes from the focus group data to present their results. They emphasize that the themes of identity, surveillance and responsibility among young Muslim women attending college, were consistent with Sirin and Fine’s (2007) findings regarding Muslim teenage girls’ experience. This study emphasizes the burdens and responsibilities experienced by daughters of second-generation Muslim Americans, who attend college in the aftermath of the events of 9/11: scrutiny from non-Muslims as well as their own community; refusal to be categorized as either oppressed or liberated; willingness to be multicultural with the associated feeling of being “between” cultures; loyalty to religion, ethnicity, community, family, and the United States.

Sirin and Fine (2007) examine how young Muslim Americans negotiate their identity in a post-9/11 context. In this mixed-method study, 32 girls and 38 boys Muslim American adolescents age 12-18 took a survey, and a sub-sample of 14 girls and 13 boys also participated in focus groups. The two main ethnicities represented were Southeast Asians and Arabs. All attended religious schools. In their attempt to analyze what they called hyphenated identities of second-generation Muslim youth, the authors used three scales to measure respectively discrimination, acculturation, and anxiety. Discrimination was measured by a 10-item measure of ethnic and religious discrimination published by

Krieger and Sidney in 1996. Acculturation was measured using the Acculturation, Habits, and Interests Multicultural Scale for Adolescents (AHIMSA) published by Unger et al. in 2002. Anxiety was measured using the 37-item Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS) published by Reynolds and Richmond in 1985.

Quantitative results did not show a significant difference regarding the three measures between girls and boys. There was a correlation between discrimination and acculturation for boys (the more integrated, the less concerned with discrimination) and between discrimination and anxiety for girls (integration does not reduce anxiety while facing discrimination). Focus groups revealed that girls felt a sense of authority in their Muslim identity and a mission to educate others. They also consistently described a fluid movement between being a Muslim and being an American, which was not the case for boys. In response to outside pressures, girls tended to justify themselves among their Muslim peers with regard to their decision of wearing or not the hijab (it does not mean that I am a bad Muslim girl if I don't wear the hijab). Regarding quantitative results, this study provides interesting evidence of the critical role of gender in identity formation. The authors questioned the validity of the scales they used for Muslim youth though, as they were not specifically designed for Muslim youths. The qualitative part of the study seemed to provide more immediately usable information regarding girls' reactions to both outside and Muslim-peer pressure, with the prospect of extending research to young adult women and of focusing on specific Muslim ethnicities. Even though this study focuses on adolescent Muslims, including boys, results contribute to the understanding of gender-based identity negotiation and the ability for young Muslim women to maintain



continuity between their Muslim and American identities.

In a subsequent study, Sirin et al. (2008) used mixed methodology to explore dual identification among second generation Muslim Americans. They used a sample of 97 participants, 55 women and 42 men, whose age ranged from 18 to 28. Participants completed a survey and were also asked to draw identity maps. “Muslim collective identities” and “American collective identities” were measured using race-specific versions of the “Collective Self-Esteem measure” from Luhtanen and Crocker (1992). Acculturation practices, religiosity, frequency of discrimination, and discrimination-related stress were also measured using quantitative methodology. The findings showed that most young American Muslims identified ways of allowing their Muslim and American identities to co-exist. Only a small minority expressed conflicting identities. These findings are consistent with previous results regarding Muslim adolescents’ identity negotiation: American Muslim young adults also practice co-existing identities and trends observed in teenager years with respect to identity negotiation are confirmed in young adulthood.

Data gathered from open-ended interviews with 35 young Arab Muslims from Northern France, men and women aged from 18 to 35, allowed Venel (2005) to identify four main social identities among interviewees: secular, co-existing, individualistic, and Muslim. She notes that categorizations are somewhat artificial as identities may not be exclusive of each other and may evolve in time. For the secular type French secular values come first and they generate civic obligations, while religion is a marginal aspect if present at all. The co-existing type refuses to choose between being French and being

Muslim as both identities exist simultaneously and are not dissociable. The individualistic type rejects all labels, and civic involvement refers more to status than identity. For the Muslim type, being Muslim supersedes all other sense of belonging and civic engagement becomes confrontational. Venel stresses that young Muslims in France are consistently described in the dominant discourse from a religious lens that negates the diversity of identities among second generation Muslims. Shea adds that this focus has contributed to promoting a feeling of solidarity and belonging among young French Muslims.

In both countries, despite dominant discourse that tends to deny the multiplicity and fluidity of their negotiated identity, young Muslims practice coexisting identities that are both individual and collective, that may evolve over time, and are not necessarily religion-based.

### **The Diverse Meanings of Hijab as Experienced by Young Arab Muslim Women**

Gurbuz et al. (2009) conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 16 young Muslim women in three colleges in New England. They were from various ethnic backgrounds, including Arab, and all 16 participants were adopters of the headscarf practice. The researchers argue that secularization has stigmatized hijab and enabled it as a symbol of identity reconstruction. Based on the study findings, they identify two ways in which the stigmatization of hijab empowers identity reconstruction: as a reinforcement of personal identity, where the symbol of hijab is internalized independently of parents' influence; as a reproduction of collective identity, with the feeling of representing Islam. Reinforcement of personal identity is expressed among participants through the

performance of religious identity, gender identity (the veil becomes a shield from American secular lifestyle), and moral and cultural identity (the veil expresses resistance to assimilative influence). In addition, collective identity is endorsed as a liberating endeavor. The authors conclude that the hijab represents multiple sources of empowerment for young Muslim college women in the United States.

Killian (2003) interviewed 45 North African women in France, first generation immigrants, between the age of 25 and 58. She asked participants to express their opinion on the “headscarf affair” (the French controversy over Muslim girls wearing the veil in public school). The results show that religious observance is tied to age, with older, less educated women being more observant. Younger, well-educated Muslim women argue that the headscarf is a matter of personal liberty and cultural expression. Older, poorly educated women dismiss the veil as an issue related to French secularism. A third group of participants opposes the veil as a barrier to integration. Killian notes that participants’ arguments – even among those who disagree with French secular approach- are more French than North African. This article brings to light generational and education-related meanings of the hijab in France, as well as the internalization of dominant secular discourse among participants.

Amina (2004) conducted open-ended interviews with 17 young Arab Muslim women attending college in Paris or the Paris area. All participants, aged between 20 and 25, wore the veil and attended religious service regularly. Twelve of them had a mother who wore the veil as well. Amina stresses that the veil among young Muslim college students in France takes an intellectual meaning that embraces feminism and that allows

young Muslim women to affirm their identity vis-à-vis French society, the Muslim community and their family. Based on the study findings, Amina show how young Muslim women in France attending college experience “interpersonal conflicts of knowledge” as well as “internal conflicts of knowledge.” The first category is embodied by university professors who represent a secular institution that is organized in a rational manner and does not legitimize religious beliefs. The second category refers to a religious and cultural learning process that started in childhood and that was constrained by secular rules leading eventually to a legal ban of the veil in public schools in 2004. In order to be able to pursue education, some participants had to remove their headscarf. Succeeding at school became a means to affirm their legitimacy and once in college, where headscarf is allowed, wearing the headscarf completed their identity as both intellectual and religious young women with “specific knowledge.”

In both the United States and France, as the hijab has become a symbol of Muslimness, young Muslim women wearing the veil find themselves engaged in a self-defining process, that may lead to the affirmation of various meanings that contradict the dominant perception of the hijab as the representation of submission to men and outdated custom.

### **The Veil as a Tool of Resistance: More Predominantly in the French Context than in the American One**

In a study based on in-depth open-ended interviews with 26 American Muslim women aged between 18 and 39, among whom 16 were college students, and half of all participants were veiled, Shirazi and Mishra (2010) investigated participants’ attitude

toward the niqab (full face covering). They emphasize, “not a single American woman interviewed for this study said she was interested in wearing the niqab, although 13 of them were already wearing headscarves” (p. 52). One woman explains that she wore the niqab at the end of high school to compensate the guilt that she was feeling about having stopped wearing the hijab a couple of years earlier, but she soon ended the practice as she found it too difficult to pursue. Another participant believes that niqab takes away a woman’s identity completely and brings modesty to an absurd degree. The authors stress that even though the participants to the study say that they would never wear a niqab, 81% of them considered the decision to wear or not the niqab a matter of personal choice that should be neither hampered from nor forced. They conclude, “the niqab or face veil is unnecessary in the American context” (p. 56).

Bouteldja (2011) conducted semi-structured interviews of 32 women wearing the niqab (full face covering) in various regions of France, using snowball sampling. Thirty are French nationals. Eight are converts. Twenty-one participants are under the age of 30, most of them around 20. Twenty are of Arab origins. Fourteen have reached college level; some others have left school after the 2004 ban on the hijab in public schools. Ten have a job and the others are unemployed. The study provided the following results: most of the participants do not wear the niqab permanently, due to French sociopolitical context, work requirements, or tensions within the family in relation to them wearing full face veil; wearing the niqab does not express refusal of socialization, as the participants go out with friends to shopping malls and restaurants; most participants were wearing the hijab before starting wearing the niqab; the reasons they expressed for wearing the niqab

were spiritual process and feelings of awkwardness regarding their body during adolescence. Twenty-five of the participants started wearing the niqab after 2005 (the French ban on hijabs in public schools having been implemented in 2004). The vast majority of participants state that they decided to wear the niqab without pressure from their family and that in fact they have been in conflict with their family and mother in particular, following their decision to wear the niqab. All participants report having been verbally abused in public places by both non-Muslims and Muslims. Even though this study does not target Muslim women attending college, most of the participants are of college-age. Conducted just a few months after the French legal ban on full veil covering in public spaces, this study is informative on motives and experience of young Muslim women wearing the niqab in France. It is estimated that a little less than 2,000 women wear the niqab in France (Bouteldja, 2011) and this study's results contradict the common beliefs that women wearing the burqa are victims of coercion and represent a cultural threat.

Wearing the veil in France may express resistance and control in a context of severe discrimination, while the veil in the United States may represent an expression of American Muslim identity (Ajrouch, 2007; Haddad, 2007).

### **Gap in the Literature and Contribution of the Study**

In studies conducted in the United States, Muslims are often portrayed as a homogeneous group, without much exploration of racial, ethnic and cultural differences among them. Research on Muslim women's identity is still limited, with an increase in the recent years (Afridi, 2001; Laird et al., 2007). This study identifies Arab Muslim

women as a group particularly stigmatized that faces unique challenges with respect to integration, from both dominant society and their own community. In France, studies on young Muslim women do focus on North Africans and Arabs, due to the fact that Arab Muslims represent the largest minority group in France (Keaton, 2006). There are relatively few empirical studies available however, and a good part of the published literature on identity negotiation of young Arab Muslim women in France is conceptual. This study provides empirical data on young Arab Muslim women in France and the United States.

Few studies concentrate specifically on young Arab Muslim women attending college. The current study brings light to the particular experience of attending college in secular society of young Arab Muslim women. In addition, only very limited comparative research has been completed on the topic of young Arab Muslim women's identity negotiation in the United States and France. Moreover, the articles presenting comparative analysis of young Arab Muslim women in college, in the United States and France are mostly conceptual. The current study provides cross-national qualitative data on identity negotiation of young Arab Muslim women in college.

Finally, this study was conducted within a phenomenological framework and using one-on-one open-ended interviews, with the purpose of "giving voice" to the concerns of participants as well as to interpret and contextualize their comments (Larkin et al., 2006). As literature on young Muslim women's identity negotiation emphasizes the notion of multiple meanings, phenomenology is an ideal methodology for research with young Arab Muslim women since it allows the exploration of multiple meanings of the

particular phenomenon “being a young Arab Muslim in college.” No studies were found using phenomenological methodology to compare the experience of young Arab Muslim women attending college in the United States and France. The current study contributes to the understanding of identity negotiation of young Arab Muslim women in college as a phenomenon experienced from both a national and cross-national perspective.



CHAPTER II  
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

**Researcher's Approach**

Young Arab Muslim women attending college negotiate multiple identities that incorporate various influences such as the negative focus on Muslims since the events of 9/11 and the desire of second-generation Muslims to resist it; the potential influence of ethnic community and peers; the post-colonial discourse that Arab Muslim women encounter in their everyday life (such as racism and patriarchy); the ability to use the veil as a powerful tool for recognition and resistance; and the experience of being a young woman of color. In this study, young Arab Muslim women are considered as a group who shares elements of identity such as culture, religion, ethnicity and gender. In addition, the multiplicity and individuality of their identity is explored with the concept of intersectionality. The influence of the state is described through secularism and citizenship. This study refers to three theories that explore identity formation from social, cultural, racial and gender-related perspectives.

**Theoretical Framework**

Identity negotiation of young Arab Muslim women is explored through Henri Tajfel's social identities, Stuart Hall's cultural identities, and critical race feminism which include the concept of intersectionality.

## **Social Identity**

In the 1970's, British social psychologist Henri Tajfel meant to explain prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup conflict by considering large-scale collective phenomena that he stated were not aggregates of individual or interpersonal processes (Hogg et al., 2004). Tajfel and his graduate student John Turner argued that human interaction ranges from being purely interpersonal (when people relate entirely as individuals, with no awareness of social categories; Tajfel and Turner believed this phenomenon to be rare) to purely intergroup (when people relate entirely as representatives of their group). Therefore, individuals position themselves along the interpersonal-intergroup spectrum (Hornsey, 2008). Tajfel (1978) identifies three social psychological processes. First, social categorization: social or physical characteristics such as language, race, ethnicity or skin color can become the basis for social categorization leading to social identities. Second, social comparison: once individuals are categorized as a group, they naturally tend to compare their group with others. Group's status becomes significant in relation to perceived differences from other groups. Third, psychological work: in order to feel good about the groups into which they have been categorized, individuals use cognitive and emotional work to achieve a positive sense of distinctiveness.

In France, young Muslims are often categorized by the dominant discourse as violent and as a potential source of trouble (Bowen, 2007; House, 2006; Jugé & Perez, 2006; Read, 2007). The 2005 riots in the outskirts of Paris, which predominantly involved young Arab Muslim men may be seen as a response to racist categorization and socio-economic discrimination (House, 2006; Maira, 2004). Young Muslim women are

subsequently described as victims of and submissive to their community's violence (Scott, 2006).

Brewer (1991) states, "social identity can be viewed as a compromise between assimilation and differentiation from others, where the need for deindividuation is satisfied within in-groups, while the need for distinctiveness is met through inter-group comparisons" (p. 477). People sharing the same social identity compete as a group with other groups for evaluation of positive distinctiveness; the nature of the competition and the strategies used depend on people's perception of intergroup relations (Hogg et al., 2004). With respect to Muslim identity, "muslimness" has become a strong binding identity among young Muslims in North America and Europe in the aftermath of the terrorist events of 9/11 (Mishra & Shirazi, 2010).

The groups that are most problematic for a sense of positive distinctiveness such as memberships that are visible to others or that have become politicized by social movements are those that will most likely become social identities for individuals. They are easily accessible, thought about a lot, and most noticeable. In contrast, unproblematic group memberships, such as being White for example, may not become social identities as they are associated to privileges and are not obvious to others (Hurtado et al., 1994). Social identity theory acknowledges, "that groups occupy different levels of a hierarchy of status and power, and that intergroup behavior is driven by people's ability to be critical of, and to see alternatives to, the status quo" (Hornsey, 2008, p. 207). Tajfel's social identity model is meant to be a theory of social change (Hornsey, 2008; Hurtado & al., 1994).

This theory may be applied to both American and French dominant culture's reaction to Muslim women wearing the hijab or the burqa, and the subsequent endorsement of such exterior signs of religion by Muslim women. Ajrouch (2007) emphasizes the tendency for second generation Muslims to place women and girls at the center of a strategy of power via traditional and ideal norms, in an attempt to resist subordination. Moral superiority is opposed to political and economic oppression. Wray-lake et al. (2008), notes that the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 led both Muslims and non-Muslims in the United States to interlace in their mind religion and politics, promoting a politicized view of Islam among the second generation. In that context, the visual aspect of the veil symbolizes both personal choice and group cohesion (Haddad, 2007; Moore, 2007).

Social categorization leads to conceptualizing identity in terms of in-group/ out-group relation. In particular, ethnic identity is often measured in the context of other ethnic groups (Jackson & Smith, 1999). Phinney states that ethnic identity "is not an issue except in terms of a contrast group" (as cited in Jackson & Smith, 1999, p.122). Lee and Ottati (2002) define in-group/out-group bias as the tendency for the ethnic in-group (for example Whites in the United States) to evaluate the ethnic out-group (for example Mexican immigrants) negatively, resulting in in-group favoritism and prejudicial devaluation of the out-group. They argue that in-group favoritism stems from motivation to maintain a positive sense of social identity, while out-group devaluation may express displaced aggression, childhood socialization or conflicting values. In addition to social pressure, history and social structures influence the modes of adaptation to immigration,

including the construction and reconstruction of ethnicity. Second-generation immigrants, as they experience more interactions with the receiving country's population than their parents, are more likely to face multiple social categorizations, to compare themselves to others, and to elaborate distinctive characteristics (Hurtado et al., 1994).

While young Arab Muslim women attending college in the United States and France come from an ethnic and religious group that is at odd with the dominant group, they also join mainstream culture and society through college. They are second-generation, are exposed to multiple categorizations and will have to negotiate their identity as part of multiple groups.

After Tajifel's death, Turner et al. (1987) aimed to move beyond the intergroup focus of social identity to describe intragroup processes as well (Hornsey, 2008). They developed the concepts of self-categorization and depersonalization. Turner and colleagues identified three levels of self-categorization: human identity as a human being, social identity (as defined against other groups), and personal identity as personal self-categorizations based on interpersonal comparisons. Individuals' self-categorization occurs based on the combination of accessibility and best fit (Hornsey, 2008).

Depersonalization occurs when individuals identify closely with a group and see themselves less as individuals and more as exemplars of the group they represent. As group members, they self-validate group categorization and embrace their group's prototype (they assume that everyone in the group shares the same values and therefore, they tend to comply with group norms (Hornsey, 2008). Muslimness identity among young Muslims in the Western world, prevailing over ethnic identity, may be an

illustration of this concept. Hogg and Terry (2000) define prototypes as “fuzzy sets that capture the context-dependent features of group membership... [that] embody all attributes that characterize groups and distinguish them from other groups, including beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behavior.” They emphasize that prototypes are highly context-dependent and particularly influenced by out-groups’ evolving context: if, for example, Catholics gradually define themselves by comparison to Muslims as opposed to Protestants, Muslims’ prototype and self-categorization is going to evolve as well. Self-categorization theorists also apply the notion of context dependency to stereotypes: stereotypes are not fixed mental representations, rather, they depend on the comparative context; stereotypes assume the social function of legitimizing the past and current actions of the in-group (Hornsey, 2008). Stereotyping of young Muslim men and women in both the United States and France has allowed both countries to legitimize legal actions or lack of distinct legal protection.

### **Cultural Studies**

Stuart Hall (2001), a leading theorist in cultural studies, emphasizes the impact of colonization in the construction of otherness as well as self-othering. The dominant culture had the power to make colonized communities see and experience themselves as “other.” As opposed to coming from our inner selves, identity comes from the way in which we are recognized; without the others, there is no self-recognition. Therefore, the skewed structures imposed by colonization not only create an identity as “other” for colonized groups, but also influences how they position themselves during the colonization period as well as after political independence has occurred (Hall, 2001).

Using the example of Caribbean identities, Hall describes how, in order to accomplish cultural independence of identity in parallel to political independence, colonized groups need to initiate a redefinition of their identity. He asserts that this process did not occur in the early phases of the independence movement in the British Caribbean Islands, as profound assimilation to the dominant culture was standing in the way. With respect to Muslim women in the United States and France, second-generations may be able to find opportunities for undertaking a redefinition of identity that was not completed by their mothers.

Philosopher Frantz Fanon described the consequences of colonization and enslavement, in addition to external exploitation, as a process of internal collusion with an objectification of oneself, which is a misrecognition of one's own identity (Hall, 2003). In his essay *Algeria Unveiled*, Fanon (1965) depicts the role played by the veil as Muslim women from Algeria became a focus of the French colonial administration: In order to destroy Algerian society's capacity of resistance, the colonial power aimed at neutralizing the women by using the argument of women's liberation to try and force them to unveil. Algerian women were pictured as oppressed by Algerian Muslim patriarchal society and Algerian men were presented as guilty of imposing on their women medieval and barbaric customs. Colonial authorities gave Algerian women the mission of overthrowing Algerian men's authority. Schools played an important role in the attempt to eradicate the veiling practice by promoting colonial values that would single out women wearing the veil as well as their daughters (Fanon, 1965). Fanon notes that before colonial power's grip on the veil, it was an "inert element of the native

cultural configuration” (p. 171) that was not evolving in design, color, or meaning. Nevertheless, in the face of the dominant power’s frenzy to unveil Algerian women, natives developed strong opposition and the veil became a symbol of resistance to colonial power. Fanon argues that “it is the action, the plans of the occupier that determine the centers of resistance around which a people’s wish to survive becomes organized... To the colonialist offensive against the veil, the colonized opposed the cult of the veil” (p. 171). It was when Algerian women took active part in the revolution against colonial power, bearing messages and stand watching in the streets, that they unveiled. In doing so, they became exposed and – young women particularly – often had to face humiliation and incomprehension from peers or a part of the family. Eventually, the struggle for independence led to the almost entire disappearance of the veil, not only among women involved in the struggle, but also among those not actively involved (Fanon, 1965).

Jugé and Perez (2006) argue that the current French political discourse closely resemble the colonial period and is rooted in a racialized concept of “otherness.” They stress that even though France officially promotes color-blind nationalism via a process of assimilation, minority groups carry this “otherness” as they are of different skin color, culture, nationality or religious affiliation. Jugé and Perez link the notion of French citizenship to Whiteness, as it was inherited from France’s colonial past: it is the untold privilege of white skin color that provides true citizenship; all others remain foreigner, independently of their citizenship status. The notion of “sameness” in the political



discourse has become a mode of exclusion and cultural difference in France is closely related to racial difference (Jugé & Perez, 2006).

Hall (1996, 2003) stresses that the concept of identity is strategic, positional. Since identities are constructed within discourse, they need to be understood as produced in specific historical and institutional contexts. Hall describes race as a floating signifier: A signifier is the classification of a culture that is used as a system of power. The meanings attributed to race change with history, events, and culture. The notion of race becomes a political argument. Hall describes identities as the different ways people both are positioned and position themselves within the narrative of history and culture: racial identity is a positioning, leading to signifying practices. The concept of signifying practices may be applied to the practice of veiling among Muslim women, both in the United States and in France. In addition, the post-colonial internalization of otherness may also be applicable to the Arab Muslim community in both countries. Al-Saji (2010) states that in the case of both skin color and veiling, racialization functions largely through a visual process: racialized bodies are not only seen as inferior, dominant groups are not able to see them otherwise. The veiled body is seen as oppressed and cannot be seen as a subject who might reconfigure or re-appropriate itself. The hyper visibility of Muslim veils in Western perception is directly associated to the assumed invisibility of veiled women and Islamic gender oppression becomes the sole dimension through which veiled Muslim women are seen (Al-Saji, 2010).

Mishra and Shirazi (2010) draw on Hall and Bhabha's (1990) work to show how young Muslim American women engage in their own interpretations of Islam. They

transgress dominant meaning and negotiate new ones in relation to their everyday lived experiences. For Bhabha, ethnic and cultural identities constitute an ongoing process of negotiations and interactions that leads to a “third space” from which hybrid identities can be constructed. Hybrid cultural spaces are sites of both collaboration and contestation. Mishra and Shirazi (2010) acknowledge that the notion of hybrid identity has been criticized on two accounts: it is a concept accessible to global, cultural elites rather than to poor and marginalized populations; while focusing on transgressive elements, it underplays factors such as alienation and exclusion (Anthias, 2001). Dallaire and Denis (2005) highlight the role of social power in hybrid identities and explain that hybridity is not the result of a consensual positioning but rather the outcome of power relations in society. As they face anti-Muslim discrimination in a post-9/11 context, Muslim women’s identities get shaped through social power play (Mishra & Shirazi, 2010).

### **Critical Race Feminism**

Critical race feminism emerged in the late 1980’s, and incorporates Critical Race Theory and Feminist perspective. Wing and Smith (2006) point out that the perspectives presented by critical race theory often assume that women of color's experiences are the same as that of men, while much traditional feminist jurisprudence is based on the experiences of white middle- and upper-class women. They assert that mainstream feminism can be too simplistic in its focus on patriarchal domination and overlook the fact that patriarchy affects women of color differently than White women. Critical race feminism may help understand the oppression experienced by young Muslim women as

members of ethnic minorities in the United States and France.

Crenshaw (1991) introduced the concept of intersectionality of identities for women: gender needs to be understood in relation to other social identities such as race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation. In contrast to models that suggest for each minority group a given accumulation of disadvantage, intersectionality emphasizes the qualitative differences among intersectional positions; intersectional identities are defined in relation to one another (Shields, 2008). Williams (1999) identified as “spirit injury” the psychological, spiritual, and cultural effects of multiple types of oppression experienced by women of color. Wing and Smith (2006) refer to this idea of spirit injury with respect to France’s ban on hijab: the ban may constitute a psychic human rights violation that affects not only Muslim girls at school but all Muslim women and indirectly, all of France. Body-Gendrot (2007) stresses that Muslim girls in France have various motivations for wearing the hijab, that they might not wear it all the time or everywhere. She calls attention to the fact that we are all made of multiple social identities and advocates for the deconstruction of the global category “Muslim girls.” The concept of intersectionality helps understand how young Arab Muslim women negotiate multiple identities in the United States and France.

“Third wave feminists” (Harnois, 2008; Mack-Canty, 2004) have broadened the notion of intersectionality of sexism with race, class, and heterosexuality “to include a wider, potentially unending assortment of embodied positions, attitudes and location” (Mack-Canty, 2004, p. 160). Third wave feminists often define themselves in contrast to “second wave” American feminist movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s that focused on

white middle-class women (Harnois, 2008). They also acknowledge some continuity with the second wave, as they extend the notion of “personal is political” to “personal is also theoretical” (Mack-Canty, 2004). Macey and Carling (2010) call attention to a “communal identity” that incorporates the intersectionality of race *and* ethnicity *and* religion. Weir (2008) advocates for feminist identity politics that move from a static to a relational model, in which the questions of category such as that of “woman” are replaced with the notion of identification-with: common identity is based on “desires, relationships, commitments, ideals” (p. 111).

Globalization has produced a universal dominant discourse on women’s rights that promotes Western values as being superior and desirable for all women, and “voices of the South that fit these Western characterizations of the South... were valued, such as those of the Islamists who advocated violence against the West or of Muslim women who supported Western views of their rights” (Hatem, 2006, p. 35). New frameworks are being developed that center on women from developing societies’ perspectives. Singh (2007) states that the current understanding of women’s needs in developing countries refers to the gender and development paradigm, which is development-focused and centered on Western feminism ideals. She emphasizes that Western feminism’s primary goal of equality between men and women does not correspond to most women’s reality in developing countries as they are dependent upon their husband and family for survival and financial support. Singh advocates for the use of “identities of women” as an alternative framework that is centered on individual women’s self-perception of their environment and their agency within their individual contexts. She rejects generalizations

about women's identity and instead promotes the "acknowledgment of an individual woman's ability to have multiple identities and to negotiate new ones" (p. 105).

Over the past 15 years, Islamic feminism has developed in Muslim societies as well as in Europe and North America (Ahmadi, 2006; Badran, 2006). Islamic feminist movements are being created in the United States (Progressive Muslim Union) and Europe. In France and Belgium, the movement Muslim Presence has been challenging the French bans on the veil, and claims the right to veil as a matter of personal choice, not religious obligation (Fournier, 2008). Islamic feminism is "a feminist discourse and practice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Quran... and calls for the implementation of gender equality in the state, civil institutions, and everyday life" (Badran, 2006, p. 1). Mashhour (2005) and Shah (2006) emphasize that the deterioration of women's rights in many Islamic countries is due to their patriarchal nature, not their Islamic nature, and that the intention of the Quran was precisely to raise the status of women in society.

Most Muslim women may reject the feminist label as Western and neo-imperialist, while some Western feminists may reject the possibility of women fighting patriarchy within an Islamic framework (Cooke, 2000). However, "the linking of apparently mutually exclusive identities can become a radical act of subversion... To call oneself an Islamic feminist is not to describe a fix identity but to create a new, contingent subject position" (p. 93). Bilge (2010) calls for an intersectional approach to "the agency of veiled Muslim women" that moves beyond subordination to men versus resistance to Western hegemony. Badran (2006) argues that there is no line between East and West

with respect to Islamic feminism as it is an inter-Islamic phenomenon developed by Muslims throughout the world, which promotes both gender equality and social justice in the East and more pluralistic societies in the West with equal rights for all, whatever ethnicity, religion or gender. Referring to Badran's work, Ahmadi (2006) asserts that the question whether Islamic feminism is self-identified or identified by others is "superfluous" and that what counts is its focus on post-modern concepts that moves away from patriarchal frameworks.

### **Key Constructs**

#### **Identity Negotiation**

As stigmatization and racialization of Muslim immigrant communities have increased in Western countries following the events of 9/11, second generation Arab Muslims may experience various manifestations of identity as coping strategies in the environment that they are facing at any given time (Tindongan, 2011). Young Arab Muslims face multiple identities associated with religion, culture, nation of origin, and gender; "such identifications at times co-mingle and at other times clash. Negotiating multiple identities creates tension reflecting the inner turmoil associated with questions about who one is and where one comes from" (p. 80).

Said (2001) showed how Western media promote Orientalist representation of Islam and Muslims by describing them as primitive and violent. Zine (2004) notes that since the attacks of September 9, 2001, "renewed Orientalist constructions of difference have permeated the representation of Muslims in media and popular culture" (p. 184). Several studies have highlighted "the post 9/11 rescue rhetoric adopted by the U.S.

government as regards Muslim women and its linkages with the political ambitions of the American empire... In France too, Muslims are being framed in a neo-Orientalist discourse” (Mishra & Shirazi, 2010: 196). For Maira (2004), Muslims in many Western societies have to “grapple with the meaning of the state’s role in their lives and with the implications of war, violence, and racism for an ethics of belonging” (p. 225).

### **Secularism**

Historically, both the United States and France have established a strong separation between Church and State: this principle is stated in the first amendment of the United States’ Constitution, as well as in a French law of 1905 that guaranties the freedom of religion (Scott, 2007). The two countries view the notion of secularism differently. America has a history of welcoming religious minorities fleeing persecution from European countries, and the separation between church and state was meant to protect those groups from government intervention, as well as to prevent any single religion to interfere with the affairs of the State. In France, separation was meant to break the power of the Catholic Church and to ensure allegiance of individuals to the Republic (Scott, 2007).

McClay (2001) calls “negative” secularism the approach promoted by the United States in which the state may neither favor a particular religion nor interfere with religion, while he calls “positive” secularism the French interdiction of religion and religious symbols in public institutions. While negative secularism is an opponent of established beliefs and a protector of free association, positive secularism is a proponent

of established unbelief and a protector of individual rights, including that of religious expression.

The concept of secularism is contested by critical political philosophy, particularly since the events of September 11, 2001. For example, as a core element of liberal democracy, secularism led to legitimizing France's legal ban of the Muslim headscarf (Jansen, 2006). Critics assert that state's religious neutrality in Western societies should not be presented as absolute, since Christian churches are sometimes financially supported by or incorporated to public institutions; in fact, historically dominant religions may generate religious dogmatism and oppression (Jansen, 2006). Bader (1999) suggests that states may give "priority to democracy" over secularism.

Religious pluralism is presented as an alternative to secularism. Eck (2006) describes religious pluralism as follows: First, pluralism is not diversity itself, but the engagement with diversity; in contemporary democratic societies, religious diversity is a given but pluralism is not. Second, pluralism implies more than tolerance; it involves "the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference" (p. 1). Third, pluralism is not about giving up controversial differences, but rather it promotes holding to one's religious commitments and embracing the encounter of others' commitments. Fourth, in order to create encounters of commitment, pluralism needs dialogue.

### **State**

The meaning of state may be expressed through citizenship, civic engagement and inclusion, and civil rights of its citizens. In both the United States and France, citizenship is a positive outcome accessible to second-generation immigrants born in the receiving



country. It is important to note that children born in France of immigrant parents are considered foreigners until the age of 18. Their access to citizenship is conditioned on five years of residence after age 11 and good moral character. Thus, those children become “foreigners by nationality of origin” (Migration Information Source, 2004) and integration may be at the good will of the administration. Jugé and Perez (2006) argue that by refusing to give French nationality to children of immigrants at birth, the French government outcasts them and designate them as potential troublemakers. In this study, identity of young Arab Muslim women will be explored through the multiple lenses of religion, race, gender, and citizenship.

Both countries have implemented government policies that have negative effects on Muslim immigrants. In France, a legal ban on the hijab at school in 2004 and a legal ban on the burqa in all public places in 2010. In the United States, the Patriot Act of October 2001, which encourages racial and religious profiling leading to increased immigration proceedings against Muslims, and the Special Registration program launched in December 2002, which requires registration at immigration offices for all foreign males already in the United States, 16 and older, from specified countries that are almost all predominantly Arab and Muslim.

### **Specific Terms and Description**

#### **The Argument of Secularism**

Some scholars suggest that the concept of separation between church and state does not adequately describe Western liberal states’ current approach to secularism, and that instead continuous regulation of religious life expresses a much more blurry

delimitation (Mahmood, 2006). In the United States, since the events of 9/11, multiple court decisions have regulated when and how religion may be practiced and expressed in public. Similarly in France, the legal ban on religious symbols and the veil in public schools is another example of how states define what religious and nonreligious attire is in the public domain (Mahmood, 2006). Mahmood argues that the state's interference in the religious sphere is becoming a norm in Western democracies, with the intention of reshaping the form religion takes and the subjectivities it expresses. National cultures privilege historically majoritarian and religious norms. He also calls attention to the "civilizing and disciplinary aspects" of the United States' approach to secularism in its discourse regarding the Muslim world. Asad (2003) argues that even though mutual independence of state and religion is a fundamental notion of secularism, it is the state that has the power to affect religious practices, unilaterally.

Based on the above developments, secularism in France and the United States is more an argument leading to state's regulation than a value of religious neutrality.

### **Citizenship and Secularism**

Calhoun et al. (2011) state, "the tacit understanding of citizenship in the modern West has been secular" (p. 75). They argue that the distinction between public and private sphere with respect to religious expression leads to impairing participation to the public debate as citizens of religious citizens such as Muslims. They make a parallel with past restrictions of women's political participation as justified by the same public/private sphere argument. Bhargava (2009) criticizes Western societies for ignoring attempts to develop contextual secularisms, as practiced in India, which may allow for depoliticizing

of religion and active recognition of multiple religions simultaneously. In both the United States and France, dominant secularism – that does not recognize the specificity of religious citizens such as Muslims – has been strengthened yet since the aftermath of the events of 9/11.

### **Religion as Identity**

Modood (2010) advocates for a moderate secularism that takes into account religion as a minority identity. He argues that the current hostility to Muslims in Western societies calls for protection from the state: if oppressed minorities value their religious identity more than it is the norm in the dominant society, religion becomes an ethnic feature with personal, social and political salience. Therefore the state needs to develop anti-discrimination policies in relation to religious groups, as well as even-handed allocation of resources. The United States and France do not recognize religion as a minority identity that grants specific rights.

### **Hijab as Controversial Clothing**

Scott (2007) emphasizes the fact that “the numbers do not explain the attention being paid to veils” (p. 3) and adds that just before the 2004 law was passed in France, only 14% of Muslim women wore the hijab, out of 51% declaring that they actively practiced their religion. She notes that even though veils are not the only signs of Muslim religious belief, as Muslim men often display beards, loose clothing and religious behaviors such as prayers or food preference, women wearing the hijab or burqa are seen as a more serious threat than Muslim men and are targeted by French laws. For Scott, Muslim women and teenage girls are perceived as subordinated to men as if patriarchal

societies were essentially Muslim, and opponents to the veil identify it as the ultimate symbol of Islam's resistance to modernity. Amina (2004) mentions that in France the word "hijab" is much less used than "headscarf" or "veil" – even though it is more accurate – as "hijab" does not relate enough to the "headscarf affair" that originated in 1989 and therefore does not grasp all aspects of the French context. Caincar (2009) explains that, in the United States, Muslim women are more targeted by exclusion and discrimination than Muslim men, as women wearing the hijab are perceived as a foreign cultural threat, rather than a threat of violence or terrorism.

Bowen (2007) identifies three perceived threats to French modernity that are emblemized by the veil: communalism, Islamism, and sexism. He describes communalism as "the closing in of ethnically defined communities on themselves... and a refusal of integration" (p. 156) and explains the French perspective on communalism as the fear that citizens become isolated by valuing their affiliation to specific communities, to the detriment of their collective participation in the nation. For Bowen, Islamism is used as an ambiguous term throughout the Western world, to describe an array of initiatives, from the political agenda of creating Islamic states, to the mere promotion of public manifestations of Islam: It becomes easy for opponents to draw of the general public's fears of totalitarian Islam in order to generate suspicion on Muslim associations. Finally, he states that sexism and violence against women are often associated with Islamism.

In France, while the headscarf issue was presented as a social problem in parallel to the rise of Islamism in Algeria, the media alleged young Algerian males' refusal to

integrate, whereas young women of Algerian descent were represented as passive and submissive (House, 2006). In the United States, the media regularly connect terrorism to Islam and as a result, Muslims and Arabs have been severely “othered” (Caincar, 2009). Caincar notes the perception in American popular culture of Muslim women as purveyors of hatred and actively nurturing violent personalities of Muslim men by refusing to hug them as children.

Zine (2004) and Ahmed (2005) note that the hijab has acquired new meanings in the United States, quite different from both those prevalent in the Middle-East and those assigned by the dominant non-Muslim discourse, including that of Western secular feminists. For Read (2007), while in many Arab nations, women’s level of education and of participation to the labor force is comparatively low, the Muslim Arab Diaspora in Western countries such as the United States and France displays a broad diversity in gender relations and the role of women. Some Muslim women wear the veil against the wishes of their husbands or fathers, as a means to handle the marginality they experience as minority members in their host country, while others use it as a means to avoid being judged as inappropriate by their own community when they access male-dominated activities and spaces (Read, 2007). Moore (2007) states that membership in a minority religion can be an important source of identity that may lead to the strategic decision of wearing specific clothing. She emphasizes that even though wearing the hijab is not legally prohibited in the United States as it is in France, American Muslim women wearing the hijab face strong discrimination at school and in the work place in particular. Nevertheless, in recent years, religious groups, Christians and Muslims alike, having

challenged in court restrictions on religious practices in public setting, this practice has led to better accommodation of religion in public settings and has produced a particular kind of Muslim identity as citizens with particular rights (Moore, 2007).

In their effort to rally the French general public against the veil, most French feminists linked communalism and Islamism to the oppression of Muslim women in France and throughout the world (Bowen, 2007). Most members of the French Women's Liberation Movement and affiliated groups opposed wearing the veil. Even those of them who disagreed with expelling girls wearing scarves in 1989 stated that the veil was a sign of the oppression of Muslim women. In contrast, the anti-racist association SOS Racism defended the girls' claim to remain in school. The organization was accused of violating women's dignity (Bowen, 2007).

American feminists, including those who are Muslim American, are split on the issue of the veil bans in Europe. Some, such as Eltahawy (2009, p. 1) believe that the burqa "erases women from society" and strongly support the bans. Others, such as Nussbaum (2010) strongly oppose the bans. Nussbaum identifies and confronts five arguments that are commonly made in favor of the bans: security reasons, the burqa's impediment regarding social relations, the objectification of Muslim women, the coercion of Muslim women, and the lack of comfort of such clothing. She argues that security and social issues are not brought up about other groups such as those who wear hats and scarves in the wintertime or various professionals wearing specific uniforms. Regarding the objectification of Muslim women, she asserts that plastic surgery and sex magazines are symbols of male supremacy that are readily accepted by Western societies, while the

burqa is not. With respect to coercion, she states that there is no evidence that Muslim families have a disproportionate rate of domestic violence in comparison to other groups. Finally, with respect to clothing that might be uncomfortable, she suggests that other attributes used by women such as high heels would never be banned because they are approved by Western standards. She concludes that all five arguments are discriminatory and should be rejected.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD STATEMENT

#### **Introduction**

This qualitative study adopts a social constructivist philosophical worldview as it seeks to grasp the subjective meanings participants give to their experiences. The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' view of the situation they are experiencing (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In this study, the intention is to understand, from the perspective of the participants themselves, what it means to be a young woman of Arab descent and of Muslim religion in Western countries such as the United States and France, which carry a post-colonial heritage and secular values. Data consists of participants' contributions gathered through interviews as well as some observations and impressions generated during the research process. The research paradigm for this study is phenomenology, which is both a philosophy and a research method.

#### **History and Key Contributors to Phenomenology**

After the First World War, German philosopher Edmund Husserl, following the steps of Kant and Hegel, developed a philosophy that opposed positivist science's reference to absolute certainty (Dowling, 2007). Husserl rejects the belief that reality exists independently and argues that the only certainty is that which appears before us in our consciousness (notion of intentionality). He seeks to emphasize knowledge that is



rooted in meanings, through the scientific study of phenomena, rather than in an analysis of a physical reality (Moustakas, 1994). As a student of Husserl, Heidegger introduced the concept of existential phenomenology: the dialogue between a person and her world. Subsequently, French philosophers Sartre and Merleau-Ponty significantly increased the influence of existential phenomenology, and in the 1970s a phenomenological methodology was developed (Groenewald, 2004). Husserl's approach evolved into descriptive phenomenology, while Heidegger's contribution led to interpretative phenomenology (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

### **Phenomenology as a Methodological Approach and Application to the Study**

As research methods, descriptive phenomenology and interpretative phenomenology differ primarily in how the findings are generated and in how the findings are used (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Both approaches rely on in-depth interviews as main data source. Regarding production of data, Husserl's descriptive approach leads to focusing on the observed phenomenon as described by participants while the researcher's own knowledge of the phenomenon and personal bias are actively set aside (bracketing). In contrast, the interpretative approach means to incorporate participants' interaction with their environment as well as the researcher's a priori understanding of the phenomenon (Hein & Austin, 2001; Lopez & Willis, 2004). With respect to data analysis, the descriptive approach follows the assumption that there are common features in all experiences of the same phenomenon. Unity of participants' experience is identified and allows for a generalized description of the phenomenon, which is independent of history and context. In contrast, the interpretive approach focuses on describing the meaning of

participants' experience as influenced by their individual context (Hein & Austin, 2001; Lopez & Willis, 2004).

This study follows a descriptive approach to phenomenology in which the phenomenon of identity negotiation is explored by setting aside any pre-conceptions or previous knowledge that the researcher may have. I am interested in identifying common experiences of young Arab Muslim women who attend college, within the French and the American sample as well as across samples. In reference to Moustakas' (1994) perspective, this study commits to describing experiences, not explaining or analyzing.

Over the past 30 years, authors have developed in North America an empirical approach to descriptive phenomenological research (Hein & Austin, 2001). Psychologists Van Kaam, Giorgi, and Colaizzi use similar series of steps (Dowling, 2007): descriptions are divided into units; units are transformed into psychologically sensitive meanings (units of meaning); such transformations are combined into a general description of the experience (structure). Colaizzi (1978) adds to the process a final step that involves participants' feedback on the researcher's description.

I have chosen to inform my work by Giorgi (1975, 2003, 2006) and Colaizzi (1978). Giorgi and Colaizzi have been very influential in social science research and Giorgi continues to improve solid research strategies as he writes regularly about phenomenological methodology (Dowling, 2007). Please refer to Appendix A for a table of descriptive methodology as applied to the study.

## **Key Concepts Applied to the Study**

Descriptive phenomenology is characterized by the following concepts:

### **Phenomenological Reduction and Bracketing**

The concept of phenomenological reduction is a key strategy that was first proposed by Husserl: the aim is to “understand the essential features of a phenomenon as free as possible from cultural context” (Dowling, 2007, p. 132).

In order to best understand the phenomenon under study, the researcher needs to make every effort to identify, express and “set aside his or her presuppositions, biases, and other knowledge of the phenomenon obtained from personal and scholarly sources” (Hein & Austin, 2001, p. 5). This process is called bracketing. Setting aside or bracketing assumptions allows being as receptive as possible to participants’ descriptions of their experience. In this study, assumptions involved comparison of French versus American environment in terms of young Arab Muslim women’s opportunities, interaction within their community, civic involvement in the country they were born in, gender-relations, and the issue of the veil.

### **Empathy and Relationship Leading to Meaning**

Wertz (2005) emphasizes the need for a highly empathic attitude that will allow the researcher to enter fully the situations described by participants. The researcher co-performs participants’ involvement and the sharing of the experience will lead to later reflection on meanings. Osborne (1990) has described how the researcher’s empathic understanding and interpersonal communication skills will allow researcher and participant to co-constitute a relationship. In this study, expressing high level of empathy

toward each participant while practicing self-reflectivity was a primary goal.

### **Data Saturation as Key Factor for Sampling Decision**

Authors (Groenewald, 2004; Guest et al., 2006; Wertz, 2005) suggest that the nature and number of participants in phenomenological studies depend on when saturation of data has been reached; meaning that redundancy of findings that fulfill the research goal is achieved. This objective may be reached at an early stage, after a few interviews are conducted, or the researcher may choose to continue recruiting participants whose experience will complete the data. Pre-determined sample and sample size are difficult to achieve, as the researcher has to assess themes emerging during data collection as well as quality of data with respect to research goals. Recent published dissertations using phenomenological research have used small samples, from 4 to 15 participants (Ward, University of Florida, 2008; Holloman, Columbia University, 2009; Lindros, Columbia University, 2010; Lee, University of Southern California, 2010). In this study, interviews were first conducted in Paris, France, and preliminary analysis indicated that data saturation had been reached with eight interviews. Subsequently, eight interviews were conducted in Chicago, while building a sample comparable to the French one. Data saturation was also reached in the American sample.

### **Immersion in Data for a Sense of the Whole**

Giorgi (1975), Colaizzi (1978), and Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) promote as a first step to data analysis, immersion in the data, which involves reading the transcript several times and developing a good sense of the participant's experience of the phenomenon. Reading each interview several times allowed me to grasp the complete description of the

experience, from a phenomenological perspective.

### **Inductive Approach to Data Analysis**

In phenomenological research, the identification of themes and coding schemes is “merely preparatory” for a more in-depth analysis that follows (Wertz, 2005, p. 172).

Empirical phenomenology relies on factual data collected from participants and tends to draw on the actual words that participants use to communicate their experiences; a priori coding schemes are avoided (Hein & Austin, 2001). In this study, themes emerge from data. In addition, data analysis incorporates multiple quotes from participants.

### **Meaning**

Giorgi (1975), Colaizzi (1978), and Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) identify two phases in the process of giving meaning: extraction from transcript of meaning units and transformation of meaning units into themes. In this study, descriptive elements of the transcripts were identified and subsequently these elements were clustered into “psychologically sensitive expressions” (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 252).

### **Structure**

As stated by Priest (2002), “the aim of phenomenology is to produce a description of a phenomenon of everyday experience, in order to understand its essential structure” (p. 51). The researcher needs to look for shared features among the diverse appearances of a phenomenon in order to best describe it (Hein & Austin, 2001). The current study identifies within the interviews the various expressions of young Arab Muslim women’s identity negotiation at the intersection of multiple identities and multiple contexts.

### **Return to the Participant for Validation**

Colaizzi (1978) adds a final step to data analysis in descriptive phenomenology. Once all data is transcribed, the researcher returns to participants and asks them to read the description of their transcript for validation. They may add or remove elements of their transcripts. In this study, all participants received a copy of their transcript (as part of member checking process) and some made changes to the original version. All changes were included in the description of the phenomenon. Please refer to Appendix B for key concepts applied to the study.

### **Research Question**

Two sub-questions stem from concern with identity formation of young Arab Muslim women attending college in the United States and France:

1a. How do young Arab Muslim women attending college, in the United States and France, negotiate their identity vis-à-vis multiple contexts of citizenship in secular state, gender, religion, culture, and race?

1b. What are the similarities and differences in this process of identity negotiation between young Arab Muslim women in the United States and France attending college?

Identities explored in this study are political (as citizen), gender related, religious (as Muslim), cultural (as recipient of the family's and country of origin's traditions), and racial (as second generation member of a minority group).

## **Sampling**

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Young Arab Muslim women attending college are defined as women of 18 to 26 years old, citizens from either the United States or France, attending college either in the United States (Chicago) or France (Paris), of Arab descent from one or both parents, and Muslim. As phenomenological studies imply exploring the structure of participants' experiences, which might require repeated access in order to gain deeper meaning, convenient access to sample appears to be particularly important. Nevertheless sampling based solely on convenience would not be consistent with phenomenology's emphasis on the diversity of individual experiences. There is also a need for purposive sampling, which allows for inclusion of specific population criteria particularly relevant to the study (Porter, 1999).

### **Assessment of Religiosity**

Assessing each participant's level of religiosity allows comparisons between samples in the United States and France. Religiosity is not part of inclusion criteria. The samples' level of religiosity was assessed with three items from Read's (2003) scale that is specific to Arab American women. Participants were asked to complete the following questionnaire: (1) Attend services: never; a few times a year; once or more a month; (2) Religiosity over the life cycle: low in childhood and adulthood; decreased since childhood; increased since childhood; high in childhood and adulthood; (3) Religious conservatism: "Holy book of my religion is the literal word of God": Strongly disagree or disagree; neither agree nor disagree; strongly agree or agree.

## **Sampling and Secularism**

The sample is ideally constructed to discuss secularism: from an in-group perspective, the participants are members of a Muslim family leaving in a secular world and experiencing cultural adjustments; from an out-group perspective, going to college represents being away from Muslim values that may be at odd with dominant values.

### **French Sample**

#### **Recruitment Strategies and Procedures**

The interviewing process was conducted over four months, through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Initial contacts were established via email. The French catholic organization for university students in need of academic or psychological support that had originally committed to helping recruit participants was not available at the time when research was conducted. A search on the Internet for Muslim student associations in Paris had led to the general website of EMF (Muslim Students of France) but no specific contact or link seemed available on the main Parisian universities' websites. When asked about Muslim students associations in their university, participants answered that they were not aware of any and some of them suggested that the fear of being blamed for communalism might be a major reason. Ultimately, initial recruitment took place through personal connections. I met L. through a doctoral candidate from University of Paris I. She expressed interest in my project and I sent her via email the recruiting material that I had prepared. She agreed to participate.

I shared with L. my hope to be able to interview a diverse group of Muslim students, some veiling and some non-veiling ones, with various levels of religiosity and



various backgrounds. She acted as a recruiter and introduced me via email to a first set of friends who had expressed interest based on the recruiting material. I met with E. who in turn introduced me to M. and S. Expressing strong interest in helping me diversify my sample, S. recruited two other students. L and S did not know each other, but shared the willingness to broaden my perception of what it meant to be a Muslim student in Paris. I met again with L. who, based on the sample I already had, introduced me to two more friends of hers.

### **Sample Description and Access**

The sample is comprised of eight second-generation French Muslim women aged 19 to 25. Their parents are of Arab origins and were born in Northern Africa; in every case both parents are from the same country. All participants were born in France and are therefore French nationals. Four of them are of Algerian ancestry, three of Moroccan, and one of Tunisian ancestry. Four participants do not wear the veil, two of them wear the hijab, and two wear the long veil (veil prolonged by a long sleeved dress; the face is not covered). Among the four who do not veil, one tried wearing the veil during the summer between high school and college but chose to remove it after she entered college. Among the two who wear the hijab, one started wearing it during the summer between high school and college after visiting the United States. The other one wears a turban that she calls “hijab.”

Snowball sampling led to participant recruitment in four public universities in Paris. L., who acted as a recruiter was a student at University of Paris I Pantheon-

Sorbonne;<sup>3</sup> three students were recruited from the same university and one from University of Paris V;<sup>4</sup> S., was from University of Paris IX<sup>5</sup> and she recruited two students from University of Paris IV Paris-Sorbonne.<sup>6</sup> None of the participants are living on campus.<sup>7</sup> Five of them live with their parents and siblings, two are married and live with their husband, and one is single and lives alone. Six of them live in peripheral areas of Paris and two live in near suburbs, in the Seine St Denis area, which is very stigmatized since the 2005 riots.<sup>8</sup> Except for one participant, they all come from modest family backgrounds. All participants are high-achievers in the French education system.

The sample is very diverse in terms of culture of origin, age, religiosity, with an equal number of women wearing the veil and not veiling. These eight women were all very motivated in participating to the interviews; they answered every question in a very detailed and articulate manner. Each of them was anxious to contribute to a “complete

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<sup>3</sup>University of Paris I Pantheon-Sorbonne is a prestigious public university in Paris that specializes in political and economic science, law and humanities.

<sup>4</sup>University of Paris V is a renowned public university in Paris with a strong focus on medical and social sciences and mathematics.

<sup>5</sup>University of Paris IX is a public university that specializes in business organization and decision science.

<sup>6</sup>University of Paris IV Paris-Sorbonne is also a public university that specializes in humanities and civilization studies.

<sup>7</sup>These Parisian universities are set in very urban environments and are not organized in campuses; there are no lodging facilities available on site. In general, French universities do not offer campus facilities as students in the U.S. know them, but there are some resources available to assist with lodging.

<sup>8</sup>In October 2005, the death in a suburb of Paris of two teenagers who were fleeing the police triggered riots in various suburbs of Paris with predominant African and Arab communities, particularly in the Seine Saint Denis area, before spreading to other regions of France. A state of emergency was declared in November 2005 and unrests spread throughout the month of November (BBC News, 2005). Years later, the Seine Saint Denis suburbs remain stigmatized.

picture” of young Muslim women attending college in France and several of them contacted friends whom they thought would either complement or contrast their own perspective.

### **Religiosity of Sample**

Completing three items from Read’s (2003) scale, six participants out of eight reported attending service a few times a year; one, once or more a month; one, never. Six participants reported an increased level of religiosity since childhood, one reported a level of religiosity as high in adulthood as in childhood, and one reported a decreased level of religiosity since childhood. Six participants also supported religious conservatism, and two chose the item “neither agreed nor disagree.” Seven participants expressed a high level of religiosity and one participant expressed a low level of religiosity.

### **Conduct of the Interviews**

Finding an adequate space to meet and record interviews was consistently an issue, as participants did not think that there would be space available at their university. Meeting at the participant’s university library was a possibility but instead, all participants preferred meeting outside their university and identified either a home or a coffee shop as the place of their choice. Participants who followed daily schedules of five prayers per day preferred meeting in a home; which allowed them to pray on time, either right before or right after the interview. Three participants chose to come to my apartment, which was close to their school building; three asked me to come to their place; and two preferred meeting in a coffee shop.

### **Implications of Recruiting Process for Sampling**

Snowball sampling led to a group of young Muslim women who claim their Muslim identity, some by wearing the veil in an environment that sets them aside, some by participating to blogs or Muslim associations. At the same time, all are well integrated into the French higher education system. The religiosity scale shows that seven participants out of eight are very religious and one moderately religious. All participants expressed their attempt to correct an image of Muslims that they feel is distorted. The fact that some participants helped recruit other participants with the idea to either complement or contrast their own perspective does not interfere with the diversity of the sample, to the contrary, it increased its level of diversity, with women who veil in different manners and non-veiling women who made that choice for varied reasons.

### **Translation**

Since interviews with French participants were conducted in French, translation from French into English was needed. Translation of qualitative studies raises issues of trustworthiness and authenticity, especially when the researcher is not fluent in the participants' language (Esposito, 2001; Temple & Young, 2004; Twinn, 1997). In the case of this study, the researcher being French, bilingual in English, there was no need for the presence of a translator during the interviews. Esposito (2001) identifies techniques to check the accuracy of transcript translation, such as back-translation (translation of a transcript that has already been translated into a different language back to the original language), comparison of two translations of the same transcript, checking for comprehension, testing for naturalness and readability. She recommends a combination

of tests to increase the translation's credibility. In a study using Chinese participants, Twinn (1997) acknowledges that there was no significant difference between the use of either Chinese or English in terms of major categories generated during the data analysis. Finally, Temple and Young (2004) emphasize that from a social constructionist perspective, there is no neutral position from which to translate and there is no single correct translation. In addition, even though a researcher who is also able to be the translator benefits from broader opportunities in terms of research methods (for example, the experience of translating may be used to discuss points in the text where she particularly had to think about meaning) the researcher/translator role is still bound to the socio-cultural positioning of the researcher.

In this study, translation from French into English was conducted by myself as a researcher/interviewer/transcript translator. Translation accuracy was ensured by checking for comprehension and testing for naturalness and readability. During the translation process, the attempt to stay true to original meaning, with respect to some comments that were made across the interviews, led to verbal discussion with the recruiter of the French sample.

### **American Sample**

#### **Recruitment Strategies and Procedures**

Initial recruitment of participants took place through the Muslim Student Association (MSA) of Loyola University Chicago. MSA is a national non-profit student organization that promotes various programs and events throughout the year about Islam and its teaching. Initial contacts were established via email. I first met with M., Vice-

President of MSA Loyola University Chicago and provided her with recruiting material. Based on the French sample I had obtained of eight participants as well as primarily analysis, I asked her to identify at least four veiling women and at least four non-veiling women, with various levels of religiosity and various backgrounds. She promptly initiated contacts with MSA members. The interviewing process was conducted within a month, through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Five participants were direct contacts of M. Among them, one participant introduced me to her sister and to a friend. Another participant also introduced me to a friend.

### **Sample Description and Access**

The sample included eight second-generation American Muslim women aged 19 to 23. Their parents are of Arab origins. All participants were born in the United States and are American citizens. Four of them are of Palestinian decent, with both parents being Palestinians. Two of them are of Syrian decent and both their parents are Syrian. One participant is of Egyptian decent from both parents, and one participant has a Moroccan mother and a European-American father who converted to Islam. Four participants wear the hijab, and four do not veil. Among the four who do not veil, one tried wearing the hijab in eighth grade and took it off during her freshman year in high school, and one wore it from eighth grade to her sophomore year in college. There are two sisters in the sample: one wears the veil and the other doesn't.

Using snowball sampling, participants were recruited in three universities in Chicago: Five students were recruited from Loyola University Chicago<sup>9</sup> by the Muslim Student Association (MSA)'s vice-president at Loyola. One participant contacted two students from University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)<sup>10</sup> and another participant contacted a student from Northeastern Illinois University Chicago.<sup>11</sup> Four participants live on campus and four live at home with their parents, in the suburbs of Chicago. None of them is married. All participants are members of MSA, with various levels of involvement, from being on the board to only attending some events, to not attending any event. All participants have at least one parent who pursued higher education and are high-achievers in the American education system.

The attempt to match the French sample's diversity led to building an American sample that is also very diverse in terms of culture of origins – with five different countries of ancestry – age, and religiosity. As in the French sample, four women are veiling and four are not. All participants were very motivated about participating to the interviews and they answered every question with much detail and were attentive to helping me understand their perspective. Participants were less involved in the sampling

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<sup>9</sup>Loyola University Chicago is a private Jesuit university that offers undergraduate to doctorate programs in most major areas of studies. It has three campuses in Illinois. All interviewees were students from the Lake Shore campus, in the north side of Chicago.

<sup>10</sup>UIC is a public university that also offers undergraduate to doctorate programs in most major areas of studies. The campus is located in the west side of Chicago.

<sup>11</sup>Northeastern Illinois University Chicago is a public university that provides undergraduate and graduate programs in the arts, sciences, education and business. Northeastern main campus is located on the north side of Chicago.

decisions than some members of the French sample, as they did not suggest any particular traits for participants.

### **Religiosity of Sample**

Completing three items from Read's (2003) scale, seven participants out of eight reported attending service once or more a month, and one, a few times a year. Four participants reported an increased level of religiosity since childhood, three reported a level of religiosity as high in adulthood as in childhood, and one reported a decreased level of religiosity since childhood. Five participants also supported religious conservatism and three chose the item "neither agreed nor disagree". All eight participants expressed a high level of religiosity.

### **Conduct of the Interviews**

Even though quiet space was easily available at their university, four participants chose to meet at a coffee shop near their campus; two chose to meet in a quiet space on campus; one asked me to meet her at a coffee shop in the suburbs where she lived and one at a coffee shop in downtown Chicago.

### **Implications of Recruiting Process for Sampling**

Participants were recruited both through Loyola University Chicago's MSA and snowball sampling. As they all are members of MSA, all participants are self-identified Muslims. Some are active in MSA as well as in activist organizations and some are not. All care about expression of religious beliefs and all are well integrated in the American higher education system. The religiosity scale shows that all participants are religious. The fact that all participants are members of MSA does not affect the diversity of the



sample, as participants expressed varied levels of involvement within the organization as well as varied motives for joining. French and American samples are both diverse and easily comparable as they present common structure and characteristics.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Ethical Considerations**

All participants checked the “member checking” option on the consent form. A signed copy of the consent form was either handed out to them or scanned and sent via email. Each participant completed a brief religiosity scale before starting the interview. Each participant received her transcribed interview via email. Some of them made small changes with the purpose of clarifying what they had meant to say. One participant asked that we meet again to work on some changes. Based on primary analysis, I asked some participants via email to develop a particular point or to answer an additional sub-question. When changes were made to their transcript, an updated version of it was emailed to participants. All participants approved the final version of the interviews.

#### **Consent Process**

A signed consent form was obtained from each participant to the study, both in France and the United States. The document signed by both participant and researcher was either handed in person to the participant or scanned and emailed to her. The English version of the consent form was translated into French and exact transcription of terms was ensured. Content of the consent form was based on Loyola University Chicago’s Institutional Review Board (IRB)’s (2011) guidelines regarding informed consent that are posted on the university’s website: contact with participants is non-intrusive and it is

important to verify “whether or not the participant understands the information presented, has the ability to give consent, and is free to make a voluntary choice.” Participants are provided with the following information: Purpose of research, expected duration of the participation and the procedures involved, potential risks or discomforts, potential benefits, procedures to protect confidentiality, statement specifying that participants may discontinue their participation at any time, and the researcher’s contact information if they have questions about the research (Loyola University Chicago’s IRB, 2011).

In both France and the United States, recruiters were provided with a description of the objective of the research, the nature of the interviews, their duration, and the possibility of follow up contacts. When meeting with potential participants, each part of the inform consent was explained and time was allowed for questions and adequate answers. Participants were informed that they could discontinue their participation at any time. Potential benefits of participation were identified as the opportunity for participants to: voice their feelings and opinions on what it means to be a young Muslim woman attending college, receive a copy of their interview for them to keep, and have access to the study’s findings if they wished to. No foreseeable negative effects were identified. In addition, the comparative aspect of this study, between the United States and France, was systematically emphasized.

### **Instrumentation**

The research instruments were audio-recorded open-ended interviews conducted in person with each participant. No focus group were organized, as phenomenology requires that individuals describe their experience “in a relatively ‘uncontaminated’ way”

which is in conflict with the approach of interaction between participants as promoted in focus group (Giorgi, 1989; Webb & Kerven, 2001).

Questions were kept broad in scope. There were four main questions: (1) What is it like to be a college student in the U.S/France?; (2) What five words would you use to describe yourself?; (3) How do you make the choice to veil or not to veil?; (4) What are your goals and how do you see working towards them? In addition, a list of prompt questions was developed to guide participants who needed more structured questions. Please refer to appendix C for a detailed list of questions. All participants, in both the French and the American sample, used some of the prompt questions. In addition each participant informed a brief religiosity scale (Read, 2003).

The questions in the open-ended interviews seek to address the following theory-based and context related issues: Is the underlying conflict between race theory, which approaches issues at the group level, and feminist theory, which approaches issues at the individual woman's level, apparent in the chosen sample? Does the fact that the United States and France promote secularism while they are primarily Christian states have a meaning for the sample? Do the participants have a political identity? Do they give preference to one identity or the other? What is the meaning of being Arab Muslim attending college for the sample?

### **Issue of Validity**

As discussed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), validating qualitative studies may be best accomplished by using alternative concepts to "validity" and "reliability" which belong to quantitative methodology. They suggest using instead "trustworthiness", which

includes credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, and “authenticity”, which describes fairness, enlargement of personal constructions, improved understanding of constructions of others, action stimulation, and action empowerment (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Kluge, 2002).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) promote “member checking” as a strong tool for establishing credibility of qualitative studies. Member checking consists of having participants view the raw data and comment on their accuracy: the process allows participants to tell the researcher if the themes and categories make sense and if the overall transcription is accurate; in turn, the researcher incorporates participants’ comments into the final narrative. Validity is ensured by the participant’s input (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member checking represents a powerful verification strategy that is endorsed by Feminist research as a process that encourages collaborative and empowering relationships between participants and researchers (Kluge, 2002).

Regarding the compatibility of phenomenological studies and member checking, Webb and Kerven (2000) emphasize that validity in a phenomenological sense is reached if “a description is judged plausible by the researcher who has written it, who has used a transparent and systematic approach to data analysis and has communicated this to others” (p. 800). Thus, they argue that member checking is not necessary in phenomenological studies. Nevertheless, Moustakas (1994) in his description of phenomenological research methods does supports the use of member checking and suggests that researchers incorporate to their description and final synthesis additions and corrections made by the participants. In the event that some participants may not take part

to the checking process, researchers need to document how many did not respond and how and how many times they were contacted; their interview may still be included in the data analysis.

In this study, member checking was used to provide elements of trustworthiness as well as to promote a sense of empowerment among participants. The consent form included a description of the member checking process: an opportunity for each participant to receive a copy of her interview transcript via email and to meet again with the researcher in person or via phone to comment the transcript. Participants had the option to either accept to participate in the member checking process by circling “yes” or to refuse, by circling “no” on the consent form. All participants, in both the French and the American sample agreed to participate.

### **Limitations of the Research Design**

This is a qualitative study that does not incorporate any quantitative measurements. As it focuses on the understanding of individuals’ experience of their world, phenomenological research follows the tradition of descriptive science rather than explanatory science (Giorgi, 1986). “Exploration and description of human experience may well lead to later hypothesis testing but should not be thought of as an inferior preliminary step towards the ultimate goal of explanatory science” (Osborne, 1990, p. 80). In-depth interviews of young Muslim women attending college in the United States and France provide important information on how each group’s experience is both different and similar.

The use of a small sample size in each country may be perceived as limiting with

respect to future exploitation of findings. In qualitative research, data saturation is a key factor in determining sample size (Groenewald, 2004; Guest et al., 2006; Wertz, 2005). In this study, data saturation was reached with eight interviews in France and the same number of interviews was conducted in the United States and data saturation was also reached in the American sample.

Conducting a cross-national study in the United States and France involves comparing the experience of young Muslim women attending college that are influenced by two different contexts. Due to differences in backgrounds, past opportunities and current perspectives, the two samples may seem hardly comparable. However, Cultural studies and Critical race feminism emphasize the influence of issues such as globalization, post-colonialism, and the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11 on ethnic and religious minorities' discrimination in the Western world (Hall, 2001, 2003; Leonard, 2005; Mishra & Shirazi, 2010; Wing & Smith, 2006). Young Muslim women attending college may in fact face common oppression from dominant discourse.

The need for translation of French data into English introduces a layer of complexity that may raise issues of trustworthiness and authenticity. In this study, researcher and translator are the same person. As much as one tries to stay true to original meaning and to check for comprehension, naturalness and readability, translation is not neutral (Temple & Young, 2004; Wong & Poon, 2010); it is a "social practice" that constitutes "an interpretive and partial account of the interactions captured during an interview" (Wong & Poon, 2010, p. 157). In this study, translation becomes part of the subjective process endorsed by researchers in phenomenology. In addition, attempt to

stay true to original meaning led to a discussion with one of the participant regarding meaning that enriched the original data.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

Young Arab Muslim women attending college in the United States and France encounter similar processes of identity negotiation at the intersection of faith, culture, gender and race. Nevertheless, American and French secular societies provide distinct environments that affect the manner in which they are able to express their identity. All participants were eager to share with me their own process of identity negotiation as well as their understanding of what context they developed it in. They were attentive to answering my questions in great details and demonstrated a high level of self-reflexivity. As they described various personal backgrounds and opinions, they provided this study with very rich and diverse data. Even though all participants emphasized the individual aspect of their identity negotiation process, common themes emerge across and within sample. This chapter presents the similarities as well as the multiple nuances of their experience across sample. It also uncovers similarities and differences in college experience between French and American samples.

#### **Review of the Research Design**

In this study, data analysis was conducted with the purpose of answering the following research questions:



1a. How do young Arab Muslim women attending college, in the United States and France, negotiate their identity vis-à-vis multiple contexts of citizenship in secular state, gender, religion, culture, and race?

1b. What are the similarities and differences in this process of identity negotiation between young Arab Muslim women in the United States and France attending college?

Eight interviews were conducted in Paris and eight in Chicago. Using a phenomenological approach, data was first analyzed across sample in order to identify common experiences of identity negotiation among all participants, and then within each sample with the purpose of comparing the American and French experiences of identity negotiation in secular society. Theoretical frameworks applied to the study are social identity, cultural studies, and critical race feminism. These frameworks help understand how participants negotiate their identity between: integration and differentiation from others; influence of dominant culture and attempt to redefine identity; gender and specificity of the experience of women of color as well as interrelation of multiple identities.

### **Participants' Characteristics**

Following a phenomenological approach, participants' characteristics are described from the perspective of common lived experiences as opposed to individual traits. In addition, this approach ensures participants' anonymity and confidentiality as no individual description is provided. All participants are self-identified Arab Muslim women attending college under the age of 26, either American or French citizens. In each sample, four women wear hijab and four are not veiled. Based on a brief religiosity scale,

fifteen participants are very religious and one is moderately religious. Among French participants, four of them are of Algerian ancestry, three of Moroccan, and one of Tunisian ancestry. Among American participants, four of them are of Palestinian descent, two are of Syrian descent, one of Egyptian and one of Moroccan and American descent. Among the French interviewees, two are married and live with their husband, one is single and lives alone, and the five others are single and live with their parents and siblings. All American participants are single; three of them live on campus and five with their parents and siblings.

### **Data Analysis**

Based on Giorgi's (1975), Colaizzi's (1978), and Giorgi and Giorgi's (2003) approach to descriptive phenomenological data analysis, I engaged in the following steps: (1) As participants were given the opportunity to read and amend their transcript, all changes to transcripts were incorporated for analysis. (2) I read each transcript several times in order to reach a good understanding of participants' experience. (3) As an alternative to a priori coding scheme, I allowed themes to emerge from data: I first identified meaning units from transcripts and then clustered them into themes, while eliminating repetitions. (4) Based on themes identified in the interviews, I described common elements of participants' experience that formed a general structure. In doing so, I used many quotes from participants. I was also attentive to incorporating variations within the themes from individual interviews. I used the computer program NVivo 10 to proceed through theme analysis and description of common experience among participants.

## Findings

Data analysis identified multiple dimensions of identity, as experienced across sample by sixteen young Arab Muslim women attending college in Chicago and Paris. Two main themes, relevant to the research question, are emerging: Hijab is central to the experience of being a young Arab Muslim woman in college; being Muslim is a way of life. For some, hijab represents a social barrier, for others, it allows them to socialize on their own term. Hijab also intersects with gender in characterization of Muslim women. For all, women wearing hijab experience high levels of racism. With respect to Islam in general, all participants express that being Muslim is a way of life, leading to four main points: being Muslim is an identity; religiosity is a personal process; hijab has various meanings; and secular states promote harmful generalization of Arab Muslim women.

In addition to uncovering common themes across sample, this study aims at comparing college experience in the United States and France. In doing so, similarities and differences between the two samples' college experience are identified. It appears that both samples share similar identity negotiation processes but that what differs is how participants are able to *express* their negotiated identity. Participants across sample feel that attending college is globally an opportunity; citizenship is a privilege even if secular standards are at odds with Muslim values; and they articulate personal process of identity negotiation with strong family and community influence. With respect to differences in college experience between French and American sample, French participants feel that being religious is associated with refusal to integrate French society, and that secularism imposes one unique mold. Separately, some French participants do

endorse French secular arguments in favor of legal bans of veil and burqa. In contrast, American participants report a much more positive college experience as a whole, due to a strong and supportive Muslim community in college and support for religious diversity from both religious and public universities.

### **Hijab is Central to the Experience of Being a Young Arab Muslim Woman in College**

Most participants articulate their answers to the four main interview questions around their personal circumstances as hijabi (Muslim woman wearing the hijab) or non-hijabi. Across sample, they express how central hijab is to the experience of being a young Arab Muslim in college. Wearing hijab or not in college affects social life, characterization as Muslim women, and integration into secular society.

**Hijab and social life.** Some participants mention that they are able to blend in and have a good social life in college as Muslim women for the reason that they don't veil (even though they are religious and don't date or drink alcohol). Some who veil, acknowledge that hijab is isolating and that they mostly socialize with Muslim girls. In contrast, other veiling girls describe hijab as an advantage as it helps connect with religious Muslim girls but also, on their own terms, with non-Muslims who are "open-minded."

***Hijab as a social barrier.*** Several participants across sample who do not veil believe that the reason they have a satisfactory social life in college is that they are able to blend in. One notes, "in everyday life, I did not feel anything special. At the same time, I do not wear the veil, I dress normally, I have all kinds of friends, a little social life".

Another participant mentions “I don’t wear a scarf and I kind of blend in but my friends, they all wear the scarf, so when I hang out with them... you feel like it’s kind of different.”

Among the eight participants who do veil, five acknowledge that wearing hijab isolates them from non-Muslim students and in some cases from non-veiling Muslims as well. One participant who started veiling in her first year of college reports, “I got a lot of negative comments, friends who told me that I had disappointed them. In college I have friends who were with me in high school and who don’t speak to me anymore.” One participant who wears the long veil refers to stereotypes against veiled women: “women like us are targeted because we wear the long veil; it’s the cliché of veil woman, submissive woman.” Other comments express strong feelings of frustration across sample: “the second they see the veil, they just know who you are, what religion you stand for. Then I guess it does make a difference because people sometimes give you attitude.” And also:

I feel I have to prove myself... Just because I wear the hijab, just because I’m Arab, it doesn’t mean that I don’t want the same things as you do... Why should me having my hijab on mean or indicate to you that I’m any lesser of a human being? Any lesser of an intellect? That shouldn’t be.

Addressing the issue of being a minority on campus, one participant states, “I think that if there were more of us, rather than making it easier, people would be more afraid of us.”

Another one yet concludes “If we choose to wear the veil, it excludes us from society.”

A minority of veiling participants across sample does experience a much more satisfactory social life on campus. One of them mentions that “it’s been more of a

positive experience; people I've met here thankfully have been more open-minded and asked me some questions instead of keeping their distance from me." Another participant adds that wearing hijab gives her "an advantage over others... in the sense that when I'm walking, people know that I'm Muslim, so many girls approach me, whether they wear the scarf or not, they feel I'm like them and they want to know me."

*Hijab to socialize on one's own terms: Being subject versus object.* Several veiling women across sample explain that hijab, in addition to its personal meaning as part of a religious obligation, "is an advantage because instead of being objectified, you are being the subject, wherever you are." Therefore, "you are not going to see me for my looks or my physical attributes; you're going to see me for my mind first... You have to assess me for my mind, what I have to say, my personality." Hijab is then perceived as a protection against undesired interactions with others: "I was subjected to what people see, the criticism of people's remarks, the stalking of men... so when I decided to wear the veil, I realized the blessing that it was." Or, as another participant explains, "I choose to show my body to whom I want and there are people I don't want to show it to, especially if I'm exposed to inappropriate comments or behavior." Hijab shields Muslim women from secular society's tolerance for open sexuality. As one participant declares, "women sometimes make themselves into sexual objects by overexposing their bodies. When you put on the hijab you put the attention on your face, your seat of honor, not your ass."

**Hijab and characterization as Muslim women.** When asked how different they feel college experience is for Muslim women versus Muslim men, all participants state that it is easier for Muslim men to fit in, as they are not characterized by hijab. In addition

to expectations from their own community, Muslim women face the visibility of the veil and its social implications. As one participant asserts, “the guys... don’t have to say ‘I’m Muslim, I can’t go out with you’... because there is no physical display of it.” Hijab makes tensions between wanting to fit in and staying true to Muslim values a gender issue: “Men more easily hide their culture, it may be a smarter move to fit in, but to the point of forgetting it, I’m not sure.” A participant who doesn’t veil states that even if people are more open to the veil in college than they were in high school, “it would still have been a barrier, unlike for men, for whom first contact is perhaps easier.” One participant who explains that she was able to overcome social barriers as a hijabi, mentions that “for Muslim women, it becomes much harder because... I know many girls who wear the scarf and they feel they’re secluded. They say it’s not easy to connect with other people.” Another participant notes that even when Muslim men are visibly religious, they are more accepted than women wearing the veil because wearing hijab characterize women as being submissive to men:

You can’t necessarily tell whether a man is Muslim or not, but us, with our clothes, people know immediately... Men don’t have to face that... And even the few Muslim men in our class who wear beards... they don’t get any of the negative comments we get as veiled women... it’s the cliché of veiled woman, submissive woman.

One participant who veils also emphasizes that Muslim men respect more the women who wear hijab than those who don’t. She states, “if I didn’t wear a scarf, they wouldn’t take me as seriously... Muslim men... will choose not to speak to me because I wear a scarf. They would see it as disrespectful to me when they talk to me.” Another participant adds, “With Muslim people, I feel that I’m more conscious of being a woman,

because men who have been exposed to hijab, they can see any beauty that I have... I don't get approached unless they are Muslim women."

**Hijab and racism.** Most participants across sample associate hijab with increased exposure to racism. In parallel, some of them mention that they experience less racism in college than they did in high school while others link greater diversity in college to more open racism. One participant states, "My friends, some people go on calling them 'towel heads' and its comments like, 'go back to your country.' I don't wear it so I don't have to deal with those problems." Another adds, "In high school, I was not yet wearing the hijab, no one would expect that I was an Arab Muslim... They did not expect me being Arab and intelligent and I still encounter that today." Some comments refer to teachers' racism against hijabis in college: "During class sometimes, we feel that some teachers... It's obvious to my friends and I that it's a little different for students who don't show their religious affiliation." Or "It depends on the teachers. For some of them, origins are already an issue... The second issue is when you're of Arab and Muslim background and you wear a Muslim outfit."

While some participants across sample acknowledge that "what I like in college is that people are more open-minded" or "there are some people in college that I know that have gotten racist comments because they wear the veil and the dress... But I would say it's much worse in high school than it is in college" other participants describe experiencing racism more openly in college than they used to in high school. Two French participants describe how diversity in college and the possibility to wear the veil result in an acute focus on race: One, who does not veil, acknowledges that



This diversity in college that wasn't there in high school made me realize that there was a kind of segregation with Jews on one side, Muslims on the other, it was visible... It was something I had not felt in high school... Even though many people were religious, there was no physical distinction... I started asking myself what religion meant to me, if I wanted to display it, if I wanted or not to belong to a group, a clan.

Another participant, who does veil adds, "As I was very visible as a Muslim woman, the Jews wanted to attack me directly. When I would speak with other Muslims, they would say, 'but this does not happen to us,' they have no idea".

### **Being Muslim is a Way of Life**

All participants express that being Muslim shapes the person that they are. Ties to culture of origin, Muslim community and family intersect with an individual approach to religion in secular state as part of identity negotiation of a Muslim identity. Participants emphasize that religiosity is a personal process that they mostly reached on their own and that gives them a responsibility to make Islam understood better by others. Participants also insist that hijab is a private choice.

**Muslim first: Being Muslim is an identity.** When asked to describe themselves in the context of a young Arab Muslim woman in college, eight participants identify as Muslim first, five as Muslim women, two as Muslim citizens, and one as a citizen first. In all cases, being Muslim means more to them than being of Muslim faith. As a Muslim, "There's that reference to Islam in every world, every gesture, every behavior... I think today if you say you're Muslim, you can't live without it, it's the basis of your existence, at home, at work, in the street." As one participant explains, "My life is actually based around it". Several participants describe Islam as "a way of life." Islam is not "just a

religion, it's not a world religion; it's a world way of life." Islam is "the basis of everything, including my behavior with people in everyday life, it's a bit like my civil code, an instrument that escorts me." One participant who identifies as Muslim first explains, "I see myself as Muslim before any ethnicity or the fact that I'm a woman, just because being Muslim is not just a religion but it's a way of being."

**Religiosity is a personal process.** All participants mention that they have developed their own understanding and practice of religion and they make a distinction between their family's traditions and their own religious process. Most participants emphasize that being Muslim in college gives them the responsibility to fight stereotypes and educate other students.

*Seeking Islamic knowledge on one's own.* Even as they acknowledge being committed to their parents' values and traditions, all participants mention that they pursue their own approach to religion, beyond the culture of origin carried by their family. One participant explains,

In college, I got the impression that people were becoming more observant, they engaged in an identity quest, mostly religious. Having parents of different geographical origin, their benchmark was more religion. For example, the people I know come from very different backgrounds... and I had the feeling of knowing these people even though we have totally different customs and practices... but we were united by religion... They had explored their identity and what they wanted to convey beyond their origin, and it was religion.

Another interviewee summarizes her quest: "A word that is very important to me is legacy. This idea has kept my mind very busy; what did I receive and what do I want to pass on and share?" Some participants across sample mention that they developed a

personal interest in religion, beyond or despite their parents' own religiosity during their high school years. One states, "Parents when they tell certain principles, they don't explain... The prayers for example... I took the initiative in my late teens... It's clear that my parents haven't given me as much as what I got later, I learnt by myself." Another participant adds, "I grew up with Islam and once I reached adolescence, I made the decision on my own to learn more about my religion... Parents may be ignorant on some points of religion while I'm going to go deeper." One participant who veils but mentions that she often does not relate to other veiling girls' perspective states, "there's a point when we must think by ourselves... Some Muslims believe that the Koran should be interpreted literally... I prefer to criticize and eventually realize that I was wrong... rather than following it stupidly." Some interviewees mention that it was in college that they started shaping their own approach to religion. In particular, one participant says,

Until I got to college it was more about what culture dictates... Then, when I got to college I was introduced more to what the Koran says... We're actually going to the source directly. So, at home it was more about this is what my parents say... what I learnt was more by example... Then I came to college and sort of become more conscious of my religiosity and I became more curious and wanted to learn more about my religion. So, I've done my own research.

***Fighting stereotypes and educating others.*** Participants across sample express a feeling of responsibility toward their religion, to make Islam better understood and respected around them. Reacting to stereotypes against Arab Muslims, one interviewee declares, "Our job in college is to teach people that it's not all like that... To be a Muslim girl going into education shoes everyone that we're not all the same." Another participant states, "What I aim to do is be a Muslim woman, a Muslima, I advocate for my faith

basically, to show that what's in the media isn't completely true... It's an obligation on me to show how Islam is." One participant points that Muslim women are also greatly responsible toward their community: "Ultimately, we have to use our reasoning, not just for ourselves but for the community. In Islam, you're not just yourself; you have to consider everyone else." Veiling women are described as particularly accountable: "the veil gives them a responsibility, duties, they are supposed to be careful about what they say, what they do, because they carry a symbol." One hijabi declares "I'm not afraid to approach professors, I want to break down the perception that non-Muslim people have of hijabi Muslims." Another hijabi told me "I try to show a different image than the one we see in the media reports with fairly low intellectual level and an outdated discourse. Opening up to you is a way for me to... show an Islam that fits its time."

**Hijab is a private choice.** Eight participants across sample wear the veil and eight do not. All but one participant across sample emphasize that wearing hijab is a religious achievement. Several interviewees acknowledge that some women may be forced to wear hijab but they believe that in the end it is their choice to keep it on or take it off. Six women across sample describe their own experience of taking off hijab at some point in their life.

***Wearing hijab is a private choice.*** All but one interviewees make the point that hijab is a private choice that is not dictated by parents or the Muslim community. They state that wearing hijab demonstrates a high level of religiosity that can only be attained through personal quest and that should be respected as so by parents, Muslim community and state. One participant explains: "In our religion, when a girl gets her first period,

she's supposed to wear it...Some girls wear it when they first get to college, some girls wait till they're done with college, and some people never wear it." She also stresses that wearing hijab is "not easy at first because... it's more restriction in what you wear, then you still have to be a good Muslim, be very modest, humble, very kind to others." One participant describes how she made the decision to veil:

In 8th grade, I told my mom I wanted to wear the scarf... She said "you're too young, I don't want you to wear it before you're well informed of it." I really command her for that because she let me decide on my own when I wanted to wear it... I started wearing it and then you think, is it worth it to take it off and not get those stares from people or is it better to keep it on and have people be curious and you can answer their questions in the right way? So, I had to make the decision and I told my mom, "I want to wear it because I would have to be the first one to learn about it so that I can answer people when they ask me."

Another participant adds, "My parents didn't want me to wear it, they thought I was too young... They said, ok that's fine; wear it if you want to. But they were convinced that I would eventually take it off, but I never did". One interviewee who wears the long veil confirms, "My parents didn't want me to wear the full veil...unless I go to a Muslim country."

Another interviewee emphasizes the spiritual aspect of the veil as a reason why it can't be forced on someone:

Some people let the veil come to them gradually and some act very quickly... The veil is primarily a quest for spirituality that really expresses the culminant point of our religious practice... My parents never discussed the veil with me. I knew about the veil but no one ever told me that I had to wear it, ever.

One participant who prefers to wear a turban rather than a scarf states her personal approach to veiling: "I wear the turban and it's a religious choice. I may be deviating a

little from what the veil is really supposed to be, but...it's about being good, patient, loving each other...I don't mind showing a little hair here." In addition to a religious purpose, one participant mentions that for her veiling is "about self-respect and rebelling against what the media say... The media tell women... you're more valued as a person if you take off more clothes; if you put on more clothes, you're obviously less valued." One interviewee describes different hijabis profiles:

There's like four hijabis: Hojabis, blue jean hijabis, fashion hijabis, and ninjas. The hojabis are the ones who don't do justice to the hijab; they wear super tight clothing and just way too much make-up. Then the blue jean hijabis are kind of relaxed, they're like, yes, I'm going to be modest but we live in this country and blue jean is like America...So, they're cool. Then the fashion hijabis, I feel like they're more modest; but they want to be unique at the same time. Sometimes people think that wearing the hijab means that you're going to be a hermit, you wear black and you don't care. I feel like the fashion hijabis say, no, women are beautiful, they should be beautiful and present themselves with style. And then the ninjas, they just cover themselves.

***Being forced to wear hijab.*** All participants believe that women should not be forced to wear hijab. Some participants across sample acknowledge that there are women and girls who are forced or pressured to wear the veil. One of them, who expresses strong feelings against the veil states, "we are more mature but when I see children who are forced to wear the veil, for me it's like a good little soldier obeying without any real explanation and they impose something that makes no sense." Other interviewees across sample believe that even if some women are forced to veil, they will eventually either understand its purpose and embrace it, or they will reject it and not veil any longer. One participant says "some parents want to force their kids, but parents are encouraged not to force their kids, because if they force them, then they'll take it off later." Another

participant adds, “I know some people who are pressured to wear it because everyone else is wearing it... and then later they take it off, so they were doing it for the wrong reason.” Another one believes that “a lot of times women who are forced to wear it eventually sort of end up liking it and understanding the reasoning of why you need to wear it and appreciating it.” One participant refers to young Arab Muslim women’s desire to follow their parents’ will: “if she later figures out that she doesn’t want to wear it, let her take it off. But for now, if she respects her parents and her parents are saying, you ought to keep it on... that’s a tough call.” In contrast, other interviewees declare that no one is forced to wear the veil in Western countries: “personally, I’ve never heard someone say ‘I was forced to wear the veil’ I only see it on tv... it doesn’t exist.” Or “in the worst case, the need to wear it was pointed out to them, but forced on them, it’s impossible.... To the contrary, I have rather seen cases where parents forbade it.”

***Taking off hijab.*** Six participants report having been confronted to taking off hijab. Three of them took hijab off after realizing that they were not ready to wear it, and three reported that they were asked to take it off at some point in their life. In both cases, they mention that it was a difficult process. One participant states, “I made the choice to wear it at one time... before entering university... I was too hasty in wanting to make everything right away... which meant that I dropped it as quickly as I had picked it up.”

Another participant recalls,

I used to wear it in 8th grade, so I was 13. I did it just because I knew it was our religion but I didn’t understand the depth of it... once I found out the depth and reality of wearing the veil, it hit me so fast. I went from a normal girl to someone getting weird stares and attitude. My life was completely turned around... Now that I’m older, I would know how to

answer people right away if they were to ask me “why are you wearing this?” But when I was younger, I just didn’t get it.

One interviewee took off her veil in college, after wearing it for several years. She emphasizes the gap she experienced between what she looked like and what she felt:

In my sophomore year, I was still wearing the hijab but I was having a lot of struggles internally because I wasn’t praying... I didn’t feel religious and I wanted to take it off to feel more comfortable in my own skin because I really didn’t like people looking at me as the good girl. There’s this huge issue with the non-hijabis and the hijabis and it’s like, they would look at you wearing the hijab and they would mark you off as almost perfect and I didn’t want that. I wanted people to meet me, and then make a judgment about me, instead of seeing something physical about me and make all these assumptions about my character, my personality and who I am. Because I was a lot more liberal than I was showing myself to be.

In France, three participants were confronted to the veil ban in high school. One refused to remove the veil and therefore had to study from home: “It didn’t work for me to... have to remove it for the whole day of school... So, I decided to study from home... Rather than learning alone, I’d rather learn with other students, that’s for sure.”

Another participant states that having to remove the veil at school left her with strong negative feelings: “I would remove the top part so that my whole head could be seen. Retrospectively, I had feelings of regret not to have taken my exams as an independent candidate... I felt so much anger, sadness.” One participant describes how she eventually adjusted to the ban:

I started wearing it when I entered the 6th grade... when the 2004 law was passed...I didn’t understand because I was not doing anyone any harm. I didn’t understand either the girls who refused to go to school because they refused to remove it.... So, I arrive at school, I keep it on my head and then the assistant principal calls me... and she says, ‘you can’t keep it on.’ I wept, I removed it and then I went to the school playground and all my



girlfriends took me in their arms and told me 'it's nothing, don't worry, it's going to be ok.' The first days were hard but I eventually got used to it and I realized that in the end, it's only hair... I ended up accepting it but I'm happy not to be asked to remove it in college.

**Secular state promotes harmful generalizations of Arab Muslim women.** All participants emphasize that negative representation of Islam and of the Arab culture in secular society, and French bans on veil decline to recognize Arab Muslim women's individuality and personal choices.

*Negative representation of Arab Muslims.* All participants express frustration toward a negative image of Arab Muslims and Arab Muslim women that they feel is promoted by the media and secular society. They feel that "because there is Islamophobia right now, if there is one little mistake in the Muslim world, it is announced is every radio, every newscast." One participant states, "when I was little, people didn't even know what Muslims and Arabs were, but these days they all think of them as the same thing, terrorist and all that stereotypical stuff." One adds, "today Islam is something that is presented as archaic, related to jihad, terrorism and I'm so tired of this!" And another one yet: "I love my religion so I can't stand people who give a bad image of it, and I've met so many of them... we are reduced to terrorists or uneducated people." Some participants particularly emphasize the negative image of Arab Muslim women in the media: "it depicts a picture of Muslim women as disadvantaged, low, being domestically violated... it's not something that is on a religious spectrum, it is on a global spectrum and it can occur anywhere." And "they think we're objects of our men, that we

do whatever he wants and if he doesn't want us to work, we have to stay at home and pray. It's not like that."

One interviewee remembers being targeted as an Arab Muslim at school:

I was growing up during 9/11 and it was very hard for me... After it happened people who knew I was Muslim and Arab spread the rumor that I had said that I knew who did it. I was 11 years old. I was thrown to the social work office and I was crying...I had no idea of what was going on and I was being accused of knowing who had plotted this... I felt definitely attacked by the school. For them to even bring me in...

Another participant summarizes: "Western countries have a mindset like, we have the power and we are going to tell you what is best."

***French bans on veil: Public law against private religious process.*** All participants but one insists that opposing a legal ban to Muslim girls' wish to veil at school is unfair as it targets a religious obligation that is important to devout Muslims as part of their personal quest. Regarding the legal ban on the burqa in public spaces, they all acknowledge that wearing the burqa is not a religious obligation and is more of a cultural inclination. They still believe that it is a personal decision that should not be barred by a law:

From a religious viewpoint, I don't agree at all with the wearing of the burqa. I think it's a sad way of interpreting the Koran. And at the same time, I think that they have the right to dress as they wish. It's true that they give an image of Islam that is detrimental to girls like me, but at the same time, who am I to deny them the right to dress as they choose and to live their faith as they want to live it?

Interviewees state that "most women who wear the hijab do it for personal reasons and it's their decision how they want to express their faith." One participant who does not veil explains about young veiling women, "they finally have the courage and the conviction to

wear it... it's like... I'm very strong with my faith and I'm willing to represent Islam... and they're told you can't because of a law." Another participant who does not veil either adds, "In Islam, the person wearing the veil is the right person and were somewhat the 'wrong' persons." One interviewee asserts, "It is not right to generalize people as one whole... It's not fair to have to be secretive about who you are and you should be able to express it." Finally, one interviewee emphasizes her belief that the ban is political and does not respect religious belief: "Who says it's an insult to the dignity of women? A woman who wears the veil will tell you 'to the contrary, since I've been wearing it, I'm freer than before.' This is ruling without interpreting meanings and religion."

### **Comparing College Experience in the United States and France**

Both samples express that hijab is central to the experience of being a young Arab Muslim woman in college, and that being Muslim is an identity. With some variations within and across sample, participants share comparable goals and identity negotiation processes. Differences appear in how they are able to *express* them.

#### **Similarities in college experience across French and American sample.**

Overall, college is perceived as an opportunity to achieve educational and professional goals. Participants express that they do identify with American or French citizenship even if they disagree with some principles and policies. They also feel that they have to negotiate their identity in a context of strong family and community influence.

***Attending college is globally an opportunity.*** Most participants across sample see college as an educational opportunity that their country of origin would not provide. One interviewee explains, "it's very difficult to be a student in Arab countries... so

access to higher education is already an opportunity that doesn't necessarily exist in Arab countries" and one adds, "it's an opportunity because everyone wants to come abroad, even here, in order to study. It's an advantage regarding the quality of training too."

Another participant adds yet, "the result of years of study may take the form of a passport that will allow us to travel, consider projects, or even build a life in a different country."

Five participants do not refer to their country of origin and focus rather on the continuity of their academic education. One of them states, "it's a logical outcome... I don't think I would have considered studying abroad, at least at my level, maybe later, but I feel it makes sense with my background. I haven't asked myself too many questions about that". Another one emphasizes, "God encourages us to study and to gain whatever knowledge we can. So for me it's really important." One interviewee who says she experiences racism as a hijabi states, "it doesn't prevent us from studying, it's rewarding. It's important; we like it, we're really learning things." While one participant notes, "it's like everyone described it to me. I mean it's different from other places obviously, because my dad went to college in Syria and it's a lot different than there, you have a lot more opportunities here" another interviewee says "it's definitely a very different experience than what I expected it to be... I've got lots of opportunities here, I've learned a lot. I'm reflecting more about what I'm learning, how it affects me and others around me."

***Citizenship is a privilege even if secular standards are at odds with Muslim values.*** All participants across sample acknowledge that American or French citizenship is an opportunity for them: "it's pretty important because there's a lot more opportunities

here so, if I was born and raised in Syria, it wouldn't be the same as living here" and "it's fairly important actually because being a U.S. citizen is like a status thing and you could be completely average but being a U.S. citizen, you get elevated ten steps." Also, "it's very important... in terms of the benefits and rights that you get... Assuming I did not have French nationality, no doubt I would see and feel the importance of gaining it. But for me, it's natural" and "It's my identity because my Moroccan origins are inherited from my parents, but my French citizenship, I got it because I was born in France, and grew up in France; it connects me to myself in fact." One participant emphasizes how important citizenship is for religious minority members: "it's very important; especially when you identify in a religion that is not a predominant religion here in America, people might see you as an outsider."

Some interviewees across sample experience citizenship both as a privilege and as a status that is at odds with their culture of origin and Muslim values. One participant explains

it's really important, I want people to know that I have the same rights as they do, I was born in this country, I'm just as American as you are... Sometimes I do feel that I care more about my culture than I care about America because I don't love the values of an American standpoint.

Another participant states,

I identify a lot more with the U.S. than I do with Syria... I guess I don't consider America very close to my heart but I just consider my life here and the people around me and I'm thankful for the privileges that I get from being a U.S. citizen.

Another participant yet describes contradictory feelings with respect to the meaning of citizenship:

Here, I'm really proud to be a U.S. citizen because I guess in this country we have more than other countries have, but when you're in the Middle East visiting, it's kind of like, I'm not very proud of it. Especially with the country my parents are from, Palestine, I'm almost embarrassed but at the same time it has opened a lot of opportunities for me that I probably wouldn't have if my parents had stayed in Palestine.

One participant who, at first, states, "for sure French nationality is a big advantage and an identity, you are part of the country, you are integrated, you are a French citizen, not set apart from the main population, you are part of the French inhabitants" also declares later in the interview, "studying in France is more difficult than in other countries... it is even harder outside university... there is this suspicious look that is not necessarily present in other countries." Similarly, another interviewee expresses at first, "It's my origins, it means that it's a part of me, that's where I was born, it's my right too" to add later in the interview, "I wish I could be in another European country, in England... I know there are many other European countries where religions are so much better tolerated and accepted. France doesn't make me want to be French any longer."

As one interviewee describes a feeling of balance between citizenship and culture of origin: "I really feel French but also Moroccan... I have two cultures. When I'm in France I'm French but I don't forget where I come from... when I'm in Morocco, I also feel at home there" two other interviewees emphasize how secular society opposes citizenship and culture of origin. One states, "it seemed like I had to make a choice, like one couldn't be French of foreign origins and that the expectation was to choose to be fully French and to kind of forget our roots." The other one adds,

It's very important. I have no other nationality... I find no need for a foreign nationality... In a way it's a paradox to say I have French

nationality, I am French but I don't feel being French, I don't have the same culture or the same religion... For me, saying I have French nationality is... in theory rather than practice because in practice I just have to deal with paperwork or traveling to find that people talk to me as if I did not understand.

*Personal process of identity negotiation is articulated with strong family and community influence.* Participants describe that they also have to negotiate parent's authority, traditional values and expectations from their community. In particular, they mention the difference in expectations from young women and young men in the Arab Muslim culture.

*Respect for parents' authority is crucial.* As much as all participants describe a personal and religious quest beyond their parents' tradition and influence, most of them also emphasize the predominance of parents' authority in Arab Muslim culture. One participant states, "at home, it's what your parents say to you or your fear of your parents. At school, it's all about you." Another one adds, "it's God first, and then your parents. So, before anything, it's what your parents want... I want to treat my parents as if it's the last day I'm with them." One interviewee who ended a relationship with her boyfriend when her parents found out about it explains,

I broke up... because my parents got involved... I was heartbroken... you get to a point where you just don't want to disrespect your parents... My parents are my entire life. People think I was crazy for letting him go but... there's a very different view on respect between parents and American children.

Participants often emphasize their motivation to please their parents and be a good daughter. One interviewee who says she struggled to figure out her own priorities states, "I had this fear to put up with my family's choice, to want to please them." Another

interviewee says, “I worship my mother, she’s everything to me, so if I don’t make her happy, I’ve done nothing worthy.” As one participant explains, “it’s really important to me to be good to my parents, especially my mom. In Islam, it’s so critical, they say ‘the Heaven is beneath the mother’s feet’ ... It’s important to me to be a good daughter.”

*More is expected of young women than of young men in the Arab Muslim culture.*

Participants across sample express that Arab Muslim culture and community are more judgmental toward young women than young men. One participant explains,

in Arab Muslim culture specifically, girls are taught, you have to be good, ... if you mess up, people will stay away from you and will judge you. Whereas I think men ... can get away with what they want. They can do all these things that as a Muslim you shouldn’t be doing and ... in the end they end up marrying this nice girl who’s religious and all these different things. Whereas as a Muslim woman you’re just expected to be this good girl who follows the rules her entire life.

Another participant confirms, “In the Arab culture, the man is the one who has most freedom ... Arab women are raised with the idea that they should be the perfect wives ... whereas men are freer.” One interviewee emphasizes the strong influence of the community: “guys, they go to parties, they blend in ... but it’s different if I do it. Culturally, people look at me differently. If people in my community found out, that would be a big deal.” Another interviewee brings attention to the need for Arab Muslim girls to balance priority for education and expectations to marry:

A woman needs to get married right after school ... men can be more focused on their education and we’re focused on our education plus trying to make sure that we’re still wanted. That the mothers of the sons that are going to marry us are still going to want these girls.



**Differences in college experience between French and American sample.**

French participants describe a much less positive college experience than their American counterparts, with respect to social life and personal development. French participants believe that being religious is associated with refusal to integrate French society and that secularism imposes one unique mold. They feel more themselves at home than in college. Some of them do endorse secular arguments against the veil. American participants report benefitting from a strong and supportive Muslim community in college, as well as religious tolerance from their universities.

***French sample.***

*Being religious is associated with refusal to integrate French society.* All French participants express feelings that they have to make a choice between being openly religious and being French. Both veiling and non-veiling interviewees report that they feel more themselves at home than in college: One participant says, “I’m not myself in university, I can’t practice my religion... people don’t know my religious or political views, sometimes I slip away without telling where I’m going... because I have my prayers.” Another interviewee states, “It’s a shame there is no allocated space... It’s a pity we don’t have a room anywhere that is not only for Muslims, but also for those who want to meditate or anyone who wants to do yoga.” Others add, “I am forced to wait for the end of my day to return to practice, to catch up with my prayers” or “Of course we feel freer at home because we live with our family and we share the same religious beliefs, traditions and customs” or yet “university life and home life are two different areas. We have our intimacy at home; we can do anything we want.” One participant explains the

lack of Muslim student associations on campus by the concern of being blamed for communalism: “There are many associations of Jewish students, so I do not see why there would be no Muslim ones, but I think that it would reinforce the image of a community that does not open up to others.”

Three interviewees emphasize their feeling that secular society is attempting to shape them. One of them expresses both that “I have been fortunate to... attend a school where there were no people of Arab origin, I was in a more diverse environment” and at the same time, that she “felt a little schizophrenic... dealing with one world at home and a different one outside, and I was the one who had to mix the two... It takes work to be able to juggle the two worlds eventually.” Describing her college experience, another interviewee refers to “its system that does not offer much choice and tries to format us... that’s why I feel much better at home than in college.” Another one yet explains:

For the past five years, I’ve had the feeling that I almost had to make a choice between my parents and my country. I was feeling torn between the two, and all around that issue of identity was the place of religion in my everyday life and in my future.

With respect to future life opportunities, one participant recalls her parents’ reaction when she started wearing the hijab: “The first reaction was... ‘if you practice law, you’re supposed to represent your clients in front of a court, the Republic, how are you going to do?’ The issue was work.” Another interviewee adds, “I don’t really have much choice. We are not necessarily accepted with our veil, whether long or short, so it’s really limited... It’s really a shame that we are restricted in the projection of our future. ”

Another one yet concludes, “I don’t want to make plans in France. Practicing my religion is my top priority and I don’t feel comfortable here because it’s not well tolerated.”

*Secularism imposes one unique mold.* One participant expresses how she feels that secular society forced her to make identity choices that she was not ready to undertake, between being Arab and Muslim and French:

I understood that being different had very negative implications and that we had to fit the same mold... I tried to find answers in my religious practice... What was hard was to be confronted to these issues too abruptly, in somewhat imposed circumstances with pressure from the media... I had to find an answer right away and above all it had to be valid arguments, not subjective reasons of my own, based on my vision of life, or my feelings... When people talk about the French of foreign origin, this is what I am... Most recently on halal food, the burqa, they were almost made a national priority and I told myself, I always ate halal and it has never been a problem and now I must ask myself, is it a good thing? Is it a sign of rebellion? A symbol of identity?... Gradually I found myself not necessarily legitimate, I felt I was disintegrating when trying to integrate.

Another participant describes similar internal conflicts: “Gradually, when you get to high school and college... you want to assert yourself as French... There are even times when we try to justify ourselves if we don’t follow Ramadan or if we don’t go to the mosque.”

One interviewee spent several months in the United States after high school, before going back to France to enter college. She started wearing hijab in the United States. Regarding the French ban on the veil, she states,

At first I was thinking, ‘it’s normal, we’re not in our country, we’re of Arab origin and France is not a Muslim country so it’s normal to have this ban on wearing the veil’... We were told especially about the influence of parents, friends, etc., and when I left France for the U.S., I completely changed my mind. Because I realized that... kids were wearing it in the U.S... and they told me, first, this is not something that our parents forced us to do, we grew up in Islam so for us it’s normal to wear it. Second, it’s not because we’re wearing it that we’re ever going to influence our

friends... Then I realized I had a false image of France. Especially since when I came back to France and I went to university, I thought, but what's the difference between the veil that is allowed in college and the veil that is prohibited in middle or high school?... My views on the principle of secularism have evolved after my trip to the United States... When I returned to France, I realized that French secularism was everything but neutral. France wants Muslims to be invisible.

*The internalization of secular arguments.* Four participants in the French sample express their support toward French argument that religion should remain private, without any public display. Two of them reject French bans on the veil and the burqa though. One participant says about the bans, "it's worthwhile because in the end, conflicts come with religions. It's really when one is trying to impose his religion onto others that the problems start... Allowing the veil would be in conflict with French tradition." Another participant asserts about the veil, "some wear it for real religious purposes but I think that at the present time it is only pure provocation... faith is inside... it does not need any clothing or any accessory." Another interviewee refers to being "civilized" and explains,

I was born in an environment where no one wore the veil, neither my grandmother nor my mother nor my aunt; they are all very civilized... I remember that my grandfather was a very civilized man, who did drink, who enjoyed good living while trying to practice some traditions or religious rites, certain holidays... I think that in order to integrate and live more discreetly, you must be more civilized rather than less.

In addition, one participant who does wear hijab states, "I saw a lady praying on the lawn. For me, it was really pure provocation. It was not a place for Muslims; it was a public park, in France! In the end, it's the cautious people who endure the consequences."

*American sample.* In contrast with their French counterparts, American participants report that even though hijab does create a unique context within which to negotiate social life and integration, college provides a space with strong opportunities for constructive social life and personal development. They experience more freedom in college than they do at home. They identify the presence of MSA (Muslim Student Association) on campus, the promotion of religious values in Catholic universities, and the support for religious diversity in public universities as important factors that contribute to a positive experience in college.

*A strong and supportive Muslim community in college.* All American participants are members of MSA and four of them are very active in the organization. Most report feeling supported by the Muslim community in college. Others, to the contrary, are critical of it. When they experience a disconnect between life at home and in college, most of them express that college is an opportunity for personal development. Most participants do not experience a strong discontinuity between life at home and in college. One participant who is on her university's MSA board and a "sister adviser" describes the purpose of her activities as:

to make the bonding of sisterhood on campus increase as much as they can. So we have retreats every year... the word of mouth got around that it was an amazing experience, something you want to do before you graduate... we have a weekly meeting... the bonds that we form in these meetings, you can't repeat them anywhere else... Another thing that we do is we have dinners, almost every two weeks... We also have sports on campus, advising.

One interviewee explains, "kids from MSA, they stick together, they have that community to retain their values, because there are those pressures but they don't really

feel them because they are surrounded by like-minded Muslims”. Another one adds, “you have people supporting you... I’ve gotten more religious since I’ve got to college, because it’s a bigger Muslim community there, there are more people who influence you.” One participant emphasizes that women are “the ones that will be the backbones of MSA and actually take charge of events... So far at Loyola, campus activism and awareness has really been spearheaded by women.”

In contrast, three interviewees are very critical of their college’s Muslim community. They state, “I don’t relate with the majority of the Muslim students. I just wished that there was a wider variety of thinking... A lot of Arab Muslims were raised judgmental... and I think I’ve grown out of that” and “Middle Easterner Muslims cut themselves off... I wished the Muslim community wouldn’t be so closed off and would branch out to other ethnicities, other religions, non-religious and see what we can learn from them” and yet “there were a lot of clicks... I was kind of left alone. So, I had a very bad experience and just from that I didn’t ever want to have anything to do with MSA.”

With respect to potential disconnect between life at home and in college, most participants express that even if “life at home is extremely cut off from the outside world... I’m forced to self-reflect more... in college I’m much more dynamic, free, I’m able to do the things I want.” Only one interviewee describes, “at home, you can get up right away and pray; at school, you can’t. At home, you can... talk about religious things; at school, you can’t, people will give you weird looks.” Others experience a feeling of continuity between life at home and in college: “I still live at home, I commute every day... and I don’t see myself as changed as a person, it’s just that my responsibilities are

now greater.” One of them concludes, “I think I’m content with my life, my studies, my friends. I’m happy with my life.”

*Support for religious diversity from religious and public universities.* Five participants attend a religious university, Loyola University Chicago, and three attend public universities. One Participant from Loyola states,

I ended up in a Catholic university! But I like it a lot... I can’t say that another school wouldn’t have done the same but what I can say is that Jesuit values here, I can see them everyday... Of course there’s always that one person who says something that shouldn’t be said or does something that is rude, but there are people like that everywhere... The prayer spaces we have, it’s perfect.

Another participant adds, “in Loyola we’re obviously in a Jesuit institution, so you sort of learn about other religions... and what comes out, I don’t know, it sort of shifted me into being more conscious.” Another one acknowledges, “wearing hijab allows me to be a normal student because there are many others, especially on Loyola campus.”

One interviewee who attends a public university also states,

My college is actually very pro-Muslim you know, they have a Muslim Student Association there, so it’s very nice because you get to meet a lot of people that are Muslim and attend college. My school actually has its own hall where people can pray, so a lot of the time, between classes I just go up over there and I pray.

One veiling participant, who describes enjoying very much her college experience summarizes,

Here in America, it’s an advantage for us to do what we want... My beliefs stem from the origins of Islam, from an Arab culture and from a Palestinian decent. So wearing hijab was just a good way to assimilate all my beliefs into one; I wore the headscarf in America because I knew it was all possible under one shell.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how young Arab Muslim women in college negotiate their identity as women who are members of a religious and ethnic minority that undergoes negative attention in secular society of western countries. Comparing the experience of participants to the study in the United States and in France shed light on identity negotiation processes that are shared by most participants across sample, as well as on how participants may express their negotiated identities in the United States and in France. Using a descriptive phenomenological approach, data analysis led to identifying the following themes: hijab is central to the experience of being a young Arab Muslim woman in college; being Muslim is a way of life; there are strong similarities in college experience across sample; there are contextual differences in college experience between French and American sample.

Findings are discussed in relation to current literature on young Arab Muslim women in college, using social identity, cultural studies and critical race feminism theoretical frameworks, with the purpose of answering the research questions: How do young Arab Muslim women attending college, in the United States and France, negotiate their identity vis-à-vis multiple contexts of citizenship in secular state, gender, religion, culture, and race? What are the similarities and differences in this process of identity negotiation between young Arab Muslim women in the United States and France



attending college? In addition, this chapter describes the implications of the study findings for young Arab Muslim women in college. Finally, it identifies limitations of the study and presents some suggestion for future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

The findings show how identity negotiation of young Arab Muslim women attending college in the United States and France is a complex and multi-faceted process that all participants claim is the result of a personal quest, and that presents at the same time strong common characteristics across sample. Hijab appears to be central to the experience of young Arab Muslim women attending college. Whether they wear it or not, hijab does characterize young Muslim women in college (they belong to a certain type of women) while young Muslim men do not face this challenge. As some participants perceive hijab as a strong social barrier, others choose to turn it into the advantage of having control over with whom they socialize. In any case, participants associate hijab to increased exposure to racism.

All participants express that being Muslim is a way of life. They feel “Muslim first” and emphasize that their religiosity is a personal process that they explore on their own, beyond their parents’ belief and the influence of their culture of origin. As Muslim college students, participants also feel a sense of responsibility to fight stereotypes and educate others about Islam. In reference to French laws banning hijab in schools and burqa in all public places, they also insist that wearing hijab is a private religious choice with which no state should interfere. Participants who do acknowledge that some young women are forced into wearing hijab believe that they still should not be prevented by

law to wear it, even if they do so to follow their parents' will, as respect for parents is very much part of their personal values. They state that in any case, those who are forced to wear hijab will take it off when they are older. All participants also emphasize how secular state promotes harmful generalizations of Arab Muslim women.

There are strong similarities in terms of participants' goals and identity negotiation processes across sample. Participants across sample believe that attending college is globally an opportunity; citizenship is a privilege even if secular standards are at odds with Muslim values; family and Muslim community play a very important role in their lives, leading to strong parental authority and more expectations of young Muslim women than of young Muslim men. What differs between college experience in Chicago and in Paris is not how young Arab Muslim women in college negotiate their identity, but rather how they are able to express it. French participants express feelings that French society does not allow them to be openly religious and fully accepted as citizens at the same time. They claim that French secularism imposes one unique mold that is intended to format them. Some of them have internalized secular arguments that disapprove public display of religiosity and support legal bans against the veil. In contrast, American participants depict a much more positive college experience, which they mostly attribute to benefiting from a strong and supportive Muslim community on campus as well as from their university's religious tolerance. Please see appendix D for summary of findings.

### **Discussion of Findings**

In this study, findings are explored through the lenses of social identity, cultural studies, and critical race feminism. These theoretical frameworks help understand identity

negotiation in terms of integration and differentiation from others; influence of dominant culture and attempt to redefine identity; gender and specificity of the experience of women of color as well as interrelation of multiple identities. Based on the articulation of the research question in two sub-questions, the discussion focuses first, on the experience across sample of being a young Arab Muslim woman attending college and second, on the comparison of the experience between American and French participants.

### **Research Question 1a**

How do young Arab Muslim women attending college, in the United States and France, negotiate their identity vis-à-vis multiple contexts of citizenship in secular state, gender, religion, culture, and race?

The two main findings concerning participants across sample are as follows: hijab is central to the experience of being a young Arab Muslim woman in college; being Muslim is a way of life. Therefore citizenship, gender, culture of origin and race are experienced through an overarching Muslim identity that takes multiple meanings. In parallel, most participants identify ways of allowing their Muslim and western identities to coexist. Some participants also claim prevailing identities that are not necessarily exclusive of each other and that may evolve over time. These findings are consistent with those of Zaal et al. (2007) and Sirin and Fine (2007) who explain how second-generation Muslim women attending college use coexistence of identities as a strategy for integration: in a context of scrutiny from both non-Muslims and their own community, they attempt to escape categorization as either oppressed or liberated and to negotiate their identity between multiculturalism and loyalty to religion, ethnicity, community and

family. Additionally, Venel (2005) describes how young Muslim women attending college may also opt for one identity that supersedes others, such as secular (secular values come first and generate civic obligations), individualistic (rejects all labels and civic involvement refers more to status than identity), or Muslim (being Muslim comes first and civic engagement may become confrontational).

**Hijab is central to the experience of being a young Arab Muslim woman in college.** Participants explain how wearing or not hijab is a decision that affects most aspects of their college life. Whether they perceive hijab as a responsibility to face or an opportunity, the visibility of the veil creates a unique social context in which they negotiate their identity at individual and group level. As Tajifel's (1978) social identity theory points out, the influence of dominant group's categorization of others leads categorized groups to compare themselves with other groups and to work toward a positive sense of distinctiveness. In addition, memberships that are visible to others most likely become social identities for minority groups (Hurtado et al., 1994). The visibility of the veil generates a strong and immediate indication of membership with which young Arab Muslim women in college have to contend.

***Hijab and social life.*** In this study, several participants emphasize that hijab in college creates a strong social barrier. Wearing hijab does not allow one to blend in, and moreover leads to having to prove oneself in the classroom, as well as with non-Muslim friends. As a minority group on campus, young Arab Muslim women face the complexity of in-group/ out-group relations. The dominant in-group evaluates the minority out-group negatively, which results in prejudicial devaluation of the out-group (Lee & Ottati, 2002).

As most participants experience negative perceptions of the veil from non-Muslims on campus, veiling becomes a social challenge that some choose to avoid or differ and that others are ready to embrace: response to in-group categorization is also an intra-group process (Turner & al., 1987; Hornsey, 2008) leading to self-categorization. Individuals' self-categorization occurs based on the combination of accessibility and best fit (Hornsey, 2008).

Some participants endorse the veil as a means to socialize on their own terms, with whom and in the manner in which they choose to. As stated by Gurbuz et al. (2009), hijab becomes a symbol of identity reconstruction for second-generation young Muslim women. Hijab is internalized as a personal identity independently of parents' influence, and as a collective identity with the feeling of representing Islam. The veil becomes a religious, gender-based, moral and cultural identity, as a means of resistance to secular life style and assimilation. Therefore hijab represents a source of empowerment for these young Muslim women attending college. All participants to this study who are wearing hijab are very assertive with respect to their motivations, even as some acknowledge that they also feel isolated. They fully endorse hijab as part of their identity. Recent studies on re-Islamization of second-generation young Muslim students (Peek, 2005; Haddad, 2007; Santelli, 2008) show that in a context of increased stigmatization of Arab Muslims, young Arab Muslim women appropriate hijab as a symbol of both resistance to secular values and belonging to a group that offers support. Islam is a declared identity. In addition, wearing the veil in college may be a means for young Muslim women to affirm, from a feminist perspective, the legitimacy of an identity that is both intellectual and

religious (Amina, 2004). Some participants clearly express that they believe that hijab allows them to be subject instead of object.

*Hijab and characterization as Muslim women.* As participants experience tensions between wanting to fit in and staying true to Muslim values, hijab becomes a gender issue. Muslim men do not have to make a decision about wearing or not the veil, and therefore they are not held accountable for it. In addition, hijab identifies young Arab Muslim women among non-Muslims as members of an ethnic/racial minority. Hijabis's identity is gendered and racialized. Wearing hijab also defines what kind of a Muslim woman one is among the Muslim community. Hijab is a responsibility that earns respect from the community but may also be isolating; Muslim men respect more the women who wear hijab than those who don't.

These findings illustrate the feminist concept of intersectionality: gender needs to be understood in relation to other social identities, and intersectional identities are defined in relation to one another (Crenshaw, 1991; Shields, 2008). Hijab places young Arab Muslim women who veil at the intersection of race *and* ethnicity *and* religion. Macey and Carling (2010) and Weir (2008) call this intersection of identities, "communal identity" in which categories are replaced with the notion of identification-with. By wearing the veil, young Arab hijabis in college express the identities with which they most identify. The decision to wear or not hijab places young Arab Muslim women in college at the center of a complex process of identity negotiation in a context of heightened visibility and scrutiny from non-Muslims, perception from non-Muslims of liberal Muslims as marginalized by their conservative peers, pressure experienced by

conservative Muslims in the liberal environment of western campuses, and surveillance from the Muslim community (Mir, 2009). These findings describe the multiple subjectivities of young Arab Muslim women's identity.

*Hijab and racism.* Most participants to the study believe that wearing hijab increases exposure to racism even as college environment promotes diversity. Whether they wear hijab or not, they all identify as non-white, which is consistent with findings such as Alimahomed's (2011) showing that second-generation Arab Muslims, as they experienced the aftermath of 9/11, have developed a new collective and individual racial consciousness. Stuart Hall's (1996, 2001, 2003) work in cultural studies demonstrates how identity comes from the way in which one is recognized: dominant culture creates an identity as "other" for minorities. Therefore, the notion of race becomes a political argument. Young Arab Muslim women wearing hijab illustrate Hall's concept of racial identity as a positioning that leads to signifying practices: the veil becomes a racialized practice. Participants express that they are well aware that wearing hijab exposes one to further racism. Those who do veil try to re-appropriate the practice of hijab that is disapproved of by dominant discourse, as a means to redefine their identity on their own terms, despite the negative manner in which dominant culture consistently position them.

When participants associate hijab with increased racism, they are aware of the heightened visibility of the veil. As Al-Saji (2010) states, racialization functions through a visual process: the hyper visibility of the Muslim veil in Western society is directly associated to the assumed invisibility of veiled women who are perceived as oppressed.

**Being Muslim is a way of life.** In this study, all participants state that being Muslim influences all aspects of their life. They negotiate a Muslim identity at the intersection of religion and citizenship in secular state, culture of origin, and Muslim community. As much as they refer to a common identity shared by all their Muslim friends in college, they insist on the personal dimension of their own identity. This finding illustrates the feminist concept of communal identity that is a relational model in which common identity is based on what individuals identify with such as commitments, ideals and relationships (Macey & Carling, 2010; Weir, 2008).

***Muslim first: Being Muslim is an identity.*** When all participants explain that they feel Muslim first, some also define themselves as a Muslim woman or a Muslim citizen. In any case, being Muslim means more to them than being of Muslim faith. This finding is consistent with studies on increased Islamization of second-generation Muslims (Peek, 2005; Haddad, 2007; Santelli, 2008). Efforts to overcome the effects of stigmatization in the construction of citizenship lead young Arab Muslims to the process of affirming a new Muslim identity. From the perspective of social identity theory, the process of Islamization is elaborated at both the individual and national level (Santelli, 2008). At the individual level, identifying as a Muslim provides feelings of belonging to a supportive group. At the national level, it contributes to legitimizing Islam.

Hall (2001) emphasizes the influence of colonization in the construction of otherness (minorities are identified as “other” by dominant culture) as well as self-othering (colonized minorities see and experience themselves as other). He notes that even after political independence has occurred, colonized groups remain influenced by



the manner in which the dominant group had defined them. While Arab Muslim immigrants to France have directly experienced colonization and their counterparts in the United States have not, Arab American Muslims also have been affected by post-colonial discourse as well as the aftermath of the events of 9/11. When second-generation Muslims, in both countries, affirm a religious identity constructed independently from their parents' traditions, they may seek to create space for personal and collective emancipation from dominant discourse (which was internalized by their own parents).

In this study, while participants emphasize that they are Muslim first, they also use other important references to describe themselves such as: activists, good students, good friends, self-reflective women, or ambitious women planning for their professional future. From a feminist perspective, young Arab women affirming an identity as Muslim first articulate the interaction of race and gender in the identity negotiation process. Naber (2005) refers to strategic politics: being Muslim first allows women to remain faithful to their Muslim community while simultaneously fighting dominant racialized-gendered discourse.

*Religiosity is a personal process.* As all participants insist that they have been developing an Islamic knowledge of their own, they make a distinction between the cultural heritage of their family and their own religiosity. Without rejecting their parents' values and tradition, they have elaborated their own understanding and practice of Islam. This finding is consistent with William and Vashi's (2007): second-generation Muslim women negotiate social and religious identities as a reaction to both stereotypical assumptions from non-Muslims and their own family's teaching of religious traditions.

They seek out “true” Islamic knowledge of their own (Ali, 2005). In this study, several participants who wear hijab or the long veil mentioned that their mother was either not veiling or veiling in a more casual manner than they did themselves. As Killian (2007) and Ali (2005) note, the move toward wearing hijab has only happened in recent years. Second-generation Muslim girls feel more legitimate than their mothers to publicly express their ethnicity and religion, and they are becoming more politically involved locally and nationally. In addition, recent stigmatization of Arab Muslims led the second-generation to self-evaluate and to appropriate religious teachings independently from that of their parents. This study supports the observation that there are generational differences in the experience of Islam between first and second-generation Arab Muslims.

As they appropriate Islamic knowledge, participants express feelings of responsibility toward their religion. They want to fight stereotypes and advocate for their faith, help non-Muslims understand and respect their beliefs. They also mention that hijabis are particularly accountable as they promote a symbol of faith. These findings are consistent with recent studies showing that young Muslim girls tend to justify themselves among peers with respect to them wearing or not the veil and that girls are more prone than boys to feeling a sense of responsibility toward their religion and community (Sirin & Fine, 2007; Zaal & al., 2007). Gender plays an important role in the effects of stigmatization on second-generation Arab Muslims.

***Hijab is a private choice.*** Most participants, veiling or not, insist that their family and community would never have forced them to wear hijab (even though I never asked

any of them if they had felt pressured to wear it). Some explicitly refer to the stereotype of veiled woman as submissive woman and criticize it, while others simply underline the respectful attitude of their mother and family members regarding their decision to veil or not. In declaring hijab as a free choice, they endorse a feminist approach to their identity negotiation process that recognizes multiplicity and fluidity of women's identity.

Some participants do acknowledge that there are women and children who are pressured to veil. As much as they express that women should not be forced to wear hijab, they also accept the eventuality as part of what some Muslim families do. They identify two "natural" consequences to it: either the girl will take hijab off later or she will eventually understand the reasoning of why women should veil and appreciate it. A main reason for accepting to veil is the desire to respect parents and community's will. This viewpoint on the veil contrasts with western feminist arguments as part of a global discourse on women's rights (Hatem, 2006). Some of those young Muslim women endorse instead a perspective inspired by their culture of origin. Singh (2007) explains that western feminist goals often do not correspond to women's reality in developing countries and as she rejects generalizations about women's identity, she suggests an alternative framework that is centered on individual women's self-perception of their environment and their agency within their individual contexts. This framework allows for a new understanding of second-generation Arab Muslim women who endorse some traditional values that may be at odds with western culture.

Finally, some participants who took off hijab on their own explain that they were not ready to face non-Muslims' scrutiny or/and Muslim community's expectations. As

they negotiate their identity in a context of intense scrutiny from both Non-Muslims and their own community, refusal to be categorized as either oppressed or liberated, loyalty to culture of origin and that of country of citizenship, young Arab Muslim women in college juggle with coexisting identities (Zaal & al., 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2007) and may choose to temporarily or permanently decline some aspects of their identity.

*Secular state promotes harmful generalizations of Arab Muslim women.* All participants refer to the negative representation of Islam and of the Arab culture in secular society. As young Arab Muslim women, they feel particularly targeted by common stereotypes such as: Muslim men tend to be violent and Muslim women are oppressed by them; Muslim women are disadvantaged; veiled Muslim women are submissive to Muslim men. Social identity theory states that stereotypes are not fixed representations of others; rather, they depend on how the in-group (dominant) compares itself to the out-group (minority) and therefore may evolve as they assume the social function of legitimizing the past and current actions of the in-group (Hornsey, 2008). Young Arab Muslim women find themselves at the center of a politicized power play in which their habits, from what they might eat -Halal food- to what they might wear -hijab and burqa- and relationships are exposed and looked down upon. Race, culture and religion become a political argument (Hall, 1996, 2003).

Participants also insist that French legal bans on the veil at school and the burqa in all public places are unnecessary and harmful. It is interesting to note that they make a strong distinction between wearing the hijab, which is a religious obligation, and wearing the burqa, which they feel is a cultural tradition in some Muslim countries. Even as they

don't relate to the burqa in the same way as they do to the veil, a large majority of participants believes that wearing the burqa should be respected as a personal choice that should not be targeted by a law. Participants feel that French legal bans on the hijab and the burqa are disproportionate and inappropriate. They insist that veiling in public is a religious obligation (but wearing the burqa is not) and that the French law targeting veiling girls in schools is unfair to Muslim girls who are religious.

In the French sample, some participants who started veiling as they became teenagers were asked to remove their veil in school, due to the 2004 French ban on veils in public schools. One refused and pursued homeschooling, and two complied. As veiling was already part of their identity, they perceived being forced to remove their veil as a very aggressive, disrespectful and unnecessary demand from the state.

Fanon (1965) notes that during French colonial era in Algeria, the French administration used schools to promote colonial values that were critical of the veil and designated Muslim men as abusive of women (and therefore undermined their authority). Schools became a powerful tool to single out veiling women and their daughters. Jugé and Perez (2006) argue that current French political discourse closely resembles the colonial period and is rooted in a racialized concept of otherness. Fanon adds that the dominant power's negative focus on the veil created strong resistance and that the veil became a symbol of resistance to colonial power. In this study though, as participants across sample acknowledge that some women may be wearing hijab for the purpose of defying dominant power, they also express their disapproval of such response and

strongly emphasize the religious purpose of the veil. They believe hijab needs to be respected as a religious symbol by both non-Muslims and Muslims.

**Summary of discussion.** This study shows how, in a context of global stigmatization and politicization of Islam, young Arab Muslim women in the United States and France use strategic identity negotiation processes to emancipate themselves from their parents' path to integration, secular society's discredit of Muslim women, and their own community's expectations. Young Arab Muslim women are highly scrutinized by both dominant society and Muslim community. What they eat (halal food), the way they live (relationship with men) and what they wear (hijab) has become politicized. All young Arab Muslim women today are expected to take a stance vis-à-vis hijab. Young religious Arab women who wear hijab in college, as it is a religious obligation, are caught between having to prove secular society that they are neither oppressed by nor submissive to Muslim men and having to assure their own community that college life is compatible with Muslim principles. If they succeed, hijab becomes a strong source of empowerment. When they declare that being Muslim is an identity that supersedes others, young Arab Muslim women in college oppose moral superiority to stigmatization: faith becomes a political identity. They are also very much aware that in both the United States and France, being Muslim means being non-white, and therefore not necessarily legitimate. Religion, gender and race intersect under the umbrella of Muslimness to shape young Arab Muslim women's individual and collective identities as citizens of secular society.

**Research Question 1b**

What are the similarities and differences in this process of identity negotiation between young Arab Muslim women in the United States and France attending college?

In this study, findings show that French and American participants' college experience is similar in many aspects and that their identity negotiation processes are comparable. Strong differences appear though in the manner in which they are able to express their negotiated identities. As described by Read (2007), both the United States and France's secular values are at odds with Islamic beliefs and their society members often hostile to their presence, increasingly so since recent politicization of Islam globally. Both countries discourage veiling, by law in France and by lack of explicit legal protection in the United States. The two countries handle integration issues differently though (Read, 2007): While the French model encourages the abandonment of ethnic identity and adoption of a French civic identity, the United States model supports multicultural identities that include religious ones such as Muslim American. In addition, the relationship between church and state is strictly implemented in France, while the United States' religious freedom is promoted at all public levels. Finally, in the United States, Muslim American immigrants come from various ethnic background, are usually better educated, with higher socioeconomic opportunities than their French counterparts. In France, the vast majority of Muslim immigrants are working-class laborers, originally from French colonized Magreb with relatively low level of educational attainment and low socioeconomic level.

**Similarities in college experience across French and American samples.** It is not surprising, in a context of globalization and global politicization of Islam (Read, 2007), that second-generation Arab Muslim women attending college in secular societies describe similar experiences and identity negotiation processes. As hijab is made very visible in both countries, it becomes central to the experience of young Arab Muslim women in college. Furthermore, global politicization of Islam shapes a global Muslim identity beyond countries of origin and family traditions that is at the same time shared by second-generation Muslim women and individually experienced as multiple and fluid negotiated identities. Being part of a minority group, second-generation Arab Muslim women attending college perceive college and citizenship as an opportunity and a privilege that was not necessarily available to their parents. In parallel to a sense of personal and independent identity, young Arab Muslim women in both countries experience strong family and community influence.

***Attending college is globally an opportunity.*** For most participants, college is an educational opportunity that goes beyond academic and professional prospects. They refer to pursuing knowledge as part of Islamic tradition, and in parallel strongly affirm an intellectual identity that embraces feminism. Young Arab women wearing hijab in college particularly express their identity as both intellectual and religious; they assert themselves as women with “specific knowledge” (Amina, 2004).

***Citizenship is a privilege even if secular standards are at odds with Muslim values.*** All participants acknowledge that American or French citizenship represents an opportunity for them. Some refer to their country of origin and feel a sense of



appreciation with respect to benefits and rights that are accessible to them, while others consider their citizenship as “natural” since they were born in the country. Some see citizenship as a status that is at odds with their culture of origins or Muslim values, to the point that they sometimes experience conflicting feelings with respect to what citizenship means to them. Their willingness to be multicultural leads young Arab Muslim women to feelings of being “between” culture, creating tensions between loyalty to culture of origin, Muslim values, and sense of belonging to the country of citizenship (Zaal & al., 2007). As they attempt to negotiate their identity in such a complex setting, young Arab Muslim women find ways of resolving conflicting identities and of allowing their Muslim and citizenship identity to co-exist (Sirin & al., 2008). As stated by Venel (2005), in some cases, conflicting identities result in choosing one unique identity that may be either secular (religion is marginal), Muslim (civic engagement becomes confrontational) or individualistic (civic involvement refers more to status than to identity). Despite dominant discourse that tends to deny the multiplicity and fluidity of their identity, young Arab Muslim women in this study practice coexisting identities that are both individual and collective.

***Personal process of identity negotiation is articulated with strong family and community influence.*** Predominance of parents’ authority and community influence in Arab culture may create a disconnect between life at home and life in college for second-generation Arab Muslim women. While they describe a personal process of identity negotiation, participants also acknowledge the strong influence of family and community in their life. College represents for most participants a place that provides freedom and

access to broader knowledge and experiences (although in some cases, participants perceive college setting as an obstacle to the expression of their religiosity and find college life disruptive). In contrast, life at home is traditional and often more restrictive than life in college. This disconnect between life at home and in college illustrates social identity's concept of in-group/out-group relation. As the dominant group (in-group) categorizes the minority/ethnic group (out-group), identities of both groups are perceived by contrast to each other. Negative categorization of Arab Muslims by dominant culture leads to prejudicial devaluation. In such context, young Arab Muslim women are torn between allegiance to their ethnic group and desire to belong to the in-group, which they have access to through college. In this study, some participants express that they experience strong tensions as they belong to two antagonistic groups, but they also mention that they are able to find a kind of middle ground in which multiple identities can coexist, as described in the previous section.

Participants feel that their Muslim community expects more from them as young women than it does from young Muslim men. Developing their own Islamic knowledge and negotiating a Muslim identity as a college student may allow young Arab Muslim women to contest patriarchal authority through an ideological framework that is acceptable to their family, as well as to challenge dominant group's gender hierarchies and racism (Naber, 2005).

**Differences in college experience between French and American samples.** As their history and the current manner in which they implement secular values are different, the United States and France represent two distinct contexts in which young Arab

Muslim women express their negotiated identity. In France, civic identity prevails, there is a strict separation of church and state, and the socio-economic level of Northern African Muslim immigrants is usually low. In contrast, the United States promotes multiculturalism and religious freedom at all public levels, while the Muslim immigrants community comes from various ethnic backgrounds and experience higher socioeconomic opportunities than their French counterparts (Read, 2007). These differences in handling integration issues create subsequent differences in how young Arab Muslim women's identities that were similarly negotiated are able to express themselves, leading to differences in college experience between French and American Arab Muslim women.

*French sample.* French participants struggle with social life and personal development in college. They feel that French secular society pushes them to choose between being religious and being fully part of French society and they perceive secularism as an attempt to negate the multiplicity of their identity. As French secular message is omnipresent and supported by restrictive laws, some participants do internalize secular arguments against the veil.

*Being religious is associated with refusal to integrate French society.* Some of both veiling and non-veiling French participants express that they feel more themselves at home than in college, as they are not able to practice their religion openly in college environment. Veiling participants feel particularly stigmatized. The French laws banning hijab in schools and the burqa in all public places single out all women wearing the veil, even in settings where it is allowed, such as in college. French Muslim women wearing

hijab are categorized as victims and submissive to their community's violence (Scott, 2006). For Al-Saji (2010), it is precisely the assumed invisibility of veiled women in dominant discourse that makes gender oppression the sole dimension through which veiled women are seen.

*State imposes one unique mold.* French participants experience internal conflicts that are imposed on them by French society's attempt to make them choose between being Arab and Muslim and French. For Jugé and Perez (2006), current French discourse is inherited from the colonial period and is based on the racialized concept of otherness: The notion of French citizenship is linked to whiteness and therefore only white skin color provides true citizenship. All others remain foreigners, independently of their citizenship status. In effect, the French state endorses colonial racism, and cultural difference in France means racial difference (Jugé & Perez, 2006). Mehta (2010) talks about the hypocrisy of French discourse that uses the notion of secularism as a means to erase all markers of difference that do not fit into an ideal of sameness. Some of the participants articulate how even though they self-identify as French, they realize that they are actually not perceived as really French by dominant society. This finding is consistent with Keaton's (2005) work that shows that young Arab Muslim women feel perceived as second-class citizens with few opportunities to access a better life than that of their parents.

*The internalization of secular arguments.* In this study, half of the French participants support French secular argument that religion is private and may not be displayed in public. They legitimate secularism in the name of French tradition, they refer

to public display of religiosity as provocation, and one participant even repeatedly describes herself and her family as “civilized”. This finding is consistent with Killian’s (2003) study showing that French Arab women tend to use French arguments even when they disagree with French secular approach. Some young Arab Muslims in France do internalize secular arguments.

One of the French participants to this study explains that she used to perceive French secularism and veil bans as a legitimate strategy to maintain successful integration into and cohesion of French society. However, she describes how spending the summer of her high school senior year in the United States permanently transformed her understanding of secularism and convinced her that: Muslim girls were not forced to wear hijab; young women wearing hijab were not influencing others to do so; and it was possible to wear hijab and be integrated into society. She realized then that French secularism was everything but neutral and was aiming at “making Muslims invisible.”

*American sample.* American participants do feel stigmatized and do experience racism; they are aware that hijab is a challenge to social life in secular society. Nevertheless, their college experience is globally much more positive than that of their French counterparts. They feel supported and strengthened by their Muslim peers on campus. In addition, they acknowledge the importance of college environments that endorse religious diversity.

*A strong and supportive Muslim community in college.* All American participants are members of MSA. Most of them feel that belonging to a Muslim group helps them in many aspects of their college life as well as in their religious development. Nevertheless,

some participants find their college's Muslim community too narrow-minded and judgmental. As they are categorized by a dominant group, young Arab Muslim women find support in identifying with a minority group that helps them achieve a positive sense of distinctiveness. Belonging to a Muslim group in college allows for a compromise between assimilation and differentiation from others (Brewer, 1991). In embracing their group's "muslimness" members assume that everyone in the group shares the same values and they comply with group norms (Hornsey, 2008). This process leads to strong uniformity within the group, which may make certain members feel uncomfortable or non-member Muslims feel excluded, as illustrated by some participants' comments who find MSA too judgmental.

It is common for American universities, private or public, to host religious student associations, including Muslim associations such as MSA. In France, universities also welcome religious associations, but in practice they are essentially Catholic or Jewish. As I was unable to identify local offices of Muslim student associations in the four Parisian universities in which participants were students, I asked some of the participants how they felt about not having access to a Muslim association on campus. They answered that implementing a Muslim student association on campus would reinforce the current image of a community that does not open up to others.

*Support for religious diversity from religious and public universities.* In this study, American participants are students in religious and public universities. They report similar experiences in terms of how college campuses facilitate their religious practice by providing a private space for prayers, as well as space for MSA meetings. French and

American approaches to religiosity in college and in public settings are very different. For McClay (2001) the United States uses a “negative” approach to secularism in which the state neither favors nor interferes with any religion, while France has a “positive” approach in which religion and religious symbols in public institutions are not allowed. American participants benefit from equal religious opportunities on campus, while French participants do not and are discouraged from bringing religious beliefs into their everyday life in college. Several participants from the French sample mention that they wished they could have access to a quiet place to pray on campus and that such lack of private space is particularly disruptive for them as their religion requires that they pray five times a day.

**Summary of discussion.** This study identifies strong similarities in the manner in which American and French participants negotiate their identity as Muslims and women and Arabs and college students. The previous section shows how hijab is central to the experience of young Arab Muslim women in college across sample and how they affirm a Muslim identity that supersedes others while maintaining multiple coexisting identities. In addition, young Arab Muslim women in college in the United States and France acknowledge that being college students offers them the possibility to explore and complete the complex identity negotiation process they are faced with, in a setting of broader diversity and educational opportunities than what they were accustomed to in high school. As members of the second generation, they feel legitimate as citizens to compare opportunities in their country of origin and that of citizenship, and to identify internal conflicts with respect to differences of values between culture of origin and

western culture. Finally, as they recognize the influence their family and community might have on their life choices, young Arab Muslim women in college stand for the values that they choose to embrace in their culture of origin.

This study also points to major differences in college experience between American and French young Arab Muslim women in college. While their identity negotiation processes are similar, in response to a global environment, young Arab Muslim women attending college in the United States and France live in different national contexts in which secularism is differently promoted: religious freedom at all public levels in the United States and absence of religion in public in France. French young Arab Muslim women's integration into French society is being compromised in two ways: if they are religious and wear hijab, they are accused of not wanting to be part of French society; in any case, as inherited from the colonial period, their condition of non-whites maintains them as second-class citizens. Having been born and raised in a society where secular arguments are aggressively implemented (with laws banning hijab and burqa), some of them endorse secular arguments as a rule of common sense. American young Arab Muslim women in college also face dominant secular discourse, racism and stigmatization of the veil. Nevertheless, they have access on campus to Muslim groups and activities that help them maintain strong Muslim values and at the same time feel integrated into college life. In addition, when a prayer space is available to them on campus, they feel supported in their faith and recognized as valued members of their college community. Young American Muslim women have more opportunities for



constructive social life and personal development in college than their French counterparts.

### **Researcher's Reflection on the Study**

In reference to critical race feminism's attention to dominant status as a researcher and dominant representation of research findings (Zaal et al., 2007; Hamzeh & Oliver, 2010), I reflected on my relationship with participants as a researcher who is part of mainstream society, as well as on the assumptions that may interfere with my data analysis in terms of staying true to the meaning of what participants expressed. With respect to the notion of the researcher being the "stranger" and to relations of power, authority and difference between researcher and participants (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2010), I was particularly attentive to trying to determine if participants were genuinely motivated by my research, or if they were mostly trying to please me – or to impress me. It only took a few interviews to realize that the young women I was interviewing were highly motivated, very articulate on the topic of identity, taking my project seriously and having a lot to communicate. I was the one who needed to take my participants seriously. That was my first finding.

In France, I was a French non-Muslim white researcher interviewing young Arab Muslim women participants who were very much aware of dominant negative perception of their culture and religion, including that of French feminists (Bowen, 2007). The French organization that had originally committed to helping me recruit French participants became unavailable unexpectedly, and my interviewing schedule was delayed, as I needed to set up a new recruiting process. I found that the couple of months

spent in Paris working on recruitment did actually contribute to a better understanding of local French context. For example, several people belonging, as I do, to French dominant society made the comment that it shouldn't be difficult to find Muslim women to interview because "they're everywhere." Such remarks, promoted by their authors as good common sense, helped me grasp French ambient racism toward Arab Muslims and Arab Muslim women in particular who are perceived as unfortunately visible second-class citizens (Keaton, 2005; Mehta, 2010).

Several French participants made the comment that they would like my study to help their voice be heard in France. They liked the idea of being part of a cross-national study but some of them expressed their hope that I would publish findings about them in France, not just in the United States. I do feel a sense of responsibility toward their expectations and believe that, from a critical race feminist perspective, contributing to the "visibility" of these young women where they live, where it makes the most sense to them would be an important outcome of this research.

In the United States, in addition to being part of mainstream society, I was also French American and therefore from a different culture, as participants were themselves. France's foreign policy having been at odds with that of the United States at times regarding issues in the Middle East, some participants expected me to be sensitive to the Arab cause (although the recent French bans on hijabs and burqa may have altered their positive perception of France). All American participants were very eager to participate to my research. I felt that, in comparison to the French sample, as much as they wanted to convey their perception of what it means to be an Arab Muslim woman in college, their

message was globally less intense and more positive than that of their French counterparts. This observation is consistent with the study's findings that, due to their respective national contexts, American participants are more able to express their negotiated identity in college than are French participants.

I wondered if some participants throughout sample would react with mistrust toward my Jewish last name. One French participant did suggest that it might be an issue with more religious women. Another French participant emphasized in her interview the existence of Jewish cliques in college and strong racism from Jewish students toward veiled Muslim women in college. In the American sample, some participants referred to difficult relationships with Jewish students in high school, noting that they had not encountered this issue anymore in college. Several participants acknowledged that they disapproved of the United States' policy toward Arab countries. These observations are consistent with studies showing how second-generation Arab Muslims face increased stigmatization and racialization, and are simultaneously becoming more politically involved (Ali, 2005; Mehta, 2010).

This study generated very positive interest within both samples. In both countries, participants expressed their appreciation to be given an opportunity to voice their perspective. I feel that they and I developed a relationship of trust that allowed for very open comments and personal descriptions of what it means to be a young Arab Muslim woman in college. As I expressed how impressed I was by their ability to discuss so well the complex topic of identity, some participants mentioned that it had not really been their choice, but that they had been forced to define themselves at an early age, due to

ambient stigmatization. Multiple studies in the United States and France (Peek, 2005; Ali, 2005; Killian, 2007; Haddad, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2007; Santelli, 2008) show how stigmatization of young Arab Muslim women affects their identity negotiation processes.

### **Implications of Findings and Recommendations**

This study explores how the convergence of religious, racial, gender related, and cultural contexts, at both individual and communal level, shapes the identity of young Arab Muslim women in college as citizens of the United States and of France. Recent studies on young Muslim women have described the link between perceived stigmatization and accelerated Islamization (Haddad, 2007; Peek, 2005; Santelli, 2008); the generational differences in the experience of Islam between first and second generation (Ali, 2005; Killian, 2007; Williams & Vashi, 2007); the gendered and racialized articulation of identity (Alimahomed, 2011; Hamzeh & Oliver, 2010; Keaton, 2005; Mehta, 2010; Mir, 2009; Naber, 2005); the coexistence of identities as a strategy for integration (Sirin & Fine, 2007; Venel, 2005; Zaal et al., 2007); and the diverse meanings of hijab (Amina, 2004; Gurbuz et al., 2009; Killian, 2003). The current study supports these findings and shows the articulation between all major factors contributing to identity negotiation of young Arab Muslim women. With respect to studies focusing on the veil as a potential tool of resistance (Bouteldja, 2011; Shirazi & Mishra, 2010), neither the French nor the American sample in this study support the notion of the veil as a means to oppose stigmatization, they confer to the veil a religious purpose only.

This study's findings bring to light that young Arab Muslim women in college, in the United States and France use common strategic identity negotiation processes and in

effect create a “third space” (Bhabha, 1990) in which to develop multiple identities beyond the argument of integration versus resistance promoted by secular society. As they affirm a “Muslim first” identity, young Arab Muslim women are challenged by hostility to Muslims in western societies. The current study supports Modood’s (2010) call for a moderate secularism that takes into account religion as a minority identity: if minorities value their religious identity more than is the norm in the dominant society, religion becomes an ethnic feature that is entitled to specific rights and protection. Neither the United States nor France currently recognize religion as a minority identity that grants specific rights. Citizenship in western liberal societies is tacitly understood as being secular and therefore young Arab Muslim women’s participation to the public debate as religious citizens is impaired (Calhoun et al., 2011).

Most participants to the current study feel that secular arguments against the veil are harmful to young Arab Muslim women who are religious and wear hijab as a religious requirement. They feel that they are made scapegoats and blamed for issues that have little to do with them or even their community. This study endorses the argument that current approach to secularism in western liberal state is less about separation between church and state, than about regulation of religious life (Mahmood, 2006). In addition, state’s religious neutrality in western societies should not be presented as absolute, since Christian churches are sometimes financially supported by or incorporated to public institutions (Jansen, 2006). This study’s findings illustrate how unfair and counterproductive French public legal bans on the veil and the burqa – which are private choices – may be. Young religious Arab women wear hijab for religious and/or personal

motives, one of them being the desire to be modest. The French bans are unfair as they single out veiling women and penalize them (some young Arab Muslim girls may be forced to leave school) and are counterproductive as they politicize and radicalize an intention that was to be modest.

As they described the experience of being a young Arab Muslim woman attending college in the United States and France, participants to this study unfolded negotiated identities that were personal, complex, and sometimes at odds with values that are taken for granted in western societies. In a context of global stigmatization of Islam and collective Islamic identity, a universal dominant discourse on women's rights promotes western values desirable for all women (Hatem, 2006). Such values do not necessarily correspond to young Arab Muslim women's personal context. For example, the politicization of hijab in the United States and France affects all young Muslim women and misrepresent the motivations they might have to wear or not wear it. Singh (2007) advocates for the use of an alternative framework centered on women's self-perception of their environment and their agency within their individual contexts. This study's findings illustrate the importance to consider alternative approaches to dominant discourse on women's rights in order to develop social work practice, research and policy that support young Arab Muslim women's identity negotiation, life and needs.

This study advocates for religious pluralism as an alternative to secularism. Pluralism can be described as: engagement with diversity, efforts to understand differences, mutual respect for religious commitments, and dialogue (Eck, 2006). Neither the United States nor France currently endorses religious pluralism models. Yet, the

current study shows that differences between the two countries in their approach to secularism have direct implications on participants' personal development in college. Young American Muslim women have more opportunities for constructive social life and personal development in college than their French counterparts. France promotes assimilation, a model in which maintaining exterior signs of cultural background and beliefs is perceived as resistance toward integration (House, 2006), while the United States give preference to multiculturalism initiatives with prevalent initiatives regarding integration of diverse groups being developed by communities (Sundar, 2009) and Federal government keeping a "hands-off approach" (Koser, 2007). French participants express feelings that French society does not allow them to be openly religious and is intending to shape them (with some success, as several French participants have internalized secular arguments). In contrast, American participants feel supported by their Muslim community on campus and their university's efforts to provide a private space for prayers on campus. American participants benefit from equal religious opportunities on campus while French participants do not. This study suggests that, as imperfect as it may be, the American model of multiculturalism initiatives offers young Arab Muslim women in college better opportunity for constructive identity negotiation processes than the French model of assimilation.

### **Suggestion for Future Research**

This phenomenological study was small with respect to sample size and broad with respect to participants' background and environment. As empirical research on Arab Muslim women is currently limited in the United States and in France, there are

numerous opportunities for further research that can contribute to the understanding of young Arab Muslim women's identity negotiation. Suggestions of topics for comparative studies between the United States and France include: identity negotiation processes of non-religious young Arab Muslim women in college; young Arab Muslim women's civic engagement; young Arab Muslim women's perception of their own Muslim community; young Arab Muslim women's integration into the work place. In addition, in a non-comparative setting: the notion of veil as tool of defiance in France; relationship between personal development of young Arab Muslim women in college and involvement in Muslim groups on campus in the United States; comparison of experiences of young Arab Muslim women and young black women in France as racialized groups; comparison of experiences of young Arab Muslim women and young Mexican women in the United States as racialized groups.

In this study, all 16 participants were self-declared as religious or moderately religious. Therefore, their perspective on the veil and on most issues relating to their life in college was influenced by their belief. It would be interesting to explore the experience of young Arab Muslim women who do not follow Islamic religious requirements –and therefore are at odds with their own community. Separately, comparing young Arab Muslim women's civic engagement in the United States and France would bring light to their specific positioning as citizens in countries that have different approaches to secularism. Both qualitative and quantitative studies would be useful contributions. A comparative study on young Arab Muslim women's perception of their own Muslim community would allow to explore from a feminist perspective, their self-perception of



their environment and their agency within their personal context, in two liberal and secular countries. Another interesting angle of research would be young Arab Muslim women's integration into the work place. A longitudinal study, allowing to follow the path of participants who were in college at the beginning of the study would provide very rich data. Alternatively, a comparative study focusing only on young Arab women in the work place that could be either quantitative or qualitative would also be significant.

In addition, conducting research within only one setting, French or American, would help deepen the understanding of young Arab Muslim women's identity in either context. Studying the notion of the veil as a tool of defiance in France would cover an aspect of some young Arab Muslim women's identity that was not explored in the current study. A quantitative study measuring the relationship between personal development of young Arab Muslim women in college and involvement in Muslim groups on campus in the United States would shed light on the influence of Muslim groups on campus. Finally, a study in France comparing the experience of young Arab Muslim women and young non-Muslim black women, who are both racialized and stigmatized in dominant discourse would help identify the respective influence of religiosity and race in identity negotiation of both groups. In parallel, a study comparing in the United States the experience of young Arab Muslim women and young Mexican women as racialized and stigmatized groups would show how religiosity and race affect both groups' identity negotiation processes.

## Conclusion

This study compares identity negotiation processes of young Arab Muslim women in college, in the United States and France. It identifies strong similarities across sample as well as significant disparities in the manner in which participants are able to express their negotiated identity. In a context of global stigmatization of Islam leading to the emergence of a collective Muslim identity among the second generation, young Arab Muslim women's identity is politicized and scrutinized by both secular society and Muslim community. Young Arab Muslim women attending college in the United States and France affirm multiple and fluid identities at the intersection of religion, gender, race, and culture. These identities develop beyond their parents' and community's traditions while remaining loyal to values that may be at odds with secular society. As the United States and France promote distinct secular models –multiculturalism initiatives in the United States versus assimilation in France- the experience of citizenship of young Arab Muslim women in college differs: in the United States, young Arab Muslim women are able to build a distinct American Muslim identity, while in France, they are in effect expected to choose between being French and being Muslim. French legal bans on the veil in public schools and the burqa in all public places single out not only those targeted by the laws, but all French Muslim women and misrepresent the motivations they might have to wear or not wear the veil.

APPENDIX A  
PHENOMENOLOGY AND APPLICATION TO THE STUDY

<b>Author</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Application to the study</b>
Edmund Husserl	<p>Descriptive phenomenology</p> <p>Bracketing allows researcher to focus on pure phenomenon. Participants' common experiences of the phenomenon are described as the structure of the phenomenon</p>	<p>This study commits to describing experiences, not explaining or analyzing (Moustakas, 1994). The use of bracketing allowed me to set aside pre-conceptions and bias before conducting each interview</p>
Amedeo Giorgi (1975)	<p>Empirical/Descriptive phenomenology</p> <p>The aim of the researcher is to describe the phenomenon and attribute meaning</p>	<p>Data analysis was comprised of four steps: immersion in the data; determination of meaning units within data; elimination of repetitions and creation of themes; identification of common themes among participants and determination of the structure of the phenomenon</p>
Paul Colaizzi (1978)	<p>Empirical/Descriptive phenomenology</p> <p>In addition to previous steps, participants validate interview transcript and may add to or modify their description</p>	<p>Once the interview was transcribed, each participant read it and either approved it right away or made small changes. Changes to the transcript were incorporated for analysis</p>

APPENDIX B  
KEY CONCEPTS AND APPLICATION TO THE STUDY

Concept	Source	Definition
Reduction and Bracketing	Edmund Husserl (Hein & Austin, 2001; Dowling, 2007)	In order to free the phenomenon from context, the researcher sets aside all presuppositions and bias. * Illustration from study: I did my best to identify my assumptions and to set them aside before each interview
Empathy and relationship leading to meaning	Osborne (1990); Wertz (2005)	The quality of the relationship between researcher and participant will lead to reflection on meaning. * Illustration from study: I observed how participants developed trust and confidence through the interviewing process
Data saturation	Groenewald (2004); Wertz (2005); Guest et al. (2006)	Nature and number of participants depends on when data saturation has been reached * Illustration from study: data saturation has been reached with 8 participants in each sample
Immersion in data	Giorgi (1975); Colaizzi (1978); Giorgi & Giorgi (2003)	Reading the transcripts several times gives a sense of a whole * Illustration from study: Reading each interview several times allowed me to grasp the complete description of the experience
Inductive approach	Hein & Austin (2001); Wertz (2005)	Themes emerge from data * Illustration from study: I had not prepared any pre-conceived themes for data analysis; all themes emerged from data
Meaning	Giorgi (1975); Colaizzi (1978); Giorgi & Giorgi (2003)	Meaning units are extracted from data and they are subsequently transformed into themes * Illustration from study: I first identified units using

		participants words and subsequently grouped them into “transformed” themes
Structure	Hein & Austin (2001); Priest (2002)	Shared features of a phenomenon describe its structure * Illustration from study: based on themes identified in the interviews, I described common elements of participants’ experience that formed the general structure
Participant Validation	Colaizzi (1978)	Once data is transcribed and described, participants read their transcripts for validation and may add or modify elements from it * Illustration from study: Each participant read her transcript. Some added or removed information. I used the amended version for analysis.

APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS



Questions:

1. What is it like to be a college student in the U.S./France?
2. What five words would you use to describe yourself?
3. How do you make the choice to veil or not to veil?
4. What are your goals and how do you see working towards them?

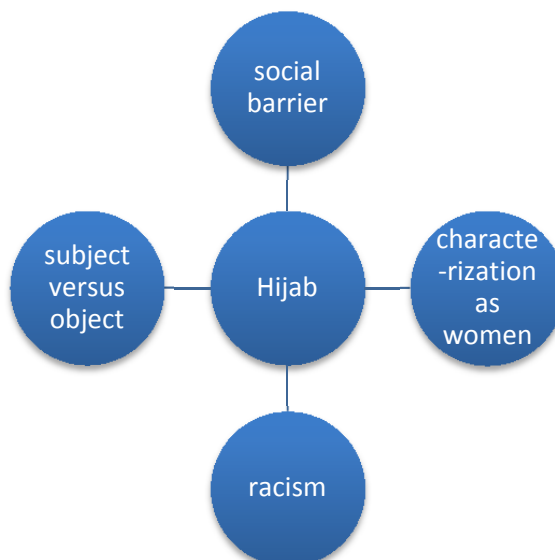
Prompts:

1. What is it like to be a college student in the U.S/ France?
  - 1a. What does it mean to you to be a young Muslim woman of Arab descent in college?
  - 1b. How important is it to you to be a U.S./French citizen?
  - 1c. How different do you think college experience is for Muslim women versus Muslim men (or women versus men)?
  - 1d. What is the role of religious and cultural tradition in your life?
  - 1e. How do you feel about college experience in comparison to life at home?
  - 1f. How different do you think your college experience would be if you were a white non-Muslim U.S/ French citizen?
2. What five words would you use to describe yourself?
  - 2a. Some possible identities: American/French; Arab-American/ Arab-French; Arab; bi-cultural; Muslim; religious Muslim; non-observant Muslim; young woman; student.
  - 2b. In which order of importance?
3. How did you make the choice to veil or not to veil?
  - 3a. What do you think about wearing the hijab? As a child at school? As a young woman?
  - 3b. How do you feel about the recent laws in France that banned the hijab at school and the burqa in all public places?
  - 3c. Why do you/ do you not wear the veil?
  - 3d. What does your family think about you wearing/ not wearing the veil?
  - 3e. What do your friends think about you wearing/ not wearing the veil? (Muslim friends, non-Muslim friends)
4. What are your goals and how do you see working towards them?
  - 4a. What are your major priorities for the near future?
  - 4b. How do you see yourself in the future?

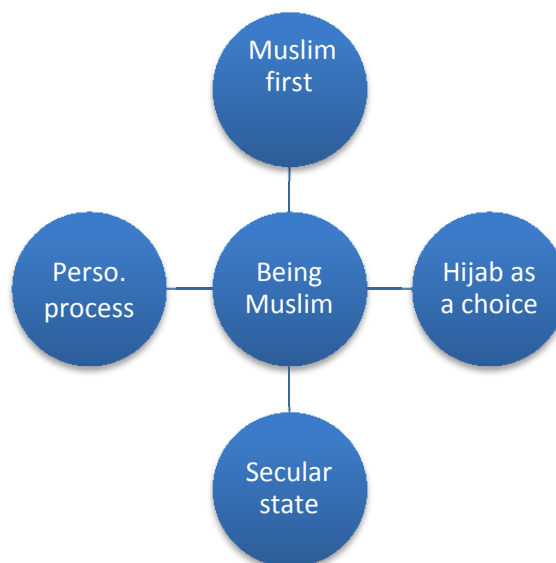
- 4c. Do you believe that attending college can help you become the person you want to be?
- 4d. What kind of professional career do you envision?
- 4e. What kind of family life do you envision?
- 4f. What do you wish was different in your current college life?
- 4g. How do you think you could help some things change?

APPENDIX D  
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

**A. Hijab is central to the experience of being a young Arab Muslim woman in college**



**B. Being Muslim is a way of life**



## C. Comparing college experience in the U.S. and France

### C.1. Similarities

similarities across sample		
Attending college is globally an opportunity	Citizenship is a privilege / secular standards are at odds with Muslim values	Personal process of identity negotiation / strong influence of family and community

### C.2. Differences

Differences between samples	
French sample	American sample
Being religious / refusal to integrate Secularism: one unique mold Internalization of secular arguments	Supportive Muslim community Religious diversity in universities

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## VITA

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