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The racialization of Muslim veils: A philosophical analysis

Alia Al-Saji
Department of Philosophy, McGill University, Canada

Abstract

This article goes behind stereotypes of Muslim veiling to ask after the representational structure underlying these images. I examine the public debate leading to the 2004 French law banning conspicuous religious signs in schools and French colonial attitudes to veiling in Algeria, in conjunction with discourses on the veil that have arisen in other western contexts. My argument is that western perceptions and representations of veiled Muslim women are not simply about Muslim women themselves. Rather than representing Muslim women, these images fulfill a different function: they provide the negative mirror in which western constructions of identity and gender can be positively reflected. It is by means of the projection of gender oppression onto Islam, and its naturalization to the bodies of veiled women, that such mirroring takes place. This constitutes, I argue, a form of racialization. Drawing on the work of Fanon, Merleau-Ponty and Alcoff, I offer a phenomenological analysis of this racializing vision. What is at stake is a form of cultural racism that functions in the guise of anti-sexist and feminist liberatory discourse, at once posing a dilemma to feminists and concealing its racializing logic.

Keywords

feminism, France, Frantz Fanon, gender oppression, *hijab*, Islam, phenomenology, racism, veil

From June 2009 to 2010, France saw a renewed intensification of debate around the question of the Muslim veil, a debate that many had thought closed with the passage of the 'law on the headscarf' in 2004. As some politicians in France attempted, with some success, to pass yet another law on the veil – banning the so-called 'full or integral veil [*voile intégral*]' from public services and public spaces – the need to revisit the sources of this debate and the passage of the 2004 French law has become evident.[1]

Corresponding author:
Alia Al-Saji, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, McGill University, 855 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec H3A 2T7, Canada.
Email: alia.al-saji@mcgill.ca

Whence these recurrent representations of, and this obsession with, Muslim veils? How are we to understand the persistence of discourses on the veil, repetitive in their representational logic, despite their manifestly diverse formulations and the differing veiling practices and contexts upon which they focus?

France passed the law that banned wearing what were termed 'conspicuous [*ostensible*]' religious signs in public schools in March 2004. Though seeming to include all religious signs, both the debate leading up to the passage of the law and the majority of cases to which the law was applied concerned girls wearing the Muslim headscarf [*le foulard islamique*], or 'veil [*le voile*]', in schools.[2] This law has been described as a specifically French phenomenon; whereas proponents of the law saw it as a sign of France's rigorous secularism [*laïcité*] and commitment to gender equality,[3] opponents saw it as a symptom of France's colonial and racist history.[4] While I do not mean to contest the latter claim and certainly wish to acknowledge the specificities of a context in which cultural perceptions of the Muslim veil led to a legal redefinition of educational space, I believe it is too narrow to limit the discourse on the veil to a 'French exception'. Many aspects of the passage of this law are specific to the French context: the definition of *laïcité*, the opposition of republican values to 'communitarianism', the assertion of a centralized and homogeneous sense of nation, both within Europe and in relation to immigrant and 'ethnic' populations, and the way this ideal of citizenship was supposed to be instantiated through the public school system. Yet the argument regarding gender oppression, which I will argue was central and which finally facilitated passage of the law (section 1), has echoes in other times and contexts. Indeed, though gender is not mentioned in the text of the law, the metonymical identification of veiling not only with religion (specifically Islam) but with gender oppression provided the crucial impetus for the law. Moreover, such representations of the Muslim veil are neither new to the French context, as the colonial project to unveil Algerian women attests, nor are they restricted to France.[5]

Western representations of veiled Muslim women have multiplied in recent memory. In 2001, alleged moral arguments for the United States' war on Afghanistan were formulated through an appeal to the liberation of Afghan women. The image of the *burqa*-covered body of the Afghan woman became the symbol for the oppression of women under Taliban rule. This representation conflated various historical factors that had contributed to women's situation in Afghanistan, attributing that situation to a unitary source, an 'Islamic fundamentalism' immediately identifiable with the *burqa*. No less problematic (though seemingly less dramatic) representations of Muslim veils have arisen in other multi-cultural contexts, including the Canadian one from which I write. In 2007 and again in 2010 in Quebec, veiled girls and women were repeatedly marked for exclusion from various domains of public life, including sporting tournaments, educational institutions and voting booths.[6] Whether represented as dangerous and immobilizing or recalcitrant and obfuscating, veiling became the focus of a public debate in which Muslim women themselves did not have a voice.

From France to the United States and Canada, these diverse examples hold structural commonalties. My point is neither that the content of images is identical, nor that misrepresentation of the veil is inevitable. My aim, rather, is to describe a representational schema that predominates in discourses on the veil – one whereby gender oppression is naturalized to the Muslim veil – and to point to the perils that attend such representations.[7]

In this sense, even seemingly 'authentic' or 'innocent' images function within a framework where their reception may be over-determined in advance, apart from the intentions of their authors. Attempts to subvert this structure of representation require both awareness of its hold in the imagination – its role in defining notions of identity that rely on a dichotomous construction of the 'other' – and attention to the invisibility of this structure, an invisibility that sustains the 'naturalness' of the notions of identity in question. Moreover, understanding the ways in which images of the veil participate in the construction of gendered, 'western' identities is crucial for feminist theory. In speaking of and for other 'oppressed' women, specifically Muslim women, feminist theory needs to be aware of the ways in which it enters a discursive field mapped in advance. If it is to destabilize rather than reinforce dichotomies such as Islamic-western or oppressive-free, a certain hesitation with respect to feminism's own position in this field, its blind spots and exclusions and its potential for cooption, is called for.

That western representations of veiled women very often misrepresent the lived experiences of Muslim women and the diverse meanings of veiling has been clearly shown by other theorists.[8] My purpose in this article is to understand the mechanism that sustains these representations in the 'western' imaginary. My argument is that western representations of veiled Muslim women are not simply *about* Muslim women themselves. Rather than *representing* Muslim women, these images fulfill a different function: they provide the foil or negative mirror in which western constructions of identity and gender can be positively *reflected*.[9] It is by means of the projection of gender oppression onto Islam, specifically onto the bodies of veiled women, that such mirroring takes place. This constitutes – I argue drawing critically on Frantz Fanon and feminist theory – a form of racialization (sections 2 and 3). What is at stake here is a form of cultural racism that hides itself under the guise of anti-sexist and even feminist liberatory discourse. The naturalization of gender oppression to veiled Muslim women thus permits the norm of western womanhood to be constituted as 'free' of such oppression, as the only imaginable mode of female subjectivity.

It is my claim, then, that images of veiled Muslim women play a constitutive role in many patriarchal narratives in the West. That the image of the Muslim woman forms a kind of 'constitutive outside' (to use Judith Butler's term) explains the exclusionary and silencing function played by this representation.[10] Although what is represented as inevitably oppressive is the Muslim veil in general, it is representations of the veil themselves that demand and enforce the exclusion of Muslim women.[11] Hence, in diverse contexts from France to Quebec, images of the veil have as their counterpart policies that enact the exclusion of veiled women (section 4). In this regard, the relative intransigence of colonial and contemporary western representations of Muslim women – their surprising immunity to empirical cases and counter-examples – reveals something of the mechanism at play. These representations put Muslim women in positions scripted in advance, where veiling is constituted as the equivalent of *de-subjectification* – a lack of subjectivity, a victimhood or voicelessness, that these images in turn work to enforce.

Though my focus in this article is the French context, both contemporary and colonial (sections 1 and 2), other western discourses on the veil should not be lost from view and they serve to frame the more general analyses of sections 3 and 4. Although the term 'West' is an admittedly inadequate notion – especially if it is taken to refer to a unitary

geographical entity or pre-existent identity – my aim in using the term is to designate a cultural and discursive construct in formation.[12] The 'West' is an imaginary formation that constitutes itself through representations of its (racialized and gendered) 'others'. Seemingly marginal images of veiled Muslim women play a central role in this imaginary construct, underwriting the binary of freedom and oppression and the modes of gender and subjectivity through which the 'West' maintains its imaginary borders. 'Western' representations of veiled women tend to flatten and homogenize in ways that are not only reductive of Muslim women but that attempt to normalize and circumscribe what is defined as 'West'.

1 The question of the 'veil' in the contemporary French context

On 15 March 2004, the law banning the wearing of conspicuous religious signs[13] was passed in France.[14] The law is commonly referred to as the law on the headscarf or veil, '*la loi sur le foulard*', a name which reflects the main religious sign that the law has targeted and to which it has been applied. It should be noted that the terms 'veil [*le voile*]' and 'Islamic (head)scarf [*le foulard islamique*]' were both used during the debate leading up to the French law.[15] Both terms can be questioned. The Arabic term, *hijab*, did not have currency in the French context, was too foreign to the general public, and so was very little used.[16] 'Islamic headscarf' is then the French alternative to this term,[17] adapting an innocuous and familiar article of clothing, *le foulard*, to an apparently alien religious sense, 'Islamic'. There is a tension here between the scarf, as a mere article of clothing with seemingly practical and varied uses, and the perceived religious and symbolic weight of the specifically Islamic headscarf. This generates the impression that the article of clothing is a mere symbol and that it can be removed without affecting the bodily sense of self of the woman wearing it. In particular, a *foulard* could be worn around the neck or shoulders rather than the head without its ceasing to be a *foulard* (hence the 'compromise' offered to the young Muslim women in Creil, at the onset of the controversy in 1989, that they drop their headscarves to their shoulders in the classroom).[18] What is elided in the use of the term *foulard* is the cultural-religious bodily practice that veiling defines, as well as the complex and dynamic history in which it participates.[19]

The other term used, the 'veil', succeeds in evoking a history, but one of negative and exotic stereotypes and static, 'regressive' gender practices. 'Veil' is a term that recalls orientalist and colonialist images of Muslim cultures, presenting in a homogeneous way what are historically dynamic and culturally distinctive modes of feminine dress. (Hence the *chador, burqa, niqab* and *hijab* could all be considered forms of veiling, yet in fact designate different forms of dress, contextual significance, and degrees of covering.[20]) To the extent that it is this western representation with its colonial heritage that I wish to critically analyse in this article, I will be employing the term 'veil'. But the limits of my presentation, and of the term itself, should be kept in mind. Specifically, this article does not have within its scope an extensive study of histories, empirical cases, or individual experiences of veiling and unveiling. It does not take up the theological question of veiling; it is neither an apology nor a condemnation of Muslim veils, but

attempts, as much as possible, to bracket these questions in order to study the role that representations and discourses of the veil play in the western context.

In the French context, there are at least two historical moments when Muslim veils have become major focal points: the colonial project to unveil Algerian women (which I will discuss in section 2 in relation to Frantz Fanon's essay on Algeria) and the contemporary debate around Muslim girls wearing the veil in schools. *What, it could be asked, did the Muslim veil come to mean in the contemporary French context, so that a law was called for to exclude it from public schools?* Only when the meaning of veiling became inextricably tied to 'gender oppression', I argue, did passage of the law become possible. (Hence, I do not dispute the importance of the framework of *laïcité* for the law, but question its sufficiency.) In order to show this, I analyse three aspects of the contemporary French discourse on the veil: (1) the kinds of arguments employed in the debate leading up to the law on the veil; (2) the implication of feminism in the pro-law movement; (3) the use of the term 'conspicuous [*ostensible*]' in the formulation of the law.

The contemporary discourse on the veil is understood to have begun in 1989 when three girls wearing the veil were suspended from their *collège* in Creil (Oise).[21] The Minister of Education at the time, Lionel Jospin, in an attempt to contain the issue, appealed to the Conseil d'État for a clarification of the existing law (the 1905 law on *laïcité)*. The Conseil d'État emphasized that students be allowed 'freedom of conscience' and hence the right to wear religious signs, so long as this did not take the form of proselytism.[22] In effect, this meant that veiling had to be considered on a case-by-case basis.[23] The debate was revived in 1994 when the then Minister of Education, François Bayrou, issued a general interdiction on veiling in schools, interpreting every case of the veil as '*ostentatoire*' in itself. This was, however, not upheld by the Conseil d'État, which again referred to the law of 1905 in pointing to the fact that religious signs could not automatically be interpreted as contrary to *laïcité*. Interestingly, it is these decisions by the Conseil d'État that meant that a new law was needed, *if* there were to be a general ban on the veil in public schools.

Appealing to the tradition of *laïcité*, the specifically French-republican version of secularism, does not sufficiently answer the question of how the law on the veil came to appear as necessary in the contemporary French context. Indeed, as some commentators have pointed out, the arguments for such an interdiction based solely on secular grounds did not have sufficient weight (even though the law of 2004 was eventually interpreted as an extension of French secularism).[24] Other arguments were needed before enough momentum could be generated for a law to be passed. This is where I see the argument for gender equality, naturalized as a French republican value, as entering the scene. In this argument, the veil is equated with the oppression of women in Islam, both in other countries like Iran, Algeria and Afghanistan, but also in the French suburbs [*banlieues*] themselves. It is as a symbol of Islamic gender oppression that the veil should be banned from public schools, a space where gender equality is presumed (or desired).[25] Though such an argument had been articulated by some French feminists and intellectuals in 1989,[26] it became a consistent staple of popular media and political discourse around the veil from the late 1990s onward.[27] Indeed, this argument came to the fore during the hearings of the Stasi Commission (the commission instituted in 2003 by the then President, Jacques Chirac, to reflect on the application of the principle of *laïcité* in the

republic).[28] In the commission's report, gender equality was quickly emphasized as continuous with *laïcité* and a core French value; the report also outlined how the French state had failed to protect young Muslim women in the suburbs from communal or Islamic forms of gender oppression.[29]

It should be noted that the Muslim veil takes on a restrictive meaning in this framework, signifying universally and almost exclusively the oppression of women. Significantly, the veil becomes seen as more than just *a* religious sign. It metonymically stands in not only for Islam but for the putative gender oppression of that religion – allowing a continual slippage in pro-law arguments between Islam as religion and Islam as essentially oppressive and hence problematic ('*[le] patriarcat le plus dur de la planète*').[30] It is in the latter sense that the veil becomes a *conspicuous* religious sign. If they were simply religious, students' veils could be seen as expressions of freedom of conscience that should benefit from the protection of the 1905 law on *laïcité*. But as an *oppressive* religious sign, the veil poses a challenge to that law, in particular if that law is understood also to imply gender equality. As unable to protect students from gender oppression, from assumed familial and religious coercion, the law of 1905 is construed as in need of a supplement (the new 2004 law).[31] In this line of argument, freedom from gender oppression effectively overwrites freedom of conscience, broadly defined within French secularism. Implicit in the pro-law argument is the assumption that veiled women cannot be understood to have freedom of conscience, since their agency or subjectivity has been mutilated by familial or communal forms of gender oppression; they have been de-subjectified.[32] Even in cases where young women insisted on their choice to wear the headscarf, their claims were interpreted as instances of bad faith that could not allow for genuine freedom or agency to be expressed.

Through this argument, the 2004 law was construed as a 'feminist' and anti-sexist law – as a way for French society to combat gender oppression in one of its last remaining outposts, within its Muslim communities and in its suburbs. (This was despite the absence of any mention of gender or equality in the text of the law.) Relying on the slippage between Islam and gender oppression, pro-law arguments were able to blur French state secularism (and French national identity to which secularism was posited as central) with gender equality. Through opposition to gender oppression in the guise of Islamic veiling, French society could be identified with a commitment to gender equality (which some commentators even assumed as already attained); a politics of anti-sexism could be endorsed that took as its target the Islamic other (in the suburbs) but did not seem to require any critical self-examination on the part of mainstream French society.[33] Absent was any clear consideration of whether gender equality was indeed part of the secular or national project and what degree of it had really been achieved. As a bastion of the secular project, the public school was seen as '*un lieu d'émancipation*' in general – not merely neutral with respect to religion, but free of gender oppression.[34]

Although the law on the veil did not originate from French feminist circles, it polarized feminists in France in dramatic ways. The law posed for feminists what Christine Delphy has called a dilemma between anti-sexism and anti-racism.[35] Though Delphy shows how this dilemma was a false one and was based on a denial of the sexism of mainstream French society itself,[36] it is clear that this way of formulating the argument meant that many feminists took the anti-sexist route, or chose to remain silent.

The presentation of the project of the law as unquestionably 'feminist' limited what could count as feminist reflection and position-taking in this context. Thus the debate around the law was construed in terms of, on the one hand, feminists who were seen as exemplary and uncompromising in their anti-sexism, tolerating no exceptions (e.g. Elisabeth Badinter), and those, on the other hand, whose feminist consciousness had been compromised by their anti-racist and anti-colonialist commitments.[37] This dichotomy meant that feminist anti-law voices were often defensive, ceding from the start the oppressive nature of Islam and veiling, and opposing the law in its pragmatic effects (e.g. exclusion of already 'oppressed' young women) rather than on its representational and conceptual grounds.[38] It also meant that more complex feminist analyses, problematizing the very assumptions of the debate, were not heard. Indeed, the few feminists, like Christine Delphy, who did consistently and unapologetically speak out against the law were portrayed by the law's proponents as anti-feminist.[39] Significantly, there was no subject-position within this debate from which veiled women could speak as feminist; their access to feminist consciousness was excluded by the 'false consciousness' or bad faith that their acceptance of veiling was taken to reveal.[40] In a move that posited the mutual exclusion of feminist subjectivity and veiling, both Muslim women who veiled and feminists who questioned the law were relegated to the margins of public discourse on the veil.[41] Here I wish to point to two mechanisms that can be encountered in other discourses on the veil: the de-subjectification and exclusion of veiled Muslim women, in particular, from a debate that concerned them most directly (see section 4); and the way in which the pro-law movement took up, or more properly speaking coopted, feminist and anti-sexist arguments, thereby placing the burden of sexism on a particular othered and racialized group, in this case French Muslims (see section 3).

It is in relation to such othering that the term '*ostensiblement*' takes on importance in the formulation of the law.[42] It points to a visibility that is conspicuous and hence stands out in comparison to other religious signs, which themselves do not attract attention and, though also visible, remain 'discreet' or normalized.[43] In light of the debates leading up to the law the term '*ostensible*' points to multiple registers. First, we may ask, how is it that a sign is visible *as* religious? The assumption in most French discourse on *laïcité* is that all religious signs are equally foregrounded, and hence made visible, against a neutral, secular background from which religion is absent (in public schools, administration, government). This is understood to apply as much to crosses as veils. But French secularism was built on a history of Christianity; that it has had to accommodate and coexist with Catholicism has meant, as some commentators argue, that secular public space is not a generalized but a structured absence.[44] Secular space in fact holds the trace of religious practices that were removed but not contradicted; in other words, this space is structured such that certain religious practices can coexist with it, even though they are no longer explicitly inscribed within it. The typical French school week provides an example – with time off on Wednesday, traditionally in order to accommodate students taking catechism classes, the week extended until recently through part of Saturday and designates Sunday the day of rest on the weekend.[45]

This invisible structure of secular space (and time) means that cultural-religious practices are rendered differentially visible when put into coexistence with it. Some attract attention more than others: we may imagine that some signs and practices appear

compatible with this space (and hence 'discreet'); others are indifferent (with an undecided status, more visible in some cases than in others); and further signs are in conflict and hence 'conspicuous'.[46] But we may also ask, what makes the veil visible in such a way as to require its active exclusion? During the debates around the veil (1989–2004), veiling moved from being seen as an indifferent sign by some (problematic only in cases where political or religious proselytism was perceived) to a conspicuous sign in all cases.[47] This move, I believe, is due to the inscription of gender oppression as an essential feature of the representation of the Muslim veil. Parallel to this move, the invisible structure of secular space was reconfigured through a further dimension of sense, that of the presumed gender equality of French society (conceived as continuous with and even an outcome of secularism). Against this complex ground, veiling was doubly adumbrated and came to appear as an over-determined figure – not merely visible in belonging to a different religion but hypervisible as the symbol of gender oppression of that religion. (In the rest of this article, I analyse gender oppression as the schema through which the hypervisibility of the veil is constructed and by means of which it is racialized.)

It is in this way that veiling was seen as *opposed* to French secular space. I would add that it is also in this way that a specific heteronormative and heterosocial gendering of public space – constituted through particular feminine habits of dress, behaviour and *mixité* (coeducation) – was reinforced as the norm of French public space. In arguments against veiling, *mixité* is often evoked as *the* form that gender equality takes in French secular space.[48] Left invisible in these discussions is the historical particularity of this gendering practice (coeducation is relatively recent in French schools) and its continued patriarchal configuration of public space.[49] No comparison is then possible to other gendering practices such as veiling (heteronormative in a different way).[50] Through the lens of gender, what is conspicuous is what does not fit the gender practice accepted as norm (and posited as most egalitarian). Other practices are perceived not as another gendering that generates different subjects, nor as another kind of sexism, but as *the* principal form of sexism that needs to be eradicated. What the term '*ostensible*' finally brings us to ask is: *for whom* and *within which field of vision*? To answer this, we must look back to another French discourse on the veil and to the way in which vision (and so hypervisibility and invisibility) work within a field already mapped by race and gender.

2 Vision and the racialization of the 'veil'

In his essay 'Algeria Unveiled', Fanon describes the French colonial project to unveil Algerian women (a project that took on explicit dimensions from the 1930s onwards).[51] Fanon's analysis of this colonial project allows us to understand the degree to which the veil was, for the French colonizer, metonymically identified not only with the Algerian woman but with Algerian culture as a whole. The 'unveiling' of Algeria was then coextensive with the colonial project to destroy its culture, as Fanon explains (DC 37–8/19). Foreshadowing the over-determined character of French perceptions of the Muslim veil in the current context, what comes through clearly in Fanon's account is the *homogeneity* of perceptions and reactions to the veil whether at the level of French colonial governance or individuals (DC 37/18). In reading Fanon's essay, I will attempt to reveal

the structures of the visual field that made such a perception possible – over-determining how veiled Muslim women were seen and represented.

To start, Fanon's explanation of the unity of reactions to the veil attributes it to the material unity of the veil itself: 'The woman seen in her white veil unifies the perception that one has of Algerian feminine society. Obviously, what we have here is a uniform that tolerates no modification, no variant' (DC 36/17). Yet in the footnote on the same page, Fanon admits the wide variation in veiling practices in Algeria: women in rural areas are often unveiled, as are Kabyle women except, he notes, in large cities (DC 36 n./17 n.). The *haik* (the specific Algerian form of veiling) applies, then, only to women in urban centres.[52] The same could be said of Algerian feminine dress as Fanon says of masculine garb, it undergoes regional modifications, allowing 'a certain margin of choice, a modicum of heterogeneity' (DC 36/17). Why then the homogeneity in colonial perceptions of, and the rigidity of reactions to, the veil? What remains in question throughout Fanon's essay, and despite the explanations he gives, is why it is the veiled Muslim woman in particular who becomes the focus of the colonizer's gaze and cultural attack. Fanon does, however, provide several openings through which to pursue an answer.

We must begin by scrutinizing the *visibility* of the veil in the colonial context. Fanon's description of the colonial perception of Algerian women is rendered in terms of the visibility and invisibility that the veil – as a material and symbolic sign of cultural difference and barrier to possessive vision – operates for the colonizer. Fanon begins: 'The way people clothe themselves, together with the traditions of dress and finery that custom implies, constitutes the most distinctive form of a society's uniqueness, *that is to say the one that is most immediately perceptible*' (DC 35/16; emphasis added). What is most visible is thus essentialized as the marker of a society's difference. But most visible to whom? 'In the Arab world, for example, the veil worn by women is at once noticed [*vu*] by the tourist' (DC 35/16); '[f]or the tourist and foreigner, the veil demarcates both Algerian society and its feminine component' (DC 35–6/17). Fanon explicitly inscribes the gaze – an outsider, a tourist, a colonizing subject – in this vision. French perception of the veil is no innocent seeing, but a gaze made possible by a world order where French subjects can travel to, reside in and 'observe' Algeria – in other words, by French colonialism. Thus the question why the veil comes to be seen as the marker of Islamic or Algerian cultural difference brings us to the already constituted field of vision of the French observer. This field of vision has been structured by colonialism, in terms of both material exploitation and representational violence. Colonization functions not only through economic and political hegemony, but also by means of an apparatus of representation that over-determines perceptions of the colonized.[53] This representational apparatus is the lens through which the colonial observer sees the colonized society. But this lens is also a mirror. The representational apparatus of colonialism not only constitutes the image of the 'native' but posits this image in opposition to a certain self-perception of colonial society and against an implicit normalization of gender within that society (as we shall see in section 3).

This process of othering is one which Fanon has described in the context of racialization in *Black Skin, White Masks*.[54] Though I argue in the rest of this article (beyond Fanon) that the process by which the veiled Muslim woman is 'othered' in western and

colonial perception is double – her racialization being inseparably intertwined with gender – I also maintain that this othering is a form of racism continuous with the racialization that Fanon has described. (Specifically, I will argue that western perceptions or representations of the veil can be characterized as 'cultural racism'.) Just as the law on the veil in 2004 was not only a law that targeted a particular religious group, but was also invested in defining and reinforcing a certain sense of French identity, so the French colonial attack on veiling in Algeria was more than an attempt to destroy that society (though it was undoubtedly that). It was also the means by which colonial society attempted to construct its self-image; more precisely, it was the mirror or foil through which colonial ways of seeing and gendering could become norm.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes the way in which the anti-black racism of white culture constitutes the 'black' as other to the 'white' self through a mechanism of abjection. Here, the undesirable alterity of the self is projected or transferred onto the other.[55] In this process of othering, both 'white' and 'black' identities are constructed, and though they are constituted relative to one another, these identities are taken to be mutually exclusive. Excluded from the 'white' self are any perceived impurities, undesirable incongruities and differences that may trouble its univocity, stability and sameness. These qualities are projected onto the 'other', now seen in these terms. Only through this exclusion, which operates to essentialize both black and white identities, can whiteness be seen as pure and unified, as a stable identity. The abjection of 'blackness' functions to define the borders of the 'white' self. The essentialist logic of racist society thus sees the relative constructs of 'black' and 'white' in absolute terms.

It does this by naturalizing race as a property of the black, material body, and specifically of skin color. In this way, race becomes seen as a natural category and not as a social, cultural and historical construct; the mechanism by which 'black' and 'white' identities are produced is effaced. The seeming naturalness of these categories works to justify the very racist logic that produced them. The myth or representation of the 'black' as naturally inferior structures the visual field and over-determines 'normal' perception in racist society; 'black' is seen as inferior and superiority, including moral superiority, is by default a characteristic of white identity. It is then, on Fanon's account, racist society that creates the 'black' and, we can say, colonialism that creates the 'native'. As 'other' in the colonial imaginary or collective unconscious, the black or native plays the role of 'scapegoat' for the collective guilt of white society.[56]

In the cases of both skin color and veiling, racialization functions largely through a visual register (although different perceptual, imaginary and discursive dimensions are also implicated).[57] Extending Fanon by drawing on the phenomenological work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Linda Martín Alcoff, I want to ask after the role of vision in the naturalization of 'race' to the body. This naturalization is made possible, I contend, by the intentional structure of vision and its reliance on habit. To say that vision is 'intentional' in the phenomenological sense is to say that it is constitutive of the physiognomy and sense of what is seen (which does not preclude this constitution being motivated by a receptivity or affective openness to the world). Vision is not a mere neutral recording of the visible. As Merleau-Ponty notes, we learn to see.[58] This means that vision not only *makes* visible, it does so *differentially* according to sedimented habits of seeing – according to the tacit ways the body relates to and moves in the

world, allowing certain aspects of that world to be foregrounded. Such habits of seeing owe to a social, cultural and historical horizon, as Alcoff has argued, a visual field structured in such ways as to motivate, without fully determining, certain forms of perception, certain meaning-making schemata.[59] (Thus, in my account, the visual field of colonialism motivates the othering of the 'native', and that of western phallocentrism the production of western, white femininity as object of the gaze.) Through sedimentation and habituation, the constitutive operations of vision remain tacit or pre-reflective; its intentionality works in us without our reflective awareness, as Merleau-Ponty has shown.[60] It is the perceived object that is seen, as figure against ground, while the habits of visual perception remain themselves invisible. We see *through* our habits; we do not see them, Alcoff notes.[61] Invisible is the gaze (seeing body) in its constitutive and dynamic relation to the object, as well as the historical horizon and spatial ground against which that object is adumbrated. Indeed, the object appears *visible in itself*, acontextually and absolutely, while the relational and perspectival conditions of that visibility are elided. It is in this way that visual qualities are *naturalized* to the visible body, attributed to it alone.

Though vision is habitual, not all vision others or racializes in the way Fanon describes (that is to say that vision is not inevitably racist, but contextually and historically so).[62] Significantly, racist vision builds on the intentionality and naturalization of all vision, upon the self-reflexive erasure of vision before the visibility of its object. *But racializing vision is both more and less than this*. Hence, though I agree with Alcoff that racist vision is, like all vision, habitual, I want to take the account further to ask after the distinctive intransigence and de-humanization of racist vision by means of this *more and less*.[63] Racializing vision is *less* in that the responsivity and affectivity of vision are circumscribed – the openness of vision to other ways of being, which may destabilize or shatter its perceptual schemata, delimited. The dynamic ability of vision to change is partially closed down. Racialized bodies are not only seen as naturally inferior, they *cannot be seen otherwise*. The veiled body is not merely seen as oppressed, but cannot be seen as a subject who takes up and constitutes itself through that oppression (see section 4). In its over-determination, racist vision is also *more*. The mechanism of othering, which undergirds this vision, sustains itself by means of the very representations or perceptions it motivates. Hence the homogeneity and rigidity of this vision, its resistance to change. In a narcissistic and self-justifying move, racist habits of seeing inscribe their cause in the racialized body, positing themselves as the objective or natural reaction to the seen. Cultural racism is a development of this racist logic, as we shall see. In this vein, the desire to unveil 'the veiled woman' is posited as a reaction to her veiling, even though this way of seeing at once assumes and produces the image of the veil as limit. Racist vision can be said to be *representational* in both senses outlined above – hence my use of the terms vision and representation conjointly in this article.

If visibility/invisibility are not in themselves properties of objects but are meaningful only relative to the position of the gaze in a visual field, a desire to see and a way of looking, then the visibility of veiled women to the colonial gaze must be contextualized to the particular field of gender relations to which that gaze belongs (and against which veiling appears conspicuous). That perception of the veil is neither neutral nor universal is illustrated, in Fanon's essay 'Algeria Unveiled', by the different ways in which

Algerian and French men perceive veiling. Whereas the veil is hypervisible to the French male observer, Algerian men, Fanon says, do not *see* veiled women; more precisely, their gaze is trained 'not to perceive the feminine profile, not to pay attention to women' (DC 44/26). In a field of vision where gender and familial structures are generated and defined in part through veiling practices (who unveils in the company of whom), it is not surprising that veiled women do not appear conspicuous. Significant, however, is Fanon's claim that the typical Algerian male attitude to veiled women is neither sexually charged nor objectifying (DC 44/26), though still presumably sexist and heteronormative (given Fanon's account of the Algerian family, DC 105–7/90–2). This affective indifference or deference to veiled women indicates a different patriarchal and sexually differentiated social order, a differently configured field of vision, that should lead us to question the partiality of dominant western perceptions of veiled Muslim women.

Indeed, generalized perceptions of Muslim women as sexually 'repressed' and passive bodies, hidden behind their veils, are very much products of a western and colonial way of seeing.[64] This phallocentric gaze – what Marilyn Frye has famously called 'arrogant vision' – institutes (western, white) 'woman' as object of male desire, defining her subject-position and the means of recognition available to her relative to that gaze.[65] Representations of veiled women – as sites of sexual repression and gender oppression – are generated by such vision, specifically by a gaze that desires possession of women's bodies and 'wants to see' (DC 44/26). For this vision, veiling constitutes an obstacle to desire and hence an object of frustration and aggressiveness (as Fanon shows by analysing the everyday attitudes and violent dream content of French colonial subjects, DC 44–6/26–9). But to say that the veil is an obstacle or barrier to vision is to already assume a particular way of looking as norm. It should be noted that the image of the veiled woman is not merely a product of such vision, but at once serves to ground and sustain it (instantiating the logic of racist vision outlined above). Although the image of the veiled woman is represented as a limitation to vision, in being posed this limit also constitutes the possibility of transgression. Thus it is in terms of the representation of the veil as *obstacle* that a totalizing and transgressive vision, one that seeks to expose and possess colonized society (and women's bodies in general), can define itself. While colonizing vision takes veiling (and the society to which it belongs) as other, I would argue that veiling is *constitutive* of this vision, serving both as a concrete point of application for this vision and as a negative mirror for the norms of womanhood and gender that this vision assumes. At the same time, the representation of the veil as obstacle or limit allows the general *desirability* of unveiling to be posited – a move that normalizes the availability of women's bodies to the colonial gaze.[66] The project of unveiling is then not an accidental aspect of French colonialism, but belongs to the structure of colonial vision itself.

This explains the complex and paradoxical positionality of the veiled woman in colonial and western visual fields. First, while the veil is *hypervisible* as oppressive and repressive barrier, Muslim women 'behind the veil' are not merely invisible to the western gaze, but are *made invisible* as subjects. As racialized in this visual field, they cannot be seen otherwise; as gendered, the subject-position available is that of object to the colonial male gaze, a subject-position which demands unveiling. Women who continue to veil seem to place themselves beyond (colonial male) recognition. They have no place within this heterosocial and scopic economy. Not even objects, their ability to return the

gaze, to see and to actively make meaning, cannot be imagined within this field.[67] The obstacle that the veil constitutes for the colonial male gaze is naturalized to the veil as *itself* limiting to the women wearing it.[68] As Fanon notes, the Algerian woman is 'pictured as humiliated, sequestered, cloistered. … transformed by the Algerian man into an inert, demonetized, indeed dehumanized object' (DC 38/19).

Second, in the colonial attack on the veil, it is not only Muslim women who are othered, but also Muslim men, family life, and culture. The veil becomes a *focal point* in the othering of Islam. This is because the oppression of Muslim women (visually identified with veiling practices) is attributed uniquely to gender relations *within* Islam or Muslim culture. In this regard, the Muslim man can be 'denounced and described as medieval and barbaric', the family defined as the place of women's seclusion and repression (DC 38/19). The complex difference of Muslim women is reduced to the dimension of gender oppression, construed as existing solely within Islam.[69] Third, the constitutive role of the image of the veil, as anchor for the othering and totalizing form of vision that colonialism requires, remains a *blind spot*. Not only does the image of the veil justify the aggressivity that colonialism operates towards Muslim women and their society as a whole, it also serves as a foil to colonial self-representations and gender relations. Thus, while the veil is only too visible as material barrier, its role in sustaining western notions of identity and gender remains invisible. I will turn to this constitutive function in what follows, examining more closely the imbrication of race and gender in western representations of veiling.

3 Feminist dilemmas: Gender oppression and cultural racism

Discourses on the veil employ gender in a way that makes their racialization of Muslim women difficult to discern. Indeed, these discourses constitute a form of (cultural) racism that goes under the guise of feminist liberation. The dilemma posed to feminists by such discourse was apparent in the public debate that led up to the 2004 French law and in French colonial policies aimed at 'saving', or unveiling, Muslim women in Algeria. Such discourse is not limited to the French context; variations on this theme have emerged repeatedly in modern colonial and post-colonial settings.[70] Leila Ahmed has shown how British colonial focus on the 'woman question' in early 20th-century Egypt was constructed in terms of a 'colonial-feminist' discourse that identified Islam as oppressive to women and thus morally justified colonial rule.[71]

More recently, the discourse put forward to justify the United States-led war on Afghanistan (2001–2) deserves our attention.[72] There the image of the *burqa*-clad body of the Afghan woman was used to designate 'Islamic fundamentalism' as the enemy, providing an amalgamation of Islam and oppression in a visible and immediately identifiable form.[73] Though this image was supposed to solicit indignation towards the oppressors (here Taliban), the 'otherness' and abjection of the image also made it possible for the US population to dis-identify with Afghan women (and Afghans more generally) – a mechanism that functioned to hide the devastating effects of the war on those women. By claiming to oppose gender oppression, represented as the sole purview of 'the terrorists and the Taliban', a unified and liberatory sense of 'Americanness' could

be posed. Laura Bush's radio address on 17 November 2001 instantiated this logic: the 'blessings of American life' are evoked by means of the contrast with the 'brutal oppression of women' and the inhumanity of 'the terrorists and the Taliban', represented as incapable of loving their 'women and children'.[74] Although this appeal to the liberation of Afghan women on the part of the Bush administration was criticized for its opportunism (in light of that administration's disregard of women's rights in general), the reaction to the war on the part of feminists was largely characterized by a belief that Afghan women were in need of saving. Thus such organizations as the 'Feminist Majority', whose campaign against the Taliban predated the 11 September attacks, could be found to support the war despite (and indeed because of) their purported concern for the conditions of Afghan women. Mainstream feminist discussions were formulated in terms of a dilemma between opposition to a war that would certainly affect women most severely and the desire to overthrow the (gender-) repressive regime of the Taliban.[75] This is not unlike the dilemma that was articulated by many French feminists around the law on the veil in 2004: support a law which excludes only women, or accept a form of religious and communal gender oppression.

The dangers for feminist theorizing and solidarity that such 'colonial' or imperial feminist discourse constitutes have been shown by theorists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Marnia Lazreg and Christine Delphy, to name a few.[76] Extending their analyses, my point is not only that the image of the veiled woman reduces the complex difference of Muslim women to the sole dimension of gender,[77] but that the projection of gender oppression onto the veil *is the means* by which racialization takes place in this case. Discourses on the veil thus present themselves as overtly feminist while their racism remains hidden.

To understand the specific form of racism involved in representations of the veil, the structure of racialization presented by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* needs to be complicated. At stake is not merely the addition of two dimensions of identity, race and gender, but an understanding of how they rely on and function through one another. While we could say that the abjection of the 'veiled woman' permits the identity of 'western woman' to be constituted as a desirable ideal, we should not forget that this identity represents the feminine 'other' within a patriarchal system of gender relations. Projected onto the 'veiled woman' are not simply those qualities that are excluded from the western norm of femininity, but also, I would argue, the mechanism of gender oppression of that western patriarchal system itself. This helps explain the positive valence of the norm of 'western woman' so constructed. Here, we have a construction that takes place on two levels. (1) What constitutes the ideal of the feminine in a particular western imaginary is negatively reflected in the counter-image of the Muslim woman. (For example, the norm of western, white woman as body available to the male gaze is posed by being opposed to the sexually 'repressed' and hidden Muslim woman; see section 2.) (2) At the same time, all the weight of the process of gender othering or oppression, the very mechanism that sets up the western norm of femininity, is projected onto the shoulders of the veiled woman and specifically onto her veil. It is in this way that the veil becomes the most visible marker of Islam in western eyes, for it is seen as the symbol of the gender oppression of *that* culture. Focus on the veil, its hypervisibility, deflects attention away from the patriarchal structures of western or colonial society itself,

which become invisible in contrast. More so, this mechanism fosters the impression that women within western social orders are neither oppressed nor bounded by gender norms, i.e. that western woman is 'free'.

This projection of gender oppression onto Muslim veils places 'western' and 'Muslim' women in opposed and non-reciprocal subject-positions, even though their images are implicitly constructed relative to one another. This mutual exclusion means that commonalties between women and between cultures are hidden from view, and that hybrid forms of feminine subjectivity that blur the boundaries of Muslim and western become unimaginable.[78] The contemporary debate around the law on the veil in France is particularly revealing in this regard. For this debate posited white French women as unaffected by sexism, beholden subjects of a gender-equal society, while projecting the burden of gender oppression onto the veils of Muslim women, officially no less French but 'from the suburbs'. This sustained contrast not only produced dis-identification with veiled women, but also permitted the exclusion of their voices from feminist debate and from being recognized as genuine expressions of female subjectivity.[79]

It is by means of this projection of gender oppression that the oppositional difference of 'West' and Islam – and the identification of 'West' with gender equality, modernity and freedom – are made possible. But this racialization does not merely make use of the concept of gender oppression, as if 'gender' were a neutral given that could be abstracted from contextual operations of power. Rather what we recognize as gender is already *racialized*. Western and white, heterosexual gender relations are naturalized by means of the contrast instituted with other forms of gendering (here veiling) represented as in themselves oppressive. Thus, while Islam is taken to repress and deform feminine subjectivity and sexuality, it is assumed that western systems of gender allow femininity free (and natural) expression.[80] In what follows, I will argue that this racialization can be called 'cultural racism'. What is differentially visible is not skin color as such, but culture defined largely through the perceived presence of gender oppression (ostensibly embodied in veiling practices). Significantly, since the hypervisibility of the veil is configured as gender oppression, the racism that structures this perception is covered over by the manifest anti-sexist and feminist concern for the liberation of Muslim women. As Christine Delphy has argued in the French context, it is this conflation of racism with anti-sexism that confronts western feminists with an apparent dilemma in the case of the veil.[81] It has been my aim to show that discourses on the veil, which pose such a dilemma, not only perpetuate a paternalistic attitude toward Muslim women – an attitude that is inseparably sexist and racist – but also reinforce blindness to gender oppression in western contexts. The politics they inscribe is hence not only racist but also anti-feminist.

It may be asked how the process of racialization that I have been describing in the case of the veil corresponds to the ordinary sense of 'racism' linked to skin color. I would argue that the cultural racism I describe is continuous with color racism; it is neither new nor exceptional.[82] Though differences clearly exist in how 'race' is understood in each case – whether as biological inheritance or as cultural genealogy and belonging – it is important to note that bodily difference plays a role in both forms of racism. Cultural racism is not merely intolerance of the 'spirit' of another culture, it is directed at bodies, which this racist vision materially inscribes and perceives as culturally different. This racism naturalizes cultural difference to visible features of the body, including clothing.

Hence the backwards belief that it is the ostensible visibility of bodily practices, such as veiling, that 'causes' racist reactions in western society. As Etienne Balibar notes, racist reactions are construed as a 'natural' response to the 'intolerable' or 'inassimilable' practices of the cultural other (a variation on the way racist vision is taken to be caused by the black body).[83] Yet it is sometimes claimed that this is not really 'racism' (or merely 'neo-racism'), since a simple solution exists to alleviate it: forcibly or voluntarily changing one's cultural practice or clothing (e.g. unveiling). Such a claim is doubly problematic, in my view, for (1) it overlooks the way in which clothing forms an integrated part of one's bodily sense of self, and (2) it misconceives the kind of racism involved.

Clothing is often seen as an artificial envelope that can be removed to reveal a 'natural', biological body. What is missed is the way in which clothing constitutes a bodily extension that cannot be removed without transforming one's bodily sense of self. As phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty have shown, through habituation, clothing is no longer felt as an object apart from the lived body, but comes to form an integrated part of one's body schema. Bodily extensions (which include articles of clothing but also tools) become themselves dimensions through which the subject perceives and interacts with the world and others.[84] Crucial for my argument, such extensions affectively and kinaesthetically transform and recast one's sense of bodily space (as well as one's body image). The limits of one's body are felt not at the skin, but at the surface and edges of the clothing one wears, redefining one's sense of 'here'. In navigating one's surroundings, it is in terms of this 'here' that a sense of 'there', an external space, is configured. Though I do not mean to reduce veiling to a simple article of clothing – since it takes part in subject-formation in arguably more complex ways, at once spiritual, religious, conventional and cultural – both veiling and clothing more generally should be understood as more than superficial 'cover'. None of this is to imply an essentialist view of veiling, nor to assign a univocal meaning to veiling experiences. What I mean to point out are the ways in which veiling can be formative of the subject, so that instead of liberation, unveiling is experienced as bodily disintegration or immobilization.[85]

Moreover, the recommendation that Muslim women unveil in order to eliminate the reactions of intolerance directed against them misconstrues the kind of racism involved. For in cultural racism, culture becomes nature.[86] Bodies are not only perceived as belonging to a different culture, they are also seen to be culturally determined and inferior as a result.[87] Thus, the veil is seen as both a marker of Muslim culture and an explanation of its inferiority, just as skin color is seen as the site of racial difference and biological determinism. The determinism that characterizes cultural racism goes along with a construal of the other culture or religion (here Islam) as static, 'closed' and incapable of progress – in contrast to western cultures which are understood to be 'open' and hence perfectible, to be spaces that enable, rather than determine and limit, individual expression.[88] It is in this context that clothing becomes differentially visible. Whereas veiling is seen as 'cultural' or 'religious' (with a univocal and determinate sense that is oppressive), clothing which is part of mainstream practice in western societies is taken to express fluid and heterogeneous individual choice (e.g. gendered modalities of dress such as high-heeled shoes or trousers are not generally perceived as either limiting or conventional). At the same time, since veiling is perceived as homogeneous and unchanging across historical periods and contexts, this reinforces the representation of Islam as

closed; western dress, on the other hand, is seen as instantiating the historical dynamism and progress of western societies. It is in terms of such cultural racism that the homogeneity in western perceptions of the veil can be understood.

4 Invisibilization of Muslim female subjectivities

Ultimately, it is not only clothing as an envelope of the body but the body as a whole that is racialized in cultural racism. In western representations of veiled women, the veiled body is over-determined as an 'oppressed' body. Because of the rigidity of this racist vision – because it is structured such that it cannot see otherwise (as argued in section 2) – Islamic gender oppression becomes the sole dimension through which veiled women are seen. At the same time, this gender oppression is construed as an unchanging and static dimension, essentialized to Islam as a 'closed' religion.[89] The over-determination of its oppression finally means that veiling is seen as a kind of material prison – perceptually limiting and immobilizing, but also affectively, psychically and physically disabling. The veil is not merely perceived as a mode of gender oppression in Islam, one that could be reconfigured, reappropriated, or subverted; rather oppression is taken to belong to the materiality of the veil itself, molding the veiled body in ways that exclude its subjectivity or agency. These two seemingly contradictory operations go together: the *hypervisibility* of Muslim veils in western perceptions and the assumed *invisibility* of veiled women, what I am calling their de-subjectification. It is by means of the naturalization of oppression to the veil that the veiled woman is at once hypervisible as oppressed and invisible as subject.

In this sense, the subject-positions available to Muslim women in western representations are circumscribed in advance, scripted according to their assumed de-subjectification in Islam.[90] But the racialization of Muslim women does more than represent veiled women as passive victims, it also enforces a space that imaginatively and often practically excludes their multiple subjectivities, reducing the complex meanings and enactments of their veiling to Islamic oppression. The aggressivity of colonial attitudes to the veil was already an instance of this. More specifically, we can discern a certain *invisibilization* of veiled women in the contexts cited in this article.[91] It has been noted that the voices of veiled women were markedly absent from the contemporary French debate on the veil. French media and press coverage of veiling incidents in public schools could be seen to construct this voicelessness, as did the official discourse.[92] The Stasi Commission, whose report culminated in the recommendation of the law on religious signs, publicly interviewed only two women who wore the headscarf; their testimonies took place on the last day of public hearings, without being able to make a difference in the outcome of the report which was due less than a week later.[93] Moreover, the 2004 French law itself can be seen as a mechanism to exclude veiled women from the public space of schools and hence a way of rendering their agency invisible.[94] The more recent proposal of a law in 2010 to ban the face veil (or so-called 'integral veil') from public services and spaces in France can be understood as an extension of this logic.[95] That this veil covers the face – rendering it invisible in public and, in principle, to male eyes – is read as a sign both of veiled women's unwillingness to communicate and their muteness. Despite the fact that the face

veil does not impede speech (or the ability of a woman to look through it), her subjectivity as one who sees and speaks is excluded in this representation.

In the US discourse on Afghanistan, Afghan women were represented as weighed down and silenced by their *burqas* and, as a result, de-humanized. They were recognized only as 'downtrodden ghosts' in the US media, and the effects of the war on such anonymous and insubstantial beings could be easily forgotten.[96] In the case of Quebec where girls wearing the *hijab* were banned from specific sporting events and women wearing the *niqab* were excluded from voting and language education, veiling was represented as a material barrier. The veil was either seen as a physical obstacle to safe and fluid mobility (in sporting activities); or it was presented as a barrier to intersubjective recognition and communication (hence hindering the participation in, and transparency of, elections and obstructing learning in the classroom). Although it was the veil, in its multiple forms, that was represented as immobilizing or obfuscating, it was again the reaction to the veil that immobilized the women involved and excluded them from sporting events, educational institutions and voting booths.

Thus veiling is perceived as, and in a certain sense *made* into, an obstacle to veiled women's subjectification – a form of immobilization, invisibilization and silencing. What comes to the fore in the contexts studied is the representation of veiling as an obstacle to becoming or flourishing as a subject. Complicating this representation is the way in which veiling practices are often adopted rather than imposed. This means that the veiled woman is seen as oppressed and immobilized by her veil, needing to be 'saved', but she is also often assumed to be complicit in her own oppression and hence incomprehensibly renouncing her activity, mobility and subjecthood. What seems unimaginable is veiled, Muslim female *subjectivity* – an active sense of self that may be constituted through veiling practices.[97] The oppressive function of the veil (whether adopted or imposed) is equated with a passivity so complete that it is de-subjectifying. Unveiling is then understood as the sole means not only to freedom but to subject-formation.

But Muslim women should not be understood to be reducible to the de-subjectified scripts assigned to them. Indeed, there are multiple ways in which Muslim women take up, resignify and subvert the invisibilization to which they are submitted. Thus the insistence of veiled Muslim schoolgirls on their place in the French public school system can be read as an attempt to resignify not only veiling but also French identity – to destabilize the borders of what is meant by 'French' and its exclusion of what is 'Islamic'.[98] That the response to this attempt took the form of a law shows the anxieties raised by this 'hybridization' of French identity and its perceived contamination of national, secular space. The re-creation of veiling as a place of subversion and resistance was already part of Algerian women's participation in revolutionary struggle, as Fanon recounts. The invisibilization of the woman 'behind the veil', which structured the French colonial vision of Algeria, was used against the colonizer to smuggle arms, provide protective cover, and maintain a certain 'safe' space into which the colonial gaze could not penetrate (DC 61–2/44–5).

This sense of veiling, as protection and subjective space, allows us to see how veiling is not reducible to the de-subjectification that its western image presumes. As 'portable seclusion' or 'mobile home', to cite Lila Abu-Lughod, veiling can provide the place within which a certain sense of bodily self is formed, allowing participation and mobility

in public spaces without contradicting conventions of modesty, community and custom (which define that space as gendered in various ways).[99] More so, veiling in some contexts provides the very means for women's self-constitution as pious subjects (as Saba Mahmood has recently shown in the case of the women's mosque movement in Egypt).[100] At the same time, in other contexts, the veil has been resignified as a place of political self-awareness and as a form of 'Islamic feminism'.[101] It should be noted that these different senses of veiling are not exhaustive of its possibilities, nor are all manifestations of veiled subjectivity necessarily subversive or feminist. By pointing to the multiplicity of meanings which veiling can take and its implication in subject-formation in different Muslim and western contexts, my aim is to indicate the complexity of the question without assigning any one meaning, liberatory or oppressive, to veiling. There is neither an essence to Muslim veils, nor is veiling easily reducible to any one dimension of sense.

The project of this article has been a critical one: to interrupt the stereotypical schemata according to which veiled Muslim women are seen and represented in western discourses. To do so, the tendency to focus on 'the veil' as a singular and homogeneous object had to be resisted. My approach, rather, has been to turn scrutiny back onto the vision that constructs veiling as oppressive, asking after its inner workings and elisions. For if Muslim women are not to be reduced to their images in western discourses, if other ways of living and making oneself as a subject are to become recognizable, then the structural limitations of these discourses and their investments in oppositional notions of gender and identity must be revealed. My aim has been to insert hesitation into habitual western perceptions of Muslim women, so as to critically deflect the desire to look and represent, commencing instead the effort of speaking with and listening.

Notes

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1. See Éric Raoult and André Gerin, *Proposition de résolution réaffirmant la prééminence des valeurs républicaines sur les pratiques communautaristes et condamnant le port du voile intégral comme contraire à ces valeurs, no. 2272* (Paris: Assemblée Nationale, déposée le 28 janvier 2010). 'Full veil [voile intégral]' was meant to capture forms of veiling that covered more than the head. With this term that evoked at once Islamic 'integrism' and a physically totalizing cover, several forms of veiling could be amalgamated, notably full body covering (e.g. burqa) and face veils (e.g. niqab). The case of Faiza Mabchour who wore a face veil and who was refused French citizenship in June 2008 (after appealing her case to the Conseil d'État) should also be recalled as an earlier recurrence of this question of the veil.
2. See Hanifa Chérifi, *Application de la loi du 15 mars 2004 sur le port des signes religieux ostensibles dans les établissements d'enseignement publics: Rapport au ministre de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche* (Paris: Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche, 2005).
3. In this vein, the law on the veil is understood as a symptom of *laïcité*, itself construed as a 'French exception' (an oft used term to describe the way in which French national identity is defined as exceptional in its cultural, economic, or public policy). Here, this designates the

French solution to the problem of demarcating the political from the religious and of defining the 'neutrality' of public space.

4. Christine Delphy, 'Une affaire française', in *Le foulard islamique en questions*, ed. Charlotte Nordmann (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2004), pp. 64–71.
5. To limit the treatment of the veil to French nationalism or secularism misses how such discourses are themselves constructed *through* representations of the veil, not only in the French context but in other nationalist discourses. This risks either naturalizing the French law as a necessary extension of *laïcité* or excusing other western policies towards immigrants and their descendants by comparison with the French way (e.g. Canadian or US policies of integration or assimilation).
6. Though the *hijab* was not banned from the public school system in Quebec. Several events illustrate this tendency: a Muslim girl from Ottawa was asked to remove her *hijab*, for purported safety reasons, at a soccer tournament in Laval in February 2007; she refused and her team withdrew from the tournament. A team of Quebec Muslim girls withdrew from a Tae Kwon Do tournament in Longueuil in April 2007, after the provincial Tae Kwon Do federation decided that the *hijab* (which would be worn under the mandatory protective helmet) contravened the dress code and posed a safety concern. Three days before the provincial election in March 2007, Quebec's chief returning officer issued a new election rule requiring all voters to uncover their faces for identification purposes; this reversed an earlier rule that allowed alternatives to facial identification. The decision came after several days of media controversy over women being allowed to vote while wearing the *niqab* (face veil) and emails to Elections Quebec from Quebeckers threatening to arrive at polling stations with masks. Though few women wear the *niqab* in Quebec and none asked for special accommodation while voting, the issue became an election item. All these events can be inscribed in the 'reasonable accommodation' debate in Quebec culminating in the work of the governmental commission headed by Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor ('Commission de consultation sur les pratiques d'accommodement reliées aux différences culturelles' whose final report was published in May 2008 under the title *Fonder l'avenir: Le temps de la conciliation*). More recently in 2010, a woman wearing the *niqab* was expelled from the French-language class for recently arrived immigrants that she had been attending at Cégep Saint-Laurent, in a suburb of Montreal. The decision by the Quebec Ministry of Immigration was a response to the reported 'recalcitrance' of the student and the construed necessity of facial communication in language instruction.
7. Although gender oppression is not the only lens through which veils are represented (they are also seen as 'religious', 'cultural', or sometimes 'political'), my point is that this dimension tends to predominate and to reinscribe how other aspects are read. (I will argue in section 1 that the veil is not just seen as any 'religious' symbol in the current French context, but as a gendered symbol, and is hence identified with the oppression of women in the name of religion.)
8. See Homa Hoodfar's perceptive analysis in 'The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Images of Muslim Women'. *RFR/DFR* 22(3/4) (1993): 5–18.
9. Though I will continue to use the word 'representation' below, this sense of representation as construction or constitution should be heard in the term.
10. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. xi.
11. Though I do not mean to deny the patriarchal forms that Muslim cultures and communities may themselves take, I would claim that reducing the practice of veiling to the univocal

dimension of patriarchal oppression elides modes of subjectivity that Muslim women develop in relation to, and through, veiling.

12. See Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 13. I am not claiming that the 'West' is a homogeneous context, any more than Islam is. Both are complex discursive fields, historically and representationally interconnected.
13. The law reads: '*Dans les écoles, les collèges et les lycées publics, le port de signes ou tenues par lesquels les élèves manifestent ostensiblement une appartenance religieuse est interdit*.' The law also stipulates that disciplinary measures should be preceded by a dialogue with the student. ('Loi no. 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics', *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 17 mars 2004.)
14. An earlier, shorter discussion of this can be found in my French-language article 'Voiles racialisés: La femme musulmane dans les imaginaires occidentaux', *Les ateliers de l'éthique: la revue du CRÉUM* 3(2) (2008): 39–55.
15. The form of veiling in question was the head cover (or *hijab*). In an earlier period of the French debate, when the issue of Muslim veils in schools first arose (1989), the term *'chador* [*tchador*]' was also commonly used. This probably had something to do with the recent memory of the Iranian Revolution (1979), though it was clearly misapplied to what the Muslim girls were wearing in French schools. The *chador* is a Persian term for a body covering that sits on the head and covers the whole body. That visibly different forms of clothing could so easily be amalgamated is itself telling.
16. As Charlotte Nordmann and Jérôme Vidal point out in their introduction to *Le foulard islamique en questions*, ed. Charlotte Nordmann (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2004), p. 14. The *hijab* today describes a piece of cloth that covers the hair and neck, not the face.
17. This conjunction was coined purposely for the debate, as Michela Ardizzoni points out ('Unveiling the Veil: Gendered Discourses and the (In)Visibility of the Female Body in France', *Women's Studies* 33 [2004]:629–49[634– 5]). Ardizzoni also offers a positive rereading of the term from the point of view of Muslim women seeking to resignify their headscarves in the French context (643).
18. See Norma Claire Moruzzi, 'A Problem with Headscarves: Contemporary Complexities of Political and Social Identity', *Political Theory* 22(4) (1994): 653–72 (658). Particularly interesting is the distinction Moruzzi notes between *foulard* and *fichu*, the latter covering by definition a woman's head, neck and shoulders (667, citing Lacoste-Dujardin).
19. This is not to imply that the headscarf or *hijab* has the same meaning or form today that it did in previous Muslim societies. See Barbara Freyer Stowasser, 'The *Hijab*: How a Curtain became an Institution and a Cultural Symbol', in *Humanism, Culture, and Language in the Near East: Studies in Honor of Georg Krotkoff*, ed. Georg Krotkoff, Asma Afsaruddin and A. H. Mathias Zahinsen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), pp. 87–104.
20. This list is not exhaustive. *Hijab* and *chador* have been defined above. The *niqab* indicates a form of face veil with an opening that leaves the eyes uncovered, while the *burqa* is a form of body cover, typically worn by some ethnic populations in Afghanistan, that extends from the head to the feet with a mesh over the face to see through. Indeed, some of these 'veils' would be considered forms of *unveiling* from the perspective of other contexts, historical periods and

modes of veiling (e.g. the *hijab*, since it does not cover the face, would have been seen as a form of unveiling in early 20th-century Iraq or Egypt).

21. For a summary of the events from 1989 to 2004 leading up to the law on the veil, see Natalie Benelli, Ellen Hertz, Christine Delphy, Christelle Hamel, Patricia Roux and Jules Falquet, 'De l'affaire du voile à l'imbrication du sexisme et du racisme', *Nouvelles Questions Feministes* 25(1) (2006): 4–11, and Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 21–41.
22. The Conseil d'État is the highest authority in questions of administrative justice in France. The existing law was the law of 1905 establishing the separation of church and state. This law guarantees 'freedom of conscience' under pre-established conditions; it does not treat directly of public education, which was dealt with previously in the Jules Ferry laws (1881–2). (See Christine Delphy, 'Antisexisme ou antiracisme? Un faux dilemme', *Nouvelles Questions Feministes* 25(1) [2006]: 59–83 [81–2].) The first article of the 1905 law reads: '*La République assure la liberté de conscience. Elle guarantit le libre exercice des cultes sous les seules restrictions édictées ci-après dans l'intérêt de l'ordre public*.' ('Loi du 9 décembre 1905 concernant la séparation des Églises et de l'État', *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, publiée 11 décembre 1905.)
23. What this meant for Samira Saidani and Leila and Fatima Achaboun in Creil was that they still could not wear the headscarf in the classroom. Eventually, they accepted the compromise that meant they had to drop their headscarves to their shoulders during class. (See Moruzzi, 'A Problem with Headscarves', 669.) At the same time, however, other girls in other schools in France could wear the veil.
24. Benelli *et al*., 'De l'affaire du voile', 6; Delphy, 'Antisexisme ou antiracisme?', 60. See also Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*, pp. 97–8, for how the interpretation of secularism became absolutist in debates on the veil. Though I agree with Scott that this was motivated by other factors such as racism toward 'immigrants', I also want to show how these factors were reduced in the debate to the representational schema of gender oppression in Islam, and how it is this schema that finally allowed such racism to pass almost unnoticed. Interestingly, this representation found a certain consensus among left and right, so that even some opponents of the law accepted the equation of Muslim veiling with gender oppression (see, for instance, Etienne Balibar, 'Dissonances within *Laïcité*', *Constellations* 11(3) [2004]: 353–67 [359]).
25. For a formulation of this position in the popular press, see the petition in the magazine *Elle* at the end of 2003 ('Un appel à Jacques Chirac de femmes favorables à une loi', *Elle*, 8 décembre 2003).
26. Notably, Elisabeth Badinter, Régis Debray, Alain Finkielkraut, Elisabeth de Fontenay and Catherine Kintzler in a letter addressed to the then Minister of Education, Lionel Jospin, entitled 'Profs, ne capitulons pas!' Published in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 2–8 November, 58–9 (the letter was dated 27 October 1989).
27. For the history of how this argument became central to the pro-law movement, see Benelli *et al*., 'De l'affaire du voile', 6–9; Delphy, 'Antisexisme ou antiracisme?', 61–4. Of particular interest is the problematic role of the organization *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* (founded 2003) in the pro-law movement (see Judith Ezekiel, 'French Dressing: Race, Gender, and the Hijab Story', *Feminist Studies* 32(2) [2006]: 256–78).
28. For the ways in which the hearings and deliberations of the Stasi Commission came to conflate the defense of gender equality with a ban on veiling, see Jean Baubérot, 'La commission Stasi:

Entre laïcité républicaine et multiculturelle', *Historical Reflections* 34(3) (2008): 7–20 (13–14). Baubérot was the only member of the Stasi Commission to abstain from supporting the recommendation to ban religious signs in schools (though, in a separate vote, he voted in favor of the commission's report itself).

29. Bernard Stasi, *Commission de Refléxion sur l'Application du Principe de Laïcité dans la République: Rapport au Président de la République* (Paris: Présidence de la République, 2003), pp. 15, 46–7. It is noteworthy that the commission addresses the need for a law by arguing that increased attention to the gender discrimination of the veil showed how the 'problem' had itself intensified between 1989 and 2003 (pp. 29–31). The law on religious signs was among the commission's 26 recommendations, but the only one to be implemented (pp. 66–9).
30. Badinter *et al*., 'Profs, ne capitulons pas!', 58–9.
31. This was formulated as a problem in the concrete application of the principle of *laïcité*, not as a contradiction within the principle itself. The principle (and hence the law of 1905) was construed as needing to be strengthened. See the then President Jacques Chirac's national address on 17 December 2003, 'Discours relatif au respect du principe de laïcité dans la république', in *Guide Républicain: L'idée républicaine aujourd'hui* (Paris: Delagrave Édition, 2004), p. 14.
32. One example of this is found in Badinter *et al*., 'Profs, ne capitulons pas!', 58–9: '*Tolérer le foulard islamique, ce n'est pas accueillir un être libre (en l'occurrence une jeune fille), c'est ouvrir la porte à ceux qui ont décidé, une fois pour toutes et sans discussion, de lui faire plier l'échine*.'
33. See Delphy, 'Antisexisme ou antiracisme?', 64. Delphy cites Elisabeth Badinter as one of those who declare the sexism of French society inexistent.
34. Badinter *et al*., 'Profs, ne capitulons pas!', 58–9.
35. Delphy, 'Antisexisme ou antiracisme?', 60–1.
36. Delphy, 'Une affaire française', pp. 64, 67.
37. See the hesitations articulated by Judith Ezekiel, and her avowed silence, in 'French Dressing', 258.
38. See, for example, the article by Catherine Albertini from 10 November 2003, 'Non au voile mais non à l'exclusion des mineures de l'école laïque!' Accessed 20 November 2006: http://www.sisyphe.org
39. For an example of this, see the portrayal of Delphy by Bronwyn Winter, 'Secularism aboard the Titanic: Feminists and the Debate over the Hijab in France', *Feminist Studies* 32(2) (2006): 279–98 (281, 291–2). It should be noted that in my research, Delphy is one of the few French feminists to give an analysis of the imbrication of sexism and racism in the formulation of the law and to question the identification of the law with feminism.
40. For more on the silencing of veiled women's voices in the French press, see Ardizzoni, 'Unveiling the Veil', 639–41; Moruzzi, 'A Problem with Headscarves', 660, 668. And section 4 below.
41. Benelli *et al.,* 'De l'affaire du voile', 7–8. I do not mean to repeat this mutual exclusion here; obviously the category of veiled women can include feminists and that of feminists includes veiled and non-veiled women.
42. '*Ostensible*' replaced the term '*visible*' that the French government had initially intended to use. See Balibar, 'Dissonances within *Laïcité'*, 366–7. The reason for this change was reportedly to avoid explicit contradiction with the European Human Rights Convention's articles on freedom of religious expression. But it should also be noted that banning all 'visible' signs

could have included small crosses, which were eventually allowed under the law since they were seen as discreet rather than conspicuous.

43. The distinction between 'conspicuous [*ostensible*]' and 'discreet' religious signs can be found in the Stasi Commission's report (Stasi, *Commission de Refléxion*, p. 68) and again in Jacques Chirac's national address of 17 December 2003: '*Les signes discrets, par exemple une croix, une étoile de David, ou une main de Fatima, resteront naturellement possibles. En revanche les signes ostensibles, c'est-à-dire ceux dont le port conduit à se faire remarquer et reconnaître immédiatement à travers son appartenance religieuse, ne sauraient être admis. Ceux-là – le voile islamique, quel que soit le nom qu'on lui donne, la kippa ou une croix manifestement de dimension excessive – n'ont pas leur place dans les enceintes des écoles publiques*' (Chirac, 'Discours relatif', p. 16).
44. I owe this argument to Balibar, 'Dissonances within *Laïcité'*, 363, and Moruzzi, 'A Problem with Headscarves', 664–5.
45. This is not to mention the observance of traditional Christian holidays. It is not surprising that the Stasi Commission's suggestion of adding new holidays (from Judaism or Islam) to the educational calendar was rejected by Chirac in the same discourse in which he recommended the law on religious signs (Chirac, 'Discours relatif', p. 17).
46. I am pointing to different ways in which *Gestalt* vision may work: as continuity between figure and ground, as contextual prominence, or as opposition. In the case of the secular–religious binary, my point – following Talal Asad – is that what appears as conspicuously 'religious' is constituted in relation to the 'secular', where these are intertwined and coexistent constructs rather than in-themselves essences (Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, pp. 14, 25).
47. Though crosses are religious signs, they are for the most part seen as discreet (except when 'excessively' large). Veils, however, whatever size they may be and even if they take the form of headbands, are always conspicuous (Ezekiel, 'French Dressing', 261). The lack of imagination in the French discourse on religious signs, in particular when it comes to enumerating what may count as a conspicuous Christian sign, is indicative of the differential perception at play.
48. See the insistence on *mixité* not only in schools but also in hospitals at the end of Chirac's national address (Chirac, 'Discours relatif', pp. 17–18).
49. As Françoise Gaspard points out, *mixité* came into effect at the end of the 1960s in French public schools, mainly for economic considerations: 'Femmes, foulards et République', in *Le foulard islamique en questions*, ed. Charlotte Nordmann (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2004), pp. 72–80 (p. 78).
50. See Afsaneh Najmabadi, 'Gender and Secularism of Modernity: How can a Muslim Woman be French?', *Feminist Studies* 32(2) (2006): 239–55 (246–8).
51. Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. H. Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965); French-language edn, *L'an V de la révolution algérienne* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001 [1959]); henceforth cited as *DC* with English-language pagination followed by French.
52. The *haïk* designated a white sheet that sat on the head and covered the body. As with other forms of veiling, it could be held in such a way as to provide more or less cover (for instance, for the face).
53. I am drawing on Edward Said for whom colonialism is not only material and economic, but cultural and representational; see *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 156.
54. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. C. L. Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

55. ibid., pp. 190–1.
56. ibid., pp. 192, 194.
57. This is not to imply that other senses are immune to racism. See Linda Martín Alcoff, 'Habits of Hostility: On seeing Race', *Philosophy Today* 44 (Supplement 2000): 30–40 (38).
58. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 153.
59. Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 95, 114.
60. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. xvii, 143–4.
61. See Alcoff's appropriation of Merleau-Ponty in 'Toward a Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment', in *Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), pp. 267–83 (pp. 275–6).
62. Indeed, Fanon understands racism and colonialism as pathological for both colonized and colonizer (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 11). He does not see racist vision as inevitable, but presents the possibility of disalienation through revolutionary engagement and the production of a 'new humanism'.
63. See Alcoff, 'Toward a Phenomenology', p. 276.
64. Afsaneh Najmabadi warns against the easy equation of veiling with containment and control of female sexuality by Muslim societies. This equation is based, she argues, on a construction of female sexuality as naturally heterosocial and heterosexual. But if veiling in fact allows female homosociality, while at the same time regulating and hence generating a particular form of heterosexuality (based on who veils in the presence of whom), then veiling must be read differently ('Gender and Secularism of Modernity', 246–8).
65. Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1983), pp. 66–72.
66. I agree with Joan Scott that the reaction against veiling reveals an anxiety about a different system of gender and sexuality, one whose logic belies the 'naturalness' of the French organization of sex (see her remarkable analysis in *The Politics of the Veil*, pp. 151–74). I differ, however, in that I do not want to assume two opposed systems of sexuality, one 'open' and the other 'covered', but a multiplicity of possible organizations. I take the opposition between open and covered (France and Islam) to be the product of a particular point of view, the French one, and seek to show how the very construction of Muslim sexuality as 'covered' (read as repressed, though not by Scott herself) is a means for naturalizing the French organization of sexuality and desire. The image of the veil functions here as a 'constitutive outside'.
67. The elision of veiled women's own ways of seeing and being is hence a structural aspect of the colonial visual field. To borrow Fanon's expression, veiled women have no 'ontological resistance' in the eyes of the colonizer (although colonized men are attributed their own ways of seeing, albeit condescendingly) (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 110).
68. In contrast, see Lila Abu-Lughod's description of the *burqa* as 'mobile home', or 'portable seclusion' (drawing on Hanna Papanek's work). Abu-Lughod's point is that veiling *allows* the mobility of women outside the home, while observing the moral requirements and gendered space of the community. (Lila Abu-Lughod, 'Do Muslim Women Really need saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others', *American Anthropologist*, 104(3) [2002]: 783–90 [785].)

69. Fanon's account does not always escape such reduction. See his description of the pre-revolutionary Algerian woman as a 'minor', in comparison to her revolutionary 'entry into history' (DC 106–7/91–3).
70. Mohja Kahf has shown the historicity of this image of the Muslim woman as oppressed, associating it with the colonial expansion of western powers and uncovering very different images of Muslim women from other periods of western history and literature, in *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999). See also Falguni Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), pp. 95–107, for an insightful analysis of modern liberal discourses on the veil.
71. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 149–68.
72. I have dealt with this discourse in my article 'Muslim Women and the Rhetoric of Freedom', in *Constructing the Nation: A Race and Nationalism Reader*, ed. Mariana Ortega and Linda Martín Alcoff (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), pp. 65–87.
73. See Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, 'Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency', *Anthropological Quarterly* 75(2)(2002): 339–54.
74. 'Radio Address by Mrs. Bush'. 17 November 2001. Accessed 13 November 2006: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/ 20011117.html
75. See Sharon Lerner, 'Feminists agonize over War in Afghanistan', *The Village Voice*, 1 November 2001.
76. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 17–42; Marnia Lazreg, 'The Triumphant Discourse of Global Feminism: Should Other Women be known?', in *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*, ed. Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj (New York: Garland, 2000), pp. 29–38; and Delphy, 'Antisexisme ou antiracisme?', 59–83. I owe the term 'colonial feminism' to Leila Ahmed (*Women and Gender in Islam*, 151), while 'imperial' feminism or 'global' feminism are terms that critically describe trends in western feminism. There is a difference in emphasis between the two terms, though the paternalism they describe is the same: 'colonial feminism' points to the use of feminist arguments in colonial projects of domination (with which some women and feminists were complicit); 'imperial feminism' indicates the tendency within some western feminist movements to adopt a paternalistic attitude towards women of other cultures, generalize their own social values acontextually, and explicitly or inadvertently support imperialist interventions into those cultures.
77. This draws on Mohanty's argument in 'Under Western Eyes', pp. 31, 38–42.
78. See Nordmann and Vidal, *Le foulard islamique en questions*, p. 11; Najmabadi, 'Gender and Secularism of Modernity', 253; and Ardizzoni, 'Unveiling the Veil', 645.
79. Muslim women's voices are taken to be ventriloquized by 'fundamentalist' Muslim men, unless they are seen as 'escapees' (which requires unveiling). E.g. the march against the law on the veil was described in terms of 'bearded men keeping watch over the rows of veiled women' (Ezekiel, 'French Dressing', 258).
80. While oppression is seen as the nature of Islam, freedom is naturalized to western social orders. Women or 'gender', on the other hand, are assumed to be the same across contexts, blank slates to which repression or freedom can be applied.

81. Delphy, 'Antisexisme ou antiracisme?', 59–83.
82. For different ways of theorizing the continuity between cultural and biological racism, see Etienne Balibar, 'Is there a ''Neo-Racism''?', in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 17–28; David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), pp. 70–4; and Tariq Modood, '''Difference'', Cultural Racism and Anti-Racism', in *Race and Racism*, ed. Bernard Boxill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 238–56.
83. By naturalizing racist conduct towards, and intolerance of, other cultures, cultural racism according to Balibar displaces biologism but does not eliminate it ('Is there a ''Neo-Racism''?', p. 26)
84. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 143.
85. Frantz Fanon and Homa Hoodfar have pointed to the immobilizing effects of de-veiling on previously veiled women (Fanon, DC 59/42, and Hoodfar, 'The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads', 10–11).
86. Balibar, 'Is there a ''Neo-Racism''?', p. 22.
87. It is in this way that the supporting role of phenotypical difference in cultural racism can be understood. Since it is the body as a whole that is racialized, phenotypical differences that would otherwise have been seen as indifferent become over-determined through this form of racism. It is hence no coincidence that the image of the veiled Muslim woman is also of a non-'white' woman, and that 'white' women who choose to veil pose a problem for the western imaginary. (Hoodfar, 'The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads', 14–15.)
88. Lazreg, 'The Triumphant Discourse of Global Feminism', p. 31; Balibar, 'Is there a ''Neo-Racism''?', 25.
89. The representation of Muslim families in contemporary French discourse provides a telling example of affective relations that are flattened to the sole dimension of gender oppression. (See Badinter *et al*., 'Profs, ne capitulons pas!', 58–9. Cf. Delphy, 'Antisexisme ou antiracisme?', 73–5. It should be noted that this representation is also a feature of Laura Bush's radio address of 17 November 2001, discussed above.)
90. For subjectivity and subject-position, see Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, p. 148. Since my essay is a critique of representation, it has mainly examined the limits of the subject-positions assigned to veiled women in western contexts.
91. I owe the term '*invisibilisation*' to Nordmann and Vidal, *Le foulard islamique en questions*, p. 11.
92. The French press generally referred to suspended students only by their first names. They were largely treated as silent, or, when they were quoted, their voices were mediated and reframed. (Moruzzi, 'A Problem with Headscarves', 668; Ardizzoni, 'Unveiling the Veil', 643.)
93. In total the commission heard more than 100 people. The two veiled women interviewed were Saïda Kada (co-author of the book, *L'une voilée, l'autre pas*) and Fathia Ajbli, on 5 December 2003 (Stasi, *Commission de Refléxion*, p. 74). This was only six days before the report was submitted and according to one member of the commission, Jean Baubérot, the report had been largely composed at that point, the deadline having been moved forward (Interview in 'Emission Arrêt sur Image', *La Cinq*, 13 March 2004). Another commission member, Alain Touraine, suggested that there was a decision, early in the organization of the commission, not to invite veiled women to speak (Philippe Bernard, 'Controverse autour de l'unique audition de musulmanes voilées', *Le Monde*, 2 February 2004). It appears that the

commission did not interview the veiled Muslim girls who had been excluded from schools (though there had been private interviews with some veiled students according to another commission member, ibid.). For a critical narrative of the workings of the Stasi Commission, see Baubérot, 'La commission Stasi: Entre laïcité républicaine et multiculturelle', 12–14, and Jean Baubérot, 'La commission Stasi vue par l'un de ses membres', *French Politics, Culture & Society* 22(3) (2004): 135–41 (139–40).

94. Nordmann and Vidal, *Le foulard islamique en questions*, p. 11.
95. See Raoult and Gerin, *Proposition de résolution* (28 janvier 2010).
96. Barry Bearak, 'Kabul retraces Steps to Life before Taliban', *The New York Times*, 2 December 2001.
97. This subjectivity is, of course, differently constituted through different practices and contexts. My point is not that there is a singular model of subjectivity for veiled women, only that veiling is understood to exclude subjectivity and agency in the western imaginary.
98. See Najmabadi, 'Gender and Secularism of Modernity', 253; and Ardizzoni, 'Unveiling the Veil', 645.
99. Abu-Lughod, 'Do Muslim Women Really need saving?', 785, on the *burqa.*
100. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
101. Miriam Cooke, 'Multiple Critique: Islamic Feminist Rhetorical Strategies', in *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse*, ed. Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-Lan (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 142–60 (153–4).