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Book Review

Freeing the Muslim Other to Conform:

Spiritual Group-Based Affiliation and the State in Québec & France

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Abstract

The topic of secularism has achieved particular prominence in the post-9/11 era, as the emergence of a perceived Islamic threat interacts with policies and legal systems. Clashes over religious freedoms and a popular consternation with the migration of individuals from predominantly Muslim countries (and the perceived threat from Islamic fundamentalism) have changed the debate around the separation of the realm of religion and spirituality from the state. Simultaneously, the rise of the neoliberal citizenship ideal has resulted in a push for abandonment of group-based spirituality or belonging in favour of individual identity. This article examines the two recent categories of threats frequently cited by the Québec and French Governments: threats to *laîcité* and threats to gender equity. These threats factored prominently in defenses of the Québec Charter of Values (Bill 60) last year and previously supported the 2004 ban on overt religious dress in schools in France, based on the *Stasi* Commission Report. Québec's ties to France and its lingering separatist aspirations help explain the suggestions put forth in the Charter of Values, which in many ways contrast with Canada's multiculturalism. This paper argues that a stated threat to secularism and *laîcité* is really a perceived threat *from* 'different,' non-Christian religions and spirualties, especially Islam. It posits that the underlying message given to Muslims and other non-Christian faith practitioners is that they must be 'freed' from group-based affiliations in order to conform to the ideal of the neoliberal citizen.

Keywords: Secularism, laîcité in France and Quebec, gender equality, Muslims, Québec Charter of Values, Stasi Commission Report.

S ecularism and *laîcité* emerged in reaction to the Catholic Church's dominance over the lives of citizens (Selby 2012; Shachar 2005). These concepts, however, have been re-visited by governments as they deal with increased immigration from non-Christian and non-European cultures (Ikegame 2012), achieving particular prominence in the post-9/11 era, as the emergence of a perceived Islamic threat interacts with policies and legal systems. Clashes over religious freedoms and a popular consternation with the migration of Muslims (and the perceived threat from Islamic fundamentalism) have changed the debate around the separation of religion

from the state. The Québec and French Governments frequently cite two specific threats as a basis for necessitating restrictive policies: a threat to *laîcité* and a threat to gender equity. A stated threat to secularism and *laîcité* can be read as a perceived threat *from* 'different,' non-Christian religions, especially Islam. The underlying message given to Muslim minorities[1] is that they must be 'freed' from group-based affiliations in order to conform to contemporary citizenship ideals.

The *Charte des valeurs québécoises*[2] (Québec Charter of Values) claims to affirm "...the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men" (National Assembly 2013). In Québec, references to *laîcité* were used in tandem with references to gender equity to determine which communities' citizenship and belonging might be considered problematic during Québec's Reasonable Accommodation (RA) debate (Bilge 2013). In France, similar principles were evoked in the law that followed the *Stasi* Commission Report.[3] This law refers to *parité* (gender parity) in addition to *laîcité* (Selby 2012). The *Stasi* Commission Report on *laîcité* might not have opposed religious symbols outright— as long as they did not counter Republican values (Lassalle 2011)—but it did target the Muslim *hijab* in its 26 recommendations (Selby 2012). The law that followed was based on the *Stasi* Report and banned obvious religious symbols in schools. It was enforced starting in September 2004, even while militants who opposed the ban were holding two French reporters hostage in Iraq. At that time, the law reportedly affected 12 million children (*BBC News,* Sept. 2, 2004). The French position, based ostensibly on the need to protect equality or parity between the genders and *laîcité* of the state, was firm. As in Québec, the French position rested on these two notable tenets: that of religious neutrality and that of gender equality. These oft-stated ideals have vast implications for the discourse on state responses to difference and how this influences perceptions of citizenship in both Québec and France.

Western Statehood and Group-based Affiliation

Many states of the West increasingly emphasize a lack of government intervention in economic markets, while placing increased prominence on the need for citizens to be self-sufficient and self-governing. The relationship between the sovereign state and the individual citizen is pre-eminent over any group-based affiliations, and social conceptions of citizenship are discouraged in favour of individualism (Razack 2008; Gökariksel and

Mitchell 2005). This notion accompanies the project of modernity and free-market capitalism, which positions group-based affiliations—and especially Islamic culture—as it's opposite. Group based identity is seen as a constraint, preventing cultures that value a collective mentality from progressing into modernity. If group-based identity is to be subverted to individual identity, and the relationship with the sovereign state takes place on the individual level, group-based claims are easily discounted.[4] The responsibility for discipline and performance of citizenship rests with the individual citizen, a subject of the state that is supposed to have limited collective demands or expectations from the sovereign (Gökariksel and Mitchell 2005). Razack notes that if assimilation to the individualistic, liberal ideals put forth by contemporary states in the West is not possible for communities with strong group-based identities, then these groups are 'legitimately' excluded (2008). Muslims, who as a minority group require (non-Christian) accommodations from the state, are thus easily cast as the purveyors of unreasonable demands in France and Québec (and in other Western States, though an examination of these exceeds the scope of this article).

Laîcité in Québec and France

Laîcité is founded on the understanding that no particular set of convictions can be used to justify the existence and action of the state; its legitimacy rests only on the collective sovereignty of the people (this is also referred to as the principle of separation) (Koussens 2009). Ayelet Shachar notes that the principle of civic Republicanism, used in France alongside the principle of *laîcité,* relies upon the "state as the source of social cohesion" (2005: 82). Also inherent in the concept of *laîcité* is the principle of neutrality, which means that religious liberty and equality are guaranteed by the state's regulation of political justice. Moreover, *laîcism* also includes the understanding that all citizens can access rights related to neutrality and separation enshrined in its mandate (Koussens 2009). Despite attempts to define the concept, it should be noted that *laîcité* is a polymorphic idea, one that is re-defined and questioned through key legislative acts in France (Koussens 2009). Thus, although the term has some basic indicators upon which its formation rests, the definition of these elements is fluid and differs depending on the audience and the interpreter.

It must be noted that the term grew out of discussions between the French State and the Catholic Church. An examination of the history of *laîcité* since

the time of the French Revolution (1789-1798) indicates that this concept was sculpted through years of tensions and conflict between the Catholic Church and Enlightened humanism (Selby 2012). A uniting of the French people under one umbrella (that of *laîcité*) was a gradual process, wherein large hesitant factions of the public were appeased through concessions to the Church. Recent policies and references by politicians in Québec and France indicate that the roots of Catholicism are far from forgotten in the public sphere. While elements of its definition can seem fixed from a contemporary perspective and while the elements discussed above are inherent to its meaning today, *laîcité*'s history is inextricable from its contemporary expression.

Laîcité was first mentioned in Québec in 2007 (Bilge 2008). Today, several writers and commentators recommend that Québec adopt the French model, and the term is invoked affectionately in Québec's political and intellectual circles (Koussens 2009). The *québécois* project of establishing a *citoyenneté Quebecoise* (Québec Citizenship) can be seen as the most recent phase of an attempt at delimiting boundaries of belonging in the State, a process that began with the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s. Attempts by the Québec government to court the ethnic vote in order to solicit vital support for the separatist cause were brief. Policies of interculturalism have given way to the construction of a nation united by common culture and values, which are to acquire a place of dominance over other modes of ethnic identification (Juteau 2002).[5] This model of citizenship is closer to the civic Republican model that was adopted as the official state model in France. Québec's clashes with the multiculturalist policies of Canada are clarified in studying the French ideal of *laîcité*. Strong *québécois* ties to France facilitate the influence of these ideas. Québec, similar to France, cast off its Catholic roots, disentangling church from state through the Quiet Revolution. A common history, with its commonalities emphasized through shared roots and defense of the French language (see Leroux 2011), promote an adoption of a version of France's *laîcité* in the Québec context.

A common, public political space that gives preference to no religion in particular seems unproblematic as no religion is explicitly targeted or assisted by the state. Such a model is presumably effective at curbing the tendency for any particular religion to unfairly dominate the laws of the state and at preventing religious debate from impinging upon the functioning of the state. The problem with contemporary expressions of *laîcité* stems from

the fact that while it purports to safeguard the public sphere from religion, it is really used as a guise to isolate and further marginalize minority religious groups. Thus, the claim of 'separation' justifies state separation from religions deemed threatening, without challenging majority or 'accepted' religious or cultural beliefs. The claim to neutrality legitimates the state's regulation of these supposedly threatening groups, which are themselves in many cases *threatened by* the majority. The result is naturalization of a hierarchy of dominance, which Sirma Bilge describes as "one partner, 'us', controlling the range of possible actions of 'others'" (2013:167). Within these efforts is found a racial, ethnic and religious Othering that is far from neutral. As is subsequently discussed, the Muslim Other located in a precarious position as she is asked by the contemporary state to renounce her group based affiliations in the process of assimilation.

The Threat to Laîcité

A threat to *laîcité* is really a threat from non-White, non-Christian culture. While it must be recognized that the political response to this threat targets several religions or cultures (notably Sikhism and Orthodox Judaism in the debates and laws on religious head coverings), the Muslim religion is normally targeted. The post-September 11th rhetoric and fear around Islamic extremism, in combination with the relatively large amounts of Muslim migrants that populate urban spaces in Québec and France, help explain this focus.[6] There are two ways in which the claim to neutrality in the public sphere is negated in Québec and France.[7] First, the bias against non-Christian culture and religion is evident in policies that impinge upon religious expression of non-Christian culture, while providing excuses for Christian practices and symbols. Second, the lasting vestigial features of Catholicism, demonstrated through *laîcité's* history and comments made by politicians, also challenge the claim of religious neutrality.

In Québec, Canadian Federal laws on human rights have been implemented to counter attempts to limit religious expression through particular forms of dress. The appeals process differs markedly from that in France, where the administrative courts (like the *Conseil D'état* or Council of State) will not hear cases from private parties (Wayland 1997). Furthermore, the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms defends religious freedom and is often employed in the defence of religious minorities' self-expression. Examples are found in the debate on the *kirpan* worn by Sikhs in Ontario public schools (Wayland 1997) and in the continuation of the polygamous Mormon community of Bountiful, British Columbia (Beaman 2004). [8]

In recent policies, however, the Québec Government has attempted to ban from the public sphere elements of religious dress worn by Muslims. This is evident in Bill 94, which requires all persons to show their faces when accepting or delivering public services in Québec (Bilge 2013: 176). Obviously, since the *niqab* and *burka*, a religious dress worn by a very small number of Muslims, would contravene this bill, the law disproportionately affects this population. The recent Québec Charter of Values (Bill 60) also calls for a ban on symbols that "overtly indicate a religious affiliation" (National Assembly 2013, S.5). It echoes the requirement put forth by Bill 94, that the faces of personnel that work in public bodies or people receiving services from them are not permitted to have their faces covered (National Assembly 2013, SS. 6,7). There is an obvious targeting of the Muslim minority in these policies, as evidenced in the disproportionate effects of the Bill on this population (Stasiulis 2013).

These policies follow the incidents within public schools and sporting events where *hijabs* worn by girls were seen as problematic, with strict consequences for their wearers. In one such instance, an 11-year old girl was prohibited from playing in a Québec soccer match because she would not remove her *hijab* (*CBC News*, March 3 2007). In 2007, an altercation over whether Muslim women would have to lift their veils in order to vote constitutes another pre-cursor to the proposed Charter. The 2007 debacle over veiling of voters led to the introduction of Bill C-6 to amend the *Canada Elections Act* by requiring that all voters must uncover their faces to be identified. Despite very limited evidence of voter fraud in Canada, prevention of this crime was cited in defense of the Bill (Bakht 2007). As in the case of the Charter of Values (Bill 60), this bill excludes Muslim women from participating in the public sphere. Unlike the proposed Charter, Bill C-6 associates veiled Muslim women with danger of fraud, rather than purely a threat from a religion that is Other. These policies have in common their perception of a threat from Islam.

It is interesting to note, as Bilge and others mention, that policies banning overt religious symbols are not generally problematic for adherents to the Christian religion, where head coverings are not required or mandated in public (2013). Not only did this policy advanced by the Québec administration render problematic and inadmissible the religious symbols worn by non-Christian (mainly Muslim) adherents, it also made explicit allowances for "the emblematic and toponymic elements of Québec's

cultural heritage that testify to its history" (National Assembly 2013). This wording likely referred in part to the names of streets and villages with traditional Catholic influences.[9] The crucifix that hangs in the National Assembly further underlines the point that Christianity is considered a benign belief system (or even one that should be encouraged or recognized) in juxtaposition with the obvious threat perceived in Islamic dress or religious expression. The neutrality of the public sphere is thus preached as an ideal, but non-Christian (notably Muslim) religions are obviously not tolerated while some lasting Christian emblems are excused. This presents the impression that religious faith is benign if it is Christian, but terrifying and intolerable if Islamic.

In France, too, Christian roots deeply permeate society, and the definition and construction of *laïcité* itself cannot be extracted from its roots. In 1905, an Act led by the 59th French Prime Minister established official *laïcité* in France. Having been forged after a long battle with Catholicism, *laïcité* cannot be separated from these religious roots, and the result today is that the idea and way of structuring government still "works best for French Catholics" (Selby 2012)[10]. The aforementioned *Stasi* Report and the subsequent law banning religious symbols in schools obviously disproportionately affected France's Muslim population. In France, as was seen in the recent Québec Charter, religious accommodations that are afforded other religions are not extended to Islam. Notable examples include the accommodation for Jews through foregoing examinations scheduled on Saturdays, and French public schools' serving fish on Fridays, so as not to disturb Catholic beliefs. Statutory holidays in France are also scheduled according to the Christian calendar (Selby 2012).

Further complicating the ostensible claims to promote secularism are comments that overtly promote Christianity, or call for a return to the Christian roots of France. Although not representative of a majority, perhaps, these comments nevertheless betray a strong religious bias and complicate the claim of secularism. In France, President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007 referred in his controversial speech at Latran Palace to France's essentially 'Christian roots,' remarking that: "in the transmission of values and learning the difference between good and evil, the teacher will never be able to replace the priest or minister" (Lassalle 2011). It is obvious, therefore, in religious accommodation for non-Islamic faiths that is not extended to Muslims, and in Sarkozy's overt comments, that

only some religious beliefs are really thought to challenge *laîcité*. In the fear and stigma of the post-September 11 political environments, this challenge is most frequently detected in the perceived Muslim threat.

In sum, threats to *laîcité* and secularism, articulated by the Québéc and French governments, can be understood as threats from Islam. In Québec, Bill 60's excuse of toponymic Christian religious influences and the persistence of Catholic symbolism in the National Assembly, while Muslim religious expressions have been repeatedly disallowed and banned from the public sphere, indicate this differential treatment. Furthermore, the principle of *laîcité* has Christian roots, and still continues to work best for French Catholics, or post-Catholics. Politicians' overt references to Christianity indicate that the threat to secularism in the public sphere is mainly a threat from non-Christian religion and culture, particularly from Islamic influence. This threat must be managed through strict policies of assimilation, which reform the Muslim Other and turn her or him into the autonomous citizen demanded by the state. In the absence of the willingness to assimilate, the state is justified in totally excluding the Other from legitimate citizenship.

The Threat to Gender Equality

References to gender equality closely follow references to the preservation of secularism and *laîcité*. This indicates a metonymic correlation of concepts in the thoughts and speeches of politicians and policymakers within Québec and France. Konrad Yakabuski quotes *Parti Québécois* Minister Louise Beaudoin, who epitomized this linkage when she said that, "everywhere in the world [where] secularism has moved in reverse...the rights of women have generally moved in reverse too" (Globe & Mail, Sept. 15, 2013). This linkage permits the use of women's bodies as objects in the debate on overt religious symbols, and as symbols of the stagnation of cultural progress more broadly. First, Muslim women become reduced to images that serve as examples of the negative and repressive effects of patriarchal, non-Western ways of thinking. Second, the Muslim woman is painted as the victim of her culture, a casualty of religious oppression, who must be saved through a 'neutral' state system of superior morality (Gökariksel and Mitchell 2005). In this way, the Muslim woman is at once an object used to prove the superiority of the Western position (something to be gawked at, provoking the comment: 'look at how that inferior civilization treats its women'), and an imperiled victim that must be rescued from her culture.

While there are parallels in the political rhetoric which objectifies Muslim women and which casts them as victims, it will be shown that there are distinctions between these categories. Importantly, the objectified Québec or French Muslim immigrant represents a threat while the victim is under threat. In the first rendering, her feelings are not considered. In the second rendering, any feeling besides helplessness is not acceptable. Her personhood is compromised in the first, and her agency denied in the second. It should be noted that objectification and victimization of overtly Muslim women is performed by Western feminists along with other groups, while victimization is also extended to white, Western women, whose equality and freedom is thought to be at risk by invasion from nonwhite, tribal or pre-modern ideologies. Furthermore, in spite of a victim narrative that applies to Muslim women, if a woman chooses to defend her right to wear *hijab*, she can easily be perceived as militant.

Ultimately, the perception is that a Western (presumably superior) civilization must be protected from the negative influences of gender inequality that threaten it from Muslim sources (Razack 2008).[11] Both the 'Muslim woman as object' and the 'Muslim woman as victim' characterizations serve the goal of advancing Québec and France's agenda of immigrant assimilation. In explicating examples and elements of these characterizations, it will become clear that the paradoxical hope of these states is to foster citizens that have been freed so they can conform to *québécois* or French ideals.

First, Muslim women's bodies easily become weapons in an objectifying move to use them to support political arguments. This denies their personhood or their humanity. Women's bodies become ammunition in a male-dominated debate. They are exhibits that indicate the correctness of a superior, male-dominated view in a power struggle between competing patriarchal societies. Québec's position as a part of Canada, which often historically appears to officially embrace multicultural values on an almost unparalleled, exceptional level (Bloemraad 2012), means that its policies come under scrutiny. Despite this, a dominant *québécois* sentiment follows the French mentality in decrying an overly-multiculturalist Britain. To this end, a host on a Québec media outlet commented after his visit to Britain that there were "more *burkas* than miniskirts" in London's streets (*CBC News*, Nov. 7, 2013). *Burka*-clad women are juxtaposed with liberated Western women, who are free enough to wear minimal clothing in the

street. The starkly opposite symbols of the less-dressed woman next to the woman completely covered provide well-articulated objects in a debate over how women should dress. Overtly Muslim women occupy a symbolic position in a male-dominated debate, in which truly *québécois* males challenge unwelcome immigrant intruders over how 'their' women present themselves.

While patriarchal attitudes are boldly displayed in the struggle over religious symbols (and, arguably, gender equality), which makes overtly religious women into objects, feminists have also joined the ranks of those perpetuating the polemical debate. In Québec, some feminists are at the forefront in support of the Charter of Values, while others oppose the new proposed legislation (*Toronto Star,* Sept. 19, 2013). The former group of Québec feminists sees the *hijab* as a tool of oppression, and bristle at the thought of allowing their daughters to be influenced by teachers or public figures that wear it (Globe & Mail, Sept. 15, 2013). The *hijab* and other forms of religious dress are seen as symbols of the impending threat of a civilization that hates gender equality. These feminist arguments, in addition to showing the objectification of overtly Muslim women, suggest that assimilation is the answer provided by the province's policies and politicians for Muslim women and girls. This position in clarified in the ensuing discussion on the victimization of Muslim women.

In France, too, overtly Muslim women have become symbols of backwardness, of a dangerous ideology threatening modernity. Most of the opinions expressed around the 1989, 1994 and 2003-2004 *affaire des foulards* (headscarf affair) debates in France were expressed by men (Freedman 2004). Debates in France (which are often dominated by male voices) in this way challenge the Other civilization (French culture's proclaimed adversary or competition) over how the latter culture's men treat its women. The culture calling for immigrant assimilation is dominated by the same patriarchal values as that which it denounces as discriminatory and repressive. In both sides of the debate, men's voices are arguing over women's bodies, which are effectively rendered as objects.

The politicization of the *hijab* means that its wearers are thought to promote pre-modern, even tribal political ideals (Razack 2008; Freedman 2004). Sherene Razack explicates at length how Samuel Huntington's notion of the "clash of civilizations" infiltrated the mainstream after September 11, 2001 (2008; see also Huntington 1997). In line with this argument, the overtly

Muslim woman becomes an object of non-Western ideology, a symbol carrying dangerous ideas into the secular Republic. She is a political symbol in an ideological debate, a conflict between civilizations at war (Razack 2008). Many feminist voices in France supported the ban on *foulards,* complying with the notion that women's rights were compromised by a patriarchal society that mandated the veiling of its women (Freedman 2004). The overtly Muslim woman is an object in a debate that is at one level very obviously about male domination of women, and at another level is about the invasion of a pre-modern, tribal, 'uncivilized' and racialized Other into a white society perceived as 'modern.' In both Québec and France, male-dominated debate and feminist factions see her as a politicized object threatening their freedom.

A key emphasis in France arises from the neocolonial relationship of the state with Muslim immigrants from former colonies, which provides another avenue of women's objectification. The bodies of racially-'different' colonial female subjects were sexualized objects during the time of France's occupation of Algeria. The exotic Otherness of these women cast them as objects of desire, nonhuman entities to entertain the (white) male gaze. Veiling and harems were eroticized in the colonial time period (Selby 2012). In today's France, the legacy of colonialism is manifested in neocolonial objectification of the female body. Thus, the overtly Muslim woman is at once a threatening and an eroticized object within the neocolonial French Republic. In France as in Québec, the threat to 'Our' values provokes a male-dominated debate on the treatment of women, but also involves feminists that see is as their duty to protect the homeland, and objectify Muslim women in the process. As is true of the threat to *laîcité* expressed in both states, the objectification of Muslim women is instrumental in the perceived threat to women's equality, or gender parity in Québec and France.

Second, Muslim women are thought to be under the all-consuming control of their husbands and fathers. This assumption overlooks the agency that women possess, rendering them as passive victims (Selby 2012; Razack 2008: Shachar 2005; Freedman 2004). In reality, women wear and oppose the *hijab* for a variety of reasons (Freedman 2004). The dominant, mythical perception that sees the Muslim woman as a victim glosses over these nuances. She is a convenient victim and this convenience overshadows any of her attempts to voice her noncompliance with victim status. Her opinion does not matter, because her victimhood is so convenient.

In Québec, examples of perceived victimization that women from other cultures—and Muslim women in particular—are thought to be under from their cultures, are found in the infamous Hérouxville code. The town of Hérouxville in Québec, which has no Muslim or foreign-born population, posted a code of conduct in 2007, endorsed by the mayor and drafted by city councilors. The code announced that a series of practices was forbidden in Hérouxville, including the stoning of women or burning them alive, and female genital cutting (Stasiulis 2013; Razack 2008). The code clearly feared the victimizing practices that Other cultures apparently inflict upon women and girls. In the perceived threat to the way of life in Hérouxville, the victimization of women in cultural or religious traditions deemed as 'Other' is understood as a defining feature of such cultures. In order to prevent the incursion of such *difference* into the rural Québec way of life, the victimization of women is seized upon as a defining factor of the Other. Ironically, as mentioned by one feminist opposing the recent Québec Charter of Values, the proposed ban would further limit the participation of Muslim immigrants in Québec society. She cited the already-high unemployment rate among immigrants as a reason not to implement it (Globe & Mail, Sept. 15, 2013). Limitations on ostentatious religious dress would presumably further limit employment opportunities for Muslim women. An assumed victim status is thus used to defend a Bill that would further marginalize an already-marginalized community.

In France as in Québec, main arguments for and against keeping girls in classrooms despite their donning of the *hijab*, betray the assumption that they are passive victims. The two sides of polemical debate are dominated by prominent arguments that never consider the agency of girls themselves. The two sides of the debate are also both undergirded by an assimilationist stance. Girls should be kept in school so that they can be freed from their repressive cultures or religions, through the influence of superior Republican education. Girls should be removed from schools for wearing *hijab* because the Republican education system is under threat from the domineering and sinister religious powers that force the girls to wear *hijab* (Freedman 2004). Regardless of the side that the argument stems from, girls and women that overtly identify as Muslim are rendered as passive victims in need of rescuing.

The *Stasi Report* led to the 2004 ban on religious symbols in French schools, and was followed by the similarly positioned 2003 *Debré Report*, which concluded that the *hijab* is a symbol that seeks to affirm women's inferior place in society (Selby 2012). Both reports were compiled based

on hearings involving hundreds of interviews held over the course of six months. In ethnographic research about this process, it became clear that Muslim women who wore *hijab* were not listened to, even being silenced in the course of events (Bowen 2007 in Selby 2012). This indicates the reluctance in authorities to recognize any type of agency in the Muslim woman who maintains ties to her community. The convenience of her victimhood easily overwhelms any interest in her opinions.

Operational in these opinions is a deep-seated mentality that perceives non-White, non-Western women as victims of their cultures. This is an attitude denounced by Gayatri Spivak, who perceives an obsession on the part of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (1994: 93). Brown women, or women of colour, are convenient victims to enable the forced salvation attempts of white men. Other feminist scholars note that white feminist arguments, and white arguments in general, perceive non-White, non-Western women as cultural casualties (Mohanty 1991). The freedom to act outside of constraints from religion is considered a right and an ideal, with little regard for religious contexts or group-based identities. This means that overtly religious (especially obviously non-Christian) women are seen as limited by their religions and cultures. Scholars have worked to demonstrate the lack of validity in this viewpoint (Korteweg 2012; Solanki 2012; Mack 2003). The tendency to see group based affiliation as constraining is nevertheless still a powerful one. Thus, popular arguments that see the nonwestern woman as a victim of her culture, though widely critiqued, still operate in this discourse on victimized Muslim women, and influence the opinions of policymakers and members of the public – feminist or not.

Victim status is given to women and girls that are born into Muslim families, but it is also extended to *québécois* and French women who are seen as targets in the Other civilization's attempts to subvert them to men. This is poignantly portrayed in the attempts to conflate Muslim men with rapists. A leading Norwegian newspaper claimed in 2001 that foreign perpetrators were guilty of 65% of rapes that happened in the country, a category predominantly made up of Muslims (Razack 2008).[12] Similar arguments against the violent and unbridled sexual domination of Western women by Muslim men were also advanced in other European countries, notably in France (Razack 2008). The Western woman, embodying secularity and freedom, is defiled, in these accounts, by the threatening Other that stems from a culture where gender equality is not valued. The Western or modern woman is a victim of pre-modern thought, a pre-modern order

that devalues women. Western men must 'save' the women of a backward, tribal and pre-modern culture from the men of their own culture, but must also protect 'their' own women from the same men. The result is a thorough victimization of women and exaltation of Western, civilized or modern men, wherein women's agency (be they modern women or not), does not register.

The result of these objectifying and victimizing forces in both Québec and France, is entrapment of the Muslim woman by opposing narratives. Any inaction on the Muslim woman's part is liable to be read as passivity, a corroboration of her victim status (Selby 2012). Any action in support of her religious or cultural ties is seen as pandering to patriarchal elements in her culture and supporting fundamentalism. To this effect, in 2003, former French Prime Minister Alain Juppé claimed that girls wearing *hijab* were exhibiting militancy, "which is supported by real Fundamentalist Propaganda" (Freedman 2004: 136). Regardless of which choice a Muslim woman takes, she succumbs to one of these narratives. The only choice left, within the framework built by Québec and French policies and politicians, is conformity with her identity as an individual, 'liberated' citizen. She is forced to abandon the tribe, forced to embrace her individual 'freedom.' As stated by the French Education Minister Francois Fillon in September 2004 when the ban on ostentatious religious symbols was implemented in Québec schools: "There is no question today of excluding. It is a question of convincing" (*BBC News*, Sept. 2 2004). The Muslim girl or woman is forced into embracing her freedom as a citizen. The battle waged by assimilationist politicians and policies fights ties to collective identity to win her freedom. She is free to conform.

Conclusion

This article has analyzed two main threats that are noted in *québécois* and French policies and discourses: the threat to *laïcité* and the threat to gender equality. It has noted that the threat to *laïcité* can only be understood, judging from the comments of politicians and policies and the unequal consequences of policy implementation, as a threat *from* non-Christian religions, particularly Islam. While the conflation of this threat with Islam was heightened by the events of September 11, 2001, it did not start there. Increased migration into France from former colonies, particularly, sparked feelings of animosity. The threat *from* Islam is perceptible in 'us versus them' rhetoric employed by politicians, as well as in the subtle support of Christianity in both France and Québec. Furthermore, the concept of

laîcité, which evolved through key defining events in French history, still resonates best within a post-Catholic, white societal structure. Québec's repeated failures at achieving sovereignty, and its unique location as a comparatively autonomous province within the Canadian Federal system, factor in this analysis. With sovereignty for Québec as the latent hope of many in the province, the recently tabled Charter of Values provides an opportunity for establishing difference from the Rest of Canada. The *québécois* ties to French roots further underline this need for distinction from Anglophone Canada.

The second threat, that to gender equality, is best expressed and understood in the debates over the *hijab.* Both Québec and France have a history of debate around this issue. Overtly Muslim women are treated as objects, as symbols in the debate on *hijab,* which depersonalizes them and their individual choices on whether or not to wear the *hijab.* Western women's agency is also cast aside in a fear of the Muslim male Other, thought to promote a violent culture of oppression that does not value gender equality. The position of the Muslim woman who wants to maintain her religious group identity poignantly illustrates how the assimilationist agenda demands a disconnection from group affiliations in order to fulfill the demands of citizenship. The contemporary citizenship project in Québec and France demands a citizen who is individually connected with the sovereign power of the state and does not advance 'unreasonable' group-based demands, particularly if these stem from minority religious affiliation, notably Islam.

Freedom as an ideal does not punish difference, and yet the paradoxical outcomes that emerge in recent policies in Québec and France indicate that immigrants—particularly Muslim immigrants—should be forcibly freed from their own cultures. When examining the choices that dominant, objectifying political narratives leave open to Muslim women wanting to maintain cultural, religious or communal ties, it becomes obvious that they are trapped. The current citizenship ideal leaves them no choice but to assimilate. The salvation of Muslim women is found in their assimilation to the free, Republican state, in their abandonment of traditional, backward and communitarian values to embrace their identity as liberated citizens. By extension, Muslim men must also conform to the ideals of Western culture in Québec and France, because their own culture is seen as dangerous and a threat to gender equality, a threat that they are thought to perpetuate. Within the policies of Québec and France, which identify a threat to *laîcité* and to gender equality, is a thinly shrouded imperative

that calls for the assimilation of immigrants. The cost of non-conformity, of refusing to embrace freedom, is exclusion. The non-Christian, Muslim Other in Québec and France is free to conform.

Notes

1. This message also applies to a variety of other Non-Christian religious groups and non-White, racially Otherimmigrants. Muslims are the focus here as they appear to be the most obvious targets in discussions around national security threats from religious extremism and terrorism post-September 11, and because Muslims constitute a large percentage of immigrant groups to Québec and France in recent years (see Wayland 1997).
2. See as well, for French title of the Charter, Le Devoir 23 October 2013.
3. This Report was commissioned to determine the impact and implications of laîcité for the French Republic. It resulted in 26 recommendations that informed legal frameworks to promote laîcité.
4. As a result, legitimacy and support is diminished for affirmative action policies and other attempts to redress historical grievances that occur as a result of structural inequality (Razack 2008).
5. Juteau finds that the French language is conceived of as a source of unity and a common possession to be preserved by the citizens of Québec (2002).
6. In 1997, 40% of legal foreign immigrants to France were Muslim (Wayland 1997).
7. At times in this essay, the term 'state' will be used to refer to Québec as well as France, despite the fact that Québec is not a sovereign nation. This terminology is used in an effort to simplify and to reflect the fact that the Québec Province takes policy decisions and processes of defining 'citizenship' in isolation from the Rest of Canada (ROC).
8. Leroux notes that the transnational québécois-French citizen has been constructed from a heritage of shared hardships and a fight to protect and preserve the French language. The québécois rootedness in France is a cornerstone of construction for the normative québécois citizen, which is accompanied by a position of racial and moral superiority (2011). This leads to deeply entrenched boundaries drawn between the post-Christian, white settler society that traces its roots to France and more recent immigrants to the province.
9. The appeal to French norms and the difference from the Rest of Canada that is established in the Charter is evident, although Québec politicians, notably Jean Charest, have also denounced the new ban as unconstitutional (National Post, Oct. 23, 2007).
10. Such as the prefix 'Saint' for street names, and similar Catholic influences.
11. Selby writes that Baubérot terms the Catholaîcité (2012). This term emphasizes the history and roots of the term laîcité (2012).
12. This Muslim threat is often thought to stem from the Middle East despite the prevalence of Islamic faith outside of this geographical region.
13. This statistic is provided in Razack's book. It is also present in her 2005 article in Social Justice (2005). The Brussels Journal in 2007 mentioned an article by the Norwegian newspaper Aftenpost, which allegedly made identical claims about Oslo (The Brussels Journal, Mar. 2, 2007).

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