

WHAT'S IN A WORD? INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE IDENTITY OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN FRANCE TODAY

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Abstract

Over the past few decades, France has been experiencing an identity crisis of sorts. As more and more immigrants have come into the country, France has become, to its chagrin, a multicultural nation. According to the Pew Research, Center France has the largest Jewish population in Europe and the second largest Muslim population, with many Muslims families immigrating from former colonies in North Africa. France has begun to question how it can remain French with all of these non-French nationals coming into the country. Their solution is complete assimilation: anyone can become French as long as they must become completely French. This firm stance on assimilation has made it difficult for some minorities, Muslims specifically, to be fully accepted in France. Simple actions such as covering one's hair can be interpreted as disrespect for French values. Islamic culture is largely seen as incompatible with western French values and is deemed by some to be a threat to the Republic. Citizens who eat halal meat, have an Arabic name, or choose to wear modest swimwear are seen as 'other' and as not part of the national identity. Stuck in the middle of all of this are Muslim women, particularly those who choose to cover their hair. These women face multiple cultural challenges: they are Muslim and therefore must deal with anti-Islamic hatred, they are women and therefore must deal with sexism, and then they must deal with the unique combinations of racism and sexism due to their multiple identities. Muslim women in France are dealing with intersectional oppression stemming from their religious and gender identities.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, France has been experiencing an identity crisis of sorts. As more and more immigrants have come into the country, France has become, to its chagrin, a multicultural nation. According to the Pew Research, Center France has the largest Jewish population in Europe and the second largest Muslim population, with many Muslims families immigrating from former colonies in North Africa. France has begun to question how it can remain French with all of these non-French nationals coming into the country. Their solution is complete assimilation: anyone can become French as long as they must become completely French. This firm stance on assimilation has made it difficult for some minorities, Muslims specifically, to be fully accepted in France. Simple actions such as covering one's hair can be interpreted as disrespect for French values. Muslims are currently the largest minority in France, with an estimated population of 8 million. Of these 8 million people, some are new residents, including refugees from Syria, some are first generation, often with Algerian parents, and others are simply French, with their family having been in France for generations. These 8 million individuals cannot be placed into one box; they are multifaceted people with different thoughts, opinions, and feelings. Unfortunately, as a minority they are often treated as one collective mass, pigeon-holed into only one identity: Muslim. Islamic culture is largely seen as incompatible with western French values and is deemed by some to be a threat to the Republic. Citizens who eat halal meat, have an Arabic name, or choose to wear modest swimwear are seen as 'other' and as not part of the national identity. France cannot flourish if nearly 10% of their population feels unwelcome in their own nation.

To make the situation more complicated, France along with the rest of Europe, is facing a refugee crisis. It is estimated that 65 million people are currently displaced in the world, with 21.3 million refugees registered under the United Nations Refugee Agency

(United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). Many refugees have been seeking asylum in Europe, with the continent seeing 1.2 million people applying for refugee status in 2015 alone. A majority of these refugees have fled from Syria and Afghanistan and they are Muslim, though there are Christian and Jewish refugees as well. The refugee crisis has triggered a rise in hate-crimes and empowered nationalist political parties across the continent. The beliefs that these refugees are threats to Europe, unwilling to integrate, and even potential terrorists, has caused unrest among Europeans. France's nationalist party Le Front National has seen a rise in popularity as more French citizens have begun to subscribe to their anti-immigrant platform. With France becoming more hostile to Islam and immigrants, Muslims are at risk for further marginalization.

Le Front National, which is known for its anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and anti-Jew stances, has gained political power in recent years. Marine Le Pen, the head of the party, is currently ranked second in voter polls in the French presidential election. This is the first time the party has seen such support since its founding in 1972 (Craw). The rise of the Front National has followed the refugee crisis and the spike in terror attacks that France has seen over the last two years. At the same time, hate crimes against Muslims and Jews have seen a sharp increase. The situation is similar to what the United States is currently seeing with the rise of alt-right/fascist/neo-Nazi groups and rise in hate crimes following the election of Donald Trump. Hateful nationalism has begun to gain political acceptance again and is threatening the rights of minorities.

Stuck in the middle of all of this are Muslim women, particularly those who choose to cover their hair. Since the 1980s, France has passed a variety of laws policing the clothing choices of Muslim women. They are not allowed to wear a hijab in public schools, they cannot wear a burka or niqab in any public space, and they cannot even wear a modest swimsuit to the beach. These women face multiple cultural challenges: they are Muslim and

therefore must deal with anti-Islamic hatred, they are women and therefore must deal with sexism, and then they must deal with the unique combinations of racism and sexism due to their multiple identities. Muslim women in France are dealing with intersectional oppression stemming from their religious and gender identities.

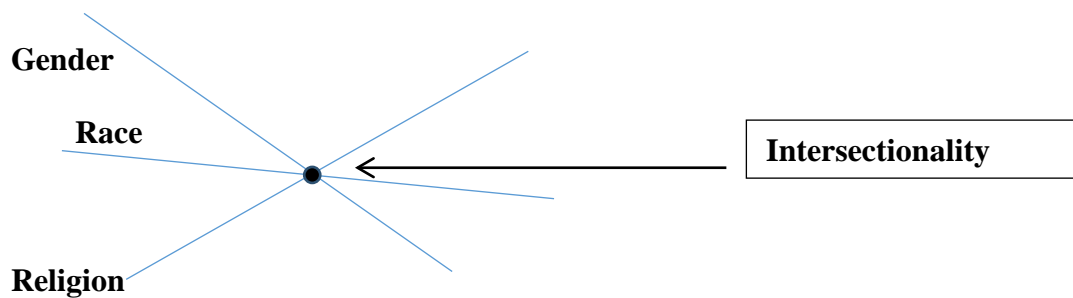


Figure 1: Intersectionality

In 1989, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw used the term ‘intersectionality’ to describe how overlapping or intersecting identities relate to oppression (Crenshaw). Intersectionality is the idea that multiple identities intersect to create a whole new identity that is different from the component identities. It is the idea that one cannot be separated from one’s multiple identities, they all work together to make up a person and how to determine the world interacts with them. These identities include gender, race, social class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, mental disability, physical disability and beyond. The theory of intersectionality proposes that each trait of a person is inextricably linked with all of the other traits and together traits comprise a person’s identity (Crenshaw). Crenshaw argues that due to people’s multiple identities oppression is multidimensional and interconnected. Acts of racism and sexism do not exist in a vacuum from one another, but instead work in conjunction with one another. Intersectionality is not simply a theory of personal identity, but is rather an analysis of the power hierarchies present in society. The framework of intersectionality provides insight into how multiple systems of oppression interrelate and are

interactive; intersectionality is a response to formations of complex social inequalities (Cooper). Crenshaw originally used this term to discuss the treatment of black women in the United States. Since then the concept of intersectionality has expanded to provide analysis for all types of identities.

In response to the term 'intersectionality,' Moya Bailey, an African-American woman, created the term 'misogynoir' as a part of her Master's thesis. Moya Bailey created this term in order to describe the unique combination of racism and sexism that African-American women face. By creating a term to describe these experiences, Bailey was able to solidify previously abstract feelings of discrimination. Emotions and feelings can be very difficult to describe if a word for them does not exist. Bailey dealt with this by creating her own term so that she could clearly define and articulate what African-American women had been experiencing. Misogynoir is able to encompass the intersectional experiences of racism and sexism of African-American women, something that was previously impossible to do in a singular word. Before the existence of the term the struggle of black women was acknowledged, as stated in Zora Neale Hurston's book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world" (Hurston 44). However, it was not a widely known issue outside of the black community, and even then was considered a lesser civil rights concern than those that affected men.

Muslim women in France are in a similar position, experiencing intersectional oppression due to their overlapping identities. Currently there is no word to specifically describe the oppression of Muslim women in France, and this should change. The existence of a word makes an idea more concrete and understandable to those who may or may not have experienced what the word names. Words have power and the creation of a term for the situation of French Muslim women would allow them to better describe their experiences. Words make things real, if a term was created it could enlighten the ignorant to the

oppression these women are under. The existence of the word misogynoir makes instances of misogynoir much easier to recognize, define, and discuss. How can an issue be addressed if that issue cannot even be named? A term for French Muslim women would allow them to discuss the specific oppression that they experience due to France's complicated relationship with Islam. Their oppression is different from the oppression of Muslim women in the UK due to the different histories, cultures, and laws of the nations. I believe that a word to define their struggles would be a valuable tool in the French Muslim woman's fight for equality and autonomy.

In this paper I analyze the causes of oppression against Muslim women in France and its roots in French society. I discuss how the concept of French identity, their total assimilation policies, and their history as a nation have all contributed to the existence of islamophobia and misogyny in France. I discuss examples of both misogyny and religious/racial discrimination in France and show how these have come to intersect for Muslim women. Finally, I argue for the creation of a specific term to describe the unique form of oppression that Muslim women in France are currently experiencing. The inspiration and reasoning behind this term comes from the ideas behind the academic terms 'intersectionality' and 'misogynoir'. I explore the process of word creation, the pros and cons of some examples, and how I came to finalize my term choice, IFEM (Inégalité Français Encontre Musulmanes).

French Identity

French society has created a theory of identity which does not allow for multiculturalism and which marginalizes those who try to embrace multiple identities. This can be seen most easily in the perceived impossibility of being both a citizen of the republic and a practicing Muslim. France is a traditionally white Roman Catholic nation and those

who do not match this description have historically had a difficult time gaining social acceptance. Assimilation in France can be seen as hierarchical, as implied by Harvard's Jim Sidanius, who states that "success is measured by how close people come to the summit, which is perfect Frenchness" (Berreby). The aim of achieving perfect Frenchness can be easily impeded by one's dress, native language, or religious beliefs. This theory of identity does not allow one to be French and Muslim, because those two ideas cannot coincide.

France has a population of nearly 67 million people as of January 2017 and it is estimated that 7-9% of the population is Muslim. This makes Muslims the largest religious minority in the majority Catholic country, with an estimated population of 8 million. It is estimated that France has the second largest Muslim population in Europe, and the largest Jewish population. France welcomes approximately 200,000 immigrants annually, a majority of them coming from Europe and Africa. African immigrants are most likely to come from Algeria, a former French colony, with 14% of immigrants arriving from Algeria in 2008. Surveys show that from 2006 to 2008 almost 40% of newborns had one foreign-born grandparent, with a majority being from North Africa (Breuil-Genier et al). France is a multicultural nation full of new and old citizens and many different religious beliefs, whether or not it likes it.

In France there are purportedly no such things as composite or 'hyphenated identities.' One is only French. While the United States is full of African-Americans, Indian-Americans, Chinese-Americans and so forth, France only has the French (Berreby). This is inaccurate of course, as just like many modern states, France is home to many immigrants and is a multicultural nation. However, France does not like to think of itself in that way. Within French culture, identities are not allowed to mix and mingle, and multiculturalism is unacceptable, even unpatriotic. These ideas stem from the French Revolution, when it was decided that all French citizens should be equal. However, the idea

of equality soon turned into the idea of sameness. The overarching thought became that everyone in France is equal, not because they are human, but because they are “French”. The idea of an ‘Algerian-Frenchman’ or a ‘Korean-Frenchwoman’ does not and cannot exist within this concept of French identity.

Article 1 of the French constitution, which states that “*France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion,*” has been used to eliminate the idea that minorities legally exist in France (Assemblée National). This article of the constitution was also used to justify an 1872 law that forbade the French government from asking for one’s religious background on the census. This law was reaffirmed by a 1978 law that prohibits the government from asking for information about its citizens that would in any way reveal their ethnic or religious backgrounds (Gilbert and Keane). France refers to this as their “color-blind” policy, by which location and class criteria instead of religion or race are used to address social inequalities (Bleich). Today France continues to have only unofficial data on its population demographics. In fact, France reported to the United Nation’s Human Rights Committee that Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was not applicable to them since no ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities existed in the country (Randall 15). The French government’s interpretation of “equality” has faced international criticism, notably from the UN Human Rights Committee and from the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (Randall 15-16). Furthermore, France’s version of equality has caused legal and social problems in the country. It is difficult for discrimination or hate crimes to be tracked due to the legal nonexistence of minority groups. Groups, particularly Muslim and North African, feel that this policy allows for any discrimination against them to be ignored by their government as there is no legal means for them to report issues such as hate speech (Gilbert and Keane). Since France lacks data

regarding ethnic and religious markers of hate speech, anti-discrimination policies refer instead to the “*banlieues*” (suburbs) or “immigrants”, even when the concerned populations might be third or fourth generation French citizens. This type of language further ‘others’ vulnerable communities that are already socially marginalized.

Despite its new reality as a multicultural and multiethnic nation, France has not changed its definition of Frenchness. French schools continue to teach students about “nos ancêtres les Gaulois,” or our ancestors the Gauls, just as they have since the 19th century (Fredette 79). France’s unwillingness to change its idea of what it means to be French has led to the social exclusion of anyone who does not match the exact definition. Muslims who might be third or fourth generation French are viewed as outsiders because they do not drink wine; somehow not drinking a beverage is enough to erase someone’s national identity. This can cause the most problems for second generation immigrants, who might be seen as too foreign to ‘truly’ be French, but who might not have much connection to their parents’ homeland. This lack of cultural identity can lead to frustration and depression, and it is theorized to be a cause in the rise of homegrown terrorists that France has seen recently (Renaud). If France does not accept its reality as a nation of more than just the French, then it is doomed to splinter, just as it did during the French Revolution. In an ironic turn of events, France’s attempt to maintain social equality has resulted in the growth of unaddressed discrimination and the separation of citizens.

Assimilation

When immigrants arrive in a new country they are generally expected to become productive members of the society. Many countries, such as the United States and France, offer cultural, civic, and language classes to help new arrivals adjust to their adopted home. This allows new residents to learn about cultural norms and values so that they might better

fit in and understand the new culture that they have joined. Different nations have different expectations of how well their immigrant populations will meld with mainstream society. France, with its ideas of equality and sameness, holds immigrants up to very high standards of assimilation, rather than merely integration. The French theory is that in order for there to be equality, everyone must be the same, therefore everyone must be at the same 'level of Frenchness' or else they're not the same and are not equal.

The need for assimilation came in the 19th century when almost every region of France had its own dialect and there was no overarching French identity for citizens and minorities to unite under. A public school system was created and for the first time all children were taught the same language (Lacroix). The creation of the public school system and compulsory military service helped forge a common identity to unite the nation. During the colonization of Algeria, Napoleon III implemented a "religious status" law (Lacroix). It allowed Muslims to practice aspects of their religion that would otherwise have been illegal under French law, such as the practice of polygamy, but it also deprived them of the right to vote and to be eligible for citizenship. Nationality and citizenship were thus separated based on religion. To be eligible for citizenship, immigrants were effectively required to renounce their religion in the public sphere (Lacroix). The ability to totally assimilate to French culture became required for anyone wishing to participate in French society.

In France total assimilation is viewed as the best way to protect the nation from the "tyranny of the minority" (Bowen 11). According to Republican thought, "living together in a society requires agreement on basic values" such that "citizens must all subscribe to the same values in the public sphere" (Bowen 13). The French concept of *laïcité* goes hand in hand with their policy of total assimilation. *Laïcité* is the French concept of the separation of Church and State and it is a strongly held value dating back to the French Revolution. The French constitution states in Article One that France will be a secular, indivisible, Republic

(Assemblée Nationale). The concept of *laïcité* extends beyond the political sphere and is considered essential for social cohesion. Religion is considered to be a private matter in French culture, something that is not to be explicitly expressed in the public sphere. One can maintain religious symbols in one's home but to bring them into the public space is seen as divisive. French culture revolves around the idea of equality and sameness; therefore, to declare your religion publicly is seen as a way to remove yourself from that sameness. The neutrality of the public space is considered absolutely essential to the correct functioning of this model, where "citizens, regardless of their regional, ethnic, or religious origin, are entitled, even required, to come together as equals to enact secular rituals and to reinforce the shared values of the social order" (Bowen 15).

People who are unable to or unwilling to meet the social standard of Frenchness are seen as foreign and even as threat to the republic. When asked about assimilation in French society, Hassan Idmiloud of the Muslim Association of Toulouse stated that "someone who has an Arab-sounding name, or who doesn't eat a certain food, is seen as dubious. It is as if at some point, to be French, you have to have the right name, and eat the right things" (Bleich). Immigrants and their descendants are more likely to be pushed out of French society and become marginalized. Immigrants are more likely to live in poverty, to be unemployed, to drop out of school, to be stopped by the police and arrested, than are non-immigrants (Fredette 18). This marginalization comes in part from the nation's hard line on assimilation.

Over the years, there have been political conversations about the failure of Muslim integration. In 2011, President Nicolas Sarkozy commented, "let us recognize the failures of French integration" during a political debate. Politicians typify Muslims as failures within the social system and outsiders, despite their citizenship or immigration statuses (Fredette 36). It has been argued that France has a 'universal model' of who is a French citizen, and if one does not meet the model's standards then one is undeserving of citizenship. This model has

been crafted since the French Revolution and defines a deserving citizen as a “sexually liberal, irreligious, culturally singular, abstract individual” (Fredette 34). This model represents an individual whose sexual and gender identity meet social norms, who practices either no or very little religion, who is of white European heritage, and who has grown up free from social inequality. Carol Pateman and Charles Mills state that following this formula the universal citizen is in essence a straight, nonreligious, financially secure, white man (Pateman and Mills 62). If this is what French citizens are expected to be, then it is no wonder that Muslims are considered an integration failure. In France, Muslims are characterized as sexually atypical (predatory or virginal), extremely religious, and unwilling to accept French social values. All of these stereotypes make it impossible for a Muslim citizen to be perceived as a true French citizen, according to the ‘universal model.’ Alain Boyer refers to this issue as an “image handicap”, where the negative cultural view of Muslims causes their national belonging to be questioned (Boyer 19). This “image handicap” has played a major part in the perception that Muslim women are oppressed or unintegrated if they cover their hair. The intersectional oppression of Muslim women is aided by the belief that they are outsiders.

In France, the term immigrant has evolved to be all-encompassing; it can signify that one is Muslim, dark skinned, North African, or all three. The terms have melded to become a synonymous symbol of otherness within the psyche of France. “Muslim” has become both a religious and quasi-racial classification for people of African descent. Given the overlap of these concepts, it is not uncommon for a French citizen of African descent to be automatically referred to as an immigrant or a Muslim, with little regard for the truth of the statements. Such statements have been found in political discussions where “immigrants” is said in place of “Muslims”. This could be due to the prevalent but incorrect belief that all immigrants from North Africa are Muslim. Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin stated in an interview discussing affirmative action that “the central idea is to help youths whose parents

are immigrants to find their place in society. I do not want us to describe them by their religion but by their skills” (Huet). He leapt to the assumption that the children of immigrants would automatically be Muslim. Equating Muslims with immigrant and vice versa has been institutionalized in France through the creation of the *Conseil Français du Culte Musulman*. The council is tasked with the mission of representing Islam, immigrants and their children in France and are often requested by the media to speak on behalf of these not mutually exclusive groups (Tiberj 186).

Discrimination in France

Anti-Semitism

France has a history of discrimination based on religious or ethnic differences. While this is not uncommon among nations, France’s discrimination is unique due to their values instilled during the French Revolution. Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia can both be found throughout the country’s history and into the modern day. While not the focus of this paper it is important that the history of anti-Semitism in France be acknowledged to show France’s past of religion based discrimination. For example, Jewish citizens were expelled from France on several occasions during the Middle Ages. These expulsions were both religiously and politically motivated. The king would expel Jews in times of political and financial troubles, using them as scapegoats and then confiscating all of their property (Duclert 21).

One of the most poignant moments of anti-Semitism in France’s history was the Dreyfus Affair in 1894. Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a young French artillery officer of Alsatian and Jewish descent, was convicted of treason in 1894. He was sentenced to life imprisonment for communicating French military secrets to the German Embassy in Paris. In 1896, evidence came to light that a French Army major named Ferdinand Esterhazy was the real traitor; however, this evidence was suppressed by military officials and Esterhazy was

acquitted. After Esterhazy's trial the French military accused Dreyfus, who was imprisoned at the time, of additional charges based on falsified documents. A retrial was held in 1899 and divided French society between those that supported Dreyfus and those that condemned him. Public opinion and the press played major roles in the trial and the social conflict that followed. Dreyfus was convicted again in his retrial despite overwhelming evidence of his innocence. He was granted a pardon by French President Emile Loubet but was not officially recognized as innocent by the Supreme Court until 1906. This affair had a large social impact in France with a rise of nationalism and anti-Semitism. The press was very influential during this period and was free to publish anything they wished, no matter how inflammatory or offensive. This freedom allowed anti-Jewish rhetoric and hate to become wide reaching, with anti-Semitic papers, such as *La Libre Parole*, using Dreyfus as an example of why Jews were destroying French society. Anti-Semitism became so profound in France that Theodor Herzl, considered to be the father of modern Zionism, became convinced that Jews needed to leave Europe entirely. Anti-Semitism in France has continued into the 21st century with the number of hate crimes against Jews doubling from 423 in 2014 to 851 in 2015. According to a European Union survey it is thought that as many as 80% of attacks go unreported, putting the actual count for hate crimes much higher (Hadro). In 2015 there was the Porte de Vincennes siege on a kosher grocery store in Paris, where 19 customers were held hostage and ultimately four of them were killed. This attack was only two days after the infamous Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris and was committed by a friend of the Hebdo shooters (Lichfield).

Islamophobia

As it has with their Jewish population, France has a complicated history in its relations with Muslims both at home and abroad. Muslims first came to France in the 8th century following the Moors' conquest of Spain. This goes against the popular idea that

France did not have any Muslims in its borders until their colonization of the Maghreb in the 19th century. France has had relations with Muslims going back to the 12th century Crusades, when King Louis VII attempted to march to Jerusalem. The Kingdom of France participated in multiple crusades, some more successful than others, but all of them involving war with Muslim majority kingdoms (Throop).

While these events happened centuries ago, the narrative of the crusades, a war between the East and West, has been used by both European and Islamic fundamentalists. These conservatives on both sides have used the crusades to support their reasoning of why the other group is terrible. The fall of Jerusalem to the knights of the First Crusade is used as a powerful metaphor for the apparently implacable civilizational conflict between Islam and Christianity. The parallel, a Western army invading a Middle Eastern country, relying on military technology to shock and awe a numerically superior Muslim opponent, is crude and reductive but poignant among some groups. During the 19th century, at the height of colonization in Africa and the Middle East, interest in the history of the crusades began to rise in Europe. The crusades became a symbol for the long history of European colonialism in the Middle East, particularly surrounding the issue of Israel and Palestine. The narrative of the crusades was also embraced by fascists and racists in 19th century Europe who celebrated the story of white Christian knights that slaughtered Jews and Muslims alike (Danforth). The crusades have become a symbol of the impossibility of Islam and the West coexisting peacefully. This idea continues to be used by those that wish for them to never coexist and has unfortunately shaped some of the perception of how Europe can and will relate to Islam and by extension the Middle East.

France's perception of Islam has been further complicated by the country's colonization of most of North and West Africa, with the North being a majority Muslim region. Out of all of France's colonies, Algeria was the most important and it eventually

became an administrative Department of France. The colonization of Algeria began in 1830 and lasted until 1962. As a French department Algerians were eligible to become French citizens and gain full rights, but only if they “renounced their Muslim culture and religion” (Kelly 43). The colonization of Algeria occurred during the same period as the creation of a singular French identity. Those who opposed extending rights to colonized people came up with the concept of “assimilability” (Kelly 42). They argued that some indigenous populations had cultural and racial characteristics so different that they were unable to accept the social pact of French identity. They were supported by the writings of French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville, who made a voyage to the colony in 1840 to study Algerian tribes. The mission’s findings still haunt today’s debate on integration. Algerians, portrayed as deeply religious as well as polygamous, nomadic, and unwilling to work, were described as being the farthest from the national standard, and the least “assimilable” (Lacroix).

During colonization, Muslims were allowed to fill some government positions in Algeria but only those that were considered to be “*bureaux arabs*” or Arab offices. These “*bureaux arabs*” were given to Algerians who were French-educated, who spoke French, and who were thought to be more civilized than the average Algerian (Sessions 42). As subjects of the Republic, Algerians were expected to reflect their new identity and adopt the French language and customs. One of the most obvious non-French ‘problems’ about Algeria was the fact that most of the population was Muslim. To address this, the French colonial government outlawed the use of hijabs or veils for women. They promoted an ‘unveiling’ campaign, as part of *la mission civilisatrice* (mission to civilize) to convince Algerians that the veil was archaic and that any smart French-Algerian woman would be happy to be rid of it. The veil was actually the first social program that the colonial government undertook, targeting Algerian women who were seen as symbols of the Algerian home and heart of the culture (Boariu 177). Like all colonizers, France saw itself as a beacon of civilization that it

was sharing with the savage Algerians and believed fully in the superiority of the “West.” Only Algerians who assimilated were thought of as partial equals and welcomed into French society. This belief of superiority and expectation of total assimilation still defines how France relates to outsiders today.

Despite having the largest Muslim population in Europe, France has taken very few steps to integrate that population into society. For example, during the 2012 presidential race, the issue of halal meat being served in schools became a major political concern. All the candidates repeated declared that they would never allow halal meat to be served at public French schools as it went against their ideas of *laïcité*, separation of church and state (Berreby). The candidates all made it very clear that they would not accommodate their largest minority population in public schools paid for by the very same population’s taxes. Muslims were told instead that they must accept whatever France gives them, because they are in France. In France everyone is welcome at the table, as long as they agree to speak French, eat French food, and take on a French worldview. This expectation of complete assimilation is a lot to ask of one’s minority citizens, and it has led to marginalization of Muslim immigrants. Residents are told to completely abandon their identities or their heritage in exchange for a French identity and social acceptance. Those who do not assimilate are forced to the fringes of French culture, both figuratively and literally as the suburbs of Paris are largely populated by first and second generation immigrants suffering high levels of poverty (Paris, Agence France-Presse). These areas are physically cut off from the center of Paris by a large interstate and many of the neighborhoods are notoriously hard to reach by public transport. But they are not just physically cut off. Those living in the banlieues feel removed both socially and economically. The Paris suburbs, many of which have been classified as "sensitive urban areas," can have unemployment rates more than twice the national average, with those under the age of 24 often the hardest hit. The suburbs are often

also home to higher poverty and crime rates, as well as a higher rate of high school dropouts (Gee).

In the past few years there has been an increase in hate crimes in France against minorities, specifically against Muslim and Jewish citizens. In 2015 the Muslim Council of France recorded 124 Islamophobic attacks and 305 threats, a 224% rise from 2014 and the highest numbers on record. Incidents became noticeably more violent, it claimed, peaking after the shooting at the Charlie Hebdo offices in January, and the Paris attacks in November of 2016 (Porter). There were 26 mosques attacked in 2015 in some cases the buildings were firebombed and others had grenades thrown at them. After Charlie Hebdo on January 7th there were 147 'hate acts', ranging from hate speech to physical assaults, carried out within the month. These hate acts ranged from yelling obscenities to physical attacks. Of the attacks in 2015, 80% were against Muslim women, particularly those that were "visibly Muslim" (Draper). "Visibly Muslim" women are those who choose to wear a hijab, niqab, or other garment associated with Islam, in public. In fact, those who wore a niqab, which covers all of the body but one's eyes, appeared to suffer more anti-Muslim hate incidents and more aggressive assaults than those who wore a hijab. While these women are practicing their freedom of speech and religion they are much more likely to be abused. Women filed complaints about spitting, general abuse, pulling and tearing at niqabs and hijabs, dog feces and bottles being thrown at them, as well as people shouting things like 'Muslim whore' 'Muslim bitch' or 'Muzzie' (Draper). In 2015 a woman with a 5-month-old baby was pushed and cursed at by an elderly man. In the city of Marseille, a young girl was punched in the face and was stabbed in chest with a box cutter (Gopalakrishnan). Women are more likely than men to be attacked due to their visibility and the perception that they are weak. The niqab and hijab have become symbols of 'otherness'; they fly in the face of France's idea of social cohesion where citizens have no discernible differences. France does not truly care about

women covering their hair, they care about what it symbolizes. A woman wearing a burka or niqab is seen as a threat to the values and norms that France was built upon.

Along with general violence in public, there have also been instances of police brutality against minorities. A 2009 study reported that “individuals identified as black or North African” were six to eight times more likely to be stopped by French police than their white counterparts (Grabar). The most recent example of this is the case of a young black man identified only as Theo. Theo was stopped in a routine patrol and asked for his ID, the situation escalated and he was then beaten and raped by a group of officers in the Paris suburb of Aulnay-sous-Bois on February 3. An anonymous video was released showing officers beating and sodomizing the young man with a baton. He suffered grievous injuries and was hospitalized for several weeks. The police called the incident an “accident” but three of the officers involved have been charged with assault and one has been charged with rape (Chrisafis). This incident comes only a year after the death of Adama Traoré, who died in police custody. Traoré, also a young black man, was arrested in the suburb of Beaumont-sur-Oise outside Paris for interfering with the arrest of his brother. Police originally attributed his death to an infection but upon investigation it was found that he died of asphyxiation (Grabar). The investigation of his death is still ongoing a year later and the police have been accused of covering up evidence.

Over the past few years there has been an increase of support for far-right political parties in Europe. The most prominent in France is “Le Front National” which was founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1972. The party is highly nationalistic and has historically opposed France’s membership in European Union and the Schengen Area. They have supported and called for anti-immigrant, anti-Jew, and anti-Muslim policies. Le Pen was nicknamed “the Devil of the Republic” by the mainstream media and his party was largely regarded as extremists (Craw). In 2011 his daughter Marine Le Pen became the leader of the party and

the FN has seen massive growth since. The party won several municipalities at the 2014 municipal elections, a first for the party. It then became the first French party at the 2014 European elections with 25% of the votes. By 2015, the FN had established itself as one of the largest political forces in France, and in December 2016 it was the most polled as the popular party among French citizens ages 18-34 (Fredette 62). The rise of the FN has followed the rise of the refugee crisis in Europe, which has led to massive influx of majority Muslim refugees in the continent. Fear of these refugees, who are seen as potentially dangerous outsiders, has helped empower normally fringe political groups. As the FN gains supporters and political power they will have the freedom to pass more restrictive immigration laws and dismantle anti-discrimination policies. Marine Le Pen has stated that the allowing women to wear full face veils was “just the tip of the iceberg” of the ‘Islamization’ of France (Craw).

Intersectional Oppression

The oppression that Muslim women in France face is intersectional, and it due to both the misogyny and Islamophobia in French culture. These women cannot escape their gender identity or avoid how they are viewed as inferior due to their sex. Gender inequality in France is a key part of the intersectional oppression that Muslim women are facing. Today’s France is much more progressive on gender equality than it has been in the past. French women were not given the right to vote until 1946 after the end of WWII (France 24). However, inequality still exists within the country, even if it is not as discernible as it once was. France deals with many of the same gender issues as the United States, such as the pay gap, gender based violence, and sexual harassment. A 2013 study on violence against women in France states that women are three times more likely than men to be victims of sexual violence. Women are also more likely to be killed from domestic violence, with a 2010 survey finding that on

average, a woman was killed every 2 days due to domestic violence (Gender Equality in France). In 2010 it was also revealed that the average French woman was paid 15% less than a man, which means women were effectively working 38 more days each year than men for the same salary (Pasha-Robinson). A study conducted by the Ministry of Interior in 2011 showed that a majority of French citizens felt discriminated against due to their gender (Renaud).

Modern misogyny in France is more shrouded but can still be seen in instances such as government officials being accused of sexual harassment. In 2016 the deputy speaker of the French assembly, Denis Baupin, was accused by eight women from his own party of sexual impropriety. Baupin was forced to resign after these allegations came to light (Poirier). As in the United States and many other nations, accusations of sexual harassment are often met with deaf ears. Sexism is part of a system that keeps women out of politics. Complaints are often not taken seriously or dismissed as a trivial offense. Thus, sexual violence is trivialized and the victims are expected to bear the consequences. Blaming the accuser is much easier than taking action to prevent the actual crime, and the fear of being reprimanded or stigmatized keep many victims in silence.

France also deals with issues with clothing and the ethics of regulating clothing in the public space. France has passed multiple laws that ban anyone from wearing items of clothing that are considered “ostentatious religious symbols” or seen as threats to security. While these laws apply to all citizens, they target women, specifically Muslim women who choose to cover their hair. State regulation of female clothing is a show of power over a woman's body and what she chooses to put on it. The state is taking away a woman's autonomy by telling her that it is illegal for her to dress how she wants. Men do not have to worry about these laws; they are not the intended targets of the legislation. The best example of true intention of these laws can be seen in the controversy surrounding the “Burkini” and

the multiple bans that were placed on this women's swimsuit style. The 'burkini' is a loose fitting wetsuit that covers the wearer's body and hair, it was designed by Aheda Zanetti who created the swimsuit so that Muslim women could enjoy swimming while maintaining a modest appearance. This swimsuit was seen as a threat to civil society and was banned in multiple coastal cities. The bans were eventually struck down by the French high court, but controversy around the bathing suit remains. For the summer of 2016 the entire country became obsessed with what women, especially Muslim women, were wearing at the beach. For a state, run by mostly male politicians, to rule on what women can and cannot wear is a blatant act of sexism. Controlling what a woman puts on her body is an attempt to control a woman's body, whether this is done by an individual or by a state. Woman cannot truly be considered equals in a society where their bodily autonomy is infringed upon. Unfortunately, the struggle over women's clothing choices has been going on for decades now, with every step towards female self-determination seen as a threat to society.

In France, Muslim women are oppressed due to both their gender and their religion, separately and in combination. Muslim women cannot be separated from either their religion or their gender and they are therefore experiencing intersectional oppression. In the society in which they live, these women cannot escape the inequalities that are done against their gender, or those that are done against Muslims. They are discriminated against as women, as Muslims, and as female Muslims. Islamophobia affects female Muslims more in daily life than their male counterparts in France. It has been found that visibly Muslim women are the most likely to be attacked and harassed on the street level (Scott). They are also the group that the French government has been most actively legislating against, with laws such as the 'burqa ban' and 'burkini ban'. The Islamophobia that these women experience is layered with sexism, due to resistance against both their religious group and gender group.

Examples abound of oppression against Muslim women. In 1989 three female students were suspended from their middle school for refusing to remove their hijabs in class (Scott 15). The Conseil d'État, France's highest court, ruled that the religious expression of the hijab was compatible with the *laïcité* of public schools. Teachers were given the responsibility of allowing or banning the wearing of hijabs on a case by case basis. Then in 1994 the Conseil re-ruled on the case and passed a memo that differentiated between "discreet" religious symbols and "ostentatious" symbols (Scott 31). All Islamic scarves were then considered to be ostentatious and were therefore not allowed to be worn in public schools. Between 1994 and 2003, some 100 female students were suspended or expelled from middle and high schools for wearing a hijab in class. All 'ostentatious' religious symbols were officially banned from public schools in 2004 (Jones 54). While the law does not mention any specific religion and therefore bans all conspicuous religious symbols, it has been claimed by Muslim activist groups that the law targets Muslim schoolgirls who cover their hair (Scott 78).

In 2011 a new law was passed that banned face coverings in public. Banned items include masks, helmets, burqas, and niqabs. The law was passed as a public security measure with the argument that face-coverings prevent the clear identification of a person and pose a security risk. Supporters of the law also argued that the law would prevent women from being forced to cover their faces, and that it would force Muslims assimilate to traditional French social norms. If one violates the law one is fined 150 euros and one must take a citizenship education course, a clear indicator that these laws are meant to target the immigrant population. If a man is found to be forcing a woman to wear something that covers her face, like a niqab, he can be fined up to 30,000 euros (Assemblée nationale). The law was brought to the European Court of Human Rights, where it was upheld, with the court accepting the French government's argument that the law was based on "a certain idea of living together" ("French

Senate approves 'Burka ban'"). The ban is a way for the French government to control their Muslim minority by controlling the women and it appears to be an extension of the colonial policy in Algeria where they outlawed the use of headscarves in an attempt to 'civilize' the population. Now over a century later, descendants of Algerians are being faced with the very same type of laws, which target women and nullify their autonomy. The ban also re-enforces the stereotype that Islam is innately oppressive to women and that Muslim men force women to cover themselves. While burqas and niqabs are only worn by a small percentage of women in France, they have become symbols of 'radical' Islam to French politicians. President Nicolas Sarkozy called the burqa a symbol of "debasement" that was "not welcome" in the country in 2009 (Pasha-Robinson).

Instead of encouraging social cohesion, as the government hoped, this ban has only further divided Muslim and non-Muslim citizens. Outlawing a traditional, though uncommon, garment is way of othering Muslims and further separating them from the majority. Women who choose to wear a niqab are now seen as potential terrorists, since they wear a symbol of 'radical Islam'. The ban has failed to discourage women from covering their faces, as many of the women fined for breaking the law are repeat offenders (Pasha-Robinson). In fact, the ban may have actually caused an increase in the number of women wearing niqabs, with some women claiming that they now wear one in an act of protest against the ban (Pasha-Robinson). Ironically the ban is heralded by some as a feminist victory for Muslim women, who in some other countries are forced to cover themselves. Unfortunately, this ban is simply the other side of the same coin; the state dictating what a woman must or cannot wear is all part of the same systemic oppression. The obsession to the point of fetishism with Muslim women's mode of dress and covering curtails the most basic of human rights, the right of self-determination and freedom of expression. Coercing a woman out of the burka

instead of enabling her to choose can be seen as an act of violence, humiliation and cultural imperialism.

Burkini bans were passed in twenty coastal cities in the summer of 2016, following the terrorist attacks in Paris and Nice ("Cannes bans burkinis over suspected link to radical Islamism"). Anti-Muslim sentiment was particularly high at the time and there was a substantial increase in the number of reported hate crimes. Burkinis were first banned by the Mayor of Cannes who declared them to be "the uniform of extremist Islam" ("Cannes bans burkinis over suspected link to radical Islamism"). The ban was supported by Prime Minister Manuel Valls and former President Nicolas Sarkozy but was eventually struck down by the French court. Despite the court ruling against the ban, many of the mayors who had implemented the ban stated that they would not rescind the law. The burkini, a loose fitting wetsuit, is designed for women seeking modest swimwear or protection from the sun. It was created by Australian designer Aheda Zanetti, who has stated that around 40% of her customers are non-Muslim. While to many the burkini is simply a swimsuit that people should have the freedom to wear if they so choose, to others it is a threat. The head of the Municipal Services in Cannes stated that the rule was about banning "ostentatious clothing which refers to an allegiance to terrorist movements which are at war with us" (Bittermann and Shoichet). Amnesty International's European Director stated that the ban "[promoted] public humiliation" and that the enforcement of the ban "[led] to abuses and degrading treatment of Muslim women and girls" (Bittermann and Shoichet). As evidence of this, photo captured in Nice shows a distressed woman removing her modest swimsuit under the gaze of armed police officers. This photo became widespread through social media and is the perfect example of the abuse and humiliation this ban created.

The burkini ban is not actually about what women are wearing, it is about their religion, gender, and the perceived social threat they pose. This ban, just like the others

before it, is another push against multiculturalism in France. The swimsuit is not the problem, it is what the suit symbolizes: it is seen as a danger to social norms and French culture. The officials that put these bans into place feel threatened by the ‘otherness’ or ‘non-Frenchness’ that they are seeing in their country. These fears are amplified by terror attacks, of which France has been the target in recent years. However, as France tries to legislate against Muslim women in order to control them, just as they did in Algeria, they only increase the divide between peoples. Islamic terror groups use France’s anti-Muslim legislation as proof for the incompatibility of Islam and the West, as well as proof of France’s hatred for Muslims. By further ostracizing minority citizens France is actually making it easier for their citizens to be radicalized, the exact thing they are trying so hard to prevent.

The issue of covering one’s hair, even with just a hijab, has led to women being discriminated against in the workplace. For example, in 2009 a woman named Asma Bougnaoui was fired from Micropole SA, a digital engineering consulting firm in France. After a client had complained about her wearing a hijab. The company asked her not to wear it in the presence of the client, and when Bougnaoui declined to comply she was fired (Employers allowed to ban the hijab: EU court). The company did not have any official policy banning religious symbols, and they had allowed her to wear one freely until the client’s complaint. Following her dismissal, Bougnaoui, along with a Belgian woman who had also been fired for wearing a hijab, took their case to the European Court of Justice claiming that they had been discriminated against. The court ruled that employers were entitled to ban staff from wearing visible religious symbols, and that such a policy was not considered to be “direct discrimination” (“Employers allowed to ban the hijab: EU court”). In their ruling, however, they noted that this was not the case for Bougnaoui and that she had been treated differently and that the client's demand that she not wear a hijab could not “be considered a genuine and determining occupational requirement” (“Employers allowed to ban

the hijab: EU court”). There is also the issue of Muslim women being passed over during job searches if they wear a hijab. One woman, interviewed by Jennifer Fredette, claimed that when she began looking for jobs as a school instructor she took off her hijab in order to be hired. This woman made the choice to remove her hijab on her own, but it was only due to her perception that with it she would never be hired in her field. She stated that she needed to “make a decision between [her] hijab and [her] professional life” (Fredette 46).

On top of dealing with discriminatory legislation from the state, Muslim women who cover their hair must also contend with their fellow French citizens. Since their religious practices often include visible garments, Muslim women have become the main targets of public violence. This phenomenon is not restricted only to France and has been a rising trend in Western nations, including the United States. The Council of Europe published a report declaring that 80% of the anti-Muslim acts that occur in France are carried out against women. The report stated that despite advances in legislation and measures to combat intolerance and racism, discrimination and hate speech not only persisted in France but were on the rise. The report showed that that visible women were the ones targeted at a street level. So women who wear a hijab are sometimes targeted for abuse, and those who wear a niqab tend to experience even more anti-Muslim hate incidents and even more aggressive assaults. Victim data in the report shows that perpetrators are usually male and aged between 15-35, while the victims are mostly women and aged between 15-45 (Directorate of Communications). Women are more visible and are considered to be weaker and less likely to fight back than men, making them prime targets for aggressors. Thus, some women wearing a hijab or niqab has become an act of bravery as well as faith.

Creating a Term

Moya Bailey created the term *misogynoir* in 2011 in a blog post. The creation of this term allowed for African-American women to discuss the oppression that is specific to them.

Before *misogynoir* there was no word that could describe the intersectional oppression that these women suffered from due to their race and gender identities. She went on to use the term in several academic papers and it has now become part of the contemporary feminist lexicon. Bailey filled an empty space in the English language with her term, and she made it so that language could reflect her reality as an African-American woman. Bailey is part of a long line of feminist scholars who have created terms to discuss their realities. At one point in time the words *sexism* and *sexual harassment* did not exist. The behaviors associated with the terms existed, but there was no specific term to describe either. Sexual harassment was not coined until the 1970s during the second major feminist movement in the United States. Words such as *feminism*, *sexism*, and *date rape* can all be considered to be feminist linguistic innovations as they were all invented in order to describe issues that affected women (Ehrlich and King 62). I believe that another feminist linguistic innovation is needed to address the oppression of Muslim women in France. They are victims of gender based and religious/racial based discrimination but currently no word exists that can describe their exact oppression.

There are many things to take into consideration when trying to create a word. What language will the word be in? Will the word actually be a word or a phrase or acronym instead? Who will use the word? Will it be something only used by scholars or is it intended to be used by everyone? How will the word effectively convey a meaning? How will the word be used? Will it only be used in academic papers or will the media use it, or even the government when forming policy?

For a word to describe intersectional oppression of French Muslim women, there are three obvious language options: English, French, and Arabic. English is the language of this global feminism, French is the language of the region the oppression occurs in, and Arabic is potentially the first language of a portion of those affected by our problem. If the priority is to

invent a term to be used by a niche academic community, then English would be the best choice. North American and English academics could use the word to describe troubles in France as viewed by outsiders. However, this term would likely not find its way into the consciousness of any French citizen if it was in English. If the term is to be used by the women whose situation it is trying to describe, then French or Arabic makes more sense. Muslim women in France could use such a term amongst themselves and within their communities to raise awareness of the problems they face. If the word was in French it could also be used as an education tool to raise awareness of the oppression of French Muslim women among non-Muslim French speakers. A French term is more likely to be recognized by institutions in France such as human rights groups, universities, and the government. As a third option, the term could be in Arabic and could be used by immigrants of North African or Middle Eastern origin, as well as people residing in those regions. This would mean that the term would probably be used only by women who have a connection to Arabic, which would include some but not all French Muslim women. The term could also be used by those outside of France to discuss the poor treatment of Muslim women in the country; however, this term would not be very accessible to non-Muslims in France. Weighing all three options, I believe that French is the most effective language for this new term.

My intentions for this term is for it to be something that makes French Muslim women feel empowered. I want it to be something that reflects their reality, their thoughts, and feelings. It should be a word that makes them feel emboldened against the hate they experience. I want the term to be used by Muslim women, but for it to also be something that academics or lawyers or reporters or politicians would feel comfortable using. Now there is a slight problem with this idea; how can I, a white non-religious woman from the United States, create a word that would embody the experiences of French Muslim women? An even better question is, do I have the right to be creating such a word in the first place? I do not wish to

speak over these women or appropriate their voice, I only intend to discuss the creation of potential terms and present them as possibilities, not absolutes. During the creation process I attempted to create a term similar in structure to *misogynoir*, which is a combination of misogyny and noir, French for black. However, I discovered that I was dealing with too many words to simply combine them all together. The word would need to symbolize both misogyny and islamophobia specifically in French culture, so a composite word quickly became jumbled. I came up with terms such as *misogynulism*, a combination misogyny and Muslim, or *islamigyny*, a combination of Islam and misogyny, however neither of these terms convey the Frenchness of this issue. I moved on to acronyms, using a word bank of multiple French words which included: *misogynie*, *Islam*, *français*, *musulmane* (female Muslim), *inégalité* (inequality), *encontre* (against), and *oppression*. By combining these terms, I attempted to create a French acronym that made grammatical sense and came up with the following, IEMF (Inégalité Encontre Musulmanes Français), IFEM (Inégalité Français Encontre Musulmanes), ODMF (Oppression de Musulmanes Français). IFEM, which would be pronounced as “eh-femme” in French, is the best of the proposed terms. It is pronounceable, encompasses the main points of the oppression, and could slip into easily into people’s speech.

Words have power and the creation of a term for the situation of French Muslim women would allow them to better describe their experiences. Words make things real, if a term was created it could enlighten the ignorant to the oppression these women are under. The existence of the word *misogynoir* makes instances of *misogynoir* much easier to recognize, define, and discuss. How can an issue be addressed if that issue cannot even be named? A term for French Muslim women would allow them to discuss the specific oppression that they experience due to France’s complicated relationship with Islam. Their oppression is different from the oppression of Muslim women in the UK due to the different

histories, cultures, and laws of the nations. I believe that a word to define their struggles would be a valuable tool in the French Muslim woman's fight for equality and autonomy.

Conclusion

While Muslim women in the West all experience religion- and gender-based discrimination, those in France deal with a unique type of oppression due to the history and values of the nation. France's staunch belief in *laïcité*, their complicated history of governing Muslim, and their insistence on a difference-blind republic has created this perfect storm of oppression. French Muslim women are attacked in the streets, fired from jobs, arrested, and marginalized for choosing to cover their hair. Their plight has often been overlooked and has at times even been worsened by feminist groups. They have been forbidden from expressing themselves in their schools, in their workplaces, and even at the beach. Their autonomy as citizens is slowly being taken from them, and with the rise of Le Front National and ongoing refugee crisis it appears as if it will only worsen.

The creation of a term to describe the hardships that French Muslim women are facing could help spread knowledge of these issues. Currently the oppression of French Muslims is hardly at the forefront of anyone's mind outside the affected community. However, the creation of a word would allow this insight to spread and might lead Human Rights agencies and social justice warriors to take notice and call for action. France could be held responsible for its discriminatory laws, racist politicians, and systemic oppression. The creation of a term is the next step in revealing and addressing this abuse.

Once a term is created, French Muslim women can use it how they see fit, whether to appeal for international support or to create awareness. I would like to see such a term be able to empower these women and assist them in their struggle for equality and bring visibility to their oppression. France needs to acknowledge that it cannot succeed as a nation while

oppressing its largest minority. France is a multicultural nation full of new and old citizens and multiple religious beliefs, whether or not it likes it. This is unlikely to change in the modern era, so France must embrace its reality of a difference-filled republic and let go of their blindness. A nation is only as strong as its citizens and without granting its people equality and autonomy France will fail in the modern multicultural world.

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