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Berg, Linda; Lundahl, Mikela

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Un/veiling the West
Burkini-gate, Princess Hijab and Dressing as Struggle for Postsecular Integration

By Linda Berg & Mikela Lundahl

Abstract

The ban of the burkini in the summer of 2016 in France is the latest stage in a long political history, where the French depreciation or fear of the veil, and of Islam, has come to play a more significant role since the end of the cold war. Unveiling female bodies at the beach in Nice expose conditioned values of the French republic. In this context, drawing black veils on public advertisements becomes a performative act commenting on consumerism, religion, secularity, and the imagined Muslim woman. In this article we discuss freedom and integration in "third spaces" via an analysis of "hijabisation" in street art and the official reactions against certain types of beachwear. In line with Talal Asad (2006) we want to raise the issue on how the secular state addresses the pain of people who are obliged to give up part of their religious identity to become acceptable. Race-thinking was once an explicit part of celebrated values like modernity, secularity, democracy and human rights. However, the fact that the idea of races has been erased from articulations of Western nations and international bodies does not mean that traces of race-thinking in the heritage from the enlightenment are gone. By following Princess Hijab and the "Burkini-gate" a nationalist fantasy intertwined with the idea of the secular state reveals itself and acts of un/dressing emerge as signs of integration revealing a challenged imperialist paradigm.

Keywords: Veils, Un/veiling, France, Secularity, Burkini-gate, Princess Hijab, Integration, Freedom

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Garment of fear

From 2006 and onwards a graffiti artist called Princess Hijab has been drawing black hijabs and niqabs on advertisements in the Paris Metro. It can be seen as a form of ad busting in which capitalism and white Eurocentric heteronormativity are exposed and commented on through what has been labelled *hijabisation.*[1] By using veiling as a symbol of otherness, as something foreign and threatening, this work highlights the normalised set of commercialised bodies within public advertising. Princess Hijab is a character presented by an anonymous artist through a persona as a veiled young girl.[2] The artwork of Princess Hijab garnered international attention in media outlets such as *The Guardian*, *Al Jazeera* and *The Independent*. After the burqa-ban in France, the work gained new relevance.

When Nice, along with a number of towns along the French coast, banned the use of the burkini as beachwear in the summer of 2016, after the attack in Nice where a truck drove into the public who celebrated the 14th of July and killed 86 people, it was argued that burkinis are upsetting to the public and that the burkini is an expression of extreme terrorism. Much of the argumentation for the bans was in accordance with the discourse on the war on terror, which has been prominent in France since the attacks in Paris during 2015.

Here we aim to take a closer look on in what respect these two hijabising phenomena may effect how Muslim female bodies can inhabit public space in a French context.[3] What reactions does the everyday use of burkini and street art painting on bodies in commercials evoke, relating to the dichotomies religion/secularity, tradition/modernity and oppression/autonomy? Through postcolonial and border thinking, we are deconstructing narratives about the two phenomena, in order to destabilize the order of things they are placed in (Anzaldúa 2012; Mignolo 2011; Bhabha 1994; Foucault 1966). Our primary material is media sources such as news papers, online archives, interviews, digital galleries, social media and blogs about Princess Hijab and what we label as "burkini-gate", that we analyse as scholars grounded in postcolonial, queer, and gender theory (Spivak 1988; Trinh 1989; Anderson 1991; Butler 2015; Brown 2005), experienced in research on racism, gender politics and culture. These two different, yet connected, examples in a French context, both highlight a challenged secular condition in the post-colonial state. Critique has been directed towards the use of postcolonial theory and left legalism in understanding burqa-bans (Fournier 2013), and hence we see the importance of rethinking issues with a broader postcolonial perspective (Fournier 2013:12). We do not tackle this field of study as scholars on the French Muslim context but rather, as Afsaneh Najmabadi formulates it, acknowledge the need to understand that "the current controversy is in part defined by a historical legacy not of French making alone" (Najmabadi 2006: 240). It therefore needs to be addressed as a translocal issue that cannot be explained only from within, since it

is the "result from a multitude of circulations and transfers" (Greiner & Sakdapolrak 2013: 375). What happens in the French context has its parallels also in other European countries, since they all in different senses are home to a growing Euro Muslim population (Amer 2014: 97).

Our examples unfold in France, where veiling has been highly debated for a long time, and where the most radical measures against it, in the European context, have been taken (Fernando 2014). They are both part of an on-going negotiation between – and on – the Muslim world and "the West", even if it all unfolds in the actual west, since Muslims are otherized and framed as non-western, and situated in what Homi K. Bhabha has labelled a third space or In-Between (Bhabha 1994, 1996). This in-between can shortly be defined as an ambiguous space where hybridising "identities" can be negotiated and created (Bhabha 1994: 36-39). The examples raise wider issues about the right to appear in and the right to be defined as a legitimate inhabitant of public space (Butler 2015). We saw a connection between the two different practices of hijabisation – in street art and what we call the burkini gate – which both addressed current crucial concepts such as freedom and integration in third spaces. In this article we aim to undertake an analysis of them with analytical support from postcolonial, feminist and postsecular theories (Butler 2015; Spivak 1988; Mahmood 2001, 2005; Asad 2003; West 1989; Latour 1993). More specifically we are interested in what we can learn from interventions – both everyday actions as the use of burkini and the more intentional covering art – that reveal and criticise contemporary secular paradigms, in this case within a French context but relevant to other parts of Europe as well (Cady & Hurd 2010; Berg, Lundahl, & Martinsson 2016).

In the Western orientalising imagination the veil has remained quite intact and is seen as a never changing garment and a symbol of otherness, oppression, backwardness and in need of development. But veils and their uses are undergoing immense transformations globally. With growing migration veils become present and visible in contexts where they have not been frequent for a long time. For scholars it is not a new thing that veils and veiling practices are in constant flux and have many and changing meanings (Amer 2014). Nevertheless, the common discourse tends to homogenise them again and again. There is a tendency to accept that veiling is changing and has shifting meanings in Western contexts, but not in more "traditional" societies. It reflects a chrono-political thinking (Fabian 2002), where a self-defined "West" imagines itself as contemporary or even as belonging to the future, and cultural expressions of the other is placed in an imaginary, ahistorical past. The homogenising process continues, and heterogenising stories have to be produced over and over to show other stories. In what follows we will contextualise and analyse what veiling do and what reactions it causes and in the end we aim to discuss the effects in terms of integration and seg-

regation that both veiling and counteractions has. Through a short introduction of French state secularism and how the burkini became a loaded symbol, we unfold the material through two central themes safety and freedom, followed by a call for rethinking integration.

In the name of neutrality and unity

In order to understand the layers of France's relation to hijabising one has to put it in the context of secularism and the foundational status it has for the French republic, and for Frenchness. It can be traced back to the late 18th century and the French revolution, as an ideal of a liberation of public institutions, especially primary schools, from the influence of the Catholic Church, in line with ideas from the enlightenment. French state secularism, *laïcité*, is defended by the political leadership as the foundation of freedom of thought as well as freedom of religion. The actual law separating State and Church, however, was not officially adopted until December 9, 1905 and reflects the secularist and republican values of France. The secular laws of France prohibit the wearing of religious symbols of any nature in schools and certain public buildings. The principle of secularity has been a corner stone in the French Constitution, reinforcing state neutrality and guaranteeing national unity. It is argued that *laïcité* is exceptional and foundational for France, but secularity is always localised, and in the case of France it is tightly knit with the republic and the idea of universalism (Amer 2014: 98; Selby 2012: 70ff).

The principle of secular schools was challenged in 1989, when three young Muslim French girls of North African descent, came veiled to their school in Creil, a poor suburb north of Paris, and refused to unveil. After first being expelled by the director, the girls were finally allowed to attend school on the condition that they would not veil inside the classroom (Amer 2014: 97).

> While many schools continue to accommodate veiled girls, others protest what they view as a violation of the principle of secularity. France's highest administrative court, the Conseil d'État, rules that veils are compatible with the French separation of church and state. (Rémond 1999)

The debate on the Islamic veil in the French public sphere has been on-going ever since, and on March 15, 2004, a new law meant to reinforce the principle of secularity was adopted, whereby it became forbidden to wear conspicuous religious signs in schools (Amer 2014: 94). It's also been framed in terms of size, where religious signs such as a small catholic cross or the star of David are tolerated. This has strengthen the suspicion that the law is directed against Islam, rather than

being pro-*laïcité* (Casanova 2007).

In a speech on June 20, 2009, the sitting president Nicolas Sarkozy declared that the burqa would not be tolerated in France, not because it's a religious issue, but because it's questioning the freedom and dignity of women. A law forbidding covering of the face in public was passed by the French Senate in September 2010 and came into force in April 2011 (Amer 2014: 102f).

The ban of the burkini in the summer of 2016 can be understood as one part in this long history of *laïcité*, where the French depreciation or fear of the veil, and of Islam, has come to play a more significant role since the end of the cold war. The mayors of a number of cities along the Riviera, and on Corsica, individually decided against the use of burkini; decisions that are in violation of the French law from 2011, since it only bans covering of the face in public. The burkini in its common form covers the body and the hair, but not the face, and the law from 2011 is not – according to France's highest administrative court, the Conseil d'État – applicable on the burkini. The ban has no support in the French constitution or legislation, since the law from 2011 only concerns face covering in public. Hence, there are no legal arguments or support, and it seems quite clear that it's the escalating and manicheistic discourse of islamophobia, neo-orientalism and fear of terror that has instigated the bans.

From veils to burkinis

A pillar of French colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries has been assimilation. In the French colonial setting it meant that everyone who mastered the French language and culture – people within France and its colonies, regardless of colour it was argued – were considered French. Nationality could be acquired.[4] In reality it was not that easy and there were numerous ways to install new differences, which created a never ending spiral of a Frenchness just out of reach for the non-white colonised other (Bhabha 1994 (1987): 86ff). What this non-essentialist doctrine did not make explicit, but which has been pointed out by its anticolonial critics, was that privileging Frenchness meant erasing the value of all other languages and cultures within the French empire, since the French colonial ideology equated the universal, e.g. civilisation, with modern, French culture (Senghor 1963; Fanon 1952). Since colonial times this idea of the hierarchy of cultures, or even the obscuring of all others, has been the dominant one, although it has been severely criticised by anticolonial activists from the colonies, like the Negritude thinkers and Algerian freedom fighters (Lundahl 2005; Azar 2001).

Contemporary European debates on veils and veiling, with France as an active part, need to be understood within this context of French colonial history (Scott 2007; Camiscioli 2009; Selby 2012). During French colonial rule, veils served as

symbols of both the conservative nature of Algeria, as well as the frustration and humiliation of France (Scott 2007: 66). The veil was identified as "the bone of contention" within the battle between France and Algeria (Fanon 1967: 36f). Since the principle of secularity was challenged in 1989, when the first efforts to restrict the use of veils began in France, it has stirred conflicts and debates, and evoked different kinds of resistance. But as Gillo Pontecorvo shows already in his film from 1966, *The Battle of Algiers*, about the French-Algerian war, veils became weapons (sometimes they hid messages or guns) used by the FLN (*Front de libération nationale*) and the resistance movement played on how the French framed Algerian women as apolitical – either they wore "traditional", i.e. veils, or "Western", i.e. "modern feminine" clothes – and they were in both cases assumed to lack political agency (Moruzzi 1993; Najmabadi 2006: 252). Or, from the other side, when Algerian women in 1958 dropped their veils to proclaim their Frenchness, since "a Muslim woman can claim Frenchness only if she is willing to drop her veil in public." (Najmabadi 2006: 252) Veils in France have become the carriers of the old colonial relationship to Algeria and the colonial wound opens up again whenever veiling is debated. *L'Algérie*, feminine form in French, unveils itself in order to reveal "truths" taken for granted. In "Western", orientalised conceptions of *the* veil, it is assumed that it veils something, the thing itself, or its absence, and sometimes the movement of unveiling is inseparable from an understanding of the veil, in that unveiling constitutes the veil as such (Cixous, Derrida, & Bennington 2001: 34). 1989, when the first controversy unfolded, was also the year of the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie, and was a breaking point for the emerging conflict between "east" (even if the scene was in France, and most of those concerned, were descending from Algeria, that is "south") and the "west", were connections were made between events in Iran, developments in Algeria, Palestine and the Algerian-descending population in suburbs as Creil (Amer 2014: 99).

Even if clothing often is absent in discourses on power, that changes as soon as dress codes – at least if they relate to the female body and/or her sexuality – are broken, or overstepped. Then they become interesting also for the rest of society.[5] In the summer 2016 many Europeans learned a new word: *burkini*. "If a woman goes swimming in a burkini, that could draw a crowd and disrupt public order," the mayor of Cannes, Mr. Lisnard, explained and continued: "It is precisely to protect these women that I took this decision. The burkini is the uniform of extremist Islamism, not of the Muslim religion." (Breeden & Blaise 2016) The reaction was not restricted to local politics. The French Prime Minister Manuel Valls also thought it appropriate to explain that the burkini is "not compatible with the values of France and the Republic." (Dickey 2016) Mayors from some coastal towns banned the veil with reference both to terrorism and to secularism:

> Beach wear that ostentatiously presents a religious affiliation while France and places of worship are now the target of terrorist attacks is likely to create the risk of disturbances to public order (mobs, scuffles) that it's necessary to prevent,' said the bylaw. Therefore, access to beaches is prohibited until after Aug. 31 'to any person not properly dressed, respectful of morality and secularism'. (Dickey 2016)

Even if these ordinances were later identified as not supported by French law, men in power apparently saw this type of clothing as threatening, and some of the mayors declared that they would stand by their decisions in opposition to the Conseil d'État. How they came to the conclusion that "the burkini is the uniform of extremist Islamism" is hard to understand given that it was developed in Australia to enable Muslim girls and women to participate on similar conditions in the beach life. During the decade of its existence, the burkini has been seen at beaches or in sports all over the world, and it comes in many forms, covering the whole body, except face and hands, or significant parts of it.

The term burkini is made up of the two words *burqa* and *bikini*. As women's clothing they could be described as the two most extreme outfits women wear in public. The traditional burqa intends to hide as much of a woman's "attributes" as possible, whereas the bikini is designed to cover as little as possible in order to expose the body/skin to nature, sun, and water, and possibly to the gaze of others. The burkini intends to make it easier for women who want to be comfortable at the beach without exposing their bodies to the sun or gazes.[6] As such, it situates itself in between the bikini, which is assumed to give the wearer the ultimate experience of freedom of the body, and the burqa, which obviously not only hides the wearer's features, but also restricts what one can do while wearing it. The introduction of the burkini facilities the fulfilment of the desire to move freely both on land and in water, and yet protecting the body from unwanted gazes – or for that matter, ultraviolet rays.

If we recall the formulation from one of the ordinances: "access to beaches is prohibited […] to any person not properly dressed, respectful of morality and secularism" we see that now, in 2016, proper dressing has become synonymous with (at least at beaches) uncovered bodies.[7] Being uncovered has become normal and to cover up has become suspicious, signalling danger. With Sara Ahmed one could say that the covering up has become a token for being a "stranger" and a stranger for her is not the unknown, but that which is known as unknown:

> The stranger here is not somebody we do not recognise, but somebody that we recognise as a stranger, somebody we know as not knowing, rather than somebody we simply do not know. The stranger is produced

> as an object of knowledge, rather than coming into being in an absence of knowledge. (S. Ahmed 2000: 49)

Women in burkinis are treated as strangers, in the sense Ahmed evokes. But they are not unknown, they are the strangers that we already know, maybe too well.

Public and safe space?

Who react to veiling? The resistance against veiling is often formulated with references to an idea of the free liberal subject, in a free and at times more or less nude body, or clad in garments supposedly without religious or political connotations – representing the neutral and safe. There is also the desire to describe the veil as an object of hatred and a sign for victimhood (Berg & Carbin 2013), where veils – in colonial discourses – tend to represent symbols of patriarchal oppression in which these women need to be "saved" by Westerners (Spivak 1988).

The ordinance against burkinis states that religious freedom can be curtailed for security reasons and does not explicitly mention any particular faith. The mayor of Cannes, Mr. Lisnard, however, told the newspaper *Nice Matin* that the ban was directed specifically at Muslim attire, even though Cannes officials acknowledge that the number of women who swim in such clothing is "marginal." ("Nice Matin" 2016)

The ordinance was the latest step taken in the name of *laïcité* targeting Muslim clothing, a regular point of contention in France (Daley & Rubin 2015). Politicians disagree deeply on how to define *laïcité*; some acknowledge that it is increasingly used to justify measures, which single out Muslims, rather than to keep government out of all religion and vice versa, the principle's original intent (Breeden & Blaise 2016). The uniqueness of French *laïcité* suggests that it has a fixed meaning, but the way it has been used against veiling since the late 1980s indicates that it's more contingent than the discourse usually acknowledges (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, & VanAntwerpen 2011). It might be argued that what is special is its relation to the French state and even to Frenchness in itself and how the French imagined community is constituted (Anderson 1991; Latour 1993).

As the French state initiated the ban against veils in 2004, a normalisation of non-veiling became institutionalised and the public sphere turned into neutral spaces for some bodies but not for others. In this context the persona Princess Hijab was created by an anonymous street artist in France, a persona who intervened in the crossfire of democracy, religion, secularity and consumer capitalism with the veil as subject. In guerrilla art, artists are often anonymous as the art is often illegal and offers alternative visual narratives outside the commercial sphere. The artist behind the character named Princess Hijab is not known and uses this po-

sition for artistic purposes. Several discussions have focused on whether the artist is a woman and/or a Muslim (Esseghaier 2013). By using veiling as a charged act in a French context, the artistic expressions "un-safe" the imagined neutral space. In an interview by Wooster Collective, Princess Hijab relates the expression to fear and safety: "I chose the veil because it does what art should do. It challenges, it frightens, and it re-imagines" (Wooster Collective 2009).

The underground as a crowded place is supposed to be public and secure; hence with guerrilla art, things taken for granted and perceptions of space are made part of a dialogue. The artist points to what the viewer may not have seen, asking for a response. For example, an open place experienced as neutral and safe for some, are alienating and sometimes frightening for others. To cover oneself can be a way to protect yourself from the eyes of others and hence, in a French context covering rather than uncovering can be viewed as demanding rather than modest. Public transport is one possible place where irregular immigrants can be caught, identified as Other via their clothing.

The artist shows an awareness of the many varied connotations of the veil, and perhaps the multiplicity of identities and opinions related to it, and that is what keeps the artist from aligning with any one group or an explicit political message (see video interview in *Al Jazeera*). Hence by the different expressions and interviews she can be defined as an insider or an outsider, but most of all disturbing the public's urge for a clear line between the speaker and spoken.

The hijabisation of "uncovered" bodies can be interpreted as pointing to the paradox that veiled women are viewed as submissive at the same time as female nudity is normalised in and through everyday advertising. In Princess Hijab's manifesto she unpacks the racist message of modern beauty brands as L'Oréal and Dark & Lovely.[8] The two brands in question have strong symbolic value; the former since it has been sued in France for racial discrimination and the latter for its hair-straightening cream, which is becoming increasingly controversial due to its reinforcing the "white" norm of straight hair, and the protests coming from movements that celebrate "natural hair" (Bird 2009). The artist seems to choose objects carefully and uses consumer imagery to create statements about political exclusion and images of normativity, while mirroring the apolitical nature of the imagery in a refusal of explicit politics (Hirdman 2001).

Street art has often been viewed as a movement with a democratic motif; a claim to space, a reminder to people of the possibility of making it theirs (McAuliffe 2012). The streets and squares do not belong to the leaders of this community, country, the world – it belongs to everyone in these spaces (McAuliffe & Iveson 2011). Although street art sometimes has mainly artistic purposes and the reason behind it varies, the street artist often seeks to give meaning to a space and communicate messages. The communication is directed towards the users of the

place in question, with the possibility of turning hegemonic room-making into an alternative public space, or with Jeffrey Hou, professor in architecture and public art, *insurgent public space*.

> Because of the scale and the mode of production, the making of this alternative public space is more participatory and spontaneous, and therefore more open and inclusive. The insurgent public space that they have created is therefore both a smaller and a grander public space. (Hou 2010: 15)

Veiling have been used to discuss the bodily rights and, through art, highlight and denaturalise secular norms, something which is also the case with the art of Princess Hijab (Atluri 2017: 182). With a black marker pen the artist included veils in the artwork, starting in 2006 after the ban of headscarves in 2004 and before the following burqa-ban in 2011. The artworks can be read as resistance, which confronts and displays the specific French fear of veils and Islam. In an interview for *the Guardian* she points to Naomi Klein's No Logo (Klein 2000) as one source of inspiration:

> I'd been working on veils, making spandex outfits that enveloped bodies, more classic art than fashion. And I'd been drawing veiled women on skate-boards and other graphic pieces, when I felt I wanted to confront the outside world. I'd read Naomi Klein's No Logo and it inspired me to risk intervening in public places, targeting advertising. (Chrisafis 2010)

Metro systems in general tend to be protective about their advertising space, so the work of Princess Hijab usually only stayed up for about an hour before it was torn down again. As a result, very few people have seen the actual interventions, but they are well documented in photographs, which have been widely spread online. Princess Hijab wrote a manifesto on a webpage for the character in question with an archive of pictures. Together with the artist strategies and the extensive and abundant spread, the artistic interventions have a continuing afterlife online. The images have been discussed and Princess Hijab has been called both a feminist and an anti-feminist, racist as well as pro-multiculturalist. In many ways this reflects how the veil has become a symbol that mobilises as well as divide different ideological positions on feminism and racism. Of course this also relates to the speculations on who is behind the artwork. The question of whether or not Princess Hijab belongs to a certain ideological position, raises questions about who has the right to define problems and solutions as well as the on-going homogeni-

sation on what veils really "are". In interviews the artist says she is interested in the veil since it

> has many hidden meanings, it can be as profane as it is sacred, consumerist and sanctimonious. From Arabic Gothicism to the condition of man. The interpretations are numerous and of course it carries great symbolism on race, sexuality and real and imagined geography. (Chrisafis 2010)

Even though she does not explicitly identify with a specific community, she sometimes labels her work as part of a "graffiti of minorities" that reclaims the street. Whether or not these "hijabisations" are directed toward bans against veils, and raise questions on who is considered to be represented and feel safe in public space, these questions inevitably follow as an effect of the interventions. And, as Princess Hijab puts it, the veil "challenges, it frightens, and it re-imagines". But who reacts by being scared, provoked and maybe even feeling unsafe by veils or street art in public space of Paris?

This evidently raises issues about safety and unsafety. What can be defined as a safe space, and who are included in such a space? The concept is in itself connected to a feminist, antiracist and queer activist tradition where safe spaces sometimes have been called for (Hanhardt 2013). In the case of the burkini ban – for the safety of sunbathers – and public transport with everyday advertising, safe space becomes something urgent. With the threat of terror growing stronger after the terror attacks in Nice and in Paris, it has of course a very literal and direct meaning. But there is also quite specific violence and threats directed towards queer people, veiled women, and racialised people in Europe, which makes the demands for safe spaces very concrete. Hence those who are voicing the demands for safety are usually not the most vulnerable, and freedom of speech becomes the mantra for a certain kind of (liberal) freedom.

Boundaries of liberal freedom

In Princess Hijab's ad busting art veils are not used mainly to veil, to hide something from the gaze of the public, even if it does that as well. Rather, they are used to uncover and show the world the white, patriarchal commercial industry (Esseghaier 2013). Drawing black niqabs on advertisements becomes a performative act commenting on consumerism, religion, secularity, and the imagined Muslim woman. Hijabisation becomes a challenging and political act in the French cultural context, where the burqa and the niqab are seen as symbols of Otherness from the past to the present.

Princess Hijab's art articulates connections between myths of femininity and citizenship in works that mirror global contestations of consumerism, and by working within this specific context, she targets the similarities between secularism and feminism in consumer culture rather than subverting the hypocrisy of global corporations (Humphrey 2012). The veiled body becomes unseen, unreachable and with its mythic connotations of the Orient, it is reiterated as unknown and potentially dangerous. The almost naked models are turned into normalised representations of people – primarily women – in the city, and, thereby the (painted) veiled model turns into the deviant. Hence, as the white body is hijabised it also becomes flesh, a body seen in its bare apparition.

Drawing black veils on fashion advertisements in the Paris metro is not only telling us something about veils. Veils are transformed into tools against a certain type of industry but they also act as symbols for reclaiming *democracy*, and function as a way to politicise the apolitical. All of the works have a clear distinction between what is the ad and what is the intervention. The black ink often runs, and the pen creates a surface that differs significantly from the exclusive fashion prints. The image is obviously made as a personal unique initiative and not as one copy of thousands of images made by someone anonymous for a famous company. Via the quick artistic expression, the de-personalised communication becomes visible. As a contrast to messages from something unknown, Princess Hijab's drawings become a call for attention. The drawings become individualised and uncomfortable; at the same time they point at collective problems, regarding ownership and agency of the female body, the power over public space and burning questions of conviviality.

As a comparison, veiled women on the streets, at beaches – in burkini or other hijabs – hijab in the meaning modest cover (Amer 2014: 13f) become politicised, often reluctantly, even if their choice to veil is often personal. But their reasons to why they hijab, veil cannot be heard (Spivak 1988) and they are forced into belonging to one-dimensional "Muslim" communities, which are not imagined from inside but from the outside (Anderson 1991) and are attributed certain values and ideas, which are difficult to resist or reject, if one does not reject Islam altogether. However, we are not claiming to let the subaltern speak in this text, but rather, in line with the phenomena we are studying – especially the interventions of Princess Hijab – we see an on going need to comment and challenge hegemonic norms and raise questions concerning who has the right to exist and who has the need to learn to unlearn.

The French law prohibiting hiding of the face, safeguards the right for women to appear unveiled and denies the right for women to appear according to religious norms of their choice. In this sense, the act of forcing women to religious disaffiliation installs the public sphere as negating imagined forms of belonging

(Butler 2015: 81). Communities of belonging (whether they are chosen or forced upon its members) based on certain kinds of religious affiliations are in this sense violently denied. The events of the summer of 2016 at the beaches of France demonstrates how the so-called public sphere, in this French context, is constructed on foundational exclusions in line with ostracism. The message about the "freedom to appear" becomes a brutal act to appear according to dominant norms or simply disappear.

The commercial actors are free to invade our space with selected choices, a freedom they purchase. Princess Hijab grabs this freedom, probably at great risk, to show us something else, but her message remains marginal, a marginal comment; it does not claim to be hegemonic or normative. Naked bodies – especially if they are female – are here portrayed as a token of freedom (but whose freedom?), whereas covered, hijabised bodies are assumed to be unfree. Burkini-gate showed us another story. The four policemen who tried to unveil a peacefully resting woman on the beach of Cannes will stay in our memories as a strong reminder of who is forcing whom to what. It shows us that the freedom to be covered is threatened, and nudity is forced. Freedom is conditioned, and needs to be exercised within specific boundaries. Burkini-gate was a negotiation of these boundaries: "can we agree that on beaches everybody must show skin?" For now the Supreme Court says no, but local politicians claim that they will go on. Princess Hijab is also an engagement in similar conversations; her art questions current boundaries of freedom: whose freedom to appear and how? This challenges what we mean when we talk about freedom, and Aheda Zanetti, the designer of the first burkini, argues that: "The burkini stands for freedom, flexibility and confidence, it does not stand for misery, torture and terror" (Dumas 2016).

Whose (failed) integration

Veiling is often seen as a token of otherness, an otherness that cannot be accommodated within a modern Western state. An alternative view, however, would be to see hijabisation as something in between, as an invention from Muslim communities to be able to – on their own conditions, as Muslims – participate in modern life – as themselves, on their own conditions, which is what the burkini aimed to accomplish. According to Aheda Zanetti, the designer of the first burkini, the Muslims felt integrated when the burkini was accepted in the Western world (Dumas 2016). The burkini has had this integrating effect since a number of non-Muslim women have embraced the burkini as well as their chosen beachwear, both before Burkini-gate, but reportedly also during it (Pearlman 2016), which is reflected in Zanetti's selling rates: "Every time anyone says something bad about the burkini, I get enquires and sales out of it" (Dumas 2016).

The burkini was developed to answer the need for Muslim women to both cover their bodies and to participate in modern beach life. Beaches have been used by people all over the world for different activities, but swimming as a common activity is quite recent, as is Western swimwear. Western swimwear has followed the development of the 20th century to develop clothes less ruled by decorum, and partly formed by the increased sexualising of especially the female body. Not only the sexualised, also the abled body, the fit body, is celebrated by mainstream beachwear. Aspects that might have grown since the actual need of a strong body has declined in the Western middle class, and therefore – just as cultural phenomena that once were important for daily life tend to become displayed at museums when they are not really needed – has become something to demonstrate and show off rather than to actually use.

Judith Butler (2015) talks about mobilising bodies in space, and the importance of seeing the responsiveness of everyone. So what could this be? We see a parallel to making personal expressions in public space, arguing for bodily assemblages, for uncertain efforts to make alliances between different bodies. In line with Butler we want to emphasise the crucial dimension of people always trying to embody and politicise place. When male, secular, Western bodies use their right to speak and be seen in the public there is almost an invisible link, a direct connection between private and public. If women from minority groups use "freedom of speech" and the right to appear, it becomes an overt political action. To demand the right to speech, and to inhabit a public arena depend to a high degree on access to power and possible subject positions. Already in 2006 Afsaneh Najmabadi stated that there is a gap between the loud protests against veils in public and the care for women's real inclusion:

> Muslim women who stay in their "cloistered homes" hardly pose a visible challenge to French […] secularism. It is, rather, those Muslim women who insist on making their presence seen in public, in educational and professional sites and public spaces, who present a spectacle of strangeness […] the French state, in effect, has chosen to insist that a Muslim woman's veil singularly means an undermining of Frenchness and its secular character, and that it singularly means Muslim woman's oppression. (Najmabadi 2006: 252f)

When minorized people use the classical tools of freedom they are destabilising the safety of the space – that is, their actions demonstrate how conditioned those tools are, that they require users that conform to norms. Or as Princess Hijab describes it:

> My art is rooted in a thinking process and posture which fight society's codes and conventions. It's since touched upon more global issues (anti-advertisement campaigns, state-secularism and religion), but my work will always be a game between myself and my city. Princess Hijab has the clothes and the directness of an Adbuster. She reminds us of the excesses and the failures of our consumer society, but there is no attempt at utopianism … *I am simply aware that a paradigm shift is needed.* (Payne 2009)[9]

The intervention of drawing black hijabs over white bodies by a character named Princess Hijab, call for the spaces in-between given subject positions, a displacement of the hegemonic colonial narration of structure as well as practice (Bhabha 1994, 1996). By contrasting the glossy commercial imagery and the rough painted black ink, with the metaphorical hijab-dressing on pale naked western ideals – a hybrid strategy opens up a third space for rearticulation of negotiation and meaning (Bhabha 1996).

By following different examples of un/veiling, a nationalist fantasy intertwined with the idea of the secular state demonstrates itself (Fernando 2014). Hijabisation and burkini-use ultimately become decolonial interventions and signs of integration revealing an imperialist paradigm; seemingly marginal actions, which can be viewed as examples of negotiations and struggles about public areas and, in the long run, what is and should be the common.

Both our examples confirm that hijabising – through wearing burkinis or performing street art – represent diversity within the community of Muslim women. They both challenge the current French hegemony, which puts secularity in the center as an important tool to secure the common in a modern democratic society while at the same time differences of class, gender, region and race do not fit well into the idea of what the "community of shared values" in France is assumed to be (Asad 2006: 14).

Given France's long and partly violent colonial history, it is disturbing to hear how the French public is still trapped in what one early critic of French colonial power called "superiority complex" (Senghor 1963). We find it important to further discuss the aftermath and continuing effects of "European culture and knowledge" by identifying resistance and transformation of the injustices to which disempowered peoples and societies remain subjected (Young 2001: 68).

In her introduction to *Is Critique Secular?* Wendy Brown points out that if race had been a part of the Danish Muhammad cartoons, they would likely have been illegal in many European contexts (Asad, Brown, Butler, & Mahmood 2013: 11). Her point is that through a different language, described as tacit, silent or implicit race thinking, it becomes possible within the law and the liberal discourse,

to still talk about the "Muslim". But not about the Arab, for example, or about the Middle East, or other regions' cultures or about different races and their assumed internal differences. The content from racism has moved to other categories like ethnicity, culture, tradition, and religion. Within the law and the current French hegemony it's possible to enforce pork meals in school (Fraser 2015), de-veil women on beaches, publish offensive Mohammad cartoons, etcetera, i.e. continue to harass Muslims in the name of culture, yet avoiding explicit racialising.

Race thinking might be gone from most explicit discourses but was absolutely normal when most of the thinking that we proudly see as defining us – modernity, secularity, democracy, human rights –was articulated. This makes it not only possible but likely that there are implicit traces of race thinking in most of the heritage from the Enlightenment, and we cannot assume that it is enough to erase the explicit references to race (and sex, class, sexuality, religion, etcetera) to free an idea from this heritage (Eze 1997).

The capacity of secularity to function as a prerequisite for modernity, critique and reason, and the fact that it does not see itself (or is seen) as political, ideological or historical is harmful for a reciprocal integration. We need to see secularism as the particular and local position that it is, and as one of many ways of understanding and framing the world. And it is pertinent for the future that we who are disciplined into the secular paradigm become aware of our own framings, and how they shape our worldview (Casanova 1994; Asad 2003; Calhoun et al. 2011).

One of our times' challenges is to scrutinise given values for Eurocentric, patriarchal heritage, which includes the idea that religion and secularity are entirely separable, and the idea that the secular should be the most rational way to organise society, and instead begin to build societies where secularism is one of many possible positions, that many still see as the best for them, but not necessarily as the best for everyone. There is a need to rethink the idea of secularity as something that everyone eventually needs to embrace, as well as to stop seeing secularism as the only position that can accommodate critique, modernity, and the existence of a public sphere and an engaged civil society.

> These questions emphasize an observation that is becoming increasingly commonplace: the rise of religious 'fundamentalisms', the spread of nationalist movements, the redefinitions of claims to race and ethnicity, it is claimed, have returned us to an earlier historical movement, a resurgence or restaging of what historians have called the long nineteenth century. Underlying this claim is a deeper unease, a fear that the engine of social transformation is no longer the aspiration to a democratic common culture. We have entered an anxious age of identity, in which the attempt to memorialize lost time, and to reclaim lost territories, cre-

> ates a culture of disparate 'interest groups' or social movements. Here affiliation may be antagonistic and ambivalent; solidarity may be *only* situational and strategic: commonality is often negotiated through the 'contingency' of social interests and political claims. (Bhabha 1996: 58)

Dr Linda Berg, senior lecturer in Gender Studies at Umeå University with a research interest in feminist postcolonial studies, focusing especially on solidarity and subjectivity in transnational relations and activism. linda.berg@umu.se

Dr Mikela Lundahl, senior lecturer in History of Ideas at University of Gothenburg with a research interest in feminist postcolonial studies, especially anti- and post-colonial struggle through philosophy, literature and heritage.
mikela.lundahl@gu.se

Notes

[1] There is a sura in the Quran often referred to as the "the verse of the hijab", Q 33:53, in which men are asked to only interact with the wives of the prophet from behind a curtain or a screen, in order for everyone to keep their hearts clean. From that idea of a physical border between men and women the practice of hijabising has emerged. There is another sura, Q 33: 59, which urges women to draw their veils closer around them. Other than that there are no specific rules about veils or hijabs in the Quran (Amer 2014: 22ff). From these verses one can talk about hijabisation as the act of veiling rather than being about the veil or hijab itself, which is not mentioned or described in the Quran.

[2] The quotation is taken from an email interview by ethnologist Jenny Gunnarsson Payne (2009). We have also been in contact with the artist called Princess Hijab. In all interviews this female character is in focus and in all public information the gender of this persona is labelled she, therefore we have chosen to use female singular when discussing the artwork by Princess Hijab.

[3] There is a growing body of scholarly work on Muslims, and especially female Muslims, and their place in public France. For example: L. Ahmed 1992; Fernando 2010; Bowen 2007; Deltombe 2005; Silverstein 2004; Keaton 2006.

[4] For a long time the practice of *jus soli*, birth right citizenship, was practiced in France, but it has been restricted since the 1990s (Brubaker 1992: 150f).

[5] Uniforms and suits are although standard requisites in the corridors of power and an important part of constructions of heteronormative (not to say hegemonic) masculinity (Connell 1987: 79ff).

[6] The burkini has been branded as "Muslim", even though the designer Aheda Zanetti claims that she did not only think of Muslim women when she designed it (Zanetti 2016). The British food celebrity Nigella Lawson made headlines when she wore one in 2011 (Bunting 2011). Apparently many non-Muslim women have bought one after it became a legal issue in France as an act of solidarity (Khan 2016).
[7] Swimming and sunbathing became a part of Western upper classes' recreational and leisure life during the late 19th and early 20th century, and it was not until the late 1920s that it become fashionable with tanned skin, and the now normative bikini was introduced as late as 1946 (Martin et al. 2009).
[8] In a now erased "manifesto" from her blog she wrote that "Princess Hijab knows that L'Oréal and Dark & Lovely have been killing her little by little," (Gordon 2009; Cabein 2009).
[9] Italics by authors.

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