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**MUSLIM WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN FRANCOPHONE EUROPE: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF FRANCE AND BELGIUM**

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List of Abbreviations

BSA	British Sociological Association
CCIB	<i>Collectif Contre L'Islamophobie en Belgique</i>
CCIF	<i>Collectif Contre L'Islamophobie en France</i>
CDH	<i>Centre Démocrate Humaniste</i>
CFCM	<i>Conseil Français du Culte Musulman</i>
CSC	<i>Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens de Belgique</i>
ECFR	European Council for Fatwa and Research
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EMB	<i>Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique</i>
EmBeM	Empowering Belgian Muslims
FEMYSO	Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations
FN	<i>Front National</i>
MR	<i>Mouvement Réformateur</i>
MRB	Muslim Rights Belgium
MSSD	Most similar systems design
MDSD	Most different systems design
NPNS	<i>Ni Putes, Ni Soumises</i>
POS	Political opportunity structure
PS	<i>Parti Socialiste</i>
PR	Proportional representation
SES	Socioeconomic status

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Glossary of Terms

Term	Meaning
<i>Hadith</i>	Sayings or teachings of the Prophet (peace be upon him).
<i>Hijab</i>	Typically refers to Muslim women's modest dress or more specifically Muslim women's head covering. Style of adoption varies between individuals. Used interchangeably with headscarf.
<i>Laïcité</i>	Explored in detail in Chapter Two, very broadly refers to the legal separation of church and state.
<i>Niqab</i>	Face covering worn by some Muslim women. Distinct and different from the headscarf. Used interchangeably with veil.
<i>Qur'an</i>	Islamic holy book.
<i>Ramadan</i>	Islamic lunar month in which most Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset.
<i>Sunni</i>	Majority Muslim sect globally, typically characterised for their following <i>hadith</i> and <i>Qur'anic</i> sources.
<i>Shi'a</i>	Second most populous Muslim sect globally, characterised by the greater emphasis placed on the lineage of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him).
<i>Ummah</i>	Global Muslim community.

Thesis Summary

Muslim women constitute almost half of all European Muslim parliamentarians, yet they are typically framed as oppressed or as a threat to European values. Simultaneously, although France and francophone Belgium are seen as similar, there are significant disparities in the levels of Muslim political representation in each case. The introduction outlines the rationale behind studying the principal motivations, opportunities and barriers to Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium, and also the basis of studying the role of 'European Islam', political opportunity structures, secularism and Muslim women's dress.

The second chapter details the research design and methodological approaches applied in the study. Via the in-depth comparative analysis of each context and its norms, along with data derived from semi-structured qualitative interviews with Muslim women who participate in politics, the subsequent chapters present findings related to the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium. Chapter Three details the expressed motivations derived from experiences, Islamic and European values, discusses their desires to participate in political projects that will benefit the wider society and groups with whom they socially identify, and how this leads to the Muslim women pursuing diverse political engagement.

Chapter Four explores the role of contextual norms and political opportunity structures in shaping and contributing to the distinct disparities in the nature of reported opportunities for political participation encountered by Muslim women in the two cases. Chapter Five details the obstacles to participation posed by Muslim women's dress in France and the emergence of such patterns in Wallonia. It also outlines the barriers to Muslim women's political participation linked to Islamophobia, racism and gender. The concluding chapter brings together the principal conclusions of the study, namely the similar faith related motivations to pursue political engagement expressed by the Muslim women who participated in this study, the increasingly similar barriers to political participation faced by Muslim women presented by norms surrounding Muslim women's dress in the two cases. The study also details the different effects of the political opportunities on the nature of political roles occupied by Muslim women in France and Belgium. Finally, the thesis highlights the remarkable resilience and consistent determination of Muslim women in the two cases.

Keywords and Phrases: Muslim Women, Political Participation, 'European Islam', Secularism, Political Opportunity Structures

1. Chapter One: Introduction

In this chapter I outline the research focus in this thesis, namely the comparative study of the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium. This chapter seeks to detail the relevant literature and current state of Muslim political representation in Western Europe. This section also considers the stereotypes commonly associated with Muslim women and the obstacles to political participation faced by women generally. This highlights the relevance of comparatively analysing the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium.

The chapter continues to present the aims and the research questions that will be assessed during the course of this thesis, including the study of the principal factors that motivate Muslim women to participate in politics in the two cases, a comparison of the nature of the opportunities for political participation encountered by Muslim women in France and francophone Belgium and finally the barriers to political participation faced by the Muslim women interviewed. The ultimate section of the chapter outlines the format of the thesis.

1.1 Muslim Political Representation

There are an estimated 38 million Muslims in Europe¹, meaning that Muslims make up approximately 6% of the European population (Pew Forum 2015) meaning that Muslims are commonly seen as Europe's new and principal ethnic and religious minority (Klausen 2009). Muslims form a significant part of European society and are ethnically, culturally and even religiously diverse.

Given the noteworthy presence of Muslims in Europe, it is perhaps unsurprising that their political participation benefits both the Muslim community and society more generally. For example in the UK, Muslims involved in politics promote civic engagement amongst the wider British Muslim community and are better able to assist potentially marginalised British Muslims than other non-Muslim politicians (Sinno and Tatari 2009). Furthermore, Muslim political participation and representation encourages diversified political inclusion, strengthens and enforces national democratic principles and processes (Zibouh 2013).

Muslim political representatives also work effectively to build multi-ethnic coalitions within their political careers, thus Muslim participation in politics brings diversity to the political arena and this, it is argued, subsequently lessens racism and discrimination in the political sphere (Sinno and Tatari 2009). Muslims who participate in politics represent positive role models for young Muslims since they constitute an alternative to extremist attitudes apparent within small sections of the Muslim

¹ In this instance, Europe refers to the European continent, as defined by the Pew Forum in the statistical database from which these figures are taken.

community (Sinno and Tatari 2009). The observed and argued benefits of Muslim political representation contribute to and underline the relevance of studying the nature of Muslim women's political participation.

Nonetheless in spite of the significant European Muslim presence and the multiple benefits brought about by a Muslim political participation, Muslims often find themselves politically underrepresented (Klausen 2009). For example, in Germany Muslims make up 4% of the wider population. However of the total 614 seats in the *Bundestag*, only seven are occupied by Muslims (Sinno 2009a, 72-75)². Put alternatively, this means that German Muslims only constitute 0.81% of the German lower parliamentary chamber and are absent from the upper house. Similarly, Greek Muslims make up 3.5% of wider society, yet they only constitute 0.33% of the Hellenic Parliament (Sinno 2009a, 72-75). Worse still, with French Muslims making up an estimated 8% of the wider community (Pew Forum 2009, Sinno 2009a, 72-75), France has the largest Muslim population in the West. Nonetheless, of the total 908³ seats in the two chambers of the French parliament only five are occupied by French Muslims (Sinno 2009a, 72-75). This means that proportional to the French Muslim population size, European Muslim national political representation is poorest in France at a ratio of 1:0.07. These generally low rates of Muslim national political representation in the West persist in spite of the suggested increasing rates of political participation by Muslims post 1990 and 9/11 (Back et al. 2009, Sinno 2009a, Yazbeck Haddad and Ricks 2009). Therefore, the analysis of the nature of Muslim women's political participation contributes to understanding the gap between the argued increase in participation by Muslims and the generally low rates of Muslim political representation.

Conversely, some European Muslims enjoy higher rates of parliamentary representation. For example, in the UK there are eleven elected national parliamentarians and similarly twelve in Belgium (Sinno 2009a, 72-75)⁴. This means that the UK and Belgium have the highest numbers of Muslim parliamentarians in Europe. However, closer inspection reveals British Muslims still only constitute 0.8% of the national parliament, therefore indicating that proportional to population size British Muslim national political representation is still relatively low at a ratio of 1:0.24 (Sinno 2009a, 72-75). Nonetheless, as well as having the highest number of Muslim national political

² Although these figures put forward and adapted from (Sinno 2009a) might not be the most recent statistics pertaining to rates of Muslim political representation, these figures are used since they represent a standardised cross European data set and therefore allow greater comparability across cases, as required in the framing of this research.

³ Figures provided for France in Sinno (2009a, 72-75) precede the increase in seats in the *Sénat* in 2011. The total number of seats across the French national parliament is currently 925.

⁴ Here and throughout the text "national parliamentarians" indicates elected representatives from both houses in bicameral systems where relevant. Also this statistic and all others quoted taken from Sinno (2009a) refer to the situation in 2009, figures in Belgium and the UK have since changed. However, based on issues surrounding the identification of Muslim parliamentarians, the limited remit of this study and the comprehensive nature of Sinno (2009) I have chosen to use these figures here.

representatives, Belgium appears the only case in Europe where Muslims are not politically underrepresented. In fact at a ratio of 1:1.35, proportional to Muslim population size Belgian Muslims are politically overrepresented at the national level (Sinno 2009a, 72-75). These statistics point to the exceptionalism of Belgium.

Table 1.1 is adapted from Sinno (2009a, 72-75). It details rates of Muslim national political representation in Western European cases where Muslims constitute at least 2% of the overall population. The data is presented in rank order ranging from the highest to lowest proportional rates of representation.

Table 1.1. Muslim Political Representation in Europe - adapted from Sinno (2009a, 72-75)

Country	Percentage Muslim Population	Total Number of Parliamentary Seats	Number of Muslim Parliamentarians	Percentage of Muslim Parliamentarians	Ratio of Percentage Muslim Population to Percentage Muslim Parliamentarians
Belgium	4%	221	12	5.4%	1.35
Netherlands	5.8%	150	7	4.67%	0.81
Denmark	3.7%	179	3	1.6%	0.45
Norway	1.7%	169	1	0.59%	0.35
European Parliament	3.3%	732	8	1.09%	0.33
Sweden	3.9%	349	4	1.15%	0.29
UK	3.3%	1367	11	0.8%	0.24
Germany	4%	614	5	0.81%	0.20
Greece	3.5%	300	1	0.33%	0.09
France	8%	908 ⁵	5	0.55%	0.07

These stark disparities in Muslim political representation persist in spite of France and Belgium being neighbouring and seemingly similar cases. Therefore, I take these two different cases, France and Belgium, as the primary sites of study and compare the nature of Muslim women's political participation in the two contexts. However, given the distinct Flemish and francophone Belgian communities, along with the linguistic and arguably normative similarities, such as those relating to secularism and Muslim women's dress, between France and the French speaking Belgian regions

⁵ See footnote 3.

(Mielants 2006, Severs 2010) this study focuses on France and francophone Belgium, rather than comparing France and Belgium as a whole.

1.1.1 Muslim Women's Political Representation

My own analysis of existing evidence indicates that Muslim women constitute 47% of all Muslim parliamentary representatives in national European governments (Sinno 2009a). This figure is central to this study and is particularly remarkable for two principal reasons. Firstly, women's political representation generally tends to be low, with women previously only making up between 10-20% of national parliaments worldwide (Kenworthy and Melami 1999, 236). More recent statistics suggest an improvement in women's national parliamentary representation, with figures rising to a 22.6% global average (IPU 2016). Specifically, women constitute 27% of French national parliamentarians and 38% of Belgian national political representatives (World Bank 2014). These figures are perhaps unsurprising given the obstacles to political participation faced by women generally, including limited resources, traditional gender roles, lower levels of educational attainment and negative attitudes from within the political sphere. This means that within the Muslim community, when compared to global and national averages, European Muslim women enjoy noteworthy rates of national political representation in Europe. This observation contributes to the decision to comparatively study Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium, rather than opting to research Muslim political participation across gendered boundaries.

Secondly, it is my argument that the observed high rates of Muslim women's political representation are exceptional given the popular, highly mediatised, politicised and often negative image of Muslim women prevalent throughout Europe. Academics highlight that the current perception of European Muslim women is informed by popular Islamophobic discourses (Meetoo and Mirza 2014). Visibly Muslim women are often framed as victims of cultural and religious misogyny, and subsequently seen as oppressed (Al-Saji 2010, Amara 2004, Bullock 2002, 2005, Carland 2011, Esposito and Mogahed 2007, Fayard and Rocheron 2009, Ghumman and Ryan 2013, Peelman 2002, Wallach-Scott 2007, Yazbeck Haddad 2007). This perception is also linked to the assumption that visibly Muslim women are sexually controlled, evident in their covering, and therefore their external appearance is perceived as anti-feminist (Winter 2008, Fayard and Rocheron 2009). Simultaneously visibly Muslim women are seen as a source of cultural (Amiraux 2007, Fayard and Rocheron 2009, Wallach-Scott 2007) and violent threat (Carland 2011, Edmunds 2011, Zemni 2006). These stereotypes have contributed to visibly Muslim women being increasingly singled out as targets for Islamophobic attacks (Allen and Nielsen 2002, Benyekhlef and Thami 2013, CCIF 2014, Ghumman and Ryan 2013). Furthermore, given the multiple negative connotations attached to Muslim women and their external appearance, many Muslim women

report spending much of their time attempting to combat these undesirable perceptions (Bullock 2002).

Many of these stereotypes are linked to Muslim women's dress, and although not empirically supported Shadid and Van Koningsveld (2005) assert that the majority of European Muslim women do not wear the headscarf or face veil in their daily life and only chose to adopt the headscarf during prayers, mosque visits and specific religious occasions. Additionally, for Muslim women the significance attributed to their dress is often personal, complex, multifaceted (Kulenovic 2006) and at odds with common preconceptions. For example, evidence from Muslim women's own accounts and some limited academic study suggest that Muslim women see the headscarf as symbolic of piety, religious identity, modernity and autonomy (Boubekeur 2004, Bouzar and Kada 2003, Lévy et al. 2004, Lyon and Spini 2004).

Nonetheless, highlighting these common views of Muslim women, along with considering the general obstacles to participation faced by women in general, further underlines the surprising nature of the observation that of the European Muslim national parliamentarians 47% are women. The statistics combined with the stereotypes of Muslim women, obstacles to women's participation, the paucity in literature related to European Muslim women's experiences of political participation, and also findings that Muslim women have been increasingly politicised and politically visible post 9/11 (Wadia 2015) emphasises the relevance of comparatively studying Muslim women's experiences of political participation in France and francophone Belgium.

Table 1.2 sets out a detailed breakdown of European Muslim women's national political representation. It details the number of Muslim parliamentarians, followed by the number of Muslim women parliamentarians in each case. The data is presented in rank order of number of Muslim women parliamentarians in each case and includes information pertaining to the percentage of female political representation more generally.

Table 1.2 Muslim Women's Parliamentary Representation in Europe - adapted from. (Sinno 2009a, 72-75, World Bank 2014).

Country	Total Number of Muslim Parliamentarians	Number of Muslim women Parliamentarians	Percentage Females in National Parliament
Belgium	12	10	38%
Netherlands	7	4	39%
France	5	3	27%

Germany	5	3	37%
UK	11	3	23%
European Parliament	8	2	
Norway	1	1	40%
Denmark	3	0	39%
Greece	1	0	21%
Total	53	26	

As Table 1.2 shows Muslim women's parliamentary representation ranks fairly high in France when compared with the other cases outlined above. However, more remarkably of the total twelve Muslim parliamentarians in Belgium ten are female. This means that Belgium is home to the highest number of female Muslim parliamentarians, as well as being the only European case where Muslims are proportionally politically overrepresented. As previously highlighted, 4% of the Belgian population is Muslim and simultaneously Belgian Muslim women make up 4.52% of national Belgian parliament. This means that Belgian Muslim women's parliamentary representation alone proportionally exceeds Muslim population size in Belgium. Yet, little is known about the experiences of these seemingly well-represented women and additionally little has been written about the objective structures and personal experiences that give rise to these figures, again this contributes to the rationale behind studying the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium.

To conclude this section, against the background position of generally poor rates of women's political representation and stereotypes of Muslim women, evidence indicates seemingly remarkable rates of Muslim women's political representation, especially in Belgium (Sinno 2009a), a growth in the politicisation and political visibility of Muslim women post 9/11 coupled with the noted limited academic consideration of Muslim women's political participation (Wadia 2015), I establish the rationale behind studying the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium.

1.2 Aims and Research Questions

The primary research aims addressed in this thesis are to assess the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium and to determine the factors that differentiate their experiences in the two cases. In order to effectively assess this the study

emphasises Muslim women's reported experiences and considers these in conjunction with the objective structures and norms in place in each context. As part of my endeavours to provide a holistic comparative analysis of the nature of Muslim women's political participation, I adopt a series of three sub-themes; these areas relate to motivations to participate in politics, the opportunities for Muslim women's participation and finally the barriers to participation faced by Muslim women in each case and are as follows:

What are the principal motivations, opportunities and barriers to Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium, and what differentiates their experiences in these two apparently similar but quite distinct settings?

- **Does 'European Islam' motivate political participation by Muslim women in either France or francophone Belgium?**
- **To what extent do political opportunity structures in either France or francophone Belgium provide opportunities for Muslim women's political participation?**
- **Does secularism and particularly its influence on the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress in either France or francophone Belgium constitute a barrier to Muslim women's political participation?**

Adopting a three-strand approach, outlined above, enables the effective and systematic study of the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium and therefore sheds light on a previously under-researched area in a structured and coherent way

In studying the motivations expressed by the Muslim women interviewed, the research provides insight into the specific issues and instances that catalyse and drive Muslim women's political participation. This section of the research also seeks to explore the extent to which Muslim women in either France or francophone Belgium are motivated to participate in politics by 'European Islam'. As often skilled, educated and politically aware second generation Muslims in Europe negotiate their position in secular European society (Just, Sandovici, and Listhaug 2014, Karic 2002, Klausen 2007, March 2007, Merali 2011, Pedziwiatr 2006, 2007, Roy 2005, Saint-Blancat 2002, Salih 2004, Salvatore 2007), the debate surrounding 'European Islam' brings into question the extent to which Islamic values are compatible with political participation by European Muslims (Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking 2013, Karic 2002, Ramadan 1999, 2004, 2010). A minority of European Muslims refute the acceptability of participation in Western politics (Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking 2013, Parvez 2013). For example, based on semi-structured qualitative interviews with twenty young Canadian Muslims, Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking (2013, 187) found that among their sample one interviewee suggested a contradiction between democratic and divine law and therefore felt that he could not participate in formal politics. However, within their study, this view appears less

significant than barriers posed by political disillusionment for example. Also in France, (Parvez 2013) reports similar attitudes among often impoverished French Muslims in the *banlieues* of Lyon. In spite of this, prominent European Islamic scholars, such as Tariq Ramadan, and organisations stress and advocate political participation by European Muslims (Ligue des Musulmans de Belgique 2014, Ramadan 1999, Bechler 2004, Ramadan 2010), indicating that ‘European Islam’ might motivate European Muslims to participate in politics. However in spite of this implied motivation, ‘European Islam’ remains contested, theoretical, imprecise (Salih 2004) and empirically understudied (Allievi 2005). Studying the extent to which ‘European Islam’ motivates political participation by Muslim women in either France or francophone Belgium contributes to a gap in the literature, provides insight into the motivating factors specific to European Muslims and also informs the wider understanding of the nature of Muslim women’s political participation in France and francophone Belgium.

This study recognises the potential influence of political opportunity structures (POS) on political participation by individuals (Arzheimer and Carter 2006, Hooghe 2005, Kitschelt 1986, Koopmans 1999, Leighley 1995, Martiniello 2005a, Meyer and Minkoff 2004, Mayer and Staggenborg 1996, Nelson 1979, Nentwich 1996, Norris 1997, Rootes 1999, Tarrow 1996). POS comprise the combined effects of exogenous long-term features such as institutional configurations, electoral systems and legislative measures in conjunction with short-term features such as context specific historical precedents, personal resources, wider extrinsic political and social discourses and their potential to either enhance or inhibit opportunities for individuals to participate in politics. These factors can also be characterised via the application of a formal versus informal division, with formal POS including elements such as institutional configurations and informal POS comprising current social attitudes.

Although previous quantitative study into Muslim political participation speculates on the influence of institutional factors and specifically the positive effects of proportional representation (PR) electoral systems on political participation by Muslims (Sinno 2009a, Zibouh 2011), the in-depth study of the influence of POS on Muslim participation remains under-researched.

Given its qualitative focus and participant-centred approach, this study also comparatively analyses Muslim women’s reported experiences of the opportunities for their political participation, and in doing so combines the study of the objective or formal POS with Muslim women’s subjective experiences of these structures. This combined approach is both novel and sheds light on the wider understanding of the nature of Muslim women’s participation in French or francophone Belgian politics. Moreover, studying the formal and reported opportunities allows an understanding of the ways in which the expressed motivations to participate in politics translate into actual political participation by Muslim women in France or francophone Belgium and

additionally contributes to explaining why some of the Muslim women's political aspirations remain unrealised.

The final thread of this study seeks to comparatively analyse the barriers to Muslim women's political participation in each case. It explores the role of secularism and its influence on the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress and the extent to which these contextual norms create barriers to Muslim women's political participation in either France or francophone Belgium. The decision to study this theme stems from the argued increase in 'combative *laïcité*' in France, which is characterised by its anti-Islamic nature (Baubérot 2012, Boussinesq 1994, Charentenay 2010, Laachir 2008, Ramadan 2004, Roy 2007). This current variant of French *laïcité* has been influential in the legalised limitation of Muslim women's dress in France (Legifrance 2004, 2010, Baubérot 2004, 2012, Fayard and Rocheron 2009, Hargreaves 2007, Haspelagh 2012) and has partly contributed to the normalised social construction of visibly Muslim women as anti-secular and therefore anti-French (Charentenay 2010, Motha 2007, Wallach-Scott 2007), oppressed, and therefore helpless and anti-feminist (Amara 2004, Fayard and Rocheron 2009, Winter 2008, Yazbeck Haddad 2007) and paradoxically they are also symbolic of threat and Islamic extremism (Amara 2004, Carland 2011, Edmunds 2011, Wallach-Scott 2007, Zemni 2006). Against the background French assimilationist position (Bertossi 2012, Kuru 2008, Silverstein 2008, Streiff-Frénart 2012), these stereotypes are partly influenced by French debates concerning secularism and its implementation, as discussed in greater depth in Chapter Five, and ultimately 'other' French visibly Muslim women. These preconceptions are also at odds with observations that Muslim women constitute almost half of all European Muslim national political representatives (Sinno 2009a). Therefore, studying the influence of French secularism on the normative attitudes towards visibly Muslim women presents both the opportunity to assess the outcomes of these discourses on Muslim women's political participation in France and also allows for the study to potentially challenge these seemingly normative perceptions.

Simultaneously, Dutch-style multiculturalism in Belgium (Coene and Longman 2008a, Haspelagh 2012, Koutroubas, Vloeberghs, and Yanasmayan 2009, Lettinga and Saharso 2012, Zemni 2006, Mielants 2006, Severs 2010) in conjunction with Belgian 'organised secularism'⁶ contributes to the national recognition and inclusion of religious groups including Islam (Kanmaz 2002). However, there are increasing suggestions that French-style secularism and assimilationist norms are increasingly influential specifically in francophone Belgium (Mielants 2006, Severs 2010). These suggestions persist in spite of the fact that secularism is not explicitly cited in Belgian legal measures that limit Muslim women's dress, such as the recent Verviers French-style school

⁶ Belgian 'organised secularism' is arguably the result of the combined influences of French secularism and Dutch pillarisation present in Belgium. The term refers to the comparable structure and organisation of religious and secular groups officially recognised by the state.

headscarf ban (Verviers Conseil Communal 2013), the national veil ban (Moniteur 2011), nor at present, do we see the same connotations associated with visibly Muslim women in Belgium as observed in France, such as the idea that there is a male enforcement of Muslim women's dress. Nonetheless, the suggested increase in French-style 'combative' secularism in francophone Belgium implies that Muslim women's experiences of the potential headscarf barrier to political participation will be comparable in both cases. Therefore this study also presents the opportunity to assess the extent to which this is the case whilst also allowing for the explanation of limitations specific to Muslim women, as well as providing general insight into the factors that limit Muslim women from realising their desires to participate in politics and the ways in which Muslim women in the two cases handle such obstacles.

1.3 Thesis Outline

This chapter has detailed the background state of European Muslim, and specifically Muslim women's political participation and outlined rationale behind comparatively studying the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium and the key research questions to be addressed within this thesis

Chapter Two comprises an overview of the research design and specific research methods of study selected. This includes a discussion of the role of reflexivity and feminist standpoint theory and their subsequent influence on networking, participant recruitment, undertaking the fieldwork and completing the data analysis. It also outlines the underlying motivations and merits of adopting a qualitative approach and the specific use of semi-structured qualitative interviews in the field. As part of the research design the chapter continues to discuss the strengths of applying a comparative, analytical approach. It also reports data collection methods, including the preparatory measures taken, such as defining the parameters for participant recruitment, seeking ethical approval, networking and sample sizes, before finally outlining the nature of the fieldwork and providing a summary of the participants in the study.

The thesis then presents three analytical chapters. These are informed by the research sub-questions posed earlier in this chapter. Chapter Three specifically outlines the literature pertaining to 'European Islam' before assessing the extent to which the evidence derived from the fieldwork suggests that it motivates Muslim women's participation in politics, and the way in which this differs in both cases. It goes on to discuss the wider motivations expressed by Muslim women including the role of the perceived efficacy, the influence of personal experiences on their motivations to participate in politics, their personal identity and the motivations underpinned by altruism and social justice.

Chapter Four examines the opportunities for Muslim women's political participation. The chapter begins with an overview and comparison of the objective POS in France and francophone Belgium. It then presents and comparatively analyses Muslims women's responses related to the nature of the opportunities that they encounter and reveals the distinct influence of contextual differences on Muslim women's political participation in each case.

The fifth and final analytical chapter reviews the nature of secularism in France and Belgium respectively, and how this then influences the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress in each case. The chapter goes on to compare the extent to which Muslim women felt that these secular norms and approaches towards Muslim women's visibility shape their political participation in each case. The chapter reveals the significant barrier to Muslim women's political participation posed by 'combative *laïcité*' in France, the changing nature of secularism in Wallonia and Brussels and the unexpected ways in which Muslim women overcome these obstacles. The chapter also explores the wider barriers to Muslim women's political participation in each case, including Islamophobia, racism and limitations related to gender.

The final chapter of the thesis brings together the principal conclusions reached throughout the analytical chapters and seeks to respond to the initial research questions posed at the outset, related to the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium. Additionally it presents the key findings related to the factors that motivate Muslim women's participation and the role of 'European Islam', the perceived and actual opportunities for political participation by Muslim women in the two cases, the role of secularism and its influence on the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress and the wider barriers to political participation encountered by Muslim women in France and francophone Belgium respectively.

2. Chapter Two: Methods

Having established the rationale and primary research aims in the preceding chapter, Chapter Two begins with an overview of the research design applied in this research. Via the consideration of reflexive approaches and feminist standpoint theory, I continue to discuss the effects of my unique position as a female British Muslim researcher comparatively investigating Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium, the advantages it brought and also the ways in which I overcame potential obstacles presented by my status. I then go on to discuss the rationale behind my decision to apply a qualitative focus in the research and the specific strengths and weaknesses of this approach. The following section of the chapter reviews the rationale behind adopting comparative analysis, its merits and potential limitations, along with the specificities of comparatively studying Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium and the advantages and potential challenges posed by this analytical method.

The chapter then continues to outline the fieldwork process. This includes a summary of the parameters imposed whilst recruiting participants to the study, the sampling criteria and ethical considerations taken prior to conducting the fieldwork in both countries. In this section of the chapter I also discuss the fieldwork timeline and a summary of the participants before presenting my final conclusions related to the methods.

2.1 Research Design

Given the paucity of research related to Muslim women's experiences of political participation in France and Belgium, along with the limited focus on Muslim women's voices in academic, political and social discourses, I also aim to focus on Muslim women's personal voices, in addition to exploring the context-specific norms and structures. This approach aims to provide a more holistic understanding of the factors that define the nature of Muslim women's political participation in the two cases. These foci, along with the additional emphasis on 'European Islam' and motivations, political opportunity structures, and secularism and associated barriers to Muslim women's political participation has methodological implications. The following sections of this chapter outline the methodological considerations that have been taken into account and which, as a result, have enabled the effective study of the primary research areas in each case.

2.1.1 Positioning, Reflexivity and Standpoint Theory

Social science researchers are part of the social world which they are studying and therefore cannot be entirely divorced from the research process (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007, Williams and Treadwell 2008). My own position in undertaking this study has implications for the fieldwork process, potentially shapes the nature of the data collected and also influences subsequent data analysis (Mauthner and Doucet 2003). I was aware that the multiple facets of my identity meant that during the research process I was simultaneously an insider and outsider in relation to the researched community. Additionally, my position as a visibly Muslim woman from an ethnic minority background meant that I also potentially subvert the dominant view of what a British researcher might be. In order to better interrogate, problematise and conceptualise my position and its effects, I look broadly to the literature regarding reflexivity and feminist standpoint theory and subsequently relate these approaches to my personal position. Interrogating one's position in the research process contributes to understanding the assumptions made by researchers, the standpoints occupied and their influence on the fieldwork, data collected and data analysis (Hsuing 2008, Mauthner and Doucet 2003).

Reflexivity involves critically questioning one's place as a researcher in the wider research process (Brownlie 2011, Delanty 2005, Zubair, Martin, and Victor 2012), or put alternatively "...reflexivity

entails arriving at a critical turning point where the researcher turns the investigative lens away from others and toward him or herself.” (Hsuing 2008, 23)

Self-scrutiny during the research process gives wider perspective, shapes research design (Hellawell 2006) and challenges notions that being a complete outsider brings efficacy and objectivity (Delanty 2005). The position of the researcher is often framed in terms of insider and outsider status boundaries (Hellawell 2006). Being an insider involves having shared characteristics and experiences with the researched community, whereas outsider status is characterised by difference between the two parties. Viewing these relationships in binaries is oversimplified and therefore problematic. Given the multiplicity of identities held by individuals (Delanty 2005), rather than adopting this binary view I would argue that it is more appropriate to view the insider/outsider relationship as fluid and on a continuum, as Hellawell (2006) argues. This means that there are instances where the researcher is a complete outsider, but on other measures the researcher can also simultaneously be an insider. Like others (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007, Mauthner and Doucet 2003, Williams and Treadwell 2008), I adopt the view that being a complete outsider to one’s research is not entirely possible. However I do not see this as a limitation, instead I recognise the multiple benefits brought about by occupying insider and outsider positions simultaneously. Nonetheless, acknowledging this also brings the need for increased reflexivity prior to and whilst conducting the fieldwork, and also during the data analysis. This reflexive approach attempts to counter criticisms and subsequently enhances the research findings.

In addition my position as a female Muslim researcher investigating political participation by other Muslim women prompted me to read into feminist standpoint theory. This theory emerged in the 1970s with second wave feminism (Bowell 2011, Harding 2004, Wylie 2003). In spite of the recognised controversy as highlighted by experts in the area (See Bowell 2011, Harding 2004, Wylie 2003), surrounding feminist standpoint theory, the approach remains widely used and influential in the social sciences (Harding 2004). Feminist standpoint theory partly arises in response to the traditional systematic ignorance of women’s experiences in research and as criticism to what is described as the often sexist and racist ends of much research that emerged prior to its popularity (Harding 2004). Feminist standpoint theory rejects notions that researcher distance or outsider status enhances objectivity, meaning that my insider position becomes less problematic. The approach refutes the traditional assumption that ‘true’ scientific or abstract knowledge is possible (Bowell 2011) and therefore sits well with my personal epistemological perspectives.

Feminist standpoint theory also emphasises the socially situated nature of knowledge (Harding 2004), for example “certain socio-political positions occupied by women (and by extension other social groups who lack social and economic privilege) can become sites of epistemic privilege” (Bowell 2011). Therefore according to standpoint theory researching minority communities and

women capitalises on the epistemic privilege of such groups. This involves recognising the socially located nature of knowledge and the specific awareness of those who occupy particular marginalised social positions. Therefore, via the consideration of feminist standpoint theory, this study recognises and capitalises on the specific knowledge of Muslim women's experiences held by Muslim women themselves.

The recognised epistemic privilege means that feminist standpoint theory advocates researching marginalised groups (Bowell 2011) since this reveals insights into the experiences of minorities, meaning we see events from the perspectives of the marginalised rather than the elite. This approach also provides an insight into the position and perspectives of dominant and non-marginalised groups in society (Bowell 2011). Or, as Wylie (2003, 34-35) states: "marginal status generates a fundamentally different understanding of how the world works."

Therefore according to feminist standpoint theory, by studying the experiences of often marginalised Muslim women, we gain an insight into their personal experiences, as well as gaining knowledge of the wider hegemonic views and structures in place in France or francophone Belgium.

Furthermore, when I set out to undertake this study I was motivated primarily by what I perceived to be the need to challenge the exclusion of Muslim women's voices in the literature, save for a few examples (Boubekeur 2004, Bouzar and Kada 2003, Bullock 2005, Contractor 2012b), and also the need to consider issues affecting Muslim women from the perspective of these women. An obvious example of the exclusion of Muslim women's voices is apparent in the debates that preceded the introduction of the 2004 *Loi Stasi* (Legifrance 2004, Baubérot 2004). Since Muslim women's voices are traditionally overlooked, feminist standpoint theory would suggest that the approach in this study has emancipatory potential (Harding 2004). Although this is debatable, the examination of Muslim women's voices and political experiences presents an alternative view and has the potential to challenge dominant preconceptions about Muslim women.

Feminist standpoint theory emphasises the benefits of shared experiences and collective knowledge brought by marginalised researchers studying similarly marginalised groups (Bowell 2011, Harding 2004), so for example given their shared position women are better placed to conduct research about other women. In this study, occupying the same marginalised standpoint as many of the interviewees facilitated access and also improved my understanding during the fieldwork process. For example, shared Muslim female identity was particularly beneficial whilst recruiting participants and negotiating interviews. During my fieldwork I found that some associations with whom I was in contact held their events and meetings in the women's sections of Islamic cultural centres or mosques. These spaces were used since these centres are able to offer meeting facilities to the often underfunded associations free of charge. As a Muslim woman

I had privileged access to existing knowledge of such spaces; this subsequently meant that I was more readily able to gain access and was at ease in such associations. Also my privileged position meant that interviews that took place in these organisations were not hampered by a lack of contextual knowledge.

Similarly, as European Muslim women we occupied a minority position and had a shared knowledge of the issues faced by European Muslim communities, such as Islamophobia and marginalisation. However, this common position also presented the risk of generating limited interviewee responses on the basis of presumed collective knowledge. By employing reflexivity and examining my standpoint prior to undertaking the fieldwork, I was able to incorporate prompting strategies within my interview schedule. These prompts served as a means of eliciting more detailed responses should the women have offered non-detailed responses on the basis of presumed knowledge.

Although difficult to precisely pinpoint without entering a detailed discussion related to class, and not directly addressed during the interview, I often shared similar levels of 'class' or socioeconomic status as many of the women interviewed. Both the majority of the interviewees and I shared ethnic minority status, and therefore marginalised status, meaning again I was an insider. However, I am personally neither of North African nor Turkish ethnic background, nor am I ethnically European like many of the converts in this study, meaning once again I was an outsider to some degree. Therefore throughout and on various measures I was simultaneously an insider and outsider to the researched community. In this regard, my reservations about framing insider and outsider status in terms of simple binaries were borne out, emphasising the utility of perceiving insider/outsider status as fluid and placed along a shifting continuum. However, given the non-ethnically bound nature of Islamic identity and also since this study foregrounds Muslim identity over ethnicity, origin is less influential in this research. This religious focus also differentiates my work from the work of others, such as that of Zubair, Martin, and Victor (2012) where the British Pakistani female principal researcher, Zubair, foregrounds her Pakistani identity. Zubair details in her critical reflections of conducting qualitative fieldwork with older British Pakistani Muslim, the ways in which her ethnic identity facilitates her access and research into the researched communities. In spite of the difference in primary focus, this reflective piece informed my understanding and conceptualisation of insider and outsider statuses and my role as a researcher in the research process, as well as encouraging my adoption of a critical approach during and after data collection. The comparison of this research with my own also highlights the ways in which seemingly marginalised female Muslim researchers are able to foreground facets of their identity for the benefit of their research.

As I am neither French nor francophone Belgian I found that on this measure as a British researcher I was an outsider to the women being interviewed. Initially I found that this meant that networking and recruiting participants to the study might present some difficulty, particularly since I lacked specific knowledge of local networks and organisations. Again, employing reflexivity and considering the standpoints occupied by myself and the interviewees prior to conducting the fieldwork, enabled me to place greater emphasis on networking and encouraged me to carefully consider the participant recruitment strategies that I would employ. In this regard the networks generated as a result of my work with the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO) and interactions with the Empowering Belgian Muslims (EmBeM) network contributed significantly to overcoming the gap presented by my non-French and non-Belgian status.

Aiming to conduct the interviews completely in French also contributed towards bridging the distance between myself and the interviewees. However, whilst the majority of each interview was conducted in French, I often found that the interviewees would switch to either English, since they were aware that this was my first language, or alternatively interviewees also commonly added Arabic phrases to the conversation given our shared religious identity and common cultural links. This code-switching emphasises the previously highlighted notions of multiple identities held by myself and the interviewees and also underlines the continuum of multiple and shifting insider/outsider positions occupied. However, the mixed language use that emerged during the interviews also added complexity to the data management and analysis later in the study. Therefore, to ensure uniformity, enhance cross-respondent comparability and to facilitate readership, I translated all excerpts taken from the interviews presented throughout the thesis into English.

Being an outsider to the French and francophone Belgian contexts also brought specific benefits during the data collection process and the subsequent data analysis. For example, since participants often assumed a lack of knowledge of local processes and incidents on my part, they were often keen to contextualise and clearly explain local specificities during the interviews. In this case being an outsider contributed to eliciting detailed accounts from interviewees, facilitated data collection and contributed to clarity in subsequent data analysis.

To conclude this section, I put forward the view that questioning my own multi-faceted identity enabled me to interrogate my own assumptions, challenge hegemonic preconceptions regarding distance and 'objective knowledge', and most importantly it allowed me to better understand and negotiate my position, in reference to the interviewees, along the insider/outsider continuum in order to enrich the networking, data collection and data analysis presented in this thesis.

2.1.2 Qualitative Research

In this section of the chapter I present the rationale behind this study and specifically opting to use qualitative methods and specifically semi-structured qualitative interviewing over other data collection methods. Primarily, the central observations pertaining to the perception of Muslim women, and especially those who visibly and can clearly be identified as Muslim women, the simultaneous absence of their voices and personal stories from popular discourse related to them, means that this study emphasises the need to present a view of Muslim women, *by* Muslim women; and the existing statistical evidence pointing to significant rates of Muslim women's political representation especially in Belgium drive this methodological choice.

The detailed quantitative understanding of Muslim political representation in France and Belgium coupled with a limited qualitative focus, as presented by others (Sinno 2009a, Zibouh 2011), partly drives the qualitative approaches in this study. From a practical perspective conducting qualitative research generally generates a wealth of specific and analytically rich data in a short space of time (Barbour 2008). Furthermore, qualitative interviewing provides an insight into the subject's lived experiences, opinions and activities (Kvale 2007). These strengths of qualitative methods both fit with the given time constraints in this study and enable the effective fulfilment of the research aims discussed previously. However the wealth of data generated also presents issues related to effective data management. I was able to overcome this potential limitation by employing effective data management strategies. For example, all but one of the interviews were audio recorded via the *Livescribe Echo* smart-pen. Additionally, whilst undertaking the interviews I made notes that related to the key content themes of motivations, 'European Islam', opportunities and POS, the influence of the headscarf and secularism and finally the general barriers to Muslim women's political participation in each case. The smart-pen software automatically bookmarks and links sections of audio to written text and therefore I had already partly begun to prepare the data for analysis whilst undertaking interviews. Furthermore, since interviews were audio recorded and electronically stored in a confidential manner, it was possible to efficiently electronically manage the data. Also this meant during the data analysis I was able to return to each full audio recording and associated written notes.

Based on guidance in Kvale (2007) *Doing Interviews* (2007), as part of my attempts to effectively manage data, I had initially intended to transcribe each interview in full. However, given the practical limitations faced, full transcription was not in the remit of this study. Therefore, I chose to listen to each recording several times and subsequently selected and transcribed relevant content. As stated, given the mixed use of languages during the interviews when transcribing and further in the thesis I opted to translate all material into English. The selected transcriptions were grouped and stored according to the research themes with which they corresponded.

The decision to adopt a qualitative focus subsequently shaped the specific data collection methods available and therefore prior to embarking on the fieldwork stage of this study, I had to carefully consider the merits and limitations of each potential method.

Very quickly it became apparent that an ethnographic approach would not be most suitable. Conducting an observation, either as a participant or a direct observer, would have meant attending and observing Muslim women as they participated in politics. Although observations are particularly useful in the analysis of patterns of behaviour among researched individuals at a particular given time, ethnographic research would have been problematic for numerous reasons. Firstly, observations tell us little about thoughts and previous personal experiences. This is an issue since this study aims to address Muslim women's opinions and experiences, and the ways in which these shape their political participation in the two cases. Also because the Muslim women who participated in this study pursued a range of political activities, an ethnographic approach would mean potentially only observing selected types of political engagement; this would subsequently limit the potential to generalise from the research and hence detract from the sought after holistic view of the nature of Muslim women's political participation. Additionally this approach would have been exceptionally time consuming and therefore beyond the remit of this study. These practical issues along with issues of access presented by the potentially hidden nature of Muslim women who participate in politics and the sensitivity of some of their political engagements informed my decision not to pursue ethnographic qualitative methods.

Instead, I opted to use qualitative in-depth interviewing as the primary means of data collection. This method allows for an exchange between the researcher and interviewees centred on the research aims and questions. Interviews allow for the in-depth expression of the voices of the researched (Barbour 2008, Kvale 2007), as desired in this study. However, interviews are also subject to bias, as a result of the interviewer's questioning style and interviewee's desire to offer an appropriate response. This potential limitation meant that it was necessary to employ reflexivity and careful consideration whilst designing the interview schedule and during the interview process in order to prevent such bias arising.

There are multiple ways of conducting interviews, such as one-to-one or group interviews involving the interviewer and two or more interviewees. However in this instance, given the personal nature of the information that was likely to be divulged by interviewees, along with the emphasis on the individual voice and personal experiences of motivations, opportunities and barriers to political participation, I decided to pursue one-to-one interviewing rather than undertaking group interviews. One-to-one interviews also often mean that the interview exchange is not hampered by group dynamics, which can cause particular interviewees to become reserved or reluctant to share their experiences whilst others dominate. In this regard the selection of one-to-one

interviews further facilitates the in-depth study of individual Muslim women's personal experiences.

Interviews also differ in terms of the level of structure imposed, ranging from predominantly unstructured interviews, semi-structured or entirely structured interviews. In unstructured interviews although the general interview theme is set by the researcher, the flow of the exchange is largely directed by the interviewees. The broad and undefined nature of unstructured interviews risks not fully covering all of the areas of investigation in this study and potentially detracts from cross-interviewee comparability. Alternatively, structured interviews are governed by a strict interview schedule devised prior to the interview by the researcher. Heavily structured interviews forfeit flexibility and leave little option to follow-up areas of interest expressed by interviewees. These limitations mean that neither unstructured nor heavily structured interviews constitute an ideal method for investigating and comparing the nature of Muslim women's political participation.

Instead I use semi-structured, qualitative interviewing. This type of interview is most commonly used in qualitative research, represents an ideal middle ground between structured and unstructured interviews and is recognised as being the "gold standard" in qualitative research (Barbour 2008, 113, Leech 2002). By adopting semi-structured interviews I therefore utilise the optimal mode of interviewing, follow precedents in the literature and attempt to overcome the criticisms of other interview styles. Semi-structured interviews are loosely guided by an interview schedule devised by the researcher prior to interview. However the schedule also allows for flexibility during the interview process (DiCicco and Crabtree 2006) and therefore allows the researcher to explore areas of interest raised by the interviewee that have not previously been considered by the researcher or existing literature. This flexibility would not have been open to me had I adopted structured qualitative interviewing.

Semi-structured interviews are co-constructed by both the researcher and participant, thus emphasising the role of both the researcher and the interviewee in the data collection process. This notion of co-construction further emphasises the utility of having previously interrogated both my position and that of the interviewees within the frame of reflexivity and feminist standpoint theory prior to the interview process. This method of interviewing Muslim women who participate in politics also capitalises on Muslim women's epistemic privilege of the area of study as outlined in the previous section.

Having opted to conduct one-to-one, semi-structured interviews in this research I needed to devise an interview schedule (see Appendix One). This schedule was intended to provide a guide, contributed to the partially structured nature of the interview and sought to ensure a degree of

comparability between each of the interviews. This in turn would inform and enhance the wider comparative analysis in the study.

The interview schedule was based on the research questions presented earlier in this chapter, meaning that all of the interviews conducted address Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics, the role of 'European Islam' in their participation, the perceived opportunities for political participation by these Muslim women, the extent to which secularism and contextual approaches to Muslim women's dress limit political participation and finally the more general barriers to Muslim women's political participation in each case. The open-ended nature of these questions was intended to stimulate discussion and in-depth responses from the interviewees, and subsequently foreground and emphasise Muslim women's voices.

In order to determine the suitability and the extent to which the interview schedule was conducive to eliciting detailed responses, I completed three pilot interviews in Brussels during August 2013. The interviewees comprised a range of Muslim women, including a respondent from France, an interviewee from Brussels and one from Wallonia. These women were also engaged in a wide range of political activities, including European level participation, local state level political engagement, trade union activism and local associative participation. This diversity among the pilot interview sample was specifically sought out since I believed it would indicate the ways in which the diverse interviewees included in the wider sample might understand and relate to the interview questions.

After conducting the initial three pilot interviews, I returned to the UK to reflect on the interview process, the effectiveness of the interview schedule and my approach during the interviews. This meant that I had the opportunity to revise the interview schedule for future use if necessary. I concluded that although the pilot interview responses differed, it was clear that the interview schedule was coherent and that the interviewees offered significant and analytically rich responses. My reflection also highlighted that the overall structure of the interview schedule was logical and flowed well. Considering these positive qualities meant that I chose to maintain the interview schedule in subsequent interviews and include the three pilot interviews in the overall sample of Muslim women interviewed in this study.

2.1.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was predicated by effective data management, organisation transcription and storage. In the section below I outline the rationale, the strengths and weaknesses of comparative study and the specificities of comparatively studying France and francophone Belgium.

Comparative study allows for the in-depth analysis and contrast of contexts and political systems. Adopting a comparative approach permits the structured juxtaposition of Muslim women's

experiences of participation in the two cases, whilst also allowing for a detailed comparison of the two contexts. It fulfils part of the research aims since it enables the understanding the factors that differentiate the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium.

Comparative research is described as a means of testing political systems (Hopkin 2010a). Comparison of between one to twenty cases is termed small-N comparative research and tends to be based on qualitative research methods, whilst comparison of more than twenty cases is large-N comparative research (Landman 2008) and this typically relies on the adoption of quantitative research methods, as with non-comparative research, the constraints of resources and data management often dictate quantitative approaches in studies with many cases. Since this study compares only France and francophone Belgium, the research is based on a small-N comparison.

Comparative research is based on either a 'most similar systems design (MSSD) or alternatively 'most different systems design' (MDSD) (Tarrow 2010). MSSD comparative research is based on the study of two or more similar cases that have a different key variable, whilst MDSD models consider cases that differ in all aspects except for sharing a similar key variable. These models emerged as an alternative to the criticised and oversimplified Millian comparative analytical models of difference, agreement and concomitant variables (Hopkin 2010b, Millward 2008, Hopkin 2010a). The MSSD and MDSD methods of comparative study are seen to be more desirable than the preceding methods of comparing cases since they account for subtle differences and similarities, along with acknowledging the complex naturally occurring variables that exist between contexts.

I adopt the MSSD comparative model since France and francophone Belgium are largely similar cases. They are both home to similar Muslim communities, with Muslims constituting an estimated 8% of the wider population in France and 6% of Belgian society (Pew Forum 2015). Similarly, in both cases, the majority of Muslims are from migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds, however French Muslims tend to be from the former French North African Colonies (Hargreaves 2007), whilst Belgian Muslims tend to originate from either Turkey or Morocco (Kanmaz 2002). Both France and Belgium are also home to significant communities of converts to Islam (Karagiannis 2012).

As I explore in Chapter Five, both France and francophone Belgium, increasingly are seen to have adopted 'combative *laïcité*' (Baubérot 2004, Boussinesq 1994, Charentenay 2010, Haspelagh 2012, Laachir 2008, Bechler 2004, Roy 2007). This is in spite of French 'ideological' secularism (Boussinesq 1994) and Belgian traditions of multiculturalism (Coene and Longman 2008a, Haspelagh 2012, Koutroubas, Vloeberghs, and Yanasmayan 2009, Lettinga and Saharso 2012, Mielants 2006, Zemni 2006, Severs 2010). These similarities further motivate the comparison of France and francophone

Belgium and contribute to the adoption of the MSSD model. Additionally, it is my argument that the increase in 'combative' secularism in either France or francophone Belgium potentially has similar adverse effects on Muslim women's political participation. Furthermore, it is such normative similarities, along with linguistic likenesses and the general remit of the thesis that motivate the comparison of France and francophone Belgium, rather than the study of France and Belgium as a whole.

However, as presented in-depth, in Chapter Four, although the French and Belgian institutional configurations are similar, their political systems differ in terms of voting patterns, political precedents, norms and electoral systems. There is consensus that the overall POS in any case shapes opportunities for political participation by individuals (Arzheimer and Carter 2006, Hooghe 2005, Kitschelt 1986, Ladner and Miller 1999, Leighley 1996, Martiniello 2005a, Meyer and Minkoff 2004, Mayer and Staggenborg 1996, Nelson 1979, Nentwich 1996, Norris 1997, Rootes 1999, Tarrow 1996). The comparison of POS informs both the understanding of the opportunities for participation encountered by Muslim women and also the factors that differentiate Muslim women's political participation in the two cases. With regards to the MSSD comparison adopted in this study, although the POS differ in the two cases, I would argue that since both cases are Western European democracies, the adoption of an MSSD comparison remains relevant, but this also highlights the way in which the MSSD and MDSD models account for subtle differences.

Small-N qualitative comparison is praised since it offers scope for a particularly detailed level of analysis (Hopkin 2010b, Landman 2008, Lijphart 1971). Hopkin (2010b) posits that small-N study benefits from a holistic and sophisticated culturally sensitive consideration of the complexities in each case being studied. However I would argue that these strengths also come with qualitative research in general. Instead, the key benefits of small-N comparative research stem from the reference point provided by the other cases being studied; this means that the conclusions drawn in each case can be assessed and compared to those from other cases in the study. Put alternatively, conducting comparative analysis guards against over- or under-generalising research conclusions (Halperin and Heath 2012). This subsequently strengthens the conclusions reached during data analysis and therefore provides a greater insight into the specificities that underlie the causal relationships being studied (Hopkin 2010b, Landman 2008, Tarrow 2010). Comparing France and Belgium means that the conclusions reached, related to the nature of Muslim women's political participation benefit, from both the advantages brought about by conducting qualitative study, as well as profiting from the strengths of comparative research. These advantages outweigh those brought about by conducting a single case qualitative study or simply studying France and francophone Belgium as two individual cases.

However, in spite of these strengths, comparative research is criticised as being based on biased case selection (Halperin and Heath 2012, Hopkin 2010b, Landman 2008). For example, this arises when case selection is based on geographic proximity alone (Lijphart 1971). This renders research methodologically soft and therefore compromises research findings. Typically applying large-N comparison overcomes these criticisms. However, in this thesis studying several cases risks detracting from the depth of analysis brought about by small-N comparison and is also beyond the remit of this study. Therefore I draw on the rationale presented in Chapter One to overcome the criticisms of biased case selection.

Although France and francophone Belgium represent two neighbouring and linguistically similar cases, I focus on the existing literature related to significant disparities in Muslim political representation in France and Belgium and remarkable rates of Muslim women's representation (Sinno 2009a, Zibouh 2011, 2013) as the primary justification behind my case selection. Additionally, I also draw on the argued increase in 'combative *laïcité*' in both France and francophone Belgium to justify my comparison of France and Wallonia along with Brussels, rather than the whole country (Baubérot 2012, Haspelagh 2012, Laachir 2008, Mielants 2006, Ramadan 2004, Roy 2007, Severs 2010).

Given the small number of cases studied, small-N comparative research is criticised as having limited scope for generalisation (Landman 2008). In order to overcome such criticism, this study relies the recruitment of a diverse sample, as detailed later in this chapter. To an extent the diversity of the research participants reflects the wider Muslim female community in each case. This subsequently contributes to the generalisability of the research findings presented whilst also continuing to allow for an in-depth, participant-centred comparative understanding of Muslim women's political participation that might not have been possible had I adopted a large-N comparison. Therefore, in this study adopting a small- N comparative analytical method fulfils research aims by allowing for the understanding of the factors that differentiate Muslim women's experiences of political participation in the two cases.

2.2 Data Collection

In this section of the chapter I report the data collection strategies employed during this study, including the problematisation of the participant recruitment criteria, the ethical considerations made, the nature of the interviewee sample, networking and fieldwork phasing.

Having considered my research design and the underlying rationale behind the research, I carefully considered the nature of interviewees to be included in this study. This meant that I needed to problematise and attempt to define what is meant by some of the key terms in the research. Based on my background reading, the aims of the study and the research questions, to participate in this

research very broadly interviewees needed to self-identify as a Muslim woman and participate in either French or francophone Belgian politics. Although I recognise that I equally might have tackled the issue of defining key terms earlier in the thesis, I have taken the decision to explore these notions here since the way in which I problematise and attempt to define principal terms ultimately shapes the data collection and subsequent analysis.

Whilst the geographical focus on France and francophone Belgium, namely Wallonia and the Brussels Capital Region, present clearly defined geographical parameters for criteria of inclusion, the potentially problematic nature of the terms such as 'Muslim' or 'political participation' pose an issue with regards to interviewee recruitment. Below I discuss the ways in which these terms are understood in the wider literature and specifically in the limited literature related to Muslim political participation and combine these existing positions in an attempt to better define what is meant by 'Muslim' and 'political participation' .

2.2.1 Defining the Criteria

Defining Muslim

Ramadan (1999, 179) points out; "...The notion of Muslim identity is very theoretical and imprecise..." This imprecision creates a conceptual and subsequent methodological problem, and also emphasises the need to better define Muslim in this study. However in much of the literature related to Muslims, many scholars assume a shared common and unspoken understanding of the term Muslim and as a result do not attempt to define its meaning.

Very generally, Muslims are those who follow the monotheistic faith, Islam. However, although globally Muslims largely follow the same core beliefs, the Muslim community is remarkably varied. As Esposito and Mogahed (2007, 2) in their review of the 2001-2007 Gallup World poll based on interview data, state; "Religiously, culturally, economically and politically, there are multiple images and realities of Islam and of Muslims." The extensive heterogeneity of the Muslim community is manifest in the numerous ethnic and cultural differences, the various sectarian differences between Muslims and the differing levels of religiosity among Muslims. Acknowledging the broad diversity of Muslims subsequently means that this study does not, and perhaps cannot, impose strict criteria to define Muslim, such as those related to ethnicity, political ideals or levels of religious practice.

Within the literature related to Muslim political participation, Sinno (2009b, 70) discusses the multiple facets that may make up an individual's Muslim identity and describes Muslim as: "...an identity that may have religious, racial, political or cultural dimensions." He suggests that this broad criteria is largely adopted by the multiple authors in his edited book *Muslims in Western Politics*, therefore suggesting that this type of understanding of the term is the norm In his specific

quantitative consideration of Muslim underrepresentation in American politics and also where he provides statistics pertaining to Muslim national political representation across much of Europe, Sinno (2009a) presents a more precise definition of the term Muslim; where an individual “[is] Muslim if he or she is Muslim by faith or has at least one parent who is Muslim by faith or belongs to a group that is traditionally Muslim.”

The definition highlights that the term Muslim incorporates religious belief as well as cultural heritage and identity. However, in this specific example cited above, the identification of Muslim parliamentarians is externally imposed by the researcher, meaning that Sinno identifies Muslim national parliamentarians independently from afar. Given his quantitative objectives, this is perhaps the most appropriate way of identifying Muslim national political representatives, since it is not practical to survey all national politicians to assess the extent to which they self-identify as Muslims. However, I would argue that this means of identifying Muslim parliamentarians is also potentially flawed. Neither coming from a “traditionally Muslim” group, nor having “at least one parent who is Muslim by faith” guarantees self-identification as Muslim. In neglecting the importance of self-identification the study potentially and falsely includes individuals who do not see themselves as Muslim and also fails to include Muslims who are neither from traditionally Muslim backgrounds, nor appear visibly Muslim, such as non-visible converts to Islam.

In her quantitative study of Muslim political representation in the Brussels regional parliament, Zibouh (2013, 20) applies the definition of Muslim as used by Sinno (2009a). Additionally, she adds that her categorisation includes “secularised or agnostic Muslims or even atheists of Muslim culture.” Although initially it may appear paradoxical to consider atheists or agnostics in this categorisation, particularly when the term ‘Muslim’ traditionally refers to religious identity, we see here that her research also places emphasis on heritage and the cultural aspect of Muslim identity. Like Sinno, Zibouh also relies on researcher-led external identification of Muslim parliamentarians. In both of these studies this is most suitable and meets the quantitative ends of the research. However, both studies risk overgeneralisation and also failure to include those who do not publicly appear Muslim. Put alternatively, relying on identification of Muslim political representatives on the basis of their “Muslim sounding names” (Sinno and Tatari 2009, 116), is problematic and not effective for this study.

In her study of Muslim political leaders in the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark, like Zibouh, Klausen (2007) recognises the possible variations in levels of religiosity among Muslim political leaders and therefore seeks to employ a broad and flexible definition of Muslim. Klausen (2007, 11) states:

I use the label 'Muslim' to describe faith and heritage in the same way you would use 'Christian' or 'Jewish'. It is a flexible description; I did not make any prior assumptions about how important faith was to the participant in the study.

Although the definition put forward may be criticised as being overly broad, it highlights the flexibility of the term Muslim and also underlines the significance of the researcher not imposing his or her own assumptions in defining what is meant by Muslim. However, in this case given the qualitative focus adopted in the study cited above, Klausen has the privilege of access to participants. This is something that was not possible for Sinno or Zibouh given the quantitative nature of their contributions. I draw on the approach taken by Klausen and do not seek to impose my assumptions about faith on the interviewees.

Drawing on the literature discussed above it is apparent that either isolating or foregrounding any of the facets of Muslim identity would limit this study, since it privileges particular aspects of the Muslim identity at the expense of other central elements. Similarly my criticisms of previous work underline the potential flaws that come with researcher assumption. Therefore, I acknowledge the broad nature of 'Muslimness', recognise the complexity of Muslim identity and that it encompasses religious, cultural and ethnic elements. However, instead of either strictly defining Muslim identity or externally identifying individuals as a Muslim, I capitalise on the qualitative nature of this study and rely on self-identification as Muslim as a criterion for inclusion in the research.

Having completed the fieldwork and had the opportunity to reflect on the decision to allow for self-identification as Muslim by participants in this study, I believe that this approach was advantageous and enabled the inclusion of a more diverse range of Muslim women in the study, including those who perhaps might not have typically been identified as Muslims, since they were neither from traditionally Muslim cultures or ethnic backgrounds, nor did they have "Muslim sounding names" (Sinno and Tatari 2009, 116) and similarly they did not appear visibly Muslim. Therefore, by prioritising self-identification as Muslim, this study benefits from increased diversity among the research sample, this in turn increases generalisability and strengthens the research findings.

Additionally, in this study the emphasis on self-identification as Muslim also prevents the false inclusion of women who might be externally seen as Muslim but might not personally see themselves as Muslim. On one occasion, having contacted a French member of parliament recommended to me by a French Muslim interviewee, I received a reply stating that the study did not correspond to her. Presumably this was linked to her non-identification as Muslim, or alternatively her adoption of French republican values which would consequently shape her refusal to be acknowledged in terms of her religious identity. Therefore this underlines the practical utility of my approach and indicates that this study does not include the responses of women who do not see themselves as Muslim. This subsequently means that the findings drawn in the analytical

chapters specifically pertain to self-declared Muslim women in each case. Although relying on self-identification means that the definition of Muslim in this study is broad, upon reflection I feel that this method was most appropriate since it overcomes potential criticisms about over and under-generalisation. This approach also helped to secure a more diverse sample and this in turn enhances research findings.

Defining Political Participation

A brief consideration of the literature related to political participation demonstrates that there is either an assumed common understanding of the significance of the terms ‘politics’ and ‘political participation’, or alternatively those who do attempt to pin down its meaning typically highlight the lack of general consensus of the meaning of these terms. As (Randall 1987, 10) writes in her book *Women in Politics: An International Perspective*:

As with feminism, so with politics, there is no overall agreement on definitions [of what is meant by politics]. In different eras and different societies and even from one political thinker to another, the nature and scope of politics have been viewed very differently.

Thus definitions of politics and political participation tell us about the terms themselves, those who put forward such definitions and finally the context in which they are understood. Therefore, drawing on my earlier considerations in section 2.1.1 related to reflexivity and standpoint theory and the primary research aims of this work, I attempt to define political participation in relation to feminist political science and existing work related to Muslim and ethnic minority political participation, especially in France and francophone Belgium.

Many suggest that politics and political participation entails activities that attempt to voice concerns, influence or support the actions or policy implemented by government and bring about social change (Milbrath and Klein 1962, Norris 1997, Teorell 2006, Verba et al. 1993b). Van Deth (2014) identifies four common themes in the literature that attempts to define political participation; firstly, political participation involves activity and therefore cannot be passive; secondly, participation in politics is activity that is pursued by citizens; thirdly, that political participation must be voluntary in nature and cannot be enforced by law; finally, that political participation involves engagement with government or state official bodies. Whilst these common threads identified might account for a significant amount of political participation, the four themes identified are problematic in that they exclude a considerable range of political participation and political actors. For example, suggesting that only voluntary action constitutes political participation would automatically exclude participation in Belgian electoral politics, as voting is legally compulsory in Belgium, albeit fines for non-participation are relatively lenient and not often enforced.

Also, although not highlighted by Van Deth, political participation also encompasses both legal activities that fall within formal political structures and also illegal activity (Conge 1988). However from the outset, given the already potentially sensitive nature of researching Muslim women's political participation along with the potential ramifications of the disclosure of illegal political activity for both myself and the interviewees, I have opted to focus on legal political activity only in this study. This means that political activity that contravenes French or Belgian law, such as crop trashing movements, is excluded.

Perhaps most problematic for this study is the observation that most traditional definitions of political participation tend to focus heavily on active participation within the mainstream in formal and public political structures. Specifically, traditional definitions of political participation often fail to fully recognise the diverse and ever changing nature of politics and participation and the spaces within which political participation takes place, such as both the public and private spheres (Lovenduski 2008). As a result such definitions are narrow and restrictive and in this case are likely to tell us little about the overall nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium. Criticism of traditional definitions of political participation as overly narrow are especially highlighted by political scientists (Ekman and Amnå 2012, Lovenduski 2008, Miller 2002, Salisbury 1975, Van Deth 2014, Wadia 2015).

Moreover, a restrictive understanding of political participation would not be appropriate in this study since both women and ethnic minority groups tend to participate in non-formal politics at the grassroots level. For example Wadia (2015) highlights that feminist political science studies show that women participate in grassroots, unstructured politics. Similarly, Martiniello (2005a) discusses the non-state level political engagement of ethnic minorities in Belgium and their political impact.

In the past, women's absence from elite political structures has been explained as stemming from women's alleged inadequacies, as Lovenduski (2008, 603) writes:

Women were widely believed to be less politically interested, active and competent than men. Such contentions were often based on prejudice. A reflection not of scientific analysis or reasoned debate, but sexism in a male dominated profession.

Or, alternatively the lack of ethnic minority presence in politics has often been attributed to socioeconomic factors (Verba et al. 1993b). I would argue that the limited women's and ethnic minority presence in politics has previously often been explained away rather than understood in detail. Put alternatively, there is a significant quantitative knowledge of political participation by marginalised groups, but a limited qualitative understanding of the political experiences of those who are marginalised. For example, as Lovenduski (2008, 609) states: "Information about the

political representation of women in formal political arenas has become widely available, but less is known about informal activities.”

In a similar manner, section 1.1 draws on Sinno (2009a) to set out the disparities in rates of Muslim, and in particular Muslim women’s political representation in France and francophone Belgium, yet it also highlights that little is known about the wider nature of Muslim women’s political participation. This observation further points to the need for the adoption of a broad definition of political participation in this study. Helpful in conceptualising the features that such a broad definition of political participation might entail, I considered Wadia (2015) and her work detailing the nature of political participation by British Muslim women, in which she states (Wadia 2015, 89):

Thus feminist scholars expanded the definition of the political to include not only electoral and institutional (elite) politics but also so-called unconventional political activity such as direct action and protest at grassroots level, in favour of social and political transformation.

Drawing on these points, I sought to apply a broad and inclusive definition of politics and political participation that includes both political participation in formal and elite structures as well as that which takes place at the grassroots level. However, rather than separating out these types of political participation, I specifically apply an adapted version of Martiniello’s (2005a) typology of political participation. In his study of ethnic minority political participation in Belgium, Martiniello (2005a, 2) defines political participation as an:

...active dimension of citizenship. It refers to the various ways in which individuals take part in the management of the collective affairs of a given political community. Unlike a lot of political science research, political participation cannot be restricted to conventional forms, such as voting or running for election. It also covers other and less conventional types of political activities, such as protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, hunger strikes, boycotts etc.

This understanding of political participation combines both the need for a broad definition of politics and is drawn from the study of European, including French and Belgian, immigrant political participation. Furthermore, the definition touches upon the notion of activities that seek to influence the state and governance. Most importantly, the typology provides concrete examples of political participation, which were used a tool for facilitating interviewee recruitment to the study.

Table 2.1 Typology of Political Participation - adapted from Martiniello (2005a).

Level of political participation	Type of political participation	Examples	Included in study?
State Political Participation	Electoral	Voting	No
	Local/regional	Local council	Yes

Non-State Political Participation	National	National parliament	Yes
	Supranational	European Parliament	Yes
	Transnational	Political participation in country of origin	No
	Consultative	Advisory bodies (such as CFCM)	Yes
	Trade unions	Unions (such as CSC – <i>Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens de Belgique</i>)	Yes
	Community organisations	Non-governmental organisations (such as FEMYSO)	Yes
	Pressure groups	Lobby groups (such as <i>Une École Pour Tous et Toutes</i>)	Yes

As the table highlights this study considers Muslim women's active political participation at both state and non-state levels. Adopting a broad classification of political participation generates greater insight into the nature of the motivations, opportunities and barriers to Muslim women's wider political participation in both cases. This subsequently contributes towards increasing the potential generalisability and validity of the research findings. In addition, the broad nature of the classification facilitates interviewee recruitment and prevents any potential obstacles that might have been encountered had I opted for a more restrictive view of political participation. For example, had I opted to focus the study solely on Muslim women in parliamentary roles, like Sinno or Zibouh (2009a, 2011, 2013), I might have found that interviewee recruitment would have presented difficulties in France given the established low rates of Muslim parliamentary representation.

Given the qualitative remit of the study, the research does not focus on Muslim women's voting behaviour. Furthermore, given that voting is compulsory in Belgium and non-compulsory in France, it is likely that solely focusing on voter turnout among Muslim women would have revealed patterns concordant with respective national legislation, or put alternatively in France where voting is non-compulsory, arguably turnout rates among Muslim women, and the wider population would be lower than in Belgium, where voting is a legal obligation. Also, this approach would not have generated significant insights into the nature of Muslim women's political participation in the two cases. However as detailed in Chapter Four, I recognise the potential effects of these differences in the POS on Muslim women's participation in both France and francophone Belgium.

Similarly, the study does not focus on Muslim women's transnational political participation. This is driven by the preceding decision to specifically focus Muslim women's political participation in

France and francophone Belgium. The introduction of transnational political engagement would simultaneously introduce numerous extraneous variables, and since the remit of this study only allows for an in-depth comparison of the two cases, this risks detracting from the focus on the nature of Muslim women's political participation in the two initial cases.

Notwithstanding this and based on my interviewees' reports and personal observations, drawing on my interactions with the interviewees in this study, I recognise a potential increase in transnational political activism amongst European Muslim women, and particularly amongst Muslim women of Arab ethnic origins, since the beginning of the 'Arab Spring'. During the fieldwork some respondents mentioned the nature of their transnational political engagement following the 'Arab-Spring' and compared this to their participation in either French or francophone Belgian politics. However, I do not focus on these accounts in this thesis.

Also the typology does not focus on street politics, such as demonstration attendance, internet based activism, such as blogging or petitioning, or finally consumer politics, such as boycotts. Although these forms of political participation are legitimate forms of political engagement and like the other actions in the typology seek to bring about social change, these forms of politics were not primarily sought out as I opted to focus on more representative political action within the French and Belgian context instead. Notwithstanding, some of the interviewees were involved in such movements. For example, an interviewee in Belgium was very active in the pro-Palestine movement and therefore participated in boycotts and demonstrations related to the matter. Often I found that those involved in street, internet or consumer politics tended to have more transnational political focus and thus were less relevant to this study.

To summarise, the study sees political participation as behaviours that seek to support or influence policy, bring about social change or voice concerns. The study includes those who participate at the state level, in supranational, national, regional and local political institutions and also includes those engaged in non-state level political activities, such as lobbying, trade union activism and engagement in political advisory bodies. Given the political underrepresentation of Muslims, particularly in French politics, the broad criteria facilitate interviewee recruitment. Furthermore, the wide-ranging classification of activities that constitute political participation seeks to provide a greater insight into the general features of Muslim women's political participation across the spectrum and contributes to the novel nature of this study. The state and non-state level classifications detailed in the table above are used throughout the thesis.

2.2.2 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were informed by university based training and consultation of the British Sociological Association's (BSA) Statement of Ethical Practice (British Sociological Association 2002)

and these shaped the fieldwork . In addition to the specific measures based on BSA guidance outlined below, I have been mindful of consequences of my study, my responsibilities both to advancing knowledge and simultaneously protecting the interviewee's rights. The ethical considerations applied are as follows:

Protection from Harm and Safeguarding Participant Wellbeing

In order to maintain the professional integrity of this study, I aimed to implement measures to protect both the interviewees and myself as a researcher from either psychological or physical harm. To assess these potential risks I return to my earlier reflexive consideration of the positions occupied by myself and the respondents. With regards to the interviewees, I initially felt that the often very public roles of the interviewees meant that they were less likely to be vulnerable. This assumption implied resilience among the interviewees and consequently reduced risk of psychological harm. Additionally, the questions posed during the interviews focused on political participation and related experiences and therefore the questions were not deemed excessively sensitive. This combined nature of the interviews, along with self-selected participation in the study indicated that involvement in the research would not cause the interviewees undue psychological or physical harm.

In addition, to ensure that interviewees were at ease during the interviews and subsequently guarantee data collection was not hampered, I invited the interviewees to select the location of the interview. This further prevented interviewees from feeling at risk of harm, but also meant that as a researcher I had to take extra precautions to protect my wellbeing. Prior to each interview I shared my location with an individual external to the research. However, given my focus on protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewees I was careful not to disclose any information that would compromise this, whilst also putting in place measures to protect myself during the fieldwork.

Informed Consent, Right to Refuse Participation or Withdraw from the Study

At the beginning of each interview I obtained informed consent from the interviewees. This meant that prior to asking the respondents the questions detailed in the interview schedule in a clear, concise and standardised manner I explained the purpose of the interview and the study, answered interviewee questions and advised interviewees that the exchange would be audio recorded. Also, at this stage I offered interviewees the opportunity to decline the recording and informed them of their right to withdraw or refuse participation in the study. The standardised explanation was incorporated into the interview schedule.

Having explained the purpose of the interviews and wider study, right to withdraw or refuse participation and the intent to audio record the interviews, I invited interviewees to sign a

standardised consent form (see Appendix Two). These were stored electronically on a password protected device. Given the emphasis on participant anonymity and confidentiality and the need to protect interviewee identity, these forms are not included with the thesis.

Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality

Whilst outlining the nature of the study I also informed interviewees that they had the right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. Given the diversity of the interviewees recruited to the study, I was aware that for some participation would be predicated on the right to anonymity, whilst others might have seen their identification as inevitable given the often already well-publicised nature of their political engagement.

Having conducted the fieldwork I observed that only two of the interviewees wanted to be explicitly identified as interviewees, therefore I decided to implement sample-wide anonymity. Also given the potentially sensitive and non-relevant nature of some of the information discussed in the interviews, I similarly opted to maintain privacy and confidentiality across the sample. This meant that data was stored according to numbers assigned to each interviewee. Nonetheless, I informed interviewees that carefully selected quotations from the interviews would be included in the thesis. Also given privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, the appendices includes a non-specific summary of all interviewees in the study (see Appendix Three).

Ethical Approval

Having reflected on the measures I would take to ensure the ethical soundness and integrity of my research, I submitted a brief report outlining my considerations to the Aston University school of Languages and Social Sciences ethics committee. Securing ethical clearance is customary when working with research interviewees or when researching sensitive research topics. Although I did not perceive the often public facing politically active Muslim women participants to be vulnerable and I understood that although the interviews did not deal with sensitive topics, there was a potential that our exchange during the interview might raise discussion of difficult experiences and therefore sought ethical guidance and clearance from the committee.

Following my initial submission to the committee I received a series of suggestions; these included recommendations to clarify the ways in which I would access participants, to specify further detail as to how interviewees might withdraw from the study, detailing data storage and the amount of data that would be viewable in the final thesis. I was able to respond to these recommendations and have incorporated them into my discussion related to networking later in this chapter.

The committee also advised I re-think the extent to which I perceived the interviewees to be non-sensitive and suggested that contrary to my initial assumptions, the interviewees were potentially

vulnerable. Therefore, the committee advised that I take the contact numbers of relevant helplines should the interviewees break down emotionally during the data collection process and that this precaution would contribute to protecting the respondents from psychological harm. Although I implemented this recommendation, the contact numbers were not required by any of the interviewees. Having applied these additional measures I was cleared to undertake research in the field.

2.2.3 Sample Size

Having outlined the recruitment criteria for participation and secured ethical clearance to undertake the proposed research, I set about to define an appropriate sample size. Typically, qualitative research is characterised by small samples (Marshall 1996). However it is difficult to pinpoint adequate sample sizes (Laforest 2009). Generally evidence suggests that on average qualitative research tends to have sample sizes of between 20 and 60 participants (Marshall 1996, Morse 2000), whilst the average qualitative PhD research sample size is 28 participants (Morse 2000). Precedents in the existing literature informed my decisions related to sample size and contributed to achieving a manageable sample size that was comparable to existing qualitative research.

Regardless of averages, it is recommended that sample adequately fit the scope of the research. This means that the sample must not be so small that it does not reflect the wider researched population or that it fails to sufficiently answer the research questions. Similarly it should not be so large that the data collected becomes unmanageable (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2007). Sample sizes are also governed by 'saturation'. This occurs when the recruitment of new participants to the study no longer yields new information (Mason 2010). As the sample size grows, the likelihood of saturation also grows. Once saturation is reached there is a plateau in the generation of new information. In addition to existing precedents, saturation and the need to effectively answer the research questions, the sample size is also governed by the availability of resources, including time and financing trips to either France or Belgium. Therefore, based on the notion of saturation and existing precedents in qualitative research, I initially intended to recruit a sample of 30 participants in total, comprised of fifteen respondents from each case. I believed that this sample size was obtainable, it reflected similar qualitative studies, would yield saturation and would generate a manageable data set. In spite of the initial goals set, at the end of the fieldwork phase the research sample was made up of 29 participants in total. There was an under-recruitment of interviewees in France, with only eleven interviewees and an over-recruitment in Belgium, with eighteen francophone Belgian respondents.

2.2.4 Networking

Having determined both recruitment criteria and adequate sample size, at this stage in the research process I needed to carefully select the most appropriate means of recruiting interviewees to the study. This was governed by several factors, including resources, accessibility and identification of potential interviewees. Also having previously reflected on the positions occupied by myself and the interviewees, I recognised that my being neither French nor Belgian, I might face difficulties in terms of networking and recruiting interviewees to the study. This, along with recommendations from the ethics committee, subsequently meant I needed to apply robust networking strategies and also invest extra time to secure participation by a diverse range of Muslim women who participate in politics in each case.

Having reviewed various methods of recruiting interviewees to the study, I selected 'snowballing' as the most appropriate means of securing participation. 'Snowballing' relies on contact with key gatekeepers in the field. These individuals are usually well connected and able to put the researcher in touch with further potential interviewees. 'Snowballing' also requires that each of the subsequent interviewees recommends further interviewees to be followed up by the researcher. With each interviewee the sample grows in the same way a moving snowball does.

The rationale behind selecting 'snowballing' is shaped by multiple justifications cited in the literature, including the observation that 'snowballing' is the most widely used method of recruiting interviewees within qualitative research. Furthermore, 'snowballing' is the most appropriate means of recruiting individuals from hidden groups (Noy 2008). Therefore using 'snowballing' means that this study is comparable to other published qualitative research and enabled me to overcome the potential obstacles presented by my outsider status.

However, I also recognised that my reliance on key gatekeepers had the potential to shape the nature of interviewees included in the study, and therefore subsequently shape the data and research findings. In order to prevent an atypical sample I contacted a diverse range of organisations known for their Muslim women's presence, such as *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* (NPNS) in France. However in spite of my efforts to establish contact with such organisations, my attempts were unsuccessful. The lack of response points to potential limitations of 'snowballing' methods.

I relied predominantly on two primary gatekeeper organisations; FEMYSO and EmBeM. As umbrella organisations both of these groups have privileged knowledge of other relevant organisations and have both direct and indirect contact with Muslim women who participate in politics in each case. The broad nature of these organisations and the heterogeneity among individuals connected to these associations meant that I was able to recruit a diverse range of Muslim women to the study in both cases. For example, FEMYSO's member bodies include

numerous Muslim organisations (of varying Islamic standpoints), and pan-European anti-racism movement, the European Network against Racism (ENAR). ENAR's projects on Afrophobia or anti-Gypsyism mean that the group was also able to put me in touch with French and Belgian Muslims from these backgrounds, meaning that I had greater diversity in my sample.

2.2.5 Fieldwork Phasing and Timeline

This section of the chapter reports on the fieldwork phase. In order to undertake the data collection phase of the study I relied on the networks I had built during my time working with FEMYSO and via networking with EmBeM. The fieldwork took place in France and Belgium between August 2013 and November 2013.

As part of my 'snowballing' participant recruitment strategy, in August 2013 I asked each of the pilot interviewees to recommend other Muslim women who they thought might be interested in participating in the study. Each woman interviewed recommended further possible interviewees. I followed up these leads upon my return to the UK.

In September 2013, I undertook a further eight interviews in Belgium. These interviewees were recruited from both my prior networking and from the recommendations put forward by the first three interviewees. Since the European Parliament and other supranational European political organisations are based in Brussels I was able to interview both French and francophone Belgian Muslim women during this trip. Interviewees were from across France, Brussels and Wallonia, the majority of whom travelled to Brussels for the purpose of the interviews. At this stage in the fieldwork process I had completed two interviews with French Muslim women and nine interviews with Francophone Belgian Muslim women.

I returned to Belgium in October 2013 and interviewed a further nine francophone Belgian Muslim women. My return trip to Belgium was necessary since my 'snowball' interviewee recruitment strategy had generated significant leads and I found that given the nature of the political calendar, many potential candidates had expressed interest in participating in the study but would be away from their political commitments until October.

Furthermore, during my visit to Belgium in October 2013 I was also able to attend the second annual *Foire Musulmane de Belgique* held in the outskirts of Brussels. This event spans three days and is attended by Muslims from across Belgium. Numerous non-state level organisations also advertise their activities at the event. This meant that I was able to network with a number of associations and attempt to recruit further interviewees to the study. By the end of this trip I had interviewed a total of two French respondents and eighteen francophone Belgian Muslim women.

My final fieldwork trip took place in November 2013, during which I interviewed a further nine French Muslim women. The sample comprised members of parliament, councillors and non-state level activists. The interviewees were recruited, directly and through snowballing via FEMYSO, the EmBeM network. During my trip to Paris, I was invited to attend various associational meetings which also led to the recruitment of further French interviewees.

This final fieldwork trip mean that I had interviewed eleven French and eighteen francophone Belgian women. These figures meant that although I had exceeded the number of francophone Belgian interviewees required, I had not interviewed the fifteen French interviewees desired. This was predominantly due to difficulty in recruiting French Muslim women to participate in the study.

2.2.6 Summary of Interviewees

As much as was possible, during the fieldwork, I sought to interview a diverse range of Muslim women in both France and francophone Belgium. This diversity related to the nature of political participation, ethnicity, visibility of Muslim identity and age among other pertinent factors. Appendix Three provides a summary of the interviewees. Each interviewee is allocated a number, this is subsequently used during the analysis chapters to indicate the orator of each quotation in the analysis. In order to protect the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of the interviewees I have intentionally only provided brief information about the nature of their political participation.

During the networking and 'snowballing' I found that I received a comparable number of recommendations in both cases. However, I received more non-responses in France. In part, I attribute the difficulties faced in France to two possible causes. Firstly as previously discussed, I posit that might have been linked to non-identification as Muslim which arises in spite of being recommended as a Muslim woman who participates in politics. My experiences in the field underline my critique of earlier work which relies on external identification of Muslim parliamentarians (Sinno 2009a, Zibouh 2011, 2013) and emphasises the value of self-identification as Muslim in the study of Muslim women's political participation.

Secondly, I posit that I may have encountered comparatively increased reluctance among potential interviewees in France given French secular norms which emphasise the importance of neutrality of state officials. These norms and fear of external identification might subsequently have discouraged Muslim women from participating in the research directly linked to Muslim women's political participation. The comparatively reduced prevalence of such norms in Belgium meant that Belgian Muslim women were more readily willing to participate in the study.

Furthermore, whilst I faced some difficulties in securing interviews in France, my experiences differed significantly in francophone Belgium. Not only did I encounter comparatively increased willingness to participate among the francophone Belgian Muslim women, I also found that

throughout the fieldwork interviewees from across Wallonia would often offer to travel to Brussels for the purpose of the interview meaning that I would not have to travel extensively, perhaps reflective of francophone Belgian Muslim women's keenness to participate in the study. In terms of interviewee recruitment, obstacles faced in francophone Belgium were linked to the often busy schedules of potential interviewees in the study. However, I also encountered similar obstacles in France.

Of the total sample, none of the interviewees wore the *niqab* to the interview, nor did any of the women discuss ever wearing it in public. This observation is perhaps shaped by both French and Belgian legislation, which prohibits the veil in public spaces (Legifrance 2010, Moniteur 2011, Brems et al. 2012, Haspelagh 2012). The sample composition also reflects reports that very few women in each case wore the veil prior to the implementation of the respective bans (BBC 2011) and suggests that very few do so currently.

However, eighteen of the interviewees wore the headscarf to the interview and reported wearing it whenever in public. As I illustrate in Chapter Five, in France wearing the headscarf shapes the nature of Muslim women's political participation. Of the sample, a minority of French interviewees discussed wearing, adapting or removing the Islamic headscarf as and when they saw it necessary. Finally nine women in the sample did not wear headscarf to the interview and similarly discussed not wearing it in public. There was comparable diversity in the adoption of Muslim women's dress between the French and francophone Belgian respondents. Arguably, to an extent this diversity in dress reflects the wider nature of Muslim women's diverse dress in Europe (Shadid and Van Koningsveld 2005).

The sample also included 23 women who had been born into Muslim families and six converts to Islam, four in Belgium and two from France. The converts to Islam were from diverse ethnic backgrounds; however, all but one of these women were from Western European backgrounds. The inclusion of converts to Islam in the study means that the sample reflects the wider composition of Muslim communities in Europe (Karagiannis 2012). Furthermore, the converts to Islam included in the study might not typically be seen as Muslim given the non-visibility of their Muslim identity, the women not having "Muslim sounding names" (Sinno and Tatari 2009, 116) nor coming from traditionally Muslim families. As stated, in previous studies that examine Muslim participation in either French or Belgian politics these women might have traditionally been excluded. However, the use of self-identification as Muslim as part of the criteria for inclusion in this study, allows for increased diversity in the sample and subsequently contributes to enhancing the external validity of this study and its findings.

In addition and as might be expected, the French sample was made up of predominantly North African Muslims, but also included French, Caribbean and sub-Saharan African Muslims. Similarly,

reflective of the wider Belgian population, the Belgian sample predominantly included Muslim women from either Turkey or Morocco, but also included ethnically French and Belgian women. The composition of the sample in each case reflects the ethnic make-up of the wider Muslim community in France and Belgium respectively (Hargreaves 2007, Kanmaz 2002).

Finally the range of political participation pursued by the women who took part in the study was diverse and corresponded to the adapted typology of political participation (Martiniello 2005a) outlined earlier in this chapter. However, whilst there was a significant range in political engagement among francophone Belgian respondents, in France I found that the final sample comprised more women involved in non-state level politics than those who participated in state level politics. The composition of the French sample partly reflects the difficulties in participation recruitment encountered in France and additionally French contextual secular norms which dictate neutrality and non-religious identification of state officials and also the tendency for women to be involved in non-state level politics as discussed in 2.2.1.

2.3 Conclusions

Via consideration of the research design, feminist standpoint theory and finally a reflection of the fieldwork in this chapter, I reached several key conclusions. Firstly, the research aims, namely the desire to comparatively assess the experiences and nature of Muslim women's political participation in the two cases, given the limited consideration of Muslim women's voices in politics, in the wider literature (Boubekour 2004, Bouzar and Kada 2003, Bullock 2005, Contractor 2012a), dictated that it would be most appropriate to conduct one to one, semi-structured qualitative interviews with women that came forward to participate in the research, as it would generate insight into Muslim women's experiences of political participation; as Kvale (2007, 9) states:

The qualitative interview is a key venue for the ways in which the subjects experience and understand their world. It provides a unique access to the lived world of the subjects, who in their own words describe their activities, experiences and opinions.

Secondly, reflecting on my unique position as an ethnic minority, British Muslim female researcher, meant that I was able to reflect on and acknowledge the potential implications of my conducting the fieldwork. Although I argue that complete objectivity is unobtainable, by employing reflexivity I was able to recognise and limit possible obstacles or biases and also highlight the positive consequences of my position in relation to the interviewees.

Finally, reviewing the fieldwork process in this chapter contributed to my understanding of some of the difficulties that I faced in the field, such as those related to the under-recruitment of French Muslim women to the study. As stated, I partly attributed these to the influence of French secular norms and especially the desire for neutrality of state officials in France. In undertaking this review,

I was able to better position myself to be able to effectively complete analysis of the data presented in the three forthcoming chapters.

3. Chapter Three: Motivations

This chapter assesses the first in the series of research sub-questions: **does ‘European Islam’ motivate political participation by Muslim women in either France or francophone Belgium?** Typically associated with Tariq Ramadan (March 2007, Nielsen 2007, Salih 2004, Salvatore 2007) ‘European Islam’ refers to the revivalism, appropriation and adaptation of Islam in the secular European context (Roy 2005, Saint-Blancat 2002, Salih 2004). This process appears with second and subsequent generations of Western European Muslims (Saint-Blancat 2002, Salih 2004) as they negotiate their faith and position in European society. Re-appropriation is possible for these European born Muslims given the specific skills, higher levels of education and political awareness that they possess (Just, Sandovici, and Listhaug 2014, Karic 2002, Klausen 2009, Pedziwiatr 2006, 2007). Although framing the emergence of ‘European Islam’ as the result of higher education automatically confines the concept to Muslims of a particular and privileged socioeconomic status. ‘European Islam’ is regarded as an alternative to assimilation for often marginalised European Muslims (Salih 2004) and is typically seen as a bottom-up process that emerges from Muslims themselves (Merali 2011, Saint-Blancat 2002). Simultaneously, some European states also articulate preference for, and put in place measures to construct ‘European Islam’, since it is also perceived as a ‘moderate’ form of Islam (Merali 2011, Saint-Blancat 2002). Thus, ‘European Islam’ is both a bottom-up process and sometimes emerges as a result of top-down initiatives.

Although ‘European Islam’ remains contested, highly theoretical and imprecise (Salih 2004), namely because it is approached from a largely academic and theoretical angle rather than empirically, the surrounding debate questions the acceptability and legitimacy of political participation by Muslims in the Western European context (Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking 2013, Karic 2002, Just, Sandovici, and Listhaug 2014, Ramadan 1999, 2010). This debate has led to Islamic theological reasoning by prominent European Islamic scholars and organisations alike stressing the permissibility and even encouraging political participation by Muslims in Europe (Ligue des Musulmans de Belgique 2014, Ramadan 1999). The notion that ‘European Islam’ is linked to, and may even motivate political participation by European Muslims is central to the rationale behind its inclusion in this study.

Furthermore, studying the potential role of ‘European Islam’ in motivating political participation by Muslims also presents the opportunity to explore a motivation specific to European Muslims that is not experienced by the wider non-Muslim community, thus potentially meaning ‘European Islam’ is a factor that differentiates European Muslim women’s motivations to participate in politics from those experienced by the wider public. Since little is known about the extent to which ‘European Islam’ motivates Muslim women’s participation, this study also contributes to addressing the noted imprecision and lack of empirical understanding of ‘European Islam’ and its

effects on European Muslims (Allievi 2005), whilst also contributing to the understanding of the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium.

Given the diversity of motivations expressed by Muslim women in both cases, the chapter also comparatively explores the wider motivations to participate in politics in both cases. Traditionally, models of political participation tend to focus on general interest in politics as a factor that motivates political participation (Verba et al. 1993b), or the perceived costs and rewards of participation (Back et al. 2009, Fowler and Kam 2007, Han 2009, Miller and Krosnick 2004) amongst other factors. However, these models tell us very little about the personal motivations and specific factors that motivate individuals to become involved in politics, nor do they tell us about issues in which individuals are motivated to become involved. In this chapter I combine the "Beyond the Self" model proposed by Fowler and Kam (2007) and the "Issue Public" model (Han 2009) to go beyond traditional models of motivation and attempt to better explain the seemingly altruistic basis of the motivations expressed by the Muslim women in this study.

3.0.1 Chapter Structure

The chapter begins with a brief review of the existing literature related to 'European Islam', followed by an attempt to define the concept and specifically discuss how it might motivate Muslim women's political participation in either France or francophone Belgium. I then present an analysis of how the Muslim women interviewed in both cases perceive and understand 'European Islam', before comparatively considering the extent to which the women felt that 'European Islam' had motivated their political participation. I begin with an analysis of the data from France, followed by francophone Belgium and finally move on to compare the two cases.

Since the Muslim women interviewed described motivations beyond 'European Islam', the following section of this chapter presents and seeks to explain the general motivations expressed by the women. The principal motivations put forward by the Muslim women in each case are categorised by the themes that emerge from the analysis in both cases, including perceived efficacy, personal experiences, social justice and identity.

3.1 'European Islam'

In this section I review the literature in an attempt to define what is meant by 'European Islam' and how it influences political participation by European Muslims and in turn Muslim women. I also draw on the literature to underline the importance of studying the question of 'European Islam' as a motivating factor in the wider study of the nature of Muslim women's political participation.

3.1.1 What is 'European Islam' and How Does it Influence Political Participation?

Islam is Europe's second largest religion (Allievi 2005, Pew Forum 2015) and Muslims constitute the second largest faith groups in both Belgium and France (Pew Forum 2015). The enduring Muslim presence in Europe means that Muslims are very much part of European society. Nonetheless, in spite of the continued presence of Islam and Muslims in Europe there is often still a normalised negative perception of European Muslims; this perception is oversimplified and essentialised (Salvatore 2007). European Muslims are often perceived as a homogenous group with little desire to integrate (Roy 2005) or mix in European society (Allen 2010). For example Allen (2010) highlights this 'othering' of Muslims in his book *Islamophobia*, in which he details the history, contextual factors and definition of Islamophobia. In a section entitled "'They're All the Same': Islamophobia in the Context of the UK", he demonstrates the way in which British Muslims are seen as one uniform group. In the same chapter he assesses the result of a 2002 British YouGov poll to highlight the prevalence of preconceptions and prejudices against Muslims. Popular discourse draws on stereotypes, frames Muslims as being at odds with European society and normalises the treatment of Europe's Muslims as suspicious (Allen and Nielsen 2002, Allievi 2005, Rich 1999, Salih 2004, Vanparys, Jacobs, and Torreken 2013, Wharton 2008). Thus, the well-known '*Clash of Civilisations*' as described by Huntington (1993) is argued to be now taking place within European geographical boundaries. Furthermore, European Muslims are seen as a source of demographic and ideological threat whereby this threat stems from immigration, fertility rates and to a lesser extent conversion (Meer 2012, Nielsen 2007, Wharton 2008, Ye'or 2005); this contributes to Muslims increasingly being subject to Islamophobia (Allen 2010, Allen and Nielsen 2002, Salih 2004, Vanparys, Jacobs, and Torreken 2013). These normalised perceptions and attitudes lead to a questioning of the compatibility between Europe and Islam (Salvatore 2007, Soysal 1997), or an alleged opposition of Islam and Europe (Salih 2004). Simultaneously, these debates have contributed to the emergence of 'European Islam', whereby the role of Islam and Muslims in Europe is questioned by society and Muslims themselves.

'European Islam' is typically associated with Tariq Ramadan (March 2007, Nielsen 2007, Salih 2004, Salvatore 2007) and has numerous labels, these include 'European Islam' (Allievi 2005, March 2007, Meer 2012, Saint-Blancat 2002, Salih 2004), 'Euro-Islam' (Meer 2012, Merali 2011, Salih 2004), 'European centred Islam' (Nielsen 2007), 'Diaspora Islam' (Saint-Blancat 2002), national variants such as 'Belgian Islam' or 'French Islam' and also 'High Islam' or 'Islam of citizens' (Pedziwiatr 2006, 2007). I draw on the literature that assigns these various labels, as presented in my discussion below.

'European Islam' is both political and ideological (Karic 2002). It relates specifically to the Western European context (Bougarel 2007, Wharton 2008) and not indigenous Eastern European Muslims

(Bougarel 2007). It largely centres on second and subsequent generations of diaspora Muslims in Western Europe (Allievi 2005, Pedziwiatr 2006, 2007, Roy 2005). However the categorisation also includes native Western Europeans who have converted to Islam (Allievi 2005).

Unlike the first-generation Muslims who arrived in Europe during the post-war migration period, Muslims who identify with 'European Islam' are often born in Europe (Pedziwiatr 2006, 2007, Saint-Blancat 2002) and have been socialised and educated in European society, whilst still maintaining their Islamic religious heritage (McLoughlin 2005, Pedziwiatr 2006, 2007). Being born and educated in Europe means that these Muslims often have a higher level of civic skills, socioeconomic status (SES) and political awareness than first generation of Muslims in Western Europe. Civic skills and SES contribute to an individual's ability to participate in politics (Alford and Scroble 1968, Bennett and Klecka 1970, Berinsky and Lenz 2011, Bollen and Jackman 1985, Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010, Crowley 2001, Galston 2004, 2001, Huckfeldt 1979, Lindquist 1964, Milbrath and Klein 1962, Nelson 1979, Odmalm 2009, Schlozman et al. 1995, Verba et al. 1993b). However, as with models linked to SES and motivation to participate in politics the seemingly class bound nature of 'European Islam' by default excludes many European Muslims.

In his book *Secularism Confronts Islam*, Roy discusses the nature of *laïcité* in France in relation to French Muslims, he states: "There is very clearly an "Islam of the young" made up of a complex mixture of generational conflict, a search for authenticity going beyond the parents' generation, and an affirmation of identity *and* protest" (Roy 2007, 88). This therefore suggests that 'European Islam' is as much about identity affirmation as well as skills and education. 'European Islamic' identity also places emphasis on moral responsibility and social good (Bari 2005), thus further emphasising its potential in motivating political participation. However, much of these arguments are based on theoretical work rather than extensive fieldwork with European Muslims.

The emergence of 'European Islam' is seen as the negotiation of Western and Islamic cultural values by Muslims (Bougarel 2007, Nielsen 2007) and is therefore led by Muslims in Europe (Merali 2011, Saint-Blancat 2002). In this regard, I would argue that the Muslim generated emergence of 'European Islam' represents an alternative to the popularised alleged opposition of European and Islamic values. For example, in her paper centred upon a single in-depth, qualitative interview with a spokesperson from the organisation *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia* (Italian Muslim Youth), Salih (2004) in part sets out to assess the dichotomously portrayed relationship, as perceived by young Muslims, between the European and the Islamic. Although the paper is based on a single case study, her findings point to the way in which European Muslims combine the European and Islamic as part of their multiple intersecting identities.

Typically under 'European Islam' the culture of origin is rejected (Merali 2011, Pedziwiatr 2006, 2007, Roy 2005, 2007) and replaced by European culture, along with a closer textual engagement

with Islamic sources (Nielsen 2007, Pedziwiatr 2006, 2007). This cultural replacement is the product of the enduring Muslim presence in Europe, since these Muslims are very much European as well as simultaneously Muslim. Closer textual engagement arises since European Muslims have higher levels of education and are able to pursue Islamic sources in ways that previous generations might not have been. 'European Islam' is argued to be independent from the Muslim world (Nielsen 2007), however it is perhaps more appropriate to describe it as being distanced from the cultural rather than spiritual features of the Muslim world. It allows for the simultaneous maintenance of both European and Muslim identities and is both an alternative to assimilation and presents a means of contesting marginalisation and stereotyping of Muslims in Europe (Salih 2004).

Additionally, perhaps given the ethnic diversity of Europe's Muslims, 'European Islam' places greater emphasis on the Islamic concept of *Ummah*, or global and non-ethnically defined Muslim community (Bougarel 2007, Roy 2005, Saint-Blancat 2002). Foregrounding *Ummah* unifies and is therefore relevant for Europe's ethnically diverse Muslims. However, as Roy (2013: 134) Roy (2013) highlights whilst historically *Ummah* might have been expressed through paradigms such as the Ottoman empire or Caliphate, it is a non-geographical notion.

In addition, 'European Islam' is seen as desirable therefore and sometimes imposed by the state, thus it is also a top-down process. This has increased following the events of 9/11 (Yazbeck Haddad and Golson 2007). For example, in France the state-led imposition of 'French Islam' is seen as a means of domesticating Islam and promoting a more "Euro-friendly" variant of Islam (Yazbeck Haddad and Golson 2007, 487). This "Euro-friendly" practice of Islam in France was intended to de-radicalise groups such as the *Union des Organisations Islamiques de France* (UOIF – Union of Islamic Organisations in France) and therefore gives rise to a more acceptable 'moderate' Islam. Although often poorly received by many Muslims, institutionalisation of Islam reflects the state's desire to maintain law and order, implement counter-terrorism strategies and enhance communication between Muslims and the authorities (Silvestri 2007).

In France, the creation of the *Conseil Français du Culte Musulman* (CFCM) in 2003 was supported by the then interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy and is typically seen as the mode of introducing a top-down model of 'French Islam'. The CFCM is made up of elected members from across various French Muslim organisations (CFCM 2014). Partly due to their inability to overturn the Islamic headscarf ban imposed in French schools since 2004, the consultative body and the creation of 'French Islam' have not been well received by French Muslims on the basis that it was slow to respond to the 2004 headscarf affairs in France (Yazbeck Haddad and Golson 2007). Arguably, since the organisation indicates the state's interest in national Islamic affairs, I would suggest that its presence contradicts French 'combative' secular norms surrounding the removal of faith from the public sphere. The top-down creation of an "Islam de France" as stated by Sarkozy, also contradicts

French blindness to difference and egalitarianism. These apparent contradictions contribute to explaining why the CFCM and the top-down creation of a 'French Islam' are negatively perceived by French Muslims. However these assertions are not based on empirical evidence from French Muslims, and therefore this remains an area that requires further study in the field.

Conversely, in Belgium, Islam has been officially recognised since 1974 (Kanmaz 2002). It is represented at the state level by the *Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique* (EMB). Unlike the CFCM in France, the EMB is largely well received by Belgian Muslims. This can be attributed to the wider Belgian recognition and funding of diverse religious groups, meaning that the recognition of Islam in Belgium is unlikely to be perceived as a specifically targeted means of controlling Muslims and instead is seen as being in keeping with Belgian constitutional secularism and general tolerance of religion.

Within the wider debate surrounding 'European Islam' the question of permissibility of political participation by Muslims in Europe is central. To date this question has largely been tackled from an Islamic theological or academic angle (Ramadan 1999, 2004, 2010). Whilst a minority of Muslims are against political participation (Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking 2013, Parvez 2013); this objection stems from beliefs held by a minority that participation in democratic systems contradicts Islamic divine law and is therefore unacceptable. Both of the aforementioned works by Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking (2013) and Parvez (2013) come upon this finding via the examination of Muslim political engagement rather than directly addressing 'European Islam', however unlike much of the literature cited in this section, these findings stem from Muslim voices rather than speculation. Prominent European Islamic scholars and organisations encourage political participation by European Muslims (Ligue des Musulmans de Belgique 2014, Ramadan 1999, 2004, 2010). Thus suggesting that there is general consensus between 'European Islam' and political participation by European Muslims (Meer 2012) and that subsequently it may be influential in motivating European Muslims to participate in politics.

From an empirical perspective, little is known about the extent to which 'European Islam' motivates Muslim political participation, or its effect on Muslims generally (Allievi 2005, Salih 2004). Instead there is an argued "theoretical and political deadlock" surrounding 'European Islam' (Salih 2004, 995) and limited empirical evidence (Allievi 2005). However, this gap in the literature along with the suggested encouragement of political participation, emphasis on social good and the attainment of education, SES and political awareness among those who identify with 'European Islam' prompt the study of 'European Islam' as a principal motivator in Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium.

3.1.2 What Does 'European Islam' Mean to You?

In this section of the chapter I present Muslim women's understandings and identification with 'European Islam'. I begin by looking at the responses in France, followed by those in Belgium, before finally comparing the two cases to subsequently understand the extent to which it motivates political participation by Muslim women in each case.

3.1.2.1 France

In France, the interviewees generally did not identify with 'European Islam'. However the small minority⁷ who identified with the concept tended to be involved in varied Islamic organisations and projects at the European level at the time of the interview, and thus were more exposed to Islam in the European context and as a result were comparatively more likely to identify with 'European Islam' than those whose participation was limited to France. Although the literature establishes that 'European Islam' predominantly relates to second generation diaspora Muslims who are born and educated in Europe (Allievi 2005, Pedziwiatr 2007, Saint-Blancat 2002, Salih 2004), in this study French interviewees who identified with 'European Islam' had diverse backgrounds; one conformed to the standard profile detailed in the literature and was a second generation Muslim of North African origin who was born and educated in France. Others included converts to Islam and also a first generation Muslim woman who had been born and partly raised in North Africa.

However, in addition to being engaged in European-level Islamic organisations, those who identified with 'European Islam' were of a comparable age, between 25 and 30 years old. This evidence suggests that age combined with the nature of political participation is more influential in identification with 'European Islam' than being a second generation Muslim. Consistent with this view, the two older French interviewees in the sample suggested that 'European Islam' was more pertinent to younger Muslims.

Those who clearly identified with 'European Islam' felt that it best described their experiences as a European Muslim. Their understandings mapped onto the theoretical discussions in the existing related academic literature. 'European Islam' was described as the: "... practice of religion that is free from traditions associated with culture of origin. It is having an understanding of religion that is not moderated..." (1), she adds "'European Islam is a 'cleaned-up' [version] of Islam, you see... it is the Islam for me." (1)

They also identified a distancing between it and their culture of origin due to the diverse backgrounds of Muslims in Europe. This understanding meant not prioritising any particular

⁷ Three of eleven French interviewees expressed a clear and complete identification with 'European Islam', whilst others held varying opinions ranging from partial identification to complete rejection of the concept.

culture: "What is left is 'pure Islam', in inverted commas, it is not Algerian Islam, and it is not Turkish Islam." (26)

Whilst it is likely that 'European Islam' is at least distanced from particular ethnic and cultural backgrounds, I argue that the notion of a 'pure Islam' should be treated with caution, since Islam is not culture-free, meaning it is not something that exists independent of a given culture. Instead, in this case it has adapted to the European context and adopted its values. These values are compatible with Islamic values, for example, the interviewees suggested that European traditions of freedom of speech, rationality and freedom of conscience shaped 'European Islam'. Put alternatively, the notion of a 'pure Islam' raises questions regarding the parameters that define culture and religion. Furthermore although these findings shed light on the matter and are driven by evidence, this is an area of study which requires further and more in-depth future investigation.

'European Islam' was also seen to be shaped by issues faced in specific European contexts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who identified with 'European Islam' related its existence to the headscarf affairs and the European Muslim response to these controversies. An interviewee pointed out that the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) (ECFR 2014) issued a ruling stating that young French Muslim girls should remove their headscarves in French schools following the implementation of the 2004 French headscarf bans. Whilst the example demonstrates an adaptation to a specific European event, the predominantly Arabic ECFR website makes ECFR page inaccessible to many European Muslims, therefore the ECFR is perhaps not the best example of 'European Islam' in practice.

As stated, the majority (eight of eleven) of the French sample did not identify with 'European Islam', albeit to varying degrees. Non-identification transcended age, being born and educated in Europe and the diverse ethnic backgrounds of the women in the sample. These women tended to participate in the French rather than in the European political sphere, therefore the nature of their participation in France, rather than in Europe, has partly influenced their responses.

However based on the interview responses, it appears that the main reason behind the non-identification with 'European Islam' was linked to the notion of Islam and Muslims making concessions in order to please European authorities. These concessions were seen as problematic as the interviewees felt that they would detract from the basic essential principles of Islam. Interviewees described that 'European Islam' or 'French Islam' was a non-organic, state-imposed means of controlling French Muslims:

When I hear 'French Islam' it makes me cringe a little or [if I hear about the] Conseil Français du Culte Musulman, the thing that Nicolas Sarkozy created with the [Grande] Mosquée de Paris etc. He created it to regulate Muslims... (27)

She continues: “We don’t need someone to tell us ‘French Islam’ is this or you have to do this, no, no, no!” (27)

The state-enforced, top-down creation of ‘French Islam’ was also described as “McDonaldisation” (21) of Islam, meaning that the state’s involvement is perceived as the commodification of Islam for state benefit. The same interviewee questions: “If a ‘French Islam’ is created, is it going to be an accomplice of the imperialist state or will it resist [the state]?” (21). Furthermore, even among those who did identify with ‘European Islam’, an interviewee stated that she was against “an [interpretation] of Islam that makes concessions.” (26) Therefore, rather than having the desired outcomes, the top-down instatement of ‘French Islam’ pushes Muslims away and enforces scepticism. These findings are consistent with the work of Yazbeck Haddad and Golson (2007) who state that French Muslims distrust notions of ‘French Islam’ and the CFCM. Furthermore, based on the interviewees’ responses I argue that state involvement potentially limits the development of bottom-up ‘European Islam’ in France.

3.1.2.2 Belgium

Unlike in France, fourteen of the eighteen interviewees in Belgium identified with ‘European Islam’, with a fifteenth interviewee stating that although she personally did not identify with the idea, it was “true that the European Muslim population had created its vision of Islam” (10), and therefore I take this to mean that the idea had some resonance for this interviewee in a broader sense. This was present to varying degrees across the sample.

Like the three French respondents who explicitly identified with ‘European Islam’, the Belgian interviewees underlined how ‘European Islam’ entailed a distancing from practices associated with the culture of origin:

The Islam that they [the first generation] were living was generally influenced by their culture [of origin]. So when we [Muslims] came to Europe, we tried to just take the religion as it is without the culture, because we get more of the European culture. So, ‘European Islam’ is just Islam without the culture of the Middle East. It is different from what our parents had... So, it [‘European Islam’] has become a pure religion, (11)

Or: “It is obvious that being a Muslim in Europe is not the same as being a Muslim in Saudi Arabia. We [European Muslims] have a different context.” (2)

Alternatively:

...It is true that the way of living, in terms of context, is not the same [as in the Muslim world]. And therefore, we can’t impose all the ways of doing things from the country of origin. Because in this case for example, there are a lot of Moroccans and Turks. So, we can’t impose the Moroccan or Turkish way of living for example. We have our own way here in Belgium, Islam is compatible with all contexts. (17)

Or: “For me, ‘European Islam’ is constructed by individuals in their given context.” (12) Or, simply another suggested that ‘European Islam’ had to exist since “we are European!” (9) and simultaneously Muslim. Or finally: “I see ‘European Islam’ as being an opportunity to go back to what Islam really is, without being too influenced by traditions and cultures... as an opportunity to go back to the essential” (7)

Therefore, based on the responses put forward by the women, ‘European Islam’ is seen as being dissociated from culture of origin. Although two interviewees argue the emergence of ‘pure Islam’, those remaining interviewees who identified with ‘European Islam’ articulate the necessary adaptation of Islam to the European context via the adoption of European values that are compatible with Islamic principles. The women stress that this adaptation is only possible given the compatibility and flexibility of Islam:

There is a part of Islam that is indisputable, for example the principles, the pillars⁸, the values... but there is obviously a part of Islam that is adaptable, which has adapted to the context within which it [Islam] is. (17)

Or: “It is our Islam, for us and by us, because Islam and European democracy are compatible. Entirely compatible!” (9)

These responses indicate that as long as the basic principles of Islam were maintained, Islam was mouldable to the European context, thus ‘European Islam’ is a variant that is “nourished by European culture” (20) and in this regard the majority of Belgian Muslim women’s articulations of ‘European Islam’ are congruent with much of the wider literature related to the topic in that ‘European Islam’ is perceived as a positive adaptation and coming together of European and Islamic values (Merali 2011, Pedziwiatr 2007, Roy 2007).

3.2.2.3 Comparison: Perceptions of ‘European Islam’ in France and Francophone Belgium

Analysis reveals distinct differences in the extent to which Muslim women interviewed in each case identify with ‘European Islam’. The majority of French Muslim women interviewed largely rejected notions of ‘European Islam’ (eight of eleven interviewed), whilst francophone Belgian respondents were largely accepting of the idea (fourteen of eighteen and a fifteenth broadly acknowledging the idea). The range of responses also suggested that rather than viewing identification or non-identification with ‘European Islam’ as two discrete categories, it is more appropriate to define identification also a sliding scale from strong, to moderate to very little identification.

The perceptions of ‘European Islam’ articulated by those who largely identified with the idea reflected the wider positions in the literature related to the topic. These ideas included the

⁸ ‘The Pillars of Islam’ incorporate fundamental Islamic beliefs and include the belief in the oneness of God, the belief the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the final messenger, practicing the five daily prayers, fasting from sunrise to sunset during the Islamic month of Ramadan, giving charity to the poor and performing the pilgrimage, *Hajj*.

distancing from culture of origin as part of a natural and necessary response to Muslim diversity and the enduring presence of Islam in Europe, and also a closer engagement with Islamic sources, such as the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* (Pedziwiatr 2007, 2006, Roy 2005, Merali 2011).

Given the profile of the French respondents who identified with 'European Islam', I speculated that age and the nature of political engagement at the European might have influenced identification. However, having reviewed the distinct differences in levels of identification with 'European Islam' among French and Belgian Muslim women respondents I have reached two principal conclusions; firstly given the small number of French Muslim women who identified with 'European Islam', the link between factors such as age and nature of political participation and the extent to which European Muslims identify with 'European Islam' is not entirely clear and therefore represents an area for potential further systematic investigation.

Secondly, I would argue that the general patterns of identification or non-identification that become apparent when comparing the two cases suggest greater influence of contextual norms and the state's position on the extent to which Muslim women involved in politics identify with 'European Islam', rather than age or the nature of political engagement. I argue that the French top-down model of 'European Islam', against the background of *laïcité*, leaves French Muslims feeling singled out, targeted and perceiving 'European' or 'French Islam' as symbolic of state-driven commodification and control of Islam. Whereas the Belgian contextual norms of multiculturalism and 'organised secularism' mean that 'European Islam' or 'Belgian Islam' is not as readily perceived as a state-led imposition and consequently the women in this study are comfortably able to articulate identification with the idea. Therefore, inconsistent with much of the literature, I would argue that identification with 'European Islam' is predominantly driven by contextual, rather than solely by personal factors as the literature in this area would suggest.

3.1.3 'European Islam' and Motivation to Participate in Politics

3.1.3.1 France

Analysing the extent to which 'European Islam' motivated the French interviewees to participate in politics revealed two distinct themes. Firstly, instead of being motivated by 'European Islam' all but one of the women were often, but not exclusively, motivated by their negative experience as Muslims in France. For example: "It is not 'European Islam' that influences my participation, it is Islamophobia." (21) Or, alternatively an interviewee described how she had been motivated, in part, by the way in which "Muslims in France have become scapegoats" (23) and were therefore increasingly discriminated. Another interviewee described the way in which "we live in an Islamophobic society" (25) and this contributes to her participation. Thus we see that hostility towards Muslims in the French context has spurred Muslim women's participation in politics. Also

in this category, the women mentioned the headscarf affairs, in 1989 and 2004, as an example of Islamophobia that had encouraged their participation in French politics. Therefore rather than limiting Muslim women's participation, negative experiences or grievances also have the potential to motivate Muslim women's political participation in France. (Klandermans, Toorn, and Stekelenburg 2008, 993) define grievances as "a sense of indignation about the way authorities are treating a social or political problem." In this case, grievances are linked to both the state position and generally normalised mainstream anti-Muslim attitudes in society. This reflects Muslim women's sense of marginalisation and the extent to which Islamophobia and specifically the French headscarf affairs have affected Muslim women in France. This nature of motivation was cited by French Muslim women across the sample and therefore evidently influences participation by Muslim women engaged in state and non-state level politics.

Dobbernack, Meer, and Modood (2012) warn against the dangers of the "misrecognition" of Muslim political participation as purely grievance-based, among other forms of misrecognition, since this approach risks ignoring the range and complexity of Muslim political participation. Although grievances are not the primary focus in this study, the significant extent to which the French interviewees cite reactive motivations characterises French Muslim women's motivations to pursue politics must be acknowledged and discussed within the wider frame of Muslim women's motivations to participate in French politics. In addition, these motivations demonstrate the transformation of potential barriers into actual political engagement.

Secondly, the French Muslim women interviewed also indicated that Islam rather than 'European Islam' motivated their political participation. Principles such as social justice, equality, freedom of faith were framed as Islamic values and typically cited as factors that had motivated their political participation: "And in my political engagement it is [about] social justice... that means helping people... that is really what motivates me... and I get that from my religion." (26) These motivations were discussed across the sample, meaning that Islamic ideals motivate French Muslim women's political participation across the political spectrum. These observations recall the findings of O'Toole et al. (2013, 25) who upon interviewing British Muslim peer, Lord Nazir Ahmed, in their wider review of the state of Muslim participation in contemporary British governance found that his Islamic values guided his political engagements. They state: "Lord Ahmed told us that he saw his political role as influencing policy from a moral conscience, which for him was built on Islamic principles."

Based on the responses in this study, I would argue that French Muslim women are similarly guided and motivated by Islamic values. Consequently this leads me to argue that although the women did not articulate identification with 'European Islam', the way in which they combine Islamic values and participation in the European political sphere is indicative of a lived 'European Islam'

shaping political participation, whereby values framed as Islamic encourage participation in French society.

3.1.3.2 Belgium

In Belgium a third of those who identified with 'European Islam' noted that it had motivated and shaped their political participation and also emphasised the compatibility of European and Islamic values: "We have our own interpretation of Islam [in Belgium]. Because Islam and European democracy are compatible, entirely compatible." (5) She adds: "It ['European Islam'] is influential, but it also encourages [political participation]." (5) These responses highlight that francophone Belgian Muslim women are motivated to participate in politics by 'European Islam'; this contributes to the wider debate concerning European Muslim political activism (Ramadan 2004). The interviewees also described examples of how 'European Islam' had motivated and consequently shaped the nature of their political participation:

At the beginning I used to think that my political participation was the same as [that of] everyone else in the party, but one day I realised that we [as European Muslims] combine Muslim values, which are universal and European values. That was when I became very, very proud. (5)

Or, alternatively:

I see 'European Islam' as a way to contribute to some debates in Europe, some essential debates here in Europe, like environmental issues, like family life, err, like all human rights issues also, respect of others. But, [this can be done] only if we go back to what Islam really is. (7)

Finally, when asked if 'European Islam' motivates her political participation in Belgium, this interviewee responded: "It influences [my political participation here in Belgium], but it also encourages it." (9)

As the examples suggests, for the interviewees 'European Islam' meant combining universal Islamic values and European values to positively influence their political participation. These values were central to both the European and Islamic traditions and included justice, equality, human and women's rights. These combined values then subsequently inform the nature of the issues in which Muslim women participate. For example notions such as a human rights and equality motivate francophone Belgian Muslim women to become involved in anti-racism movements, whilst social justice motivates Muslim women to pursue political issues linked to the environment and sustainability.

One of the eighteen francophone Belgian respondents suggested that although 'European Islam' had motivated her participation, Islamophobia also formed part of her personal motivations to participate in politics, thus we see the small but emerging presence of grievance-based motivations in the Belgian sample.

3.2.3.3 Comparisons and Conclusions: 'European Islam' and Motivation to Participate in Politics

This section of the chapter revealed distinct differences in the extent to which the French and francophone Belgian interviewees state that 'European Islam' has motivated their political participation. In France the Muslim women interviewed were comparatively less likely to report that 'European Islam' had motivated their political participation. This observation correlates with the low rates of identification with 'European Islam' observed among the French interviewees.

Conversely, to varying degrees across the sample in francophone Belgium, the interviewees were comparatively more likely to suggest that 'European Islam' had at least in part motivated their political participation. This finding reflects the higher rates of identification of 'European Islam' among the Belgian interviewees. Comparing the responses related to the extent to which 'European Islam' motivates Muslim women's political participation in the two cases leads to several key conclusions. Firstly 'European Islam' contributes to francophone Belgian Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics, whilst it is comparatively less influential among the French Muslim women interviewed; thus 'European Islam' can motivate political participation among European Muslims. This difference in reported influence of 'European Islam' in France and francophone Belgium reflects the previous observations related to the differing levels of identification with the idea in each case. Although much of the previous literature related to 'European Islam' focuses on the effects of personal factors, such as being a second generation European Muslim, levels of education and socialisation (Just, Sandovici, and Listhaug 2014, Karic 2002, Klausen 2005, Pedziwiatr 2007) the findings here indicate the influence of the state's position and contextual norms on the extent to which 'European Islam' is relevant to European Muslim political participation, with top-down state led initiatives being negatively received and therefore less influential on political engagement, and bottom-up Muslim led 'European Islam' being more readily accepted and therefore contributing to motivations to participate in politics. These findings also contribute to improving the understanding of the role of 'European Islam' in European Muslim life and political engagement.

Furthermore, the interviewees in both cases also argued that universal Islamic values, such as social justice, equality, human and women's rights motivated their political participation. However in France the women largely saw these as independent of French values, whilst francophone Belgian Muslim women were more likely to report the combination of European and Islamic values. Again this difference reflects the previously highlighted differences related to 'European Islam' in each case. In both cases, these principles shaped the nature of Muslim women's political participation; for example, as highlighted ideals related to equality and justice encouraged the women's engagement with anti-racism movements. The influence of ideals framed as Islamic values, such as justice or freedom of faith, on participation in the European political sphere observed in both cases is consistent with the work of others (O'Toole et al. 2013) and also led me

to conclude that the Muslim women interviewed combine Islamic values with their engagement in European society. Like other religious groups previously observed in the literature related to motivations to participate in politics (Lam 2002, Scheufele, Nisbet, and Brossard 2003) these findings also show the role of religion in motivating political engagement. This observation also demonstrates the perceived compatibility of Islamic and European values among the interviewees, rather than the hypothesised clash between the two (Huntington 1993).

Also as highlighted within the frame of 'European Islam' the French Muslim women interviewed are comparatively more likely than the Belgian interviewees to cite that Islamophobia was more influential in motivating their political participation. They illustrated this hostility towards Muslims through the discussion of the French headscarf affairs. These French grievance-based motivations illustrate some of the factors that differentiate the nature of Muslim women's political participation in the two cases, highlight the way in which negative experiences are central to and characterise French Muslim women's motivations to become involved in politics and also demonstrate the transformation of potential limitations into factors that drive political engagement. These observations highlight some of the ways in which Muslim women's political participation differs in France and francophone Belgium.

3.2 Alternative Motivations

In addition to interrogating the role of 'European Islam' in motivating Muslim women's political participation, data analysis also revealed a series of alternative motivations expressed by the Muslim women in both cases. In this section of the Chapter I comparatively explore and seek to thematically classify these alternative motivations.

Numerous competing models seek to explain what might motivate an individual to participate in politics, including those that frame motivations in terms of the costs and rewards of participation (Han 2009, Miller and Krosnick 2004, Fowler and Kam 2007). Costs include factors such as time and resources spent participating in politics, whereas rewards or incentives to participate are classified as material and non-material (Klandermans and Oegema 1987); these include positive outcomes such as being elected as a political candidate (Wittmann 1983). These models assert that when rewards outweigh the costs associated with participation an individual becomes more likely to be motivated to participate in politics.

Alternatively, others explore the role of perceived political efficacy as central to motivating political participation (Pinkleton and Weintraub-Austin 2001). Others consider the role of social norms (Gerber and Rogers 2009), the threat of a loss of services (Miller and Krosnick 2004) as factors that might motivate individuals to pursue political engagement. For example Miller and Krosnick tested the notion of threat as a political motivator by conducting a field experiment whereby they sent

out letters to three sets of pro-abortion rights individuals. The first group, the control, was sent a generic letter relating to abortion, the second and third groups were sent either a letter discussing the possibility of policy change to improve women's rights in terms of access to abortion or a letter describing the threat of a loss of these rights and services. In the final experimental condition, where there was a threat of policy that would bring about a loss of services resulted in greatest financial and political support. All of these aforementioned models tell us about the conditions under which individuals are motivated to participate in politics, therefore we gain an insight into when individuals are motivated to participate in politics, but these models do not always contribute to understanding the particular issues in which individuals are motivated to become engaged, or which individuals are likely to pursue specific forms of political participation.

Alternative models consider who might be motivated to participate in politics. For example, the 'Attentive Publics' model suggests that only a small elite section of the public will be motivated to participate in politics. These individuals are argued to be motivated and able to participate in all political issues, whilst the masses remain non-motivated (Han 2009). This model correlates with research related to the importance of SES and its influence on political participation in that it suggest elites are more able to participate in politics (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995, Verba et al. 1993b, Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010, Crowley 2001, Schlozman et al. 1995, Odmalm 2009, Milbrath and Klein 1962, Stokes 2003, Alford and Scroble 1968, Berinsky and Lenz 2011, Bollen and Jackman 1985, Bennett and Klecka 1970, Lindquist 1964, Nelson 1979, Huckfeldt 1979, Galston 2004, 2001), but I would argue that this model presents an oversimplified binary, is not likely to accurately reflect patterns of participation in the real world, in particular political action among marginalised groups, and it does not explain the factors that motivate individuals to pursue particular political issues. Nonetheless, much of the evidence related to the role of SES in political participation is based on extensive fieldwork and data and therefore these notions are tested and as a result cannot be dismissed.

As a result of my analysis I found that the traditional models of motivation to participate in politics alone do not best explain the nature of motivations expressed by the Muslim women interviewed. Therefore, in this section I draw on and combine elements from various models of motivation to best explain the patterns observed in France and francophone Belgium respectively. Firstly, I observed that in both cases, and across the political spectrum, Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics are underpinned by the extent to which the Muslim women feel that their political action will be effective, therefore I draw on existing theory that underlines the importance of efficacy in motivations to participate in politics (Pinkleton and Weintraub-Austin 2001). In their study which focuses on the effects of mass media on cynicism and political disenchantment, based on a telephone survey of 592 registered voters in Washington USA, Pinkleton and Weintraub-

Austin found that the extent to which individuals feel that their political participation will be effective shapes motivations to participate in politics. Although this research is based on voter behaviour in the USA, it sheds light on the notion that perceived efficacy underpins actual political participation.

Given that the Muslim women often described personal and seemingly selfless motivations to participate in politics, I incorporate Fowler and Kam (2007) work on the role of altruism and social identification in motivating political participation into my explanation of Muslim women's expressed motivations to participate in politics. The authors criticise existing literature related to costs and rewards, and propose the "Beyond the Self" model of motivation as an alternative. Firstly, whilst the model notes that some motivations to participate in politics can be explained in terms the relative benefits that they bring to the individual, this model suggests that individuals are also motivated to participate in political issues that benefit groups with whom they socially identify. Secondly, the model also posits that individuals are motivated to pursue political activity that brings benefit to others, or political engagement with rewards "beyond the self". Fowler and Kam (2007) reach these conclusions having conducted a highly controlled 'dictator games' study, whereby participants were allocated a number of lottery tickets to share with individuals. In each case the hypothetical recipient was anonymous, however in the control no political affiliation was discussed and in the two experimental cases participants were told that recipients were either registered democrats or republicans. The experiments revealed that individuals were more sympathetic to those that they identified with, importantly the test also revealed a degree of altruist actions among participants. Although the empirical evidence in this case is based on a somewhat unusual experimental condition, the theory that individuals pursue political action based on social identification and altruism strongly correlate to the patterns that we observe in this thesis. Arguably the evidence from this study represents a real-world example of motivation to participate in politics based on the principle of bringing about benefit to others.

I extend the model posed by Fowler and Kam (2007) and rather than viewing altruism, social identification and rewards to the self as independent categories, I suggest that motivations are best described as falling on a spectrum of motivations. This means that whilst some motivations might be purely altruistic, others might be partly altruistic and partly driven by social identification.

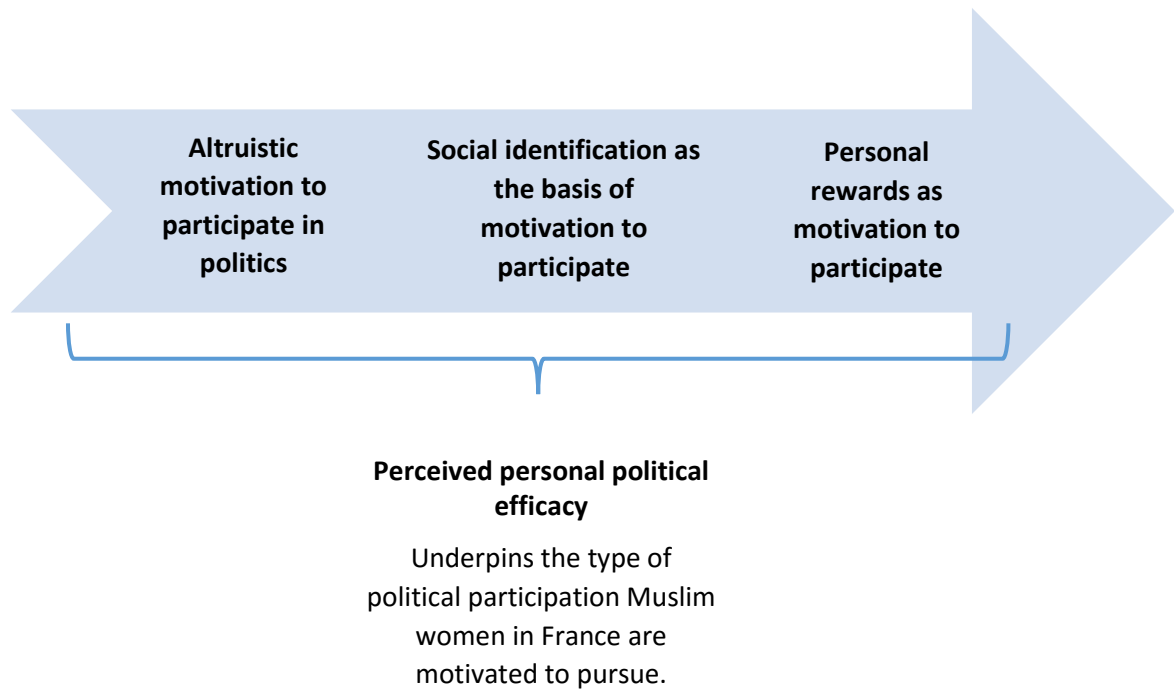
Additionally, based on Muslim women's responses I also draw on the work of Han (2009), who describes issue public membership as key to describing patterns of motivation to participate in politics. An issue public is a subset of the wider population that is motivated to participate in particular political issues. Thus motivation is driven by personal significance and specialist knowledge of the issue in question. Individuals might be members of multiple issue publics, but not everyone will be motivated to participate in each specific issue. Han discusses her approach as

a response to the elite and resource focused models of political motivation that dominate the political participation literature and their inability to effectively explain political motivation and action among marginalised groups. She empirically tests her theories through conducting a regression analysis of two data sets; the 1996 American National Election Study and the 1990 American Citizenship Participation Study. Although her data sets can be criticised as being out of date, her findings are based on large data sets and show issue public membership to be relevant in the field.

This model therefore contributes towards explaining individual differences between members of society and contributes to explaining why individuals pursue specific issues and not others. Additionally, the model allows for the consideration of context and its influence in each case and also transcends limitations of SES and resources in explaining the nature of political participation, put alternatively this model is especially appropriate in this study since it contributes to explaining the factors that motivate marginalised members of society to pursue specific political projects.

Combining this model with the previously discussed “Beyond the self” model (Fowler and Kam 2007) and the consideration of the role of efficacy in motivation (Pinkleton and Weintraub-Austin 2001), overcomes potential shortfalls of either model taken independently and therefore seeks to provide a holistic view of the alternative motivations to participate in politics suggested by the Muslim women . The model is visually represented below:

Figure 3.1 Model of Motivations to Participate in Politics



The model builds upon and modifies existing theory related to motivations to participate in politics and enables me to explain and classify the seemingly diverse motivations expressed by the women interviewed in both France and francophone Belgium. In the sections below I begin by discussing the role of efficacy of motivations to participate in politics, before moving on to discuss the influence on experiences, moral ideas such as social justice and finally the role of personal identity on Muslim women's motivations to participate in either French or francophone Belgian politics. In each section I first discuss evidence from France, followed by francophone Belgium, before concluding and comparing the findings from each case.

3.2.1 Efficacy

Muslim women, like the wider public, are motivated to participate in politics by the extent to which individuals they feel that their actions will be effective. Across the French sample, and particularly among Muslim women who tended to participate in non-state level politics, participation in political parties was seen to detract from Muslim women's efficacy in the French political arena. For example:

When I look back at my political engagement in the French political sphere, at one point I had become so deeply disappointed and [I] couldn't see how I could change things by being involved in a political party. And I just decided don't waste your time. (1)

She goes on to add:

In fact, that was the realisation. So I said to myself, yes in fact we can change things, but we don't need to be at that level [state level party politics] you see, on the contrary... there is more of an impact in the long term [via engagement at the non-state level]. (1)

Alternatively, another interviewee describes her frustration and disappointment with traditional political parties and the way in which she subsequently became part of a marginal political party, as a means to contest the hegemony and finding "an alternative space" (21) in which she would be effective. Finally another interviewee discusses how she had selected to participate only in non-state level politics, as this was the only way in which she could "make a real difference" (23)

This type of response was not uncommon among the French sample, particularly given that the French interviewees predominantly participated at the non-state level rather than being engaged in traditional state level politics. Generally French interviewees suggested that their participation in state level party politics would be ineffective and therefore would not bring positive change. As a result Muslim women are motivated to pursue non-state level political activism. Therefore, here the perceived lack of efficacy in party politics shapes the nature of French Muslim women's political participation.

Alternatively, those who participated in political parties at the state level tended to argue that they were motivated to participate in this way since they felt that it was the only way to be heard and truly be effective in French politics. This therefore underlines the importance of individual differences and personal perception in defining efficacy in politics. These contribute to shaping the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France, whilst also highlighting the diversity of their political engagement. The higher prevalence of perceived inefficacy at the state level among interviewees reflects the composition of the sample and their political participation rather than a quantifiable measure of Muslim women's efficacy in either state or non-state level politics.

Equally, perceived efficacy also shapes the nature of Muslim women's political engagement in francophone Belgium. For example this interviewee discussed asking herself: "Where can I be most useful? ... And that is when I realised that if I was in a political party I would be limited." (3) Alternatively, another interviewee frames the question of efficacy in terms of her own skills rather than the level of politics she might pursue: "I asked myself, can I be useful [in politics]? Can I be useful for young people? What can I bring? What can I bring that is different? Or, that would add [to what is already there]?"(10) However, given the diversity in the nature of political participation among interviewees and variations that arise from individual differences, the francophone Belgian sample, the interviewees had differing opinions regarding the specific political locations where their engagement would be most effective, thus highlighting the role of individual differences in perceptions which consequently shapes the precise nature of francophone Belgian Muslim women's political participation. Nonetheless, these findings highlight that the women in both France and francophone Belgium carefully consider the potential efficacy of their political

participation and its outcomes, subsequently this influences where Muslim women will be motivated to participate and therefore ultimately this consideration contributes towards shaping the nature of Muslim women's political participation in each case.

Furthermore, the role of efficacy in motivating Muslim women's political participation along with existing research reviewed earlier indicates that the political motivations of the wider population are shaped by efficacy, suggest that Muslim women's motivations to participate in either French or Belgian politics are subject to the same factors as those of the wider population.

3.2.2 Experiences

In both cases the respondents explained the ways in which their personal experiences motivate their political participation. In France the interviewees described a range of personal experiences that had motivated their political participation. For example these include being motivated by their socialisation:

I started to become interested in politics since I was a child, because I come from a family with a strong background in political activism. So, you could say that I didn't have a choice! I was attending political meetings, going to demonstrations. Erm yeah, I mean like listening to political debates between my parents and their friends and their colleagues. So my political awareness, if you can say that, started quite early. And also because I am, I was born abroad and we came to France when I was five years old and we were considered as political refugees. So, the link with political things was quite strong. (1)

Although this interviewee's profile was not typical given that the interviewee initially arrived in France as a political refugee, it highlights the influence of socialisation in contributing to French Muslim women's motivations to participate in French politics. However, socialisation within the family tended to expose the women to transnational political concerns rather than those linked solely to the French context. I would argue that this reflects the non-French heritage of many of the French Muslim women interviewed and the potential persistence of transnational political concerns among non-native European Muslims. Nonetheless, exposure to political ideas arguably equips French Muslim women with skills and awareness of politics, which then contributes to their motivations to participate in French politics.

Others interviewed describe how their experiences of racism during childhood schooling in France motivated their political participation:

Personally, I was insulted when I was at high school. How old was I? I was about twelve or fourteen years old and I was insulted. Someone at school called me a "dirty Arab" in front of everyone! ... I asked myself, why did he say that? ... I think in the end that insult was the first thing that motivated me to become politically active. (4)

As discussed previously, others described how their experiences of Islamophobia have spurred them and other Muslims, on to become active in French politics: "In fact, it is that nowadays, even in parliament... Muslims have become scapegoats... I think that paradoxically... Muslims have

begun to become more [politically] engaged.” (23) Here, in spite of the differences in the nature of experiences, Muslim women in France have similarly been motivated to participate in politics, therefore highlighting the importance of experiences in shaping the nature of their political participation. Experience also shapes the specific issues in which the Muslim women are motivated to become involved. So, for example the interviewee who described being motivated to participate by her experiences of racism at school detailed how she began her political participation with groups such as the French anti-racism movement *SOS Racisme*. Whilst the interviewee who spoke of the ‘scapegoating’ of French Muslims discussed her subsequent participation in anti-Islamophobia groups in France and Europe. Therefore, while general negative experience is linked to Muslim women’s motivations to become involved in politics, the specific nature of the experience subsequently determines the type of political activities that French Muslim women pursue. These experiences also map onto the grievance based motivations to participate in politics discussed earlier in this chapter. These observations also underline the relevance of applying Han’s (2009) “issue publics” model of motivation to explain Muslim women’s motivations to participate in politics.

Experiences that motivate political participation are both personal and also linked to the wider political context. For example, a respondent notes how the success of the far right in the 2002 presidential elections also contributed to her motivations to participate in politics:

... in 2002, it was my first year of high school and it was the election year, if you remember in France Jean-Marie Le Pen advanced to the second round of the presidential elections....that was quite a shock for my generation to see Jean-Marie Le Pen at that level. And, I err, we actually went out onto the streets and participated in demonstrations to call on people to vote for Jacques Chirac and to be a barrier to the far right in France, [to] prevent them from being heard. (1)

Therefore whilst the potential electoral success of the far right did not directly impact this interviewee in the short-term, experiencing rising popularity of the *Front National* (FN) at the polls motivated political action. Additionally, the headscarf affairs and subsequent ban of the Islamic headscarf in French schools in 2004 had also motivated French Muslim women to become involved in French politics. For example:

So, I began [to participate in politics] around 2002 or 2003, at the time of the headscarf affairs. I began to participate in an organisation. It [the organisation]⁹ was formed to fight against the law that was going to be voted on in March 2004. I was also active in another organisation, we were like the antithesis of *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*¹⁰. (21)

⁹ Here and in the extract below, the name of the organisation has been intentionally omitted, in an attempt to protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

¹⁰ The French feminist organisation, NPNS, was consulted by the government’s Stasi commission prior to the implementation of the 2004 headscarf ban. See Amara (2004) and Baubérot (2004). The organisation is predominantly made up of ethnic minority women in France, but it is also recognised for its ‘Republican feminist’ stance, meaning that they were largely supportive of banning the headscarf in French schools.

Or: "What pushed me to get up and do something, it was the [anti-headscarf] law in 2004 in particular, yes it was that." (22) Finally: "I first became engaged in the initiative [name of organisation], because I felt that it was really important that these young girls [who wore the headscarf] could go to school." (24)

Like the experience of the threat of the far right, the headscarf ban was not always something that directly impacted the interviewees in the short-term. However, both the rise of the FN and the ban on the headscarf in schools represent potential long-term threats from the perspective of the interviewees. Thus this type of motivating experience observed among the French Muslim women interviewees reflects previous suggestions that threat motivates political action (Miller and Krosnick 2004), outlines ways in which Muslim women's participation in French politics is similar to that of the mainstream and deepens the understanding of the general nature of their political engagement.

In addition, reviewing Muslim women's experiences and their role in motivating political participation highlights the grievance-based character of the motivations expressed by the French Muslim women. I previously touched upon the notion of grievance-based Muslim political participation and the warnings against classifying Muslim political participation in this way (Dobbernack, Meer, and Modood 2012). However, in France I would argue that these grievances are central to explaining French Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics.

In francophone Belgium respondents were also motivated to participate in politics by their previous personal experiences. For example, experiences included those derived from their childhood experiences as users of non-profit organisations:

At school there was nobody to help us...in the non-profit organisations there were always priests and nuns that used to come to help us with our homework... I was lucky when I grew up I had my degree and I thought to myself, why not [help like the nuns and priests]... (2)

The interviewee cited above describes the way in which the support provided by the Catholic Church in Belgium subsequently motivated her to participate in Christian, Muslim and secular non-profit associations. Whilst this motivation is arguably shaped by experience, this example also relates to social identification, whereby having personally received support by such organisations the interviewee is similarly motivated to pursue similar political action that would help young children who were in a comparable situation to the interviewee, during her childhood. Additionally, having first-hand experience of the positive effects of such organisations, this respondent is also arguably motivated by an awareness of the potential efficacy of her participation at this level.

Others in francophone Belgium indicated that their experience of political dissatisfaction had motivated their political participation: "I decided that being part of it [participating in politics] was better than doing nothing, because they [politicians] are the ones who vote in the laws... we can't

do anything otherwise.” (15) This particular interview extract also relates to the theme of efficacy discussed in the preceding section of this chapter. Political disillusionment was framed in terms of their fear of instrumentalisation in a system where their presence as ‘different’ would be merely tokenistic: “Also in political parties...it is a worry that you will always be fighting. So it is a waste of your time to keep fighting, especially when I knew my presence would be nothing more than that.” (3)

Perceiving political dissatisfaction the interviewees were motivated to pursue state level political participation, since they felt that their participation at this level would be effective in bringing about change. This therefore also relates back to and emphasises the importance of perceived efficacy in Muslim women’s motivations to participate in politics, as stressed in this study. Nonetheless, experiencing political dissatisfaction is not specific to Muslim women, in the same way as the experiences of racism and Islamophobia, and potential impact of the headscarf affairs may be particular to Muslim women in France or francophone Belgium.

To compare and conclude, in both France and francophone Belgium, Muslim women’s previous experiences motivate and subsequently shape the nature of their political participation. However in France, previous experiences were largely characterised by their negative nature. I argued that the experiences put forward in France largely motivate grievance-based political participation by the interviewees. Conversely, the women in Belgium were more likely to report the influence of their previous experiences with positive role models, or political dissatisfaction, rather than issues related to ethnicity or the Belgian Muslim community, as a factor that motivates their political engagement. Comparing the role of experiences in the two cases leads to the conclusion that grievances are central to French Muslim women’s motivations and comparatively less relevant in francophone Belgium. This subsequently indicates the role of context in the creation of grievance-based motivations to participate in politics, with French specificities such as a colonial past – with specific links to predominantly Muslim North African countries rather than the largely non-Muslim Belgian former colonies, comparatively increasingly normalised Islamophobia, the national school headscarf ban or the growing popularity of the far right in France (Shields 2010) thus increasing the likelihood of Muslim women pursuing reactive political participation. Comparison also indicates that social identification and perceived efficacy predicate Muslim women’s motivations to participate in politics in each case. Therefore, this observation also underlines the appropriateness of combining the “Beyond the Self” model of motivation and considering the role of efficacy in explaining the motivations expressed by the Muslim women in this study (Fowler and Kam 2007, Pinkleton and Weintraub-Austin 2001).

3.2.3 Social Justice

The fieldwork also revealed that Muslim women who participate in politics in France express ideological motivations to participate in politics. These ideological motivations include notions

such as equality, fair distribution of resources and justice for all. I broadly group these ideological motivations under the theme of social justice. These notions motivate a diverse range of political activities among the Muslim women interviewed and are also influential in determining the issue public membership of the women.

In part these ideals stemmed from their Islamic values in both cases. However as previously highlighted, the francophone Belgian respondents also saw these ideals as being part of the adoption and combination of European and Islamic values. Therefore, there is clear overlap here with the motivations cited here and those related to 'European Islam' discussed earlier in this chapter.

For the French interviewees, participating in politics was a means of contesting and challenging the injustices that they had witnessed: "There were inequalities all around me. I had a choice, either I do what everybody else does and try to continue to have a [normal] daily life or, I could do something to change things." (26) The same interviewee continues to add:

Justice, in my career, in my religion and in my [political] engagement... in my religion, it is what God wants, justice for humanity. And in my political engagement it is [about] social justice... that means to help people out of poverty, to improve education. Justice - that is really what motivates me... and I get that from my religion. (26)

However, she sees how in France this might be problematic: "And in France, if I say that I get my morality or my ideas from my religion, well..." (26)

At this point in the interview the woman silently gestures to imply that it would be the end of her political career. Therefore, whilst this example shows the importance of Islamic based motivations in French Muslim women's political participation, the quotation also demonstrates the way in which French secular norms result in Muslim women not being able to openly express the role of Islam in motivating their political participation. I would argue that although French *laïcité* dictates the neutrality of state officials, the public expression of the positive effects of Islamic ideals on Muslim women's engagement in French society has the potential to dispel common stereotypes related to the incompatibility of Islam and the West (Huntington 1993, Ye'or 2005).

The desire for social justice motivates a range of participation among the women interviewed in this study, such as combatting poverty, or improving education. For example, an interviewee who worked on her party's education policy, described how she was motivated to participate on this issue since she believed reform and amelioration of the French education system would allow: "...children and young people from all social and cultural backgrounds to obtain a profession, to take on responsibilities, to study and to have a real life plan." (29)

Social justice inspired Muslim women in France to pursue political action that would benefit groups beyond those with whom they socially identify. For example an interviewee in the study noted that

her conception of social justice meant that she would campaign in favour of the rights and equality of homosexuals, even if the practice of homosexuality was against her personal religious beliefs. Therefore, I would argue that social justice, whether inspired by Islamic principles or not, motivates Muslim women interviewed in France to pursue political participation that is more altruistic in nature and not just based on social identification. This also means that issue public membership for the Muslim women interviewed in France, is shaped not only by issues of personal significance but also by social justice.

However, arguably social justice is also at the centre of Muslim women's motivations to pursue issues that will benefit groups with which they socially identify, for example campaigning for the right of young Muslim girls to be able to wear the headscarf and attend school benefits other Muslim women and is part of their fight for equal access to education. This blurring of social identification and altruistic political motivation demonstrates the appropriateness of perceiving Muslim women's motivations to participate along a spectrum ranging from altruism, social identification and potential personal rewards.

Similarly, Belgian interviewees also expressed that social justice underpinned their general motivations to participate in politics. For example: "I wanted to participate in politics because of injustices." (9) Alternatively, this interviewee went on to describe specific instances of injustice in Belgium that had spurred her political participation, namely police violence or homelessness (15).

Interviewees also highlighted that their understanding of social justice is partly rooted in Islam, as this respondent suggests:

When I converted to Islam, well even before I had this kind of feeling of injustice in the world and I mean I was educated in a university that is really left wing, so as I said, I was not politically active, but still I was really influenced... but when I really converted to Islam, I saw all these aspects of discrimination.... Also when I joined this faith [Islam] and justice is so important to the religion, I would say [I was motivated to participate] even more. (7)

In this example, in addition to her education and general sensitivity to the question of social justice, her conversion to Islam represented a turning point which catalysed her motivations to participate in politics. Furthermore across the francophone Belgian sample, social justice was seen as something that came from the combination of Islamic and Belgian principles. This reiterates the previously observed combination of Belgian and Islamic values by the interviewees.

In francophone Belgium social justice encouraged the Muslim women to participate in altruistic political endeavours. Projects cited include helping those who reported being victims of police brutality, or helping homeless and impoverished locals: "There is also a collection tomorrow, [we collect] everything, like food and clothes, everything, so that we can distribute it to the homeless, or families in difficulty." (15)

Therefore, social justice motivates political participation by Muslim women in both cases. In France this is seen to largely stem from Islamic values alone, whereas in Belgium it was more commonly seen as being linked to both Islamic and European values. I argue that this reflects the discussion and findings presented earlier in relation to 'European Islam', whereby Belgian respondents are more comfortable than the French interviewees in drawing on combined Belgian and Islamic values. In France publicly expressing that motivation to participate in politics was derived from Islamic principles was recognised as problematic; conversely this was not the case in Belgium. I argue that this disparity reflects the importance of contextual norms in shaping Muslim women's political participation in the two cases, with French 'combative' secularism resulting in Muslim women feeling unable to express any elements of Islam in their political engagement; thus given the French context, Muslim women face difficulty in reconciling their Islamic and French identities. Furthermore, whilst the majority of the women in France and francophone Belgium described social justice as something that had motivated their political participation, we see that across the two cases social justice led to Muslim women pursuing a diverse range of political projects and therefore social justice motivates a range of issue public memberships among Muslim women who participate in politics. The Islamic frame of reference applied to the concept of social justice underlines several points; firstly it shows that Islam is important in characterising Muslim women's political motivations, also the positive influence that Islamic values can exert on Muslim participation in European life and specifically politics, and finally in an area that has been considered through the frame of other religions (Lam 2002, Scheufele, Nisbet, and Brossard 2003, Verba et al. 1995), this finding highlights that like other religions, Islam shapes and specifically contributes to motivating women to pursue political participation.

3.2.4 Identity

Additionally, Muslim women interviewed in francophone Belgium specifically also pointed out that specific facets of their identity motivated their political participation. In comparison, French interviewees did not mention that their French identity had motivated their participation. For example a Belgian interviewee states: "I participate because I am a citizen." (9) She adds:

At the time of the elections, because we have elections quite often in Belgium, at the time of the elections, I asked my dad, "Who should I vote for?" And he told to vote for this person and I asked him "why?" And he said, "Because he is Turkish" and I said "yeah, ok." That was the first time and then two years later he said to me "vote for this person" and I said "listen, dad do you even know this person?" and he said "no", [I said] "Do you know what the party stands for?", he said "no." So I said "why should I vote for someone, just because he is Turkish...because we are Belgian. (9)

The interviewee cited above described how this conversation with her father led to her taking a greater interest in Belgian politics and her taking on a role in the local branch of her political party. This example highlights the emphasis placed on Belgian identity, the distancing from the culture of

origin as discussed within the frame of 'European Islam' and their combined potential to motivate Muslim women's political engagement.

However, comparing this type of response to the lack of such articulation in the French context, further emphasises the importance of context in differentiating the nature of Muslim women's political participation. I attribute these observed differences in motivation to several factors. Firstly, in spite of the argued increasing influence of the French-style 'combative' secular and assimilationist norms in francophone Belgium (Mielants 2006, Severs 2010), national multicultural norms (Haspelagh 2012, Lettinga and Saharso 2012, Mielants 2006, Severs 2010) take precedent and therefore result in the acceptance of diverse Belgian citizens. For the Muslim women interviewed this means an acceptance of their Muslim identity and ethnic difference alongside their Belgian citizenship, thus these women are confident in articulating identification with Belgian identity since it does not mean forfeiting other elements of their identity. Subsequently the acceptability of hybrid identities has positive effects on Muslim women's political participation since it allows for Muslim women's diverse presence in politics.

Secondly, as I elaborate further in Chapter Four, I would also argue that the nature of the Belgian POS also facilitates Muslim women's political inclusion as Belgian citizens. Several features in the Belgian POS give rise to favourable conditions for Muslim women's political participation, such as the PR electoral system which arguably facilitated Muslim political representation (Sinno 2009a), the compulsory vote in Belgium (Deschouwer 2009) which subsequently results in high levels of voter turnout and therefore minority vote seeking by political parties. As part of attempts to secure minority votes, political parties seek the inclusion of minority candidates (Hooghe 2005), thus ethnic minority Muslim women become desirable candidates. Simultaneously Belgian gender parity legislation (Ghailani 2010) further facilitates the inclusion of Muslim women in Belgian politics. It is my argument that the openness of the Belgian POS contributes towards motivating Muslim women's participation, since they are aware that their efforts will be effective and well-received in the wider political arena. Conversely, assimilationist norms in the French context dictate conformity to an abstract model of 'Frenchness' (Bertossi 2012, Streiff-Frénart 2012, Kuru 2008, Silverstein 2008), thus Muslim women are less able and arguably less comfortable in articulating their hybrid identity. With regards to political participation, the restrictive nature of 'Frenchness' means that they are less likely to express being motivated to participate in politics by their French identity and the nature of the French POS results in perceived reduced efficacy.

Interviewees also discussed how their Muslim identity motivates their political participation. As discussed previously in this chapter, in France political participation motivated by Muslim identity typically tended to be reactive and linked to issues such as Islamophobia, or alternatively linked to Islamic ideological concepts such as social justice. Conversely, in addition to these ideas, the

francophone Belgian Muslim women also described the way in which their Muslim identity motivated political participation, stating “political participation is a religious obligation” (20).

The motivations that stem from Muslim identity are not dissimilar to the previously discussed motivations that emerge from ‘European Islam’. Nonetheless, I would argue that the selective foregrounding of the multiple facets of identity by the francophone Belgian Muslim women interviewed further underlines the positive effects of Belgian multiculturalism and ‘organised secularism’ on Muslim women’s motivations to participate in politics.

Upon discussing the role of Muslim identity in motivating their political participation the francophone Belgian Muslim women described their motivations to participate in specific political projects linked to Belgian Muslims, such as campaigning for Muslim women’s spaces in mosques, or involvement in projects that would better the understanding of Muslims in wider Belgian society: “It [my motivations to participate in politics] is to please God... It is also to create a better understanding of the religion among the whole [Belgian] community.” (8)

Therefore we see here that Muslim identity motivates political participation based on social identification, rather than ideals as detailed previously. Alternatively four of the eighteen francophone Belgian women interviewed stated: “I am an environmentalist... that is what pushes me [to participate in politics].” (6) Or, another interviewee describes how when she was approached by *Écolo*, pursuing participation with this party would be ideal since it fit her identity and stated that environmentally friendly ideas “are what I grew up with.” (6)

The interviewee goes on to describe how this ethos shapes all aspects of her life, from furniture to fashion, therefore this self-identification shapes her everyday life and also shapes the nature of her political participation. For some self-identifying as an ‘environmentalist’ encouraged them to directly pursue participation in the francophone Belgian branch of the green party, *Écolo*, to pursue green issues in their own respective political parties, or finally to become engaged in non-state level political organisations with a specific environmental focus. Furthermore, for some selectively foregrounding their ‘green identities’ provided an alternative to being consistently and solely associated with Muslim related political issues:

... The journalists only ever used to talk about my headscarf, now it is less and less, because I am mainly working on issues concerning energy and the environment and that is something that matters to everyone... (9)

Self-identification as an ‘environmentalist’ motivates participation in specific issues related to energy, environment and sustainability; therefore the multiple facets of identity discussed by the women in francophone Belgium has the potential to predict the issue publics in which these women are involved. Additionally, the factor that only a number of francophone Belgium Muslim interviewees expressed motivation to participate in environmental political projects is consistent

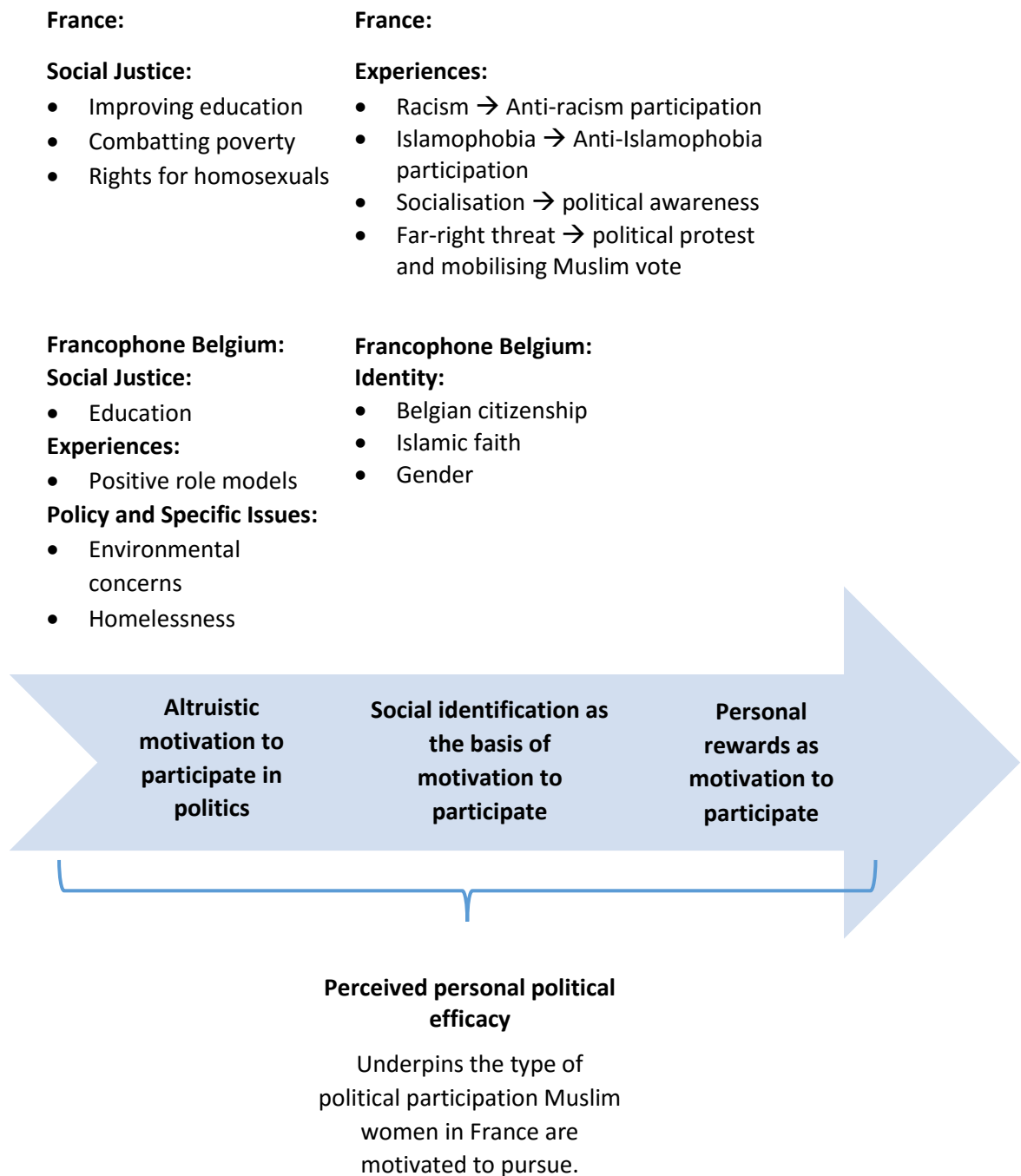
with the arguments put forward by Han (2009) indicating that only a select proportion of each community will be motivated to participate in specific political issues. Additionally, Muslim women's motivations to participate in green politics also demonstrates political participation shaped by both altruism and social identification. Finally, motivation to participate in green issues allows for the women to be cast in an alternative light, but is also compatible with their Islamic identity.

Comparatively, interviewees in Belgium are more likely to stress the role of identity in motivating their political participation than those interviewed in France. These facets of identity include Belgian citizenship, Muslim identity and self-definition as an environmentalist. I would argue that these differences in the discussion of identity and motivations to participate in politics are not reflective of francophone Belgian Muslim women having more multifaceted identities and French Muslim women having comparatively seemingly foreground more unidimensional identities. Instead I attribute these differences in motivation to the influence of contextual norms on Muslim women. I argued that Belgian multiculturalism and the tradition of 'organised secularism' permit the articulation of hybrid identities and particularly acknowledge the presence of the Muslim identity in the Belgian sphere. Conversely, French assimilationist norms restrict open articulation of multifaceted identities. These differences determine the extent to which women in either case are able to foreground a particular facet of their identity in their motivations to participate in politics. Furthermore, I also argued that Belgian multiculturalism and the comparatively more open nature of the Belgian POS which, as Chapter Four demonstrates, seeks the inclusion of Muslim women candidates, and means that Muslim women are able to express their hybrid identities without fear of political exclusion.

3.3 Conclusions

In both France and francophone Belgium, interviewees present a varied and diverse range of motivations to participate in politics. This partly represents the variety of the sample and also the diverse nature of the interviewees' political participation. Below is a visual representation of the reported motivations expressed by the interviewees. These motivations are placed in the model of motivation outlined earlier in the chapter.

Figure 3.2 French and Francophone Belgian Muslim Women's Motivations to Participate in Politics



As the illustration shows in both cases the women did not focus on the personal rewards derived from participation as a principle motivating factor. This is therefore not consistent with existing literature related to costs and rewards (Han 2009, Miller and Krosnick 2004, Fowler and Kam 2007, Klandermans and Oegema 1987, Wittmann 1983). As stated, this does not mean that Muslim women in the two cases do not gain any reward from participating in politics, instead this indicates that personal gains are not among the explicitly stated principal motivations.

Analysis of the data demonstrates that the expressed motivations to participate in politics are shaped by the extent to which they believe that their political participation will be effective in both cases. In both France and francophone Belgium this resulted in the women carefully considering

the level of politics at which they are motivated to participate. So, for some, efficacy meant that they participated in only non-state level political participation, whilst others felt state level political participation was the only level at which their participation would be effective, this reflects both individual differences, the diversity within the sample and shows that just as with wider society, perceptions of political efficacy vary between Muslim women. The emphasis placed on efficacy by the Muslim women in both cases also reflects positions in the wider literature (Pinkleton and Weintraub-Austin 2001). Nonetheless, perceived efficacy was central to shaping Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics and determining the nature of political participation to be pursued.

Similarly, in both France and francophone Belgium analysis shows that Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics are informed by the notion of social justice. The women in Belgium saw this as linked to both Belgian and Muslim values, whilst in France women saw these as stemming from Islam. The full and partial Islamic rootedness of such motivations echoes O'Toole et al. (2013) who identified that some Muslims who participate in politics in Britain were influenced by their Islamic moral understanding. These motivations also echo the earlier discussion related to 'European Islam'.

I argue that differences in attribution in each case demonstrates the effects of the Belgian multicultural model versus the French assimilationist model. So, whilst Belgian norms allow for the recognition of hybrid Belgo-Islamic identities and values, the restrictive nature of French norms means that Muslim women distinguish and foreground independent facets of their identity and are comparatively less likely to discuss combined identities. Analysis also highlighted that since French Muslim women linked their social justice based motivations to their Islamic values, they reported feeling that they could not openly express that Islam had contributed to their participation in the French political sphere. I argue that this is also linked to the normative attitudes related to assimilation and the demands of 'combative *laïcité*', which means that as representatives of the state individuals cannot express personal faith. However, I noted that the public understanding of the positive effects of Islamic values on French Muslim engagement in society has the potential to dispel popular stereotypes related to the incompatibility of Islam and Muslims with French values

Furthermore, in both cases Muslim women were motivated to participate in politics by their previous experiences. These subsequently shape issue public membership or the nature of political engagement that Muslim women undertake in each case. The type of experiences mentioned by the women in each case differed, with the francophone Belgian Muslim women discussing experiences of political dissatisfaction and previous encounters with positive role models, and the French Muslim women highlighting socialisation and more negative experiences such as

experiences of Islamophobia and racism. Comparing the two sets of experiences led me to conclude that experience based motivations put forward by the women in France were largely negative in nature, thus I defined these as grievance-based motivations. Although others caution against classifying Muslim political participation in such terms (Dobbernack, Meer, and Modood 2012), I argue that grievances are central and characterise the nature of Muslim women's motivations to participate in French politics. The differences between the two cases also indicate that the role of context in shaping Muslim women's motivations is particular in each case.

Particularly in francophone Belgium, Muslim women discussed motivations that stemmed from the multiple facets of their identities. These motivations included those linked to the Belgian, Muslim and green identities. Similar patterns were not observed in France. I argue that whilst the Muslim women in both cases are equally likely to have multifaceted identities, the apparent differences are linked to contextual norms. As highlighted these differences can be attributed to Belgian multiculturalism and French assimilationist norms and 'blindness to difference'. In addition, based on the expressed motivations in the two cases I would argue that Muslim women in francophone Belgium are able to put forward a more diverse range of motivations. This diversity in expressed motivations can be partly attributed to the multicultural and seemingly more open nature of Belgian society. Conversely, French Muslim women tended to focus on reactive motivations to participate in politics, and this is subsequently indicative of the centrality of Muslim women's grievances in France and the effects of French secular and pro-assimilationist norms. Therefore, the differences between the cases also indicate the ways in which context shapes Muslim women's expressed motivations to participate in politics.

Finally, at the beginning of this chapter I outlined the central research sub-question to be addressed in this chapter: **does 'European Islam' motivate political participation by Muslim women in either France or francophone Belgium?** This question was intended to provide an insight into the nature of Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics and the ways in which these motivations might differ between the two cases.

Comparatively analysing the responses from both cases demonstrated the 'European Islam' was understood by the interviewees as the adaptation of Islam to the European context and therefore the distancing from culture of origin. In this regard, the findings echo similar ideas in the literature on 'European Islam' (Pedziwiatr 2006, Saint-Blancat 2002, Roy 2005, Salih 2004).

However the similarities related to French and francophone Belgian Muslim women's identification with 'European Islam' stop here. Instead, there is a distinct difference in the extent to which the Muslim women in each case identify with and subsequently state that 'European Islam' motivates their political participation. In France, the majority of interviewees did not feel that 'European Islam' was relevant. Conversely, to varying degrees most of the francophone Belgian respondents

identified with the notion. These differences in the level of identification with 'European Islam' arise in spite of superficial similarities between the CFCM and EMB in France and Belgium respectively, which on first sight might indicate comparable approaches to Islam in each case and therefore similar Muslim experiences in both France and francophone Belgium.

Upon discussing identification and the extent to which 'European Islam' motivates political participation, the francophone Belgian respondents described 'European Islam' as the combination of European and Islamic values, as part of the necessary adaptation to the European and Belgian context. The comparatively higher levels of identification with 'European Islam' also subsequently meant that the francophone Belgian Muslim women were more likely to suggest that 'European Islam' had contributed to their motivations to participate in politics. Therefore, in relation to the central research question posed in this chapter, data from francophone Belgium suggests that 'European Islam' does motivate Muslim women's political participation.

Conversely, in France 'European Islam' was seen as the "McDonaldisation" (21) of Islam, meaning it was seen as a top-down led initiative that specifically sought to commodify and regulate Islam in France. This type of response led me to conclude that French Muslim women involved in politics treat the notion of 'European Islam' with suspicion and hostility. This subsequently means that the Muslim women in France were less likely to suggest that 'European Islam' had motivated their political participation. Instead the women spoke about Islamic ideals such as social justice which had contributed to their participation. The women highlighted that they could not publicly express this type of motivation. Additionally, the women stressed the way in which Islamophobia in France had motivated political participation, rather than 'European Islam'. Juxtaposing Muslim women's responses in the two cases highlights the differing extent to which 'European Islam' motivates Muslim women's political participation.

I conclude that the observed differences in the role of 'European Islam' in motivating Muslim women's political participation are linked to contextual norms in the two cases. In France hostility towards 'European Islam' reflects the adverse effects of the top-down enforcement of 'European Islam', or state driven attempts to institutionalise Islam in France (Kuru 2008) coupled with the normalisation of anti-Islamic discourses (Silverstein 2008) in secular and assimilationist French society. The apparent suspicion of 'European Islam' among the French interviewees also echoes previous observations related to the general Muslim distrust of the CFCM (Yazbeck Haddad and Golson 2007). This subsequently means that French Muslim women who participate in politics are unlikely to identify 'European Islam' as a factor that motivates their participation.

Conversely, although the EMB is linked to the Belgian state (Kanmaz 2002), I argue that organised Belgian secularism and national traditions of multiculturalism mean that the EMB and the associated state funding of Islam are seen as being on par with that of other faiths in Belgium and

therefore Islam is not singled out in Belgium. This subsequently means that the francophone Belgian Muslim women perceive the emergence of 'European Islam' in Belgium to be the result of bottom-up processes, meaning that they are more likely to identify with the idea and cite its influence in their motivations to participate in politics. However looking at the overall data related to motivations, I found that to varying degrees, in both cases, the women cite the influence of Islamic values in shaping their ideals and subsequent nature of political participation.

Comparing the responses in the two cases led me to reflect on the appropriateness of choosing to study 'European Islam' rather than Islam generally. My rationale for studying 'European Islam' stemmed from suggestions that identification with 'European Islam' is linked to and may motivate political participation by European Muslims (Karic 2002, Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking 2013, Just, Sandovici, and Listhaug 2014, Ramadan 1999, 2004, 2010), along with the paucity in empirical evidence in this well theorised area (Allievi 2005, Salih 2004). Additionally, I was motivated to study the influence of 'European Islam' on Muslim women's political participation since I argued that it represented a potential motivation specific to European Muslims and in this case French or francophone Belgian Muslim women.

Given that the French Muslim women stated Islam more generally rather than 'European Islam' had in part motivated their political participation, whilst Belgian Muslim women suggested that 'European Islam' had contributed to motivating their political participation I feel that it may have been more insightful to interrogate the extent to which Islam motivates Muslim women's political participation in either political sphere, rather than questioning the extent to which 'European Islam' motivates political participation. This would have still provided insight into the ways in which Muslim women's political participation is similar and differs in the two cases, whilst also illustrating factors that differentiate Muslim women's motivations to become involved in politics from those of the wider population.

The issues faced stem from the problematic and poorly defined nature of the term 'European Islam' (Allievi 2005, Salih 2004). Also, in each case the term 'European Islam' carries different connotations, dependent on the perceived role the state has had in the formation of 'European Islam'. Therefore, studying the extent to which Islam generally motivates Muslim women's political participation would have removed these context-based connotations and therefore potentially may offer increased comparability between cases. This represents an area for potential future study. Nonetheless, the comparative analysis of 'European Islam' and Muslim women's general motivations to participate in politics reveals that Muslim women's motivations are comparable to those faced by wider society. Also analysis provides insight into motivations specific to Muslim women and the ways in which the factors that differentiate Muslim women's motivations to

participate in politics in the two cases and also sheds light on the understudied area of 'European Islam' in highlighting the role of the state in the process.

4. Chapter Four: Opportunities

In this chapter, I comparatively explore the nature of the principal opportunities for political participation by Muslim women in France and francophone Belgium. This chapter specifically explores and compares both the formal POS and the perceived opportunities for political participation as reported by the Muslim women interviewed. The chapter addresses the second in the series of research sub-questions put forward in Chapter One of the thesis: **to what extent do political structures in France and francophone Belgium provide opportunities for Muslim women to participate in politics?**

Although Zibouh (2011) briefly considers the role of institutional factors in her quantitative exploration of the exceptional rates of Muslim political representation in the Brussels parliament, and Sinno (2009a) argues that cases with PR political systems give rise to higher levels of Muslim political representation, the detailed study of POS and their influence on Muslim women's political participation is something that has not been considered in-depth in the literature related to political participation by Muslim women in either case. Comparatively examining formal POS along with analysing Muslim women's reported experiences of the opportunities for their political participation in either France or francophone Belgium constitutes a novel approach to the study of Muslim women's political participation and also contributes to the wider understanding of the nature of their participation. In addition it allows us to understand the ways in which the expressed motivations to participate in politics, analysed in the preceding chapter, translate into actual political participation by these women, or alternatively why some of their political aspirations might remain unrealised.

The concept of POS was developed in relation to social movement studies (Arzheimer and Carter 2006), and typically, but not exclusively, research in this area continues to focus on the study of social movements (Nentwich 1996). There are multiple definitions of POS in the literature, however there is general consensus that they are shaped by long-term stable elements such as political institutions and political traditions, and also more short-term features including policy processes and political discourse (Arzheimer and Carter 2006, Mayer and Staggenborg 1996). It is the specific configuration of these political structures that either provide opportunities for political participation by particular individuals or groups, or limit opportunities for participation by others (Kitschelt 1986). POS are therefore specific to each context and also temporal.

4.0.1 Chapter Structure

This chapter begins with an introduction to the concept of POS by describing the nature of such structures and the reasons why they are relevant in the study of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium. The chapter continues to look at the already

documented influence of POS on political participation by individuals, before more generally examining their effects on political participation by women, ethnic minority groups and finally Muslims. Given the gap in literature related to the effects of POS on Muslim women's participation, looking at this literature informs understanding of the way in which these multiple elements shape participation by Muslim women. The chapter continues with a review and comparison of the formal POS in France and then in francophone Belgium. I then comparatively assess Muslim women's perceptions and personal experiences of the opportunities for their political participation in both cases.

4.1 Political Opportunity Structures

Political actors make history, but they do not do so in circumstances of their own making. Instead they encounter constraints and are presented with opportunities by the institutional arrangements and prevailing patterns of power, which are the inescapable contexts of political action. (Rootes 1999, 75).

Participation in politics is bound by Political Opportunity Structures (POS) (Rootes 1999, Martiniello 2005b, Kitschelt 1986) and therefore it is my argument that studying of the nature of Muslim women's political participation would be incomplete without investigation of the effects of the formal political structures and the opportunities that these provide to Muslim women in each case. POS vary between cases, but also differ for specific groups and individuals within a context. As a result, by comparatively studying the POS in each case, this study highlights the effects of specific formal institutional factors on participation by Muslim women.

The concept of POS emerges from social movement studies (Arzheimer and Carter 2006) and until recently the literature in this field continues to focus on social and protest movements (Meyer and Minkoff 2004, Nentwich 1996, Rootes 1999). Although the interviewees in this study all self-identify as Muslim women, the women do not constitute a homogenous group; instead they have diverse ethnic and social backgrounds. Moreover, the interviewees have diverse political concerns and motivations, they face different barriers to their political participation and participate in politics in varied ways. This diversity means that in spite of their shared self-identification as Muslim women and the possibility of overlap in the nature of their political participation, the women interviewed do not constitute a distinct social group or movement. Therefore, this study takes a different approach and does not focus on social movements, rather formal POS in each case and simultaneously the opportunities for participation as reported by the respondents.

The study of POS assesses the openness and accessibility of a given political system (Rootes 1999, Mayer and Staggenborg 1996, Arzheimer and Carter 2006). Generally open political structures result in increased opportunities for political participation (Hooghe 2005), whilst closed political structures mean that there are fewer opportunities for political participation. Comparatively

exploring the POS in France and francophone Belgium establishes the extent to which the formal political system is open or closed in each case. This therefore provides an insight into the opportunities or obstacles to Muslim women's political participation that arise from formal political structures. By comparing POS the study highlights the importance of context in explaining political action (Kitschelt 1986) and therefore identifies formal variables that lead to improved opportunities for Muslim women to participate in politics.

The study of POS is often criticised as being too vague (Koopmans 1999), not well defined and overstretched (Hooghe 2005, Koopmans 1999), and often underestimated (Rootes 1999). Defining POS in this chapter and systematically studying their effects contributes to overcoming these previously noted limitations linked to the study of POS. There are multiple definitions of POS put forward in the literature (Arzheimer and Carter 2006) however the most commonly cited definition is that suggested by Kitschelt (1986, 58), in his comparative study of the anti-nuclear power movements across Europe and North America during the 1970s: "Political opportunity structures are comprised of a specific configuration of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents..."

Although the definition is criticised due to its broad nature (Arzheimer and Carter 2006), it highlights some of the fundamental features of the POS, including institutional configurations, traditions, and resources.

Alternatively in his chapter detailing the political structuring of social movements Tarrow (1996, 54) describes POS as:

...consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements.

Although this definition is taken from work that focuses on social movements rather than POS more broadly, Tarrow's definition highlights the way in which POS are comprised of formal and informal elements and that these then shape the behaviour of political actors. The centrality of informal and formal features of the POS is also highlighted in later work related to political opportunities (Arzheimer and Carter 2006, Nentwich 1996), and thus it remains a pertinent feature.

Alternatively in their paper focusing on conceptualising POS, Meyer and Minkoff (2004, 1457) emphasise that POS include:

...exogenous factors enhance or inhibit prospects for mobilisation, for particular sorts of claims to be advanced rather than others, for particular strategies of influence to be exercised and for movements to affect mainstream politics and policy.

Finally, through the analysis of opportunities for political participation in the European Union, Nentwich (1996, 4) describes POS as: "The various sorts of channels of access to the public sphere and to policy making which are available to the citizens." His work is particularly pertinent since unlike many others in the field, it moves beyond framing POS in terms of social movements and attempts to define the key characteristics of POS.

Drawing on these definitions along with those in the wider literature, I conclude that POS are of central importance since they describe the configuration of exogenous variables that are likely to either create or constrain opportunities for political participation by individuals (Meyer and Minkoff 2004). Political precedents, traditions and institutions form the stable and long-term variables within the POS (Arzheimer and Carter 2006, Kitschelt 1986, Tarrow 1996). Policy and political discourse shape the short-term features of the POS (Martiniello 2005b, Mayer and Staggenborg 1996). These variables influence political participation across the spectrum and have differing effects on the diverse groups in society (Leighley 1995, Martiniello 2005b, Nelson 1979).

Beyond the binary of long and short-term features of the POS, in their study of POS and explaining the success of the far right in Western Europe by analysing national election studies from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Norway Arzheimer and Carter (2006) (Arzheimer and Carter 2006) also identify the role of medium-term variables relating to ideological and attitudinal stances on the POS and outcomes for the far right. Normative attitudes towards Muslim women in both France and francophone Belgium each represent context specific medium-term variables in this study.

The interplay of these exogenous variables determines the opportunities for specific political actors to participate in politics and also contribute to explaining why particular individuals, groups or social movements are constrained in other contexts (Kitschelt 1986). POS are partly shaped by the extent to which a state is open or closed to political participation by particular individuals or groups (Arzheimer and Carter 2006, Mayer and Staggenborg 1996, Rootes 1999) at a given time, thus normative state attitudes towards specific communities and individuals shape POS for such groups.

Generally, formal political systems range from majoritarian to PR systems (Norris 2006). The nature of the POS subsequently influences which political parties will be in government, with majoritarian systems typically giving rise to centre-right party dominance and PR systems resulting in centre-left political parties being elected to government (Iversen and Soskice 2006). Additionally, PR systems usually result in a higher number of effective political parties, whilst majoritarian political systems give rise to comparatively fewer effective political parties (Ladner and Miller 1999).

PR political systems tend to result in higher levels of voter turnout and satisfaction, and better political representation of the wider population, since minority voices are more likely to be represented in the political arena (Matland 1998, Beauregard 2014, Anderson and Guillory 1997, Karp and Banducci 2008, Norris 2006). However unlike majoritarian political systems which are more likely to bring about stable governance, PR systems commonly lead to coalitions and lack of political stability at the state level (Norris 1997), since there is a greater number of effective political parties.

With regards to the nature of political opportunities available to individuals, PR systems tend to provide increased opportunities for women's political representation and result in smaller gender gaps in formal political representation (Matland 1998, Beauregard 2014). Conversely majoritarian political systems tend to result in fewer opportunities and poorer rates of women's political representation (Norris 1997). However, based on a review of twenty "advanced industrial" cases, Beauregard (2014, 618) posits that the increased number of effective parties in PR systems might hinder and therefore limit the opportunities for women's political participation. Based on her analysis of the quantitative data, taken from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems between 2001 and 2006, she reaches this conclusion and attempts to explain the gender disparities that she observes in terms of PR systems having a larger number of effective parties, which in turn requires increased voter knowledge of the political parties and therefore reduced engagement. However, I argue that these findings do not reflect the general consensus in the literature in this area. Furthermore, these effects should, in theory, be cancelled out by the implementation of gender parity legislation which should mean that more women are forwarded as candidates and not withdrawn from the campaign process as she states.

To summarise, as based on the above references outlined in this section, the effects of the formal political systems are presented in the table below:

Table 4.1 Effects of Electoral Systems on Political Representation

Proportional Representation	Majoritarian
More effective political parties	Fewer effective political parties
Centre-left dominance	Centre-right dominance
Higher voter turnout	Lower voter turnout
Increased voter satisfaction	Reduced voter satisfaction
Instability and coalition governments	Stable governance
Increased women's political representation	Comparatively reduced women's representation
Higher rates of ethnic minority representation	Lower rates of ethnic minority representation

Improved Muslim representation	Poorer rates of Muslim representation
--------------------------------	---------------------------------------

In addition to the established effects of the formal electoral systems on the opportunities for individuals to participate in politics, legislation also has the potential to shape the nature of opportunities for women's and minority political inclusion. For example, gender quotas are intended to facilitate women's political participation and subsequently improve rates of women's political representation (Htun 2004). Generally, these quotas specify the proportion of male and female candidates that must be fielded by parties, although their efficacy is sometimes criticised (Murray 2009, Sénac-Slawinski 2008), gender quotas have been influential in promoting women's political inclusion (Shvedova 2005).

However, women's political participation and subsequent representation is also influenced by the extent to which the political system is dominated by a 'masculine model' (Shvedova 2005, Ramsay 2003). Shvedova (2005) argues that political culture is typically centred on masculine norms, values and lifestyles, or a 'masculine model'. She states that this prevailing political culture along with norms related to women's domestic roles, limit opportunities for women's political participation. However in both PR and majoritarian electoral systems, an existing and established female presence in politics creates opportunities for political participation by other women (Warleigh 2001). This arises since the women who are already involved in politics act as gatekeepers and role models for other women, thus encouraging and facilitating their participation.

Additionally in some cases, minority inclusion quotas facilitate opportunities for political participation and as a result political representation by ethnic minority communities. However unlike gender quotas, ethnic minority inclusion measures are comparatively less likely to be implemented (Htun 2004), thus these measures, or the lack of such measures, indirectly influence Muslim women's participation. Finally with regards to Muslim political participation, state policies and norms also shape opportunities for political participation (Warner and Wenner 2006), therefore when dominant state policy is hostile in nature, opportunities for Muslim participation are reduced and vice versa. However, in Australia Al Momani et al. (2010) found that even when the state position is hostile and there are subsequently limited opportunities for participation, Muslims tend to be resilient and find alternative means of participating in politics. However, as previously highlighted there is limited evidence into the effects of POS on political participation by Muslim women. Therefore drawing on the general literature related to the effects of political structures, ethnic and gender inclusion quotas and the effects of state attitudes begins to create an insight into the ways in which each POS might alter opportunities for Muslim women's political participation.

4.1.1 French Political Opportunity Structures

At the central state level the French electoral system is primarily majoritarian, however this varies between specific elections. At the most senior level the French state is headed by the president, who is directly elected by French citizens and serves a five year term. Presidential elections are two-round and therefore majoritarian in nature. Candidates must receive 500 nominations from elected officials prior to standing, and as a result candidates are often high-ranking, well-connected and experienced members of political parties.

The French parliament is bicameral. The 348 representatives in the upper chamber, the *Sénat*, are elected by an electoral college comprised of political officials. Senators are elected for six year terms and replaced by half every three years. *Sénat* elections are based on either PR or majoritarian systems dependent on number of senators to be elected in a given area.

The lower chamber, the *Assemblée Nationale* is comprised of 577 directly elected representatives serving five year terms. The legislative elections are based on a two-round majoritarian system in single seat constituencies. The president is responsible for the appointment of the prime-minister, who in turn appoints the cabinet. 'Cohabitation' arises when the president and the majority of the *Assemblée Nationale* are from opposing political parties.

Additionally there are 26 regional councils in France. Regional councillors are elected for six year terms via a combined PR and majoritarian electoral system. The cantonal elections are two-round majoritarian elections and take place every six years. Those elected from the single member constituencies serve on the department general council. Below this, every six years communal elections take place to instate local town councillors. The number of elected councillors reflects municipal population size, similarly large municipalities are further divided into *arrondissements*. Councillors are elected by either PR lists in municipalities with more than 3500 inhabitants, or two-round majoritarian elections in smaller municipalities. Elected councillors subsequently appoint the town mayor and deputy mayor. Finally at the supranational level, the 74 French European parliamentarians are directly elected from the eight French constituencies for five year terms via PR lists.

French citizens are automatically enrolled to vote at the age of eighteen, however they must register to vote. Non-European Union citizens residing in France do not have the right to vote in any of the various French elections, whilst European Union citizens living in France are eligible to vote in local and European elections following registration. Voting in France is not compulsory and therefore voter turnout depends on the type of election. Iversen and Soskice (2006, 180) estimate an average 66% voter turnout across the various French elections. Howarth and Varouxakis (2014) argue apathy and fragmentation among the French electorate. This suggestion is consistent with

claims that majoritarian political systems result in comparatively reduced voter satisfaction (Anderson and Guillory 1997).

France has a stable multiparty system, with on average 3.8 effective political parties, as defined by Iversen and Soskice (2006, 173). The centre-right and centre-left wing political parties typically dominate. However the French Greens have recently enjoyed increasing success at the local level (Howarth and Varouxakis 2014) and the FN continues to make steady gains in France at both the national and local level (Shields 2010). I would argue that this party configuration shapes national political discourses and particular those related to Islam and Muslims in France.

In spite of French egalitarianism and blindness to difference, it was only after much debate centred on the extent to which gender parity measures might contradict French egalitarianism, and also counter-campaigning by feminists, that gender parity laws were introduced in France in 2000 (Htun 2004). These measures stipulate that half of all candidates fielded in elections with a PR component must be female. Candidates are placed alternately by gender meaning that theoretically that there is equal chance of a male or female candidate being elected from a list. The introduction of such quotas was intended to improve women's political representation in France. Following the introduction of parity measures women's representation improved at the municipal level (Ramsay 2003), however the measures are criticised. Criticisms based on an analysis of the 2002 French general election outcomes indicate that parties are only likely to field female candidates in unwinnable seats and as a result this has little impact on rates of women's representation, fines for non-compliance with parity measures are lenient and furthermore there is argued to be deep-rooted sexist attitudes within political parties (Murray 2004), thus suggesting that parity measures are only tokenistic and do not bring about significant change in terms of women's representation in France. Furthermore, previously gender parity measures only applied in elections with list systems, meaning that in departmental elections for example, where only one candidate is fielded, women were often not put forward as candidates meaning that consequently women's representation remained consistently low at this level. However since 2013, measures have been put in place at the departmental level, whereby both a male and female candidate are put forward and the electorate selects the two candidates of their choice, This new measure is intended to guarantee equal male and female representation at the local level.

Ethnic minority political representation is poor in France, this poor representation is more apparent in national politics than at the local level (Howarth and Varouxakis 2014). Given French egalitarianism, no specific ethnic minority political inclusion measures exist within France. The poor levels of ethnic minority representation are attributed to lack of formal citizenship, lack of skills, and relatively recent presence of particular ethnic minorities in France and simultaneously a general lack of ethnic minority incorporation in French society and institutional racism in France

(Howarth and Varouxakis 2014). Nonetheless, in spite of the poor rates of ethnic minority political representation there is increasing emphasis on the ethnic minority voters and candidates who can secure the ethnic minority electorate vote, especially by some parties in an attempt to boost support at the polls (Vidal and Bourtel 2005). However, in spite of alleged ethnic minority vote seeking, features such as the French anti-Muslim political discourse, the hostility and closed nature of French formal politics (Koopmans 1999) and alleged ‘institutionalised racism’, or “embedded discriminatory practices” towards those who are non-native in French politics (Howarth and Varouxakis 2014, 99), detract from the numerous formal opportunities for Muslim women’s political participation at the state level.

Unsurprisingly, given France’s emphasis on egalitarianism and normalised ‘combative’ secular position there are no faith based political inclusion quotas in France. Similarly, such quotas do not exist across Europe. The proportion of Muslim political representation in national politics to estimated Muslim population size is 1:0.08 (Sinno 2009a) and is therefore particularly low. These low rates of national representation imply reduced opportunities for Muslim political participation.

In theory, as a formal representative body, the CFCM also presents opportunities for Muslim political representation at the national state level. However, both my findings and the work of Yazbeck Haddad and Golson (2007) indicate generalised distrust of the organisation. Additionally, during my fieldwork phase there were no French Muslim women elected to the CFCM. Potentially this points to the male dominated nature of the organisation and consequently reduced opportunities for French Muslim women’s participation in Muslim consultative politics.

At the non-state level the French *Loi d’Association* enshrined in 1901, along with extension to non-French nationals in 1981, guarantees freedom of association to all French citizens (Legifrance 1901), therefore this legal measure shapes non-state level political opportunities for all. The act also means that officially recognised non-profit organisations are entitled to monetary subsidies. Specifically this legislation ensures that French Muslim women encounter opportunities to participate in non-state level politics by joining or forming their own organisations. In this study, all interviewees were French nationals and therefore benefited from the application of the 1901 law.

4.1.2 Francophone Belgian Political Opportunity Structures

Since 1899 Belgium has had a full PR electoral system (Deschouwer 2009). As noted, PR systems bring reflective governance (Anderson and Guillony 1997, Beauregard 2014, Karp and Banducci 2008, Matland 1998, Norris 2006), increased voter satisfaction (Anderson and Guillony 1997, Beauregard 2014, Brockington 2004, Ladner and Miller 1999) and also improved opportunities for women’s, ethnic minority and Muslim representation (Anderson and Guillony 1997, Beauregard

2013, Htun 2004, Karp and Banducci 2008, Matland 1998, Norris 1997, 2006) Additionally, PR systems are argued to bring about higher levels of Muslim political representation (Sinno 2009a). Therefore, the combined effects of these numerous observations that stem from the PR system point to increased opportunities for Muslim women's political participation and representation in francophone Belgium.

With regards to elections, the federal monarchic nature of Belgium shapes elections and means that elections are frequent, so much so that Deschouwer (2009) remarks that political parties in Belgium find themselves continuously preparing for elections. King Philippe is the current national head of the Belgian state, however his political role and that of the wider Belgian royal family is seen as largely symbolic. Belgium has a bicameral national federal parliament. The upper chamber, the *Sénat*, is made up of forty elected members and three members of the Belgian royal family. Royal senators are entitled to participate and vote in *Sénat* affairs, however they reportedly rarely do so (Deschouwer 2009). Previously, and whilst the fieldwork for this study was taking place, senators were directly elected for four year terms from each of the linguistic regions, meaning there were twenty five members from Flanders, and fifteen from francophone Belgium. However since 2014 senators are no longer directly elected, instead fifty members are appointed for five year terms via an electoral college from the Belgian linguistic parliaments and the remaining ten members are co-opted.

The lower chamber of Belgian parliament, the Federal House of Representatives is made up of 150 members of parliament from each of the eleven national districts including six francophone districts: Brussels, Walloon Brabant, Hainault, Namur, Liège and Luxembourg. Of the 150 parliamentarians, 88 must be from the Flemish districts and 62 from francophone Belgium. Representatives are directly elected via PR lists and seats are allocated via the D'Hondt¹¹ method. Deschouwer (2009) argues the decreasing influence of the federal parliament in Belgium and notes that powers are increasingly devolved to regions and municipalities.

At the regional level the Brussels capital, Walloon and Flanders each have their own unicameral parliaments comprised of elected members from the linguistic communities. Given the multilingual nature of the capital the Brussels Parliament is made up of 72 francophone members and seventeen Flemish representatives. Representatives are elected via PR lists and serve five year terms.

Below this are the Belgian provincial councils. In the francophone region, these include Walloon Brabant, Hainault, Namur, Liège and Luxembourg, whilst the Brussels capital region does not form

¹¹ The D'Hondt method of vote calculation allows voters to select specific candidates from party lists, rather than just voting for the party generally, meaning that the rank order presentation of candidates is less influential than in traditional PR systems.

part of a province. Representatives in these councils are elected via PR elections for six year terms and seats are allocated via a combination of area quotas and the D'Hondt method. However, Deschouwer (2009) posits that provincial councils only continue to exist given their historical importance and hold ever diminishing relevance. Finally, since 1976 Belgium is divided into 589 local municipalities, of which 262 are in francophone Belgium. This figure was previously significantly higher with 2359 local municipalities nationally. Municipal elections are held to appoint local councils, these take place every six years and are based on a PR system.

At the supranational level, Belgium has a total of twenty one seats in the European Parliament, thirteen of which are allocated to the Flemish regions, eight to francophone Belgium and finally one to the minority German speaking Belgian regions. European parliamentary elections take place every five years and are based on a PR list system.

Additionally, Belgian Muslims are also represented at the state level by the EMB. The organisation is made up of equal francophone and Flemish sections. Representatives are elected from Belgian Muslim organisations and also has elected female representatives. Yazbeck Haddad and Golson (2007) allude to the EMB being criticised by the Belgian Muslim population on the basis that it is intended to act as an interlocutor for all Muslims, in spite of sectarian differences between Muslims. However, at the time I undertook my fieldwork, I was made aware that the EMB had both *Sunni* and *Shi'a* executive committee members and I would suggest that this composition partly contributes to countering claims regarding sectarian differences and effective representation.

Voting throughout Belgium is compulsory for Belgians and citizens are automatically enrolled to vote at the age of eighteen. Since 2000, European Union citizens have also been eligible to vote in Belgian local and European elections. Additionally since 2006, non-European Union residents have had the right to vote in local elections, provided that they have lived in Belgium for at least five years (Hooghe 2005, Deschouwer 2009). Voter turnout throughout Belgium and across the numerous elections is necessarily consistently high (Deschouwer 2009). This can be attributed to both compulsory voting and the argued effects of the PR electoral system (Ladner and Miller 1999).

Belgium has, on average, 5.2 effective political parties (Iversen and Soskice 2006, 173) and ruling governments are often largely dominated by the centre-left and centre-right political parties. The federal nature of Belgium means that the main political parties, either historically or currently, have francophone and Dutch speaking branches in each of the Belgian linguistic territories. However today, in each linguistic area, the party branches tend to be fairly autonomous (Deschouwer 2009). In francophone Belgium, the three main party branches include the *Centre Démocrate Humaniste* (CDH), the *Parti Socialiste* (PS), and the liberal party the *Mouvement Réformateur* (MR). The CDH party was previously part of a pan-Belgian Christian Democrat party, the party formally divided into two distinct linguistic branches in 1921, and the francophone

division was known as the *Parti Chrétien Socialiste*. In 2002 the party was renamed the *Centre Démocrate Humaniste*, at this point the party distanced itself from its conservative past and adopted a more left wing political approach. Secondly, the PS is Belgium's largest political party and was formed in 1978. The francophone branch of the PS is significantly stronger than its Flemish counterpart. Finally, of the three main parties in francophone Belgium is the liberal MR, it is part of Belgium's oldest political party, and was formed in 1899. In addition to these three main political parties, francophone Belgium is also home to the green party, *Écolo*. It is among the largest and most successful green parties in Europe. As previously discussed, the PR system means that coalition governments are more likely in Belgium (Brockington 2004, Iversen and Soskice 2006, Norris 2006). *Écolo* tends to form part of these local coalitions, but is typically part of the opposition at the national level (Deschouwer 2009).

Additionally, francophone Belgium is also home to some regionalist francophone specific parties such as *Rassemblement Wallon*, and *Front Démocratique Francophone*, however these parties tend to be short lived and have particularly limited political success. Similarly, the francophone Belgian far-right party, the FN, has also experienced very limited success. Deschouwer (2009) observes that the francophone Belgian media largely silences the francophone Belgian FN and instead frames the far-right problem as Flemish, reflected in the success of Flanders based *Vlaams Belang*. All of the political parties in francophone Belgium are classed as small political parties (Karp and Banducci 2008) and all are financed by the Belgian state (Deschouwer 2009).

At the European and federal levels, and in the Brussels capital parliament quotas stipulate the proportion of Flemish, francophone and German speaking representatives that must be elected. However, there are no legal measures to facilitate the inclusion of ethnic minorities in Belgian politics. Nonetheless, a number of Belgian political parties such as the CDH (Hooghe 2005, Martiniello 2005b), are recognised for their openness and higher rates of inclusion of ethnic minority candidates alongside Belgian natives. This is in addition to the Belgian tradition of multiculturalism and acceptance of difference, which I argue further facilitate minority inclusion.

With regards to gender representation in Belgian politics, previously under the 1994 Smet-Tobback parties were required to put forward at least one-third female candidates on all PR lists (Ghailani 2010). However, since 2002 gender parity legislation stipulates that parties must have equal numbers of male and female candidates (Ghailani 2010, Moniteur 2011). This obligation has also been extended to Belgian consultative bodies since 2007 (Ghailani 2010, Moniteur 2011). Legislative measures along with the positive effects of the PR electoral system on women's representation (Beauregard 2014, Matland 1998, Norris 2006) have the potential to positively influence the opportunities for Muslim women's political participation in francophone Belgium.

Muslims enjoy exceptional national (Sinno 2009a), and in some cases regional political representation (Zibouh 2011). At the national level, Belgian Muslims are overrepresented at a ratio of 1:135 (Sinno 2009a, 72-75). My own analysis of Sinno's data demonstrated that five of the twelve Muslim representatives were francophone, and ten of the twelve national Muslim representatives are female. This means that Muslim women constitute 4.5% of the wider Belgian national parliament. Similarly Muslims make up one-fifth of the Brussels parliament (Zibouh 2011, 1). These statistics point to considerable representation of francophone Muslims in Belgian national state level politics. This subsequently implies that there are numerous opportunities for Muslims in Belgium to participate in national politics. Specific examples, such as that of the first headscarf wearing politician Mahinur Özdemir further emphasise this, however this is tempered by the controversy that surrounded Layla Azzouzi on the adoption of her headscarf, whereby Azzouzi faced great difficulty and ultimately was expelled from the *Centre Démocrate Humaniste* party once she began to wear the headscarf in January 2012 in Verviers.

Finally, at the non-state level, since 1921 freedom of association is guaranteed by law (Moniteur 1921). This means that there is an established tradition of association and strong associational networks (Hooghe 2005, Martiniello 2005b) throughout Belgium. Registered associations in Belgium are entitled to monetary support from the state (Hooghe 2005). This legislation affords increased opportunities for Muslim women's non-state level political participation in non-state level politics.

4.1.3 Political Opportunity Structures in France and Francophone Belgium – Comparisons and Conclusions

At the formal state level, both France and Belgium have largely comparable institutional configurations, ranging from opportunities to represent the country in the European parliament, the bicameral national parliaments, regional parliaments to cantonal or provincial and municipal councils and Muslim consultative bodies. In theory, these multiple institutions present remarkably similar opportunities for Muslim women's participation in formal politics in both cases, therefore the long-term, stable elements of both POS are alike. This is in spite of suggestions that Belgium has increased points of entry and therefore increased opportunities for political participation (Hooghe 2007) compared with the argued hostility of the French political system (Ersanilli and Koopmans 2011).

Also at the state level opportunities for Muslim women's participation in Muslim consultative bodies, the CFCM and EMB respectively present similar opportunities for Muslim women's political participation. However, drawing on Yazbeck Haddad and Golson (2007), and my findings presented in Chapter Five, the largely negative perception of the CFCM in France, compared to the more favourable relationship between Belgian Muslims and the EMB, means that although superficially opportunities appear similar, discourse and precedents mean that the EMB is likely to present comparatively more viable opportunities for Muslim women's political participation than the CFCM. Furthermore, opportunities for Muslim women's participation in the EMB are further aided by the Belgian imposition of gender quotas in consultative bodies (Ghailani 2010). Therefore, whilst the majority of the formal long-term stable elements of the POS are comparable in both cases, analysis of short-term features of the POS suggests differentiated opportunities.

Similarly, at the non-state level both French and Belgian freedom of association laws (Legifrance 1901, Moniteur 1921) ensure the right to form organisations, and therefore in both cases opportunities for Muslim women to participate in non-state politics are potentially limitless. However, as I present in Chapter Five, my data analysis shows that particularly in France these opportunities for participation at this level are impeded by the normative French discourse surrounding Muslim women, thus short-term elements alter seemingly comparable formal long-term features of the POS.

Although the formal institutions in both cases are largely similar and therefore present similar opportunities, electoral systems differ, with a full PR system in Belgium and a predominantly majoritarian electoral system in France. This difference shapes access to these comparable institutions. PR systems generally are argued to bring about governance reflective of the wider population (Anderson and Guillony 1997, Beauregard 2014, Karp and Banducci 2008, Norris 2006), and therefore brings about improved opportunities for women's representation (Beauregard 2014, Matland 1998, Norris 2006), ethnic minority representation (Anderson and Guillony 1997, Htun 2004, Karp and Banducci 2008, Norris 2006) and Muslim representation (Sinno 2009a, Warner 2009). The potential increase in the reflectiveness of elected bodies, opportunities for women's, ethnic minority and Muslim political representation brought about by PR electoral systems, therefore implies comparatively increased opportunities for Muslim women's political participation in Belgium and fewer opportunities in France.

The effects of the Belgian PR system compared to those of the predominantly majoritarian French electoral systems are further heightened by the nature of voting in each case. Firstly voter turnout is recognised to be higher in PR elections than those based on majoritarian systems (Norris 1997). Also, whilst in France individuals must register to vote, voting is compulsory in Belgium. This subsequently means that voter turnout in Belgium is consistently high (Deschouwer 2009), whilst

it is argued to be relatively low in France (Howarth and Varouxakis 2014). Naturally, the obligation to vote in Belgium automatically encourages Muslim women's participation at the polls. Secondly, compulsory voting for Belgian nationals aged eighteen and over, and measures introduced in 2000 and 2006 allow European citizens and non-Europeans who have lived in Belgium for more than five years, the right to register to vote in Belgian local elections. It is my argument that this diverse pool of voters comprising Belgian, European and non-European Muslims further increases the value of the 'Muslim vote'. Whilst it is flawed to assume that the Muslim electorate will vote as a monolithic block, existing evidence suggests that Muslims are likely to back other Muslim candidates (Sinno 2009a). This consequently implies that parties will put in place measures to secure the Muslim vote via the inclusion of Muslim candidates, this subsequently creates increased opportunities for Muslim women in Belgium to become involved in party politics.

Although both French and francophone Belgian politics are traditionally dominated by centre-right and centre-left political parties, the review of the POS in each case demonstrated that the French FN continue to steadily make gains in French politics (Shields 2010), whilst the francophone Belgian FN is comparatively silenced and greater emphasis is placed on the Flemish far-right, *Vlaams Belang* (Deschouwer 2009). I argue that particularly given their often anti-Muslim stance the differences in far-right party presence in each case alters the short-term political discourse related to Muslims. This in turn shapes opportunities for Muslim women's political participation, with hostile anti-Muslim political discourses resulting in fewer opportunities for Muslim political participation (Warner and Wenner 2006). Therefore, the success of the far-right in France, and the normalisation of often anti-Islamic discourses it brings, serves to comparatively limit opportunities for Muslim women's political participation.

Both France and Belgium have similar gender parity legislation. These measures call for equal representation of male and female candidates and were implemented in 2000 in France and 2002 in Belgium. However, Kitschelt (1986) underlines the importance of historical precedence in shaping POS. The review of POS highlighted that in Belgium the legislation was preceded by the Smet-Tobback law, which required that at least one third of candidates were female (Ghailani 2010). Conversely, Ramsay (2003) argues that the French measures were preceded by debate and controversy stemming from the extent to which such legislation would allow the maintenance of French egalitarianism and blindness to difference. This debate subsequently makes the introduction of positive discrimination difficult. Thus precedence and normative attitudes shape the way in which measures to include women's political participation and remove subsequent representation are received. This indirectly shapes the opportunities for Muslim women's political participation in each case.

In addition, statistics demonstrate that women make up 38% of Belgian national parliament, whilst women make up 27% of French national parliament (World Bank 2014). Therefore, whilst on first sight the formal measures in place, in both cases, suggest equally increased opportunities for Muslim women's political participation, analysing the short-term features of each POS such as precedence and discourse lead to the argument that comparatively Muslim women in francophone Belgium will encounter more opportunities for political participation than Muslim women in France.

Although in the European, federal and Brussels Parliaments seats are reserved for Belgians from across the linguistic communities, and France reserves seats for representatives from the overseas departments and territories, neither France nor Belgium has formal representation quotas to facilitate the inclusion of ethnic minorities from within either case, therefore both are similar and neither would facilitate or result in fewer opportunities to Muslim women's participation. However, Hargreaves (2007) argues that the *Parti Communiste Français* seeks minority candidates as a means of securing the ethnic vote. Alternatively Hooghe (2007) suggests Belgian mainstream parties, and especially CDH, seek out ethnic minority candidates in order to increase ethnic support at the polls. Given the predominantly ethnic minority composition of Muslim communities in both France and francophone Belgium, and this is in spite of the lack of ethnic minority inclusion quotas in either case, traditions of seeking ethnic minority candidate provide further opportunities for Muslim women's political participation.

Furthermore, I would argue that normative attitudes and values in the two cases also influence discourse related to Muslims and therefore subsequently shape the nature of opportunities for Muslim women's political participation. Perhaps the most relevant of these lies in the distinction between Belgian multiculturalism and French egalitarian and assimilationist norms. These norms are commonly recognised in the literature related to French Muslims and immigrant communities generally (Bertossi 2012, Coene and Longman 2008b, Kulenovic 2006, Kunst, Sam, and Ulleberg 2013, Kuru 2008, Lettinga and Saharso 2012, Silverstein 2008, Streiff-Frénart 2012). Sometimes classed as unique (Bertossi 2012), the French assimilationist model places demands on French citizens (Coene and Longman 2008a) to conform to an abstract model of 'Frenchness' which is legitimised by French Republicanism (Streiff-Frénart 2012). The centrality of French Republicanism subsequently means that it is difficult to contest French assimilationist policies and norms, although this does happen. The way in which such norms are applied is argued to be dependent on the era, previously being linked to anti-discrimination, followed by *laïcité* and now protection of the public order (Bertossi 2012, Streiff-Frénart 2012). The changing nature of these associated discourses over time also reflects the malleable and temporal nature of the basis of French assimilationist norms. I would suggest that in addition to the Republican basis, the central and

normative position of these associated discourses makes it even more difficult to challenge such norms. As a result, contradicting French assimilation becomes a mark of 'anti-Frenchness', anti-Republicanism and a general opposition to anti-discrimination ideals, French secularism and the protection of the French cultural order. This subsequently 'others' apparently non-assimilated French citizens or residents and also leads to assumptions regarding their moral positions.

Kuru (2008) observes that French assimilationist norms are both accepted or rejected by French Muslims. This is not surprising given the diversity of Muslims in France. Simultaneously, there is a recognised state desire to assimilate Islam in France (Kuru 2008), however popular and political discourse constructs the 'religion of the Arabs', meaning Islam and Muslims, as unassimilable (Silverstein 2008) and therefore frames Muslims as 'other' in French society. Streiff-Frénart (2012) argue that the dominant view asserts Muslim and minority communities should be grateful for French assimilationist norms, since these are associated with civilisation and modernity. I would argue that this normative view is patronising, alienates Muslim and minority communities and recalls the French colonial discourses surrounding the "*mission civilisatrice*" and the "*fardeau de l'homme blanc*". Nonetheless, both my research and existing literature indicates that French Muslims are in fact assimilated (Kulenovic 2006), for example in terms of their education or political engagement. Nonetheless, these norms potentially result in a more closed POS in France and consequently comparatively limited opportunities for Muslim women's participation in French politics.

Conversely Belgian multiculturalism encourages acceptance of diverse Belgian citizens. These dominant norms in Belgium are influenced by the Dutch and Flemish multicultural approaches (Coene and Longman 2008b, Haspelagh 2012, Koutroubas, Vloeberghs, and Yanasmayan 2009, Lettinga and Saharso 2012, Zemni 2006, 2011). These norms subsequently influence attitudes towards Belgian Muslims, which consequently shapes dominant approaches towards Muslim women who participate in politics. However, increasingly there is a distinction made between the normative influence of multiculturalism in the Belgian linguistic communities, with Flanders adopting the multicultural model and Wallonia adopting a French-style assimilationist approach (Mielants 2006, Severs 2010, Timmerman, Vanderwaeren, and Crul 2003). Mielants (2006) go as far as to argue that the French-style assimilationist norms are stronger in francophone Belgium than they are in France. However, based on my findings detailed in particular in Chapter Five, I would argue that this claim is perhaps an exaggeration and fails to recognise the complexities within francophone Belgium.

Precedents also shape opportunities for political participation (Kitschelt 1986, Warleigh 2001), and therefore the existing high rates of Muslim national representation in Belgium, contrasted with the exceptionally low rates of Muslim national political representation in France (Sinno 2009a), imply

increased opportunities for Muslim women's political participation in francophone Belgium compared to those encountered in France. I would argue that even if there is a normative move towards French assimilationist tendencies, national policies and structures in francophone Belgium continue to remain influenced and shaped by Flemish and Dutch multiculturalism, thus meaning that francophone Belgian approaches will differ from those in France.

To summarise the comparative review above has revealed the following principal similarities and differences in the POS of each case:

Table 4.2 Comparing French and Belgian POS

France	Belgium
Numerous state level political institutions → numerous points of entry	Numerous state level political institutions → numerous points of entry
1901 Freedom of association law → potentially limitless non-state level opportunities	1921 Freedom of association law → potentially limitless non-state level opportunities
CFCM → negatively perceived	EMB → well received
Predominantly majoritarian electoral system	Full PR system
Non-compulsory voting	Compulsory voting
No ethnicity quotas, but ethnic minority candidate vote seeking (Hargreaves 2007, Vidal and Bourtel 2005)	No ethnicity quotas, but ethnic minority candidate and vote seeking (Hooghe 2005)
Gender parity legislation since 2001, preceded by controversy (Ramsay 2003)	Gender parity legislation since 2002, preceded by Smet-Tobback law (Ghailani 2010)
Low rates of Muslim political representation (Sinno 2009a)	High rates of Muslim political representation (Sinno 2009a, Zibouh 2013)
Egalitarian norms and emphasis on assimilation	Multiculturalism

To conclude, I argue that examination of the formal POS reveals largely similar state and non-state level structures and legislative measures, which in turn theoretically create similar opportunities for Muslim women's political participation in both France and francophone Belgium. These similar features range from the non-state level with the respective 1901 and 1921 freedom of association laws, to state level measures such as gender parity legislation and also the nature of the numerous political institutions. My comparison of the POS in both cases at this level is not consistent with the

literature, which largely tends to argue the closed and hostile nature of the French POS and openness of Belgian politics (Ersanilli and Koopmans 2011, Hooghe 2005).

However, closer inspection of precedents and norms in each case, such as the differing rates of existing Muslim representation and norms, or French egalitarianism and emphasis on assimilation contrasted with Belgian multiculturalism, reveals that it is the short-term features of the POS in each case that contribute to the argued hostility of the French POS (Ersanilli and Koopmans 2011) and openness of the Belgian POS (Hooghe 2005). Short-term features, rather than long-term elements therefore differentiate the nature of the POS in each case and as a result shape the nature of opportunities for Muslim women's participation. This leads to the conclusion that Muslim women will encounter an increased number of opportunities for participation in francophone Belgium and comparatively fewer opportunities for participation in French politics. Nonetheless, this can only be contextualised and fully understood by fully considering and comparing Muslim women's reported experiences of opportunities for participation as explored in the next section of this chapter.

4.2 Reported Opportunities for Political Participation

4.2.1 France: Reported Opportunities for Political Participation

The majority of the French Muslim women in this study described how they had begun to participate in politics initially via non-state level engagement. Examples included participation in university and student political associations, ethnic minority and anti-racism associations, Islamic associations and participation in associations formed in response to developments in the French context. For example: "I began as an activist in associations for people descended from immigration, in Lyon and the South-East [of France]." (4)

Or, as another interviewee states:

Well, it [my political participation] takes many forms, I am really engaged at the associative level, [and] especially in impoverished areas of France...I discovered associational politics by chance. (23)

A number of interviewees also discussed how, in the wake of the headscarf affairs in France, they had been motivated to participate in politics. Some of the interviewees acted on this motivation by forming specific non-state level political associations that responded to their concerns and motivations to participate in politics brought about by the headscarf controversies. "Personally, I have been an activist since 2003, in a lobbying organisation. It [the lobby group] was [formed] because the [headscarf] law was going to be voted in." (21)

Or: “After the headscarf affair I began to participate in an initiative against the headscarf law.” (24), Similar attitudes related to the 2004 anti-headscarf law in France and the onset and motivations to participate in French politics are discussed in Chapter Three.

Other examples of associative action motivated by contextual factors include associations formed in response to the far right success in the 2002 French presidential elections, whereby Jean-Marie Le Pen reached the second round of the presidential elections, similarly these are also discussed in Chapter Three. These examples partly underline the role of motivations in shaping the nature of initial opportunities for associative participation that Muslim women in France pursue, and thus link back to the preceding chapter. The diversity in the nature of Muslim women’s associative engagement in France also reflects the heterogeneity of the sample.

Furthermore, the examples highlight the role of freedom of association in providing the primary opportunities for political participation by the Muslim women interviewed. Given its emergence in 1901, emphasising this specific opportunity might be criticised as being outdated and perhaps irrelevant, however I argue that whilst this may be the case, the importance of the law is reflective of the experiences of those in this study and based on my data the freedom of association is of central importance in explaining the initial opportunities for participation by Muslim women in France and therefore must be considered.

Although the majority of the interviewees began their political participation at the non-state level in associations that addressed the issues that motivated their participation, three of the eleven French Muslim women described how they began their political participation by becoming members of political parties and entered politics at the state level, rather than in non-state level associative politics:

I have been a member of the Socialist Party since I was eighteen years old... I attend the meetings for my political group... and now I am going to be on a list [as a candidate] for the next municipal elections in March 2014. (29)

For this interviewee participating in meetings built up her political networks, which subsequently gives rise to increased opportunities for her to take on formal roles within the party. This perhaps represents a more traditional route to formal state level political participation. However, this example is not typical of the wider experiences of French Muslim women interviewed who participate in politics.

Instead, the remaining interviewees in the French sample began and continued to participate solely in, or had retreated to French associative politics, or finally participated across both state and non-state level politics¹². This decision to focus their participation at the non-state level was usually

¹² Of the eleven French interviewees one described beginning her political career via party membership, two discussed retreating to non-state level politics only after having participated at the state level, four had

shaped by either their personal preferences, or as I will demonstrate in Chapter Five, by the various barriers that they encounter that then limit the opportunities for furthering their participation.

Those who had entered politics at the non-state level described how this had created opportunities for them to progress and become involved in alternative political participation. For example:

After my baccalaureate, I began to participate in associations. To begin with it [my political participation] was in very cultural and social associations, and then slowly I became involved in the unions. (28)

She continues:

My associative engagement also became a [state level] political engagement... they [party members] came to invite me, to ask me to participate, to participate in the elections... I was elected in my home town. (28)

Through the course of the interview this respondent goes on to describe how her participation has evolved since the 1980s and the way in which she was presented with opportunities to further her participation at senior levels of formal French politics during her political career, including opportunities to participate in French politics as an elected senator. Although this was the only instance in the study, being approached by a political party reflects the arguments and findings of Hargreaves (2007) and Vidal and Bourtel (2005) who suggest that some French political parties seek minority candidates as a means of increasing party support and securing the ethnic minority vote.

Alternatively, another interviewee describes how her non-state level associative political participation during the 1980s developed networks and in turn created opportunities for her political participation in formal state level party politics. She describes the nature of these opportunities:

In France, it is a lot more difficult to be a member of [the national] parliament, because everyone wants to be one. But, in Europe, not everyone is interested... [you have to] spend a lot of time in Brussels, rent a second apartment in Brussels... in France, there are often a lot of [French] members of the European Parliament that are there because they can't get elected in France. (4)

Therefore, in this instance in spite of having built up political networks via associative participation, the desirability of French national parliamentary roles limits opportunities for her political participation, whilst the comparatively reduced desirability of European parliamentary positions further opens up opportunities for Muslim women's state level political participation. However, Muslim political representation is not particularly high in the European Parliament at a ratio of 1:0.33 (Sinno 2009a). Nonetheless, this particular interviewee was able to capitalise on the reduced desirability of European parliamentary representation and stood as an MEP for France.

only participated at the non-state level at the time of the interview and, finally, four described participating at both levels simultaneously.

Both of the interviewees cited above were of a comparable age, and began their political participation at a similar time, through similar associative non-state level political experience, albeit in different regions of France. Neither of the interviewees were visibly Muslim, meaning neither wore 'Islamic dress', and thus they had not faced barriers in the same way as many of the other interviewees¹³. These similarities point to the potential role of associative action in facilitating subsequent opportunities for French Muslim women's participation in state level politics. However, based on the similarities between these two interviewees, I would argue that visible Muslim appearance and the time at which these women began to participate in politics temper the nature of such opportunities.

In order to explain the largely differing opportunities encountered by the women interviewed I look to the short-term contextual, historical and discourse based features and simultaneously consider the nature of the interviewees. The French sample was largely comprised of Muslim women who participated in associative politics, although it did also include a number of state level political activists. In spite of having contacted numerous state level French Muslim women politicians, I encountered some difficulties in recruiting French interviewees. I attributed these difficulties to the emphasis on neutrality of state representatives and current secular norms which demonise the public expression of faith and especially Islam (Baubérot 2012, Haspelagh 2012, Laachir 2008, Ramadan 2004, Roy 2007). These norms subsequently mean that French political representatives are less likely to be willing to participate in research related to Muslim women's political participation. Additionally, as I will explore in further depth, in Chapter Five, French secular norms also contribute to limiting the opportunities for Muslim women's political participation in France.

Analysing Muslim women's experiences of opportunities for political participation in France underlines the importance of considering the short-term features of the POS in conjunction with reviewing its long-term stable elements. Based on my analysis, I conclude that although formal political institutions are numerous in France these are outweighed by discourse, precedents and normative attitudes and result in limited opportunities for the majority of French Muslim women.

4.2.2 Francophone Belgium: Reported Opportunities for Political Participation

Interviewees in francophone Belgium tended to focus on the opportunities for their state level political participation. This can partly be attributed to both the nature and composition of the sample, which included elected members of parliament, youth parliamentarians, and elected members of consultative bodies, local councillors, in addition to trade union activists, lobby group

¹³ Of the total eleven French interviewees four wore the headscarf continually in their public life, five did not wear the headscarf in public and two interviewees 'managed' their head coverings – see Chapter Five for further details.

members and those engaged in political associations. The focus on state-level opportunities also reflects the already documented high levels of Muslim participation on Belgian state level politics (Sinno 2009a, Zibouh 2011).

However, when discussing the opportunities for non-state level participation, the women mentioned the relative ease they encountered. For example, the interviewee below describes the way in which participation at the non-state level, for example: “At the European associative level, I get invited everywhere...” (20) Additionally this was not hindered by appearing visibly Muslim: “When you are a volunteer, when it is free, people don’t care if you wear the headscarf or not.”(2)

This was attributed to the voluntary nature of their non-state participation, but I would also argue that Belgian multiculturalism and traditions of acceptance of difference further facilitate Muslim women’s participation in Belgian non-state level politics. The majority of the Muslim women interviewed in francophone Belgium often had some connection to non-state level organisations. I would suggest that the ease and frequency of participation at this level can be attributed to the Belgian freedom of association law (Moniteur 1921). In spite of its age, the law represents a formal and long-term feature of the Belgian POS that shapes and provides opportunities for Muslim women’s political participation in francophone Belgium.

At the state level, throughout the interviews it was not uncommon for interviewees to describe how they had been directly approached with opportunities to participate in state level politics¹⁴. This included being asked to stand as a candidate in a range of forthcoming elections, sit on national political advisory bodies without election and the opportunity to participate in consultative organisations. For example: “When I was 17 years old, I met people from different political parties, they [one of the political parties] asked me to join the party. It was the green party, Écolo.” (2)She adds:

And then in 2004 I was approached by the Catholic party, well... the humanist party [CDH] used to be the Catholic party... They asked me to be an activist in the party I said yes. After I was on the party electoral list in 2004 for the local elections and I didn’t campaign a lot... but thanks to God, without campaigning I had a really good result and I was elected as a local councillor. (2)

Or alternatively:

My political participation well I am not engaged in electoral politics, even though I have almost [become engaged in party politics] on several occasions, because there were political parties that approached me to be part of the electoral lists mainly the socialist party and the green party. (5)

Or finally:

¹⁴ Eleven of the Belgian interviewees noted being approached by political parties, however not all of these pursued these opportunities. This was due to personal preference, limited time and also fear of instrumentalisation, as discussed in further detail in Chapter Five.

A woman from the political party CDH came looking for me... [She asked me] what do you think of the political situation? What would you like to change? Etc. ... she said to me you are interesting, you have a good profile [for a future candidate], you must come to see me, come to CDH, we need you. (6)

The interviewee cited above went on to discuss how she was also approached by the green party and that, after deliberation she decided to pursue this opportunity and currently stands as an elected local councillor with *Écolo*.

The interviews reveal that the francophone Belgian Muslim women who participated in this study were commonly approached by left-wing political parties, including *CDH*, *PS* and *Écolo*. However, respondents were not sought by centre-right or right-wing parties, such as *MR*. The fact that the Muslim women were approached by left-wing parties can partly be attributed to the ideological position of these parties, who are generally more accepting and accommodating of minorities. As this interviewee indirectly points out:

Here in Belgium I think there are an enormous amount of opportunities [to participate in politics]... well it depends on the party, but they are open even to young people and all sorts of different things... whether that is having a different religion, or having a different ethnic background. (20)

This finding across much of the francophone Belgian sample echoes existing suggestions that some Belgian political parties seek out minority candidates as a means of securing the ethnic vote (Hooghe 2005). Therefore, based on the experiences of the Muslim women interviewed, I argue that Belgian political parties also appear to seek out Muslim women candidates in an attempt to secure Muslim votes, rather than simply focusing on ethnic minorities. However, given their typical ethnic difference, Muslim women in francophone Belgium are likely to appeal to both ethnic minority and Muslim voters.

Although eleven francophone Belgian interviewees reported being approached by political parties, the remaining respondents were not sought by parties. Comparing the profiles of the women in these two categories led to the observation that those who reported being approached were of a similar age, were typically born and raised in Belgium and were either of Moroccan or Turkish ethnic origin, thus their ethnic difference and Muslim identity were both apparent. Whilst those who did not discuss being invited to participate by political parties were often converts who were neither visibly from an ethnic minority nor were they visibly Muslim. The women in the second category either found opportunities to participate solely in non-state level associative politics, or became engaged in state level politics via becoming a party member and attending meetings before progressing further.

Comparing the profiles of the two groups further strengthens my argument that Muslim women candidates are sought in Belgium by left-wing parties in a similar way to ethnic minority candidates

(Hooghe 2005), since their presence has the potential to attract both ethnic and Muslim votes. This support is central in Belgium for multiple reasons; firstly the compulsory nature of voting in Belgium along with measures previously discussed which allow for EU and non-EU citizens to vote in Belgium means that ethnic minority and Muslim votes are potentially influential at the polls. Furthermore, since some argue that Muslims are likely to support other credible Muslim candidates (Sinno 2009a) including ethnic minority Muslim women presents a means for parties to secure both ethnic minority and Muslim votes. In this regard the interviewees also speculated that their ethnic difference created further opportunities for their state level political participation:

The fact that I have a foreign background that played a big role, because if I wasn't I think... if I had been in a different area in another town, maybe I wouldn't have been elected. In this town... there are lots of Muslims, there are lots of Turks. So, inevitably that played a part, it helped. (9)

These opportunities are intensified in largely ethnic minority and Muslim areas. This further underlines the role of ethnic minority and Muslim vote seeking by parties in the creation of opportunities for Muslim women's participation in state level politics.

In addition, interviewees also suggested other reasons as to why they were approached by political parties. For example:

I have had opportunities to be on the electoral lists, to be a local councillor... there was Écolo, and PS, and CDH as well. Every time, with Écolo it was the most recent elections, with CDH it was the election before... you see the political parties, they see that you are involved in the trade unions, and they like that. (3)

Another interviewee describes how she was first sought out by CDH whilst studying at university and the party representative said that she "had a good profile" (6), meaning both her political awareness and social connectedness was desirable.

This interviewee attributes being repeatedly approached by parties to the nature of her existing political engagement in trade unions, since this activism brings wide ranging networks and therefore potential support. However, I would also argue that political contacts are part of the range of votes that are potentially secured by Muslim women's candidacy. This desirability of Muslim women candidates persists, as this interviewee states: "Political parties approach me [to be a candidate], in spite of the fact that I am a woman, in spite of my headscarf, they [political parties] still approach me." (20)

Similarly, and as alluded to in the excerpt above, the data indicates that opportunities for Muslim women's political participation in francophone Belgian state level politics are further facilitated by their gender, as an interviewee notes: "Two years later [after joining the political party], it was the local elections, and they needed someone, a woman to put on the list and they asked me to be on the list." (9)

Belgian gender parity legislation requires that the candidate lists submitted by each political party, in every election in Belgium, is comprised of equal number of men and women. In the previous section, I speculated that gender parity legislation should also contribute to and create opportunities for Muslim women's political participation in state level politics. The above quotation highlights an example of gender parity legislation creating opportunities for Muslim women's participation in electoral politics. However, as is documented for women generally in the French case (Murray 2009, Sénac-Slawinski 2008), francophone Belgian Muslim women do not always find themselves highly ranked on the candidate lists:

So, in effect the party placed me badly, eighteenth. And [initially] the party only had two seats, so you are either in the top two, or you won't have any chance of succeeding. Personally, I was eighteenth [on the list]. So I worked really hard, I campaigned lots and I had the third highest score. And then the party won a third seat and I was elected. (9)

She continues: "I was twenty first [on the list], my party only had ten seats, and I was eleventh [highest scoring of directly allocated votes], so thanks to me, we won another seat." (9)

Gender parity legislation means being a female opens up further opportunities for Muslim women's candidacy in francophone Belgian state level politics, in additions to those presented by ethnic difference, Muslim identity and extensive political networks, Yet, based on my interviews it is clear that these women are often ranked in lower positions on the candidate electoral lists and this is likely to limit their opportunities for securing a post as an elected representative. Nonetheless, their presence on the list will still bring support from ethnic minority and Muslim voters, as well as those in the women's existing non-state level political networks and contributes to fulfilling gender parity criteria. However, the D'Hondt method means that voters can either vote for the party generally, or specifically vote for a particular candidate on the list (Deschouwer 2009). Generally votes are based on list order, however specific votes for individual candidates are also directly assigned to candidates when voters express preference. This method of vote calculation increases the opportunities for Muslim women in francophone Belgium to secure elected roles, even when they are badly placed on the candidate list. So in this case, whilst gender parity creates opportunities for Muslim women's inclusion in candidate lists, the political structure and the D'Hondt method of vote calculation create opportunities for Muslim women to secure elected roles in Belgian politics, across the spectrum of political institutions.

To conclude, at the non-state level Belgian Muslim women encounter numerous opportunities and I argue that this is linked to the legislation guaranteeing the freedom of association in Belgium (Moniteur 1921). The analysis also reveals that at the state level a number of francophone Belgian Muslim women report being approached and invited to stand with left-wing political parties in particular. Comparing the profile of those approached with those who were not approached revealed ethnicity is influential in the extent to which Muslim women are sought by parties, with

ethnic difference increasing opportunities. Therefore, these findings are consistent with Hooghe (2005). However, I also observed that being visibly identifiable as a Muslim woman also contributes to the likelihood of Muslim women being approached by political parties.

I argued that the desirability of Muslim women's difference is linked to several short-term and long-term features of the Belgian POS; firstly compulsory voting and measures which allow EU and non-EU citizens to vote mean that ethnic minority and Muslim votes are potentially influential in Belgian politics. Additionally, suggestions that Muslims are likely to vote for Muslim candidates (Sinno 2009a) means that Muslim candidates present a means of securing votes. This potential sway encourages parties to take measures that will enable them to secure such votes and therefore Muslim women's ethnic and religious difference becomes desirable.

Simultaneously gender parity legislation creates further opportunities for Muslim women's inclusion on party lists, since Muslim women's presence enables parties to fulfil legal requirements regarding the number of female candidates that must be included. However, I found that the women were often poorly ranked on lists, and therefore this would indicate that although their presence enables parties to meet gender parity requirements, secures ethnic and Muslim votes and also votes from the women's non-state level engagement, the women would be unlikely to obtain a seat. However, these facets of Muslim women's identity, such as ethnic minority status, religious identity, age and gender, along with the D'Hondt vote calculation method applied in Belgian elections create opportunities for Muslim women to take on roles as state level elected representative roles. Here I would argue that perceiving these multiple facets of Muslim women's identities in reference to intersectional theory is perhaps most fitting. At the outset of the study I framed the numerous components of Muslim women's identities as mutual facets that could be foregrounded dependent on the situation. This conceptualisation was largely driven by my considerations related to standpoint theory outlined in Chapter Two, which drove me to consider identity from the perspective of the interviewees. However my later reading led me to consider the emerging area of intersectionality. As Celis et al. (2014: 340) state in their work based on qualitative interviews with party candidates, examining the influence of gender quotas on ethnic minority representation in Flanders and the Netherlands, "intersectional theory... conceptualises gender, race, age and sexuality as interrelated systems", In this study the complex interplay of ethnicity, gender, age, class, and religious identity make up the salient facets of Muslim women's identities which then shape the nature of political opportunities that these women meet.

This is all further facilitated by Belgian multiculturalism and acceptance of difference. However, although I have discussed these opportunities in terms of party vote seeking, there is a risk of viewing Muslim women's participation in Belgian state level politics as solely reflective of their instrumentalisation by political parties, thus reducing them to a passive status. Therefore, it is also

important to highlight Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics and consider the numerous political projects in which francophone Belgian Muslim women are effective.

4.2.3 Comparing France and Francophone Belgium: Reported Opportunities for Political Participation

In both France and francophone Belgium Muslim women reported encountering multiple opportunities for their participation in non-state level politics. The comparable opportunities expressed reflect the similar laws concerning the freedom of association in each case (Legifrance 1901, Moniteur 1921) and therefore demonstrate the importance of the fixed long-term elements of the POS in shaping political participation by Muslim women in the two cases. I argued that although both legislative measures are by no means recent, the laws continue to provide opportunities for participation and therefore must be considered within the wider frame of analysis of the opportunities for Muslim women's political participation.

However, based on the data presented in this chapter, further comparison highlights that whilst the Belgian freedom of association law creates part of the multiple opportunities for Muslim women's political participation, the women in France tended to focus heavily on these opportunities at the non-state level. This difference between the two cases leads to two possible conclusions, firstly the disparity reflects the differences in the nature of the sample composition in the two cases, with the Belgian sample being comprised of women who participate across a varied range of politics and the French sample being predominantly engaged in non-state level associative politics. Alternatively, the disparity in reported opportunities and focus on associative politics in France reflects the comparatively limited nature of opportunities for Muslim women's political participation at the state level in France.

At the Belgian state level a clear pattern of reported opportunities became clear; the majority of ethnic minority Muslim women reported being approached to stand as candidates with left-wing political parties, such as *Écolo*, CDH and PS. Being invited to stand as a candidate subsequently led to opportunities for Muslim women to take on roles as elected representatives in Belgian state level politics. I attribute Muslim women's invited candidacy and subsequent election to multiple factors within the Belgian POS. Firstly Belgian multiculturalism, compulsory voting and the extension of the vote to EU and non-EU citizens in Belgium places emphasis on, and valorises Muslim and ethnic minority votes, especially in areas with large Muslim and ethnic minority concentrations. Since Muslim women are often from ethnic minority backgrounds, their political inclusion presents a means of securing ethnic and Muslim votes.

Additionally, gender parity legislation means that Muslim women's presence also compels parties to fulfil legal requirements. This further contributes to the desirability of Muslim women

candidates in Belgian politics. Therefore here, the intersection of ethnicity, gender and religious identity among francophone Belgian Muslim women constitutes a central factor in explaining the opportunities encountered by some Muslim women who participate in Belgian state level politics.

However, interviewees pointed that they were often placed in low rank positions on PR lists. Therefore, I would argue that while gender parity legislation and a culture of Muslim and ethnic minority vote seeking in left-wing politics open up opportunities for Muslim women's inclusion on party lists, the D'Hondt method of vote calculation permits Muslim women to secure seats and therefore creates opportunities for Muslim women to take on roles as elected political representatives. In Belgium there is a complex interplay of long- and short-term features of the POS and this subsequently provides and contributes to explaining the nature of the opportunities for Muslim women's participation in state level Belgian politics.

In comparison, with only one respondent reporting being approached by a party, I argue that no distinct patterns emerged in French state level politics. Again this can partly be attributed to the nature of the sample in France. However this also reflects the potentially limited opportunities for Muslim women's state level political participation in France, since only a minority of the French interviewees described the opportunities for and directly pursued state level political engagement. Therefore, in spite of the argued ethnic minority vote seeking established in the literature (Hargreaves 2007, Vidal and Bourtel 2005) ethnic minority Muslim women do not encounter such opportunities. This suggests that ethnic minority vote seeking is comparatively more increased in Belgium than it is in France. However, the observed differences related to opportunities for Muslim women's state level political participation also partly reflect the extent of the negative effects of Muslim women's visibility on the opportunities for their political engagement in France.

Also in France an interviewee described encountering opportunities to take on state level political roles that were less desirable, for example she found opportunities were increased for her participation in the European parliament than in national political institutions. I would argue that considering the perceived costs and rewards model of political participation (Fowler and Kam 2007, Han 2009, Klandermans and Oegama 1987, Miller and Krosnick 2004, Wittmann 1983), as outlined in Chapter Three, best explains this opportunity. In this instance the costs of participating as an elected member of the European Parliament compared with those associated with participating in French politics, were undesirable for most. The general perceived high cost of participating in European Parliament subsequently creates opportunities for French Muslim women's participation in supranational state level politics. Conversely, this nature of opportunity was not highlighted in Belgium. I would argue that this is linked to two principal factors; firstly the Belgian respondents largely encountered numerous opportunities for participation in state and non-state level politics at the local and national level. Additionally, given that Brussels is home of the European Parliament,

the perceived cost of participating at the supranational level is comparatively lesser than in the French case, and therefore being an MEP is no less 'costly' or rewarding than participation in local and national francophone Belgian politics. Therefore to conclude, on the whole whilst comparative analysis of the formal and fixed elements of the POS in both cases suggested that Muslim would encounter similar opportunities for their political participation, comparing data from both sets of interviews demonstrated different patterns of opportunity in France and francophone Belgium.

4.3 Conclusions

In order to understand the role of POS in Muslim women's political participation, I analysed and compared both the objective features of the political structures in each case, and then subsequently comparatively analysed Muslim women's reported experiences of the opportunities for their political participation. My argument was that taking this dual approach provided insight into the formal and temporal elements of the POS and therefore better contextualised Muslim women's reported experiences of opportunities.

As noted, POS are comprised of both long-term fixed features, and short-term elements (Arzheimer and Carter 2006, Kitschelt 1986, Martiniello 2005a, Meyer and Staggenborg 1996, Meyer and Minkoff 2004, Tarrow 1996). The long-term features of the POS include the political institutions, electoral systems, the nature of voting and ethnic and gender inclusion quotas, whilst the short-term features of the POS include political discourse, historical precedents and contextual norms. Analysing and comparing the POS in France and Belgium revealed almost identical opportunities for Muslim women's participation at the non-state level given the laws guaranteeing freedom of association in each case. The comparative analysis also highlights equally numerous political institutions, these included European and national parliament, regional and local councils and Muslim consultative bodies. In turn these institutions create multiple opportunities and potential points of entry into state level politics for Muslim women who are motivated to pursue political careers. These similarities would imply that based on these long-term features of the POS Muslim women would report similar opportunities for political participation in the two cases.

Comparative analysis of Muslim women's reports revealed that at the non-state level interviewees described largely similar opportunities for their participation, I attribute the similarities in the reports to the comparable nature of the respective 1901 and 1921 legal measures. However, in comparison to the Belgian respondents, the French Muslim women placed greater emphasis on these opportunities. I argued that this is linked to either the nature of the French sample and their experiences, or alternatively this emphasis reflects the increased opportunities for Muslim women's participation at the non-state level and limited opportunities in state level politics in France. Nonetheless, overall I conclude that the formal legislation ensuring freedom of association in both cases is influential in providing opportunities for Muslim women's participation, and the

nature of this participation corresponds with the reported motivations expressed in the preceding chapter.

In this chapter I initially outlined the nature of the state level POS in both France and francophone Belgium and observed similar institutional configurations. I suggested that the comparable nature of the political institutional arrangements alone in the two cases would provide equally numerous opportunities for Muslim women to participate in state level politics. The data analysis revealed that the francophone Belgian Muslim women remarked on the multiplicity of opportunities for their state level participation and generally tended to pursue a range of state level political careers regardless of their diverse personal profiles. Conversely, in France the Muslim women were comparatively less able to pursue the seemingly numerous opportunities that are presented by the French political institutional configuration. Those who were able to undertake and maintain state level political engagement in France had similar visibly ethnic and non-visibly Muslim profiles. In order to explain these distinct disparities in the uptake of opportunities for Muslim women's participation in state level politics in France and francophone Belgium, I looked beyond the long-term institutional features of the POS and considered the effects of legislation, precedents and finally dominant normative values in each case.

My initial comparison of the formal features of the French and Belgian POS revealed that the French electoral system is predominantly majoritarian, whilst Belgium has a full PR system. I noted that PR systems are argued to result in governance that is more reflective of the wider population, and increased opportunities for women's, ethnic minority and Muslim political representation (Anderson and Guillony 1997, Beauregard 2014, Karp and Banducci 2008, Matland 1998, Norris 1997, 2006, Sinno 2009a) and by extension this implies that majoritarian political systems lead to comparatively poorer rates of women's, ethnic minority and Muslim political representation. In this study, this means that the Belgian POS provides increased opportunities whilst the French POS potentially limits opportunities for Muslim women's state level political participation. Interviewees in France did not cite the influence of the nature of electoral systems on the opportunities that they had encountered. Whilst most Belgian interviewees also did not reference the influence of the formal Belgian POS in their personal political success, those involved in electoral politics who cite the influence of their positioning on electoral lists and the sway exerted on political outcomes by voter preference and assigned votes, recognise the influence of POS on their political participation. However, I argue that this underlines the importance and effectiveness of the combined comparative analysis of both the objective POS and Muslim women's subjective experiences in holistically explaining the opportunities for Muslim women's political participation.

Additionally, analysis of the formal elements of the French and francophone Belgian POS revealed significant differences in the voting in each case. Voting in Belgium is compulsory, both EU and

non-EU Belgian residents are eligible to vote in some Belgian elections and Belgium has a traditionally high rate of voter turnout. Conversely, voting is not compulsory in France, EU residents are eligible to vote in local and European elections whilst non-EU residents cannot vote in France. Finally France is argued to have low rates of voter turnout (Howarth and Varouxakis 2014). These differences between the two cases are both symptomatic of the electoral systems and contextual norms (Anderson and Guillony 1997, Howarth and Varouxakis 2014, Iversen and Soskice 2006). These differences, in conjunction with literature related to ethnic minority vote seeking in the two cases and Muslim women's reported experiences, allows for the understanding of the effects of the differences in patterns of voting on the opportunities for Muslim women's state level political participation. Specifically, the combined aforementioned factors result in comparatively fewer opportunities reported by the interviewees in France than in francophone Belgium.

I observed that neither case has specific formal ethnic minority inclusion quotas, however, in the short-term, the literature in both cases points to left-wing parties in particular attempting to include ethnic minority candidates as a means of securing votes from ethnic minority voters (Hargreaves 2007, Hooghe 2005, Vidal and Bourtel 2005). Comparing Muslim women's reported experiences revealed that ethnic minority francophone Belgian Muslim women were frequently invited to participate and stand as a candidates for left-wing political parties. In comparison, I only encountered one French interviewee being approached by a party to participate. Although the literature suggests that ethnic minority candidate inclusion as a means of securing minority votes occurs in both cases, comparing Muslim women's reported experiences suggested that ethnic minority vote seeking is more common in Belgium than in France. Subsequently, this difference in prevalence results in increased opportunities for Muslim women's participation in francophone Belgian state level politics. I explained these differences by considering the compulsory and non-compulsory nature of voting in each case and the comparatively greater influence of ethnic votes in Belgium. However, I found that the differences in ethnic minority candidate inclusion alone did not account for the differences between the cases, or the specificities of the women's reported experiences.

Both France and Belgium have gender parity legislative measures since 2001 and 2002 respectively (Legifrance 2000, Ghailani 2010), thus the long-term features of the two POS reveal comparable potential for an increase in opportunities for Muslim women's participation. However, analysis of the political discourse and precedents in the two cases revealed differences between France and francophone Belgium, with gender parity law being surrounded by controversy linked to safeguarding the practice of egalitarianism in France (Howarth and Varouxakis 2014, Murray 2009, Ramsay 2003, Sénac-Slawinski 2008) contrasted with general acceptance and preceding similar measures, namely the Smet-Tobback law in Belgium (Ghailani 2010).

The French interviewees did not discuss the influence of gender parity legislation on the opportunities for political participation that they had encountered. Conversely, the Belgian interviewees noted that their being invited to stand as a candidate allowed for political parties to fulfil the demands of gender parity laws. Thus gender parity and ethnic difference contribute to providing opportunities for Muslim women's political participation as party candidates. However, the women also pointed out that although they were invited to stand as candidates and their presence as women fulfilled gender parity requirements, they tended to be poorly ranked on party lists, therefore potentially limiting the likelihood of their election as councillors or members of parliament. However, I argue that the D'Hondt method of vote calculation allows Muslim women in Belgium to take on roles as elected representatives, since voters can directly vote for Muslim women candidates. Considering the potential preferences of Muslim voters, Muslim women's reports and suggestions that Muslims are likely to vote for Muslim candidates (Sinno 2009a) also leads me to conclude that gender, ethnicity and faith combined result in Muslim women in francophone Belgium being perceived as desirable candidates and therefore creates opportunities for their participation, whilst the nature of voting contributes to the opportunities for Muslim women to take on roles as elected political representatives.

Existing literature highlights the importance of historical precedents as part of the POS (Kitschelt 1986) and analysing the existing levels of Muslim political representation served as an indicator of the opportunities for Muslim women's participation. As detailed, in spite of the large Muslim community in France, French Muslims have the poorest rates of national political representation in Europe at only 1:0.08 when compared to population estimates (Sinno 2009a, 72-75). Conversely Belgian Muslim national political representation is the highest in Europe at a ratio of 1:1.35 (Sinno 2009a, 72-75). Similarly research indicates that francophone Belgian Muslims appear to enjoy high rates of regional representation (Zibouh 2011). These significantly differing historical precedents in each case suggested that Muslim women in francophone Belgium would report experiencing more opportunities than those in France. The interviewees in both cases did not discuss the respectively high or low levels of existing Muslim political representation as influential in the opportunities that they had encountered. However, I would argue that comparing the contrasting reports reveals that as the historical precedents would indicate that these precedents shape the reported increased opportunities in France and francophone Belgium. This finding emphasises the importance of considering existing precedents, along with Muslim women's subjective reports.

Finally, analysing the norms, political discourse and normative attitudes towards Muslim women revealed further differences between France and francophone Belgium and I argue that these norms underpin the opportunities for political participation that Muslim women will encounter at both the state and non-state level. I argue that the centrality of French assimilationist values and

the associated tendency to prefer conformity to 'Frenchness', means that Muslim women's often multifaceted identities are less likely to be readily acknowledged or accepted (Streiff-Frénart 2012). The norms are legitimised via French Republicanism, anti-discrimination, *laïcité*, and maintenance of the public order (Bertossi 2012, Streiff-Frénart 2012). These norms also mean that the French state's desire to assimilate Islam (Kuru 2008) is not negatively perceived by the wider population. However, French Muslims are also regarded as unassimilable (Silverstein 2008). The opposition between assimilationist norms and the view of Muslims as 'other' contribute to limiting the opportunities for Muslim women's political participation. As I explore in greater depth in Chapter Five, Muslim women's 'otherness' in French society is also intensified by visible Muslim appearance. Therefore given the emphasis on assimilationist tendencies Muslim women perceived 'otherness' limits opportunities for political participation.

Conversely, Belgian multicultural norms (Haspelagh 2012, Lettinga and Saharso 2012, Mielants 2006, Severs 2010) and 'organised secularism' entail recognition of diverse and multifaceted identities held by Muslim women. Whilst some of the literature argues that French assimilationist norms dominate in francophone Belgium and multiculturalism is only relevant in Flanders (Mielants 2006, Severs 2010, Timmerman, Vanderwaeren, and Crul 2003), my findings suggest that multiculturalism is still relevant and continues to shape francophone Belgian POS and as a result provides comparatively increased opportunities for Muslim women's participation in Belgium than in France. Although the Muslim women in the two cases did not cite the influence of assimilationist norms in France or multiculturalism in Belgium, I argue that these national values still shape the opportunities for Muslim women's political participation.

To conclude and answer the research sub-question posed at the outset of this chapter: **to what extent do political structures in France and francophone Belgium provide opportunities for Muslim women to participate in politics?**, I found that in both cases considering the effects of formal long and short-term elements of the POS, precedents, legislations, national norms alongside Muslim women's reported experiences provides greatest insight into the role and influence of political structures on the opportunities for political participation encountered by Muslim women in the two cases.

In Belgium, the aggregated effects of the full PR political system which is recognised to improve Muslim, ethnic and gender representation, existing precedents of high levels of Muslim political representation, gender parity legislation and the tradition of ethnic minority candidate inclusion mean that at the state level Muslim women are desirable political party candidates and therefore francophone Belgian Muslim women encounter increased opportunities for state level political participation. The D'Hondt method of vote calculation contributes to Muslim women candidates encountering opportunities to stand as elected political representatives at the state level.

Alternatively at the non-state level, francophone Belgian Muslim women encounter numerous opportunities to pursue political participation. I attribute this to 1921 Freedom of Association law. The combined effects of the above features of the POS are ultimately influenced by Belgian normative multicultural attitudes which permit the inclusion of Muslim women and their diverse and often multifaceted identities.

Conversely, in France I conclude that although respondents focused on the opportunities for their non-state level associative participation guaranteed by the 1901 law, generally national assimilationist French norms contribute to the 'othering' of Muslim women and in particular visibly Muslim women. The perception of Muslim women as non-assimilated and 'other' subsequently limits the opportunities for political participation encountered by Muslim women in France. These limited opportunities for Muslim women's participation in French politics arise in spite of the observed similarities in the numerous nature of political institutions, gender parity legislation and previously argued ethnic minority vote seeking. The negative effects of French assimilationist norms on opportunities for Muslim women's political participation are further compounded by the majoritarian structure of the French political system, non-compulsory voting and existing precedents of low levels of Muslim political representation in France, and ultimately mean that when compared to Muslim women in francophone Belgium, French Muslim women experience reduced rates of opportunities for political participation. In conclusion, the differing short-term features of the POS in France and francophone Belgium, coupled with Muslim women's multiple minority identities give rise to contrasting patterns of reported opportunities for Muslim women's political participation in the two cases, with a relatively marked distinction between non-state and state level politics in France and francophone Belgium respectively.

5. Chapter Five: Barriers

In this chapter I explore and compare the principal barriers to Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium. I primarily address the third in the series of research sub-questions posed in the introductory chapter: **does secularism and particularly its influence on the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress in France or francophone Belgium constitute a barrier to political participation by Muslim women?**

The centrality of secularism (Fayard and Rocheron 2009) and the rise of 'combative' *laïcité* in France motivate the inclusion of this research sub-question. Removed from its ideological and egalitarian founding principles, 'combative' *laïcité* unfairly targets Islam in France (Baubérot 2012, Boussinesq 1994, Laachir 2008, Ramadan 2004, Roy 2007) and is influential in the legalised limitation of Muslim women's dress (Legifrance 2004, Fayard and Rocheron 2009, Haspelagh 2012). Based on these observations in the literature, it is my argument that secularism in France today has contributed to 'othering' Muslim women and their dress, and that this stigmatisation is likely to have adverse effects on political participation by Muslim women in France.

The Belgian constitution sets out the terms of a national 'organised secularism', which is comparatively more multicultural in nature and allows for the recognition of religious groups throughout Belgium. Nonetheless, current French secular norms and preference for assimilation are hypothesised to be increasingly influential in francophone Belgium (Kanmaz 2002, Mielants 2006, Saroglou and Mathijsen 2007). This argued influence is most apparent in Verviers, where in 2013 a French-style headscarf ban was introduced in schools (Verviers Conseil Communal 2013). It is my argument that the increase in the French-style 'combative' secular model in francophone Belgium will, over time, influence the normative treatment of Muslim women and their dress and subsequently this will have an adverse effect on Muslim women's political participation in francophone Belgium. Comparatively analysing the reported understanding and influence of secularism on Muslim women's dress and political participation in each case allows for assessment of these hypotheses, as well as providing insight into the nature of the barriers to Muslim women's political participation. Furthermore, comparatively studying the effects of the normative treatment of the headscarf and Muslim women's dress presents the opportunity to analyse potential barriers specific to Muslim women's political participation that are not faced by the wider population.

5.0.1 Chapter Structure

I begin with an overview of the objective specificities surrounding secularism and its influence on Muslim women's dress in France. I then go on to analyse French Muslim women's reported understandings of *laïcité* before discussing the extent to which the interviewees expressed that French secularism had constituted a barrier to their political participation. I then adopt the same

structure to assess the francophone Belgian model of secularism and its influence on the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress in Belgium. I continue to explore Muslim women's perceptions of Belgian secularism before presenting an analysis of the extent to which francophone Belgian Muslim women experience barriers to their political participation linked to the headscarf and secularism.

Since the Muslim women in both France and francophone Belgium described a range of principal barriers to their political participation beyond secularism and the headscarf, in the next section of the chapter I explore and compare these obstacles. The barriers cited in the two cases include racism, norms related to gender and encountering limited resources, such as time. The final section of the chapter concludes with a comparative analysis of the range of principal barriers highlighted by the Muslim women and reveals the influence of context-specific barriers and the subsequent management or coping strategies adopted by the interviewees to enable them to continue to participate in politics.

5.1 Secularism and Muslim Women's Dress

5.1.1 Secularism and Muslim Women's Dress in France

Secularism loosely translates to *laïcité* in French (Boussinesq 1994). However, *laïcité* incorporates a range of subtle and context-based meanings. To understand these I look back to the historical conception and legal implementation of secularism. First introduced in 1905 and formally known as the "Law concerning the separation of church and state" (Legifrance 1905), *laïcité* was inspired by French enlightenment philosophy. *Laïcité* sought to lessen the powers of the Catholic Church in France and bring about greater equality for French citizens regardless of their beliefs. The 1905 legal enshrinement of *laïcité* also meant that the state must be neutral and without religion. This means that the French state cannot officially recognise or fund any religious groups in France. The founding principles of secularism recall French ideals of egalitarianism, blindness to difference and neutrality. Given the focus on the position of the state, the initial conception of *laïcité* was intended to regulate French authorities rather than French citizens. This founding vision of secularism is commonly referred to as 'ideological *laïcité*' (Boussinesq 1994, Roy 2007).

In spite of its egalitarian and neutral basis, there is a recognised shift in the nature of French *laïcité*. Secularism in France is now more properly described as 'combative *laïcité*' (Roy 2007), or 'fundamentalist *laïcité*' (Haspelagh 2012). It is seen as a means of enforcing a "dogmatic privatisation of faith" in France (Charentenay 2010, Ramadan 2004), resulting in the removal of religion from the French public sphere. 'Combative *laïcité*' subsequently limits French citizens and their public expression of faith, rather than just regulating the role of the state in its affairs.

With the growing focus on Islam and Muslims, and their visible presence in France, particularly post 1980s, 'Combative *laïcité*' is argued to be disproportionately targeted towards Islam in France, thus resulting in the stigmatisation of French Muslims (Al-Saji 2010, Hargreaves 2007, Roy 2007). In his book *Secularism Confronts Islam* (2007), Roy describes the historical shift in secularism in France: "French *laïcité* is historically a matter of dispute between the republican state and the Catholic Church founded on anti-clericalism. It is thus a combative *laïcité* marked by verbal violence and anathema, which has occurred today in the polemics on Islam" (Roy, 2007, 18). Or, in her review of the way in which *laïcité* is implemented by the French state, Laachir (2008, 123) states that the primary objective of secularism in France today is to "contain, control and regulate Islam in the public sphere". The headscarf ban in schools presents an obvious example of the application of 'combative *laïcité*' and the ways that this has led to the specific regulation of public expression of Islam, and in particular, Muslim women.

Introduced in March 2004, the *Loi Stasi* is perhaps the most well-known secular-based legal measure that has affected Muslim women in France to date. Formally titled "The regulation, in line with secular principles, of symbols or clothing denoting religious affiliation in public schools, high schools and colleges", the 2004 law seeks to ban 'ostentatious' symbols of faith in French schools (Legifrance 2004). The ambiguity of 'ostentatious' and the nature of the law meant that it was subject to much controversy and criticism (Hargreaves 2007). It became clear that the law permitted symbols such as small crucifixes, the *kippah* or the North African cultural symbol the Hand of Fatima, whilst the headscarf was prohibited. This meant that young visibly Muslim girls in French schools were disproportionately affected by the secular-based law. Hargreaves (2007, 118) estimates that across France at the time of the implementation of the ban only 600 Muslim schoolgirls wore the headscarf. Of those, 200 removed the headscarf as a result of the pressure that they faced following the introduction of the new law. Whilst these estimates are small, given its focus on those who appear Muslim, this example demonstrates the adverse effects of 'combative' secularism on visibly Muslim women in France. Its legal enshrinement also represents an example of increasingly legitimised hostile discourse surrounding visibly Muslim women in France.

The law was preceded and equally followed by years of French 'headscarf affairs', dating as far back as 1989. In that year, in Creil, three French Muslim schoolgirls were expelled from their school since it was argued that their headscarves were contrary to *laïcité* (Baubérot 2004, Hargreaves 2007). The '*Loi Stasi*' did not signify the end of headscarf controversies in France. Instead the law has permitted and legitimised calls for its extension beyond public schools, in cases such as the

'Baby Loup' affair¹⁵, to the ongoing calls for mothers accompanying their children to schools to be banned from wearing the headscarf and the more recent calls in the summer of 2013 for its extended application to French universities. Based on these examples, it appears that although the ban initially directly targets young French visibly Muslim schoolgirls it has subsequently contributed to normalising the 'othering' of visibly Muslim women generally in France. This normalisation also means that calls for its extension beyond the classroom are not negatively perceived by wider society. Specifically considering the example of the 2004 law and its secular basis demonstrates the application of 'combative *laïcité*' and its subsequent negative effects on the wider discourse surrounding visibly Muslim women generally in France.

The legislated ban of the Islamic headscarf in schools and the ongoing associated controversies construct the Islamic headscarf as anti-secular, and for some therefore anti-French (Charentenay 2010, Motha 2007, Wallach-Scott 2007). Additionally, the law and the surrounding debates contribute to the view of the headscarf as symbolic of Muslim women's oppression (Amara 2004, Yazbeck Haddad 2007). For example, Amara (2004) in her book *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* which details both her personal experiences and criticisms, has a subsection titled *The Veil, A symbol of female oppression*, in which she states: "Remember that the headscarf is above all a tool of oppression, of alienation, of discrimination, an instrument of power of a man over a woman. It is as though it is coincidental that it is not men who wear the headscarf" (Amara, 2004, 79). Although this excerpt is not taken from an academic source, when considering the roles previously occupied by Amara, including former lead of the organisation *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* and former government minister and that Amara self-identifies as a Muslim, it becomes apparent that her views have power and influence in the French popular and political spheres. Based on her arguments, by extension we see how Muslim women's dress is framed as anti-feminist, whilst also compounding Orientalist perceptions of Muslim males as oppressors and thus implying Muslim women's passivity and submissive nature. These views further contribute to the 'othering' of visibly Muslim women in France.

Beyond the 2004 law, the headscarf presents further anti-feminist complications in French society, where open displays of sexuality and femininity are correlated with sexual freedom (Fayard and Rocheron 2009, Wallach-Scott 2007). In her book *Hijab and the Republic* Winter (2008) discusses the headscarf in France at length through the critical consideration of the numerous headscarf affairs in France, French secularism and feminism in relationship to the French headscarf debates.

¹⁵ The *Baby Loup* affair is a well-known and recent French controversy which began in 2008, whereby a French Muslim woman, Fatima Afif, lost her job in a nursery, on the grounds of her wearing the headscarf. The pre-school determined that her wearing the headscarf was both against the pre-school's policy and also against French secular values. In 2013 a court ruled in her favour stating that since the nursery was private, the organisation had discriminated against Ms Afif on the grounds of her faith. However, this ruling was subsequently overturned in 2014.

Winter (2008, 249) posits that the headscarf is both asexualising, since it marks visibly Muslim women as “off-limits”, and simultaneously the headscarf contributes to the popular view of visibly Muslim women as hyper-sexualised given that they are inaccessible, or put alternatively the women are seen as forbidden and this therefore increases their desirability. Whilst these arguments may initially appear contradictory, I would suggest they contribute to demonstrating the numerous meanings and interpretations attached to Muslim women’s dress. Furthermore, these observations indicate that visibly Muslim women do not conform to traditional norms surrounding sexuality and dress in France, thus further emphasising their alterity.

In addition to being linked to sexual oppression and difference, the headscarf is also perceived to be symbolic of Islamic extremism (Amara 2004, Carland 2011, Edmunds 2011, Wallach-Scott 2007, Zemni 2006). For example Amara (2004, 47-49) details what she considers to be the three types of Muslim women who wear the headscarf in France; the third of which she describes as “soldiers of green fascism”. These women, she suggests, are often well educated and claim to wear the headscarf as a manifestation of their emancipation, yet their seemingly extreme ideals represent a serious threat to French democracy. Understanding these claims alongside the view that Muslim women who wear the headscarf need to be saved from male dominance demonstrate the way in which visibly Muslim women are simultaneously seen as oppressed and as a source of threat. In addition to being linked to the threat of extremism, Muslim women’s visibility in France is also seen to constitute a threat to French secular values. The framing of visibly Muslim women as anti-French, anti-secular, anti-feminist, oppressed and symbolic of Islamic extremism constructs Muslim women as outsiders to French society on multiple levels. The numerous ways in which Muslim women are ‘othered’ mean that Muslim women’s normalised alterity is not easily challenged, this subsequently contributes to maintaining Muslim women’s status as ‘other’ in French society.

The more recent law entailing the “prohibition of the concealment of one’s face in public spaces” (Legifrance 2010) or the ‘*Loi anti-niqab*’¹⁶ was introduced on 11th April 2011 throughout France. The ban limits the face veil across all French public spaces. Like the 2004 law, the *Loi anti-niqab* is primarily based on the protection and maintenance of French secular principles (Haspelagh 2012) and to a lesser extent national security and the protection of oppressed Muslim women. After receiving almost unanimous parliamentary support (Haspelagh 2012), the ban was introduced. This was in spite of estimates that only 300 French Muslim women were thought to wear the *niqab* (BBC 2011). This figure is remarkably low, especially when we consider that French Muslims are estimated to make up 8% of the wider French national population (Pew Forum 2009) . Nonetheless

¹⁶ Although the law was commonly referred to as the *Loi anti-niqab* by many, the French government, and those in agreement with the state position, insisted that the law did not specifically target Muslim women who wore the face veil, rather it applied to all who wore clothing that covered their face in a public space.

despite these low estimates, the law and the assumptions it carries contribute to further emphasising the alterity of visibly Muslim women in France.

Those wearing the veil in public are either liable to pay a fine of up to €150, to take French citizenship classes or both. These penalties frame Muslim women as outsiders to France who lack awareness of French values. Furthermore, under article two of the law, those found to be forcing women to wear the veil can face up to two years' imprisonment and a fine of up to €60,000 (Moniteur 2011). This arguably assumes that Muslim women who wear the *niqab* are forced to do so. Thus the terms of the *Loi anti-niqab* recall the Spivakian (1988, 93) argument of the "white men saving brown women from brown men", where in this case the French lawmakers are the white men inspired by secularism, the brown women are veiled Muslim women and the brown men are those forcing women to cover. This subsequently compounds and normalises views of Muslim women as oppressed and emphasises their 'otherness', whilst also stigmatising Muslim males. Attempts to contest and overturn the French veil ban in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) have not been upheld (ECHR 2014), meaning that the veil ban is still in operation and that the ban has effectively and indirectly been legitimised by the ECHR.

In spite of their obvious differences, in France both the headscarf and veil are referred to as the *voile* therefore indicating a conflation of terms. This suggests that as a result stereotypes associated with each distinct type of Muslim women's dress are amalgamated in French and other francophone contexts. For example this means that connotations that emerge out of the consideration of the two secular-based laws described above, such as the veil being symbolic of orientalist stereotypes, Muslim women's oppression and limited knowledge of French values, or the headscarf as representative of anti-feminism, anti-'Frenchness' and anti-secularism, become equally associated with the two distinct forms of Muslim women's dress. Nonetheless, not all French Muslim women wear the veil or the headscarf in daily life in the public sphere. Instead Muslim women's dress is equally debated by Muslim women themselves (Amara 2004). This along with my previously outlined observations related to secularism and the normalised preconceptions surrounding Muslim women's dress therefore imply that specifically visibly Muslim women, rather than Muslim women generally are subject to stigmatisation. This subsequently means that visibly Muslim women will encounter more barriers to participation than those who do not outwardly appear Muslim. However, whilst a review of literature and French laws and norms suggest differences in Muslim women's political experiences, only an in-depth consideration of Muslim women's reports can determine the extent to which this is the case.

5.1.2.1 Perceived Meaning of *Laïcité* in France

In this section I explore the way in which the French Muslim women who participate in politics perceive and understand *laïcité*, and report *laïcité* as a barrier to their political careers. The

interviewees typically expressed that they believed that there are two distinct visions of secularism in France; the first vision stems from the perceived meaning of *laïcité* and secondly the perceived current implementation of *laïcité*.

When asked to describe what *laïcité* meant to them personally, the majority of the respondents in the French case began by discussing their personal understanding in reference to the 1905 law. For example:

For me the spirit of *laïcité* is 1905. I mean the state is neutral and therefore doesn't have a religion, it's not atheist, nor is it a religious believer. But it [the state] specifically allows for a coexistence of all, religious believers and non-believers and it guarantees freedom of faith. That is *laïcité*. (21)

Other interviewees added: "Personally I think, and historically in France *laïcité* is the protection of all religions. We [the citizens] have a right to faith and the state doesn't have a religion." (26)

Or alternatively:

Laïcité is defined by the 1905 law, meaning that the state has no religion, citizens should come as they are – with their religions, with their atheism. There you go that's *laïcité*. It is something that allows people to live together, meaning that each individual can freely express themselves, whether that is through their clothing or what they say, and everything, and religiously, everything! That's *laïcité*. For me it is something that is inclusive, it doesn't exclude. It [*laïcité*] is not atheism. (24)

As these excerpts show for the French Muslim women interviewed *laïcité* is supposed to entail regulation of the state, rather than the control of French people. It is also meant to guarantee citizen's freedom of expression. Additionally, they see *laïcité* as a tool for the implementation of egalitarianism and social cohesion. The Muslim women interviewed see the prohibition of dress in the name of secularism as contrary to their personal understanding of *laïcité*.

Consistent with the literature, the women interviewed also highlighted the perceived changing nature of *laïcité* in France. For the respondents this change was at odds with their personal understanding of French secularism. For example:

Today the concept of *laïcité* has been completely changed and transformed to being a prohibition of practicing religion...They [the state] are in the process of changing it [*laïcité*]. They are making it devoid of its 1905 origins... (21)

Or:

Personally, at its very root and the true meaning of the term it is a good thing. Fundamentally it is a concept for freedom and equality. Freedom to choose your own religious practices and beliefs without being persecuted. But nowadays the concept of *laïcité* has been completely changed and transformed into a prohibition of the public practice of religion. That in its essence is not about freedom, in fact it is very much the contrary. (29)

Interviewees felt that *laïcité* was a “racist tool” nowadays (25), which was used against Muslim women: “We [anti-headscarf ban association] foregrounded the fact that feminism and *laïcité* were being instrumentalised against the [Muslim school] girls.” (21)

Therefore rather than being guardian of neutrality the French state was perceived as the author of the negative change in *laïcité*. Some interviewees tried to explain this transformation of *laïcité*:

The problem in France is that French *laïcité* was constructed in opposition to the power of the Catholic Church, because at that time it was almost entirely exclusive and therefore they [the French people] fought against the power of the Church. On seeing the arrival of the headscarf they thought they were going to face this situation once again with non-religious society on one side... against the Muslim religion. Because they are afraid that the Muslim religion may take all the power. It is a fear. It is a fantasy, because on the one hand we are not numerous enough and secondly that is not the objective of Muslims... (26)

The examples above also touch on the notion that Muslims are perceived as a source of threat, as highlighted earlier in this chapter and echo existing theory that the current implementation of *laïcité* was now directed towards Muslims and Islam (Al-Saji 2010, Hargreaves 2007, Laachir 2008, Ramadan 2004, Roy 2007). This emphasises the way in which current secular practices and norms in France leave Muslim women feeling victimised and unfairly targeted. These examples also highlight the two competing views of secularism as understood by the interviewees, as summarised by one woman:

I think that in France there are two visions of secularism; that which is used by fundamentalists, that is to say it is a means of refusal [of Muslims] and for me [the alternative understanding] which is to make society able to accept its own plurality. (4)

Based on the two distinct perceptions of secularism expressed, I conclude French Muslim women in this study more closely identify with the founding principles, or ‘ideological *laïcité*’ (Roy 2007) rather than current ‘combative’ secularism. This is linked to ‘ideological’ secularism better fitting with, allowing and protecting their plural identities as both French and Muslim women. The right to and protection of religious belief guarantees their freedom to believe in and practice Islam. ‘Ideological’ secularism also stresses the importance of inclusion, social cohesion and coexistence regardless of religious difference and associated religious dress. This therefore allows their participation in French society, in spite of their religious difference. However, the women articulated that their preferred understanding is not the dominant or normative view in France today.

Generally across the sample when asked to give a particular instance of where they had seen *laïcité* becoming ‘combative’ and used as a discriminatory tool. The interviewees typically described instances where they felt it had been used to justify the discrimination of religious practice and to target specific religious groups in France. These instances inform and aid our understanding of why as religious women, many Muslim women in France are personally left feeling victimised by

‘combative’ secularism. For example: “The implementation of French law, the implementation of *laïcité* etc. is such that has it made it difficult to practice one’s religion.” (1)

Interviewees were generally in unanimous agreement that *laïcité* in France today specifically discriminated French Muslim communities. A respondent also discussed how religious groups other than Muslims had been adversely affected by the current state interpretation and implementation of *laïcité*: “The interpretation of *laïcité* today imposes total neutrality. It restricts people, like the Sikhs for example...” (26)

The understanding of the negative implications of *laïcité* went beyond just perceiving Muslims as victims of secularism, thus highlighting Muslim women’s wider understandings of the anti-faith implications of *laïcité*. McGoldrick (2006) points out that Sikhs who wear the turban have also been negatively affected by current secular measures. With an estimated population of between 7,000 and 15,000 (McGoldrick 2006, Moliner 2011) Sikhs make up a remarkably small proportion of the wider French population. With the implementation of the 2004 law the French government had apparently forgotten the turban wearing Sikhs in France and in spite of calls for the turban not to be classed as an ostentatious symbol of faith since Sikhism is not a proselytising faith and therefore not anti-secular (McGoldrick 2006), three young Sikh boys were expelled from their school in Bobigny for wearing the Sikh turban to school. Nonetheless, I would argue that the influence of French secularism on French Sikhs remains relatively small in comparison to the negative effects of secularism and the 2004 law on visibly Muslim women in France. This argument is reflected in the sentiments put forward by the interviewees, for example: “Personally, I think that the 15th March 2004 law, is an obvious example of the racist nature of *laïcité*, where the law seeks to deny girls who wear the headscarf an education...” (21)

Or:

Honestly when I hear them talk about *laïcité* on the television, on the radio, I am well aware, even before they develop the topic of conversation, I know perfectly well who the debate is about... Muslims! (25)

Whilst another adds: “The principal victims of it [French secularism today] are Muslim women” (23)

Although Muslim women recognise the generalised anti-faith stance comprised within ‘combative’ secularism, these examples demonstrate that ‘combative’ secularism has also specifically left Muslim women feeling unfairly targeted and ‘othered’.

To summarise interviewee responses, two distinct visions of *laïcité* are perceived and presented in the table below:

Table 5.1 French Muslim Women’s Perceptions of Secularism

Perceived Meaning of <i>Laïcité</i>	Perceived Current Implementation of <i>Laïcité</i>
'Ideological <i>laïcité</i> '	'Combative <i>laïcité</i> '
Based on the 1905 law	At odds with the 1905 law
Separation of Church and state	State enacting change and transformation
State as without religion and therefore neutral	State regulates some elements of religious practice – particularly dress
Citizens have the right to faith	Secularism as a 'racist tool' which discriminates the practice of faith
Means of cohesion, inclusion and co-existence	Removal of faith in the French public sphere
State does not limit any form of practice of faith	Negative effects on those who practise religion particularly Muslim women
Equal treatment of all	Muslim women left feeling victimised
Muslims are part of French society	Fear and 'othering' of Muslims

As the table summarises those interviewed believe that *laïcité* should be based on the 1905 law; it separates church and state, ensures that the state is non-religious, guarantees equal treatment and freedom of faith for all, and does not limit its practice. Conversely, they perceive the current implementation of *laïcité* as changed by the state, and oppositional to the foundations of *laïcité*. It is seen as racist and central to the stigmatisation of Muslims and Muslim women in particular. Respondents described legal measures and debates in popular culture and the ways that these contribute to this perception. Overall Muslim women's perceptions of secularism, as it is currently interpreted and practiced in France are characterised by negativity and victimhood.

5.1.2.2 The Headscarf as a Barrier to Political Participation in France

Perhaps unsurprisingly analysis reveals that almost unanimously the French interviewees reported that the current implementation of 'combative' secularism and its treatment of Muslim women's dress had contributed to hindering Muslim women's participation in French politics. This perception was expressed across the sample. This meant that Muslim women who continually wore the headscarf, those who occasionally wore the headscarf and also those who never wore the headscarf stated that appearing visibly Muslim limits political participation. For example: "The current interpretation of *laïcité* restricts political participation [by Muslim women]" (21). Similarly: "The way in which France applies *laïcité* today means that there are lots of women with pertinent political aspirations who want to participate in politics... and they can't" (27).

Alternatively: "Personally, I think that it [the headscarf] obstructs engagement in political parties." (24) Or: "The headscarf, it is not a just a hindrance, clearly it is a barricade." ... "Today, it is

impossible that a woman who wears the headscarf might have a seat in the National Assembly.”

(1) This interviewee felt so strongly about the barriers posed by that headscarf in France, she also states: “In fact, in a country like France, headscarf wearing women have to fight for rights that make up fundamental rights. It is a huge undertaking!” Likewise, she went beyond discussing her political engagement to describe the normative state and public positions and said that in France there was simply “a hatred of the headscarf” (25).

Returning to political participation, the interviewee above notes: “You will never see a headscarf wearing women in the National Assembly. It is now impossible. Even among the most progressive parties.” (25) She adds: “The headscarf halts political participation [by Muslim women who wear it]” (25)

This view was also present among those who did not wear the headscarf: “For me, it is very clear that for Muslim women who wear the headscarf, that [the headscarf] has become the obstacle.” (4) Later during the interview that same interviewee stresses: “Personally, I think that it is clear that Muslim women who wear the headscarf, the barrier stems from the headscarf.” (4) Or, “The headscarf results in exclusion... they [women who wear the headscarf] won’t be accepted here.” (27)

Four of the eleven French interviewees, including women who had not directly faced barriers, related to the headscarf during their participation. The interviewees mentioned the highly mediated case of Ilham Moussaïd. Moussaïd’s experiences emphasised and evidenced their arguments that the headscarf constituted an obstacle to Muslim women’s participation in French politics. In 2010, Moussaïd stood as a candidate for the French far left party, the *Nouveau Parti Anti-Capitaliste* (NPA), in the Vaucluse communal elections. Following the announcement of her candidacy, Moussaïd was subject to intense media and political scrutiny on the grounds of her headscarf. The party and its leader, Olivier Besancenot, were also heavily criticised since they allowed her inclusion and her visibly Muslim presence was deemed to be contrary to French secular and feminist principles. This well-known example demonstrates how in the political arena the headscarf is framed as anti-secular and anti-feminist and therefore Muslim women’s political presence is delegitimised and ultimately limited. An interviewee described Moussaïd’s actions, namely her standing as a candidate whilst wearing the headscarf, as “career suicide.” (1) Furthermore the framing of the headscarf as anti-secular and anti-feminist is consistent with the general construction of the headscarf as discussed in the wider literature (Amara 2004, Charentenay 2010, Fayard and Rocheron 2009, Motha 2007, Wallach-Scott 2007, Winter 2008, Yazbeck Haddad 2007), meaning that these perceptions persist in the French political sphere as well as in society generally.

5.1.2.3 Managing the Headscarf Barrier

Having established that the Muslim women interviewed felt that the headscarf posed a barrier to Muslim women's participation in French politics, my analysis reveals that the interviewees adopt a range of methods that enable them to cope with this barrier. These strategies fall into three distinct categories. Firstly, the women manage this barrier by not wearing the headscarf generally:

For me, it is obvious that Muslim women who wear the headscarf, that [the headscarf] is the obstacle... the headscarf has really become a challenge... so, I think not wearing the headscarf has helped me (4)

In spite of facing other barriers to her political participation, the elected representative cited above recognises that given current normative attitudes towards visible Muslim women's dress, not wearing the headscarf has allowed for the advancement of her political career. Additionally, the high-ranking role of this interviewee and others who adopted this coping strategy suggest that not being visibly identifiable as a Muslim means that a wider range of opportunities, as highlighted in Chapter Four, remain open to Muslim women. Interviewees who fell into this category included women who had no interest in wearing the headscarf and also those who were interested in wearing the headscarf but had not done so due to societal pressures specific to the French context.

Secondly, rather than moderating their outward Muslim appearance a number of the interviewees described altering the nature of their political participation:

When I look back to my French political engagement, I had been so deeply disappointed that I just decided, like OK, don't waste your time. You will have to make so many concessions to please, you know like, for the management or for the leadership of these groups in order to get a position, to be effective. Especially because I was religiously quite practicing, I was wearing a hijab and I was not willing to make any concessions on that side. So I then tried to participate at the French society level. (1)

On the grounds of the perceived compromises that she would have to make, such as removing her headscarf, in order to be politically successful, this interviewee chose to focus on non-state rather than state level political participation. Although this strategy arises as a result of personal choice combined with norms surrounding Muslim women's dress in France, the case illustrates the specific ways in which the headscarf constitutes a barrier to Muslim women's state level engagement and ultimately shapes the nature of their political participation.

However, my analysis reveals that the headscarf does not solely limit Muslim women's political participation at the state level, but is also influential in non-state level politics. For example:

... in the associations in which I participate there are Muslims and non-Muslims who address the question of Islam and Islamophobia... but it depends on the association... there is an organisation that clearly states that they don't accept Muslim women who wear the headscarf. (24)

Similarly: "And that [headscarf discrimination in some non-state level organisations] is how I became more involved in Muslim organisations." (1)

The barriers posed by the discriminatory treatment of the headscarf in associations means those who wish to continue to wear the headscarf are excluded from formal politics and also some associations. Instead these women must find spaces sympathetic to Muslim women and their political concerns or alternatively they only participate in Muslim organisations. These examples demonstrate that the negative influence of secularism on the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress has also permeated non-state level political organisations and subsequently this further limits participation. This also highlights the increasing normalisation and acceptability of the discrimination against visibly Muslim women in French society.

However their exclusion from non-state level associations should be especially surprising for multiple reasons. Firstly the voluntary and therefore, in this case, non-paid nature of Muslim women's engagement at the non-state level should mean that it is difficult to exclude Muslim women's participation. Secondly, whilst the exclusion of visibly Muslim women at the state level can be explained by secular norms governing the neutrality and non-visibility of faith of state officials, those who participate at the non-state level do not represent the French state and therefore under secular norms, the women should not have to conceal their faith. Instead I would argue that the examples cited above further emphasise the normalisation of hostility towards visibly Muslim women, so much so that such norms have permeated non-state level organisations. Furthermore, these cases indicate that such discriminatory practices and attitudes towards the headscarf also shape non-state level participation by visibly Muslim women in France.

Finally, two of the eleven French interviewees continued to participate in state and non-state level politics while managing their outward Muslim appearance during their political commitments, the interviewee cited below discussed the matter at length during our meeting:

It is necessary to manage the headscarf... I have to take it off. So, I think that if I was able to wear it [the headscarf] I would have progressed more and a quicker rate quicker... I can attend political meetings, I have to take off my headscarf. (26)

She adds:

Because of *laïcité*, when we are in power, we have an obligation to be neutral, for them, this means neutrality of clothing. So I manage it, I don't wear a headscarf I cover my hair with something, with a hat, with a beret, something culturally French. (26)

Whilst the headscarf has previously been an obstacle and slowed her progress, rather than entirely moderating her appearance or the nature of political participation, this interviewee recognises and combines the demands of 'combative' *laïcité* and French norms along with perceived Islamic obligation and opts to cover her hair with "something culturally French." The stereotypically French nature of the beret makes it difficult for her political colleagues to criticise her head-covering. Although only a minority of the sample adopted such measures, this final strategy both

presents a novel and alternative view of Muslim women's responses to the limitations posed by 'combative' secularism and its influence on their dress.

5.1.2.4 "The Invisible Headscarf"

In addition to the barriers to political participation posed by visible Muslim identity, my fieldwork also revealed that expressing support for Muslim women's rights to cover also poses barriers to Muslim women's participation. The respondent below discusses this through highlighting her personal experience during parliamentary debates that took place prior to the implementation of the *Loi Stasi*. She felt that she was stopped from voicing her support for the girls who would be affected by the introduction of the law. She explains the prejudice she faced after this incident: "I felt to a certain extent like I was already wearing an invisible headscarf... in fact in their [other members of parliament] minds they saw me as nothing but a headscarf." (28)

In spite of not being visibly Muslim, supporting the rights of those who wear the headscarf creates barriers to participation and leaves those who speak out feeling victimised in a similar way to those who are visibly Muslim. In the same way Baubérot (2012) writes regarding the debate surrounding Islam in France, that the incontestability of French secularism silences criticism of measures justified by *laïcité*. This particular example demonstrates how the secular basis of hostility towards Muslim women's dress means that criticism of French normative attitudes towards the headscarf is silenced. Consequently, Muslim women who support the right of others to wear the headscarf are equally silenced in their political careers and as a result are left feeling 'othered' in a similar way to those who appear visibly Muslim. I previously highlighted that much of the literature focuses on visibly Muslim women and the adverse effects of the secular, popular and political discourses faced by these women (Amara 2004, Carland 2011, Charentenay 2010, Edmunds 2011, Fayard and Rocheron 2009, Joppke 2009, Motha 2007, Wallach-Scott 2007, Winter 2008, Yazbeck Haddad 2007), however this literature does not tend to discuss the negative impact of these stereotypes on those who do not cover, but instead support the rights of others. Therefore, the example above presents a novel insight into the effects of French anti-headscarf attitudes on Muslim women generally as well as highlighting how this discourse also negatively effects political participation by non-visibly Muslim women.

5.1.2.5 Secularism, Muslim Women's Dress and Political Participation in France: Conclusions

This section of the chapter highlighted that Muslim women perceive two distinct visions of French secularism. Firstly they argued that the state was meant to be neutral, ensure freedom of faith for French citizens, guarantee equality and promote social cohesion of all regardless of belief. Muslim women more closely identified with this vision of secularism, I argued that this was because this

interpretation protected their rights as French Muslim women. This observation also explains why French Muslim women sometimes self-identify as secular.

However, interviewees also alluded to the idea that ‘combative *laïcité*’ was now the norm in France. It was seen as a model of secularism that is removed from the founding ideological secular principles, central to the limitation of the practice of faith in French public spaces and specifically targets Muslim women. This personal view articulated by the Muslim women is consistent with existing academic observations in the wider field (Baubérot 2004, Boussinesq 1994, Ramadan 2004, Roy 2007)

The French Muslim interviewees almost unanimously agreed that the normative treatment of the headscarf constituted a barrier to Muslim women’s participation in French politics. However, my analysis highlighted that French Muslim women adopt strategies that enable them to tackle this barrier and ultimately continue to participate in French politics at some level. This finding echoes those of Al Momani et al. (2010) who based on their empirical study of Muslim elected representatives found that Australian Muslims who participate in politics are particularly resilient and find means of participating in state level politics in spite of barriers they encounter.

Interviewees either did not wear the headscarf and as a result were able to participate at various levels of French politics, or alternatively some continued to wear the headscarf in French public spaces and were consequently forced to alter the nature of their participation. Wearing the headscarf meant that women were excluded from state level politics and associations that were either not predominantly Muslim or sympathetic to the issues faced by Muslims in France. Finally two of the interviewees continued to participate in a range of political activities, but adopted French cultural modes of covering their hair. I conclude that this management strategy demonstrates Muslim women’s awareness and management of ‘combative’ secular demands, French cultural norms and their perceived religious duties, as well as highlighting the diversity of Muslim women, in terms of outward ‘Muslim appearance’, who participate in French politics. Furthermore, this category also emphasises Muslim women’s autonomy, integration in French society and ability to select the outward self-presentation as per the situational demands. This notion of selective self-representation recalls Goffman (1956) who writes: “Thus when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society.”

Therefore Muslim women who participate in politics and adopt the final coping strategy demonstrate self-presentation that is concordant with political and secular anti-headscarf norms. Additionally, the final strategy echoes the ‘bandana *hijab*’ adopted by French Muslim schoolgirls during the controversy surrounding the implementation of the 2004 ban, whereby the young French Muslim women seemingly attempted to adopt less conspicuous means of covering their

hair (Lévy et al. 2004, Winter 2008). Nonetheless, at this stage in the analysis it is clear that as hypothesised the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress poses barriers to, and also shapes that nature of Muslim women's participation in French politics.

5.1.2 Secularism and Muslim Women's Dress in Belgium

The Belgian national constitution outlines the national model of secularism (Constitution 2012). Similar to the French 1905 law, articles 19 and 20 of the Constitution ensure freedom of and from faith for all in Belgium, but unlike in France the freedom to practise faith extends to the public sphere and beyond public places of worship. In theory this should make it difficult for a French-style school headscarf or national veil ban based on secular principles to be introduced in Belgium.

There is no official separation of church and state in Belgium. Instead religious groups are officially recognised by the state. Also religious clergy, chaplains, places of worship and school-based religious education teachers are funded by the state. Recognised religions include Catholicism, Anglicanism, Protestantism, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism and Islam, and additionally secular beliefs (Coenen 2002, Kanmaz 2002). Recognition of faith is dependent on the number of Belgian followers of the religion in question, length of religious establishment in Belgium and an organised religious structure. In this respect the Belgian model differs significantly from French model of *laïcité*.

Islam has officially been recognised in Belgium since 1974; however, it was not until 1998 that the EMB was founded. The EMB is comprised of 17 elected Flemish members and 17 elected francophone representatives (Kanzmaz 2002). It represents Islam at the state level and is responsible for the 50 appointed imams in the 300 registered Belgian mosques and also oversees the appointment and monitoring of Islamic religious education teachers in Belgian schools as guaranteed by article 24.1 of the Constitution, of which there are currently 1500. The EMB is also responsible for the 30 appointed Muslim chaplains across Belgium.

The presence of state-funded religious education teachers throughout Belgian state schools arguably demonstrates the role of faith in Belgian schooling. Since faith is part of Belgian education it is perhaps unsurprising that unlike France there is no national prohibition of headscarves in schools (Shadid and Van Koningsveld 2005). Instead the decision to allow the headscarf typically lies with individual schools and regions. Whilst the headscarf is often not permitted in physical education lessons on the grounds of health and safety (Mielants 2006, Shadid and Van Koningsveld 2005), Verviers is the only area in francophone Belgium to operate a complete French-style ban on headscarves in schools. The prohibition is detailed in the 2013 – 2018 mandate, the General Political Declaration of the Verviers Municipality. Under section 7b it states that schools must:

Favour inter-cultural dialogue, reinforce critical development, particularly in the field of religious and non-confessional moral education, and to **prohibit students' ostentatious faith symbols** with the view to instil, at the heart of schools, a model of education that entails openness and autonomy¹⁷.

Given its relative recentness, there is scant legal and academic literature detailing the consequences of the Verviers ban. Based on my experience and interactions in the field, I would argue that like in France, “ostentatious” is used to signify the headscarf, thus meaning that young Muslim schoolgirls are unfairly targeted by the ban in Verviers. The mention of “openness and autonomy” implies that the headscarf, or ostentatious faith symbols generally, indicate the contrary, thus ‘othering’ those with visible faith identity. Furthermore, since my informal interactions in the field indicate that the ban is directed towards visibly Muslim schoolgirls, these terms imply intolerance and the oppression towards Muslim girls who wear the headscarf, subsequently constructing visibly Muslim women as outsiders to Belgian society and its values. However, unlike the French headscarf ban the Verviers ban does not carry the same connotations of anti-feminism or postcolonial memories.

Although within the ruling there is no official mention of secularism, drawing on my fieldwork and my general interactions with interviewees, I would argue this ban indicates a concrete example of a move towards French ‘combative’ secularism in Belgium. Therefore, this interpretation echoes the wider literature that posits the increasing influence of French secularism on francophone Belgium (Kanmaz 2002, Mielants 2006). Although the ban in Verviers arguably ‘others’ visibly Muslim female students, at present the ban remains a minority position and is not reflective of wider francophone Belgium. Thus perhaps it is more appropriate to argue the increasing influence of the French model on selected areas of francophone Belgium rather than the whole of the region. Although it remains to be seen, this ban has the potential to serve as precedent for other school headscarf bans in francophone Belgium. The ban might also contribute to legitimising and normalising the ‘othering’ and discrimination of visibly Muslim women in francophone Belgian society.

After receiving almost unanimous political support (Brems et al. 2012, Haspelagh 2012) the “Law concerning the wearing of all clothing that completely or partially conceals the face” (Legifrance 2010), or niqab ban, was introduced in Belgium on 1st June 2011. The legal prohibition of the ban was implemented in spite of estimates that only 30 Muslim women wore the veil across Belgium (BBC 2011). These low figures potentially emerge given the preceding region-specific face covering bans. Under the national law of 2011 those found covering their face are subject to either a fine of between €15 and €25, or to imprisonment of between one to seven days (Moniteur 2011, Haspelagh 2012). This differs significantly from the €150 fine and obligation to take citizenship

¹⁷ Translation and emphasis my own.

classes in France. Furthermore, the Belgian law does not mention any punishment for those found to be forcing another individual to cover their face. Therefore, the veil ban does not directly imply 'anti-Belgianess', nor assume a Muslim male patriarchy is at work to enforce Muslim women's oppression. Instead the risk of imprisonment constructs and emphasises veil wearing as a criminal action.

In addition to the level of fines and the implied suggestion of each ban, the Belgian ban differs from the French equivalent in two further distinct ways. Firstly, the ban in Belgium was not an entirely new phenomenon, since at the regional level there were already numerous face-covering bans in place (Haspelagh 2012). Secondly, unlike the French ban which is primarily centred on notions of secularism, the Belgian ban is based on national security, or the idea that individual's faces should be visible to ensure the safety of all (Haspelagh 2012). Haspelagh (2012, 26) describes this as a "subjective safety", whereby individuals in society are more likely to feel safe and comfortable when they are able to see other's faces, or "objective safety" whereby face visibility lessens anonymity in any criminal activity. Although superficially both bans appear similar, closer inspection demonstrates the effects of national secular discourses and their influence on the normative approaches to Muslim women's dress, with 'combative' *laïcité* in France having comparatively more negative effects than 'organised secularism' in Belgium, arguably partly due to the strict privatisation of faith it enforces. Furthermore, in spite of suggestions that French secularism is increasingly influential in francophone Belgium, analysing constitutional guarantees, formal legal measures and the way in which these shape the discourse surrounding visibly Muslim women indicates that the adverse effects of secularism on the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress are comparatively more pronounced and complex in France than in francophone Belgium. However, the ban on headscarves in schools, in Verviers, indicates that specific areas of Wallonia may be increasingly moving towards the French model. This regional disparity emerges given that the Belgian state is not highly centralised (Deschouwer 2009).

5.1.3.1 Perceptions of Secularism

When discussing secularism the francophone Belgian Muslim women began by mentioning 'philosophical *laïcité*'. This has two key features; firstly it incorporates and emphasises state neutrality, rather than a French-style separation of church and state: "Okay, erm, it's true that Belgian *laïcité* is similar to French *laïcité*, [but] I mean in Belgium I would be more likely to talk about neutrality." (2)

Or:

Laïcité, that [its meaning] depends on the definition. In fact in Belgium, we talk about neutrality more than secularism. In Belgium, we recognise French secularism, we recognise that 'cult', but we are neutral. (2)

Secondly Belgian 'philosophical' secularism entails: "... the acceptance of all differences, whatever they might be." (20)

Or: "It is accepting others as they are with respect and tolerance and also accepting the way they live." (18)

The 'philosophical' secularism articulated by the interviewees reflects the current constitutionally enshrined Belgian tradition of recognising diverse faith groups. The understanding of secularism put forward by the Muslim women also reflects Belgian traditions of multiculturalism and acceptance of Belgium's diverse cultures and religions, inspired by the neighbouring Dutch multicultural model (Coene and Longman 2008b, Haspelagh 2012, Koutroubas, Vloeberghs, and Yanasmayan 2009, Lettinga and Saharso 2012, Mielants 2006, Severs 2010, Zemni 2006). These perceptions relate to the current interpretations and practice of secularism in Belgium. Conversely, although the French interviewees discussed similar notions of tolerance and inclusion, these ideas related to their perception of what secularism ought to be rather than what it currently is in France, whilst the views articulated in Belgium relate to current Belgian secular norms. Therefore, here we see a key difference in the secular models in each case and Muslim women's relationships with these models.

The francophone Belgian interviewees stated that Belgian secularism was in accordance with their personal opinions and religious beliefs:

Personally I don't see any disadvantages. I am in Europe, when secularism is used well it allows... it should allow everybody to contribute to society, without being labelled as 'non-integrated' etc. For me, *laïcité* is completely compatible with Islam... (2)

Or, another interviewee stated that secularism was compatible with her religious beliefs, since in practice it meant that "everyone is free to live their lives, and religious practices, as they want to." (12)

Similarly: "Here in Belgium secularism doesn't really exist, we have neutrality, but the French way [of interpreting and practicing *laïcité*, well... (laughs)" (14)

Or finally, "*Laïcité*? Well that depends on the definition. In fact in Belgium we talk about neutrality more than secularism. In Belgium we recognise that in France it is a bit of cult. No, we are neutral." (13)

I would suggest that the perceived current tolerant and accepting nature of Belgian secularism facilitates Muslim women's open articulation of the compatibility of Islam with secular values, whilst the perceived hostile and discriminatory nature of secularism in France today meant that French interviewees did not cite the compatibility of French 'combative' *laïcité* with their Islamic values. Furthermore the compatibility of secularism with Islam as expressed in Belgium

demonstrates the way in which Belgian Muslim interviewees are comparatively able to more readily reconcile their Belgian and Muslim identities.

In addition, in Belgium a sixth of all respondents described the 'political' arm of Belgian secularism. This related to the recognition of religious diversity in Belgium and subsequently citizen's rights to freedom of faith: "Within the frame of 'political laïcité' there is a recognition of religions, there is people's freedom to believe and to be respected in their philosophical decisions." (17)

Here there is apparent overlap and compatibility between what the interviewees describe as 'philosophical' and 'political' branches of Belgian secularism. In addition to describing the legal underpinnings of 'political' secularism, the interviewees also reported their self-identification as 'politically *laïque*'. For example: "At the political level, personally I am 'politically laïque', because I don't instrumentalise religion." (9)

This was most commonly expressed by current and former state level politicians. Being politically secular meant respecting the legal basis of secularism in Belgium and also not manipulating or using their religious identity for political gain. This example highlights the way in which Belgian secularism has the potential to positively influence Muslim women's political participation rather than constituting a barrier to their political careers. However, , whilst the francophone Belgian Muslim women did not wish to use their Muslim identity in their political careers, there was a risk of Muslim women being instrumentalised by political parties as a means to garner support from minority groups, ethnic minority voters, the Muslim electorate and female voters.

Finally, seven of the Belgian sample described the emergence of a 'combative' secularism in Belgium. Although I discussed the emergence of 'combative' secularism as being specific to particular areas of Wallonia, this view was expressed by women from across francophone Belgium. This emerging model of secularism was described as oppositional to constitutional values and was seen as being influenced by French 'combative' secular norms. For example:

Now here in Belgium we are really influenced by the debates on French television that are broadcast here. So, there are lots of amalgamations made between [our] secularism, and secularism in France. That is wrong on the part of the Belgians. That is wrong because it confuses secular principles and the way it [secularism] is lived there [in France], against the Muslims. (13)

Others also touched on this argument: "France really influences Belgium... here [in francophone Belgium] secularism is more like it is in France. I think the Flemish have a more Dutch way of thinking." (11)

Or:

It is 'combative laïcité'. I recall that in the name of secularism they are trying to replace the Catholic nature of the state with a vision of 'combative laïcité' that seeks to remove religious visibility... especially [visibility of] Muslims. (19)

Alternatively, another interviewee argued that there was a “‘combative *laïcité*’ which seeks to remove religious visibility.” (18) Whilst another interviewee described it as “an exclusive secularism, which says no to diversity.” (5)

Or: “Politicians, especially the liberals, they are changing from philosophical to combative secularism. They like to play with these ideas so that they can push their ideas in politics.” (2) By way of an example, she adds:

After the Azzouzi scandal, the PS signed a document to prohibit municipal election candidates from wearing religious symbols... I mean since when does a supposedly neutral appearance guarantee a neutral [political] service? (2)

Finally: “Today we face a *laïcité* that is anti-clerical, anti-religious, that seeks invisibility of Islam in the public sphere.” (17)

Although only proposed by a smaller subsection of the interviewees, these examples are consistent with suggestions of an increasing move towards the French model put forward in the literature (Kamraz 2002, Mielants 2006, Severs 2010). Furthermore, based on these examples, I would argue that as in France, the emergence of ‘combative’ secularism in francophone Belgium leaves Muslim women feeling victimised and has potential adverse effects on Muslim women’s participation in francophone Belgian politics.

To summarise, the interviewees’ perceptions of secularism expressed in francophone Belgium fall into three categories, as presented below:

Table 5.2 Belgian Muslim Women’s Perceptions of Secularism

‘Philosophical’ Secularism	‘Political’ Secularism	‘Combative’ Secularism
Acceptance and tolerance of all regardless of philosophical, ideological or religious stance.	Legal recognition of religions.	Influenced by and similar to the French model of ‘combative <i>laïcité</i> ’.
Emphasis on state neutrality.	Means of achieving neutrality and equal treatment.	Not the dominant view of secularism, but increasingly pertinent in francophone Belgium.
Dominant and favoured perception of secularism in Belgium for Muslim women interviewed.	Being politically secular means recognising legal neutrality and not instrumentalising religion in own political discourse.	Anti-religious and seeks to remove visibility of all religions and especially Islam, Muslims and Muslim women’s dress.

Compatible with personal and Islamic values.		Leaves Muslim women feeling victimised.
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In francophone Belgium the majority of the interviewees discussed the ‘philosophical’ and ‘political’ elements of Belgian secularism. These comprised acceptance, equal recognition and tolerance of all in Belgian society. These views echo and point to the influence of Belgian multiculturalism. Furthermore, the interviewees felt that this basis of secularism in Belgium was compatible with their Islamic values. Additionally the women described being politically secular since they did not seek to instrumentalise their faith for the advancement of their political careers. I argue that this demonstrated the positive effects of Belgian secularism on Muslim women’s participation in francophone Belgian politics, in that Muslim women seek to apply neutrality and acceptance of all in their political engagement.

In contrast a small section of the interviewees described the emergence of a French-style discriminatory ‘combative *laïcité*’. This observation is consistent with arguments in the wider literature that there is an increase in French-style model in francophone Belgium (Mielants 2006, Severs 2010). This model of secularism leaves the women feeling specifically targeted and has negative effects on the discourse surrounding Muslim women’s visibility. Some attribute the emergence of this paradigm of secularism to the presence of French media in francophone Belgium.

This leads me to conclude that although the analysis of the formal constitutional and legal measure did not reveal an obvious move towards the French model, the mixed nature of Muslim women’s responses in francophone Belgium demonstrates the increasing influence of ‘combative’ French secularism and the way in which this is perhaps more keenly perceived than is outlined within the Constitution. It also highlights the competing influences at play in francophone Belgium with Dutch-style multiculturalism (Coene and Longman 2008b, Haspelagh 2012, Lettinga and Saharso 2012) exerting influence on Belgian legal structures and French secular model shaping norms and discourse surrounding faith and religious visibility in francophone Belgian public spaces. These competing visions have potentially varying influence on Muslim women’s political participation. In this regard the competing influences in francophone Belgium differ from the straightforward perceptions and legal manifestations of ‘combative *laïcité*’ seen in France.

5.1.3.2 The Headscarf as a Barrier to Political Participation in Francophone Belgium

As might be anticipated, the extent to which the headscarf and ‘combative’ secularism posed a barrier differed across the sample. Throughout the fieldwork, interviewees commonly mentioned

the apparent disparities between the experiences of Mahinur Özdemir and Layla Azzouzi. For example:

We have two examples here in Belgium, we have a woman who wears the headscarf, [her presence is heavily] mediatised. She was elected with CDH to the parliament, she adopted the headscarf, oh no, I mean she wore the headscarf since she was elected. Then, we have one [woman] who was active at the municipal level in Verviers. She was elected without a headscarf and then when she put it on she was excluded from the political party. That was also in CDH. (12)

Özdemir is the first Muslim woman in Europe to stand as an elected member of parliament whilst wearing the Islamic headscarf. She began to participate politics in 2004 with the largely successful former Christian party CDH, as municipal councillor in her local predominantly Turkish Muslim area of Schaerbeek and now also sits in the Brussels parliament.

Typically, the women interviewed see Özdemir as a positive role model and often argued that because Özdemir wore her headscarf continuously from the start of her political career, she subsequently faced fewer difficulties related to her outward Muslim appearance during her political career. However, I argue that the largely favourable experiences of Özdemir are also linked to the area in which she participates. The large Turkish Muslim community of Schaerbeek and Brussels more generally creates the presence of demographic features that give rise to potentially favourable environment for participation by visibly Muslim women.

In addition to the large Muslim demographic in Brussels, institutional features further improve opportunities for headscarf-wearing Muslim politicians. These features include the Belgian PR electoral system, compulsory voting, gender parity measures and precedents of relatively high Muslim representation (Zibouh 2011) in her review of the high Muslim presence in the Brussels parliament. This is along with the Belgian PR electoral system, compulsory voting and gender parity measures and precedents of relatively high Muslim representation (Zibouh 2011, 2013). Similarly, norms such as minority vote seeking through the inclusion of ethnic candidates, as outlined in Chapter Four, and multiculturalism also facilitate the inclusion of visibly Muslim women in state level francophone Belgian politics. A combination of these normative, demographic and institutional factors outweigh the potential negative effects of emerging 'combative' secularism and normalisation of hostility towards Muslim women's visibility it brings.

As noted, respondents also commonly mentioned Layla Azzouzi's experiences. Azzouzi stood as an elected member of Verviers town council. Although Azzouzi and Özdemir were both elected members of the same political party, when Azzouzi adopted her headscarf close to the end of her mandate in January 2012, she was subject to significant political and media criticism. Her visible Muslim appearance was deemed to be anti-secular and therefore incompatible with Belgian principles. Although education and politics represent different public fields, Azzouzi's personal experiences further point to the emergence of French-style 'combative *laïcité*' in some parts of

francophone Belgium as previously argued through the illustration of the Verviers headscarf ban in schools. Her case also exemplifies the increase in 'combative' secularism, how it 'others' visibly Muslim women and is subsequently a barrier to their political participation. Whilst the interviewees saw Özdemir as a positive role model, Azzouzi's experiences had the potential to dissuade visibly Muslim women from participating in Belgian state level politics. For example, when asked if anything had dissuaded her political participation, this interviewee states: "Of course, the headscarf! I don't know if you know anything about Verviers and Layla... of course when you hear these stories, it is not really encouraging." (7). Another attempted to explain Layla Azzouzi's experiences: "They were politically afraid [once she adopted the headscarf]" (9)

My analysis indicates that Azzouzi's experiences are not unique since other elected interviewees from Verviers also faced similar barriers related to outwardly appearing Muslim. For example:

Someone who was from the governing party said "The new girl, where is she from? Who is she? Is she going to do a 'Layla Azzouzi'?" A woman said to me "are you going to wear the headscarf? You must understand that [wearing the headscarf] will cause problems." (6)

Being warned against wearing the headscarf meant that this interviewee was left feeling targeted and discriminated. In order to cope with this discrimination this interviewee explained that although she is interested in wearing the headscarf, in order to be able to continue to be effective in politics she cannot adopt the *hijab*. This coping mechanism echoes that adopted by some respondents in France. This example further points to a move towards French 'combative' secularism, the normalisation and acceptability of anti-headscarf attitudes and the way in which these attitudes subsequently limit Muslim women's participation. Furthermore, in Verviers these emerging negative effects of 'combative *laïcité*' and anti-headscarf approaches outweigh the positive effects on participation by Muslim women brought about by normative and institutional factors described above.

Although previously I noted that Verviers is the only area at present with a French-style school headscarf ban, my analysis of Muslim women's experiences in francophone Belgian politics indicates that there is an increase in the French 'combative' secularism in other areas of Wallonia, as well as specifically in Verviers. As this interviewee from Verviers outlines:

In 2012 I decided to wear the headscarf. At the beginning it didn't cause any problems, then after about two to three weeks they launched the election campaigns, and the opposing right wing party, they wanted to centre their election campaign on my wearing the headscarf. They were saying things like we cannot accept that a headscarf wearing woman is a councillor... (2)

The interviewee above describes how she was initially well ranked on the party list for the municipal elections in October 2012, but that: "once I wore my headscarf, it was over!" (2) The interviewee reports that after these events and voicing her dissatisfaction, her political party tried

to appease her saying: “you can continue to be a councillor, maybe just a little bit more in the background.” (2)

Or, upon discussing the situation across Wallonia in general, this interviewee notes:

Oh yes, there are loads of examples, there are loads of political parties that invite Muslim women who wear the headscarf to stand as candidates and they let them whilst maintaining their headscarf. But, when the time comes for her to assume her political responsibilities, to carry out her role, they will say yes, but without the headscarf. (13)

Similarly, this interviewee from Liège states:

The headscarf can be a barrier to both my political and academic life. I wanted to participate [in a formal elected role] and then we [interviewee and the party] were talking and then they said to me there is just one small detail, you need to take that [headscarf] off. And that is when I really felt offended, I felt discriminated... That is the reality for Muslim women. They are discriminated because they wear the headscarf. (5)

The interviewee above continued to describe how she wanted to maintain her headscarf and therefore felt she could not pursue the political post and instead now continues to participate in francophone Belgian non-state level politics. This method of coping with the barrier posed by anti-headscarf sentiment echoes that seen in France. Additionally, these ways of dealing with the headscarf barrier echo previous literature regarding the resilience of Muslims who participate in politics (Al Momani et al. 2010). Furthermore, these experiences emphasise a move towards the normalisation of French-style, anti-headscarf attitudes in francophone Belgium, normalised discrimination of visibly Muslim women and the subsequent barriers that these views pose to Muslims women’s political participation.

Nonetheless, of the eleven who reported being approached or facing difficulties on the adoption of the headscarf described a sense of hypocrisy among political parties, for example:

The deputy burgomaster that did not want me to be a municipal councillor whilst wearing a headscarf... she forgets that six months prior [to the controversy surrounding adoption of the headscarf] she was canvassing in the mosque, saying that she didn’t have a problem with the headscarf, that she wouldn’t have a problem with activists wearing the headscarf. (2)

These cases and the general changing attitudes towards Muslim women’s dress in Belgium means that interviewees who wear the headscarf have had to be exceptionally frank with political parties, regarding their headscarf for example: “I said listen, I wear the headscarf, is that going to pose problems? They told me no, it won’t be an issue.” (9)

Nonetheless, the Belgian interviewees felt that they were perceived negatively if they wore the headscarf; for example some suggested that others would patronisingly say: “She wears a headscarf, but she is articulate. She has a headscarf yet she is clever. Sometimes people just see me for my headscarf and that is a shame.” (20)

Some also described the way in which this perception was increasingly normalised in Belgium:

Society will say that discriminating against someone young is bad, discriminating against someone Arab – that too is bad, but to discriminate against someone because they wear the headscarf, well that is normal. What's more the law doesn't even protect us. (19)

With regards to political participation outside of the elite political sphere, in the French case I observed that visibly Muslim women's participation tended to be restricted to the non-state level. In Belgium this does not appear to be the case: "When you are a volunteer, when it is free people don't care if you wear the headscarf or not." (2)

This distinction between barriers to Muslim women's non-state level participation in France and francophone Belgium leads me to suggest that the well-established nature of 'combative' secularism and the associated anti-headscarf attitudes that it entails, have permeated non-state level politics in France, whereas relatively recent emergence of French-style 'combative *laïcité*' in some areas of Wallonia means that anti-headscarf attitudes are comparatively less normalised in francophone Belgium and therefore less influential across the political spectrum. Subsequently this results in comparatively reduced barriers to Muslim women's non-state level participation in francophone Belgium than observed in France.

5.2.3.3 Secularism, Muslim Women's Dress and Political Participation in Belgium: Comparisons and Conclusions

To summarise the francophone Belgian Muslim women interviewed identified three visions of secularism in Belgium, 'philosophical', 'political' and to a lesser extent 'combative'. I argued that there was overlap between the 'philosophical' and 'political' conceptions of Belgian secularism. These perceptions were based on legal and constitutional measures that ensure the recognition, freedom of faith and tolerance of Belgian citizens regardless of their religious beliefs. Comparing these visions of secularism to those articulated by the French respondents leads me to conclude that Belgian 'philosophical' and 'political' perceptions are similar to the 'ideological' vision of secularism expressed by the French interviewees. However, this model is current in Belgium and historical in France. In addition, Belgian interviewees emphasised the compatibility of Belgian 'philosophical' and 'political' with their Islamic values and also articulated being secular in their political careers. I argue that the self-identification as politically secular was possible given the largely tolerant nature of dominant models of secularism in Belgium and also represented an unexpected positive influence of secularism on Muslim women's participation in Belgian politics.

An emerging category of 'combative' *laïcité* was also apparent in francophone Belgium. Women who argued its growing presence and influence came from across francophone Belgium and also reflected the majority of French interviewees. 'Combative' secularism was argued to be influenced by the French dominant model, circulated via French media outlets in francophone Belgium, and was characterised by its anti-faith and especially anti-Muslim nature. I observed that those who

articulated the emergence of ‘combative’ secularism were left feeling targeted and victimised by this emerging model. Furthermore the increasing prevalence of this type of secularism constituted a barrier to political participation by visibly Muslim women: “[political colleagues said] Oh no we can’t have a Muslim headscarf wearing woman on the council. It doesn’t respect secular principles...” (2)

This type of reported experience and Muslim women’s perceptions in this case indicates a move towards the French model, as suggested elsewhere (Kuru 2008, Mielants 2006). However I would not have necessarily observed the impact of this increasing model without interviewing Muslim women who participate in politics, since my review of the legal and constitutional measures in francophone Belgium do not explicitly point to the role of secularism in the limitation of Muslim women’s dress. Although women from Wallonia perceived and reported the rise in French-style secularism, I found that women in Brussels did not report directly facing ‘combative’ secular based barriers in the same way as their counterparts in Wallonia, however this is not to say such barriers do not exist in Brussels.

Observing these differences in experiences across the sample, along with the comparison of the commonly cited cases of Özdemir and Azzouzi, lead me to conclude that Belgian secularism is shaped by the competing influences of Dutch multiculturalism and French ‘combative *laïcité*’. This means that while the national legal measures are shaped by multicultural approaches, French norms increasingly influence the francophone Belgian sphere specifically. These competing influences in Belgium give rise to mixed reports related to the barriers posed by secularism and anti-headscarf attitudes on Muslim women’s political participation.

Furthermore these influences create a degree of flexibility in the extent to which the headscarf barrier applies across francophone Belgium. Specifically women in Brussels reported comparatively fewer barriers associated with the headscarf than Muslim women from Wallonia. I previously argue that a combination of the PR system (Sinno 2009a, Zibouh 2011, 2013), compulsory voting (Deschouwer 2009) and gender parity measures (Ghailani 2010) constitute formal institutional factors that facilitate Muslim women’s participation in francophone Belgian politics. This is further aided by multicultural norms and a tradition of minority political candidate inclusion (Hooghe 2005). However, these factors are present across francophone Belgium and therefore these combined factors alone do not explain the observed disparity in Muslim women’s reports.

Muslim population sizes differ in Brussels and Wallonia more generally, with Muslims constituting an estimated almost 4% of the wider francophone Belgian population and 12.5-22% of the Brussels population (Hertogen 2008, Zibouh 2011, 4). When combined with Belgian institutional and normative factors this key demographic distinction shapes the extent to which secularism and anti-headscarf attitudes constitute a barrier to Muslim women’s political participation, with the adverse

effects of 'combative' secularism being outweighed by the large Muslim demographic in Brussels, and alternatively persisting in Wallonia where the Muslim population is smaller.

5.2 Further Barriers to Muslim Women's Political Participation

In addition to the reported barriers linked to secularism and its influence on the normative treatment of Muslim women, the interviewees in both cases reported a series of further barriers to their political participation. These barriers are both specific to their female Muslim identity, but also linked to gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

5.2.1 Religious Affiliation and Practice

Although religious affiliation is recognised as influential in shaping the nature of political participation, there is limited research into the effects of religion on political participation (Audi 1990, Wald, Silverman, and Fridy 2005, Wald and Wilcox 2006). Existing literature in this area tends to focus on Christian political engagement in the USA (Billings and Scott 1994, Djupe and Tobin 2001, Campbell 2004, Jones-Correa 1998, Jones-Correa and Leal 2001, Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1999, Verba et al. 1993b, Wald, Silverman, and Fridy 2005, Wald and Wilcox 2006), and, to a lesser extent participation by the US Jewish community (Lam 2002, Verba et al. 1993a). Generally religious affiliation has positive effects on political participation. For example, Lam (2002) examined the rates of voluntary secular associative participation among respondents to the 1996 "God and Society in North America" survey. Where religiosity was measured in terms of religious organisation membership and private religious engagement, Lam reports that Jewish respondents are less likely to hold voluntary associative roles than other religious survey respondents. Whilst these conclusions are based on closed dichotomous survey data, and therefore lack in-depth qualitative qualification of responses, the findings point to differences in the nature of participation between religious groups. Nonetheless, the tendency to focus on the nature of participation by Christian and Jewish individuals, and also the preference for a quantitative approach, consequently means that there remains a gap in the in-depth understanding of the nature of Muslim political participation in the West.

Conversely, the study of Muslim political participation tends to explore the negative effects of Muslim identity on participation in Europe, the USA and Australia. For example, openly expressing Muslim identity poses a barrier to political participation (Al Momani et al. 2010), meaning that hostility towards Muslims has an adverse effect on Muslim political participation and representation. This is intensified in highly secularised nations, such as France. As outlined in this chapter, the idea is that as secularism is increasingly anti-Muslim in nature and simultaneously central to the national imagination, it allows for the normalisation of anti-Muslim sentiment, which in turn limits opportunities for Muslim political participation.

Normalised anti-Muslim attitudes more generally also create barriers to political participation by Muslims (Sinno 2009a, Sinno and Tatari 2009, Yazbeck Haddad and Ricks 2009), and worsens in larger districts. In his primarily quantitative review of American political underrepresentation Sinno (2009a) argues that this is the case as in larger voting areas where Muslim communities are more dispersed and therefore cannot rally together and support Muslim candidates. Whilst this point is based on Sinno's personal observations, it is potentially flawed to automatically assume that the Muslim electorate will automatically support Muslim candidates. Nonetheless, when we consider the role of ethnic minority or Muslim vote seeking by political parties we see that this too works on the same premise.

Additionally, pressure to engage in cultural activities with political colleagues, such as going for a drink, poses further barriers to Muslim political participation (Sinno and Tatari 2009). Furthermore, anti-political attitudes from within the Muslim community also potentially limit Muslim participation in politics, as detailed in Chapter Three (Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking 2013, Klausen 2009, Parvez 2013). The section below takes into account these established factors linked to Muslim identity and political participation whilst examining and comparing the reported effects of religious affiliation on Muslim women's political participation. These barriers linked to religion go beyond the already explored obstacles posed by secularism or visible Muslim identity.

Islamophobia was described as a barrier to participation by eight of the eleven French interviewees. Muslim women felt that their religious affiliation marked them out as targets for Islamophobia and this subsequently presented obstacles. For example: "I live in an Islamophobic society, so there are lots of limitations if you are a Muslim. Twice as many [limitations] if you a Muslim woman with a headscarf." (25) Another interviewee stated Islamophobia had become a problem since Muslims had become "scapegoats" (23). Alternatively, an interviewee who had had a long-spanning political career, noted the rise of Islamophobia: "It was as obvious before, or in the media, but things got more Islamophobic [in France]... so I said to myself why not stand in the elections?" (4) Here there is an overlap in the way in which Islamophobia both posed problems but also motivated political action.

Or, others described specific incidents and patterns in France that they felt represented the strength of Islamophobia: "It is Islamophobia, there are loads of examples; at the time [I began to participate in politics] the headscarf law, the hatred of Tariq Ramadan, oh there are loads of things." (21)

For others, this sense of Islamophobia shaped the nature of their political participation, for example: "We cannot make too much noise, we can't speak up because we are Muslim." (26)

Whilst Muslim women generally were affected by anti-Muslim sentiment in France, the adverse effects of Islamophobia were intensified for visibly Muslim women, thus there is an overlap between the barriers posed by French secular norms and Islamophobia. However, in spite of its common usage and agreement amongst the women in this sample that Islamophobia limited Muslim women's participation in French politics, Islamophobia remains contested with some disputing its existence and others denouncing all criticism of Islam as Islamophobia (Allen 2010). The Runnymede Trust report *Islamophobia: A Challenge for us All* (Richardson 1997, 1) defines Islamophobia as: "...a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and therefore, to a fear of all or most Muslims."

Seen as the first key publication regarding Islamophobia (Allen 2010), the report details features of Islamophobia, including perceiving Islam as monolithic, 'other', culturally opposed and inferior to the dominant culture, violent and manipulative. Islamophobic attitudes normalise and are used to justify hostility and anti-Muslim acts (Richardson 1997).

The *Collectif Contre L'Islamophobie en France* (CCIF 2014, 2) define Islamophobia as:

...discriminatory acts or violence, against institutions or individuals, based on their affiliation, real or imagined, with Islam. These acts are provoked by ideologies and discourses that incite hostility and rejection of Muslims.

The Paris based CCIF records reported Islamophobic acts throughout France. Although their figures come with the bias of self-reporting by victims, in 2013 the organisation recorded 691 Islamophobic incidents. These statistics denote an increase in recorded Islamophobia since 2012 (CCIF 2014). Islamophobia in France is increasingly violent in nature and predominantly directed towards Muslim women (CCIF 2014). This observation makes the issue of Islamophobia pertinent in the study of Muslim women's political participation in France.

Academic study also recognises hostility, normalised fear (Hargreaves 2007) and marginalisation of French Muslims (Silverstein 2008, Wallach-Scott 2007). Similarly, when compared to Muslims in Germany and the UK, French Maghrebi Muslims are more likely to report and perceive Islamophobia (Kunst, Sam, and Ulleberg 2013). French assimilative norms, post-colonial attitudes and the increasing normalisation of anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe and the West contribute to these reports and feelings among French Muslims.

Interviewees, particularly those involved in state level and non-Muslim organisations, identified that openly practicing Islam presented barriers to their political participation. These barriers ranged in nature and intensity: "And I didn't go to the pub after, I didn't go to the bars after, because it [attending political meetings] was already too much for me." (1)

Like those interviewed in the UK by Sinno and Tatari (2009), not drinking as a Muslim and therefore not feeling comfortable visiting pubs leaves Muslim women feeling excluded from social activities with her political colleagues. The interviewee above noted how this, along with other barriers, led to her withdrawing from state level French politics. This particular type of barrier stems from Muslim women's personal choices and preferences, which are informed by their Islamic religious affiliation.

Alternatively, Muslim women also experience barriers linked to the perceived implications of their Islamic identity:

One day in Ramadan¹⁸ I was fasting, I was in the Senate and there was a public meeting. I wanted to speak. One of my friends was there and I said to him "can I speak before you or after you? That way I would have had time to get a coffee at 6pm, I can't remember the exact details anymore. He said to me "why?" I said "It's Ramadan, at 6pm it is the time to break the fast, so I can either go before you or after you" [he said to me] "I didn't know that you were an 'Islamist'" I said "So what! I am fasting in Ramadan, that doesn't mean I am an 'Islamist'¹⁹. (28)

Although comparatively stronger than the barrier posed engagement in cultural activities, voicing practice of Islam is automatically associated with 'Islamism' or religious extremism. This conflation of Islamic practices with fundamentalism is an oversimplification, and as a result perceiving Muslims who practice Islam as 'Islamists' presents risks of further marginalisation of French Muslims. The marginalisation of Muslims is likely to indirectly adversely affect political participation among Muslim women, due to their reluctance to come forward and face such hostility and also as a result of the negative attitudes of the wider population which mean that Muslim women are not as likely to be regarded as serious political colleagues. The conflation of fasting with extremism recalls the work of those who discuss the conflation of Islam and the headscarf with terrorism (Bowen 2007, Carland 2011, Edmunds 2011, Joppke 2009). However, in this case rather than being linked to a visible Muslim identity, these flawed conflations are based on the practice of Islam.

These examples demonstrate the negative influences of Islamophobia on Muslim women's participation in French politics and specifically stem from prejudicial and normalised stereotypes associated with the practice of Islam by French outsiders, whilst discomfort with cultural practices stems from personal and often religiously based preferences. This then indicates that religious affiliation leads to both personal barriers shaped by political and cultural norms and also obstacles from increasingly normalised Islamophobic attitudes.

¹⁸ In the Islamic month of Ramadan, practicing Muslims will usually fast from dawn till dusk each day for the duration of the month.

¹⁹ The interviewee explained that here the term 'Islamist' was intended to mean religious fanatic or extremist.

Like the women in France, the women interviewed in Belgium also perceived a generalised fear or dislike of Muslims in Belgium. However unlike the French women, Belgian respondents did not mention facing specific instances of Islamophobia in their political careers, instead they noted generalised prejudice and its adverse effects on their political participation: “Well, it is clear that we don’t hear good things about Muslims, there is not a good image of Islam.” (13)

Or: “In society there is a fear of Islam” (20)

Like the CCIF, *Muslim Rights Belgium* (MRB) and the newly formed *Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en Belgique* (CCIB) record Islamophobic acts in Belgium. In 2013 MRB recorded 222 Islamophobic incidents, more than 70% of which were committed against women. In common with figures in France, these statistics come with the bias of self-reporting. Additionally, MRB cite increasing normalisation of Islamophobia throughout Belgian society (Benyekhlef and Thami 2013).

However, much of the academic study related to Islamophobia in Belgium focuses on the national level, rather than isolating the francophone case, nonetheless there is consensus that Islamophobia is steadily increasing in Belgium (Allen and Nielsen 2002, De Ley 1998, Zemni 2011). This is part of the wider trend of increasing anti-Muslim sentiment throughout Europe. Increasing Islamophobia has an adverse impact on Belgian Muslim women’s political participation. However, I would argue that the relatively significant Muslim presence in Belgian politics (Sinno 2009a, Zibouh 2011, 2013) suggests that whilst inevitably it may constitute a limitation, Islamophobia alone does not dictate the nature of Muslim political participation in Belgium.

A small subset of the Belgian respondents reported practicing Islam sometimes presented minor issues within their political careers: “When you are Muslim you must struggle all the time [because of a lack of understanding of Muslims]” (8). In the face of this, an interviewee described the way in which she had dedicated part of her political participation to “creating a better understanding of Islam.” (12) Thus what once presented a problem is transformed into a political motivation which then shapes part of the nature of this interviewees’ political participation.

Similarly: “I had some, I wouldn’t say it was even a difficulty but I always had to justify myself and explain over and over again, every year with Ramadan it was the same thing” (16) Or: “... when it is Ramadan during meetings everyone is eating and drinking and you can’t. It leads to endless questioning.” (6)

In France, fasting in Ramadan led to accusations of extremism, however in Belgium, interviewees felt that these examples represented a combination of ignorance and curiosity among their political colleagues, rather than discrimination and hostility. In part these differences can be attributed to Belgian multicultural and ‘organised secularism’ which permit religious and cultural difference, which is contrary to French assimilation and strict secularism (Laachir 2008, Ramadan

2004, Roy 2007). This then stigmatises those who practise faith in the French public sphere. Comparing the two cases leads to the conclusion that Islamophobia is more keenly perceived by Muslim women in French politics than those in francophone Belgian politics. Furthermore, the differences suggest that the open expression of Islamophobic attitudes are comparatively more normalised in France than in Belgium. This subsequently leads to Muslim women in French politics experiencing more Islamophobic discrimination, which in turn presents an increased barrier to French Muslim women's political careers and ultimately shapes and differentiates the nature of their political participation.

5.2.2 Ethnic Difference

Ethnic difference is both pertinent and perhaps inevitable in the study of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium, given that Muslims in these two cases are predominantly of non-native backgrounds. Whilst faith and ethnic monitoring does not take place in France due to egalitarianism and consequent blindness to difference, it is generally accepted that French Muslims are predominantly of North African ethnic origin, including Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian heritage (Hargreaves 2007), whilst Muslims in Belgium are predominantly from either Turkish or Moroccan backgrounds (Kanmaz 2002). Notwithstanding both France and Belgium are home to growing native convert communities (Karagiannis 2012). Although I relied solely on snowballing to recruit interviewees and therefore did not seek to manipulate the sample composition, interviewees included both converts and individuals from the largest ethnic Muslim communities in each case and therefore, to an extent the samples reflected the wider Muslim communities in each case.

Historically minority groups have not been expected to participate in mainstream politics (Martiniello 2005a). However, they are consistently politically active (Leighley and Velditz 1999, Nelson 1979, 1982). Ethnic minorities tend to experience poor rates of formal political representation (Verba et al. 1993b), although this varies between ethnic minority groups (Jamal 2005, Fennema and Tillie 2001). Their generally low rates of political representation are often shaped by national political systems (Verba et al. 1993b) and hindered by poor SES (Leighley and Velditz 1999), cultural attitudes (Uhlener and Cain 1989) and poor language skills (Lien 1994). Ethnic minority political representation is sometimes facilitated by inclusion quotas (Celis et al. 2014), however as outlined in Chapter Four no such quotas exist in either France or francophone Belgium.

For the French interviewees ethnic difference was commonly described as a significant barrier to political participation. For example: "... I'm a woman, Muslim, foreign – handicaps, that adds up to three handicaps for me." (27) Or: "The notion of race is really a limitation, it [racial difference]

creates barriers. If you don't conceal it [racial difference], you will face difficulties." (25) Others in France frequently discussed the notion of racism as a limitation to their political careers.

Or finally, as this parliamentarian illustrates:

For example, one day I arrived at parliament they [staff in parliament] had never seen the elected politicians and she said to me "down there, the service entry is down there, here is for the parliamentarians." (28)

The interviewee continued to explain how it was automatically presumed that on the grounds of her ethnic difference she would need the service entry rather than her being an elected parliamentarian. These perceptions and direct encounters of racism illustrate that this type of discrimination contributes to the barriers faced by Muslim women who participate in French politics. The women described how they felt that they needed to attempt to conceal their ethnic difference:

....to exist in the French political sphere, you must be French but without your personal particularisms and therefore negate all of the complexities of the French identity. What's more, what makes me a little bit mad is that those who physically represent the complexity of the French identity aren't allowed to show it. On the contrary, you must be more royal than the king! (1)

Or, similarly: "The question of race, it is really a barrier [to political participation in France... it creates limits. If you don't make it [ethnic difference] invisible, you will face problems." (25). The same interviewee adds:

The big political parties, they have a definition of what 'identity' means, what it means to be French, of what is republican. So, the question of race is just swept away, it is not dealt with. Therefore that may mean that it [ethnic difference] stops you from being part of a political party. (25)

Or, for example:

The Arabs who are going to find a space in French politics are Arabs like Rachida Dati, Arabs like Jeannette Bougrab, or Arabs like Fadela Amara. To exist in French politics, even among the Greens, I have loads of examples, to exist in the French political sphere you have to fit a certain image, that is to say you have to make yourself as much like the ruling class, the white elite from the upper classes for whom the concept of minority doesn't exist. (1)

Similarly, seven of the eleven French interviewees described this as the need to be "*an Arabe de service*", or token ethnic minority person and be content with this in order to succeed in the French political arena.

Ethnic difference was seen as one of many factors that Muslim women needed to conceal in order to succeed in French politics. Concealment entailed attempting to assimilate to the dominant model seen in politics of not appearing visibly and ideologically 'other', thus conforming to French assimilationist tendencies.

Failure to correspond to this model meant that the Muslim women encountered increased barriers to their political participation, particularly at the state level and in some non-state level

organisations. As one interviewee states: “You are obliged to go with the flow” (27) I would argue that these experiences point to the adverse effects of French assimilationist norms on Muslim women’s participation in French politics. Previously I have discussed the negative impact of these norms in reference to appearing visibly Muslim. However the examples cited above demonstrate how France’s strict assimilation policies transcend both faith and ethnic differences, meaning both the public expression of religious and ethnic difference are not readily welcomed.

There is increasing focus on the ‘ethnification’ of the Muslim identity (Allen 2010, Zibouh 2013), meaning that there is greater emphasis on the Muslim identity by both Muslims and states, rather than on ethnic difference. However analysing the French Muslim women’s responses indicates that although there is a new emphasis on Muslim identity in Europe, ethnic discrimination persists, particularly in France. Therefore I would argue that racism and Islamophobia now both contribute to the multi-layered and context-specific discrimination faced by European Muslims, and this subsequently shapes the nature of their political participation.

The interviewees understood race-related barriers in reference to French colonialism: “...it is because we come from a formerly colonised immigrant background and therefore from the beginning we have been dominated” (21), she adds “those of us who come from immigrant backgrounds, Arabs, Muslims, we are just seen as post-colonial subjects.” (21)

Another respondent states:

The time of Algeria [the Algerian colonisation] wasn’t so long ago. Colonialism was still very current. The problem in France is its thinking, I mean, in fact when Algeria became independent, won the war, it was a spent country, it was the same in Tunisia and Morocco. And this colonisation was very symbolic, the independence of Algeria made an impact. So an Algerian was seen as an ex-colonial subject, a ‘native’... lots of French people, they saw Algerians... [as] people who were part of the underclass. (4)

Or: “The main problem is that we are here [in France] as a result of colonial immigration and therefore it means that from the beginning we have been dominated. Also there is the fact that as a result we come from poorer backgrounds.” (28)

The interviewee cited above went onto discuss how although she had not experienced such socioeconomic disadvantage, it was a feature typical of the wider Muslim community.

Those who cited the adverse effects of colonial attitudes on their political participation tended to be older North African members of the sample who had begun to participate in French politics during the 1980s anti-racism movements, such as the 1983 *Marche des Beurs*. Although previously discussed within the frame of political motivations, this example also demonstrates the importance of previous experiences in shaping the way French Muslim women expressed barriers to their political participation. Younger respondents tended to describe racism related barriers alongside

those related to Islamophobia. I would suggest that this particular focus by younger interviewees is consistent with the argued foregrounding of faith identity by European Muslims and states (Allen 2010, Zibouh 2013), but also demonstrates in cases where there is a tradition of ethnic prejudice race related barriers persist alongside faith barriers.

Conversely, in Belgium women rarely mentioned that ethnicity presented a barrier to their political participation. This was in spite of the fact that like French Muslims, Belgian Muslims are also predominantly from ethnic minority backgrounds. Instead, as highlighted in Chapter Four, ethnic difference appears to create opportunities for Muslim women's state level political participation in francophone Belgium. I argued that this arises due to a combination of demographic, institutional and normative factors.

I would argue that the differences related to ethnic difference observed in France and francophone Belgium are linked to colonial histories and current norms in each case related to assimilation and multiculturalism. The majority of French Muslims originate from former French colonies or protectorates, whilst the Moroccan and Turkish Muslims in Belgium do not come from former Belgian colonies. This means that as stated by the French respondents, ethnically different French Muslim women feel that they are perceived as inferior former colonial subjects. Alongside the differences in colonial histories and postcolonial attitudes, Belgian multicultural norms promote the acceptance of ethnic and faith diversity, whilst French assimilative tendencies promote conformity to French cultural norms (Bertossi 2012, Kuru 2008, Silverstein 2008, Streiff-Frénart 2012). When combined these factors contribute to French Muslim women feeling that the greater barriers to their political participation are linked to their ethnic difference, whilst these are not as frequently reported in francophone Belgium.

5.2.3 Gender

Existing statistical evidence points to low levels of women's political representation across the world (Kenworthy and Melami 1999, Matland 1998, Murray 2009, 2013, World Bank 2014). In France, women make up 27% of national parliament, whereas Belgian women make up 38% of national parliaments (World Bank 2014). Both France and Belgium have comparable legal gender parity measures which stipulate that at least half of all candidates must be female. However, whilst these measures in France have been criticised, for example in Murray (2009), based on a review of the 2007 legislative elections, the author argues that negative attitudes towards women persist within political parties, women are framed as underqualified for candidacy, fines for non-implementation of parity are lenient and finally women are often fielded for unwinnable seats. Conversely, such measures appear more effective in Belgium. This effectiveness is linked to the full PR system and former Smet-Tobback law which previously required that at least a third of

candidates must be female (Deschouwer 2009, Ghailani 2010), therefore there is both a precedent and a political system which promotes women's political inclusion.

Women traditionally find that they have limited resources required for participation (Allwood and Wadia 2000, Norris, Lovenduski, and Campbell 2004, Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1994). For example, although dated, quantitative data taken from the 1989 American Citizen Participation study (Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1994) shows that when resources available to men and women are balanced, women's political participation becomes comparable to that of their male counterparts. The same study also demonstrates that when a broad definition of political participation is applied, differences in the level of men and women's political participation become significantly smaller. This points to the validity of applying a broad definition of political participation in this study, as outlined in Chapter Two. More recently in a report conducted in the UK, entitled *Gender and Political Participation* (Norris, Lovenduski, and Campbell 2004) shows that women's limited resources partly contribute to the gender gap in British politics. Nonetheless, the authors are critical and call for a broader and more nuanced explanation of the nature of limited resources amongst factors that limit women's political participation in the UK.

Women's political participation is also hindered by traditional gender roles (Allwood and Wadia 2000, Matland 1998, McGlen 1980). For example, women are often expected to take on childrearing responsibilities and this has been shown to have a negative effect on their political participation (Hooghe and Dietlind 2004, McGlen 1980, Schlozman et al. 1995). Within the political sphere, patriarchal political systems and tokenistic inclusion measures, such as only fielding women candidates in 'unwinnable seats' also have a negative impact on women's political participation and representation (Matland 1998, Murray 2009, 2013, Sénac-Slawinski 2008).

French Muslim women categorised the barriers posed by gender in two ways; traditional general gender roles and marriage, and secondly challenges posed by gender and Muslim identity. This meant that once again Muslim women in France returned to the barrier posed by their visible female Muslim identity.

Some interviewees described how they would like to get married and have a family:

As a woman, well it is personal but I am 28 and I am not married yet. I have loads of professional commitments that take up a lot of my time. I am politically active and religiously practicing and that takes up a lot of my time, but I know the time will come and I will be a lot more limited. (26)

She continues: "Even my parents, they tell me that they want to see me more, so it is time that really limits me." (26)

Or: "In truth there comes a time when you reach a certain age when you want to get married and start a family [this limits your time.]" (23)

They saw this as potential barrier to their political participation, since it would mean they would take on traditional gender roles such as child-rearing and this would subsequently result in further limited time for political participation. This nature of barrier is not specific to Muslim women (Allwood and Wadia 2000, Childs 2004, Hooghe and Dietlind 2004, Matland 1998, McGlen 1980, Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1994, Schlozman et al. 1995), but contributes to shaping the wider nature of Muslim women's political participation. Nonetheless, it may be argued that such expectations are more prevalent among some traditional Muslim communities, such as North African Muslim communities in France, however in this case the women did not describe gender roles in reference to culture. Arguably, Muslim women who were more likely to be constrained by such cultural expectations were less likely to be involved in politics and by extension excluded from this study.

Additionally when discussing the role of gender in their political participation interviewees returned to the significance of Muslim women's visible identity and stated that Muslim men do not experience the same barriers:

[It is] easier for men you see they don't have a headscarf."... "The only Muslims that will find a space to participate in politics are men, because things [Muslim identity] are less visible with them. (1)

Or similarly, "The only Muslims who will succeed in politics are men, because it [Muslim identity] is less obvious for them." (27)

This view was common across the French sample. Without assessment and comparison of the nature of Muslim men's political participation in France it is difficult to objectively assess this claim. Nonetheless, Muslim women return to stressing the barriers posed by external French approaches to their visible Muslim identity. This emphasises the perceived importance and centrality of this barrier for the French interviewees. Therefore it is increasingly apparent that the normative treatment of the headscarf in France presents a significant primary barrier to Muslim women's participation in French politics. The primacy of this barrier outweighs those posed by gender roles and any perceptions of patriarchy in the French political sphere (Ramsay 2003).

Similarly in Belgium, the respondents also felt that their gender constituted a barrier to their political participation:

"I am sure there are lots of things that limit me. The first thing that is less obvious it is the fact that I am a woman." (20)

Similarly, "There are lots of things that limit me, perhaps one that is less apparent is my being a woman." (17)

Or simply: "I find it [politics] very sexist. You have got to have your head screwed on, or they will eat you alive!" (6)

Like in France being a woman meant that the interviewees faced traditional gender roles, such as domestic and childrearing responsibilities, and this subsequently meant that they had reduced time to engage in politics. Again this example is not specific to Muslim women, but demonstrates how Muslim women are subject to barriers faced by the wider female population.

In addition to this, the women in francophone Belgium also described facing barriers related to their gender in Muslim organisations:

They [Muslim men] were really open to women's participation... [but] I saw that there were lots of stereotypes still, even young men with progressive ideas who still held stereotypes, saying they [Muslim women] are women, they have children, how can they participate... I said come on that is not coherent. (7)

Or alternatively, another interviewee states:

Personally I come from a time, seventeen years ago, when women were only responsible for the sandwiches or collecting tickets at the door during [Islamic] conferences etc.... and I swear to you one day, in front of a crowd, I said Stop! I want to contribute, to contribute to the intellectual discourse about women [in Islam] (20)

Similarly:

I think in all spheres of society and even in Muslim society, it is obvious that women are limited. In Muslim institutions you have people that come from other countries with their ideas, with a culture that is a little archaic, about men and women's relationships and that makes things more difficult. (17)

The respondents noted that although Muslim men were keen to include Muslim women in Muslim organisations, culturally-rooted gender prejudices presented obstacles to their full inclusion in these associations. The interviewees stressed that these views were not Islamic in nature and therefore could be easily broken down via effective dialogue with Muslim men in these organisations. A particular interviewee described working with the support of Tariq Ramadan to break down such barriers within the Muslim community. I would argue that the initially observed openness to Muslim women's political participation and small nature of such organisations facilitates the deconstruction of such barriers. Furthermore, although the interviewees described these barriers in reference to participation in Muslim non-state level organisations, such stereotypes persist across mainstream society (Allwood and Wadia 2000) and therefore might equally be reported by women generally.

Nonetheless, the specific dynamic of gender based issues that Muslim women face in France and Belgium is perhaps unique:

The Muslim community can also be a real obstacle for women, because the discourse about women, about liberation, whether that be in the Muslim community or civil society [in

general], it alienates [women], it alienates Muslim women. We [Muslim women] are taken hostage by conservative Muslims, '*laïcards*'²⁰ and the fight between the two, and it is not easy. (20)

Therefore, here this interviewee begins by describing the barriers that emerge from within the Muslim community, but continues to discuss the barriers presented by attitudes in wider society. These limitations result in Muslim women in the two cases feeling attacked from both sides.

To conclude, although Muslim women in both France and francophone Belgium expressed that gender limited their political participation the women placed different emphasis on how this barrier manifested. In both cases, the Muslim women discussed the negative influence of domestic gender roles on their resources for political participation. In this regard the research findings are consistent with existing evidence in the field (Allwood and Wadia 2000, Childs 2004, Hooghe and Dietlind 2004, Matland 1998, McGlen 1980, Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1994). The majority of the existing research considers formal political participation, however the findings from Belgium point to the presence of similar barriers at the non-state level.

In comparison, when discussing the role of gender in political participation, the French respondents returned to the barrier posed by Muslim women's visible identity and suggested that Muslim men do not face similar barriers. This observation leads to the conclusion that the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress is a primary barrier to participation by Muslim women in France. This was not observed in francophone Belgium and therefore this difference in reporting further emphasises the strength of the headscarf barrier in France compared to Belgium. The differences also indicates that francophone Belgian Muslim women are less focused on barriers presented by their Muslim identity and therefore able to perceive a wider range of barriers.

5.2.4 Socioeconomic Status and Resources

SES comprises social class, employment, and educational attainment. These factors subsequently affect the level of resources available to an individual, which are likely to be required for political participation. Resources required for political participation include financial assets and time. SES is among the most influential factors shaping political participation and is significant in both state and non-state level political engagement (Alford and Scroble 1968, Bollen and Jackman 1985). Low SES is also linked to poor participation generally and also adversely effects women's participation (McGlen 1980). Similarly low SES negatively influences participation by ethnic minorities (Lien 1994) and Muslims (Parvez 2013, Warner and Wenner 2006).

Educational attainment is central to SES, since it often determines employment, skills and financial assets, which subsequently impact political participation (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995,

²⁰ '*Laïcards*' is intended as a pejorative term, meaning individuals who are excessively focused on the strict implementation of a 'combative *laïcité*'.

Leighley 1995). Higher educational attainment correlates with increased political participation, whilst lower educational attainment tends to hinder political participation (Barnes 1966, Berinsky and Lenz 2011, Galston 2001, 2004, McGlen 1980, Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 2003). The effects of educational achievement on participation are similar across ethnic minorities (Uhlman and Cain 1989, Verba et al. 1993b). However women's political participation is more adversely effected by low educational attainment than men's participation (McGlen 1980).

In spite of this emphasis on SES in the literature, the French interviewees did not cite low SES or educational attainment as a barrier to their personal political participation. Respondents recognised that even if they were not personally affected, the wider French Muslim community typically has low SES and this subsequently limits their ability to participate in French politics.

Based on conclusions derived from her participant observation based fieldwork in Lyon with French Muslims, Parvez (2013) makes a distinction between the types of political participation by Muslims in France. She argues typically socioeconomically disadvantaged Muslim communities tend to be withdrawn from politics, or take on anti-political attitudes. Conversely, middle class French Muslims tended to be engaged in "middle class associations." which tend to fight for Muslim's rights and recognition, and are often disconnected from working class Muslims. These observations shed light on the implications of my methodological decisions; the use of snowballing might have led to an atypical sample. However, I would argue that in opting to study those already engaged in politics I was perhaps bound to have a middle class sample.

Like the French respondents, the Belgian interviewees did not cite personal low SES or low educational attainment as a barrier to their personal political participation. Therefore, I would argue that in line with Parvez (2013), Muslims who participate in francophone Belgian politics are likely to be from middle class backgrounds, whereas Muslims with low SES are likely to be excluded from politics.

Also within the frame of SES, resources shape political participation. Resources required include free time, financial resources and civic skills (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995, Verba et al. 1993b). These resources are typically governed by SES. Limited resources constitute a barrier to political participation. Both women and ethnic minorities tend to have fewer resources, this subsequently adversely affects their participation (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010, Crowley 2001, Verba et al. 1993b). However, when these resource deficits are accounted for or removed, differences in levels of participation are equally removed (Schlozman et al. 1995, Verba et al. 1993a).

In France, resources such as limited time were often cited as barriers to participation:

For a start there is limited time and energy. That's to say for me personally I don't have much free time. I don't have time for myself. Associational political engagement takes up a lot of energy. (27)

Also:

Already, I find that I am limited by time. That is to say I don't have lots of free time, I don't even have time for myself! And political and also associative engagement, well that takes a lot of energy. (23)

An interviewee pointed to the limited range of resources available to the non-state level political organisations in which they participated. She states that in these groups there is "a lack of physical material resources and a lack of money." (23) Although this interviewee was the only person to mention this, the financial limitations faced by associations in France and more generally indicate that this barrier is likely to be felt by many.

Similarly Belgian interviewees commonly expressed that limited time was a resource deficit that constituted a barrier to their participation: "Time is what limits me at the moment, I'm in the middle of studying" she recalls: "My family said to me wait until the end of your masters, and then [you will have the time to participate]. Also sometimes they [the party] gives me so much work and I feel like giving up." (6) Or: "It is that I don't have the time. Personally, I find I am limited because there are so many associations, you have to find the one you can be most effective in." (13) Also, "I am studying right now, so I can't take on a specific role with that organisation." (11) Or finally, "I want to do more, but it is just time that is lacking." (15)

To conclude, contrary to suggestions that solely low SES results in limited resources for political participation (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995, Verba et al. 1993b), the evidence from both France and francophone Belgium reveals that socioeconomic advantage can also accompany limited time resources for political participation by Muslim women, thus demonstrating that in part, Muslim women in France and Belgium face obstacles to their political participation that are comparable to those encountered by the wider population. The findings also illustrate that the interviewees are not from low SES backgrounds as might typically be expected in a study of Muslim women's political participation. However, as stated this composition of interviewees is perhaps inevitable given the nature of their political engagement and therefore, consequently these findings suggest that Muslims who engage in politics at state level in particular will typically be from middle-class backgrounds and therefore this adds to the understanding of the profile of Muslim women who participate in politics in the two cases.

5.2.5 Fear of Instrumentalisation

Francophone Belgian Muslim women interviewed commonly discussed how they had been directly approached by political parties and invited to stand as a party candidate. Conversely, one of the

women in France mentioned being approached by parties. This meant that a minority of francophone Belgian respondents feared being instrumentalised by parties: “I was afraid of being instrumentalised.” (9)

Similarly:

Also in political parties there is a worry that you will always be fighting [to be accepted as a Muslim woman]. So, [that is a] waste of my time spent fighting in a political party, when I know that my presence would be nothing more than just my presence. (3)

Or:

There are lots of political parties who invite women who wear the headscarf to their parties, to represent the parties with the headscarf. They allow these women to stand [as candidates], but when it comes to the time for her to take on her responsibilities, to serve in her post, they say yes, but without the hijab. (13)

Or: “They [political parties] want me to be part of the party, I mean they accept me...but they don’t want me to be a representative one day.” (7)

The fear of instrumentalisation limited some francophone Belgian Muslim women from pursuing a career in state level politics. This therefore constituted a barrier to their participation at this level. However, among the eleven respondents who had been approached and invited to participate in party politics the women felt that this represented an opportunity for their participation rather than solely viewing the risk of instrumentalisation as a barrier to their political participation. In Chapter Four I concluded that these opportunities were linked to Muslim identity, ethnic difference and gender and were favoured by the Belgian electoral system, compulsory voting, historical political precedents, multiculturalism and the tradition of ethnic minority candidate inclusion as a means of securing minority votes (Hooghe 2005). The variances between francophone Belgian interviewees’ responses point to individual differences and subjective perceptions in describing the barriers faced. Nonetheless, for some the fear of instrumentalisation presents a potential barrier to state level political participation that is specific to francophone Belgium. In comparison this was not observed in France, perhaps given that ten of the eleven French Muslim women interviewed did not report being approached by parties.

5.2.6 The Muslim Community

Also specific to francophone Belgium, a minority of the interviewees indicated that anti-political attitudes from within the Muslim community had negative effects on their political participation. For example:

There is a part of the Muslim community that is against [political participation]. Yesterday I received a small booklet from some Muslims that explained that defending democracy [is Islamically wrong]... there is a part of the [Muslim] community that is against politics. (12)

These findings recall evidence put forward by Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking (2013) in Canada, and Parvez (2013) in France. For example, Parvez attributes anti-political attitudes among French Muslims according to social class, suggesting that French Muslims from the ghettoised suburbs or low SES are more likely to take a conservative anti-political stance, whilst the middle classes are more likely to be pro-political participation in France. It is likely that these attitudes in Belgium also come from socially disadvantaged sections of the Muslim community. These attitudes from within the Muslim community constitute a barrier to participation by both men and women. However, the respondents stressed that this represented a minority position and was not the norm in francophone Belgium.

The *Ligue des Musulmans de Belgique* (LMB) (2014) attempts to clear confusion regarding Muslim political participation in Belgium on their website. They refer to the *Qur'an* to underline that participation by Muslims in Belgium is legitimate for both men and women and within the bounds of Islam. They highlight that political participation must respect the global good and not be based on fulfilment of personal interests. Although LMB have taken steps to combat anti-political attitudes within the Belgian Muslim community there is a risk that underprivileged Muslims might not have access to or take heed of this message. The message by the LMB also reflects efforts by European Islamic scholars such as Tariq Ramadan which point to the necessity of political participation by European Muslims (Ramadan 2004). The discussion of this barrier highlights that although a minority of Muslims have anti-political attitudes, much of the francophone Belgian and European Muslim community generally are working to challenge these attitudes and the barriers that these views pose to political participation by Muslims. Furthermore, since these findings are based on work with women from middle class backgrounds, along with findings from previous research (Parvez 2013), the evidence indicates the class-bound nature of such attitudes and barriers. This observation also has implications on the findings presented in Chapter Three related to 'European Islam', suggesting that middle class European Muslims are more likely to identify with this concept. In comparison the French Muslim women did not report barriers from within the Muslim community in terms of attitudes. I would argue that this does not indicate the lack of such barriers in France, especially since Parvez (2013) has already observed such attitudes in the French context. Instead, analysing the wider responses related to barriers put forward by the French Muslim women leads me to conclude that interviewees placed greater emphasis on the headscarf barrier and therefore did not cite obstacles linked to anti-political attitudes from within the Muslim community as being amongst the principal barriers to their participation in French politics. The centrality of the headscarf barrier perhaps obscures the impact of alternative barriers to Muslim political participation in France. However, an interviewee pointed out: "Also we [the Muslim community] have never been able to organise ourselves" (28), therefore implying that the Muslim community faces organisational barriers that stem from within the community.

5.3 Conclusions

Comparing Muslim women's responses in this study reveals that the Muslim women, in each case, face differing barriers to their political participation. French interviewees most often cited barriers that they had encountered in reference to the headscarf. Obstacles were posed by either wearing or expressing support for the right of others to wear the headscarf. I concluded that these barriers were best explained by considering the combative and anti-headscarf nature of the current implementation of secularism in France, the view of the headscarf as simultaneously a mark of anti-feminism and oppression, and threatening, extremist and anti-French, and finally the general incontestability of *laïcité* in France.

Since the headscarf was both a barrier to state level and non-state level political participation by Muslim women, I concluded that the anti-headscarf attitudes had permeated wider society rather than being restricted to elite politics. This leads to the normalisation and acceptability of discrimination towards visibly Muslim women and subsequently constrains Muslim women's political participation. Furthermore, understanding the extent to which such attitudes have been normalised contributes to explaining why merely expressing support for the right of others to adopt the headscarf is met with hostility and serves to hinder Muslim women's political careers in France.

In the face of these obstacles French Muslim women adopted strategies that enabled them to continue to pursue some political engagement; these included not wearing the headscarf, in spite of them wanting to do so, and therefore being able to pursue a wider range of opportunities for their political participation. Secondly, some continued to wear the headscarf and therefore retreated to 'safe' political spaces that were accepting of their presence. Finally a smaller category of French respondents described wearing the headscarf generally, removing it and replacing it with "something culturally French" (26) during their political engagements. I argued that this category represented Muslim women's negotiation of Muslim and French culture and identity, whilst also demonstrating Muslim women's awareness of French 'combative' secular demands that necessitate the concealment of their Muslim identity. I also suggested that this example demonstrated Muslim women's selective self-presentation in line with normative desired public appearance (Goffman 1956).

Furthermore, these findings add to the debate concerning the already extensive focus on women's appearance in politics. Ramsay (2003, 105-106) observes that based on their appearance, women in French politics are either constructed as "icy" and "unfeminine" or described as being "iron women", alternatively they are criticised for being "too busy looking after their 'look'", which subsequently leads to accusations that they are not capable of occupying serious political roles. These arguably sexist constructions delegitimise women's presence in French politics. However in

spite of the hyper-sexualising and simultaneously asexualising nature of the headscarf (Winter 2008), the extensive barriers to politically visibly Muslim women means that Muslim women do not enter this binary categorisation as faced by women in French politics generally and instead are already politically delegitimised and excluded from politics in France due to the normalisation of anti-headscarf attitudes. Nonetheless, Muslim women who participate in French politics face obstacles related to their appearance like other French women engaged in politics.

In Belgium, there were mixed responses as to the extent to which secularism and the headscarf had been a barrier to political participation. Experiencing headscarf related barriers was largely governed by the area and the level at which the women participated. Across francophone Belgium secularism and the headscarf did not limit participation at the non-state level. However in Brussels, secularism and the headscarf are less problematic than in other parts of francophone Belgium.

In order to explain these regional disparities, in reported experiences, I looked at the role of population sizes, institutional, legal and normative factors. This analysis led me to conclude that the large Muslim demographic in Brussels when combined with compulsory voting, gender parity legislation, the full PR political system, multicultural norms and the inclusion of ethnic minority candidates, outweighs any negative effects posed by any anti-headscarf attitude. My analysis points to the exceptionalism of Brussels and therefore my findings are consistent with earlier work by Zibouh (2011, 2013)

Conversely in Wallonia secularism and its influence on the treatment of Muslim women's dress constitutes a greater barrier to Muslim women's political participation than that observed in Brussels. However, it would appear that this barrier is an emerging obstacle and not as established as that seen in France generally. Similar to France, women in Wallonia adopt coping strategies to overcome this obstacle. Either they do not wear the *hijab* and continue to participate in state level politics or they maintain the headscarf and participate at non-state level. Although Wallonia shares institutional and normative features with Brussels, I argued the demographic differences between the two francophone Belgian areas contribute to observed differences in the strength of the headscarf barrier. Furthermore these findings also add to the debate surrounding the role of French secularism in Belgium (Mielants 2006, Severs 2010) and leads me to argue that whilst the French model is increasingly influential in Wallonia, its emergence is less apparent in Brussels.

I argued the importance of demographic factors in reducing the role of the headscarf barrier in francophone Belgian politics and although Muslims constitute 8% of the French population (Pew Forum 2009), this large Muslim demographic in France does not outweigh barriers posed by the headscarf. This is primarily linked to the nature of French secularism and the established normalisation of hostility towards visibly Muslim women, along with the limitations posed by the French political structure and norms such as assimilation.

In both France and francophone Belgium Muslim women reported that Islamophobia presented a barrier to their participation. However, while the women in Belgium cited this generally, French women described specific instances where they feel they have faced Islamophobia, including being called an “Islamist” for fasting in Ramadan. Although these barriers were expressed in both cases, the specific examples in the French case suggest that this barrier is more keenly felt by French respondents. This is consistent with existing findings which related an increased perception of Islamophobia among the wider French Maghrebi population (Kunst, Sam, and Ulleberg 2013). Nonetheless, national monitoring bodies in each case record high numbers of Islamophobic incidents (Benyekhlef and Thami 2013, CCIF 2014), therefore indicating that while Islamophobia is problematic in both France and francophone Belgium, anti-Muslim attitudes are more likely to pose barriers to Muslim women’s political participation in France than in francophone Belgium. This argument is further emphasised if we consider the headscarf barrier to represent an example of Islamophobia.

Muslim women also expressed that their ethnic difference also constituted a barrier to their participation. Again this was stressed more by French interviewees than those in Belgium. In France, the women saw ethnic discrimination as part of a French colonial legacy, whilst this was not pertinent in Belgium. I argue that French assimilative norms compared to Belgian multiculturalism further emphasise and explain the reported differences related to ethnic discrimination. I also posit that racism along with Islamophobia contributes to the multi-layered primary barriers to Muslim women’s participation in the two cases.

In both cases women argued that their gender presented a barrier to their political participation. Although not stressed as the principal obstacle in either case, this barrier was linked to limitations on time that come from assuming traditional domestic gender roles, such as child-rearing. These findings demonstrate that Muslim women’s experiences are consistent with those faced by women in politics more generally. However when discussing gender, women in France returned to the question of Muslim women’s visible identity, suggesting that as Muslim women they face more barriers from their external appearance than Muslim men in French politics. This was not discussed by Muslim women in Belgium. I argue that this further underlines the profundity of the headscarf barrier to Muslim women’s political participation in France.

Conversely, in Belgium interviewees highlighted the barrier posed by Muslim men’s cultural attitudes to gender. This barrier was most apparent in relation to women’s participation in Muslim non-state organisations. These women described that via dialogue they were able to challenge these stereotypes. I argue that it is possible in non-state level Muslim organisations, given their often small nature which permits Muslim women’s voices to be heard, that barriers can be challenged. Although Muslim women in France did not discuss such barriers it is highly likely that

these barriers exist in French Muslim organisations. Furthermore, I also suggested that women generally are likely to face barriers to their political participation from such stereotypical attitudes. Additionally, in Belgium, a minority of the interviewees described anti-political attitudes from within the Muslim community, this was consistent with existing findings related to Muslim anti-political attitudes (Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking 2013, Parvez 2013). However, I observed that this position appears to be a minority and class-bound standpoint in Belgium. Furthermore Belgian Muslim organisations and European Islamic scholars (Ligue des Musulmans de Belgique 2014, Ramadan 2004) are actively challenging and seeking to dispel this misconception.

Specifically in Belgium, respondents explained that the fear of instrumentalisation limited their participation in state level politics. In Chapter Four, I discussed how Belgian Muslim women are valuable assets for political parties in Belgium, particularly in areas with large Muslim populations, since their presence presents a means of securing the ethnic and 'Muslim vote' and meeting gender parity quotas. However, whilst some saw being able to participate in political parties as an opportunity, others perceived this as a barrier to their effective participation at the state level. These disparities in perception reflect the role of individual differences and highlights the potential shortfalls that come with such qualitative research and the way in which such research is shaped by the nature of the sample. However, I would suggest that these differences in perception are significantly outweighed by the insight that Muslim women's responses provide.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, in France, given the nature of the POS, emphasis on egalitarianism and blindness to difference, Muslim women were not sought by political parties, meaning that Muslim women did not report the fear of instrumentalisation as an obstacle to their political careers. This disparity highlights key differences in the experience of barriers to Muslim women's participation in French and Belgian politics.

Although the literature related to SES and political participation often focuses on the adverse effects of low SES on political participation, in both cases interviewees did not report low SES as a barrier to their participation. Instead interviewees discussed how their professional commitments resulted in limited time and therefore reduced resources for participation. This highlights the middle class nature of Muslim women who are active in politics in both cases. My findings are consistent with Parvez (2013), who argues French Muslim middle classes are engaged in politics, whilst those with low SES tend to be excluded from politics. I noted that this might point to the sample in this study being atypical, I argued that in studying Muslim women who already participate in politics I was bound to come across middle-class Muslim women in both cases.

To conclude, at the outset of this chapter I posed the question: **does secularism, and its influence on the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress in France or francophone Belgium constitute a barrier to Muslim women's political participation in either of the two cases?** Based

on my comparative analysis, I argue that the extent to which secularism and Muslim women's dress poses a barrier heavily depends on discourses surrounding secularism and Muslim women, and specific configurations of contextual features. In France secularism is increasingly 'combative' (de Charentenay 2010, Haspelagh 2012, Ramadan 2004, Roy 2007), debates surrounding Muslim women's dress cite indisputable secular principles (Baubérot 2012), and 'othering' and discrimination of visibly Muslim women appears to be normalised (Amara 2004, Baubérot 2004, Carland 2011, de Charentenay 2010, Edmunds 2011, Fayard and Rocheron 2009, Hargreaves 2007, Motha 2007, Wallach-Scott 2007, Winter 2008, Yazbeck Haddad 2007, Zemni 2006). These factors contribute to Muslim women stressing the enormity of the headscarf barrier throughout the interviews. Furthermore, based on the evidence, I conclude that secularism and its influence on the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress poses a distinct and principal barrier to Muslim women's participation in French politics and that this barrier is present across both the state and non-state level.

Conversely, in Belgium, interviewees reported mixed effects of secularism and the headscarf on their political participation. This led me to conclude that a combination of demographic, normative and institutional factors in the Belgian context influence the strength of the headscarf barrier. Specifically the large Muslim demographic in Brussels (Zibouh 2013) outweighs any barriers posed by emerging 'combative' secularism in francophone Belgium. Furthermore, the constitutional 'organised secularism', the POS and Belgian multicultural norms combined, mean that the headscarf is still a lesser barrier to participation in francophone Belgium, than in France where secularism is comparatively more 'combative' and anti-Muslim, and the POS along with assimilative and egalitarian norms enforce the strength of the headscarf attitudes barrier. Therefore, I conclude that the extent to which secularism and anti-headscarf limit Muslim women's participation in francophone Belgian politics is shaped and preceded by the combination of numerous context-specific factors. Furthermore, I conclude that anti-headscarf attitudes do not pose a barrier to participation in francophone Belgian non-state level politics. These differences in the extent to which secularism and the headscarf constitute barriers to Muslim women's political participation demonstrate some of the factors that differentiate Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium.

The study also revealed that Muslim women face barriers other than those posed by secularism and Muslim women's dress, these included limited time, gender, ethnicity and faith-related barriers. These barriers demonstrate that alongside their Muslim identity, Muslim women face a range of barriers based on the multiple facets of their identities. Furthermore, these barriers overlap with those faced by women or ethnic minorities in each case generally. I conclude that Muslim women in francophone Belgium comparatively report a wider range of barriers because

they are less focused on the headscarf barriers, whilst this obstacle is central to Muslim women's participation in French politics. In spite of this, Muslim women face multiple primary barriers in each case. These principal barriers are shaped by contextual specificities and reflect Muslim women's multi-layered identities.

6. Chapter Six: Conclusions

The final chapter of the thesis presents and summarises the principal findings that emerge from the comparative study of the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium. The chapter seeks to answer the principal research questions as posed at the outset of this thesis. It follows the same thematic outline as in the main body of the text, by beginning with an overview of motivations, followed by opportunities and finally barriers to Muslim women's political participation in the two cases, before drawing together the key findings from each section, reflecting on the key conclusions and discussing potential areas for further investigation.

6.1 Motivations

In Chapter Three, I sought to comparatively assess French and francophone Belgian Muslim women's primary motivations to participate in politics, with a specific emphasis on the extent to which 'European Islam' was a motivator. The central research question posed in this chapter was: **does 'European Islam' motivate political participation by Muslim women in either France or francophone Belgium?**

Comparing the French and Belgian data sets revealed a distinct difference in the extent to which the interviewees identified with 'European Islam', with French interviewees largely rejecting the notion and, to varying degrees, francophone Belgian interviewees being open to the idea of a 'European Islam'. In France it was seen as a state enforced "McDonaldisation" (21) whilst Belgian interviewees saw it as an adaptation of Islam that maintained Islamic principles and was "nourished by European culture" (20).

Through the examination of norms and popular attitudes in each case, I argued that the disparities in levels of identification with 'European Islam' are primarily driven by contextual approaches to religion and difference. Namely, non-identification in France was attributed to the combination of current interpretations of *laïcité* and the perceived victimisation of French Muslims. Whilst in Belgium traditions of multiculturalism and 'organised secularism' give rise to comparative comfort in articulating an identification with 'European Islam'. Furthermore, based on these contextual specificities I argued that in France 'European Islam' is seen as a top-down process, and conversely it is perceived as a bottom-up process in Belgium. These differences further contribute to the extent to which interviewees in each case express identification with the idea; for example, by beginning to establish the previously scarcely documented role of the state in European Muslim identification with 'European Islam'. Nonetheless, these findings emerge solely from the study of French and francophone Belgian Muslim women who participate in politics and therefore given the topical nature of Islam in Europe, these conclusions present basis for further investigation into

the effects of the state on general European Muslim identification with 'European Islam' and their societal engagement.

Those who identified with 'European Islam' described how it entailed a closer engagement with Islamic sources (Nielsen 2007, Pedziwiatr 2006) and distancing from culture of origin (Merali 2011, Pedziwiatr 2007, Roy 2005) as Islam adapts to the European context (Bougarel 2007, Meer 2012, Merali 2011, Peter 2006, Roy 2005, Saint-Blancat 2002, Salih 2004). Thus my conclusions related to what 'European Islam' entails are consistent with the existing literature in this area. However, given the previous largely academic focus in this area, this work adds a new empirical dimension to the understanding of 'European Islam' and in doing so contributes to the gap in knowledge related to 'European Islam' (Allievi 2005, Salih 2004).

Having established the different levels of identification with 'European Islam' in each case, I continued to explore the role of 'European Islam' in motivating Muslim women's political participation. Based on the previously discussed levels of identification with 'European Islam' one might have expected to see a fairly clear cleavage in the extent to which French and Belgian interviewees expressed that 'European Islam' had been influential; however, I concluded that these initial thoughts were in part superficial and only reflected earlier observations related to the role of the state and identification with 'European Islam'. Therefore, subsequent in-depth analysis revealed a more nuanced and comparable role of Islam in motivation Muslim women's political participation.

In France, rather than being motivated by 'European Islam', Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims catalysed political participation. Examples of discrimination cited included the headscarf affairs or Islamophobia in general, strengthening arguments that French Muslim women's political participation is significantly shaped by normalised anti-Muslim discourses. In addition, Islamic values had shaped interviewees' motivations to pursue French politics, but given the nature of French values and norms these could not be publicly expressed. These findings led me to conclude that identification with 'European Islam' is not central, but that the interviewees' negotiation of issues they faced, in the French context, subsequently motivated them to participate in French politics and represents an example of a lived 'European Islam'.

Francophone Belgian interviewees also stated that Islamic values shaped their motivations to participate in politics. However, these principles were seen as stemming from both their European and Islamic connections. The recognition of values arising simultaneously from both Islam and Belgian culture, I argued, reflected interviewees' hybrid identities, the favourable effects of Belgian multiculturalism and recognition of Islam. Comparing the French and Belgian data demonstrated an overlap in motivations, yet different patterns of framing and articulation. Nonetheless, the

overlap positions this research in line with existing work suggesting that Muslims are guided by Islamic principles in their political careers (O'Toole et al. 2013).

These findings led me to conclude that perhaps it may have been more insightful to interrogate the extent to which Islam generally, rather than 'European Islam', motivates Muslim women's political participation in each case. Future study into the effects of Islam on motivating European Muslim political participation has the potential to challenge common stereotypes related to the incompatibility of Islam and European culture (Huntington 1993, Ye'or 2005), present an alternative to the highly mediatised discourse related to Islam and extremism and provide even greater insight into the nature of European Muslim political participation.

I also concluded that there was remarkable heterogeneity in Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics, and therefore in an attempt to effectively present and analyse these drivers of political participation, I combined several models of motivation from the literature related to political motivations; namely the "Beyond the Self", "Issue Public" and perceived efficacy models of political motivation (Fowler and Kam 2007, Han 2009, Pinkleton and Weintraub-Austin 2001). This combined approach represents an alternative lens for the study of motivations to participate in politics and may be applied to future study in this area.

In both cases Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics were all distinctly underpinned by perceived efficacy and this perception had the potential to outweigh ideals based motivations. Perceived efficacy is shaped by national norms and also political precedents. So, for example in France the national norms related to the headscarf, meant that interviewees largely agreed that appearing visibly Muslim limits political participation. Although previously I only discussed this as a barrier, drawing together the conclusions reached throughout the thesis, I argue that French attitudes towards Muslim women's dress mean that those who participate in politics accept that they will not be effective in pursuing state and some non-state level political participation:

When I look back to my French political engagement, I had been so deeply disappointed that I just decided, like OK, don't waste your time. You will have to make so many concessions to please, you know like, for the management or for the leadership of these groups in order to get a position, to be effective. Especially because I was religiously quite practising, I was wearing a hijab and I was not willing to make any concessions on that side. So I then tried to participate at the French society level. (1)

Or, to a much lesser extent in francophone Belgium I concluded that the fear of instrumentalisation limited a minority Muslim women from participating in state level politics, since they perceived their participation here would be ineffective:

Also in political parties there is a worry that you will always be fighting [to be accepted as a Muslim woman]. So, [that is a] waste of my time spent fighting in a political party, when I know that my presence would be nothing more than just my presence. (3)

Thus in both cases, although differently manifested, perceived efficacy underpins Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics. In this regards, Muslim women's motivations to participate are similar to those expressed by wider society.

Alternatively with regards to the influence of precedents on perceived efficacy, looking to the high rates of Muslim political representation in Belgium (Sinno 2009a, Zibouh 2011, 2013), coupled with the way in which respondents in francophone Belgian interviewees saw Mahinur Özdemir as a positive political role model and established political precedents, signal potential efficacy and thus motivates Muslim women's political participation in francophone Belgium.

In sum perceived efficacy strongly shapes motivations to participate in politics and also contributes to the understanding of the wider interrelatedness of motivations, opportunities and barriers in explaining the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium.

Interviewees also argued diverse altruistic motivations for participating in both state and non-state level politics. Understanding these altruistic motivations contributed to explaining the nature of political participation that the women would pursue. For example, francophone Belgian Muslim women derive moral understanding of the importance of social justice from their combined European and Islamic values, subsequently tackling poverty is seen as a way of combating injustice and ultimately this translates into Muslim women pursuing altruistic political projects to help the local homeless community. This example demonstrates the connected nature of European and Muslim ideals, altruistic political motivations and the type of political engagement that Muslim women pursue.

In addition to efficacy and altruism, personal experiences also motivated participation in politics. In France these experiences were linked the rise of the far-right, Islamophobia and racism, and were therefore largely negative in nature. It is my argument that experiences in France lead to grievance-based motivations to participate in politics. Although others advise against classifying Muslim political engagement in this way (Dobbernack, Meer, and Modood 2012), my conclusions indicate that given French norms, it is inevitable that the study of Muslim women's political participation would reveal such grievances. These concerns shaped Muslim women's issue public membership and led to them pursuing political activities that responded to their negative experiences, such as lobbying against the French far-right or joining anti-headscarf ban associations.

In francophone Belgium women descried their experiences with positive role models, typically did not emphasise grievance-based motivations and instead tended to focus more heavily on the motivations derived from their Belgian and Muslim identification. Whilst undoubtedly racism and

Islamophobia exist in Belgium (Benyekhlef and Thami 2013), multicultural norms and perceived efficacy contribute to Muslim women pursuing political action motivated by their combined Belgian and Muslim identities. This broad motivation did not always readily indicate the nature of political participation that Muslim women in francophone Belgium would undertake. Furthermore, whilst experiences broadly motivate political participation by Muslim women, the context significantly shapes the nature of such experiences and in turn the politics pursued. Furthermore, the role of efficacy, altruism and experience in motivating Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium represents a potential model that might be applied in assessing the nature of political motivations among other groups in society.

6.2 Opportunities

In Chapter Four of this thesis I set out to comparatively explore the nature of the principal opportunities for political participation by Muslim women in France and francophone Belgium. The chapter addressed the second in the series of research sub-questions: **to what extent to political structures in France and francophone Belgium provide opportunities for Muslim women to participate in politics in the two cases?** Interrogating POS in both cases was intended to facilitate the understanding of the way in which Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics translated in actual political participation.

Reviewing the POS in both France and francophone Belgium revealed similar formal institutional configurations at the state and non-state level in each case. This similarity therefore implied that Muslim women should have reported encountering equally numerous opportunities for their political participation. However, closer analysis of voting patterns and norms, political traditions, normative contextual values and discourses surrounding political legislation in each case revealed a series of similarities and differences between the two cases.

However, I argued that analysing political structures and norms in each case only shapes our understanding of the objective factors that contribute to the political opportunities that Muslim women face in France and francophone Belgium respectively and does not shed light on the nature of political opportunities that Muslim women specifically encounter, thus emphasising the importance of the qualitative approach in this study.

Analysis of the reported opportunities for political participation expressed by the interviewees revealed a range of similarities and differences in each case. Both French and francophone Belgian interviewees highlighted encountering similar opportunities to participate in non-state level politics. Comparing the POS in both cases, underlines the role of similar 1901 French and 1921 Belgian freedom of association legislation in ensuring opportunities for Muslim women's non-state level engagement. However comparatively analysing Muslim women's experiences of these non-

state level opportunities revealed the relatively well-maintained freedom of association for Muslim women in francophone Belgium: “When you are a volunteer, when it is free people don’t care if you wear the headscarf or not.” (2)

This is contrasted with the negative influence on Muslim women’s freedom of association brought about by French secular based normative attitudes towards Muslim women’s dress:

... in the associations in which I participate there are Muslims and non-Muslims who address the question of Islam and Islamophobia... but it depends on the association... there is an organisation that clearly states that they don’t accept Muslim women who wear the headscarf. (24)

Thus attitudes towards the headscarf in each context subsequently alter the initially seemingly similar opportunities for Muslim women’s political participation in non-state level politics in each case. These findings both shed light on the nature of opportunities that Muslim women in France and francophone Belgium come across and also emphasise the efficacy of the approach of studying objective POS and subjective experiences within the wider frame of the study of the nature of political participation. Furthermore, comparing the responses from each case related to non-state level political participation underlines the extent to which norms related to the headscarf in France, namely the way in which it serves to ‘other’ the Muslim women who wear it, have spread across all sections of society. These conclusions also bring together the work in Chapter Five, related to secularism and barriers to Muslim women’s political participation in France with the findings related to understanding opportunities for political participation.

Additionally Chapter Four highlighted that French Muslim women tended to report fewer opportunities for their state-level political participation and instead focused on the non-state level opportunities. This was especially true for French women who appeared visibly Muslim. Conversely the francophone Belgian respondents highlighted a variety of opportunities for their political participation at the state level. I argued that these differences may be linked to my choice to apply a ‘snowball’ method of interviewee recruitment, leading to a potentially atypical sample. However, as outlined in Chapter Two, I put in place measures to overcome such shortfalls such as liaising with diverse Muslim women and organisations in the two cases. I also explained that given my outsider position, coupled with applying ‘snowballing’ when researching hidden groups (Noy 2008), contributed to my decision to adopt this method of interviewee recruitment.

Furthermore, highlighting the differences between interviewee experiences in France also helps us to understand the three management strategies that the French interviewees put forward in Chapter Five, namely either not wearing the headscarf, retreating to ‘safe spaces’, or managing the visibility of their covering.

I also argued that the predominantly majoritarian nature of the French POS, non-compulsory voting, the mixed reception and effects of gender parity legislation, the argued domination of the 'masculine model' in French politics (Ramsay 2003, Shvedova 2005) and the existing precedence of low levels of Muslim political representation (Sinno 2009a) further contributed to comparatively limiting the opportunities for Muslim women's elite political participation in France.

Conversely, in addition to observing that women in francophone Belgium were comparatively more likely to report increased opportunities for their state level political participation, the data analysis demonstrated that almost two thirds of francophone Belgian Muslim women reported being directly approached to stand as a candidate by left-wing political parties. Analysing the profile of the women who reported this revealed that those who were approached included women who appeared visibly Muslim and those who did not. Overwhelmingly, analysis also indicated that Muslim women who were from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to be approached than European converts to Islam. These differences in reported experiences between the francophone Belgian interviewees led me to conclude that ethnic minority vote seeking shapes the nature of the opportunities encountered by Muslim women who participate in politics, and therefore my findings reflect some of the literature related to ethnic minority political participation in Belgium (Hooghe 2005). Additionally, although some scholars report similar practices in French politics (Hargreaves 2007, Vidal and Bourtel 2005), comparing Muslim women's reports in the two cases reveals that ethnic minority vote seeking is more common in Belgium than in France. I concluded that the PR system, the decentralised nature of the Belgian POS, compulsory voting and Belgian multicultural norms contribute to the increased likelihood of Belgian political parties seeking the candidacy and participation of ethnic minority Muslim women.

I also suggested that the multifaceted nature of these Muslim women's identities increased the desirability of the inclusion of Muslim women as party candidates, since they represent a means of securing the Muslim and ethnic vote, and also allow parties to fulfil gender parity requirements. The finding that Muslim women were more likely to be approached in areas with large concentrations of Muslim and ethnic minority communities further emphasises this. However, although Muslim women reported being approached by parties, a number also noted that they tended to be poorly ranked on candidate lists and therefore this affected the likelihood of their election. However, the D'Hondt method of vote calculation (Deschouwer 2009) meant that voters could directly for Muslim women candidates. This subsequently meant that whilst low placement might have limited opportunities for their political representation, specific features of the Belgian POS outweigh these obstacles.

6.3 Barriers

In Chapter Five I set out to comparatively assess the principal barriers to Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium. This chapter was centred on the third research sub-questions; **does secularism and particularly its influence on the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress in France or francophone Belgium constitute a barrier to political participation by Muslim women?**

Exploring the nature of secularism and its influence on the normative treatment of Muslim women's dress revealed significantly different patterns in the two cases. In France secularism has 'ideological' roots (Boussinesq 1994, Roy 2007), but is increasing 'combative' and anti-Islamic in nature (Baubérot 2012, de Charentenay 2010, Haspelagh 2012, Laachir 2008, Ramadan 2004, Roy 2007). 'Combative *laïcité*' is influential in the legal and normative hostility towards Muslim women's dress in France (Legifrance 2004, Moniteur 2011, de Charentenay 2010, Fayard and Rocheron 2009, Hargreaves 2007, Motha 2007, Wallach-Scott 2007) and given the centrality of secularism in France, arguments contrary to secular principles and by extension the demonization of Muslim women's dress have become incontestable (Baubérot 2012, Fayard and Rocheron 2009). Additionally both the headscarf and the veil in France are constructed as anti-secular, anti-French, anti-feminist, symbolic of Muslim women's oppression and simultaneously the threat of Islamic extremism (Amara 2004, Carland 2011, de Charentenay 2010, Edmunds 2011, Fayard and Rocheron 2009, Motha 2007, Wallach-Scott 2007, Yazbeck Haddad 2007). These normalised perceptions 'other' visibly Muslim women, and thus I hypothesised the norms would constitute obstacles to Muslim women's political participation in France.

On the other hand, the Belgian constitution outlines the terms of 'organised secularism' nationally (Constitution 2012). Since 1974 the state has officially recognised Islam in Belgium and contributes to funding of registered mosques, clergy, chaplains, Islamic religious education teachers and the EMB (Coenen 2002, Kanmaz 2002), and therefore Belgian secularism is comparatively more open and less anti-Islamic than that observed in France. This conclusion was reached in spite of suggestions in the literature indicating an increase in French-style 'combative' secularism in francophone Belgium (Mielants 2006, Severs 2010). Similarly, unlike in France there is no national headscarf ban in Belgian schools (Shadid and Van Koningsveld 2005), save for the recently introduced region-wide school headscarf ban in Verviers (Verviers Conseil Communal 2013). In addition although Belgium has a national veil ban (Moniteur 2011), closer inspection reveals that whilst the French ban was strongly linked to French secular principles and the perception of visibly Muslim women as oppressed and anti-French, the ban in Belgium was preceded by similar regional prohibitions and is largely based on national security (Haspelagh 2012). Thus these differences in

secularism, and normative approaches to Muslim women's dress indicate disparities between France and francophone Belgium.

Interrogating Muslim women's understandings of *laïcité* in the two cases largely reflected the points that emerged from previous analysis of the literature and of legal measures, with French Muslim women stating the secularism in France was now removed from its ideological grounding and was currently cited in the justification and legitimisation of religious discrimination. Analysis in Belgium revealed a more complex and nuanced understanding of secularism, with the majority of women highlighting the compatibility of Belgian 'philosophical' and 'political *laïcité*' with their Belgian and Muslim identities. The interviewees also discussed being 'politically secular', meaning that they did not seek to instrumentalise their faith in their political careers, thus arguably demonstrating the positive effects of secularism on francophone Belgian Muslim women's political participation. Considering these principal findings alongside those that emerged in Chapter Four, whereby ethnic minority francophone Belgian women were commonly sought out by political parties to stand as candidates, indicates a disparity between Muslim women's viewpoints and political objectives, and the practice of vote seeking among left-wing Belgian political parties.

A minority of Belgian respondents also indicated the perceived emergence of a French-style 'combative *laïcité*' in francophone Belgium, with some citing that its emergence was most apparent in the Verviers school headscarf ban. To a degree the reports that emerge from the interviews echo the argued presence of French-style secularism in francophone Belgium (Mielants 2006, Severs 2010). However, the increase in 'combative' secularism was not always apparent when reviewing the legal and normative secular discourses in francophone Belgium, thus highlighting the efficacy of the combined objective and subjective approach.

With regards to the influence of secularism on Muslim women's political participation, French respondents agreed that appearing with the headscarf presented a clear barrier to Muslim women's participation in all state level and some non-state level French politics, which means that visibly Muslim women are only able to participate in a limited range of non-state level political opportunities and thus their participation is limited.

This barrier also extended to those who express support for the right of others to wear the headscarf. I put forward suggestions that advocacy of the freedom to wear a headscarf in France can be explained by considering much of the secular-based and generalised stereotypes of Muslim women in France. Furthermore, such findings related to the barriers experienced by those who express support for Muslim women's dress have not previously emerged in the literature.

In the face of these barriers, overwhelmingly French Muslim women found ways of managing their public appearance and continued to find avenues for political participation. With Muslim women

either not wearing the headscarf and therefore being able to pursue a greater range of the opportunities outlined in Chapter Four, or continuing to appear Muslim and subsequently being limited to only pursuing political engagement in specific non-state level associations, or finally and most unexpectedly a minority of the French Muslim interviewees described adopting culturally French clothing such as the beret to cover their hair during their political engagements. I concluded this final example recalled the ‘bandana *hijab*’ adopted by the young French women who were affected by the 2004 veil ban (Lévy et al. 2004, Winter 2008). I also noted that the coping strategies adopted by Muslim women in the face of the barriers that encountered by politically active Muslim women demonstrated their knowledge and negotiation of Islamic and French contextual demands, and led to them to presenting socially desirable versions of the self (Goffman 1956). I also concluded that the findings that emerge from this area of the research present an alternative to the argued binary classification of women in French politics as either being an “iron woman” or alternatively being preoccupied with their “look” (Ramsay 2003, 105) and highlight the added complexity faced by Muslim women in French politics, whilst also underlining the way in which women in French politics exercise autonomy and negotiate the scrutiny of their appearance. Additionally, I argued that the findings demonstrate French Muslim women’s remarkable resilience and determination to continue to participate in politics in the face of the clear barrier presented by secular-based anti-headscarf attitudes in French politics.

Conversely in Belgium, the extent to which the headscarf was a barrier to Muslim women’s political participation differed across francophone Belgium and the level at which the women were engaged. For example, it did not appear to be an issue in Belgian non-state level politics. I concluded that this was not surprising given my earlier review of Belgian ‘organised secularism’ and legal measures related to the *niqab* and headscarf in Belgium.

However, at the state level the headscarf only appears to be a barrier to Muslim women’s political participation in specific areas of Wallonia, such as Verviers. The evidence that emerged from the interviews indicates that the headscarf is largely welcomed in state level politics in Brussels. I concluded that these differences across the diverse areas of francophone Belgium point to the exceptionalism of Brussels and in this regard the research findings add to the work of Zibouh (2013) regarding the unique nature of Muslim political representation in Brussels. Drawing together my principal arguments from this section and those established in Chapter Four, I concluded the experiences of visibly Muslim women in Brussels arise from the effects of large Muslim and ethnic minority communities in the area and minority vote seeking (Hooghe 2005), Belgian multiculturalism, the PR system, gender parity legislation, compulsory voting the favourable effects of D’Hondt vote allocation method, which when combined outweigh any emerging anti-headscarf attitudes.

The increasing problems posed by the headscarf correlates with the Muslim women's reports and the literature which suggests an increasing French-style 'combative *laïcité*' in some parts of francophone Belgium (Mielants 2006, Severs 2010). Additionally based on an understanding of the POS, such the PR system, compulsory voting, gender parity, minority vote seeking, multiculturalism and the D'Hondt method, I concluded the comparatively smaller Muslim population residing throughout the Wallonia meant that these elements of the POS did not outweigh emerging French-style secular anti-headscarf attitudes, therefore meaning that such attitudes constituted a barrier to Muslim women's participation in Wallonia.

Comparing the different ways in which the headscarf limits political participation in France and Belgium also underlined that although at 8% (Pew Forum 2009) the Muslim community in France is exceptionally large, the differences in the POS mean that Muslim population size does not outweigh normative hostile attitudes towards Muslim women's dress, and therefore we see that there is a significant interplay or dependent linkage between the opportunities and barriers to Muslim women's political participation in the two cases. Furthermore, these observations point to the efficacy of studying the nature of political participation by individuals through the lens of motivations, opportunities and barriers to political participation.

Barriers to participation in the two cases did not only stem from secularism and attitudes towards Muslim women's dress. For example, to varying degrees interviewees in both France and francophone Belgium reported Islamophobia limited their political participation. These findings are consistent with reports related to increasing anti-Muslim sentiment in the two cases (Benyekhlef and Thami 2013, CCIF 2014). However, whilst this was mentioned in passing by a minority of francophone Belgian respondents, Muslim women in France tended to focus more heavily on this barrier, with some reporting being accused of "Islamism" (28) for fasting in *Ramadan*. Looking back to my earlier conclusions, I noted that the normalisation of Islamophobia in France contributed to French Muslim women's motivations to become active in politics and also had an influence on the nature of participation that they would pursue.

Additionally, to varying degrees the interviewees also suggested that their ethnic difference created barriers to their political participation. Looking at the nature of Muslim women's political participation in both France and francophone Belgium highlights that Muslim women participate in anti-racism politics at various levels, however whilst this type of participation was motivated by social justice in Belgium, French Muslim women described their personal experiences of racism as motivators. The French example highlights the interplay of negative experiences, motivators and barriers to Muslim women's political participation. Comparing the qualitative data from the two cases revealed that this barrier was more keenly stressed by Muslim women in France than in francophone Belgium. I attributed these differences to the combined influences of French

assimilationist tendencies and the residual effects of the French colonial past in North Africa on the largely Maghrebi French Muslim community, and Belgian multiculturalism along with the lack of Belgian colonial presence in Morocco or Turkey. However as illustrated in Chapter Four, rather than purely constituting a barrier, evidence indicated that ethnic difference contributes to the opportunities for Muslim women's political participation in francophone Belgium, thus the role of ethnicity is complex and governed by each context respectively.

In both France and francophone Belgium Muslim women encountered barriers related to their gender. However the context shaped the way in which these barriers were articulated, with French Muslim interviewees returning to the difficulties faced given their visibility as Muslim women and simultaneously argued that French Muslim men would not face such obstacles. I argued that this finding represented the profundity of the headscarf barrier to Muslim women's political participation in France and that these arguments contribute to a rationale for studying the nature of Muslim male's political participation in France in the future. Also linked to female Muslim identity, francophone Belgian Muslim women reported encountering cultural stereotypes and subsequent barriers to their participation in Muslim non-state level political participation, however simultaneously the women who described this potential limitation also noted that it was easily broken down. However, in both cases the women described barriers to their political participation that emerged from their domestic responsibilities and social norms. Therefore, these findings indicate that in addition to facing barriers linked to the Muslim identity, the interviewees also come across obstacles that stem from their gender and thus they encounter similar barriers to those faced by women generally.

Since much of the literature focuses on the barriers posed by low SES and also given that the Muslim women's responses, Chapter Five considered the role of SES in Muslim women's participation in both cases. The study revealed that in both cases rather than generally low SES limiting, Muslim women described limited time as an obstacle to their participation. However although limited time is typically linked to low SES, limited time partly arose from a combination of gender roles and their professional commitments. This means that the research findings in this thesis best fit with existing research into Muslim elites (Pedziwiatr 2006, Klausen 2005, Parvez 2013).

Specific to Belgium, the interviewees highlighted additional barriers to their political participation, including anti-political attitudes amongst a minority of the Belgian Muslim community. However they pointed out that via intra-community dialogue and publicising the permissibility of political participation among Muslims in Belgium (Ligue des Musulmans de Belgique 2014Ligue des Musulmans de Belgique 2014) such barriers could be broken down. Similarly, the fear of instrumentalisation also limited some interviewees from participating in Belgian state level politics.

I argued that these findings reflect individual differences and some of the potential issues that arise from qualitative research. In France Muslim women did not cite such limitations, I noted that this was linked to Muslim women not encountering such opportunities to participate in politics. Furthermore, I also argued that French Muslim women were exceptionally focused on the headscarf barrier and thus did not cite as many barriers to their participation. Nonetheless, to conclude French and francophone Belgian Muslim women who participate in politics encounter numerous barriers and these obstacles correspond to the numerous elements of their identities, including those linked to faith, gender and ethnicity. The nature of barriers encountered are also distinctly shaped by the context, with specific emphasis on secularism and headscarf related barriers in France and a more a more interplay of numerous barriers in francophone Belgium.

6.4 Final Remarks

At the outset of this thesis I posed the central research question: **what are the principal motivations, opportunities and barriers to Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium, and what differentiates their experiences in these apparently similar but quite distinct settings?**

With regards to Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics, in both cases these are underpinned by the extent to which the Muslim women perceive that their political actions will be effective. Furthermore, in both cases the interviewees cited a range of values and ideals that had also motivated them; these were often linked to social justice and equality. These moral principles led to the interviewees often pursuing altruistic political activities.

In France such ideals were often cited as stemming from Islamic values, whilst in Belgium these were seen to come from a combination of Belgian and Islamic values. I argued that the differences between the two cases could be best explained by considering the contrasting, dominant pro-assimilation and multicultural models in France and francophone Belgium respectively.

In addition, in both France and francophone Belgium personal experiences, and especially in France, grievances also served to motivate political participation. Furthermore in France, interviewees often discussed their political responses in relation to the numerous headscarf controversies, the rise of the far right, racism and Islamophobia. Based on these interview responses, I concluded that whilst motivations can be broadly categorised under general themes, each context shapes the specific nature of Muslim women's motivations to participate in politics.

Furthermore, based on the range of motivations presented, I concluded that rather than specifically investigating the notion of 'European Islam' as a motivator of Muslim women's political participation, and given the lack of consensus surrounding the meaning of the term, it would be more apt to review the way in which Islam shapes Muslim women's motivations to participate in

European politics. In this study Islam was pertinent to interviewees' ideological motivations and reactive motivations to pursue politics.

The principal opportunities expressed by Muslim women were heavily shaped by the POS and normative attitudes towards Islam and Muslims in each case. In spite of the potentially numerous points of entry identified, French interviewees tended to focus on the opportunities for political participation that stemmed from the 1901 freedom of association law. However, analysis of the primary barriers to Muslim women's participation in French politics, highlighted that even these opportunities were constrained by normative attitudes towards secularism and the headscarf. Conversely, francophone Belgian interviewees are more readily able to access Belgian politics, this was reflected in the range of political engagement pursued across the sample. Moreover, ethnic minority and identifiably Muslim women typically described the way in which they were approached by political parties to stand as candidates, I attributed these particular opportunities to a combination of Belgian multiculturalism, 'organised secularism', the PR electoral system, the nature of voting in Belgium, gender parity, existing high levels of Muslim political representation and precedents of ethnic vote seeking. Such effects were enhanced in areas with large Muslim and ethnic minority populations and resulted in Muslim women encountering increased opportunities for state level political participation, thus denoting that POS vary by case and within each case

Finally, the principal barriers to participation were also distinctly shaped by the context, with French interviewees stressing the clear obstacles to Muslim women's political participation posed by secularism and normative attitudes towards Muslim women's dress. In Belgium a more complex picture emerged with the exceptionalism of Brussels and the emergence of 'combative *laïcité*' and associated barriers to Muslim women's participation in certain areas of Wallonia. To varying degrees barriers to Muslim women's participation also stemmed from racism and Islamophobia, however comparing the two cases revealed that these barriers were more keenly perceived by French Muslim women than in Belgium. In both cases Muslim women faced obstacles linked to limited time or traditional gender roles. This led me to conclude that Muslim women are subject to multiple barriers and these correspond to the multifaceted nature of their identity and either heightened or lessened by contextual norms.

In Chapter Four, I also highlighted that Muslim women's identities comprised numerous elements that could be varyingly emphasised by the women dependent on the context. This thinking underpins the interview schedule (Appendix One) where, for instance, under the theme of 'European Islam' I asked women "Which facet of your identity is most important?" Having used the research methods that I have in this study, having been informed by intersectional approaches and having analysed the effects of Muslim women's multiple identities on their experiences of participation, I aimed to "give voice to the particularity of the perspectives and need of women of

colour who often remained invisible *as women...*" (Choo 2010: 1133) and to the perspectives and needs of Muslim women particularly. Having reviewed the motivations, opportunities and barriers to Muslim women's political participation in the two cases, it is evident that an interplay of the numerous components of Muslim women's identities coupled with context-specific factors relevant to each case determine the experiences and outcomes of their participation. In some circumstances, as in the case of ethnic minority, Muslim women in francophone Belgium, difference presented opportunities for the women's candidacy, whilst the political context created pathways for these women to secure representative roles; thus difference had favourable outcomes. Conversely, in France where women discussed the way in which ethnic difference and religious identity often normalised islamophobia and racism, through *laïcité* for example or assimilationist policies, Muslim women's difference inhibited state level and, in some cases, non-state level political participation.

To conclude, this study establishes the principal motivations, opportunities and barriers to Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium and positions these in reference to the objective structures and norms in place, in each context. This dual approach and qualitative focus contribute to the strengths of the thesis and its findings. The study also highlights the role of personal differences in each of the areas and the ways in which these give rise to different types of political participation among the women who participated in this study. Additionally, the research considers the way in which contextual specificities shape and differentiate Muslim women's political experiences in the two cases. Specific features that contribute to this differentiation include French assimilationist norms which dictate conformity to a homogenous abstract image of 'Frenchness' and which subsequently render Muslim women's political participation difficult contrasted with Belgian multiculturalism which accepts Muslim women's hybrid and multifaceted identities, thus largely allowing for their broad participation in politics. Additionally, the nature of the POS and secularism in each case contribute to differentiating the nature of Muslim women's political participation. The comparative and qualitative approaches, along with the decision to study the principal motivations, opportunities and barriers to Muslim women's political participation applied in this study constitute a comprehensive model and therefore presents a framework that can be used in future studies of European Muslim political participation and also presents a means of gaining further insight into the factors that encourage, allow and potentially limit political participation in each case.

7. References

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8. Appendices

Appendix One – Interview Schedule

Introduction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks and personal introduction. • 1 minute overview of research (remember to keep this vague) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Muslim women's political participation in France and francophone Belgium. ○ Explain typology of political participation. ○ Seeks to include a varied range of Muslim women. ○ Objectives: focus on Muslim women's experiences of political participation in France and francophone Belgium → comparison • Participant consent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Audio recording, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, right to withdraw. 			
Questioning:			
Topic Area:	Questions:	Prompts:	Notes:
Political Participation:	Can you describe your political participation?	Organisation? Role in organisation?	
Motivations:	What motivated you to participate in politics?	Motivations? <i>European Islam?</i>	
Opportunities:	How did you become involved in politics? What factors, or organisations, or incentives, made it possible for you to enter and progress in politics?	How did you become involved in politics?	
Barriers:	Has anything or does anything stop your political participation? What have been the major difficulties that you have faced in developing a political career (as a Muslim woman)?	Obstacles? Role of Muslim women's dress? Role of <i>laïcité</i> ?	

'European Islam':	How would you describe your identity? What does 'European Islam' mean to you?	Which facet of your identity is most important? Culture?	
<i>Laïcité</i> :	Can you describe <i>laïcité</i> in France/Belgium? What does <i>laïcité</i> mean to you?	Influence of <i>laïcité</i> on political participation?	
Islamic Headscarf:	Can you tell me what the Islamic headscarf means to you? What do you think of the way issues over the headscarf are dealt with (in France/Belgium)?	How did you come to wear it? Impact on political participation? Broader significance?	
Concluding Interview	Is there anything of importance that you would like to add?		
General Points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reiterate respondent answer to check/clarify. ○ Do you mean...? ○ You mentioned..., can you elaborate? ○ Can you give an example of...? ○ Silence as a prompt. • Contact numbers: (compile relevant numbers for each interview and insert here for each interview.) • Snowballing recommendations: Reiterate criteria for participation (Muslim women who participate in politics – under Martiniello's typology) 			

Appendix Two – Participant Consent Form

Muslims constitute a significant number of the francophone Muslim community, giving rise to theories of European Islam, however such European Muslims are argued to be significantly underrepresented in politics. In spite of this Muslim women are becoming increasingly involved in politics, yet there has been little academic consideration of the experiences, motivations and barriers faced by such women. Therefore, through this research I aim to be able to contribute to the understanding of Muslim women's political participation in France and Belgium.

In order to collect data for this project, I will use semi-structured, qualitative interviews. Should you consent to participating in this research, the interview will be digitally audio recorded, confidentially stored and subsequently transcribed for analysis as part of the thesis *Muslim Women's Political Participation: A Comparative Study of France and Belgium*, by Amina Easat-Daas (easata@aston.ac.uk) under the supervision of Professor Jim Shields (j.shields@aston.ac.uk), and Dr Graeme Hayes (g.a.hayes@aston.ac.uk) at Aston University, Birmingham, England.

In signing this form you confirm the following:

- I fully understand the purpose and background of this study. ☐
- I wish to participate in the study. ☐
- I consent to the recording of this interview. ☐
- I consent to the data recorded being analysed in the research project. ☐
- I recognise that I have the right to withdraw from the study, at any time prior to the submission of the final thesis, by contacting Amina Easat-Daas via email easata@aston.ac.uk. ☐
- I understand, if I wish, the data recorded will be kept anonymous. Data will only be available to the researcher and thesis supervisors. ☐
- I am able to request that my personal details remain confidential. ☐

Participant name.....

Participant signature.....

Date.....

Appendix Three – Summary of Participants

Nº	Interview Date and Location	Country	Nature of Political Participation	Age	Ethnicity (mixed ethnic heritage marked by /)	Family and Residential Status	Convert or Born into Muslim Family?	Highest Level of Educational Attainment	Employment (FT = Full time, PT – Part time)
1	08/2013 Brussels	France - Paris	European and national Muslim associations. Formerly involved in local and national political participation	26	Tunisian	Single With parents	Born Muslim	PhD	Political activism FT
2	08/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Verviers	Former elected local councillor. Currently Involved in multiple Muslim and non-Muslim specific non-state level associations.	29	Moroccan	Single With Parents	Born Muslim	Masters	Political activism FT
3	08/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Brussels	Trade union activist and active in local	36	Moroccan	Single	Born Muslim	Masters	Political activism

			and supranational Muslim associations.			Independent – other			FT
4	09/2013 Brussels	France – Lyon	Active in European Parliament. Also participates in national anti-racism associations.	50	Algerian – Berber	Single Independent - alone	Born Muslim	Undergraduate	Political activism FT
5	09/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Liège	Formerly elected local representative. Involved in national Muslim associations.	31	Moroccan	Married - with children Independent – with partner and children	Born Muslim	PhD	Researcher FT
6	09/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Verviers	Elected local councillor.	25	Moroccan	Single With parents	Born Muslim	Masters	Political activism/Student FT
7	09/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Brussels/ Verviers	European anti-racism organisation activist. Also participates in	26	French	Married Independent –	Convert to Islam	Masters	Political activism FT

			local Muslim associations.			with partner			
8	09/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Liège	Local interfaith association activist.	30	Turkish	Single Independent – other	Born Muslim	PhD	Researcher/ Lecturer FT
9	09/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Brussels	Regional Member of Parliament, former local councillor.	30	Turkish	Married - with children Independent – with partner and children	Born Muslim	Undergraduate	Political activism FT
10	09/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Charleroi	European Muslim organisation activist. Also participates in anti-racism associative movements.	23	Moroccan/Italian	Single Independent – alone	Born Muslim	Undergraduate	Student FT
11	09/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Brussels	Supranational association member.	23	Turkish/Swedish	Married Independent – with partner	Born Muslim	Undergraduate	Student FT

12	09/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Liège	Local and national association activist.	30	Belgian	Single Indepen dent – alone	Convert to Islam	Undergraduate	Unknown
13	10/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Brussels	Multiple local associative engagements and elected regional youth parliamentari an.	25	Moroccan	Married Indepen dent with partner	Born Muslim	Undergraduate	Housewife
14	10/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Brussels	National and local Muslim and non- Muslim associations.	30	French/Mor occan	Single Indepen dent – alone	Convert	Undergraduate	Administrati ve role FT
15	10/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Brussels	National party member and former election candidate. Local associative participation.	40	Moroccan	Single Indepen dent – other	Born Muslim	Undergraduate	Insurance broker FT
16	10/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Brussels	National trade union activist.	36	Moroccan	Single Indepen dent - other	Born Muslim	Undergraduate	Political activism FT
17	10/2013	Belgium – Brussels	Active in local Muslim	60	Belgian	Married with	Convert to Islam	Undergraduate	Semi- retired/Politi

	Brussels		associations and elected national consultative body member.			children /grandchildren Independent – with partner			cal activism PT
18	10/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Brussels	National party member and former party election candidate.	50	Moroccan/Spanish	Married with children Independent – with partner /children	Born Muslim	High school	Housewife
19	10/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Brussels	Local association founder.	28	Moroccan	Single With parents	Born Muslim	Masters	Bank Manager FT
20	10/2013 Brussels	Belgium – Brussels	European Muslim association activist and feminist group activist.	34	Algerian	Married - with children Independent – with partner and children	Born Muslim	PhD	Political activism FT

21	10/2013 Paris	France – Lyon/Paris	Prominent national political party member. Local anti- Islamophobia associational engagement.	40	Algerian	Single Indepen dent – alone	Born Muslim	Undergraduate	Administrati ve role FT
22	11/2013 Paris	France – Paris	Local Muslim association and European feminist group activist.	31	Antillean	Single Indepen dent – friends	Convert to Islam	Masters	Student FT
23	11/2013 Paris	France – Bourgogne /Paris	National and European anti- Islamophobia activist. Local associative engagement.	26	French	Single Indepen dent – alone	Convert to Islam	Masters	Political activism FT
24	11/2013 Paris	France – Paris	Anti-headscarf law lobby group activist.	40	Senegalese	Married - with children Indepen dent with partner and children	Born Muslim	High school	Housewife
25	11/2013	France – Paris	Active national party	34	Algerian	Single	Born Muslim	Undergraduate	Teacher

	Paris		member and association member.			Independent – alone			FT
26	11/2013 Paris	France – Paris	Elected local councillor. National Muslim association member and local association activist.	28	Algerian	Single With parents	Born Muslim	Masters	Lawyer FT
27	11/2013 Paris	France – Paris	Local association activist.	25	Tunisian	Single With parents	Born Muslim	Masters	Teacher FT
28	11/2013 Paris	France – Paris	Former senator and former union member. Local associative engagement.	57	Algerian	Married - with children Independent – with partner	Born Muslim	Masters	Magistrate PT
29	11/2013 Paris	France – Paris	Elected local councillor and local association activist.	27	Algerian	Single Independent – friends	Born Muslim	Undergraduate	Political activism FT