Host society's dislike of the Islamic veil: The role of subtle prejudice, values, and religion

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ABSTRACT

The wearing of the Islamic veil by Muslim women has become a source of tensions in Western European countries. In order to investigate majority members' attitudes towards the veil, the present two studies ($Ns = 166$ and 147), carried out in Belgium, integrated three lines of research that have focused on (a) the role of subtle prejudice/racism on the host society's attitudes towards immigrants, (b) the role of values on acculturation, and (c) the role of religious attitudes on prejudice. Results revealed the effects of subtle prejudice/racism, values (self-enhancement values and security versus universalism), and religious attitudes (literal anti-religious thinking versus spirituality), in predicting greater levels of anti-veil attitudes beyond the effects of other related variables such as age and political conservatism. The studies also suggest the importance of including religious attitudes as part of the intergroup-relation factors that predict attitudes towards immigrants, at least with regard to specific components of intercultural relations.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Islamic veil and intercultural relations

Despite the many positive individual and societal efforts by European majority group members to integrate immigrants into the Western European societies, immigrants still face a great deal of subtle racism, xenophobia, prejudice and discrimination (Eurobarometer 138, 2000; Eurobarometer 263, 2007; Pettigrew, 1998). This is especially the case of immigrants of Arab and Turkish origin (the majority of whom are Muslims) who are seen particularly negatively by the host society (Cuddy et al., 2009; Rohmann, Florack, & Piontkowski, 2006), possibly because of the accumulation of historical, political, economic, cultural, and religious reasons.

Within this context, the wearing of the Islamic veil by Muslim women has become a contentious issue, and many European countries have implemented specific reglementations and even specific laws to address this (McGoldrick, 2006; Welch, 2007). France, for instance, adopted a law prohibiting the wearing of "ostensible religious signs" in public schools. Other Western European countries also prohibit the veil, for instance in governmental and administrative offices or allow its banning in certain areas such as schools (e.g., Belgium).

Understanding the host Western majority's attitudes towards the Muslim veil is an important issue for intercultural relations. There has been a number of sociological studies on Muslim women's perspective of the veil and the interpretations

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they give to this symbol (e.g., Gaspard & Khosrokhavar, 1995; Weibel, 2000). The two present studies change the focus and investigate variables which predict negative attitudes towards and perceptions of the Islamic veil by the majority group in one Western European country (Belgium). These attitudes may touch on issues of ethnicity and immigrant status, religion, perceived threat for security or resources, or values relative to people's equality and autonomy.

We thus specifically investigate intergroup relations (subtle prejudice/racism, Western ethnocentrism), values (conservation versus openness to change values; self-expansion versus self-enhancement values), religious attitudes (religiousness, spirituality, and literal way of thinking about religious issues), identities (national, European, and cosmopolitan), personality (openness to experience), and political orientation. We will detail below the rationale for including these variables as well as the corresponding each time hypotheses. Note that with regard to previous studies on the majority's attitudes towards immigrants or on specific aspects of acculturation, it is, as far as we know, the first time, that a study integrates specific religious attitudes, values, and variables relative to intergroup relations as predictors of such attitudes.

1.2. Subtle prejudice/racism and ethnocentrism

There is considerable theoretical and empirical evidence that subtle prejudice/racism (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995), modern racism (McConahay, 1986), and symbolic racism (Sears & Henry, 2005), constructs, which have much in common yet, remain distinct, are new and socially acceptable forms of old-fashioned blatant racism. As a consequence of this subtle form of racism, minority groups such as immigrants in Western Europe are – as can be the case for blacks in the US – subject to prejudice, discrimination, and covert hostile attitudes by majority members (Jackson, Brown, Brown, & Marks, 2001; Pettigrew, 1998; Van Oudenhoven, Ward, & Masgoret, 2006). These groups are considered inferior in a rather essentialized way (see Leach, 2005); they are disliked (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995) and perceived as less human in terms, for instance, of emotions (Vaes, Paladino, Castelli, Leyens, & Giovanazzi, 2003). As Henry and Sears specify (2002; see also Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997; Sears & Henry, 2005), these negative attitudes and behaviors are indeed due to outgroup prejudice and subtle racism and not only to political conservatism.

Since the Islamic veil is in Europe highly associated with the Arab-Muslim communities of European immigrants, we expected the majority's negative and hostile attitudes towards the veil to be positively related to subtle prejudice/racism. We expected this to be the case with general subtle prejudice, i.e. as applied to immigrants in general, and not to be restricted to specific anti-Arab prejudice.[1] We also expected these negative attitudes to be related to specific anti-Arab Western ethnocentrism: perception of Western civilization as superior to Arab-Islamic civilization should relate to the majority's negative attitudes towards the veil. Indeed, the veil is often seen as a sign of women's submission to men and authority and as reflecting less developed, pre-modern values and worldviews in comparison to the West, which is perceived as valuing freedom and personal autonomy.

1.3. The role of values

The specific values to which majority members ascribe may play an important role in determining their attitudes relative to the Islamic veil. Indeed, previous research suggests that differences in values priorities are indicative of willingness for contact with the outgroup (Israel: Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995), the majority's perception of Islam as not favoring terror (Belgium: Saroglou & Galand, 2004), and attitudes towards immigration policies and immigrants (nine European countries: Leong & Ward, 2006), especially those of a different race/ethnic group and from poorer European and non-European countries (15 European countries: Schwartz, 2006). Overall, these studies converge on the idea that less tolerance of outgroups in general and immigrants in particular is typical of people who attribute (a) high importance to conservation values, especially security, but also conformity, (b) high importance to self-enhancement values (power and achievement), and (c) low importance to the values of universalism–egalitarianism. If we assume then that the anti-veil attitudes of majority members reflect a general ethnic and anti-immigrants prejudice, we should expect these attitudes to relate positively to conservation and self-enhancement values, and negatively to universalism. These expectations fit with what we can call "an anti-immigrant subtle prejudice/racism hypothesis".

The above predictions are derived from previous evidence from social psychological research. However, a number of different predictions can be derived from arguments against the veil that are present in the social debate in Western European societies. Opponents of the veil often advance moral arguments to reject the wearing of the Islamic veil. Specifically, they argue for the need to respect and protect gender equality and the need to guarantee young girls' and women's autonomy in the face of Muslim cultural, religious, and family pressure. From this perspective, we would expect negative attitudes toward the Islamic veil to correlate positively with the values of self-direction (valuing independent thought and action-choosing) and self-transcendence values, especially universalism, a value that includes universal

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[1] In a recent study in Spain (Echebarria-Echabe & Guede, 2007), anti-Arab prejudice was found to be strongly associated with anti-Semitism. This finding suggests that beyond differences on intensity and nature of negative attitudes towards various (ethnic) outgroups (e.g. Lee & Fiske, 2006; Rohmann et al., 2006), a general (ethnic) prejudice factor plays an important role.

prosocial ideals such as social justice, equality, and protection of the welfare of all people. We call this hypothesis the "moral defense of autonomy and equality hypothesis".

1.4. Religious attitudes

Previous research on religious attitudes suggests two important distinctions: one between religiousness and spirituality (Saucier & Skrzypińska, 2006; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005), and the other between a literal and a symbolic way of dealing with religious issues (Duriez & Hutsebaut, in press). First, spirituality shares with religion a reference to self-transcendence and the sacred as well as a sense of connectedness with all beings and the world (Pargament, 1999; Piedmont, 1999). However, spirituality does not necessarily imply belonging to a specific religious tradition and group (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). Contrary to religiousness that may, to some extent, lead to low universalism and prejudice towards a variety of outgroups (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Saroglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2004), spirituality reflects an overcome of in- versus out-group borders in terms of prosociality and universalism (Saroglou, Pichon, Trompette, Verschueren, & Dernelle, 2005; Saroglou & Muñoz García, 2008). We thus predicted that spirituality relates to tolerance of the Islamic veil. Religiousness of native Belgians, who have mostly been raised as Catholics, should be unrelated or associated with negative attitudes towards the veil.

Second, previous theory and research (Duriez & Hutsebaut, in press; Fontaine, Duriez, Luyten, & Hutsebaut, 2003) have made a distinction between literal and symbolic approaches to religious issues. In this perspective, a distinction is made between the following four attitudes: (a) literal religious thinking ("orthodoxy"); (b) symbolic religious thinking (accepting the symbolic, fundamental message of religion); (c) symbolic non-religious thinking (acknowledging the historical and/or contemporary importance of religion in terms, for example, of meaning and values without being religious oneself); and (d) literal anti-religious thinking (totally rejecting religion as irrelevant, unscientific, and exploiting people's needs and credulity). Previous systematic research has shown that it is the literal versus symbolic thinking dimension (and not the believing versus non-believing one) that predicts closed-mindedness, prejudice, and racism (see Duriez & Hutsebaut, in press, for a review). We thus expected that literal pro- and anti-religious thinkers would hold negative attitudes towards the Islamic veil whereas this should not be the case with the symbolic pro- and non-religious thinkers. For example, one may expect that orthodox religious people may be hostile towards the Islamic veil because only their own religious symbols have true religious meaning. Literal anti-religious thinkers may also be hostile because they think all what religion is about is submission and that the veil is a proof of the religious-political exploitation of people.

1.5. Other variables

We also included socio-demographic variables and measures of political orientation (right versus left wing), personality (openness to experience), and collective identities (Belgian, European, and cosmopolitan). Age, political conservatism, and national identity/pride have often been found to predict subtle prejudice, modern racism, and negative immigration policy attitudes (Echebarria-Echabe & Guede, 2007; Jackson et al., 2001; Nail, Harton, & Decker, 2003; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). We thus expected that older participants and those with strong self-identification as Belgians would be hold more negative attitudes towards the Islamic veil. The contrary should be the case for a cosmopolitan, "citizen of the world" identity. For exploratory purposes, we also included European identity. Finally, we also included openness to experience as a basic personality dimension known to underlie conservative social attitudes (McCrae, 1996) and outgroup prejudice (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007).

2. Study 1

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were adult passengers at the central train stations of three major cities in the French speaking part of Belgium. They were approached by a research assistant who asked them whether they would like to participate in a study on the way Belgians perceive the Muslim veil. Our research assistant made an effort not to distribute protocols to people who, by their appearance, likely belonged to the Arab-Muslim community. In total, 328 individuals received the questionnaire and were asked to complete it at home and then send it to the research assistant (who had a typical Belgian name) within 2 weeks time. No compensation was provided for participation in the research. More than half of those approached filled in the questionnaire and sent it back. Two people turned out to be of Arab-Muslim origin and were then excluded from the analyses.

All of the participants retained for the analyses ($N = 166$) lived in Belgium; 154 of them were born in Belgium and had either both parents born in Belgium ($n = 135$) or one of the parents born in Belgium and the second one in another European country or in the ex-Belgian Congo ($n = 19$). The 12 participants who were not born in Belgium came (together with the parents) from another European country (often France) or the ex-Belgian Congo. Ages ranged from 18 to 84 with an average of 46.86 ($SD = 15.43$). Women represented 60% of the sample. The majority of participants (68%) reported a Catholic or a Christian religious affiliation, and the other 27% reported being atheists or without religion; only eight participants reported another than the three monotheistic religions.

2.1.2. Measures

Anti-veil attitudes. We created an 8-item measure of negative attitudes relative to the Islamic veil. These items tapped feelings of discomfort with and being disturbed by the Islamic veil, as well as a willingness to ban it. A 7-point Likert scale was used for all items (1 = *totally disagree*; 7 = *totally agree*). Here are the items: (1) "In general, the wearing of the Muslim veil in some places makes me upset [in French: "me dérange", which has an additional moral connotation of disapproval]"; (2) "I find completely natural the fact that Muslim women wear the veil" (reversed item); "More particularly, the wearing of the veil makes me upset..."; (3) "in public places (e.g., administration, hospitals, ...)"; (4) "on the street"; (5) "at school"; (6) "everywhere"; (7) "The Muslim women have the right to wear the veil wherever they like" (reversed); and (8) "The wearing of the Muslim veil should be prohibited in some places". Reliability was satisfactory (α = .83). Note that, for the average Belgian citizen, "veil" is the well-spread word commonly associated with what many Muslim women wear ("hijab"), whereas a small minority of people may be really familiar with the many specific terms referring, within Islam, to different ways of covering parts of the head or the body.

Subtle prejudice scale (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). The key ingredient of this measure is "the socially accepted rejection of minorities for ostensibly non-prejudicial reasons" (p. 71). The scale (10 items) contains three subscales: (a) perception of minorities as lacking and thus threatening the host society's established values, especially work and success values (4 items); (b) a strong emphasis on between-group cultural differences, a process that sets the outgroup aside as a "people apart" (4 items); and (c) absence of any positive feelings toward these minorities (2 items).[2] The subtle prejudice scale has been successfully used in a variety of countries and studies, and with a variety of minority groups (Pettigrew & Meertens, 2001, for a review); and it is also known as a measure of "subtle *racism*" (e.g., Henry & Sears, 2002; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2005). In the scale items, we used "foreigners" as a generic term in order to test the hypothesis of a general ethnic prejudice predicting the anti-veil attitudes, and not only prejudice against Arabs or Muslims.[3] Here are sample items: "Foreigners living here teach their children values and skills different from those required to be successful in Belgium" (*traditional values* subscale); "How different or similar do you think foreigners living here in Belgium are to other Belgian people like yourself ... in the values that they teach their children?" (*cultural differences* subscale); "How often have you felt sympathy for foreigners living here"? (*positive emotions* subscale). Reliabilities were acceptable: αs = .78 (traditional values), .68 (cultural differences), .60 (positive emotions), and .74 (total scale).

Anti-Arab Western ethnocentrism. We created three additional items in order to examine another component of modern racism, i.e. feelings of superiority by host society members, here native Western Europeans, towards groups (here Arab-Muslims) considered as inferior. The following items were thus included: "Western civilization presents advantages that are absent from the Arab-Muslim civilization"; "Western civilization is more evolved than the Arab-Muslim civilization"; and "Western and Arab-Muslim civilizations share common features" (reversed item). A 7-point Likert scale was adopted (1 = *I totally disagree*; 7 = *I totally agree*). Reliability was low (α = .51), but after deletion of the third item this became acceptable (.72).

Values (Schwartz, 1992, Value Survey). The Schwartz Value Survey (1992; 44-item version) includes items representing 10 different values: tradition, conformity, security, power, achievement, self-direction, hedonism, stimulation, universalism, and benevolence. For instance, self-direction is measured by the following items: "freedom", "independent", and "choosing own goals". Respondents rate the importance of each value item as "a guiding principle in my life" on a 9-point scale ranging from 7 (*of supreme importance*) to −1 (*opposed to my values*). The structure of the ten values has shown cross-cultural stability across dozens of countries and has been found to relate meaningfully to prosocial, antisocial, environmental, political, consumer, and intellectual behaviors (Schwartz, 2006, for review).

Religious attitudes. In order to assess religious attitudes we used two indexes, one for religiousness and one for spirituality (Saroglou & Galand, 2004), as well as the Post-Critical Belief Scale (Fontaine et al., 2003). All of these measures used a 7-point Likert scale. A three-item index (importance of God in life, importance of religion in life, and frequency of prayer) measured *religiousness*. A one-item index measured importance of *spirituality* in life. Both indexes have successfully been used in many published studies, showing discriminant validity between these two constructs (e.g., Saroglou & Galand, 2004; Saroglou & Muñoz García, 2008). Twelve items selected from the Post-Critical Belief Scale served as measures of specific religious attitudes. These four religious attitudes can easily be understood as the quadrants of two orthogonal axes: (a) believing or not in (b) a literal versus symbolic way. As presented in the Introduction, a distinction thus is made between: (1) literal (orthodox) believers, (2) symbolic believers, (3) symbolic non-believers, and (4) literal non-believers. Each participant obtains a score in each of the four attitudes.[4] The scale has successfully been used in dozens of studies in several countries (Duriez & Hutsebaut, in press, for review). Here are sample items respectively for each dimension: "Ultimately, there is only one correct answer to each religious question" (orthodox); "The Bible is a guide, full of signs in the search for God, and not a

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[2] Coenders, Scheepers, Sniderman, and Verberk (2001) found that the traditional values subscale fits better with blatant rather than subtle prejudice. However, other studies are in favor of the distinctiveness between blatant and subtle prejudice as measured by Pettigrew and Meertens (see Pettigrew & Meertens, 2001; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2005).

[3] The only exception was item 2 of the traditional values subscale where a specific group had to be mentioned. We referred then to "North Africans" (in French: "Maghrébins"). The results were not due to this item in particular.

[4] An alternative way to use the data is to compute only two scores, one for the believing versus non-believing axis and the other for the literal versus symbolic thinking axis. Both ways of scoring are adopted by researchers working with the scale. Since we were particularly interested on whether the anti-veil attitudes would be typical of both literal believers and literal non-believers, we used the four scores.

historical account" (symbolic believers); "Each statement about God is a result of the time in which it was made" (symbolic non-believers); and "In the end, faith is nothing more than a safety net for human fears" (literal non-religious).

Openness to experience (Big Five Inventory; John & Srivastava, 1999). We included the 10 items of the Big Five Inventory that measure openness to experience. Sample items are: "Is curious about many things"; "Likes to reflect, play with ideas".

Collective identities. Three questions in a 7-point Likert-format scale (1: *not at all*; 7: *absolutely*) were included to assess the following collective identities: "How much do you define yourself in terms of identity as … (1) Citizen of the world; (2) European; and (3) Belgian".

Socio-demographic information. Participants provided information on age, gender, country of birth for themselves and their parents, level of education, religious affiliation, and political orientation (a 7-point scale from 1 = *extreme left* to 7 = *extreme right*).

2.2. Results

Mean and standard deviations of all measures are detailed in Table 1. The negative attitudes towards the Islamic veil were unrelated to gender and education, but were positively related to age, $r = .21$, $p < .01$. Bivariate correlations were computed between anti-veil attitudes and the other constructs; with values, partial correlations were computed, controlling for mean importance of values as recommended by Schwartz (1992). As detailed in Table 2, the anti-veil attitudes were positively related to subtle prejudice and two of its components (traditional values and cultural differences), Western ethnocentrism, security, power, achievement, right-wing political orientation, and literal anti-religious attitude. They were negatively related to universalism, benevolence, and the citizen of the world identity; and they were unrelated to the other religious measures, openness to experience, and European and Belgian identities.

Several correlates of the anti-veil attitudes were intercorrelated with each other. In order to identify the unique predictors of anti-veil attitudes—controlling thus also for the impact of age, we conducted a multiple regression analysis (with the significant correlates as predictors). To avoid multicolinearity, we retained subtle prejudice, as a stronger correlate, but not ethnocentrism (their intercorrelation was of $r = .47$); and we combined the two self-enhancement values, i.e. power and

Table 1
Means and standard deviations of all measures for both studies.

	Study 1		Study 2	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Anti-veil attitudes	4.06	1.42	3.91	1.56
Subtle prejudice				
Traditional values	4.25	1.55	4.30	1.49
Cultural differences	3.21	0.54	3.28	0.52
Positive emotions (*R*)	2.36	0.90	3.46	1.55
Anti-Arab ethnocentrism	4.02	1.77	4.21	1.14
Values				
Tradition	3.09	1.36	2.99	1.29
Conformity	4.27	1.12	4.14	1.26
Security	4.38	1.25	4.39	1.37
Power	1.62	1.38	1.72	1.47
Achievement	3.27	1.27	3.12	1.26
Hedonism	3.81	1.42	3.92	1.44
Stimulation	3.22	1.53	3.26	1.42
Self-direction	3.99	1.05	4.34	1.15
Universalism	5.02	0.99	4.90	1.05
Benevolence	5.03	0.80	4.94	1.26
Political orientation (right)	3.69	1.36	3.65	1.25
Openness to experience	3.92	0.64	3.80	0.56
Religion				
Religiousness	3.41	1.99	2.96	1.80
Spirituality	4.40	2.17	3.94	2.14
Orthodox believing	2.23	1.23	2.22	1.29
Symbolic believing	3.87	2.03	3.85	1.68
Symbolic non-believing	5.03	1.30	4.93	1.34
Literal anti-religious	3.16	1.53	3.54	1.40
Collective identities				
Citizen of the world	5.43	1.66	–	–
European	5.77	1.60	–	–
Belgian	5.72	1.87	–	–

Table 2
Correlates of anti-veil attitudes and relative to veil representations.

	Study 1	Study 2		
	Anti-veil attitude	Anti-veil attitude	Negative representations	Positive representations
Subtle prejudice	.42***	.40***	.50***	−.24**
Traditional values	.44***	.44***	.54***	−.22**
Cultural differences	.31***	.15+	.25**	−.05
Positive emotions	−.12	−.30***	−.27**	.31***
Anti-Arab ethnocentrism	.18*	.28**	.37***	−.10
Values[a]				
Tradition	−.02	−.09	.01	.29**
Conformity	.10	.08	.05	.13
Security	.20*	.28**	.32***	.05
Power	.41***	.22*	.40***	−.08
Achievement	.36***	.15	.05	−.00
Hedonism	.05	.11	.05	.12
Stimulation	−.11	−.00	−.06	.13
Self-direction	.01	−.12	−.08	.11
Universalism	−.29***	−.10	−.13	.19*
Benevolence	−.25**	−.00	−.03	.11
Political orientation (right)	.31***	.14	.06	−.08
Openness to experience	−.11	−.20*	−.14	.07
Religion				
Religiousness	−.02	−.15+	−.08	.24**
Spirituality	−.12	−.24**	−.12	.25**
Orthodox believing	.07	.16+	.27**	.15+
Symbolic believing	−.10	−.10	−.03	.21*
Symbolic non-believing	.09	−.08	−.06	.14+
Literal anti-religious	.24**	.26**	.24**	−.10
Collective identities				
Citizen of the world	−.16*	–	–	–
European	−.03	–	–	–
Belgian	.11	–	–	–

***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$, +$p < .10$ (two-tailed).
[a] Partial correlations, controlling for mean importance of values.

achievement ($r = .65$), in one total score. The anti-veil attitudes were uniquely predicted by subtle prejudice ($B = .20$, $t = 2.26$, $p < .05$), self-enhancement values ($B = .18$, $t = 2.16$, $p < .05$), universalism ($B = −.23$, $t = −2.76$, $p < .01$), literal anti-religious attitude ($B = .13$, $t = 1.81$, $p = .08$), right-wing political orientation ($B = .16$, $t = 2.01$, $p < .05$), and age ($B = .23$, $t = 2.91$, $p < .01$). The total variance explained (R^2) was 37%.

2.3. Discussion

Results supported the hypothesis that constructs which often characterize anti-immigration attitudes and outgroup prejudice also underlie anti-veil attitudes of majority members. Specifically, being uncomfortable with the veil and willing to ban it were related to subtle prejudice, Western ethnocentrism, and self-enhancement values. Political orientation to the right was an additional explicative factor. Consistent with previous research, age was not a confounding factor. Moreover, results did not confirm what we have called a "moral defense of autonomy and equality hypothesis": anti-veil attitudes were unrelated to high importance placed to the value of autonomy as an important principle in life and were negatively related to the value of universalism.

Additional correlates of anti-veil attitudes – which were not unique predictors in the regression analysis – were high importance attributed to security and a low cosmopolitan identity (as expected), but not religiousness in general or literal religious thinking (orthodoxy). Apparently, although both pro- and anti-religious literal thinking are known to predict racism (Duriez & Hutsebaut, in press), the religious people in this study (i.e. Catholics), including the more orthodox among them, did not seem to be necessarily intolerant with regard to this particular symbol of the Islamic religion. This was however the case with literal anti-religious thinkers.

3. Study 2

The goal of Study 2 was to replicate and extend Study 1 by focusing not only on the discomfort towards the veil and the willingness for its public prohibition, but also on the veil's specific representations that accompany these attitudes.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were recruited through acquaintances of students and research assistants, using a snowball recruitment method. Care was taken to recruit participants from a variety of French-speaking areas of Belgium, urban and non-urban ones, as well as a variety of neighborhoods within the same city. The return rate of questionnaires was 40%. Again, the research assistants who distributed the questionnaires were attentive not to give the questionnaires to individuals who very likely belonged to ethnic minority groups.

The sample constituted of 147 people with 96% of them born in Belgium (124 people had both Belgian parents and nine additional ones had one parent born in Belgium and the other in another European country or in the ex-Belgian Congo). The remaining participants had both parents of European origin. Ages ranged from 18 to 83 with a mean of 39.6 (SD = 17.5). Women represented 64% of the sample. As in Study 1, a large majority of participants (67.3%) reported a Catholic or a Christian religious affiliation, and the other 25% reported being atheists or without religion; only 11 participants reported another religion than the three monotheistic ones.

3.1.2. Measures

With the exception of the collective identities, all the measures of Study 1 were also used in Study 2. For the Post-Critical Belief Scale, an 18-item version was used. We added the following three items to the aversion to the veil scale: "Wearing the Muslim veil goes against the grain of modern society"; "Ostensible religious signs should not be allowed in the public space"; and "If they perceive it to be a religious symbol, I find it normal that Muslim women have to respect the veil everywhere they are" (reversed). Reliability of the anti-veil attitudes measure was greater than in Study 1 (α = .89). We also added two items in order to better balance the anti-Arab Western ethnocentrism scale: "Arab-Muslim culture has advantages that are absent from the Western culture" (reversed); "Western culture and Arab-Muslim culture are very different from one another." The reliability for this scale (five items in total) was acceptable (.61). Finally, the reliabilities of the subtle prejudice scale were satisfactory: αs = .79 (traditional values), .68 (cultural differences), .80 (positive emotions), and .81 (total scale).

In order to measure participants' endorsement of various common representations of the Islamic veil we provided them the following statement and subsequent items: "According to you, the wearing of the veil by the Muslim women, in general is . . ." (1) "An expression of faith/spirituality"; (2) "A sign of belonging to a community"; (3) "A sign of submission"; (4) "A way of emphasizing one's own difference with the Belgian society"; (5) "A way of preserving one's own freedom"; (6) "A way to protest against the West"; (7) "A strategy of provocation". Participants were asked to mark their degree of (dis)agreement on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree).

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Anti-veil attitudes

Mean and standard deviations of all measures are presented in Table 1. The mean level of anti-veil attitudes was similar to that obtained in Study 1. Age and education had no effect on anti-veil attitudes, but gender did: men held more negative attitudes, M = 4.37, SD = 1.52, than women, M = 3.63, SD = 1.52 (t = 2.81, p = .01).

The correlational analyses – bivariate, except for values, as in Study 1 – revealed many similarities with Study 1. The anti-veil attitudes were positively related to subtle prejudice and all its three components, anti-Arab Western ethnocentrism, power, security, and literal anti-religious attitude. In addition, other hypothesized results were found. Anti-veil attitudes related positively to orthodoxy (literal religious thinking), and negatively with religiousness, spirituality, and openness to experience.

Several of these constructs were intercorrelated with each other. In order to identify unique predictors of anti-veil attitudes – controlling thus also for the impact of gender – we computed a multiple regression analysis with all the significant correlates as predictors. In order to avoid multicolinearity, we again included subtle prejudice, as a stronger correlate than ethnocentrism (these two variables were highly intercorrelated, r = .70, p < .001). Negative attitudes toward the Islamic veil were uniquely predicted by subtle prejudice (B = .26, t = 2.65, p = .01), security (B = .16, t = 1.66, p < .10), spirituality (B = −.17, t = −1.76, p = .08), literal anti-religious thinking (B = .19, t = 2.10, p = .04), and gender (B = .23, t = 2.57, p = .01). A total variance of 31% was explained.

3.2.2. The role of representations

An exploratory factor analysis (principal component extraction) of the data relative to these seven representations of the veil suggested the existence of two factors explaining 63% of the total variance: (a) negative representations (items 3, 4, 6, and 7: first loadings varying from .85 to .61; no second loading higher than .30; α = .82), and (b) positive representations (items 1, 2, and 5: first loadings varying from .73 to .69, α = .56). The last item had a second loading of .35 on the first factor; we thus dropped this item and the reliability of the positive representations factor increased to .61. The two final variables, created by summing up the respective by factor items, were moderately intercorrelated, r = −.35, p < .001.

Age was positively related to the negative representations (r = .26, p < .01) but unrelated to the positive ones (r = .05). No effect of gender was observed on negative representations. Women had marginally more positive representations than men, M's and SD's of 33.70, 33.18 and 1.71, 1.69, respectively, t = 1.74, p = .08. Not surprisingly, anti-veil attitudes corresponded to

negative representations of the Islamic veil ($r = .54$, $p < .001$) and were negatively related to the positive ones ($r = -.44$, $p < .001$). As detailed in Table 2, religiousness, spirituality, and symbolic religious thinking related to high positive representations, whereas negative representations reflected literal religious (orthodoxy) or anti-religious thinking. Subtle prejudice related respectively to more negative and less positive representations of the Islamic veil. Anti-Arab ethnocentrism also related positively to the negative representations. Negative representations also related to high importance attributed to the values of power and security, whereas positive representations were positively related to the values of universalism and tradition.

Two multiple regression analyses were conducted, one each for the negative and the positive representations, respectively. Each analysis included all significant correlates as predictors (again, except ethnocentrism[5]). These analyses revealed that the negative perceptions of the veil were predicted by subtle prejudice ($B = .50$, $t = 5.66$, $p < .001$), power ($B = .24$, $t = 2.55$, $p < .05$), literal anti-religious attitude ($B = .16$, $t = 1.94$, $p = .05$), age ($B = .18$, $t = 2.00$, $p < .05$), and mean importance attributed to values ($B = -.23$, $t = -2.52$, $p < .05$). A total variance of 42% was explained. The positive representations of the Islamic veil were predicted by tradition ($B = .19$, $t = 1.77$, $p < .10$) and spirituality ($B = .22$, $t = 2.22$, $p < .05$). The total variance explained was 16%.

3.3. Discussion

Study 2 replicated most of the results of Study 1 regarding anti-veil attitudes and extended them to their corresponding representations. Anti-veil attitudes and negative perceptions of the veil reflected subtle prejudice, anti-Arab Western ethnocentrism, valuing power and security, and literal anti-religious thinking; these factors seemed to have unique effects. The role of self-transcendent values and achievement (Study 1) was however not replicated. Low openness to experience turned out to be an additional correlate of the veil's negative perceptions, but the effect of this personality factor did not remain distinct in the regression analysis. Again, the results were not explained by gender or age differences.

Study 2 provided new information on the role of religiousness and spirituality. These general personal dispositions seemed to have a "protective effect" against negative attitudes towards and representations of the Islamic veil among our participants who, as noted earlier, were Belgians mostly of Christian religious tradition. However, orthodox religious people shared with literal anti-religious people negative representations of the veil, although they did not follow them in willingness for its prohibition. Positive perceptions of the veil were related to values reflecting broad concern for the welfare of all people and for social cohesion (universalism and tradition).

Finally, in Study 2, as in Study 1, no support was found for the hypothesis of a moral motivation behind the anti-veil attitudes. In fact, there was evidence to the contrary, that those who considered the Islamic veil as "a sign of submission" had the tendency to attribute low importance to the values of universalism ($r = -.20$, $p < .05$), benevolence ($-.19$, $p < .05$), and self-direction ($-.16$, $p < .10$), and high importance to power ($.25$, $p < .01$) and security ($.21$, $p < .05$). Not surprisingly then, people who valued "freedom" – a key item of Schwartz's value of self-direction – tended to show low aversion towards the veil ($-.16$, $p = .08$), and their representations tended to be positive ($.21$, $p < .05$).

4. General discussion

The present research shows first that the majority members' negative attitudes towards the Islamic veil are partially explained in terms of intergroup relations (subtle prejudice toward immigrants in general and anti-Arab Western ethnocentrism in particular), values (high importance attributed to security and power, what very likely reflects both an authoritarian and a social dominance patterns of prejudice; Duckitt, 2005), and anti-religious literal attitudes. These findings were consistent across the two studies. Note that subtle prejudice, values (especially power), and anti-religious attitudes seemed to have unique and additive effects, even when controlling for the effects of age and gender. These results confirm what we have called, on the basis of previous social psychological research, the "anti-immigrants and anti-religious hostility hypothesis". Additional results, also in line with this hypothesis, were found: political conservatism and valuing achievement (Study 1), as well as low openness to experience (Study 2), were related to negative attitudes to and/or to negative perceptions of the Islamic veil.

Second, we also evaluated an alternative hypothesis, often advanced in the social debate in Western Europe, which we called the "moral defense of autonomy and equality" hypothesis. According to this alternative hypothesis, we should expect negative attitudes towards the veil to reflect high importance attributed to values emphasizing autonomy (self-direction), concern for equality and social justice (universalism), and quality in interpersonal relations (benevolence). Not only this was not the case in both studies, but there was some evidence for the opposite conclusion. People with high self-identification as citizen of the world and people who endorse universalism and benevolence seem to be less disturbed by the veil and less willing to prohibit it (Study 1). In addition, the more people valued these values, the less they perceived the veil as a sign of submission; and the more they valued "freedom", a key component of self-direction, the less they felt aversion towards the veil (Study 2). Of course, future research should further investigate the "moral defense hypothesis" with additional and more

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[5] Including ethnocentrism into a composite score together with subtle prejudice and computing again the regressions provided similar results. This was also the case for the two previous regression analyses reported in Study 1 and Study 2.

nuanced measures of humanitarian and human rights-related attitudes. Alternatively, it may be that "aversive racism" (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; see also Nail et al., 2003), the even subtler racism of liberals who may have internalized nonprejudiced ideals but still harbor nonconscious negative feelings against outgroups and minorities, may have played a role in these findings. Note that political conservatism played only a limited role in the present studies, which implies the presence of anti-veil attitudes also among liberals.

Third, two of our expectations were not confirmed. First, not all conservation values related to anti-veil attitudes; this was the case only with security. Interestingly, tradition showed the opposite pattern: in Study 2, people who valued tradition had more positive representations of the Islamic veil; and the correlation remained significant even after removing the item "devout/religious" ($r = .21$, $p < .05$). It may be that people who value social cohesion (see also the role of universalism and benevolence) are more prone to positively view customs and symbols of groups who are dealing with acculturation challenges. Second, national (Belgian) identity was unrelated to anti-veil attitudes. Since Belgium is by definition a federation of different, at times conflicting linguistic communities, it may be that strong national identity is less reflective of right wing and anti-immigrant tendencies than in other, more centralized nations.

These studies have also some limitations. Although the replication of the main findings of Study 1 by Study 2 was important, bringing thus confidence on the results, generalizability is not guaranteed given the methods applied for data collection. Also, mean differences on key variables of these studies may be observed in other parts of Europe, but the associations with the predicting variables can reasonably be thought to hold in various contexts as representing general tendencies in intergroup relationships. Moreover, the cross-sectional status of the data prevents us from any causal inference; experimental designs (manipulating for instance the ethnic versus religious reference of the veil) should be welcomed in future research.

Overall, the results of the present studies fit well with previous research on ethnic prejudice and suggest that the anti-veil hostility in Western Europe is a typical case of subtle anti-immigrant prejudice. Future research should also investigate the possible role of non-subtle, blatant prejudice/racism on these attitudes. Although the old-fashioned racism is presumed to have weakened, it is still present (Leach, 2005), and several outcomes that are predicted by subtle prejudice are often also predicted by blatant prejudice (Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995, 2001).

Finally, beyond subtle racism, the religious dimension seemed to be influential in predicting anti-veil attitudes. In line with what was expected, literal anti-religious thinking (in both studies) and, to some extent, orthodox religious thinking (Study 2) were positively related to hostile attitudes towards the Islamic veil. Spirituality, on the contrary, predicted more tolerance of this symbol in the public domain, and both religious and spiritual majority members tended to hold positive representations of the veil as a religious/spiritual symbol (Study 2). Interestingly, the radical anti-religious attitude turned out to be a unique predictor of hostility to the veil in both studies, beyond thus the effect of other variables such as subtle prejudice. Aversion towards the veil thus seems to reflect both ethnic prejudice and anti-religious disposition. Given the fact that Belgium – together with France – is one of the most secularized European countries (Halman, 2001), it would be interesting for future research to investigate whether anti-veil attitudes in other European countries also reflect both the anti-immigrant and anti-religion components identified here.

To conclude, the present study suggests that, at least with regard to some aspects of intercultural relations (e.g., those referring to symbols?), it is important to integrate religious factors and attitudes relative to religion together with key social psychological realities such as intergroup and majority–minority relations, identities, and values, known to have an impact on attitudes towards immigrants and openness to multiculturalism.

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