



**“It’s my choice!” – Socio-Cultural Responses
to the Headscarf from the Perspective of
Veiled Women in France, Germany and the
Netherlands**

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis deals with how societies in France, Germany and the Netherlands react to young Muslim women wearing the veil and how the societal reactions have an influence on the women's lives. There are ongoing discussions in several European countries with regard to the way in which some Muslim women choose to dress, i.e. covering their whole body or sometimes their head only. The result is that many Muslim women find themselves positioned in the crossfire between their religious identity and domestic state policies of European countries. In this context, the paper will draw on national differences in citizenship models and immigration theories in order to evaluate to what extent the headscarf could be expected to be accommodated in these countries.

The paper concludes that while the three countries differ substantially in their citizenship models and in the ways of accommodating the headscarf, they do not differ substantially in their ways of accommodating Muslim women wearing the veil in practice, and that all of the three countries are more or less positive towards women wearing the veil.

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1. Introduction

Ever since European countries face increasing numbers of immigrants, there have been discussions about how to approach and to deal with them, especially with regard to their religious affiliations. Islam may be the most prominent and surely is one of the most controversial religions among them, often leading to discussions about how far it can be integrated into European societies. Accordingly, there are different opinions and disputes about Muslim women who wear a headscarf¹ or even a veil covering their whole body in public for religious reasons. Views and opinions towards this are as manifold as reactions towards women wearing the veil, ranging from positive and open to negative and harassing. What follows from this is that these reactions may be differing between European countries, as the regulation of the veil is also approached differently among them. However, there are no insights yet if there truly are differences in reactions and how these reactions differ from each other across countries.

The purpose of this thesis is to uncover subtle stigmatization in three European societies that can be characterized as societies which are dominated by white, Christian and male people. Citizenship regimes are construed around these conditions. In contrast to this, reactions towards people that deviate from this overall picture of the European society are supposed to get different reactions in these societies, and the citizenship regimes of the three countries can be used to trace attitudes towards cultural diversity.

This paper specifically addresses this by asking whether Muslim women wearing the headscarf and living in France, Germany and the Netherlands encounter different reactions of the societies towards their veil and to what extent these reactions have an impact on their feelings of acceptance by and identification with the country of residence. In this context, it is also of interest to ask why some Muslim women choose to wear a headscarf to begin with. Ongoing discussions in a number of European countries in relation to the headscarf are largely taking place over the heads of the concerned: the veiled women. This paper however sheds a light on these women and tries to highlight their impressions of how they are received by the societies of their actual countries of residence.

¹ I will use 'the headscarf' and 'the veil' interchangeably and as shorthand to refer to the various forms of Muslim women's head- and body- covering. When I want to refer to a specific form of veiling, such as the niqab or the burqa, I will mention these forms as such.

The actual research question underlying this thesis reads as follows:

To what extent do Muslim women in France, Germany and the Netherlands encounter different reactions of the societies towards their veil? To what extent do these reactions have an impact on their feelings of acceptance by and identification with the country of residence?

As identification with the host nation largely depends on the degree to which people feel accepted in the country, the paper will draw on national citizenship models that specify the way in which immigrants in France, Germany and the Netherlands are granted legal access in the form of citizenship in their respective countries of residence. The research focuses on these three countries specifically because they are representative for the three citizenship models scholars most often distinguish between. The importance of citizenship models arises from the fact that citizenship models are some kind of measurement of the extent of immigrant integration of countries. If the national citizenship models have it right, young Muslim women in Germany will feel much less accepted by the German society than young Muslim women in France. According to the citizenship models, the Netherlands provide the highest level of acceptance towards young Muslim women wearing the veil. Another important aspect is the accommodation of religion in receiving countries, i.e. to which extent religions other than Christianity, which has always played an integral part in European history, are accepted in the respective countries. A way to measure this is through national regulations concerning the headscarf, which play a key role in today's immigration policies.

This paper makes use of a country comparative case design, since it aims at comparing the particular situations in three European countries, namely France, Germany and the Netherlands. In this context, the three different national citizenship traditions will be taken into account as they can be regarded as indicating the extent to which these countries accommodate the wearing of the veil and may thus provide possible explanations for national differences in the societies' reactions between the countries. The research design presented later on in the course of this paper includes interviews with young Muslim women wearing a headscarf. Younger Muslim women, i.e. women who are not part of the first generation of immigrants, are more of interest in this research because they immigrated to the countries of residence at a very young age, or were even born in these countries and were thus more or less socialized there. Still, they carry out a practice which is not part of the cultures of these Western countries. The reasons for this deviant behavior may be manifold: being an immigrant daughter they might not feel accepted in their countries of residence; instead, there might be some feeling of exclusion from the host country's society. In this case, Islam and the practice of veiling may offer

them an alternative identity and a sense of belonging they do not find in the societies of their countries of residence.

The importance of my research lies in the fact that there is increased focus on Muslim populations in Europe, whereby Muslim women wearing headscarves or who are veiling their whole body stand out of the Muslim society, since they are easy to recognize and identify. Although seeing women wearing scarves is quite common in Europe these days, I want to investigate whether this is reflected in European societies' reactions towards women wearing the Islamic veil.

The relevance of my Bachelor topic gains its legitimacy through the topicality of the issue. A number of European countries face ongoing debates about Muslim women and their choice to cover their body in public spaces. While these debates predominantly focus on whether and how to prohibit the wearing of whole-body coverings, it would be interesting to gain knowledge about the driving forces behind the decision of a Muslim woman to cover herself, be it the whole body or just the hair and neck. Especially for Europe as a multicultural continent it could be helpful to gain insights into the thinking of Muslim women, their motivations and positions in European societies in order to be able to meet their demands and to enhance dialogue between the different religions and ethnicities. Discrimination vis-à-vis people who do not correspond to the stereotypical image of European people is still a current topic. Especially Muslim women wearing an Islamic dress are probably affected by this, since they are an easily recognizable minority. This position in European societies is likely to impact a range of aspects of daily life, e.g. education, work, social life and simple well-being in Europe. Engaging in a process of gaining insights behind the walls of Muslim society may enable us to become more amenable towards Muslim women and their role on this continent.

2. Theoretical Framework

As outlined above, the rationale behind this paper is to find out how societies react towards Muslim women's choice to wear a headscarf, and whether this has an impact on these women's lives in societies in France, Germany and the Netherlands. In this context, it is necessary to shed a light on how these countries frame the concept of citizenship, i.e. to what extent and under which conditions foreigners are granted legal rights, duties and privileges in a country. This is important in that it illustrates how a country accommodates cultural differences and promotes diversity, also with regard to religion. Furthermore, the three countries' approach to immigrant integration is of importance, since it also covers the different headscarf regimes that are in force in France, Germany and the Netherlands. Consequently this chapter aims at introducing both citizenship regimes and attitudes towards immigrant integration. The accommodation of (religious) diversity and the regulation of the headscarf provide the basis for the rest of this paper and serve as the basis for the conduction of the research that will be carried out later on.

In what follows, the citizenship regimes of the three countries subject to this paper will be described separately to provide grounds for comparison. Next, approaches of these countries to immigrant integration and the respective headscarf regimes linked to them will be presented.

2.1 Citizenship regimes in France, Germany and the Netherlands

France, Germany and the Netherlands are representative for the three citizenship models that scholars often distinguish between: a civic assimilationist, an ethno-cultural, and a multicultural model. Hence, France is considered an example of the civic assimilationist model, Germany an example of an ethno-cultural model, and the Netherlands are said to be a typical of the multicultural model (Saharso & Lettinga, 2008, p. 457).

France and Netherlands adhere to the *ius soli* principle when it comes to awarding immigrants the respective citizenships. The *ius soli* principle is centered on a person's birthplace, or "the fact of being born in a territory over which the state extends, has extended, or possibly wishes to extend its sovereignty" (Weil, 1996).

France thus follows a pattern that aims at assimilating immigrants instead of integrating them into the French society. The assimilationist regime, sometimes also referred to as republican regime, has been described by Koopmans et al. as granting easy access to citizenship, which is due to France's adherence to the *ius soli* principle. However, migrants are required "a high degree of assimilation in the public sphere and gives little to no recognition to their cultural differences" (Koopmans, Statham, Giugni, & Passy, 2005, p. 8). Thus, the country actually denies its citizens to be member in various communities; instead, citizens are expected to "exist in public life as individual members of the Republic only" (Saharso & Lettinga, 2008, p. 457). Newcomers to the French society are therefore

expected to fully adhere to common republican ideas, sharing universal values like equality, freedom and security(Scott, 2007). Moreover, France adheres to the principle of *laïcité*, their version of secularism, which also puts religious affiliations into the private sphere of citizens and aims at preventing religion and religious signs from appearing in public.

Contrary to France, the Netherlands disposes of a huge variety of religious and ethnic representations and grants subsidies to migrant and religious communities(Saharso & Lettinga, 2008, p. 457). As Saharso puts it, “the nation is united by a thin core of common values, which goes together with the co-existence of groups that have their distinctive group identities”(Saharso, 2007, p. 516). Given this wide range of identities and traditions of groups in the public sphere, the Netherlands’ “pluralist conception of citizenship[...]grants a large range to live”(Saharso & Lettinga, 2008, p. 458). As put by Koopmans, the Netherlands is an example of multicultural or pluralist regime, and provides for both “easy formal access to citizenship and recognition of the right of ethnic minority groups to maintain their cultural differences”(Koopmans, et al., 2005, p. 8). This mainly arises from the concept of pillarization, which has once been very prominent in the Netherlands and will be explained at a later point in this paper.

Lastly, Germany represents the ethno-cultural model of citizenship. In terms of citizenship acquirement, Germany has often been contrasted with France. While in France citizenship is defined in political terms, Germany defines membership in ethno-cultural terms, thus citizenship is perceived to be more accessible and easier to obtain in France than in Germany(Brubaker, 1990, p. 386). As Brubaker puts it, “the central difference between French and German ascription rules turns on the significance attached to birth and prolonged residence in the territory”(Brubaker, 1994, p. 81). This statement refers to Germany’s former rules concerning the obtainment of German citizenship, the so-called *ius sanguinis* principle. Here, access to citizenship is dependent from the nationality of one or both parents(Weil, 1996, p. 76). This ethnic, exclusive model is one that makes access to the political community of the country difficult through high barriers to naturalization(Koopmans, et al., 2005, p. 8).

Hence, high barriers to citizenship were in place until 2000, consisting of rules laying out that people who were born on German territory were not automatically granted German citizenship, instead, one had to prove “*Bekenntnis zum deutschen Kulturkreis*”²(Saharso, 2007, p. 521). As mentioned in the German Federal Law on Expellees, “Members of the German people are those who have committed themselves in their homelands to Germanness, in as far as this commitment is confirmed by certain fact such as descent, language, upbringing or culture”(Saharso, 2007, p. 522).

² „Commitment to the German cultural realm“

European citizenship laws have undergone some change in the last two decades, “to make it easier for long-settled migrants and their children to acquire the citizenship of the host society”(Joppke & Morawska, 2003, p. 17). In this context, Germany introduced the so-called German Nationality Act in 2000 which put immigration reforms in place. Consequently, it was made clear that Germany now accepts German citizenship for immigrants, thereby paving the way for a structural integration policy built upon “an encompassing vision on immigration and integration”(Saharso, 2007, p. 523).

The reform was made up of two parts: alien’s law and later nationality law. It encompassed three main propositions: first, granting citizenship at birth to those born of someone born in Germany (so-called double *ius soli*), or someone with a legal residence permit. Secondly, fully accepting dual and multiple nationality and lastly, reducing the residence requirement for naturalization by entitlement, for those living but not educated in Germany(Hansen, 2003, p. 95). As Hansen put it, “fitfully and incompletely, Germany is turning to integration, and a key component in integration is the acquisition of national citizenship”(Hansen, 2003, p. 96).

2.2 Immigrant Integration in France, Germany and the Netherlands

The three countries under investigation differ not only in their approaches to national citizenship, but also in their integration policies. How are the differing tendencies to citizenship reflected in these policies? In the following, I will shortly mention some of the current integration policies in France, Germany and the Netherlands.

France, just like many other European states, employed a high number of guest workers during the 1950s and 1960s, of which some stayed in the country for a longer time. The main influx however came from former French colonies, mainly African countries like Algeria or Morocco. Up until now the former colonies depict the main countries of origin of French migrants. France always made it quite easy for foreigners to get a place in the French society. At the same time, the country still does not have any specific integration policy towards migrants. Instead, integration into the French society has always rather been a process of assimilation. According to Koopmans and Statham, assimilationism is more demanding than multiculturalist approaches, since it requires that “potential new members undergo full conversion to the dominant national culture as the single unitary focus of identity”(Koopmans & Statham, 2001, p. 74). In this context, individual citizenship, i.e. individual political will and adherence to the Republican norms is central, while leaving cultural specificities unrecognized in the public domain and outside of the public sphere(European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007, p. 19). Next to Republican values there are another two main principles French policy aims at adhering to: universalism and *laïcité*. The very basic notion of universalism already reveals the importance of equality in France, meaning that everyone is to be treated equally and universally, and that no difference should ever be made on the ground of race or religion.

Laïcité on the other hand refers to the principle of secularism which is of high importance in France. Church and state are to be separated from another, which also includes the prohibition of religious signs in public schools or other public spaces and again the equal treatment of people, regardless their religious identity. As put by Scott, “laïcité means the separation of church and state through the state’s protection of individuals from the claims of religion”(Scott, 2007, p. 15). Especially the concept of laïcité prevails in French policy approaches towards the veil. In 2004, France implemented a law that enforces laïcité by prohibiting the wearing of signs or clothes that have a religious appearance in public spheres, including public schools and colleges. Although this law also applies to other religions as for example Christian crosses or Jewish kippahs, the law mainly affects the Muslim population, especially Muslim women, simply because the headscarf and its numerous variations are most obvious in public(République Française, 2004). Some years later, in 2011, France passed another law prohibiting the dissimulation of the face in public spaces, thus all veils that cover the face as a whole. Wearing a niqab³ or burqa⁴ in public can now be penalized with a fine of 150€. Furthermore, in cases where it can be proved that a woman’s husband forces his wife to cover her face, he risks an imprisonment of one year and a fine of up to 30.000€(République Française, 2011). As can be seen, France easily grants access to its society, the accommodation of religious differences however is still difficult and has become a controversial topic in the French society.

Germany has a long history of immigration, also starting with the guest workers who kept moving to the country since the early 1960s. In the beginning, guest workers were expected not to be staying in the country for a longer period, thus Germany did not establish a specific integration scheme for guest workers. However, during the 1970s it became clear that some sort of a settlement process was taking place through family migration. Later on, after the end of the cold war, Germany had to face an increased influx of immigrants from the Eastern countries of Europe, mainly by people who were ethnic Germans, the so called “Spätaussiedler”. On grounds on its ethnic linkage to Germany, this group of people was granted easy access to the German citizenship(European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007, p. 22).

In contrast to France, Germany does not have a universal policy concerning the headscarf. Instead, there are differences among the single Bundesländer. In general, students and pupils are free to wear symbols reflecting their religion in public schools and universities. Yet, some Länder have specific regulations and prohibitions. In the following, I will only briefly mention the attitudes of some Bundesländer.

³ Islamic cloth which covers the face, only leaving a slim rip for the eyes

⁴ Islamic garment to cover the whole body including the face, which is covered by semi-transparent cloth

In essence, one can distinguish between three types of regulation of the veil: laic regulation separating the state from the church, non-regulation in the form of case-by-case approaches, and lastly Christian occidental regulation containing religious influences other than the Christian one (Lettinga & Saharso, 2013, p. 9). Accordingly, in Baden-Württemberg, Saarland, Hesse, Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia, there are exceptions for Christian symbols and clothing, thereby conserving values that are contained in the constitutions of the single Länder. While Berlin is an example of a laic policy approach towards the veil, in Bavaria, politically dominated by the conservative Christian parties, teachers may not wear symbols or clothing that express a religious or ideological belief. Also in Hesse, political, religious and ideological neutrality prevails and public officers are not allowed to wear or use clothing or symbols that could affect their neutrality. In North Rhine-Westphalia and Saarland neutrality prevails in schools so that no religious, ideological or political statements may be showed off that may endanger this neutrality in front of pupils or parents (Deutsche Islam Konferenz, 2013). Generally, reasons for the prohibition of religious signs and icons are that the neutrality of the Land shall be preserved, and that any threat to the political ideological or religious peace of the school shall be avoided. Hesse is the only Bundesland that implemented a law prohibiting the burqa in public services since 2011 (Deutsche Islam Konferenz, 2013).

The Netherlands were comparatively late in recruiting guest workers, many of whom returned to their countries of origin later on. However, some labour migrants, mainly people of Moroccan or Turkish origin, stayed in the country. Just as in Germany the original plan of remigration of the guest workers to their respective countries of origin did not work out and some years later the Netherlands too faced the phenomenon of family migration and increased “marriage migration” (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007, p. 28).

The Dutch attitude towards migration has always been influenced by the concept of multiculturalism and the inclusion of various groups which mainly stems from the Dutch pillarization system.

As put by Spiecker and Steutel, pillarization includes the division of society into different social segments on the basis of moral and/or religious views. In addition to this segmentation, the different pillars established organizations on their own, such as political parties and schools, but also hospitals and sport clubs (Spiecker & Steutel, 2001, p. 294f.). Pillarization is said to have promoted “the emancipation of Dutch religious minorities” and following from that, policies concerning the integration of immigrants affected (ethnic minority) groups rather than individuals (Prins & Saharso, 2010, p. 73).

This Dutch approach to the preservation of group identity and the promotion of emancipation is said to be also “vividly present” in the minorities’ policy, because it provides generous financial support for a broad range of immigrant social and cultural life(Entzinger, 2003, p. 64). Among the three countries subject in this paper, the Netherlands is the only country which has no policy approach forbidding the wearing of headscarves. Instead, there is a law allowing Muslim women to wear a headscarf, including regular civil servants like teachers, and students. Yet, there are plans to ban burqas in public sphere, i.e. public transport, schools, hospitals or governmental buildings(Lettinga & Saharso, 2012, p. 324). However, in recent years there has been a backlash against multiculturalism. As laid out by the Dutch government, “people who wish to live in the Netherlands are expected to contribute to social cohesion and demonstrate involvement and citizenship”, and it is further pointed out that the Dutch “integration policy will no longer target specific groups”(Government of the Netherlands, 2011). This is part of the new path to immigrant integration of the Dutch, which aims at integration as “active citizenship”: immigrants are expected to accept the core values of the constitutional state, to have knowledge of each other’s backgrounds, to have the willingness to fight discrimination, and to take an active part in communal activities as an effort to show their commitment to their country of residence(Prins & Saharso, 2010, p. 84). Immigrants are thus expected to actively engage in the process of integration into the Dutch society instead of passively be granted rights and freedoms.

The way in which a country frames the concept of citizenship shows how accessible it is for immigrants and how open it is to cultural diversity. Taking France as an example, its assimilationist attitude suggests that foreign people are granted access to the country if they adhere to French customs and forget about their own culture and religion in the French public. In a country like this, women wearing a headscarf can be expected to be more often subject to discrimination in any form than in the Netherlands where the society is open to diversity and foreigners can freely live out their culture and religious affiliation. The citizenship regimes thus provide a first possibility to make up expectations regarding how Muslim women wearing a veil are seen in the respective countries and in how far these women need to step back from their own identity in order to be accepted in their country of residence. The different countries’ approach to immigrant integration is in so far relevant for this research in that it encompasses the way in which the wearing of the headscarf is regulated in these states. Countries that put in place rather strict headscarf regimes are expected to treat veiled women less welcoming, so women are more likely to be subject to discrimination on grounds of their headscarf in countries with a stricter headscarf regime than in countries that frame the wearing of the headscarf more liberally.

2.3 Conclusion

As we have seen, there are differences in citizenship models among the countries through history. France and the Netherlands both easily grant access to citizenship, while Germany only recently stepped away from its previous high barriers to citizenship which required ethnic belonging to the German community. The main difference between the countries seems to lie in the countries' ways of accommodating religious differences in their respective societies. While France makes it difficult for religious groups to find themselves integrated into the French society, the Netherlands grants religious and ethnic groups a pillarized realm and even promotes these different groups by subsidizing them financially.

Yet, one could argue that these citizenship models and countries' approaches to immigrant integration are converging. Reasons for the convergence of national approaches could be that all of the three countries share the same European ideals, values and a certain culture. Especially France, Germany and the Netherlands are on grounds of their geographical proximity quite similar in their norms and values, and their societies do not differ much from each other. Therefore, attitudes and prejudices towards the veil can be expected to be very much alike, be it in a positive or negative way. In this context, one could also mention the backlash against Islam which is supposed to be the same across countries, thereby connecting negative reactions vis-à-vis veiled women.

To the end of comparison, the paper will draw on two expectations concerning the nature and kinds of reaction towards women wearing the veil in the three countries under investigation. The national citizenship models mentioned above are derived from historical differences between the countries; nowadays there are discussions about whether these discrepancies between the countries still exist or whether they just reflect historical developments. It is in this context that my expectations arise.

Expectation 1: There are differences in societal reactions vis-à-vis veiled women in the three countries under investigation.

The first expectation draws on the differences in national citizenship models and in the policies towards the headscarf, concluding that these disparities also trigger differences in reactions towards women wearing the veil, therefore suggesting that women experience various kinds of reactions towards them across the three countries. In this context, "differences" means that one country may be more accommodative of the veil, for example the Netherlands through its multicultural approach to citizenship in contrast to Germany and its ethno-cultural approach and France's secular principles. If the citizenship models have it right, young Muslim women in Germany will feel much less accepted by the German society than young Muslim women in France. Thus, according to the citizenship models, the Netherlands provide the highest level of acceptance towards young Muslim women

wearing the veil. This has also been suggested by Lettinga and Saharso (2013) who assumed the models “to differ in the extent to which they are open to accommodate cultural difference”(Lettinga & Saharso, 2013, p. 2). The extent to which societies are open to accommodate cultural differences can be expected to be reflected in the way they react to Muslim women wearing the headscarf.

Expectation 2: There are no differences in societal reactions vis-à-vis veiled women in the three countries under investigation.

In contrast to the first expectation, the second one rather draws on similarities in reactions than on differences.

Policies may be converging, so that the three countries’ integration schemes assimilate. This could be explained by the resemblance of the three countries’ societies as mentioned earlier. Transnationalism may also play a role, connecting societies and communities and therefore maybe also connecting social developments, and reactions towards them, such as Islamophobia or anti-immigration sentiments in general. In France and the Netherlands for example, populist anti-immigrant parties have quite strong political force and have been framing the wearing of the veil as a sign for the lack of integration of immigrants. As put by Lettinga and Saharso, these right wing parties became forces that “framed veiling not as an isolated religious issue, but as symbolic for Islamic immigrants living in ‘parallel societies’ unwilling to integrate and respect the basic values of the national communities”(Lettinga & Saharso, 2013).

There are thus two kinds of expectations that seem reasonable, one going for differences in reactions of European societies towards Muslim women wearing the veil, the other one anticipating striking similarities.

In the following, the methodology forming the basis of this paper will be laid out and the research underlying this paper further explained.

3. Methodology

The following chapter aims at clarifying how the data were collected that will be used to give an answer to the research question this paper is based on. It gives an insight in how the theoretical framework was related to the method of data collection, namely semi-structured interviews, and how and with whom these interviews were conducted.

In essence, the research will include interviews with Muslim women wearing a headscarf from the three countries of interest. The interviews will draw on the women's experiences in these countries with regard to reactions of society towards them and their headscarf.

First, the research design will be described in detail, followed by the sampling method, a description of the actual sample and an illustration of how the interviews were conducted. This aims at providing sufficient information for the reader to comprehend what is about to come in the following chapters.

Finally, the data analysis method and possible threats to the research design will be discussed, thereby going into details of what needed to be taken into account when designing the interview and what could have bothered the actual conduction of the interview.

3.1 Research design

The earlier mentioned national citizenship models and immigration policies served as the foundation of my actual research. It should be investigated in how far these models affect Muslim women's realities in Europe. For the purpose of data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted with women who are wearing the veil living in the three countries under investigation, namely France, Germany and the Netherlands. The research did thus not aim at investigating one European country only but to arrive at a comparison of a number of European countries. The choice for these three countries was influenced by two reasons: Firstly, my personal relations to people from European countries are focused mainly on these three countries, the conduction of interviews was thus supposed to be easier within this range of countries. Secondly, Germany, France and the Netherlands are representatives of the three different citizenship models, as already outlined above. The quite explicit differences in the ways they accommodate immigrants nurtured expectations of differences in societal reactions to the veil.

The interviews were designed using the theory introduced in the previous chapter. As outlined in the previous chapter, a country's citizenship regime is expected to reflect its accessibility for immigrants and its openness towards cultural diversity. France expects immigrants to adhere to French norms and values, i.e. republican norms and a laic public space. Consequently, women wearing a headscarf and explicitly displaying their religious identity can be expected to be more often subject to discrimination compared with Muslim women wearing a headscarf in the Netherlands, which is known as a multicultural country open to cultural diversity. The different citizenship regimes are therefore a way

of anticipating how Muslim women wearing the veil are accommodated in the respective countries. Similarly, a country's approach towards immigrant integration indicates how it accommodates the wearing of the veil, since it encompasses the regulation of the headscarf. Countries applying a rather strict headscarf policy can be expected to behave less welcoming towards women wearing a headscarf, compared to countries that have a rather liberal headscarf policy.

Both theoretical stances are represented in the interview, given that questions for example ask whether women find it easy or difficult to wear the headscarf in their country of residence, whether they had made experiences with the headscarf, be it positive or negative, and whether they feel supported by the government of their country of residence with regard to the freedom of religion. Similarly, one question asks to report the respondents' overall impression of the societies' attitude towards them, thereby leaving aside minor things and aiming at gaining an insight in how women feel generally. Further, the questions underlying the interview drew on the actual research question of this paper and its following sub questions:

- a) *What reactions do Muslim women encounter in France, Germany, and the Netherlands towards their veil?*
- b) *To what extent do Muslim women wearing the veil feel accepted in their European countries of residence?*
- c) *To what extent do Muslim women wearing the veil identify themselves with their European countries of residence?*
- d) *To what extent are there national differences in how societies react towards veiled women, in the women's feelings of acceptance and identification with their European countries of residence?*

Instead of the sub questions all being single parts of one overall research question, each sub question aims at investigating a small part of what is being researched and is reflected in the research design so that answers to all of these questions can be combined to get an answer to the actual research question underlying this paper. Thus, in essence, the interview questions were guided by the sub questions mentioned above. However, the questions first drew on general information like the respondents' age, country of origin, status of education and job status and reasons for them to veil. Then, the interview went on to ask for reactions that respondents encountered towards them and their headscarf in France, Germany and the Netherlands, eventually asking whether they sometimes find it easy or difficult to keep on wearing the headscarf, and whether they had made good or bad experiences in their country of residence on grounds of their headscarf, as already mentioned above.

Following from that, questions covered the topics of feeling of acceptance and feeling of identification with the country of residence through explicitly asking whether the respondents feel accepted by their fellow citizens and whether respondents identify with their country of residence.

The data analysis following from the interviews was done by the method of coding, i.e. the interviews were coded according to the topics reflected in the sub questions: European societies' reactions towards veiled Muslim women, feeling of acceptance of these women in European societies, and lastly the women's identification with European societies. These topics effectively guided the coding and will be reflected on in the data analysis chapter.

3.2 Case selection and sampling

It was planned to interrogate 3 women from each of the three countries, therefore having 9 cases for my research. In order to find respondents for the interviews, I contacted mosques and Islamic organization as well as friends and family members. This was complemented by a sampling procedure called "snowball sampling", where the researcher contacts a first respondent who is then asked to name another person who could match the requirements to be part of the sampling population. There was thus no expectation prior to the research about where the respondents should originally come from; it was open to all ethnic backgrounds. Although the snowball sampling method is easily applicable and useful, it is representative only to a low extent (Flick, 2009, p. 92).

In essence, I wanted to draw on information from younger Muslim women, i.e. aged 18-35, thus primarily women which are not part of the first generation of immigrants. This is mainly because older women are expected to have different reasons to veil than their younger counterparts, which stems from the fact that younger Muslim women often immigrated to France, Germany or the Netherlands at a younger age or were already born there. Hence, they often experienced their socialization in these countries where the wearing of a headscarf is untraditional. On the contrary, older Muslim women often immigrated at an older age, when the process of socialization has already come to an end. Having grown up with the practice of wearing a headscarf, it is less surprising to see these women wear headscarves in European societies, too. To this end, my research focused on younger Muslim women to investigate what drives them to wear a headscarf even though they grew up in a society in which this is an uncommon practice.

3.3 Method of data collection

In finding empirical evidence supporting or refuting the expectations underlying the analysis, semi-structured interviews were used, as already mentioned above. Original data has thus been used instead of an existing data base. The collected data is of qualitative nature, given that the questions posed during the interviews focused on statements and experiences Muslim women made in Europe, thereby ignoring quantitative aspects.

Semi-structured interviews are non-standardized and questions more or less serve as a guideline for carrying out the interviews. According to Barriball and White, semi-structured interviews have the advantage of being well-suited for exploring perceptions and opinions of respondents with regard to complex and sensitive issues, while at the same time leaving enough space for probing, more information and clarification of answers (Barriball & White, 1994, p. 330). Furthermore, a major characteristic of semi-structured interviews is that participants can freely talk about some topic; one does not have to stick to the actual course of the interview. It is thus possible to jump from one question to another, so that the possibility of having a discussion rather than a simple interview arises. The advantage of qualitative research and in this case of interviews lies in the fact that the interviewer has a broader scope to emphasize relevant information and to describe it in context, compared to quantitative research. At the same time, what may be its biggest disadvantage is that analyses from qualitative data do not have as much potential as quantitative data to draw inferences to larger populations (Flick, 2009, p. 27).

The collected data were expected to be helpful in comparing the theories discussed in this paper with empirical evidence from the interviews, because the theoretical aspects and concepts introduced have different meanings and implications for different individuals. However, the plan of finding women who were already granted the citizenship of their countries of residence was not fruitful. Instead, some women who have been living in the countries of interest for some years only have been interviewed. Generally, participants in my sample were Muslim women wearing a headscarf and had one of the following countries of origin: Turkey, Chad, Somalia, Kosovo or Iraq. As mentioned above, these women were aged between 18 and 35 because it is supposed that older women who are part of the first generation of immigrants may have different reasons to wear the headscarf than their younger counterparts.

Respondents were mostly contacted through personal contacts via the Internet, Facebook and Skype in particular, but also through mosques. Here the problem was that there was only a short period of time available in which I could talk to the women, since the interviews took place in the month of Ramadan, during which there are recitations from the Quran all day long. As a result, the interviews held with women I met in the mosque were quite short and did not provide enough time to dig deeper on some statements.

As planned, interviews were conducted with nine women in total, i.e. three women from each of the three countries. Although this sample is quite small and the conclusions that can be drawn from it are limited, interviews were anticipated to be a good way to get in touch with the persons affected and that it is more helpful to let them freely talk about a given topic than to provide possible answers to a question as it is done in surveys. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they can be used as a guideline but do not necessarily have to be carried out in the exact order.

Interviews were held in mosques, private homes and via telephone. The conversations varied in length, depending on how open and loquacious the respondents were, interviews ranged from 20 – 30 minutes. During the interviews, the actual talking was done by the women; the role of the researcher mainly was to navigate the talk and to probe where answers were vague or where women were hesitant to answer. However, questions were further explained when something was unclear and some of the women needed a bit of translation which was done by other women around. In essence, the interviews were mostly held in German and French, since the women living in Germany understood German quite well and some of the women were from Chadian origin which made it easier for them to conduct the interview in their native language than for example in Dutch.

The interviews were recorded and afterwards transcribed to simplify retracement and especially the data analysis following from the conduction of the interviews.

3.4 Method of data analysis

To the end of analyzing the interviews, categories were established on grounds of the sub questions introduced in the beginning of this chapter. Eventually, the transcriptions were coded using the following categories: *reactions towards women and their headscarf*, *feeling of acceptance in the country of residence*, and lastly *feeling of identification with the country of residence*.

The process of coding included close lecture of each interview's transcript, while marking important parts of the interview according to the categories and consequently segmenting the data. After coding the data, the results were grouped into countries, i.e. statements made by the respondents belonging to a certain category were grouped together on a country-by-country basis. This was done for every category and every country, so that statements from different respondents belonging to the same category were comparable and statements could be easily attributed to the sub questions the coding was based on.

The first category, "*reactions towards women and their headscarf*" sought to dig deeper on both positive experiences such as appreciation and interest concerning the headscarf, and one question in the interview specifically asked for support of the government in terms of freedom of religion. However, the respondents' answers were also coded by negative reactions of the societies towards the headscarf such as harassment and discrimination in any form. Responses to the respective questions were then linked to the theoretical foundation of this research, namely the citizenship models.

Countries whose societies showed rather positive reactions towards women wearing the headscarf were deemed to be more accommodative of cultural and religious diversity than countries whose societies showed rather negative reactions towards veiled women.

The following category *“feeling of acceptance in the country of residence”* was designed to further investigate to what extent the women feel accommodated and hence accepted in their countries of residence, and one question therefore asked directly for the feeling of acceptance. However, the question mentioned above about the feeling of being supported by the government concerning the freedom of religion can also be attributed to the sub question of acceptance in the country of residence, since it also measures in how far a country accommodates religious diversity in a country. Similarly to the first category described above, the second also classifies countries according to positive or negative responses. Therefore, countries giving veiled Muslim women the feeling of being accepted in this country are regarded as being more accommodative towards Muslim women than countries in which veiled women do not have the feeling of being thoroughly accepted by the society.

The third category goes along with the sub question concerning the respondents’ feeling of identification with the country of residence, and the question basically asked whether the respondents identify with their country of residence rather than their home country.

3.5 Possible threats to the research design

When designing the questions, it was important to take care of a range of possible threats to the research. This is especially true for the formulation of the questions, where it was essential to avoid any kind of bias or articulation that might hamper the easy way of responding the questionnaire. For example, double-barreled questions, biased items and terms were tried to be avoided, and the questions of the interview were expected to be relevant to the aim of the research. (Babbie, 2007, p. 257ff.). This designing part of this thesis was essential for the whole outcome of the research, as a falsely or biased questions possibly yields results that are different from the actual situation.

Threats to the research encompassed threats to the internal and external validity of this research. Internal validity refers to the possibility that conclusions drawn from the interview may not accurately reflect the reality (Babbie, 2007, p. 240). The respondents’ statements might have been influenced by the researcher’s appearance; the manner in which questions were posed or other factors that might have an influence on the respondents. This threat was tried to be reduced by conducting the interviews as similar to each other as possible and by trying to avoid a behavior of the interviewer that might hamper or alternate the women’s’ responses. In contrast to internal validity, external validity is supposed to ask the question of generalizability, i.e. to what populations and settings the measured things can be generalized (Campbell & Stanley, 1963, p. 9). This includes that certain measurements may not hold true if other kinds of units, i.e. other samples had been studied. In this research, generalizability is not supposed to be ensured, since the sample size is quite small and it is not unlikely

that another sample of women would have responded differently during the interview, thus leading to different conclusions.

Another threat included the unwillingness of women to take up the role of a respondent in the interviews. As Babbie puts it, respondents must be both competent and willing to answer (Babbie, 2007, p. 287). Regarding the competence of respondents to answer the questions, there were no constraints, given that the interviews drew on the respondents' personal life so that they could not be incompetent in answering the questionnaire. However, the fact that the questions partly lurk into the personal life of the women could have posed a problem, thereby looking back to the necessity of respondents to be willing to answer. Some women could have thought the interview requires information that is too personal for them to provide the information right away. The women were therefore informed about the procedure of the research, that the interview is confidential, and that the information gained for this research will be made available and accessible only for the researcher. Despite this informative approach, some women were at times unwilling to give a more detailed answer. Reasons for this can be personal, such as shyness and the fear of saying too much, i.e. talking too excessively about negative traits of their country of residence, which is for some of these women inappropriate.

Likewise, many of the women do not possess the citizenship of their country of residence although some questions in the interview draw on the extent of identification with the country which would be easier to answer if the women actually possessed the respective citizenship. However, it appeared that many women are simply not interested in renouncing their native citizenship for some other, so they would rather choose to live in the country of residence for a longer time without the respective citizenship and the advantages that may come along with that than giving up the citizenship of their home country.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview over the research design, information about the sampling procedure and lastly about how this qualitative research was actually conducted.

As has been pointed out, semi-structured interviews were chosen to collect the necessary data that will be used to answer the research question. The interviews were guided by the four sub questions presented above, which are inevitably linked to the theory introduced in the previous chapter. For the sake of data analysis, the interviews were coded by using categories that are also related to the sub questions. These categories are *reactions towards women and their headscarf*, *feeling of acceptance in the country of residence*, and *feeling of identification with the country of residence*.

Following from these categories, features were carved out. Reactions of the society towards women wearing the headscarf for example were attributed features like appreciation, interest, support of the government in terms of religious freedom and therefore the wearing of the veil, harassment and discrimination. According to these features, interview questions were created that adequately reflect the sub questions. Therefore, in the end, the respondents' answers to these questions could easily be coded.

4. Data Analysis

The following provides the data analyses of the interviews held with nine Muslim women, i.e. three women from each of the three countries under investigation, and basically constitutes the main part of this paper. The aim of this chapter is to introduce the respondents country by country, central statements made by respondents during the interviews and the context in which these statements were made. Firstly, after shortly presenting the respective respondents, responses given in the course of the interviews will be analyzed within the range of a country, before turning to a cross-country analysis. The introduction of the members of the sampling population shall make it easier to see the statements in context. The focus lies again on the main aspects of the interview, constituted by the four sub questions, namely the societies' reactions towards Muslim women wearing the veil, whether these women feel accepted in their countries of residence, and lastly if, and to what extent, the women can identify with their countries of residence. Finally, the findings will be linked to the theoretical framework underlying this paper and key points will be highlighted.

4.1 France

Participants in the sample in France are between 22 and 28 years old and live in different cities in France. Two of the women, Elisa⁵ and Amina are from Chadian origin and have been living in France for only a couple of years now; the third woman, Zara has a Tunisian origin and came to the country at an earlier stage. Yet, none of the three women has the French citizenship and none of them is interested in obtaining it. All of the respondents have at least a high school degree and work or study in France. While two of them are residing in the capital Paris, one of them lives in the south of the country in Montpellier. It can be assumed that Paris is somewhat more accommodating women wearing a headscarf, since veiled women living in France are most represented there.

Reactions towards Muslim women and their headscarf

As for France, the first impression from the interviews is that Muslim women wearing the veil are still outsiders in the French society. This impression arises especially through the statement of one of the respondents which will be discussed later on. In this statement she depicts a situation in which she was deprived of getting jobs, apparently grounded in her wearing the headscarf and therefore giving this woman the feeling of not being part of. Although veiled women are a quite common thing to see in France, especially in larger cities like Paris, the French still seem to tend to deliver these women a feeling of non-acceptance from their sides just by staring at them and by upholding other non-verbal activities, leading to a very subtle way of discrimination against veiled women. When asked how she

⁵ Participant names are pseudonyms.

would describe the French society's attitude with regard to her and her headscarf, Elisa said that she thinks it is not appreciated at all. According to her, it is true that there are many Arabic women wearing the headscarf or the veil in France but in her opinion the real French people have a problem with this. However, she did not want to further elaborate on that and began to stumble, saying that she rather not answers this question in detail. Still, she admitted that in France, it also depends on the neighborhoods. As it is often the case, the majority of the population in the suburbs of larger cities is constituted by immigrants; consequently the share of Muslim women wearing the headscarf is quite high. Accordingly, the wearing of the veil is something normal and does not get reactions as blatant as in the center of the cities. Depending on the neighborhood, women get different reactions from fellow citizens towards their headscarves.

When asked the same question, Amina described the French society's attitude towards her and her veil as "rather negative. The people's' gazes drive me crazy." She further pointed out that it is difficult at times, because she notices that people do not stop staring at women wearing a headscarf. However, Zara stated that in her opinion, the veil is only perceived as a political symbol. She mentioned that the French would not see the women wearing the headscarf but rather the veil as such and oppose the political and religious ideas tied to it.

The practice of staring was mentioned not only by one woman, therefore suggesting that it is a common experience of Muslim women wearing the veil to be gazed at in an uncomfortable manner. Staring is often perceived as a subtle form of discrimination by the society, since people apparently often continue staring for a longer time, thereby rendering the affected feeling unwell.

When asked about whether she had encountered positive or negative experiences wearing her headscarf in France, Elisa responded she had made negative experiences and told the story of how she was seeking a job. "I had two job interviews wearing my headscarf and they did not hire me. And I did the third job interview without my headscarf and they hired me. You see?" Despite the fact that one cannot be sure whether the rejection from the first two job interviews was on grounds of her headscarf, this woman had the impression of being discriminated because of her belief. This event somehow frustrated her, leaving her with the impression that the wearing of the veil is not esteemed at all in France. Even though this situation may not be representative for the situation of veiled women in France as a whole, it still shows what kind of problems and hurdles these women encounter in their daily life.

Feeling of acceptance and feeling of identification

When asked whether they feel accepted by their fellow people in France, the interviewees answered positively, yet hesitant. As one of the respondents replied to the question of whether she feels accepted by her fellow citizens: “More or less, yes”. The ambiguity is triggered by the feeling of being different from the French people, who, by examining veiled women and consequently staring at them reinforce their feeling of being different from the others. Still, the overall feeling of acceptance seems to weigh out the subtle discrimination, thereby casting a light on the French people’s attitude towards veiled women which is at least not thoroughly negative.

The last question of the interview referred to the women’s identification with France. All women responded that they cannot identify with France, which may also be due to the fact that two of them have stayed in France shorter than five years. However, for Zara one would have expected more commitment to the country, since she has been living in France for twelve years now. Still, the interviews suggest that there is antipathy from the immigrant women towards the French people. Their feeling of not being wholly respected causes the women to doubt that there is a possibility for them to fully integrate into the French society. Amina said that in practice, one’s religion is not an easy issue anymore. “If someone is born in France and Muslim, one often does not have another choice. But I deeply think that if one really wants to freely live one’s religion, France is not the right place for it”. She made a reference to the incidents involving veiled women who get attacked from time to time. “All this nicely illustrates the difficulty for certain Muslims to integrate and completely be part of the French society.” This suggests that somehow immigrants are willing not to integrate into their host societies for various reasons. As for Muslim women for example, the interviews suggest that the reluctance to integrate especially stems from the women’s feelings of not being thoroughly accepted by the host community as Muslimas who obey the rules and regulations of the Quran.

4.2 Germany

In Germany, the sample was more diverse than in France. Respondents originally came from Turkey, Somalia and Kosovo and have been staying in Germany for at least ten years. None of them has the German citizenship, although one of them is planning to obtain it in the near future.

Two of the women, Habiba and Khadidja are living in North-Rhine Westphalia, another woman, Shirin in Bavaria. The women thus come from two different Bundesländer who still employ the same headscarf regimes. Bavaria often serves as the major example of a Christian occidental headscarf regime, North Rhine-Westphalia however falls under the same category of a Christian occidental approach to the regulation of the veil.

Reaction towards Muslim women and their headscarves

Overall, the interviews with women living in Germany paint a rather positive picture of the country's attitude towards veiled Muslim women, the image of an open, liberal country. When asked about the German society's reactions towards them two of the three answered they had never encountered any problems wearing the headscarf. The only thing that was mentioned is that some people do take a closer look at women covering their hair but that this is completely normal. "There are always people who do not like seeing a woman wearing a headscarf. Most of the people accept it, some do not. But that is normal." Another woman mentioned that she sometimes finds it difficult to wear the headscarf, since she feels that some people have prejudices about her and "look, observe and stare", which she perceives as disturbing. Yet, both of them answered it was easy to wear a headscarf; nobody would interfere with their choice of wearing it. In response to the question whether she finds it easy or difficult to wear a headscarf in Germany, Khadidja for example said: "Easy. It is not difficult at all, for God's sake."

Only one of the three interviewees mentioned that there is a tendency of the German people to deliver the feeling of being refused by the society. When asked how she would describe the attitude of the German society vis-à-vis her and her headscarf, she answered "Honestly speaking: bad. Not everyone thinks negatively, but I think it is about 80% of the people here." Furthermore, when asked whether she had made positive or negative experiences she mentioned that she had not been addressed directly, but that she notices people have a problem with her wearing a headscarf. This statement is in contrast with the first two interviews I mentioned above. A possible reason for the striking differences in people's attitude may be the fact that the other two women live in North-Rhine Westphalia, while the third woman lives in Bavaria, a more conservative Bundesland. Despite the fact that both Länder adhere to the Christian occidental regulation of the headscarf, Bavaria is much more conservative, which is especially due to the fact that Bavaria has been governed by conservative parties throughout the last 60 years. Policy making in Bavaria, and therefore also regulation on the headscarf has thus been heavily influenced by the conservative point of view.

Feeling of acceptance and feeling of identification

In the context of a feeling of acceptance in Germany, all of the three women gave positive answers and replied that they do feel accepted by the German society. However, with regard to the feeling of identification with Germany, only one woman said she identifies with it. One of the other two women is currently applying for the German citizenship and said: "No, I do not identify with Germany at all. The German citizenship will be just on paper; I will never identify with Germany or feel German." The respondents provided all options, one identifying with the country, one having ambiguous feelings about it and one woman not at all identifying with Germany. Generally speaking, the three interviews

suggest that Germany is a rather tolerant country, giving Muslim women wearing the veil the opportunity to live their lives as they wish to do.

4.3 Netherlands

The Dutch sample of Muslim women wearing the veil was made up of three women who were between 27 and 34 years old. Maryam and Aziza are originally from Iraq, the third woman named Ayla was born in Chad. All of the three women have been staying in the Netherlands for only a couple of years now and are not interested in obtaining the Dutch citizenship.

While one of them lives in Amsterdam, the other two women are currently living in much smaller cities in Dutch provinces. All of the three have graduated from school with at least a high school diploma, and one of them is a PhD student.

Reactions towards Muslim women and their headscarves

Talking about the Dutch people's attitude towards them as veiled women, the women who were born in Iraq were very positive about the Netherlands. As Aziza pointed out: "They respect all other people with their thoughts [...]. Some Dutch people always try to understand why I wear all these clothes especially in summer and when I answer some of their questions they respect my thoughts. Not only the headscarf but also the shaking hands which is not allowed between different genders."

The interviewee obviously appreciates the people's efforts to understand her choice of wearing the headscarf and the resulting dialogue. Also, she apparently has not made negative experiences concerning her choice to not shake hands with men, which can be expected to appear strange to most people in the Netherlands. The lack of negative reactions towards the practice of not shaking hands between different genders make the Netherlands seem even more tolerant. Another woman said that the life with the headscarf "[...] can't be better" than in the Netherlands.

When asked whether they had made positive or negative experiences wearing the headscarf in the Netherlands, both replied that they had not made any negative experiences. One of them, Aziza explicitly stated that she is not getting a special treatment of people because of her veil, except for some gazes from older people. However, the other woman explained she started wearing the veil differently from the way she would wear it in her home country, to prevent herself from standing out of the masses too much. To her, it is quite easy to wear a headscarf in the Netherlands. Yet she admitted that it is difficult sometimes when she is at work, since people there weirdly stare at her. Maryam was very positive about the Netherlands, since she also had not made negative experiences in the Netherlands. However she mentioned a bizarre situation she found herself in at an airport in France where she had spent a few days and was about to head back. At the airport she was refused to pass the security area, since she was wearing the Jubba, an ankle-length garment which is often part of the Islamic clothing of Muslim women. Although she tried to explain the security agents what her jacket

was for, they did not accept to let her pass the security check. Only allowed to leave her headscarf on, she had to change her clothes before being allowed to pass through the security area. In her words, “this was the most strange behavior of a developed country”. Significantly, this incident happened in France.

Feeling of acceptance and feeling of identification

When asked whether she feels accepted by the Dutch society, Aziza answered “80% yes”, describing the other 20% to be staring at her. The other two interviewees were very positive and stated that they do indeed feel accepted by the Dutch society.

However, two out of three women could not identify with the Netherlands, one saying she will never do, another woman saying she really likes the Dutch but that she still is an Iraqi woman, since the Iraqi culture and behavior is very different from the Dutch one. Ayla, however, stated that she had been living in the Netherlands for about 10 years now and given the fact that she has friends there, she does indeed identify with the Netherlands to some extent.

4.4 Cross-country analysis

As we have seen, there were positive and negative aspects across all of the three countries. Still, it seems as if France is the country where veiled women are most exposed to the society’s negative tendency towards women wearing the veil. It is not only the fact that people are staring at women, but much more the fact that women encounter bewildering situations because of their veil.

As mentioned above, one of the women living in France said that she had not been employed twice after she took the job interview wearing the veil, while when she took a job interview without the veil, she did get the job. There is of course no evidence that the reason for her to be denied after the first two job interviews is only the fact that she wore the veil. However, it still suggests a certain negative tendency of the French towards Muslim women and them being positioned in daily life. This is in line with the story a woman from the Netherlands told during the interview, where she had not been admitted to the security check at Paris Airport. The impression these women get is far more intensive and frustrating than the fact they did not get the job or have not been admitted to the security check in the first place. But to get the feeling that the way they are treated is mostly linked to their obvious commitment to their religion is probably disappointing and may lead to a subtle frustration and maybe even to disinterest towards their country of residence, thereby also hampering sound integration.

In contrast, women in Germany were quite favorable of the country and the society’s attitude towards them. Although it was also mentioned that people are often staring, the women also maintained that they like the country and have the feeling that they can do, wear what they want and be whoever they want to be. Germany was portrayed as a very liberal country where people may not like the headscarf

but where nobody stands up to them to discriminate them. Accordingly, none of the women I interviewed had made negative experiences in Germany because of their veil.

Lastly, women living in the Netherlands also did not happen to make any negative experiences in the Netherlands as such. According to one of them, people in the Netherlands “are very respectful”, and respect all other ways of thinking than their own. While staring was also one of the bad things they experienced, they did not get harassed, but one of the women mentioned that some people tried to avoid meeting her on the streets, which is however some subtle form of discrimination.

Another woman said the society’s attitude towards women wearing the veil “can’t be better”, and she feels free to wear anything. The Netherlands have overall been pictured a very open and liberal country, accommodating other forms of religion or clothing among its people, but attitudes towards veiled women on the streets were not always perceived as accommodating.

As has been shown, overall there are no striking differences between the women’s impressions of the societies’ attitudes towards them, which is astonishing to some extent. Even if European countries are converging and reactions towards the veil along with it, one would have expected more discrepancies between them and how their societies deal with women who wear the veil. In all of the countries it was mentioned that staring is the most frequent reaction towards women wearing the headscarf, which these women perceive as negative response towards the covering of their hair. Surprisingly, only two women out of nine among the interviewees had made negative experiences in their country of residence other than staring, i.e. actual situations in which people openly demonstrated their disaffirmation towards the wearing of the headscarf.

Interestingly, some women sought to make clear that taking up the veil was their own choice and that there was and still is nobody forcing them to wear a headscarf. They stressed their autonomy in these matters and proved a lot of self-confidence by saying that they live their lives as they wish to. As Saharso suggests, this choice can stem from a multitude of reasons, such as the choice for “a (modified) tradition, a defiant confirmation of their religious identity, or a reaction to contradictory identity and loyalty claims”(Saharso, 2007, p. 528).

The educational level does not seem to have played a role. There is no evidence that women having a higher school diploma perceive the reactions towards them differently from women who have a lower diploma or who did not finish school at all. One would have expected at least minor differences in perceptions of higher educated women compared to lower educated women in terms of differentiation of reactions of the society. Yet, there is no identifiable pattern among the statements which allows an inference from the respondents’ educational level to their statements.

What seems paradoxical is that most of the women said they feel accepted in their country of residence, which suggests that the overall level of negative attitudes towards these women on behalf of the societies is rather low. Yet, only two of the nine respondents stated they do identify with their country of residence. All of the other statement suggested that the women are somewhat averse to identifying with the country they are actually living in. It is odd to see that the majority of respondents feel accepted in their countries of residence but only two of them explicitly state that they identify with the respective country. In this context, it is especially important to realize what one of the women living in France mentioned about the immigrants' willingness to immigrate. According to her, incidents in the Parisian suburbs of Muslim women who get beaten up for example trigger the unwillingness of immigrants to integrate into French society. There may thus be mutually reinforcing positions in place, namely the French society and its immigrants. While the French, similar to a range of other European countries complain about immigrants who seem reluctant to integrate and sometimes do not even shy away from aggressive acts towards them, the immigrants in return feel rejected and treated with disrespect. This nurtures a distanced relation to the country of residence, since immigrants somehow feel they will never be an integral part of the host society. In a way, this seems like a vicious circle leading to frustration on either side of the debate and distrust.

On the other hand the situation of Muslim women feeling accepted in their countries of residence while at the same time not identifying with them may just be logical. Despite the fact that the women who participated in this research have lived in France, Germany and the Netherlands for quite some time now they have not been born there and in some cases experienced their socialization predominantly in their home countries. Their disruption between the two countries may thus be rooted in the fact that they have not grown up in their actual countries of residence and are simply not as emotionally tied to these countries as one would expect people to be to identify with a country.

Another interesting point is that many of the respondents wear a headscarf especially because it is a habit which is part of the traditional clothing in their home countries. Despite the fact that a lot of them also mentioned religious reasons for their choice to take up the veil, it has often been stated that the headscarf is worn by everyone and constitutes an integral part of the traditional garment of their home countries. This illustrates nicely that wearing a headscarf is not automatically and even less intrinsically linked to a conservative Islamic thinking but more often guided by the aim of upholding a tradition. Also, there is willingness of adapting the Muslim culture to the European world. As one woman mentioned, she started wearing the veil differently from how she would have worn it in her home country to not seem too unusual to other people.

Finally, answers to the sub questions introduced in the beginning of this paper can be answered. The first sub question asked what reactions Muslim women encounter in France, Germany and the Netherlands. As we have seen, the reactions do not differ as much as one would have expected in the beginning, based on the fact that the citizenship models underlying this paper differ substantially from each other. Surprisingly however, the reactions towards women wearing the headscarf were quite inconspicuous. Although respondents of all of the three countries mentioned that people tend to stare at them, only the French society has been described as sometimes giving the impression of being intolerant towards Muslim women wearing the veil. Both Germany and the Netherlands were described much more favorably towards the veil than France.

In response to the second sub question to what extent Muslim women wearing the veil feel accepted in their European countries of residence, one can say that there is a universal feeling of being accepted among the respondents. In fact, only one woman replied that she feels accepted by only 80% of the Dutch people. Still, the other eight respondents unanimously said they feel accepted in their countries of residence.

Contrary to the positive responses to the question about the feeling of acceptance in the countries, there were only two out of nine women saying they do identify with their country of residence to some extent. More specifically, only one woman stated that she absolutely identifies with Germany. Yet, reasons for this are not easily detectable, as one may expect various reasons differing among the countries.

Lastly, the fourth sub question sought to find out whether there are differences in how the three societies under investigation react towards veiled women, to what extent these women feel accepted and whether they identify with their European countries of residence. As has been pointed out already, reactions in the three countries have been described as quite similar to each other. The same goes for the feeling of acceptance, which was positive throughout the interviews but also for the feeling of identification with the host country. Here, the majority of the respondents said they do not identify with their country of residence at all. Surprisingly, there are thus no noteworthy differences in none of the three categories where one would have expected some disparities resulting from the different approaches to citizenship and the framing of the veil in the three countries.

5. Conclusion

The focus of this paper rested upon the question of what kinds of reactions Muslim women wearing the veil encounter in French, German and Dutch societies, and to what extent different national European state policies on the Islamic dress have an impact on the integration of immigrants. These issues experience an increasing relevance through recent discussions in European societies concerning the Islamic dress and the integration of Islam itself in Europe.

After giving a short recap of the theory, this chapter concludes the main findings and gives an answer to the research question, thereby using the sub questions as guidelines. Eventually, implications and recommendations for the European Union will be introduced.

As we saw in the theoretical part of this paper, there are striking differences in the national European state policies on the integration of immigrants and on the Islamic dress.

The Netherlands pursue a profoundly liberal integrationist approach which results in a huge cultural diversity within the country. A law allowing Muslim women to veil themselves adds up to this, thereby giving these women the opportunity to live out their personal and religious identities to the extent they themselves wish to. This could be expected to simplify these veiled women's lives to the extent that they are more inclined to find themselves identifying with their country of residence. Yet, respondents living in the Netherlands did not identify with the Netherlands and the Dutch society at all. In contrast to the highly liberal integration scheme of the Netherlands, France and Germany are comparatively restrictive.

France, as a laic country separating church from state matters expects its citizens to exclude their personal and religious identities from the public sphere and demands them to cling to republican values in the public sphere. With regard to the headscarf debates in France one must say that the law prohibiting the burqa from the public sphere led to some kind of a traumatized Muslim community. Even women who are not inclined to wear the veil feel rejected on the ground of their religion. Similarly, laws on the headscarf in Germany led to a general feeling of uneasiness among Muslim women in Germany. However, this feeling remains subtle up to now and is suppressed by the predominant impression among Muslim women that they are free to live their religion in Germany without being subject to every-day discrimination.

As already pointed out in the analysis chapter, there are only minor differences between the findings for each of the three countries.

Reactions towards Muslim women and their headscarves

The majority of the women who participated in the interviews reported a rather positive attitude of the society toward them, which meets the expectations for the Netherlands, grounded on the country's positive attitude towards diversity. Germany on the other hand does not promote a multicultural society as much as the Netherlands but also does not frame the wearing of the headscarf as unwanted in everyday life. The German society's reactions towards women wearing the veil also seem rather neutral, as none of the respondents living in Germany had made negative experiences related to their headscarf. Conversely, respondents from Germany were surprisingly positive about the German society.

However, in France it seems as if the subtle disaffirmation towards veiled women is much more prominent than in the other two countries. This is in line with the theoretical aspect of the citizenship models mentioned in the beginning of the paper, which imply that religious signs are undesired in the French public sphere. The fact that France accepts religion as a private matter that must not be displayed in public has been nicely illustrated by Scott, who pointed out that "religion must be a private matter; it must not be displayed 'conspicuously' in public places, especially in schools, where the inculcation of republican ideals began" (Scott, 2007, p. 14).

Feeling of acceptance and feeling of identification

It is somewhat surprising that the statements of women from Germany were predominantly positive, stating that they feel accepted in Germany and that the society does not appear to have a negative attitude towards them. It is surprising in that the discussions over the headscarf could be expected to trigger at least a skeptical attitude of people towards veiled women.

Overall, the interviewees feel accepted in their countries of residence and are subject to only minor and rather subtle forms of discrimination, e.g. staring. However, identification with their country of residence is not as frequent as one would have expected after reading the interviews. This could be rooted in the fact that most of the women have not lived in their current European countries of residence for a longer period but came to Europe only a couple of years ago and sometimes even only for a short period, e.g. study purposes. In addition, most of the women interviewed to were not interested in obtaining the citizenship of their country of residence, so one reason for the lack of identification with the country could also be that these women are indifferent towards these countries.

As the analysis has shown, Muslim women wearing the headscarf encounter different reactions towards them and their headscarf, which are, however, not as explicit as one would have expected. In France, people tend to show their disapproval towards these women and their headscarves by subtle forms of discrimination like staring, while the Dutch society is perceived as being rather positive or at

least tolerant towards the Islamic dress. This is perfectly in line with the theory, since it was pointed out by several authors that the Islamic headscarf is “very much accepted in public life in the Netherlands”(Saharso, 2007, p. 519). It seems to show that the Netherlands follow a multicultural approach to immigrant integration that allows immigrants to openly live their ethnic and religious memberships. Germany on the other hand has also been described as being tolerant towards Muslim women covering themselves, which comes somewhat unexpectedly. Two of the three respondents living in Germany reside in North Rhine-Westphalia, the other one on Bavaria. In both Bundesländer, the Christian occidental regulation of the headscarf is in place. Accordingly, one could have expected a slightly more negative attitude towards veiled women.

The Christian occidental model of the regulation of the Islamic dress is only one example of this type of regulation in Germany. As has been explained at an earlier stage in this paper, there are three types of regulation in force, the aforementioned Christian occidental type, the laic type and the regulation on case-by-case basis. The German as well as the French laic approach to regulation of the Islamic dress applying to the working environment in these countries are less accommodating than the Dutch. This can be expected to be negatively influencing Muslim women’s feeling of acceptance and feeling of identification with the host country, since they are being communicated that a part of their own identity, namely their religious affiliation, is not being tolerated in public offices. Although it sounds reasonable to ban ostentatious signs from public offices, it appears that at least in Germany double standards are applied, since some states make an exception for Christian signs and symbols and allow these. Additionally, discussions and debates about the Islamic dress often bring forward latent negative attitudes towards the Islam and its followers among people in the society, which renders Muslims doubtful and skeptical about the country, eventually leading to unwillingness to fully integrate into society.

With regard to the expectations introduced at an earlier stage in this paper, the interviews suggest that the second expectation holds true.

Expectation 2: There are no differences in societal reactions vis-à-vis veiled women in the three countries under investigation.

As already mentioned above, the societal reactions vis-à-vis veiled women in the three countries under investigation differ only slightly. Although the data suggest that the French society is more inclined to have a negative attitude towards veiled women, this cannot be generalized. By the same token, it cannot be generalized that the Dutch and German societies are as positively adjusted towards veiled women as the interviews may suggest. However, in relation with the citizenship models, the picture becomes clearer and more likely.

The findings from the data analysis have a few implications for the European Union and its challenge of how to integrate immigrants, in this case Muslim immigrants, into European societies and making them equal citizens.

Above all, regulations concerning the laic attitude in public offices should apply for all religions universally. Even though Europe, and therefore also the European Union is often depicted as being rooted in Christianity, citizens should feel that all religious denominations are equal, and that there is no religion that gets a special treatment of any kind. This would foster Muslims' perception of being fully accepted and acknowledged in Europe, without being treated as inferior to Christianity.

Secondly, as Islam is quite present in European everyday life, the EU could engage in promoting interest in Islam, so that people get acquainted with the basic values of the religion and how it is lived today. The Islam presented in the media often applies to only a minority of Muslims, as Islamists and salafists do not properly represent the modern Islam lived by the majority of Muslims. As a result, people may begin to see the wearing of the headscarf not as a mere religious habit these women are subject to, but that most Muslim women chose to wear a headscarf themselves. Following from that, the EU could support initiatives that bring together people from different religions. As an example, local mosques could organize events during Ramadan where people from various cultural and religious backgrounds come together and spend the iftar⁶ together. On this occasion, there could be short introductions to Islam, and discussions about major topics. It is especially important to create events where people can be at ease with each other so that conversations develop and communication is pushed on. Although these types of events could take place all year, the month of Ramadan may be suited best for them since it is the most important time of the year for people of Muslim belief. If people from other cultural backgrounds showed interest for this major pillar of Islam, the Muslim community of the respective region probably felt valued higher. Still, one must bear in mind that events like this especially attract people who are interested in Islam anyway. People who are reluctant to broaden their horizon in terms of other religions are not likely to attend such an event, so the community of those who are interested more or less stays the same.

Another idea to promote common knowledge about the Islam is to develop and publish advertisements or short series about the Islam which subtly explain important facts. This way, a broader public can be reached and especially for children a comic would be attractive. The aim of teaching children major facts about different religions is supposed to trigger greater understanding between different confessions and can be seen as a wise investment in the future. In this context it can be added that schools should engage in including topics like the Islam and other religious minorities on the European continent in the schedules, so that these are not always marginalized. It is not so much about launching an autonomous class for these religions but about teaching children that there are beliefs that

⁶ Evening meal in the month of Ramadan

are equal and to some extent even related to the Christian belief which is most prominent in European schools.

However, leaving aside the fact that Europe should approach the Islam in a different way than before, the Muslim population in Europe should also step up to the European society and show some interest in the countries they live in and willingness to become an integral part of it. As it stands, immigrants often cluster and try to maintain their customs and habits, thereby giving the impression of being reluctant to integrate and to live by the norms of the host country.

5.1 Limitations and recommendations for further research

Although this research was carefully prepared and carried out, there are some limitations and recommendations for further research on the topic, which will shortly be explained in the following section.

Firstly, this research made use of interviews that were held with women that are part of the first generation of immigrants of a family who were not born and raised in their countries of residence.

However, it was actually planned to conduct interviews with women who have been born in France, Germany or the Netherlands and who have been socialized there. This research is thus likely to yield results that are different from those one would have obtained if the research had actually been conducted with women of the second or third generation of immigrants wearing the headscarf.

In addition, to get a more accurate picture of the situation of Muslim women wearing the headscarf in European societies, this research should be repeated, but the number of women participating in the research should then be considerably increased. Due to time constraints, this research made use of only nine interviews, which is a very small number of data to work with and which leaves no possibility for obtaining a larger picture of Muslim women wearing the veil in European societies and the reactions towards them.

Furthermore, the interviews should be more intensive, not only with regard to the questions asked but only in terms of the time span. When talking to the interviewees, it may be helpful to have enough time to ask questions, to dig deeper where necessary and to get into some kind of discussion with the people asked. This mainly applies to what was already mentioned above when with regard to the fact that some of the interviews were conducted in a mosque during Ramadan. It would have been helpful to have some additional time when talking to them.

Given the small sample size, this paper does not aim at painting a larger picture of the lives of veiled women in France, Germany and the Netherlands, but to provide an insight in these women's perceptions of their lives here in Europe and the ways and attitude of European societies towards young Muslim women wearing the veil.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Interview (English version)

1. How old are you?
2. Have you been born in the country of residence?
 - a. If not: where have you been born?
 - b. When did you immigrate to the country of residence?
 - c. Where did you grow up?
3. What kind of education did you get? What is your job status?
4. When did you start wearing the headscarf/ veil? Did you have any expectations before taking up the veil?
5. Were your expectations concerning the veil confirmed or not?
6. Why did you start wearing the headscarf/ veil? What were the reactions of society towards your decision to take up the veil?
7. Did you sometimes find it difficult or easy to keep on wearing the headscarf/ veil? Why?
8. Have you had good or bad experiences in your country of residence because of your headscarf/ veil?
9. Overall, how would you evaluate the society's attitude towards you wearing the veil?
10. Do you feel supported by the government of your country of residence in terms of religious freedom?
11. Do you feel accepted by fellow citizens?
12. Do you identify with your country of residence?
13. Do you feel like having to choose between multiple identities?