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Ni Putes Ni Soumises: Unveiling Women's Voices through Feminism and Social Media in the 21st Century

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Ni Putes Ni Soumises: Unveiling Women's Voices through Feminism and Social Media
in the 21st Century

By

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Ni Putes Ni Soumises (NPNS; English translation: “Neither Whores Nor Submissives”) is a French, largely Muslim, feminist political organization that aims to promote laïcité (secularization), mixité (the ability for women to fraternize with men), and gender equality. I have conducted an organizational case study including the triangulation of data comprised of critical analyses of the NPNS website, Facebook group, and other documentation and publications, to identify whether and how this organization has been successful in igniting social change. Findings indicate NPNS has grown its movement from one location (Paris) to forty-eight chapters throughout France, seven international headquarters, and has obtained consultative status with the United Nations. This was possible in large part due to media outlets such as the Internet, and more specifically Facebook and the NPNS website. Success can also be attributed to the willingness to cooperate with other organizations, devotion to education, thorough research and understanding of social problems, and the continuity of NPNS’s message and goals.

Keywords: women, feminism, political activism, Muslim, gender, equality, secularism, organization, media, social movements, social change, social media

Table of Contents

Title Page.....	i
Approval Page.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	3
Methods.....	14
Results.....	15
Discussion.....	26
Recommendations for Future Study.....	31
References.....	32

Introduction

The French belief of “laïcité” or separatism between the church and state in social, political, and economic realms has been a daily practice since the overturning of the monarchy during the French Revolution. Before this, French citizens were forced to adopt Catholicism in social, economic, and political practices of their lives. Through colonialism, immigration, and human rights protests, the French have upheld this separation.

Laïcité was challenged, however, after the Algerian War ending in 1962, when Maghreb citizens (those from the northwest region of Africa, including Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria) were offered citizenship to France. This flood of Muslim immigrants brought to light the fact that, though French citizens of any other religion were banned from wearing large symbols of their faith in public spheres, such as kippas or large crosses, Muslims were still allowed to showcase their religion through the comportment of the headscarf, commonly called the veil. This situation was convoluted by the fact that wearing a veil was not only a religious practice for Muslim women, but also a daily cultural expectation.

Therein harbored the problem. French and American feminists, along with the French government, proclaimed that veils were symbols of women’s oppression, and France banned the veil in public arenas, along with threatening to fine and/or imprison any man, and fine any woman, who forced the continuation of this tradition.

Internationally, world leaders were divided on this ruling. The intrinsic definition of

“democracy” was called into question, as well as human rights, the rights and cultural expectations of women, and the obligations of the State.

Though public conversations have taken place regarding outsider perceptions of the veil, no organization seemed to include French Muslim women in this discourse until Ni Putes Ni Soumises (NPNS), a largely Muslim, French feminist political activist group, called attention to evident injustices faced by low-income, and especially immigrant, citizens. This organization’s name translates to “Neither Whores Nor Submissives,” alluding to the double bind faced by Muslim women in France to both assimilate into dominant French culture as well as retain family and cultural traditions and expectations. NPNS was founded in part to commemorate the death of a French Muslim teenager, Sohane Benziane, who resisted Muslim teenage boys *une tournante*, or “pass-around,” a gang-rape circle, the practice of which is becoming popular with teenage boys in ghettos, or *banlieus*, where Muslims typically reside. As punishment for denying these boys access to her body, she was raped by each of the young men, showered with gasoline, and burned alive. NPNS fights not only for the rights this young woman should have had, but for those of all women, such as gender agency, opportunities for economic freedom, nationalism, Islam, and French citizenship, ultimately to create an environment where politically active women are perceived as socially acceptable and “normal.” The party has been successful in working with other women and men, both Muslim and non-Muslim, various like-minded associations, as well as national and international organizations and governments.

I have performed a content analysis of the rhetoric and themes utilized in the organization website and documents, outlined below, to examine whether and how Ni

Putes Ni Soumises has been successful in operating between two cultures, appealing to Muslims and non-Muslims, African immigrants and French natives, resulting in social change, utilizing the example of the widespread “headscarf affair” as a point of reference. Specifically, my research includes a critical analysis of documentation (including the *National Appeal from Neighborhood Women* and *The Manifesto of Neighborhood Women*), NPNS books *Breaking the Silence: French Women’s Voices From the Ghetto* by Fadela Amara, co-founder of NPNS, and *Le Guide du Respect*, and the NPNS website and Facebook page. This study will not only allow us to understand the complexities of immigration and history facing France, but it also will provide insight into how we might address immigration in the United States as well. Most importantly, this research is merely a stepping-stone toward the discovery of new ways in which we can create an inclusive and instrumental political activist group to defend women’s rights and illicit social change.

Literature Review

Colonial Control: The Maghreb

During the reign of colonial empires, France gained control of the North African area identified as the Maghreb, including the Canary Islands, Libya, and Mauritania, placing particular emphasis on the countries of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. Through these conquests, France became a Muslim power by 1830 utilizing both force, such as the invasion of Algiers and conquest of Morocco, and collaboration with the native inhabitants. “The conscious effort to control Islamic societies, establish Muslim leaders

and allies, and put a secular and tolerant face on imperialism was essential to whatever success colonial rule enjoyed” (Robinson 1999:106). France established a relationship with local authorities while maintaining power over them, a strategy that led to successful negotiations and increased colonialism.

Throughout interactions with local Maghrebs, the French developed relationships with four main groups of Muslim inhabitants: the Moors, Fulbe, Tokolor, and Wolof (Robinson 1999). The Moors were Arab-speaking, desert dwelling camel and cattle herders who considered themselves to be descendants of The Prophet and self-identified as “bidan” or white, and therefore superior to the “sudan” (blacks). The French accepted the creation of these racial and religious hierarchies, adopting the belief that “bidans” were elite in comparison. The Fulbe also raised livestock, and spoke a language native to the region. They were considered to be “not particularly devout and certainly not fanatic” (Robinson 1999:108). The Tokolor spoke the same language as the Fulbe, but were seen as fanatic followers of the jihad and the Islamic state. Later, Almamate of Futa Toro and Al-Hajj Umar would lead a resistance against a French post and urge Muslims to disassociate with the intruders. “Umar...came to epitomize Muslim fanaticism and led them to equate the Futa, the Tokolor, the Tijaniyya order, and militant Islam” (Robinson 1999:108). The Wolof people, however, were much less consistent in their behaviors. They were tied to Islam, as seen with their teachers, advisors, and court systems, while simultaneously refuting Islamic control with the use of firearms, pillaging, and consuming alcohol. “In many ways they behaved like the warrior bidan—raiders, highway robbers, outlaws—except that they were sudan (black)” (Robinson 1999:108). Black Muslims became a population to be feared, responsible for unlawfulness and

destruction, which would have devastating consequences for centuries to come. “These stereotypes proved remarkably resilient over the course of the nineteenth century...The basic racial categories, ‘white’ and ‘black,’ which emerged in the French categorizations of Islam in the early twentieth century still resonate today” (Robinson 1999:108), contributing to anti-Islamist sentiment throughout France.

Yet the French government’s actions toward the Wolof “reflected Enlightenment traditions of tolerance and the secular orientation of French regimes since the time of Napoléon,” seen for example in the government’s support in the construction of a Mosque (Robinson 1999:110). The town governor, Faidherbe, and Bu El Mogdad formed an alliance with the French government, creating anti-militant Islam propaganda, particularly against Al-Hajj Umar, and urging Muslims to embrace and adopt the French culture. “The core principles were straightforward. The French opposed Islamic states or movements which threatened to create them, [especially] Tijaniyya and Tokolor...They sought out, in contrast, Muslim teachers and leaders who rejected jihad...[who] were often [“white”], and this was consistent with the French belief in the superiority of bidan over ‘blacks’” (Robinson 1999:115). These Muslim leaders pledged their allegiance to France, persuaded their communities to embrace French culture, and were honored by the French government for their collaborative efforts, serving as anthropological liaisons, without which France could not have been as successful in trade and rule over the Maghreb region and peoples.

Flight to France

The relationship between Muslim colonials and France was convoluted, fostering a constant balancing act between authority over the people, France's own ideology, and respect for the indigenous culture. Under Napoléon III by the 1865 Senatus Consultate...the indigenous Muslim "was described as a French national but was to be judged under Muslim civil law and could only become a full French citizen if he or she renounced Islamic law" (Vince 2010:449). A byproduct of this decree became the status of Muslim women, which "became increasingly significant for judging the culturally different, subordinate other," resulting in the attempt of the French authorities to "win over the French Muslim population through appeals to its female elements" (Vince 2010:450). This created the foundation for what would later become a clash between Islamic culture and French Muslim citizens, a conflict particularly arduous for the women who would find themselves trapped between two cultures.

Despite this declaration, however, immigration to France remained low until after the French government became aware of their decrease in population resulting from World War I. Another decree was sanctioned on 2 November 1945 to encourage European migration to support the country's labor needs. In addition, to repay the "blood debt" to Algerian Muslims for their services during the first and second world wars, this population was allowed to navigate freely between France and Algeria. They were therefore granted French citizenship by assimilation once relocated in France. This event followed the construction of the Mosque of Paris in 1926 to commemorate the nearly one hundred thousand Muslim soldiers who died for France during WWI (Maillard 2005:64).

“Free circulation between France and Algeria was meant to safeguard French political interests in Africa and keep an influence on that continent. Thus the principle of free circulation, which was seen as a tool of France’s African policy, was extended to all Africa countries through a series of special arrangements” (Maillard 2005:66). This Algerian immigrant community was now living between cultures, rules, and lifestyles, providing them with a dual perspective and setting the stage for social change.

The Algerian War for Independence interrupted the relatively peaceful period of restoration on November 4, 1954. “Just as Algerian troops... had returned from a glorious military campaign with the French army in Europe...between ten and twenty-thousand Muslims were massacred...in retaliation for a hundred or so Europeans who had been killed” during Red All Saint’s Day, an attack led by the National Liberation Front (NLF) (Maillard 2005:68). The blood finally ceased to flow in 1962 with Algeria’s success. The French media responded by “condoning the one-party system, the confused and outdated socialism, the imposed [marginalizing] Arabization...and the nationalistic state that meant to become a model for third-world countries” (Maillard 2005:68-69), resurrecting feelings of suspicion and ethnocentrism that had been buried. In Algeria, the Islamic Front of Salvation (IFS) was created in response to the war, spewing “cultural francophobia, in line with its more general rejection of the West...and exercised an undisputed hegemony on Islam in Algeria, control[ing] the social fabric of the nation, and dominat[ing] the political scene” (Maillard 2005:69). This dissection of France’s views on gender equality was a devastating loss for those in support of women’s rights, rekindled only by the Evian Agreements, a treaty between the French government and the NLF which formed the cooperative exchange between the two countries, yet Algerians

were “guaranteed their civil rights, religion, language, and property” (Maillard 2005:66), rights in which women were often included.

Though this agreement created a steady flow of immigration between the Maghreb and France during the 1960’s and 1970’s, the largest bout of relocation to France occurred in the early 2000’s with the family reunification policy, or *regroupement familiale*, to “allow the family of the immigrant worker to join him... Thus the regroupement means mainly women coming for marriage or a wife and children joining their husband [and father]” (Maillard 2005:67). Rather than attracting young progressive minds, men in traditional roles of husband, son, and father relocated to France, bringing with them their families, and in many cases, their beliefs opposing the French practice of laïcité.

Rioting the Residences

Paradoxically, though France had been a “major Muslim power” for more than a century and had welcomed migrant workers, they were economically, politically, and socially unprepared for the settlement of four million Muslim immigrants (Maillard 2005:67). To satisfy the residential need, especially before the implementation of the regroupement familial, the government constructed “bachelor’s residences,” though many were unable to access this precious resource, and were therefore confined to ghettos, or banlieus; “more than 130,000 people were considered as not having adequate housing and lived in overcrowded, furnished rental units... Thus special funds were raised to build half-way houses” (Maillard 2005:66). The French government labeled these segregated housing areas “sensitive urban zones,” wherein unemployment stands at 19.6 percent—double the

national average—and at 30 percent among twenty-one to twenty-nine year olds, with incomes at 75 percent below the national average (Franz 2007:102). In October 2005, the oppressed banlieu tenants, whose exacerbation was triggered by the death of two boys (one of African descent and one of Arab descent) who were chased by the police and electrocuted in an electric subway station, began an uprising. “The riots were about the social living conditions in the suburbs and about discrimination...the double-exclusion—based on ethnic and economic factors—that North Africans and other Muslims time and again experience in France” (Franz 2007:101-2). The French government re-established subsidies to local associations and created further anti-discrimination laws in an attempt to appease the protestors, and agreed to improve housing conditions to the sensitive urban zones.

Though initiatives were taken to appease the disparities between French Muslim populations and the majority population, the groundwork for resentment and destruction had already been laid. “...[S]egments of Europe’s Muslim youth, many of whom are second- or third-generation Europeans, feel disenfranchised in a society that does not fully accept them, and so they turn to Islam as a badge of identity. Individuals of these cohorts are then radicalized by extremist Muslim clerics or fundamentalist youth groups” (Franz 2007: 91-92).

Laïcité and “The Headscarf Affaire”

Laïcité is the legal separation of Church and State initiated in 1905. It “ensures the neutrality of the public sphere, which is the key to a peaceful collective life dominated by useful commonalities, such as reason and logic” (Barras 2010:233).

Therefore, on 5 October, 1989, when three Muslim women were denied access to Gabriel Havez Middle School because they were wearing the traditional Muslim headscarf, “the issues shifted from the mosques to the schools of the secular republic, from foreign interference to French-born, French-educated youth for who the affirmation of Islam was a societal answer to a global crisis” (Maillard 2005:75). The French public supported two popular French philosophers who attested, “public schools should not only provide an education that emancipates youth, giving them the ability to become rational and autonomous beings, but also a space where they have the possibility of experiencing absolute sovereignty” (Barras 2010:242). To assess whether a law to prohibit practices in schools should be created, President Chirac implemented the Stasi Commission, a committee that released the Stasi Report, upholding the belief and practice of laïcité in schools. In 2004, the National Assembly (by a majority of 494-36 with 3 abstentions) and the Senate (by a majority of 276-20) approved the new law prohibiting visible religious symbols, including the Islamic hijab, the Jewish Yarmulke, Sikh turbans, and large crosses and Stars of David (Leane 2011:1040). Small jewelry and other discreet symbols, however, were permitted. Finally, in 2010, a law was passed to ban the burqa in public. Woman violators face 150-euro fines, and men who are found forcing women to break the law face time in jail. Both the President and National Assembly have strongly supported the ban. President Chirac proclaimed, “behind a mesh...is not the French republic’s idea of women’s dignity,” while the National Assembly released the statement, “it is necessary to maintain the French values of individualism and human dignity,” and also cited “security reasons” as cause for the ban (Leane 2011:1040). Through this law,

the clash between the French embodiment of laïcité and the religious practices of French Muslim beliefs becomes evident.

To Be or Not To Be A Feminist

Feminism is a collection of social movements, theories, and practices that date back to the Enlightenment period, which seek to promote equal rights for women. The beginning of this paradigm shift is credited to Mary Wollstonecraft with the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, which called for equality between the sexes. In it, she writes, “Contending for the rights of a woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice” ([1792] 1988: 4). Moreover, she calls for a revolution for women; famously declaring “I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves” ([1792] 1988: 62).

These powerful words eventually led to the creation of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, which publicly demanded full legal equality of the sexes, including educational opportunity and equal compensation. *The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions* was drafted during this gathering, which sparked the women’s suffrage movement. Women were granted the right to vote by their country at different rates, beginning with the United Kingdom in 1918, the United States in 1920, and some denied until after World War II, such as France declaring women fit to vote in 1944. The United Nations adopted women’s suffrage as a right under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1979 (United Nations 2013).

Rights for women continued to evolve during the 1960's and 1970's, a time of rapid social change. "The idea of equality between men and women became more legitimate and led to swift changes in legislation related to women's status in the home and at work" (Allwood and Wadia 2002: 211). However, the 1980's were met with considerable conservative backlash in major world economies, such as Japan, the United States, and Germany, resulting in economic destabilization and therefore threats to the resources and cultural environment of progressive policies (Allwood and Wadia 2002). Feminist movements became divided, and beliefs that feminism was obsolete, and that women had achieved total equality, were commonplace. It wasn't until the turn of the twentieth century that feminist movements resurfaced, rejuvenated with the emergence of former Eastern block European countries, those located in Latin America, the Indian subcontinent, and countries throughout Africa, which produced cross-cultural exchanges of feminist theories and practices, resulting in international conferences including those sponsored by the United Nations in Beijing in 1995 and New York in 2000 (Allwood and Wadia 2002).

Main criticisms of feminism include the lack of agreement on concise definitions, goals, and strategies, including whether activism or Academia is the most beneficial route in which to drive social change. It is generally accepted, however, that feminist groups usually subscribe to leftist political beliefs and ideologies, and challenge hegemonic masculinity, thereby threatening (gender) norms to restructure social, economic, and political institutions in favor of equality for women and men, blacks and whites, heterosexuals and homosexuals, asserting freedom can only be experienced if each race, class, and gender has access to the same opportunities.

Ni Putes Ni Soumises (Neither Whores nor Submissives!)

Ni Putes Ni Soumises (NPNS) is a women's movement/activist group created in protest of the murder of Sohane Benziane, a seventeen-year-old who was set on fire after refusing to partake in *une tournante*, a gang rape by teenage Muslim boys (Terranova 2004:26). They advocate for gender equality, economic resolve, French nationalism, Islam, and secularism, and are helping to foster acceptance and agency for French Muslims and other minorities. They have been successful in the political arena, have been named the "media darlings" (Pojmann 2010:230) and "aim at full political engagement...seek[ing] to be recognized as full and equal participants within French society" (Terranova 2004:26). They have distanced themselves from Islam, and yet lead a predominantly North African community, encouraging Muslim women to speak on behalf of their cultural practices and political beliefs (Pojmann 2010:230). This group supports the ban of the veil, advocating for women to transcend beyond the oppressive covering of their femininity and to use their voices to promote equality for all.

By studying this group, I hope to learn specific methods that have allowed these women to operate among and between cultures, advocating for women's rights and social change for the betterment of their nation. Not only do I strive to cultivate a further understanding of French culture and history, but explore how this country has approached social, economic, and political issues surrounding immigration, as these are becoming increasingly problematic for the United States as well. With the knowledge gained through this research, I intend to construct an organizational model of NPNS to uncover

the processes leading to the inclusion and integration of minority populations for social change that may be adaptable to issues facing the United States.

Methods

I have conducted a content analysis of the NPNS website, Facebook page, documents, and publications including the *National Appeal from Neighborhood Women* and *The Manifesto of Neighborhood Women*, NPNS books *Breaking the Silence: French Women's Voices From the Ghetto* by Fadela Amara, co-founder of NPNS, and *Le Guide du Respect*. To do this, I first translated the documents from French into English. These translated texts became my data. Through the process of translating, I began to see potential keywords form, or words that were emphasized and utilized far more than others. Next, I coded my data by counting the number of times each potential keyword was used in each specific document. After coding all of my data, I sorted the words by categories, and obtained a final count of the number of times a specific word or phrase was utilized within each text and created graphs of said data to allow relatively easy comparisons to be made between the symbolism, semantics, and rhetoric contained within the website, Facebook page, and other archival documents, and the relation between NPNS and the target culture.

As a technique, content analysis is both qualitative and quantitative, and because of its subjective nature of material, is sometimes viewed as a controversial technique (Huckin, Andrus, and Clary-Lemon, 2012). There are many benefits to completing a content analysis, however, including reviewing the language and materials with a specific, rhetoric-based approach. Important words within documents are almost never

counted and compared, yet the repetition of words and phrases speaks to the topic, theme, reason and even goal for the document, author or speaker, and the target audience.

Further, it “explicitly draws our attention to issues of power and privilege in public and private discourse” (Huckin, Andrus, and Clary-Lemon, 2012:111). By identifying which groups utilize powered speech and forceful words, and which groups are being subjected, we can create inferences regarding which groups are subordinate within a culture, and how those subjugated groups are painted as “others” in society. Finally, content analyses are relatively inexpensive and unobtrusive (Berg, 2001:260) for both the researcher and organization under review.

As with each research method, there exist several disadvantages to performing a critical analysis. The first is the amount of time a researcher needs to complete an analysis of this caliber, especially when documents must first be translated from another language. This relates to another potential barrier with this method of research, which is the availability of materials. Not only are materials sometimes physically difficult to obtain, but also when in another language, may not be accessible to the general public. Because NPNS is a relatively new organization, and due to language, cultural, and geographical barriers, Americans have had limited access to this organization, adding to the importance of my study. Another critique of this research method is the inability to establish causal relationships (Berg, 2001:260). Content analyses can aid in the identification of social hegemony, but cannot provide a timeline or detailed reasons for why this is the case. Finally, content analyses are highly subjective in nature. The researcher has control over which words and phrases are coded, and may not include some that others would argue are important to the study. Also, words and phrases may be

miscounted or overlooked altogether. To avoid these dilemmas, I utilized the same coding frames, or processes of examination, for each document. I also counted each keyword in each document multiple times, during different sessions, to ensure both precision and accuracy. I remained mindful of the benefits and limitations of content analyses throughout my study as an attempt to create a study with as accurate data and analysis as possible.

This research project is only the first step in identifying hegemony, inequality, and ways in which social change has been attempted. Ultimately, I hope this research will eventually lead to the construction of a model exploring advantageous as well as detrimental actions that have assisted NPNS in formulating and initiating social change with which to benefit women and communities worldwide.

Results

“NPNS is a popular and diverse feminist movement, open to men and women who defend the values of freedom, equality, secularism, and diversity. Its purpose is to help establish a de facto equality between men and women, and combat violence against women in disadvantaged neighborhoods, throughout France, and around the world upon which the rights and freedom of women to their bodies are being infringed” (Ni Putes Ni Soumises 2012, my translation).

Ni Putes Ni Soumises is an Association Law of 1901, which outlines the rights and requirements of non-profit organizations in France. Through this law, *associations* are given all the liberties of citizens. Because of this, organizations must provide a goal and mission statement that reflects public interest, and must operate as a democracy. Further, the location or headquarters must be clearly defined. Finally, the governance will be

treated as a *patrimoine*, enabling the organization to obtain assets and liabilities; however, this requires a birth date (organizations are usually given the “lifespan” of 99 years), address (headquarters), and the ability to conduct affairs (Council for the English-Speaking Community 2012).

To engage in business, the Association Law requires each institution to designate a President—to facilitate at the executive level, Treasurer—responsible for all monetary affairs, and Managing Director—to conduct daily operations. Funding is provided through member dues, gifts from private and public donors, and by subsidies granted by the French administration (Council for the English-Speaking Community 2012). Should any legal action be taken against the entity, any of these leaders may be sued, which is why liability insurance is strongly recommended to any budding association.

Because the government is responsible for a portion of its funds, NPNS has a much different relationship with their governing body than most non-profit organizations within the United States. The feminist movement does not hesitate to ask for assistance and support from legislators, council members, even the President, as well as collaborate with other political activist leaders pursuing similar goals.

Not only does NPNS communicate with the French government, the women’s activist organization has had Special Consultative Status with the United Nations since 2007. This honor is granted only to non-governmental organizations (NGO’s), which have a special competence and specificity in only a few of the fields of activity with which ECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council) is concerned. In this case, issues surround women’s equality, specifically violence against women, including education and prevention. The status ensures access to nearly all intergovernmental

processes at the United Nations involving economic and social development, gender issues, sustainable development, small arms, and human rights issues. Further, it enables NPNS to circulate statements at ECOSOC meetings, allowing this group to interject women's issues on a global scale.

The Venn diagram below is a visualization of the collaborative efforts between NPNS, the French government, and the United Nations, depicting how each entity is contributing to the goals of NPNS.

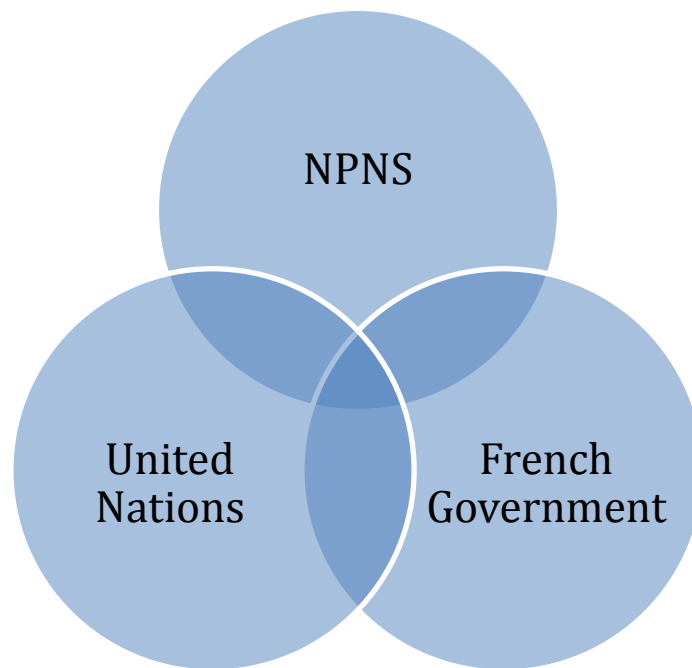


Figure 1

Neither Whores Nor Submissives is centered on three founding values: laïcité, equality, and mixité (fraternization between women and men). These three paradigms are evident throughout the NPNS website, Facebook page, and supporting documents.

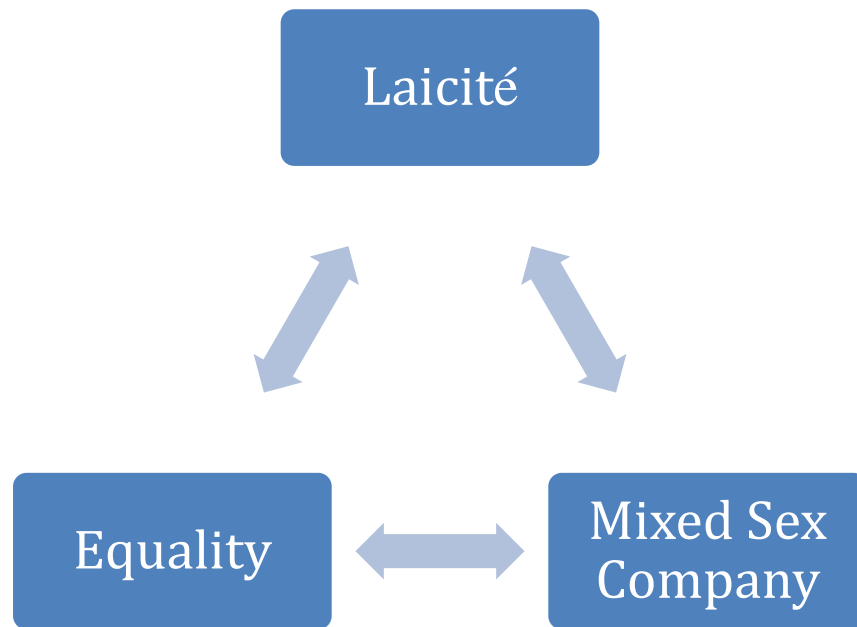


Figure 2

Published on the website of Ni Putes Ni Soumises is “The NPNS Social Contract: 17 Claims of Women (in Banlieus)” (NPNS 2012). Four main themes that emerged were government (enlisting the aid of government to create social change, including proposition or appeal of legislation), education (to abolish stereotypes and promote feminist beliefs), prevention (of violence through the observation of at-risk populations, for example), and providing resources for women. The graph below depicts the frequency of each of the four topics. (*Please note that these are not exclusive, and therefore the sum is above 17.)

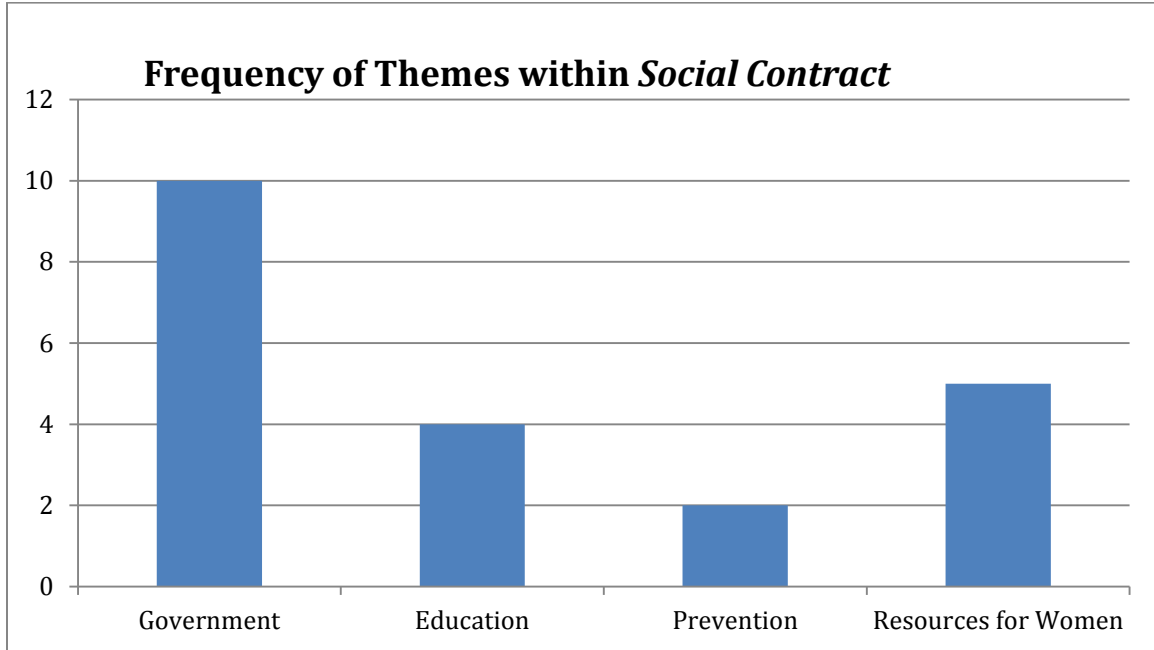


Figure 3

Because laïcité is a guiding principle of Ni Putes Ni Soumises, the organization offers nationalism rather than religion. In regards to the veil, the president of NPNS “sees the headscarf as a prison” and stated, “The scarf is a total regression because it touches upon the dignity of women. It is a sign of male dominance over the female body,” (Ni Putes Ni Soumises 2012, my translation). This control contradicts the essence of this group’s entire purpose, and is therefore a battle in which NPNS continues to combat.

To better understand the difficulties faced by neighborhood women and men, in 2001 NPNS distributed a questionnaire that investigated problems like violence, sexuality, religion, and traditions. Over 5,000 responses were received, through which sociologist Helen Orain created a paper entitled “*Livre Blanc des femmes des quartiers.*”

Amara (2006:111) explains:

The paper confirmed our analysis of what had been happening in the projects: mounting violence, social breakdown, ghettoization, retreat into sectarian politics, ethnic and sexual discrimination, the powerful return to tradition, the weight of the myth about virginity, but also practices like excision and polygamy still current in certain African communities.

Not coincidentally, these are the main topics discussed in *Le Guide du Respect*, a booklet designed to educate young men and women on sexuality, violence, traditions, respect, and the law, as well as provide resources to help those in need and offer interested students places where one can get involved in feminist initiatives.

The group's purpose was first documented in *A National Appeal from Neighborhood Women* following the first Estates General of Neighborhood Women in January 2002 at the University of Paris—La Sorbonne. The three hundred women in attendance drafted a decree that called for mobilization of women, to refuse to remain complacent while crimes against women were committed daily. Below is an excerpt, published in Amara's *Breaking the Silence: French Women's Voices from the Ghetto* (2006:163):

We women who live in the city suburbs, women from all backgrounds, believers and non-believers, are launching this appeal for our rights to liberty and emancipation. Oppressed by a society that shuts us up in ghettos where deprivation and exclusion are proliferating. Suffocated by the machismo of the men of the cités who in the name of 'tradition' deny our most fundamental rights. Gathered together for the first 'Estates general of the women of the suburbs', we hereby affirm our desire to achieve our rights, our liberty, and our womanhood. We refuse to be limited to false choices, to submit to the shackles of traditions or to sell our bodies like commodities.

A critical analysis of the themes embedded within the *National Appeal* was completed, and a frequency graph constructed to depict the ratio of these topics.

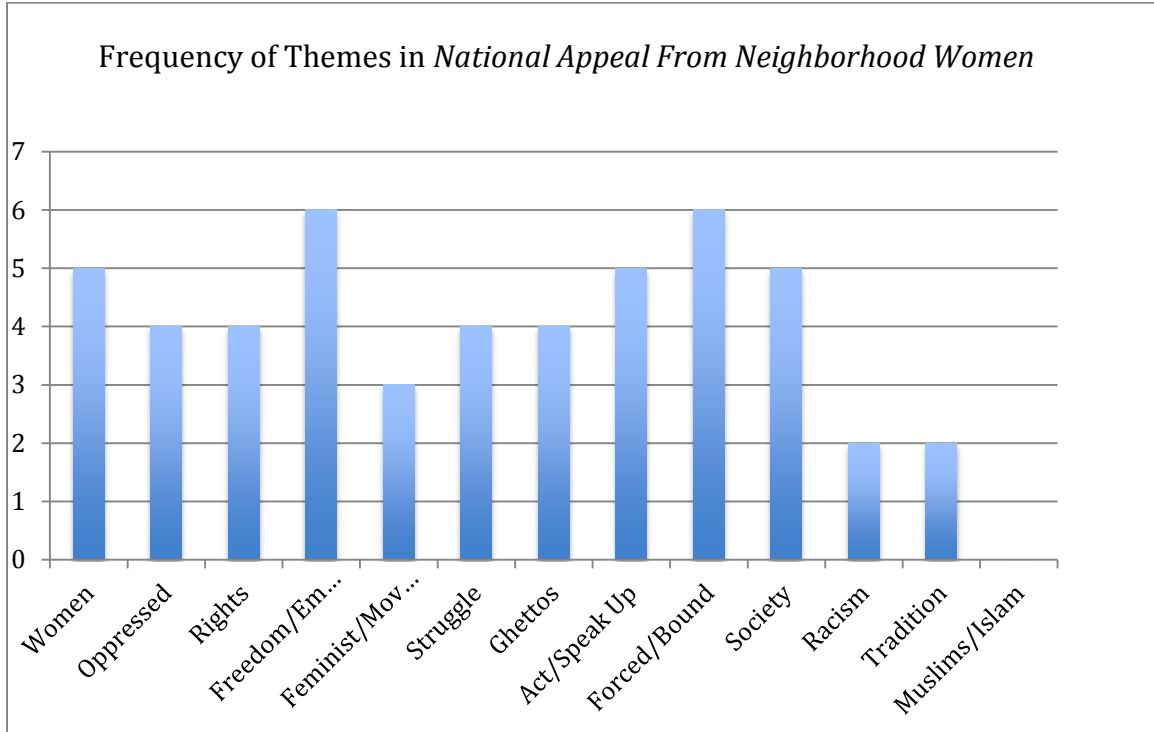


Figure 4

Interestingly, the words “Muslim” or “Islam” were not included within this document. However, “Ghettos,” the situational context of the living arrangements of many of these women, was included four times within the essay.

This meeting led to the organization and execution of a five-week march throughout France, ending in Paris on the International Day of Women, March 8, 2003. This “tour de France” began with only eight marchers—six women and two men—and a handful of partners, including SOS Racisme, Planned Parenthood, and Accor, willing to aid in the cost of meals, lodging, and media coverage (Amara 2006:116). The march included holding discussions and meetings in twenty-three towns, with the initiative gaining interest, support, media coverage, and marchers at each location. With each new

town, more emails and phone calls were made to the Paris headquarters to inquire where and how to join the movement, and personal experiences were shared and documented. The efforts culminated in the form of over 30,000 people, and a foundation for the organization Ni Putes Ni Soumises (Amara 2006).

Yet as with any social movement, there are those who resist and criticize. Muslim men comprised one main source of opposition, denouncing the marchers for disrespecting their elders, their tradition, their religion, and their god. In her account of the march, Amara (2006:124) professes:

Together with other young women in the march, we tried to explain that the march was not organized against the neighborhoods, neither against our fathers and brothers, nor against Islam, but it was a movement that allowed us to exist as women who deserved respect. We simply wanted to escape the spiraling violence that was destroying everyone in the projects. We wanted them to understand that they were themselves victims but also actors because of their behavior toward young women.

The fruits of the march were plentiful, and included not only creating allies for this new organization, but roots for many new chapters of NPNS throughout France. “The March by Neighborhood Women in February and March 2003 clearly marked the beginning of a collective consciousness” (Amara 2006:38). With a wide range of support, NPNS outlined the beliefs and goals of the association in the *Manifesto of Neighborhood Women*. This national petition was sent to each presidential candidate in April 2002, but received little response. The following graph is a visual depiction of the frequency of several themes discussed therein.

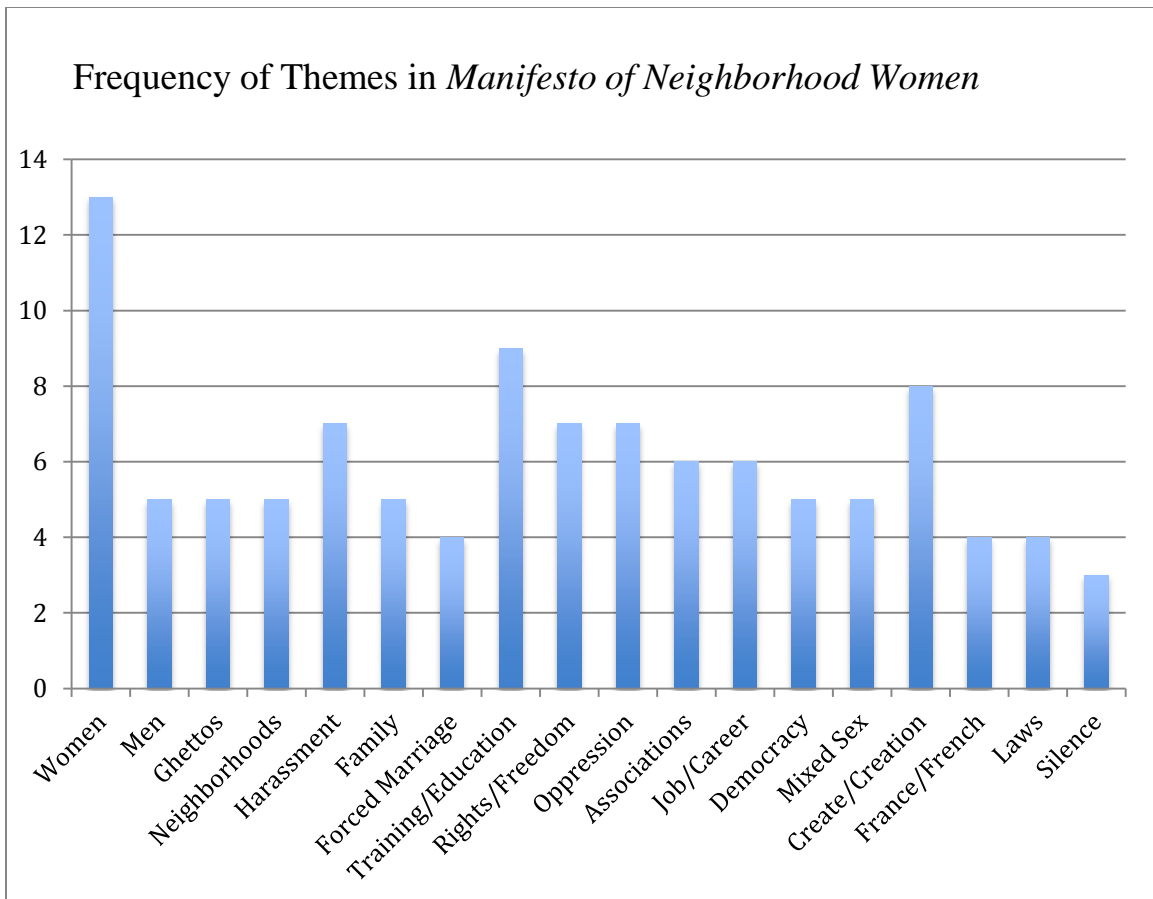


Figure 5

Just as three paradigms (laïcité, mixité, and equality) emerged from the NPNS website and Facebook group, three topics emerged from *Le Guide du Respect*: sexuality, violence, and traditions that imprison. Each of these was discussed in the context of respect for one’s own body and for others. Specifically, topics examined included sexuality, desire, virginity, protection against sexually transmitted infections, forced and arranged marriage, polygamy, excision, verbal and physical violence (including sexual violence and date rape), and the (French) laws regarding each of these.

The guidebook itself is 4 inches by 6 inches, is black with hot pink lettering, and a hot pink and black illustration on the cover with a young man’s and a young woman’s

profile facing one other in a circle. Another smaller circle sits to the right of it with the price of the booklet, 1€. At the top of the guide is the oval logo: NI PUTES NI SOUMISES, and below that in bold letters is the title, LE GUIDE DU RESPECT, with the subtitle “Filles et Garçons: mieux vivre ensemble” (“The Compliance Guide: Boys and Girls Living Together”). The booklet is 84 pages long, includes various illustrations, quotes, stories, questions to consider, and even has a glossary of terms, (emergency) contact information, NPNS locations, and partner information. The language is informal, direct, and easy to understand, and the guidebook uses lots of slang. The colors used are black, grey, white, and hot pink only. Each of these facts (the size of the booklet, the illustrations, types of resources, the kind of language, and the color scheme) is meticulously chosen to appeal to the target audience, in this case, teenage girls and boys. (Though the hot pink is most likely more attractive to young women, the background of the booklet, and therefore the most surface area, is covered by black, a color associated with masculinity.) NPNS has sold more than 30,000 copies since its production in 2005 and has been translated into the Belgian dialect (NPNS 2013). The booklet was also translated into Moroccan dialect, but the government of Morocco denied NPNS to dispense the guide; further, Morocco would not allow NPNS to create a branch within the country’s walls, as there were disagreements with the moral values of the organization (2013). One Moroccan political activist commented, “The government does not give grounds for Islamist mobilization” (Wabayn 2013, my translation). Clearly, NPNS has many barriers to destroy in the future.

The guidebook, NPNS website, and Facebook page share many similarities. Each contains anecdotal information regarding young women’s situations within the *banlieus*,

each displays the NPNS logo (a hot pink oval and lettering of “NI PUTES NI SOUMISES” with a black background), and all three contain information regarding NPNS locations, services and resources provided, and contact information for their organization as well as partnering associations.

Being forms of technological media, the NPNS website and Facebook group naturally share more commonalities than the booklet does with each of them. Both share photos, videos, current events, links to sign petitions, and meetings/events information. Each proclaims “laïcité, mixité, égalité” and displays the NPNS logo. Also, each contains links to news regarding the organization. Differences include a space for individual posting and communication on Facebook, which creates a conversation rather than a one-way access to information. The website, however, provides a timeline of the creation of NPNS and yearly events, links to partnering associations, links through which to donate, and direct links that assist one in the process of participating with any initiative(s) of the group. The website contains much more information, whereas Facebook does not have the space to include much more than an introduction to the association and a link to the website. Whereas Facebook is utilized as an outlet for outreach and communication, the website provides information and resources. Each targets NPNS supporters and calls for gender equality and social change, empowering the reader to educate oneself and to act.

Discussion

Mouvement Ni Putes Ni Soumises has clearly defined goals and an organizational leadership that has aided in the success of the group. The goals set by this institution are broad, addressing collectivist ideals such as social reform, equality, and diversity, yet have outlined specific acts and legislations with which to reach these lofty ideals. In addition, I have found that the system of leadership, which is lawfully designed as a democracy with an executive board consisting of a president, treasurer, and managing director, has a relatively low level of formalization. I attribute this to two key factors. The first is the realization of the organization that if they are to serve the public, they must be attuned to the needs and circumstances of those in need, which speaks to the necessary openness of the system. Secondly, and what I believe is paramount, is the development of social media in an organizational context. Through Facebook, for example, there is both a high increase in the frequency of interaction among group members as well as an affinity toward the decline of formality; members have access to one another's videos, pictures, blogs, and other personal information, allowing members to depict their leaders as equal human beings rather than structures of power and authority.

This technology also appears to significantly increase both the membership size and participation; because interaction via social media such as Facebook is instant, reminders can be sent, event pages can be created, and friends invited, all with a click of a mouse. Moreover, establishing relationships via social media was also observed to decrease anxiety levels regarding participation in events; members were much more likely to attend events after interacting with others online. Finally, social media was

found to provide a forum for expression, awareness, involvement, collaboration and creativity.

The utilization of technology is not the only reason for the success experienced by Ni Putes Ni Soumises. This organization has taken the time to research the social context and problems at hand. Investigations took several forms. First, by creating a questionnaire, and receiving over 5,000 responses, NPNS gained valuable insight. Secondly, a sociologist, someone familiar with compositing data from such sources, compiled these questionnaires, which helped to ensure thorough and accurate results. Thirdly, in-depth interviews were conducted throughout the twenty-three stops during the NPNS march, and observations made during that time period and afterward, as young women continued to seek help and strength from this organization. Also, the founder of NPNS, Fadela Amara, was herself a Muslim woman who grew up in the *banlieus* and therefore understood the social context from a personal level. Finally, social media such as Facebook provides an outlet for anecdotal information as young women and men continue to share their personal experiences, adding fresh insight and possible solutions to gender equality throughout France and the world.

Through technology and networking, NPNS has continued to collaborate with associations with similar goals, thereby expanding their influence, resources, and ultimately their ability to influence and ignite social change. This friendly and cooperative disposition resulted in their nickname, “Media Darlings.” For example, the Estates General of Neighborhood Women began as a group of women interested in gender equality and improving gender agency for women, particularly those in the ghettos. From this sprouted the Manifesto, and opportunities to partner with SOS

Racisme and Planned Parenthood, for example. NPNS continued their reach, drawing in local and national French politicians. This association did not discard the contacts they had made during the march, and did not allow that momentum to dissipate. Instead, they created chapters in each of the interested cities, eventually expanding the organization to 63 locales. This group's ability to maintain and continue to create allies led to an international honor, receiving special consultative status with the United Nations ECOSOC, providing NPNS with an avenue through which to pedal their materials, continue to collaborate among those with similar interests, and to further spread their influence, including the foundation of seven international headquarters, located in Amsterdam, Barcelona, Brussels, Geneva, New York, Stockholm and Rome. Each of these cities is a powerhouse for feminist thought, academic achievement, and world leadership, and therefore provides added benefits to the organization.

NPNS drafts manifestos, collaborates with the United Nations, and organizes protests. An objective this association has continuously revisited and indeed fights for is that of education. *Le Guide du Respect*, their website and Facebook groups, and Amara's book, *Breaking the Silence*, have all served as invaluable resources for young women and men in need of assistance and to those who wish to join the cause. This group does not stop with literature, pamphlets, and websites, however; they visit schools throughout France to speak on issues of sexuality, respect, equality, the law and tradition. In these various ways, NPNS attempts to saturate young audiences with cultural beliefs and resources these students may not have access to in the ghettos in hopes of exposing hatred and demolishing damaging traditions with the creation of an environment of love and respect.

Finally, the continuity of messages asserted by NPNS have aided in the success of this organization. Not only is their logo/brand unique and highly recognizable and easily identifiable, with the hot pink letters and oval declaring “NI PUTES NI SOUMISES” and the black background, it is edgy and daring, and therefore, at least in theory, attracts those who are much more likely to act, to speak up, and to add to a movement of social change, and is seen on the Facebook page, website, and all printed documents and possessions such as *Le Guide du Respect* which ensures brand recognition and cohesion of resources. The three paradigms, “laïcité, mixité, and égalité,” are the summation of all NPNS believes in and fights for, and echoes the French national motto of “liberté, égalité, and fraternité” (liberty, equality, and brotherhood).

The logo, slogan, and color scheme are not the only constants seen between materials of NPNS. As seen above in the graphs of the various critical analyses performed, the language is also consistent; whether one reads the Facebook page intro, website, or the *Manifesto*, s/he will notice an affinity for certain words and themes that serve not only to reiterate the group’s mission, but to make associations between these themes and the organization. Examples of emphasized words, phrases, and themes include: women, education, creation, rights/freedom, oppression, and society/government. Interestingly, these documents lack themes such as religion, tradition, Muslim, and Islam. I believe this is because the association is attempting to create a common experience; one shared by all women, and to include Muslim, tradition, or Islam, for example, would further alienate those who may otherwise join the movement. This tactic has been utilized in feminist documents since their origins with Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* and the *Declaration of Sentiments*

and Resolutions drafted during the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. By focusing on shared experience, the foundation of the organization becomes more cohesive, and creates a more stable base that is able to withstand the turbulent environments of political and social movements.

The beliefs of NPNS are simple, and can be summarized in three words: *laïcité*, *mixité*, and equality. The emphasis on secularism states, “We are French first. Not Muslim, not Christian, but citizens of the French Republic.” The focus on mixed sex and diversity is an attempt to focus on the strengths provided by various populations through adverse experiences, cultures, and therefore perspectives. Finally, NPNS declares that women and men, French natives and French immigrants, blacks and whites, are each worth one life, that no group should have more rights than another, should not have a higher wage than another, should have more opportunities than another. By exclaiming, “We are all equal, despite our differences,” the focus becomes the similarities and strengths of the collective rather than shortcomings or judgments. I believe this is one major reason for the success NPNS has experienced.

Though the message remains the same, the ways in which it is distributed varies. NPNS stresses education to dispel stereotypes and prejudices, and to prevent dating violence and bigotry before it begins. Therefore, not only does this organization lobby in support of public education, NPNS also visits schools to distribute information and resources. The group also collaborates with the government, enlisting the help of legislators, the President, and the United Nation. This creates national and international media coverage while generating funding for resources and other programs hosted by NPNS.

Ni Putes Ni Soumises is dedicated to the prevention and obliteration of violence and inequality of women and immigrants while striving to include men, and promotes strength through diversity. To accomplish this lofty goal, NPNS utilizes resources provided by other French citizens, the government, and the United Nations. Their focus on collectivity and positivity, rather than targeting specific groups and creating negative media, has led to a belief and practice in which others are proud to join. By emphasizing inclusion, NPNS has created a force in which all can participate and a dream in which we all can share; proclaiming the enrichment of women will benefit the community, education system, economy, government, and the world.

Recommendations for Future Study

Because of the recent international status of Ni Putes Ni Soumises, further research should be done to identify how NPNS is operating on a transnational stage. Because this organization was created in the context of French government and society, what adjustments had to be made in order to appeal to a worldwide audience? Do Muslims still comprise a large portion of activists? If so, how are these experiences similar? How is NPNS able to navigate within global contexts? In what ways has earning special consultative status with the UN helped and hindered the mission of this organization? These questions should be explored in the context of global feminism and social movements, as NPNS remains a unique and influential organization.

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