

French Media Framing of the, Islamic Headscarf: Identity Threat and Coping Strategies*

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Abstract

In March 2004, the French parliament passed a law banning the wearing of religious signs in public schools. Prior to the law, the controversy over the Islamic headscarves mobilised massive media coverage. This paper attempts to explore the potential implications of this coverage for national ingroup identity. Drawing on concepts from identity process theory (IPT) and framing theory, this paper argues that media framing of the 'headscarf debates' may have posed identity threats to ingroup national identity, which may have induced as coping strategies public support to the law and gendered Islamophobia.

Key words: *Islamic headscarf, media representations, identity process theory (IPT).*

أزمة هوية وإستراتيجية المواجهة: الحجاب في الإعلام الفرنسي

ملخص

في 2004 أصدرت فرنسا قانونا بحظر ارتداء الشارات الدينية في المدارس الحكومية. قبل المصادقة نهائيا على القانون، أثار الحجاب جدلا كبيرا وسط وسائل الإعلام الفرنسية. تهدف هذه المقالة إلى دراسة أثر هذه التغطية الإعلامية في الهوية الوطنية لدى المجتمع الفرنسي غير المسلم في ضوء نظرية الهوية ونظرية التأطير الإعلامي. تشير هذه الدراسة إلى أن الجدل الإعلامي بإمكانه أن يحدث انعكاسات سيكولوجية على الهوية الوطنية التي بدورها قد تشجع المجتمع الفرنسي على تأييد قانون منع الحجاب في المدارس وعلى ترجيل ظاهرة الإسلاموفوبيا الجنسية.

كلمات المفاتيح: حجاب، وسائل إعلام، نظرية هوية.

La Construction Médiatique du Foulard Islamique: Crise de l'Identité et Stratégies d'Adaptation

Résumé

En 2004, le Parlement français a passé une loi interdisant le port de signes religieux dans les écoles publiques. Avant l'adoption de cette loi, la controverse sur 'le foulard islamique a fait rage dans les médias. L'objectif de cet article est d'examiner l'impact de la représentation médiatique du 'foulard islamique' sur l'identité nationale des Français non - musulmans. En utilisant la théorie de l'identité et la théorie du cadrage médiatique, cette réflexion avance que 'le foulard islamique' aurait pu être perçu comme une menace à l'identité nationale, face à laquelle le public aurait adopté des stratégies d'adaptation, tel que soutenir la loi et manifester une islamophobie sexiste.

Mots-clés: *Foulard islamique, représentation médiatique, théorie de l'identité.*

Introduction:

In France, 'Islamic headscarves'⁽¹⁾ as a symbol of faith were not an important issue until 1989. In September 1989, three schoolgirls were expelled from a public middle school in Creil, a suburb of Paris, for refusing to remove their headscarves in class. The girls' exclusion was justified on the grounds that they violated the principle of *laïcité*⁽²⁾, the French state's style of secularism. Although the situation was resolved and the State Council (Conseil d'Etat), the highest administrative court in France, did not consider the wearing of 'Islamic headscarves' a violation to *laïcité*, Creil incident' sparked off nation - wide debates. The controversy over the 'Islamic headscarf' continued to simmer in the years 1994 - 1995 and 2003 (for accounts see (1) and (2)).

In 2003, the 'Islamic headscarf' was pulling passionate media debates. As a response, the French president Jacques Chirac established a commission led by the state's ombudsman Bernard Stasi (henceforth the Stasi Commission/Report) to investigate the role of *laïcité* in the French society. After auditioning various contributors, such as schoolteachers, public intellectuals and politicians, the commission submitted its report in December 2003. The Stasi Report put forward a number of recommendations, including a law that banned wearing "conspicuous religious symbols" from French public schools. In March 2004, the law was passed and became effective in the subsequent academic year. Thereafter, if girls insisted to keep on wearing their scarves in the classroom, the law would mandate their exclusion from school. The ban legislation was in fact formulated to apply equally to all 'religious signs', including Jewish kippas, large Christian crosses, and Sikh turbans. However, critics asserted, that the law targeted the 'Islamic headscarf' (1) (3) (4) (5). This claim was partly explained by the prevalence of three themes in media debates, namely *laïcité*, gender equality and national unity on the basis of which the law was justified (1) (2) (3) (6). These themes were also running through government official reports⁽³⁾, including the Stasi Report (7). As critics pointed out, had the ban project really addressed Jewish kippas, large crosses or Sikh turbans, the pervasive argument on gender equality would have become irrelevant (1) (3) (5).

Several studies have pointed out that the representations through which an ethnic or a cultural group come to be viewed by another group are the same ones through which the latter self - represents. Hall (1992) (8) emphasised the centrality of the discourse on the 'Rest' to the West's formation of its Western identity. As MacDonald (2003) (9) put it, "by defining the 'Other', we also implicitly define what holds 'us' together as 'non - Other'" (p 151). Sayad's (1978) (10) study on immigration in France showed that the discursive construction of the 'Other' entails a discursive construction of the 'Self'. A major implication of this idea is that representations of who the 'Other' group is are thus inextricably linked to identity construction of the 'Self' as a group. In this light, this paper attempts to examine the dominant French media representations of the 'Islamic headscarf' as a symbol of Islam and Muslims and their impact on the national identity of non - Muslim dominant majority (henceforth the in group⁽⁴⁾). Framing theory and identity process theory (henceforth IPT) are used as analytical frameworks.

Islam and the 'Islamic Headscarf' in the French Media:

Studies have noted that in post - colonial France, media representations of Islam and Muslims were largely negative (3) (11) (12). In his thorough analysis of television coverage over a 30 - year period (1975 - 2005), Deltombe (2005) (12) demonstrated that media discourse about Islam had been central to the construction of Islamophobia in France. According to Deltombe (2005) (12), visibility of Islam in the media started with the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979. TV coverage of this event filled French screens with recurrent images of bearded men, praying crowds and black chadors (12). These images have contributed in constructing Islam and Muslims as a threat to France at both cultural and political levels (12). More, the Islamic regime of Khomeini and his order compelling women

to wear the chador, the Iranian veiling style, facilitated connections between a political Islam and the 'Islamic headscarf'(1).

Since then, the 'Islamic headscarf' has developed into a symbol of an Islamic threat. A decade after the Iranian Revolution, the Rushdie Affair⁽⁵⁾ in February 1989 coincided with the 'Creil incident'. The co - occurring events allowed French opinion makers to draw links between Iran and women veiling, the Rushdie Affair and the headscarf controversy, making connections between Muslim headscarves and an array of perceived fears about Islam (1). While the Rushdie Affair was represented as an attack on the principles of the French Republic, *laïcité* was constructed as a bulwark against the danger of a growing political Islam symbolised by the Iranian regime (12). Bowen (2007) (1) reported that in the 1990s the Algerian civil war and the ongoing GIA (Islamic Army Group) massacres of civilians were not only commonplace on French television, but co - occurred with coverage of the headscarf controversy. Further, the Islamist terrorist (GIA) assaults in France in the mid - 1990s and 9/11 attacks have constructed Islam and Muslims as both an internal and external enemy (12). Many in France saw the 'Islamic headscarf' as the harbinger of an Islamic fundamentalism encroaching upon the Republic (2). Molokotos - Liederman's (2000) (13) analysis of 1117 French press articles published between 1989 - 1999 confirmed the negative undertones of the 'Islamic headscarf' represented as a threat to French republican ideals, notably *laïcité*. The war - on - terror rhetoric following 9/11 and the growing concern over domestic security encouraged anxieties about the 'Islamic headscarf' (1). Some scholars have even charged the French media with embedding the 'Islamic headscarf' in a discourse of Islamophobia (3) (11) (12) (14).

Framing Theory:

In communication studies, framing analysis is interested in how the media provide audiences with particular frames of interpretations to understand or discuss a particular event. According to Entman (2003) (15), framing involves two essential factors: selection and salience. That is to say, when the media represent a specific event or issue, framing entails "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (15, p 417). Media framing of a particular issue can have a significant impact on shaping public opinion about this issue in the absence of counter - frames (16). This implies that the exclusion of interpretations by frames is as significant to outcomes as their inclusion.

Identity Process Theory:

Developed in social psychology, IPT was introduced by Glynis L. Breakwell (17) in 1986 as a theoretical framework for her research on identity threat and coping. According to IPT, two universal processes provide content and value for identity structure, namely the assimilation - accommodation process and the evaluation process. Assimilation refers to the incorporation of new information in the identity structure, such as accepting the 'Islamic headscarf' in French schools. Accommodation describes the adjustment of already existing elements of identity structure so that the new information can be assimilated into identity structure. For example, accepting the 'Islamic headscarf' in schools may involve questioning allegiance to French secular values. The evaluation process gives value to the content of identity in terms of how good or bad it is.

According to Breakwell (1986) (17) and Jaspal (18), four psychological principles guide those universal processes, namely continuity (the belief that one has remained and will remain the same across time), distinctiveness (a sense of differentiation from others), self - efficacy (control over one's life), and self - esteem (feelings of personal worth). IPT postulates that identity is threatened when the social context compromises these principles (17) (18). Aversive to psychological well - being, experience of identity threats leads to the adoption of coping strategies (17) (18). A coping strategy is defined as any response, in thought or indeed, intended to remove the threat or alleviate its negative repercussions (17). According

to Jaspal (18), identity principles are not all constantly salient. Saliency of identity principles is determined by the social context and the representations ensuing from it. Identity threat can, therefore, be experienced when a given social situation frustrates salient identity principles.

Identity principles and experience of identity threat can apply to individuals as well as to community groups, whose feelings of continuity, distinctiveness, self - efficacy, and self - esteem may be compromised (19). IPT acknowledges the important impact of social representations, often considered the origin and vehicle for identity threats, on the activity of identity processes (20). Jaspal and Cinnirella (19) have demonstrated the impact of dominant media representations on group identity principles. Therefore, IP Tenables to make a connection between a given media representation of the 'Islamic headscarf' and its potential repercussions on identity principles in terms of the possible ways in which the French ingroup might respond to their threatened identity.

French Media Framing of the 'Headscarf Debates':

In response to the increasing media hubbub on 'the Islamic headscarf', the Stasi Commission was appointed to study the application of laïcité in France. In December 2003, the Stasi group released its report, proposing a range of recommendations, among which only banning conspicuous religious symbols from state schools was retained. With this project of a law, the headscarf debates in the media, along with the Stasi Report (2003) depicted grave dangers to the French republican values, namely laïcité, gender equality and national unity. Several studies reported that these themes were high on the media agenda before the passage of the law (1) (2) (3) (6), suggesting their functioning as frames.

Laïcité Frame:

In the headscarf debates, references to laïcité often coupled with accounts of France's history and Revolution (7). Laïcité is the legacy of long and bitter conflicts between the Republic and the Catholic Church, which eventually led to the institution of the 1905 - law on the separation between the churches and the state. Under the Third Republic (1879 - 1905), laïcité was introduced to schools, a sacred space for persevering and safeguarding France's cultural values. It is in schools that France's language, cultural values and norms are inculcated to, and involved in the making of, future citizens conceived to share a common (national) identity that transcends their individual particularism and communitarian attachments (21). In France, the school is key both in instructing common republican principles that shape a collective identity for citizens and in building a nation conceived to be one and indivisible (6).

Laïcité, as a principle of separation between state and religion, instructs the religious neutrality of public sphere by prohibiting the state from imposing any particular religion and by preventing any religion from imposing itself through the medium of the state (1). Yet religious neutrality of public sphere does not inhibit religious expressions (21). The law of neutrality is restricted to the state's public services and its agents, such as teachers and school curricula and does not apply to the users of public services, such as pupils (1) (3) (21) (22) (23), whose right to freedom of religious expressions in the public sphere is guaranteed by the 1905 - law itself (6). Hence, citizens, including pupils, can display their religious symbols if they want to without bringing into question the neutrality of public space (24). This explains why in 1989 the State Council recognised that the 'Islamic headscarf' constituted no violation of Laïcité (1) (4). Nevertheless, the media set an alarmist scenario about headscarves as representing an affront to laïcité (1) (3).

Many of those who supported the law banning headscarves claimed they did so in the name of laïcité. According to Bowen (2007) (1), laïcité does not offer a firm and clear legal referent for which politicians turn to for effective solutions. "No easy deductions of new laws from old principles were possible", Bowen argued (p.33). Yet in the headscarf debates, a particular understanding of laïcité was seized on and presented as "non - negotiable" to curtail the visibility of religion in public life (1). This version of laïcité, which I designate as, 'laïcism',

required strict separation between religion and public sphere where individuals must leave their religious identity at home and out of public sight. Tevanian(3) noted that this understanding of *laïcité* was the most dominant in French media debates(3). According to the French sociologist Edgar Morin (1990)(25), *laïcité* at first called for pluralistic principles as a critical response to the ideological domination of the Catholic Church. This pluralistic version of *laïcité* was superseded by a contemporary one that Morin dubbed “catho - laïque”, which hides intolerance behind the veil of rationalism. This shift in the conception of *laïcité* led several scholars to consider the utility of ‘laicism’ in normalizing hostilities against Islam and in excluding Muslim minorities(6)(26)(27). It is on the basis of this ideological version of *laïcité* that the law was often defended in the media.

In politics, laicism was based on the idea that the ‘Islamic headscarf’ was incompatible with the secular France and its schools(5). This trend gained popularity in the headscarf debates due to the virulent anti - immigrant ideas that Front National party had disseminated since the early 1980s and the ongoing tensions that prevailed in the suburbs of dominant Muslim - Maghrebi population in the 1990s and 2000s(1). Such circumstances encouraged worries about what was perceived as a problematic Islamic culture and problematic North African immigrants for which the ‘Islamic headscarf’ stood as a symbol (1)(28). As Asad(2006)(5) explained, the ‘Islamic headscarf’ in France was not just a sign of community belonging, but “an icon in the sense that it does not designate but evoke What is evoked is not a headscarf (un foulard) but the Islamic veil (le voile islamique)” (p.100). Representational associations between the ‘Islamic headscarf’ and a perceived Islamic threat authoritatively established *laicism* as being, in the words of Chirac (2003), “a non - negotiable *laïcité*”, which must be initially defended at schools, France’s “republican sanctuary” (29, p 140).

What is worth to note is that outside *laïcité* frame wandered some questions that invite consideration. If *laïcité* - as - neutrality was really compromised by the ‘Islamic headscarf’ why did not ‘the Creil incident’ induce its banning in 1989? Critics asserted that it is a mistake to think that *laïcité* calls for a strict separation of religion and state, public and private because such a claim is easily debunked by the reality of French public life and its exceptions (21)(23)(30). ‘Laïcists’ cannot deny the reality of cultural particularism that tends to dominate the French society(8)(21)(30). Nor can they refute France’s exceptions to the separation law (6) (21). France is secular with a pronounced Catholic culture; there, public and school holidays are mostly Christian(23). The French state still subsidises religions, despite the legally-prescribed abstention from doing so(1)(21). The government pays the salaries of chaplains in closed areas, such as prison or army and religious associations working for the good of public interests benefit from tax advantages(21). A more striking exception lies in the state’s funding of Christian and Jewish schools (Ecoles privées sous contrat), in which religious instruction and the display of religious signs pose no problem (8, p 28). The Stasi Report(7) even underlined the importance of these institutions because they offered a tangible proof of freedom of religion. Asad(5) found it interesting and quite revealing that the state was not concerned about the display of religious symbols in these religious institutions. Nor was the state troubled by the impact of exhibiting religious signs on pupils, or on their national identity as future citizens(5) (see national unity frame). There, Asad(5) remarked, pupils are socialised into good French citizens(5). Interestingly though, those exception aroused no worries about *laïcité* as did the ‘Islamic headscarf’.

Critics faulted *laïcité* argument used to justify the law for betraying the very legal principles undergirding *laïcité*(3)(21). Tevanian(3) even charged the veil ban for being a discriminatory exception. As mentioned earlier, *laïcité* imposes religious neutrality exclusively on public servants. Yet the new law had exceptionally extended the imposition on users of public services, i.e. Muslim schoolgirls(3). As Tevanian explained(2005)(3), the fact that a law was created confirms that *laïcité* has been revised and not implemented as it was presumed. Similarly, the controversial figure in France Tariq Ramadan(2010)(31) commented

that specialists on laïcité asserted that there was no conflict between this principle and the wearing of headscarves in schools, which led him to conclude that the ban law was not an application of laïcité but rather an amendment of it. In the mainstream media, neither these critical comments nor anti - ban specialists were audible in the cacophony of the alleged conflict between laïcité and the 'Islamic headscarf' (3). They were just drowned out by laïcité frame

Gender Equality Frame:

In the headscarf debates, opposition to 'Islamic headscarves' was expressed not only in the name of laïcité, but in the name of gender equality as well. In France, gender equality, derived from equality in rights gained from the Revolution, is a key republican value protected by laïcité (32). Many Feminists and officials who opposed the wearing of the 'Islamic headscarf' in schools said they were defending women's rights (1)(3)(21). According to them, the headscarf was a symbol of patriarchal domination that is antipodal to the school's objectives based on values of equality and liberty (1)(3). The argument denouncing headscarves as a Muslims' sexist practice became popular in the media (1)(3)(28). Later, this interpretation found a significant echo in the Stasi Report (7). The report stated that the ban would rid Muslim girls from the pressure they underwent by their families, male peers or fundamentalist groups who forced them to veil (7).

In the print press, the association between the 'Islamic headscarf' and male oppression had developed since the Creil incident'. To refer to the head - covering garment worn by the schoolgirls of Creil, the print press actively evoked ideas about Iran and oppression through the misleading use of the term chador, a garment unknown in France (12). Such links tended to promote a monolithic interpretation of the 'Islamic headscarf', namely as a symbol of women's degraded status in Islamic oppressive cultures (3)(21)(24)(28). One problem with this view is that it attributed an intrinsic universal meaning to the headscarf independently of Muslim women's declared motivations.

While the French media made salient the meaning of headscarves as oppressive, relevant sociologists, veiled Muslim women and anti - ban feminists were rarely invited to the debates (3)(14). For example, the sociological study by Gaspard and Khosrokhavar (1995) (33) showed that although the headscarf was perceived as an oppressive symbol of traditionalist patriarchy, it was not experienced as such by all women who wear it in France. Their researchers identified three types of headscarves. First, the "veil of elders" is worn by first - generation immigrants to show continuity of their culture of origin. Second, the "veil of adolescents" is imposed by parents to preserve their daughters' modesty and regulate their sexuality. Third, "the autonomous veil" is donned by well - integrated and educated second - generation women to self - identify and claim autonomy from their parents and the French society. Though Gaspard was part of the Stasi Commission, her sociological insights were ignored. Equally and unduly marginalised from the debates were Muslim women and veiled school girls (3)(14)(28). As El Habti (2004) noted, the debates made relevant not what the headscarf meant for its wearers but what the headscarf meant for the French government because that was the problem (as cited in (4) p.381). Keeping Muslim women's voices on the sidelines of the discussions unveils a paradox cleverly seized by Benhabib (2011) (34) since women's rights rhetoric that pushed for the ban denigrates these women's own capacity to define the meaning of their own actions, and, ironically, reimprison them within the walls of patriarchal meaning from which they are trying to escape" (p.174). Similarly, contributions by anti - ban feminists and intellectuals who nuanced the debates and emphasised the role of school education for young girls' autonomy and self - emancipation received little media attention (3).

'Gender equality' frame suggests that only when laïcité and its principle of equality are applied through banning headscarves can Muslim women be freed from their oppressive culture and can they embrace the state - offered emancipation and equality. Yet this reasoning leaves unresolved some significant questions. As some public intellectuals and feminist rhetorically asked, how can women's emancipation and equality be served by a law which

warrants school exclusion of young girls?(3)(24). If the headscarf was indeed an instrument of male oppression as it was generally assumed, the law would be counterproductive since it is in schools that girls learn autonomy - promoting skills that enable their emancipation by critically re - examining their family and community beliefs(21). In the telling words of Scott (2007)(6), “excluding them would be tantamount to punishing the victim”(6). And if indeed the ‘Islamic headscarf’ precludes women’s equality and contradicts French republican values as maintained by proponents of the ban, why should its ban be restricted to schools? (35). logically, it should be banned in all France. Again, the logic of media frames kept these critical observations below the radar of public attention.

National Unity Frame:

The third widely discussed theme in the media debates was communalism (Communitarism) for which the ‘Islamic headscarf stood as a symbol. Communalism refers to the formation of minor religious or ethnic communities that isolate themselves from mainstream society, showing their unwillingness to integrate(2). The Stasi Report recommended the ban of ‘Islamic headscarves’ in state schools on the grounds that headscarves signal not only a religious group identity but a politicised Islamic group identity, which precludes the social cohesion of France(2). Pro - ban officials and intellectuals asserted that they were defending the future of a nation conceived to be one and indivisible from the destructive effect of communalism(1)(3)(6).

Bowen(2007) (1) noted that the headscarf controversy offered an occasion for politicians to denounce communalism the headscarf was claimed to exacerbate. Winning ground across the political spectrum, including the Stasi Report (1), communalism argument brought the republican notion of citizenship to the fore. In a Republic conceived to be indivisible, individuals are encouraged to display their political identities in public as citizens belonging to the French national community, rather than to exhibit particularistic identities as individuals who belong to ethnic, racial, or religious communities (1), (6),(21). Thus national belonging entails citizens’ conformity to the same cultural norms that defeat individual and communal differentiations. Achieving conformity to the state’s ideals requires citizens’ social mixing (mixité) and socialising in institutions, chief of which is the school where children learn common values to fit into the French conception of its citizens (1). As such, the wearing of headscarves was seen as introducing an element of difference that encourages communalism and impedes social mixing and integration(1)(6)

Fears from the ills of communalism in schools acquired serious tones in *The Lost Territories of the Republic*(2). Published in 2002 by the Jewish teacher who wrote under the pseudonym of Emmanuel Brenner, the book described the breakdown of law and order in the poor suburbs with dominant Maghrebi immigrants. This portrayal included testimonies by teachers who reported many communalist anti - Semitic incidents provoked by Muslims. Bowen(2007)(1) noted that in essence, the book was placing the blame on Muslims living in France and particularly on their “Arab Muslim culture” for inviting communalism, “although some of the most flagrant acts turned out to be committed by neo - Nazi groups”(p.163).

For Tevanian (2005)(3), communalism argument against headscarves is barely tenable for it is hard to envisage how Muslim girls wearing the headscarf, who mix and socialise in public schools with other pupils of different religious backgrounds, may slide into isolation, nor how they could spread their communalism project in public schools. Yet the communalism argument marched through the talk of the French President, most members of the Stasi Commission, numerous politicians, journalists, and public commentators, who painted an apocalyptic scenario about the issue of the ‘Islamic headscarf’ and the future of the French nation (6). In response to the threats of communalism, the law banning headscarves was passed in the name of protecting the unity of the nation. Shortly after the release of the Stasi Report, Chirac gave a public speech in which he explained:

Splitting society into communities [communautarisme] cannot be the choice for France . . . The school is a republican sanctuary. Therefore, to protect students from the divisive ill

winds, which drive people apart and set them against one another ... the wearing of clothes or signs which conspicuously denote a religious affiliation must be prohibited at school. (29)

p139 - 140

While the idea of communalism hardly escaped media debates, the potential consequences of the ban law in relation to communalism rarely caught their attention (3). Neither integration policy nor prevention of communalism seemed to benefit from the law. Weil (2004) (23) argued that in response to the law, many Muslim girls would possibly leave school for private religious schools or opt for correspondence courses. These options would only increase the girls' separation from mainstream society, undermine their integration chances, and make them easy targets for fundamentalist groups, which is exactly what the French government wanted to prevent in issuing the law (3). Hardly considered by the media, such criticism illustrates what 'communalism frame' chose to ignore.

The aforementioned frames disclose how media represented the 'Islamic headscarf' as problematic because it hindered the sanctified Republican principles of *laïcité*, gender equality and national unity preserved and inculcated in schools. Media frames also presented the ban policy on the 'Islamic headscarf' as legitimate given the dangers represented by accommodating this religious symbol. As shown earlier, alternative views could have discredited, or at least, cast a critical insight on many arguments within the frame. Yet in the headscarf debates, "creating the reality one wants", argued Scott (2007) (6), requires "discrediting, if not silencing, of alternative points of view" (p.7). Scott (6) hinted at one reason behind many inconsistencies contained within the above frames as she explained that the headscarf controversy was, in fact, less a matter of addressing France's fears from Islamic terrorism or fundamentalism, for there are more effective and adequate ways to deal with them than banning the headscarf, than a matter of defending French national identity. Thus, the outcome of media frames and their negative representations of the 'Islamic headscarf' can operate at a psychological level of the in group identity so that a ban legislation could be seen convenient and deserving of public support.

Media Frames and Ingroup National Identity

IPT postulates that exposure to the frames' representations may have an impact on the socio - psychological principles of the ingroup national identity. While dominant media emphasised the French national and cultural values, namely *laïcité*, equality, and national unity, it portrayed the 'Islamic headscarf' in derogatory terms. In Jaspal and Cinnirella's view (2010) (19), Western media convey opposition to the Muslims through a representational process where self-aspects are emphasized in a way that "leads to the social representation that the outgroup, with its values, beliefs, and self - aspects, is in direct opposition to the ingroup" (p.295).

From IPT standpoint, the dichotomous categories ensuing from the above frames, namely *laïcité* versus Islam, gender equality versus sexism, and national unity versus communalism, may fulfil a range of psychological functions for the ethno-national in-group. First, they produce a sense of intergroup differentiation, offering the ingroup social representations of 'who they are' vis-à-vis 'who they are not', which is said to constitute an important precursor to identity construction (19). Housez (2006) (36) noted that one consensual way to define a national-self is through what 'it is not' or what is not-self' by means of creating what he calls 'an inverted identity' (*identité en négatif*) that the out group can conveniently inhabit. References made today about Islam and *laïcité*, explained Roy (2007) (26), fulfill identity needs of the groups that these concepts represent because they offer inverted mirror images to either group.

The pervasive negative representation of the out group can function to define and consolidate the ingroup national identity by means of framing who the out group is, i.e. veiled Muslims, and eventually Muslims, vis - à - vis who the in group is not or should not be, i.e. religious, sexist, and sectarian. The psychological advantage of group differentiation for national identity construction is likely to lead to the ingroup's acceptance of the negative

representations of the 'Islamic headscarf', its wearers and Muslims in general, which in turn may limit the possibilities to critically examine these representations and may also legitimise Islamophobic attitudes towards the outgroup.

Second, the establishment of a sense of differentiations by frames not only benefits ingroup distinctiveness principle, but also maintains a positive self - conception of the ingroup. The representations ensuing from the aforementioned frames clearly present the ingroup in positive terms while they derogate the out group members portrayed as anti - secular, sexist and promoters of communalism. According to Breakwell (1986) (17), out group derogation allows the ingroup members to develop a sense of self - esteem. Because media's negative representations of the 'Islamic headscarf' and the Muslim outgroup enhance feelings of self-esteem among the ingroup, these representations are more likely to be accepted and maintained by media consumers.

Third, the frames outlined earlier revealed that *laïcité*, gender equality, and national unity were constructed as sacrosanct principles that are rooted in France's modern history and part of its cherished cultural heritage. In terms of IPT, insistence on these principles not only helps reinforce the national bonds of the ingroup and shape their national identity, but also make the continuity principle of the ingroup psychologically salient. In other words, emphasising historically embedded cultural values speaks to the continuity principle as key to the existence of the ethno- national ingroup, i.e. the group's conception of its existence as a group unified by common fate and shared national values. Framing the 'Islamic headscarf' as challenging France's national ideals may represent the Muslim outgroup as seeking to introduce discontinuity into the value-system of the ingroup and putting in peril their future and well-being. The ingroup may thus feel that the 'Islamic headscarf' and Muslims, in general, are threatening its continuity, a principle which is psychologically- salient and hence overriding within ingroup's national identity. IPT claims that identity threats may cause particular psychological or behavioural responses called coping strategies. In order to protect their continuity, in-group members may support the law banning headscarves because of its potential to remove the threat and secure ingroup's values. At social encounters, gendered Islamophobia can also be manifested as a coping strategy to the perceived threat.

Conclusion and Implications:

The theoretical examination carried out in this paper indicates that mainstream media in France framed the 'Islamic headscarf' as antithetical to French national values. According to IPT, exposure to these prevalent media representations may have positive socio-psychological repercussions on in-group national identity. First, it provides a sense of intergroup differentiations that is both essential to the construal of ingroup identity and beneficial to ingroup distinctiveness principle. Second, the derogatory representation of the 'Islamic was said to bolster self-esteem among the in-group members. Such positive effect of media representations on the ingroup identity principles of distinctiveness and self-esteem may encourage media recipients to accept and maintain the negative representations on the 'Islamic headscarf', including (gendered) Islamophobia that underpins them.

Media's focus on *laïcité*, gender equality and national cohesion as historical-cultural principles that unite the ingroup members and preserve their existence as a nation-group is likely to make the continuity principle psychologically salient. Thus the representations of headscarves that may benefit ingroup's distinctiveness and self- esteem may, at the same time, generate a threat for the continuity of the ingroup. In response to this threat, media consumers may support the law banning headscarves in schools and may develop gendered Islamophobia.

One major outcome of media coverage by frame lies in the telling effect of the representations it produces on media consumers if they are not equally exposed to counter-frames. Therefore, Media producers must cogitate over informing through enlightened and balanced reporting while allowing critical voices to emerge and be heard. In parallel, media consumers need to diversify the sources of news information and make efforts to engage in

critical assessment of media coverage to arrive at informed opinions based on reasoned judgments.

This paper has focused on the impact of media representations on the identity principles of the in-group. Future research may fill in the gap and investigate the effects of these representations on out group identity principles, the potential threat they may pose for the outgroup, and the coping strategies the outgroup members may use.

Notes:

* "The Other Face of the Veil Ban in France: Challenges for Identity and Strategies for Coping"

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1-I am using 'Islamic headscarf' in inverted commas because this is the way most media in France referred to the head covering garment young girls wore in French schools, probably to emphasise its religious dimension.

2-The use of the French word *laïcité* captures the specificity of the French state-religion relationship which the word 'secularism' would fail to detect. Secularism in France has a different meaning from secularism in the USA given the historical bloody confrontations between the state and the Catholic Church that occurred in France to curb the Church's abusive power. While in the United States secularism is meant to principally secure religion from state intervention and to protect individuals' freedom of religion, in France it is meant to principally secure the state from the influence of religion and to protect individuals' freedom from religion⁽⁶⁾. For this reason, the French term *laïcité* is retained throughout this paper.

3-These were the 'Baroin Report' and the 'Debré Report' submitted in 2003 before the Stasi Report. The Baroin Report, entitled "Towards a New *Laïcité*", recommended a ban against headscarves from public schools. The Debré Report purposed to study religious signs in schools reached a similar recommendation.

4-I am adopting the terms 'ingroup' and 'out group' from social psychology. In intergroup relations, the ingroup vs. out group denotes concepts of 'Self' vs. 'Other'. In the headscarf debates, the headscarf was represented as embodying values associated with the ethno-religious group of Muslims (out group). These values were contrasted with those associated with the non-Muslim ethno-national group (in group)

5-It refers to Khomeini's death fatwa (decree) against the novelist Salman Rushdie for his blasphemous book *Satanic Verses*.

6-The first article of the law stipulates: "The Republic assures freedom of conscience. It guarantees the free exercise of faiths under no other restrictions than those set out hereinafter in the interest of public order"

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