



THE EVOLUTION OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE WEST: A CASE STUDY OF FRANCE

Syed Abdul Rehman Sherazi
Bachelor of Science in International Relations,
University of Central Punjab
Lahore – Pakistan
rehmansherazi10@gmail.com

Dr. Zahid Mehmood Zahid
Assistant Professor
Department of Strategic Studies
Air University
Islamabad – Pakistan
zahid.mehmood@mail.au.edu.pk

Abstract

The pluralist Western societies are witnessing the rise of an exclusivist and polarizing idea – Islamophobia, which is ideologically driven and action-oriented. France is the epicentre of hate against Muslims because of its colonial history and the practice of peculiar secularism, Laicism. Drawing upon Social Constructivism, this paper examines the ideological, populist, and strategic roots of Islamophobia in the West and France in particular. This study identifies the role of language and socio-political frames-cum-rationale that the French leadership uses to construct Islam as a threat to the French Republic. In addition, it attempts to expose the selective representations of the Muslims that, in return, discursively construct the Muslims in France as unacceptable for the native people on French soil. Furthermore, this interpretative study reveals how the French elite uses generalizations to criminalize Islam and Muslim symbols like Hijab, Azan, and beard, which run contrary to their secular values. Finally, this study concludes that Islamophobia is a socially constructed reality that leads to its violent manifestation.

Keywords: Social Construction, Islamophobia, Identity, Enemy Image, Muslim Threat, Secularism

Introduction

Democratic societies of the West face a grave threat of exclusionist Islamophobia, founded in the public speeches of politicians and intellectuals and seen in the practices against Muslims. Divisive politicians instrumentalize history by referring to the remote past events, such as the Crusade wars between the Christian West and Islam and terrorist events with Islamic connections, and create security suspicions by labelling Muslims as ‘aliens’ to be feared of (Zahid, 2019).



Islamophobia in the West is a toxic campaign and discrimination against Muslims, leading to incitement and bigotry. It is often defined as, “rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions (Hijab, Azan, Quran, and Mosque) of *Muslimness* or perceived *Muslimness*” (C. Allen, 2018). This is contrary to the spirit of the liberal political ideas that Western societies cherish and champion, prohibiting discrimination based on race, colour, or religion. Islamophobia is an identity claim that represents Muslims as a threat to the Western way of life based on oppositional binaries, ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and ‘in’ versus ‘out’.

Muslims’ mere presence in the West is being taken as a ‘threat’ (A. Ahmad, 2017) and dealt with in the security realm. Muslim immigrants are seen as invaders and would-be occupiers if not dealt with on a prior basis (Zahid, 2019). Islamophobia, popularly defined as “prejudice, anger, and hatred towards Islam” (Gallup, 2011), is not an objective reality but rather a constructed one that results in verbal and physical assaults against Muslims by far-right people. These callous acts are the answers to an identity question – ‘self’ versus ‘other’. Identity in social contexts is not pre-given and ‘out there’ but discursive and subjectively constructed (L. Hansen, 2006). People and societies are not made but constructed through social and cultural interaction (N. G. Onuf, 1989, p, 78-81). Hence, people and communities are what others perceive them.

The 9/11 incident provided the context for constructing a Muslim enemy in the West. Before that, publications like ‘Muslims are coming’ and ‘Clash of Civilizations’ had provided the ideological ground only to be exploited by the far-right populists in the future. In the last 20 years, Muslims have been subject to violence by Westerners, be it in New Zealand (Al-jazeera, 2019), or the Imam (prayer leader) of New York, or the indiscriminate killing of Muslims having tea in a restaurant in Switzerland.

Since 2004, France has been the epitome of hatred and aggression against Muslims (M. A. Valfort, 2018), who comprise ten percent of its population (Reuters, 2010). The Muslims in France face discrimination, and bans on headscarves, burkinis, and *burqa*. Because the government in France believed the headscarf was a sign of oppression and radicalism and against French secularism, *Laïcité* imposed a fine of 150 Euros if violated by the Muslims (O. Else, 2022). During election campaigns, the use of the Muslim card – headscarf illustrates the deep-seated roots of hatred against Muslims (T. Akyol, 2018).

In social practices, Muslim centers are attacked, mosques are vandalized, and their Prophet is caricatured to hurt their religious sentiments (K. V. Belt, 2021). More than 2000 common rooms, and make-shift mosques, in France, were closed after the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack (D. Chazan, 2015).

This paper defines Islamophobia as “the hatred-wrapped fear and discrimination directed against Muslims based on populist and ideological appeals for political and geostrategic purposes with a scope ranging from domestic politics to civilizational one” and explains the reasons for



exclusion and discrimination against Muslims in the West & France, and examines how Muslims are represented as 'contentious community' in schools, politics, and workplaces.

This study, using social constructivism, provides the answers to these questions. What are the drivers of Islamophobia in the West and France in particular, and how is this anti-Muslim hate being constructed and manifested in French society's social practices?

Theorizing the Concept of Islamophobia

Islamophobia is generally defined as 'fear of the Muslims or hatred against the Muslims' that falls into the domain of the perception of the 'Self' and 'Other' – hence identity. Identity in social contexts is not pre-given and 'out there' but rather is discursive and subjectively constructed (L. Hansen, 2006, p. 6). Therefore, social constructivism has been employed as a framework for this study to understand the hatred against Muslims in France. As Onuf believes, people and societies are not made but constructed through social and cultural interaction (1989, p. 78-81). Hence, people and communities are what others perceive them.

Islamophobia in the West presents a perfect epitome of construction, wherein Muslims have been constructed as a threat to Western values. 9/11 events gave the premise and context to the elite's performative language to do the job. Vivien Burr believes that technology plays an important role in shaping public opinion when it is conveyed persuasively, consistent with social norms and values (V. Burr, 2003, p. 12). Language, with its constitutive potential, in a particular context and system of meanings, produces specific words, relate those words to objects, and strategizes the actions and thinking about objects. In this way, contrary to "constructed and artificial," they appear as "natural and normal" (R. Diaz-Bone et al., 2008, p. 12). France, as opposed to other US and European societies, has a rather more intense form of anti-Muslim prejudice because of its peculiar secularism – *Laicism*. This is an aggressive form of secularism that, instead of co-existing with religion, seeks triumph over religion (Olivier Roy, cited by M. Francois-Cerrah, 2015). Western academic-defence-complex, based on shared ideas and social practices, construct a homogenous 'self' against the 'other' – whose *Muslimness*, despite living under the same socio-political and economic order, makes them heterogeneous to go against (A. Wendt cited by S. Theys, 2018). This is done by re-contextualizing the history of the Crusade Wars and invoking the Huntingtonian Clash of Civilization thesis into the post 9/11 context, the ontology of whom is analogous to the famous 'X' article of George F. Kennan (1948) with the potential to shape future policies (N. Sheikh, p. 106, 2003). Therefore, expanding the argument, the Clash of Civilizations thesis formed another bipolar description of the world—the USA versus Islam and crescent versus cross (Zahid, 2016).

French elite securitizes the secular values of the republic and presents the Muslims as a threat to those values. Securitization has roots in a post-positivist tradition that draws upon the speech acts – construction through utterances. Speech acts are performatives (K. E. Jorgenson, p. 185, 2018). Speeches are not mere descriptive words but constitutive and construct objects – about which they



speak to securitize (Jorgenson, p. 185). The French political and intellectual elite securitizes the country's secular values by deeply politicizing them and declaring that they (values) are facing existential security threats that demand extraordinary measures (R. V. Munster, p. 38-39, 2009). They refer to Muslims and Islam as a threat to that referent object – secular values, and propose extraordinary measures, like expelling them from the country, ridiculing them, marginalizing them, killing them, or taking their *Muslimness* away by banning *Hijab*, *Burkini*, *Azan* (VandenBelt, 2021).

Islamophobia in the West shows that it is changing. The source of this change is hatred and discrimination against Muslims, kicking the argument of what this hate should be called – Islamophobia, anti-Muslim bigotry, or racism. It is all. Though Islam is not a race, Muslims have been racialized in France by using certain frames by politicians. Most revered personalities of Islam are caricatured, Muslim men are portrayed as fundamentalist, women as oppressed, Islamic symbols are mocked, and overall, Muslims are seen with a scepticism born out of the belief that Muslims are traitors.

Material and Methodology

To answer the questions, the qualitative method has been used to understand the drivers of Islamophobia in the West at large and France in particular. Because of its theoretical rationale, this study is an interpretative examination of a single case involving a rich understudied case description. Secondary data sources that include published books, journal articles, newspaper articles, speeches, public talks, interviews of politicians, and web sources with inductive reasoning have been used for this research. Finally, qualitative content analysis has been used to arrive at certain findings/conclusions for the truth claims.

Literature Review

Since 2004, France has shown hostile tendencies against Muslims that are more lethal than any other country. Nearly 5 Million Muslims live in France, which is 10 percent of the French population (Reuters, May 19, 2010). The Muslims in France have recently been subject to religious discrimination. Like in 2004, the French Government banned wearing all types of religious symbols in school, whether it is the headscarf, the cap which Jewish wear, the cross sign of Christians, and most importantly, Muslim women is also banned from covering their faces in public places because the Government of France claimed that, the headscarf is the sign of radical Islam as it against the norms of *Laicite*. In one of his interviews, Jacques Chirac talked about the importance of this law and that any infringement of this law would be a fine of 150 Euros (O. Else, 2022). The ban on the headscarf was one of his tactics during the election to get voters' attention. It is against the basic fundamental rights that no one has the right to pressurize someone to wear clothes forcefully, whether it is burkinis or bikinis. The person has the right to wear whatever he or she wants. However, Muslim women have been mocked, ridiculed, and attacked when they cover their faces in the public domain or body having burkini on – as the latter covers the woman's full body, the French government



considers a symbol of women's imprisonment and radical Islam (T. Akyol, 2018).

The attacks on community centres of Muslims, Mosques are burned and vandalized (VandenBelst, 2021). More than 2000 common rooms in France for Muslim prayers were closed after the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack. The Muslims have requested the government to build new mosques, but the government did not accept their request (D. Chazan, 2015). The *mosques* are the places for hiding weapons used against the incidents like 'Charlie Hebdo', responded the French Government. An Arabic Center came under attack when a young Muslim boy was found to have been visited before beheading Samuel Patty, who showed the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the class.

The study conducted by the *Universite Gustave Eiffel* revealed that those students who applied for Graduate or Post Graduate programs with a Muslim surname were not selected, and other students who had ethnically French names were admitted. (C. Cook, 2022). Muslims faced the same treatment at the workplaces and did not get jobs wherever they applied for private or government jobs.

Evolution of Islamophobia in the West: A Background

The word Islamophobia surfaced after the 1990s. This paper defines Islamophobia as "the hatred-wrapped fear and discrimination directed against Muslims based on populist and ideological appeals for political and geostrategic purposes with a scope ranging from domestic politics to civilizational one" and explains the reasons for exclusion and discrimination against Muslims in the West & France, and examines how Muslims are represented as 'contentious community' in schools, politics, and workplaces.

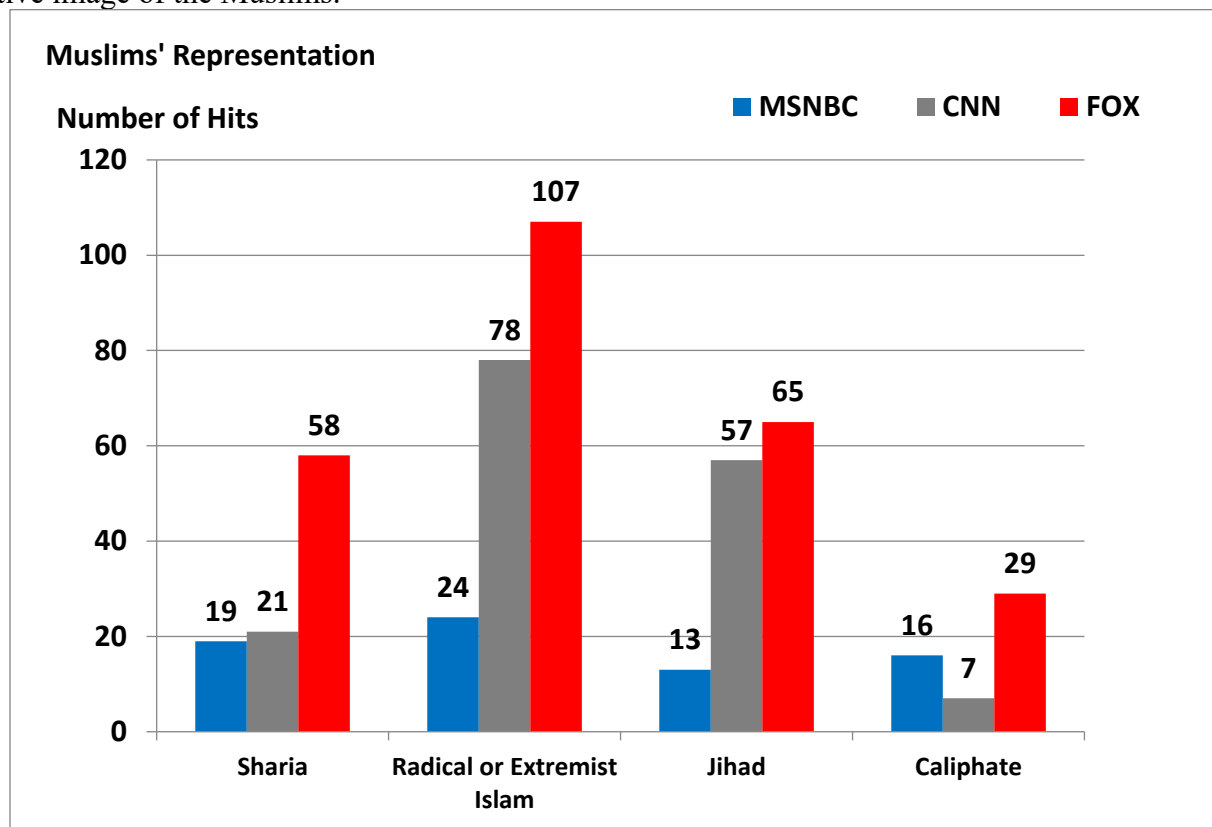
European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia's report after 9/11 found Muslims vulnerable to racial and religious discrimination in different countries of Europe (J. Esposito and I. Kalin, 2011). Danish Cartoon Crises in September 2005 and Pope Benedict XVI's speech at Regensburg University in 2006 were regarded by Muslims as a blatant attack on Islam, wherein he said, "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached," (BBC, February 11, 2013).

Former President of the USA George W. Bush used the term 'Islamofascism' which gave intensity to the Anti-American sentiments in the Muslim countries. One of the allegations against Muslims is that they first considered themselves Muslims rather than other nationals like American, French, Spanish, etc. Hence, Islam is blamed for not teaching pluralism to its followers, which is a fallacy. In Germany, Muslims have been raided and arrested for their beliefs. So, the criteria of a loyal European citizen is being a white citizen, Christian preferably, or a secular one.

Research about 'enemy image' of the Muslims has concluded that the media has proclivity to alter images. As attitudes of the political elite evolves, the enemy image changes. During the Cold War, the Western media propagated "demonizing generalizations" about Communism, which has now



been replaced by Islam (Zahid, p. 109, 2016). A coherent set of journalistic labels has been developed about “Muslim terrorism”, “Islamist militancy”, and “Jihad journalism”. In February 2012, the *Think Progress* website issued a study that underlined specific methods that TV channels utilized language that portrayed *Muslims and Islam to be feared*. Using three months’ data gathered from numerous television programs from November 2010 to January 2011 shows how frequently Fox, MSNBC, and CNN used terms like ‘Sharia’, ‘Radical or Extremist Islam’, ‘Jihad’, and ‘Caliphate’ that portrayed a negative image of the Muslims.



USA, with its hard and soft power potentials, is the world's sole superpower. Americans publicly claim to be an ‘Indispensable Nation’, the upholder of democracy, champion of human rights, and beacon of freedom for those living in America as well as in different parts of the world (M. K. Albright, 1998). An international society inhabited by immigrants, home of people who belong to all religions, the land of opportunities with liberal rights and opportunities that attracted rare talents across the world. However, 9/11 marked a horrific beginning for Muslims in America. After that incident, Muslims became the targets of hatred and racism. Mosques were burned, community centres were attacked, and Muslims received death threats and tortured on the streets. Even Sikhs came under attack because of their appearance and resemblance to the Muslims. According to a 2017 Pew poll, hate crimes and assaults against Muslims surpassed the 2001 level. In 2016, 127 cases of assaults



were reported compared with 93 in 2001 (K. Kishi, 2017). President Donald Trump was to be blamed for the recent surge in property destruction and vandalism incidents, and verbal and Physical assaults on Muslims for his populist appeal to attract Far-right voters for his White Supremacism. He turned his electoral campaign pledges into policy when he imposed a ban on six Muslim countries with Executive Order 13769 (V. Niayesh, 2019). Furthermore, he believed "Islam hates us, that Muslims harbour unbelievable hatred, and it is very hard to separate radical Islam from the religion as a whole (New York Times, 2017). His anti-Muslim rhetoric to attract evangelical Christians or white supremacists for domestic purposes has resulted in the rise of societal polarization and violence in the years to come.

Joram Van Klaveran, a member of the Dutch far-right party, a harsh critic of Islam, accused Islam of being 'a lie', and the Quran 'a poison' (E. Schaart, 2019). But, interestingly, after parting ways with the party of Geert Wilders, a man who did not conceal his hatred against Islam started to write a book on Islam and ended up converting to Islam.

Germany has also witnessed the rise of anti-Muslim sentiments in recent years. Far-right Alternative for Germany party's anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim leader, Farauke Petry's inflammatory remarks has fueled the fire of hatred against Muslims. Her rise owes to the rise of a populist tide that propelled the rise of Donald Trump to the presidency and many other European political leaders and parties to mainstream national politics. In February 2020, a far-right extremist attacked two shisha bars in Hanau, Germany, killing nine people of foreign background, most of whom were of Turkish descent. The attacker's manifesto revealed a deep-seated Islamophobic and racist ideology, reflecting a broader issue of extremism in Germany (Olterman and Connolly, 2020). Mosque Attacks: There have been instances of attacks on mosques and Islamic centres in Germany. These incidents include arson attacks, vandalism, and desecration of religious sites. For example, in 2020, a mosque in Berlin was vandalized with Islamophobic graffiti.

One third of British believe Islam threatens their way of life (Perraudin, 2019). Anti-Muslim prejudice is the major driver of the far-right growth. A 2022 European Islamophobia report recorded 37 percent rise in religious hate offences compared to the previous year, totalling 8,730 cases, with 42 percent of them against Muslims – 3,459 cases (Report, 2022, pp. 557). According to the report, 1,800 mosques across the UK experience at least one religiously motivated attack yearly.

Like other European countries, Denmark has witnessed incidents of anti-Muslim hate crimes. These crimes range from verbal abuse and harassment to physical assaults against individuals perceived to be Muslim. Mosques, Islamic centres, and Muslim-owned businesses have also been targeted with vandalism and arson attacks. Some politicians and groups have expressed Islamophobic sentiments in Denmark. Political debates surrounding immigration, integration, and religious freedom have sometimes fueled Islamophobic rhetoric, which can contribute to a hostile environment for Muslims. The cartoon controversy involving depictions of the Prophet Muhammad in Denmark dates back to September 2005, when the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published provocative and



insulting cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. That satirical content sparked significant controversy and ignited a global debate on freedom of speech, religious sensitivity, and cultural understanding. The cartoon controversy resulted in more than 200 deaths in different countries and the bombing of the Danish embassy in Pakistan in 2008 (Berkley Center, 2015).

France: The Hotbed of Islamophobia

The fear, prejudice, or hatred towards Islam and Muslims has been on the rise worldwide, especially in European countries. France is one of the main countries where Islamophobic sentiments are higher than in any other European country. Almost 5 Million Muslims live in France, which is the largest minority of Muslims in any country.

French perspective on Islam was shaped in the 16th century during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. France and many modern-day European states were under the influence of the Ottomans Empire. Nevertheless, when the Turkish culture movement called *Turquerie* spread in different parts of Europe, especially in France, the latter saw this cultural influence as a threat to their values, and as a retaliatory strike, the famous French poet and play writer, Marquis Henri de Bornier wrote a play called “Mahomet” (Muhammad); that included derogatory statements regarding Prophet Muhammad Peace Be Upon Him (A. Tufekci, 2020). It enraged the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II, who ordered the play to be taken down for its offensive script. Fearing Sultan’s wrath, France stopped the drama.

Since the 17th century, France was a colonial power, and many African nations were its colonies. For instance, Algeria, a Muslim-majority state, was a French colony, and like many other African nations, it had to fight (1952-1962) against its colonial masters – the French to win its independence. Jean Marlie Le Pen fought this war as an army officer. He believes, “we fought very hard to be French no longer, I fought them in hand-to-hand combat. I’ll be damned if they get anything from us when they come here.” (Fieschi, 2020).

In 1972, he founded a political party – ‘National Front’, now known as the ‘national Rally’, led by his daughter, Marine Le Pen. Her husband Louis Allot questioned the identity and loyalty of the Muslims to the French state and society, “Who (Muslims) are they? They are French or not? What [do] they know about France? They only follow the footsteps of their imams and do whatever they order them” (Haddad, 2019).

When France imposed the ban on headscarves in 2004, former President Jacques Chirac, in his statement, emphasized, “*no one may, in the public space, wear an outfit intended to conceal the face. These practices can threaten public safety and disregard the minimum requirements of life in society.*” Since 2004, French politicians have attempted to use policy to forge a version of Islam that they believe would be more compatible with the republic’s values. While introducing his plan to combat radical Islam, president Macron unveiled his plan to “free Islam in France from foreign influences” and to create an “Islam des lumières” – Islam of enlightenment (A. Sandford, 2020). This



has led to the weaponization of *laïcité*, a tool for curtailing religious freedoms for French Muslims (T. Jamal, 2021). In a similar theo-ideational vein, Frédérique Vidal, education minister, termed Muslim university students as “Islamist-leftists” and “radical Islamists” who demanded racial and religious equality. (T. Jamal, 2021).

Le Penn, a far-right leader and former candidate for the presidency, proposed a hijab ban in the public sphere and accused the government of appeasing Muslims and allowing the rise of Islamism and terrorism, “you are limiting everyone’s freedom to try to modify the freedoms of a few Islamists,” (M. Sollety, 2021). History guides, French, using the excuse of their values, have often used objectionable content to malign Islam and inflict emotional injuries to Muslims.

They attach ill-defined and contested concepts of ‘radicalization’ and ‘radical Islamism’ with Muslims to justify their drive against them. For instance, Gilles Kepel, a right-wing professor at Sciences Po, uses a structuralist argument, disregards the human agency, and maintains that Islam and dysfunctional sociology are to be blamed for the radicalization of Muslims in France. However, Olivier Roy, another French academician at the European University Institute, Italy, rejects this purposeful generalization, and emphasizes individual behaviour and psychology in jihadism, which he considers marginal to Islam. For him, Jihadists come from a marginalized background with colonial grievances and use Islam as a vehicle for their violent fantasies, making the phenomenon “Islamicization of radicalism” not the radicalization of Islam projected by Mr. Kepel. (A. Nossiter, 2016). Hence, he exonerates Islam as the source of terrorism in France and rather holds the structural causes as the root cause of the violence in the country.

Anti-Islam Bigotry in France

France is a consolidated democracy that claims to uphold its people's individual rights and liberties. However, in the case of Muslims, it appears to be a far reality. Muslims feel that they are marginalized and discriminated against, all because of their Muslimness, despite the protections guaranteed by the French constitution. They are seen as second-grade citizens of the state wherein they are not allowed to practice their religion freely – as enshrined in the constitution and consistent with French Republic’s values. Muslim women are attacked for wearing Hijab and men for beards.

A far-right movement, *Nouvelle Droite* (ND), emerged in France in the late 1960s that saw immigrants as ‘invaders’ and sought to send them back to their homelands (Wilson, 2019). ND’s underlying premise is known as “Great Replacement” theory, which views non-white people in the West as aliens on a mission to plunder and replace the white populations from Europe and USA (Hussain, 2019). Among the immigrants, Muslims get disproportionate attention, and they are discursively constructed as a threat to the French values on the ‘us’ versus ‘they’ structures and as a legitimate target for verbal and violent assaults. Strikingly, the Christchurch mosque shooter in 2019 was also influenced by this far-right argument that sees immigrants as aliens.



After the 9/11 tragedy, French politicians labelled Muslims as a “5th Column” and loyal to the country of their origin as opposed to French values and France itself (Wilson, 2019). This identity-mediated threat construction represents Muslims as traitors and allows the authorities to introduce extraordinary measures and legislations against Muslims in the name of security. This construction has been deep-rooted in the last four centuries – starting from the Ottoman era to European colonialism and the post-colonial consciousness of native people about foreigners. The contemporary France is no different from its old days when discrimination against Muslims was common. According to a study conducted by Jean Jaures in 2019 (Guerin and Fourel, 2021), overall, 42 percent of Muslims experienced faith-based discrimination; this number rises to 60 percent for women with a headscarf or other types of veils.

Hatred against the Muslim Women

Muslim women in France have faced stigmatization and discrimination, fueled partly by negative stereotypes and public discourse that associate Islam with extremism or terrorism. Muslim women are the target of religious hatred and verbal abuse. France has implemented laws prohibiting wearing Hijab and headscarf in public spaces such as schools and government offices (Costello and Ahmed, 2021). Critics argue these laws disproportionately target Muslim women and infringe upon their religious freedom. Albeit choosing the attire is perfectly consistent with liberal and secular values, it is an individual's choice. Two men assaulted a pregnant Muslim woman in France for wearing a headscarf.

Similarly, in another instance, two women attacked two pregnant Muslim women, tried to rip off their veil, and used racist slurs (France 24, 2020). Resultantly, the victims of this anti-Muslim bigotry suffered miscarriages. The former President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, commented about the veil:

The burka is not a religious problem, it's a problem of liberty and women's dignity. It's not a religious symbol, but a sign of subservience and debasement. I want to say solemnly; that burka is not welcome in France. Our country can't accept women prisoners behind a screen, cut off from all social life, and deprived of all identity. That's not our idea of freedom (Chrisafis, 2009).

Since the Hijab ban in 2010, as reported above, 60 percent of Muslim women in France have felt discriminated against because of their Muslim faith.

Mob Attacks on the Mosques

Since Charlie Hebdo, France, home to West Europe's largest Muslim community, the number of Islamophobic attacks on Muslim symbols has risen sharply. According to the National Observatory of Islamophobia, 154 attacks were reported in 2019, and with a 53 percent jump, 2020 witnessed 235



attacks (Daily Sabah, 2021). The reports also recorded a 35 percent increase in Mosque attacks in 2020. These attacks reflect the religious intolerance and discrimination towards Muslims only. Bayonne Mosque shooting (October 2019) by an anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim man and knife attack at the Paris Mosque attack (January 2020) by a far-right extremist are a few examples to quote.

President Macron's remarks, "Islam is in crisis" and policy of raids on Mosques and Islamic foundations and proposed "anti-separatism" law in the name of 'ensuring domestic security' is viewed by the Muslims as a systematic effort to restrict Muslim community's mobility and political activism by constructing them as "suspect community" and "reluctant French citizens." French ministry of Interior closed a mosque accusing the site of promoting "a radical practice of Islam and "cultivating a feeling of hate towards France," is against the spirit of democracy, contradictory to French values, and destined to leave Muslims more vulnerable to abuse (Jabkhiro, 2022). Mosque attackers, with "next time, we will target your head" spread fears among Muslims (Chalabi, 2015). The anti-Muslim hate permeated so deeply that a request for the construction of the mosque was turned down when local complainants opposed the project, citing, "mosque is not fit in this urban environment" (Al Arabiya, 2010). This increasingly narrowing space for Azan (call for prayer) and mosques led the Muslims to arrange 2000 common rooms for praying, as reported in 2015.

Faith-based Discrimination in Schools and Workspaces

French Muslims are also facing economic marginalization that drives them to poverty and other street crimes. This is where O. Roy's appears appealing that it is not the Islam but rather the structural causes that cause radicalization; hence, 'Islamicization of the radicalism.' White French Christians get more jobs, and Muslim only make 5 percent of the total job market. Men get terminated for having a beard, and women for wearing a headscarf. Schools do not accept students with beards and veils. Schools do not allow girls to wear particular swimsuits, 'Burkini', which was banned in 2016. A far-right mayor of Beaucaire, Julien Sanchez, banned pork-free meals on the first day of school in 2015. He also expressed his disdain expressing, "Those who don't want to eat pork, it is better for them not to eat anything (Guardian, 2015). As part of the France's secular "Republican principles", schools promote expression that is often found provocative and injurious to Muslim sentiments.

Conclusion

Muslims and Christians in the West have lived peacefully up till recently. Despite living under the same socio-economic and political order, Muslims are represented as a threat because of their Muslimness in the West. French secularism, laicism, unlike Euro-American secularism, is aggressive towards religion and restricts religious symbols in certain public spaces, such as schools and government offices. This identity-mediated discourse securitizes French values and constructs Muslims as alien to French society, that in return, asks the Muslims to preserve their religious identity by strictly adhering to symbols like the beard, and headscarf, and attending mosques for daily prayers.



The populist dimension of Islamophobia legitimizes hatred against Muslims as a norm and compares immigration to the invasion. Its strategic dimension is its political instrumentalization wherein the Western leaders use deliberate manipulation and exploitation of anti-Muslim sentiments for political and strategic purposes. This cultural construction employing demonizing discourse against Muslims has roots grounded in the famous Huntingtonian 'Clash of Civilization' thesis. Muslims have constructed threats to the Western way of life and French secular values on the 'Us' versus 'Them', 'In' versus 'Out', 'For' versus 'Against' discursive structures. Lexical resources are intelligibly used to represent secular values as an 'object to be defended' against the existential threat posed by Islam. In social practices, Muslims face discrimination in jobs and workplaces. Muslim children find it hard to get admission to schools and, when admitted, face bullying and harassment for their faith. Mosques are attacked, women wearing veils have been considered 'oppressed', and men with beards are made fun of as backward, uncivilized, and subject to verbal abuses and physical assaults. Owing to the challenge posed by Islamophobia, Muslims are now more determined to preserve their religious identity by adhering to the Islamic way of life. This amounts to securitization versus securitization: Westerns want to securitize liberal values by demonizing Islam, whereas Muslims respond by strictly adhering to the Islamic symbols and rituals as the sources of their identity. This vicious cycle will continue unless the 'Islamic threat' is deconstructed.

References



- Ahmed, Dr. Anees. (2017). *Islam In the West*. Institute of Policy Studies. Islamabad.
- Akyol, Taha. (2018, May, 9). Sarkozy and Islam. *Hurriyet Daily News*. Retrieved from <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/taha-akyol/sarkozy-and-islam-131527>
- Al Arabiya. (2010, May, 20). France Makes Way for New Mega-Mosque. Retrieved from <https://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2010%2F05%2F20%2F109111>
- Al-jazeera. (2019, March, 3). A summary of Attacks on Muslims in western countries. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/3/16/a-summary-of-attacks-on-muslims-in-western-countries>
- Allen, Chris. (2018, November, 27). Why UK's working definition of Islamophobia as a 'type of racism' is a historic step. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/why-uks-working-definition-of-islamophobia-as-a-type-of-racism-is-a-historic-step-107657>
- Anne-Valfort, Marie., Claire L. Adida. & David D. Laitin. (2010, October, 20). Identifying barriers to Muslim integration in France. *PNAS*. Retrieved from <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1015550107>
- BBC. (2013, February, 11). Pope Benedict XVI in his own words. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-21417767>
- Belt, Vanden. Kristin. (2021, June, 18). The Post-September 11 Rise of Islamophobia: Identity and the 'Clash of Civilization' in Europe and Latin America. *Insight Turkey*. Retrieved from <https://www.insightturkey.com/article/the-post-september-11-rise-of-islamophobia-identity-and-the-clash-of-civilizations-in-europe-and-latin-america>
- Burr, Vivien. (2003). *Social Constructionism* (3rd Edition). Routledge: London.
- Chalabi, Mona. ((2015, January, 14). France Has a History of Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. *Five Thirty Eight*. Retrieved from <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/france-has-a-history-of-anti-semitism-and-islamophobia/>
- Chazan, David. (2015, April, 6). Demand for More Mosques in France Raises Tension. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11518106/Demand-for-more-mosques-in-france-raises-tension.html>
- Cherian, Joan, Sony. (2022, January, 13). What is Social Constructivism. *The Hindu*. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/what-is-social-constructivism/article38264189.ece>
- Chrisafis, Angelique. (2009, June, 22). Nicholas Sarkozy says Islamic veils are not welcome in France, *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/22/islamic-veils-sarkozy-speech-france>
- Cook, Cindi. (2022, February, 18). Muslim in France face ongoing Discrimination in higher learning: study. Retrieved from <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/muslims-in-france-face-ongoing-discrimination-in-higher-learning-study/2505925>
- Costello, A. Roisin, & Sahar Ahmed. (2021, April, 16). Privacy at the Margins: France's New Ban on the Hijab. *Oxford Human Rights Hub*. Retrieved from <https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/privacy-at-the-margins-frances-new-ban-on-the-hijab/>



- Daily Saba. (2021, January, 21). Islamophobic attacks in France increase by 53% in 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/europe/islamophobic-attacks-in-france-increase-by-53-in-2020>
- Diaz-Bone, Rainer. (2008). The Field of Foucaultian Discourse Analysis: Structures, Developments and Perspectives. *Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences* 33, no. 1. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20762257>
- Else, Ornella. (2022, April, 14). Islamophobia in France: How Right-Wing Politicians Promote Opposition Against Muslim Communities. *Impakte*. Retrieved from <https://impakter.com/islamophobia-in-france-how-right-wing-politicians-promote-opposition-against-muslim-communities/>
- Esposito, John. L., & Ibrahim Kalin. (2011). *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*. Oxford: University Press: UK.
- European Islamophobia Report, 2022. Retrieved from <https://islamophobiareport.com/en/>
- Fieschi, Catherine. (2020, February, 28). Muslims and the secular city: How rightwing populist shape the French debate over Islam. *Brookings*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/muslims-and-the-secular-city-how-right-wing-populists-shape-the-french-debate-over-islam/>
- Fourrel, Zoe. & Ceicile. (2021, April, 20). A Snapshot Analysis of Anti-Muslim Mobilization in France After Terror Attacks. *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*. Retrieved from https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/a-snapshot-analysis-of-anti-muslim-mobilisation-in-france-after-terror-attacks/
- France 24. (2020, October, 22). Two French women charged over 'racist' stabbing of veiled Muslim women. Retrieved from <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201022-two-french-women-charged-over-racist-stabbing-of-veiled-muslim-women>
- Francois-Cerrah, Myriam. (2015, May, 16). Olivier Roy on Laicite as Ideology, the Myth of 'national Identity' and Racism in the French Republic. *Jadaliyya*. Retrieved from <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/32088>
- Gallup Survey. (2011). Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/157082/islamophobia-understanding-anti-muslim-sentiment-west.aspx>
- Haddad, Michael. (2019, January, 28). France Has Millions of Muslims. Why Does It Import Imams? *New York Times*. Retrieved from [nytimes.com/2019/01/28/opinion/france-islam-imams-import-algeria.html?auth=register-email®ister=email](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/28/opinion/france-islam-imams-import-algeria.html?auth=register-email®ister=email)
- Hansen, Lene. (2006). *Security as practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. New York: Routledge.
- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/3/16/a-summary-of-attacks-on-muslims-in-western-countries>
- <https://www.politico.eu/article/former-dutch-anti-muslim-politician-converts-to-islam-joram-van-klaveren/>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/13/pork-school-dinners-france-secularism-children-religious-intolerance>
- Jabkhiro, Juliette. (2022, April, 5). Special Report: French mosque closures based on 'sensitive evidence,' critics say. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france->



- [closes-mosques-with-powers-that-some-critics-say-use-secretive-evidence-2022-04-05/](#)
- Jamal, Tanzila. (2021, June, 15). The Weaponization of Laicite Against Muslims: Pushing More Towards Extremism. *LSE*. Retrieved from <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/eurocrisispress/2021/06/15/weaponization-of-laicite/>
- Jorgenson, Knud. Erik. (2018). *International Relations Theory: A New Introduction* (2nd edition). Palgrave & Macmillan: UK, 2018.
- Jyllands-Posten. (2015). Muhammad Cartoon Controversy. *Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/em-jyllands-posten-em-muhammad-cartoons-controversy>
- Kishi, Katayoun. (2017, November, 15). Assault against Muslims in U.S surpass 2001 level. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/15/assaults-against-muslims-in-u-s-surpass-2001-level/>
- Mehmood, Zahid. Zahid. (2019, December, 20). Islamophobia: Securitization of Liberal Values. *Daily Times*, Retrieved from <https://dailytimes.com.pk/523330/islamophobia-securitization-of-liberal-values-daily-times/>
- Munster, Rens. Van. (2009). *Securitizing Immigration: The Politics of Risk in the EU*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- New York Times. (2017, January, 26). I think Islam Hates Us. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/26/opinion/i-think-islam-hates-us.html>
- Nissiter, Adam. (2016, July, 12). 'That Ignoramus': 2 French Scholar of Radical Islam Turn Bitter Rivals. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/13/world/europe/france-radical-islam.html>
- Niyaesh, Vahid. (2019, September, 26). Trump's Travel ban really was a Muslim ban, data suggests. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/09/26/trumps-muslim-ban-really-was-muslim-ban-thats-what-data-suggest/>
- Olterman, Philip., & Kate, Connolly. (2020, February, 20). Germany Shooting: far-right gunman kills 10 in Hanau. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/19/shooting-germany-hanau-dead-several-people-shisha-near-frankfurt>
- Onuf, Nicholas. G. (1989). *World of Our Making*. Columbia: University of South California Press.
- Perraudin, Frances. (2019, February, 17). Third of Britons believe Islam threatens British way of life, says report. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/17/third-of-britons-believe-islam-threatens-british-way-of-life-says-report>
- Reuters. (2010, May, 19). Factbox-Some policies on Muslim scarves and veils in Europe. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-48628820100519>
- Reuters. (2019, May, 19). Factbox-Some policies on Muslim scarves and veils in Europe. Retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-48628820100519>
- Sandford, Alasdair. (2020, November, 2). Macron and Islam: What has the French president actually said to outrage the Muslim world. *Euronews*. Retrieved from



- <https://www.euronews.com/2020/11/02/macron-and-islam-what-has-the-french-president-actually-said-to-outrage-the-muslim-world>
- Schaart, Eline. (2019, February, 4). Dutch Former anti-Muslim politician converts to Islam. *Politico*. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/former-dutch-anti-muslim-politician-converts-to-islam-joram-van-klaveren/>
- Seitz-Wald, Alex. (2015, October, 7). Fox News Watchers Consistently More Likely To Have Negative Views of Muslims. *Think Progress*. Retrieved from <http://thinkprogress.org/media/2011/02/16/144856/fox-news-watchers-consistently-more-likely-to-have-negative-views-of-muslims/>
- Sheikh, Naveed. S. (2003). *The New Politics of Islam: Pan-Islamic Foreign Policy in a World of States*. London: Routledge Publishers.
- Silletty, Marion. (2021, February, 12). French minister spars with Le Pen over radical Islam. *Politico*. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/french-interior-minister-gerald-darmanin-and-marine-le-pen-spar-over-how-to-fight-radical-islam/>
- The Guardians. (2015, October, 13). Pork or Nothing: How School Dinners are Dividing France. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/13/pork-school-dinners-france-secularism-children-religious-intolerance>
- The Today Show. (1998, February, 19). Madeleine K. Albright” on NBC-TV program with Matt Lauer. Retrieved from <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statements/1998/980219a.html>
- Theys, Serena. (2018, February, 23). Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory. *E-International Relations*. Retrieved from <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/23/introducing-constructivism-in-international-relations-theory/>
- Tufekci, Ali. (2020, November, 3). Offensive theater plays against Islam: Sultan Abdul Hamid II’s endeavors in Europe. *Daily Saba*. Retrieved from <https://www.dailysabah.com/arts/offensive-theater-plays-against-islam-sultan-abdulhamid-iis-endeavors-in-europe/news>
- Valfort, Marie-Anne. (2018). Anti-Muslim Discrimination in France: Evidence from a Field Experiment. IZA Institute of Labor Economics. Retrieved from <https://docs.iza.org/dp11417.pdf>
- Wilson, Jason. (2019, March, 28). With links to the Christchurch Attacker: What is the Identitarian Movement. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/28/with-links-to-the-christchurch-attacker-what-is-the-identitarian-movement>
- Yasar, Abdul. Aziz. Ahmad. (2019, April, 9). France’s Islamophobia and its roots in French Colonialism. *TRT World*. Retrieved from <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/france-s-islamophobia-and-its-roots-in-french-colonialism-25678>
- Zahid, Mehmood. Zahid. (2016). U.S.A Versus ‘Them’: Fomenting Enemy for Hegemonic Discourse. *IPRI Journal* 16, no. 2: 105-118. <http://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/7-Zahid-M-Zahid.pdf> 109