Perceptions of Muslim Women in French Print Media: 

_Le Monde and Le Figaro_ as Case Studies

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**Abstract**

France is one of the European countries calling for democracy, human rights and more particularly women’s rights. Needless to say, Article One of the French Constitution declares that “France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens without distinction of origin, race, or religion”. This signifies that French institutions, especially the media, should apply the article above and present a fair image of its citizens including the Muslim women. Hence, neither discrimination nor misrepresentation should take place in reporting about Muslim women. Media, in this regard, plays a crucial role in presenting a good or a rather bad image of Muslim women. The aim of this paper is to demystify and to probe into the representations and typifications of Muslim women in _Le Monde and Le Figaro_ newspapers, using critical discourse analysis. This paper will demonstrate how Muslim women are seen in France as a democratic country. The findings of this paper will be used to reflect upon the image of Muslim women in
France, and try to improve and correct that image in France as well as all over Europe.

Keywords: Muslim women, Perceptions, Print Media, *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, France

0. Introduction

In France, there are large numbers of immigrants with a Muslim background. These Muslim immigrants face the application of the principle of *laïcité*\(^1\) that the French Republic adopts. Muslims in this country whether men or women are required to abide by this principle which bans the wearing of ostensible religious symbols in public space. Muslim women are most widely affected by this principle as they wear a headscarf, Burqa, or a Burkini. These religious symbols make it difficult for Muslim women to practice their religious rituals freely. Needless to say, they are treated badly and misrepresented as their mode of living shakes the French assimilationist model. This paper aims at shedding light on the portrayal of Muslim women in French print media by going over some of the articles as well as images in *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* to reveal how these newspapers depict Muslim women.

1. A Brief History of the Veil affair, the Burqa or Niqab, and the Burkini in France

The headscarf is one of the symbols that allegedly violate the French principle of *laïcité*. The story of the headscarf began in November 1989 when three school girls wore headscarves in Creil in the north of Paris. This raised many questions regarding the incompatibility of Islam with *laïcité* (Modood, 2013, p. 175). The issue came back to the surface when the Minister of Education, François Bayrou, issued a circular that forbids the wearing of ostensible religious symbols. The headscarf issue became a serious problem in 1994 when some school girls were excluded and expelled from their public school. Joan Scott (2007, p. 15) argues that the 2004 ban of the headscarf is discriminatory as that religious sign is used as an indication of non-Frenchness of Muslim women. The headscarf or any other religious sign is merely a “disguised cover for religious

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\(^1\) It is a concept that is based on the separation of the state from the Church /any religion. Being neutral towards religious institutions, the state no longer recognizes any religion nor funds it. It is issued with the law of 1905.
discrimination by the French state against Muslims” (Mattei & Aguilar, 2016, p. 3).

In 2010, Niqab was prohibited in public space. In 2011, the French government outlawed the wearing of any religious garb that covers the face, basing its argument on security reasons in terms of the clear identification of the person wearing this garb; therefore, they are not allowed in public places such as schools, hospitals and public transport. The ban of Burkini was also issued by many municipalities in August 2016. In a study on the importance of religiosity in defining one’s identity for young Arab Muslim women in the United States, Zimmerman (2015, p. 68) concludes that “French participants experience internal conflicts that are imposed on them by French society’s attempt to make them choose between being Arab and Muslim and French”.

2. Vilification of Muslim Women in the Western Media

Before embarking on how Muslim women are typified in the media, it is worth considering how Muslims in general are misrepresented in Western media. Muslims have been associated with negative stereotypes and images. Karim (2006, pp. 119-120) summarizes the stereotypes and typifications that Muslims are associated with: they have “fabulous but undeserved wealth (they have not earned it), being barbaric and regressive, indulging in sexual excess”. Defamation and stigmatization of Muslims in the media is grounded on Orientalist thinking which is based on essentialist perspective in that the West is unique and has its own civilization that distinguishes it from the rest of the world. It is obvious, then, that Western scholarship divided the world and prejudged the East and Islam without having deep insights into them. European scholars solely construct an Other to compare themselves with, even though the comparisons are untrue and not based on real facts. For instance, Islam has been denounced as a religion that counteracts the ideals and endangers the security of the West. This had started from ancient times, yet it aggravated and intensified in the aftermath of 9/11 (Said, 1978). Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013, p. 253) maintain that “only when Muslims are engaged in notable acts of violence are they newsworthy”.

Concerning the garb Muslim women don, Dickey argues that “the imaginary veil that comes to the minds of most Westerners is an awkward black cloak that covers the whole body, including the face, and which is designed to prevent women’s mobility” (Eltantawy & Atef,
This means that the West views the veil as a stumbling block for the development of women. Similarly, Hametner in a study on the discursive representation of Muslim women in Austrian newspapers (2019) has found out that the headscarf stands for patriarchal oppression and coercion. The same study has concluded that “Muslim women appear more “active”, “emancipated” and “self-determined” if they seem distanced from practices associated with Islam such as veiling”.

Academic studies that have been conducted on the framing of Muslims by news media revolve around two major and recurrent themes: terrorism and the oppression of women. Any committed terrorist attack is highly likely to be imputed to a Muslim (Green, 2015, p. 235). In Western media, Muslim women are painted as sexually oppressed by the misogyny of men. Women are seen as passive and have no agency in determining their own destiny and life. The media reports stories of women suffering from honor-related violence caused by their violation of the sexual ethic of their families. The way the media frames the events is based on “the classic narrative of helpless Muslim women destined to suffer at the hands of misogynist Muslim men until rescued by enlightened, compassionate Westerners” (Green, 2015, p. 242). The media also is concerned with stories of women wearing the veil or Burqa. Both of these are considered as “the standard symbol for the oppression of women in the Western media” (Green, 2015, p. 242). The latter associates the veil or the Burqa with backwardness and the uncivilized nature of Islam.

3. Banning the Veil: Negating Cultural Diversity

France is one of the European countries where the media is highly obsessed with the veil as France banned the Hijab in public schools in 2004. In this regard, the media did not bother about the opponents of this law, yet it rather reports its proponents by giving voice to politicians, journalists, and other public figures to advocate and praise the ban. The media hardly gives accounts of girls and women having good experiences with the veil away from the alleged Islam’s oppression and sexism. The veil in French media represents an antithesis of women’s rights and equality. The West sets itself as a savior of Muslim women who are voiceless and who lose their identity and freedom (Green, 2015,
According to the “Collective against Islamophobia in France”\(^2\), Muslim women are the most targeted by Islamophobic acts; 75% of victims of Islamophobia are directed against Muslim women. These feel stigmatized and discriminated in public space as long as they endeavor to put on those conspicuous religious signs.

France is a home for many immigrants from various parts of the world. This is supposed to pave the way for a variety of cultures and religions that make of French society a multicultural one where tolerance and respect for cultural differences should take place. Still, Muslims are a minority whose culture differs from the French one. This is the fact that the French Republic does not seem to cope with, especially because the veil reflects a Muslim identity that Muslim women are not ready to give up. As previously mentioned, *Laïcité* in France implies the assimilation of Muslim women to French norms, emphasizing the equality of all citizens, an equality that muzzles the voices of the immigrants who need to manifest their own identity. This echoes Spivak’s (1988) concept of subalternity which refers to the state of someone oppressed, helpless, and voiceless. In other words, Muslim women in French media might not be able to speak or “define their own identities” (Macdonald, 2013, p. 15).

### 4. Visuals in Media Discourse

Visuals are defined as “any graphic displays (either in dynamic or static form) that depict all or some of the accompanying text’s content” (Reyes & Bingat, 2017, p. 5) such as photographs, images, and caricatures. Visuals hold a key role in conveying and disseminating a plethora of meanings. Hodge and Kress (Locke, 2004, p. 23) contend that “meaning resides strongly and pervasively in systems other than the verbal, especially the visual”. According to Fairclough (1995, p. 7), “the images have primacy over the words in the sense that the events related happen first visually”. This is the power of the image to produce knowledge, which is the representation we make of the world. In the same vein, Bignell (2002, p. 94) states that photographs in the news are used to connote different meanings.

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\(^2\) Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en France is an association that defends human rights, founded in 2000. Since 2003, its mission has been to fight Islamophobia. Annual report 2017
5. Methodology

This paper sets out to examine the representations of Muslim women through studying a plethora of articles and images taken from the two newspapers under study. *Le Figaro* and *Le monde* are two French daily newspapers that are highly circulated. By so doing, they “broadcast output by providing more in-depth coverage, explanation and analysis than is commonly available on radio and television” (Kuhn, 1995, p. 43). Despite the competition of TV, radio, and the internet, daily newspapers and weeklies “continue to fulfill an important role as opinion formers among the national political and economic elites” (Kuhn, 1995, p. 45). In this study, the choice of *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* springs from the fact that both are newspapers of record. This means that they have a large circulation and are authoritative as they are employed by the government to publish its legal and public notifications. This study covers relevant articles about Muslim women from 2015 to 2018. This period is characterized by heated debates about the integration of Muslims in France as it also witnessed a set of terrorist attacks where most of the perpetrators are of Muslim identity. It should be noted that the phrase “*femmes musulmanes*” was inputted into the search engine of each newspaper. The articles are all classified in a folder and checked for relevance to this study. Thus, it has been noticed that there are numerous articles revolving around Muslim women though they do not include in their headlines “*femmes musulmanes*”. For this reason, articles whose headlines mention words such as “*femme*”, “*musulmane*”, or else “*voile*”, “*Burkini*” and other related garb items are selected. This is because headlines are considered as “the most widely read part of a newspaper” (Isani, 2014).

Critical discourse analysis is the approach this study will be using. It is an approach that aims at conducting a close analysis of texts (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2). It analyses language and grammar as they are used by people to achieve communicative purposes. CDA analysts believe that it is within discourse that “power relations are exercised and negotiated” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 272).

6. Data Analysis and Discussion

Through reading the corpuses of both newspapers between 2015-2018, it has been found out that those articles perceive women via the theme of oppression and submission on the one hand, and the theme of leadership
and feminism on the other hand. Below are some instances of articles from *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* which exemplify the two themes. These articles will be studied using critical discourse analysis to unravel the discursive ideological strategies making the bulk of those themes. Some of the visuals will also be analyzed to glean some of the representations of Muslim women.

### 6.1 Muslim women: oppression and submission

As it is indicated in the literature, Muslim women are widely portrayed by the Western media as submissive and oppressed by sexist Muslim men. This is what the following quote exemplifies:


(USA: A Muslim woman kidnapped in front of a mosque and killed.)

> Une jeune musulmane de 17 ans a été tuée dimanche après avoir été enlevée devant une mosquée près de Washington, mais la police n'a pas retenu à ce stade la qualification de crime raciste.

(A 17-year-old Muslim girl was killed on Sunday after being kidnapped in front of a mosque near Washington, but the police have not yet called it a racist crime.)

Here the writer resorts to the passive structure “enlevé … a été tueé” in order to emphasize the Muslim woman bearing the action, de-emphasize the actor, and to obscure agency and responsibility. In the second clause the words “la police…crime raciste” explicitly emphasize the agent; however, the police are put in the agent position to disclaim that the killing of the Muslim woman is not due to her faith (Van Dijk, 2000).

The following headline, however, reveals the agent and the actor (*par son père*) conspicuously. This is because those brutalizing the woman are Muslims from her family.

**Le combat d'une musulmane pour aimer un catholique (Le Figaro, Oct 19th, 2016)** (the fight of a female Muslim to love a Catholic)

> La jeune femme aurait été brutalisée par des cousins et menacée de mort par son père. (The young woman was reportedly brutalized by cousins and threatened with death by her father.)

The fact that the woman’s father and cousins rejected her demand to love a Catholic will make her lose her life as they threaten her with death. This
is to lay much light on how Muslim women are deprived of their ‘rights’, eschewing thus the particular cultural and religious principles of the Muslim culture. The article also reveals that Muslim women are subjugated to the patriarchal role of their fathers, which consists of violence and threats.

As mentioned before, veiled Muslim women are accused of wearing the veil, Burqa or Niqab under pressure and violence from Muslim men. The role of the French Republic is to liberate them from these shackles. In this regard, Lydia Guirous⁴, who is the founder of “Future, to the females” and the Secretary of the National Radical Party for fighting discriminations against women, declares that

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\text{En tant que femme et féministe, face à une femme voilée, en pantalon, tunique à manches longues sur une plage, ou en burqa, je ne peux m'empêcher de ressentir un sentiment d'injustice, de révolte, et de peine. Ces filles, dès la puberté, sont soumises à la même rigueur vestimentaire.}
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(As a woman and a feminist, in front of a veiled woman, in pants, a long-sleeved tunic on a beach, or in a burqa, I cannot help feeling a sense of injustice, revolt, and pain. These girls, from puberty, are subjected to the same rigor of clothing).

According to Guirous, Muslim women are forced to pursue a dress code against their own free will. She presumes that Muslim women are to choose between veils or patriarchal assaults and insults. They put on the veil because they fear their husbands and abide by the norms of the neighborhoods they live in (soumises). They are also abandoned by French politicians who cannot make decisive decisions and fear losing some Muslim votes in elections. The writer employs a set of negative words (injustice, revolt, pain) “to describe the actions of the Others” (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 154). In light of this, the veil “in France…has always been considered as a symbol of enslavement of women”⁴. It is also employed by the Republic to lead a cultural clash with the Muslim world.

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In the same vein, in an article entitled “Le voile, ‘objet de mode’ ou instrument ideologique des salafistes?" (The veil, object of fashion' or ideological instrument of Salafists) by Éléonore de Vulpillières, Pierre Vermeren argues that the veil in some suburbs is a sign of ideological and cultural conquest. He further claims that Islamists use the veil to deliver a political message, that is, to prove that they occupy the territory and the souls of French people. Though Muslim women, when veiled, are seen as aberrant and accused of disturbing and flouting the laws in the French companies, Sophie Gherardi6 defends French laïcité and claims that “the French have no problem with religion”, in the sense that the objective is that laïcité should be respected regardless of the type of religion.

Instead of shedding light on and reporting the great advancement of Muslim women all around the world, the French media limits attention only to some trivial matters that, however, make part and parcel of one’s particular culture and identity. For example, another article in Le Figaro is entitled “Marina Jaber, l’Irakienne à vélo qui brise les tabous”7, the writer claims that Muslim women in Iraq are not allowed to ride a bike as it is a taboo that no one is able to violate. Marina Jaber dares to ride a bike only after coming back from the United Kingdom which is referred to as a city where one feels free to practice what they like.

Mathieu Bock-Coté8 relates the Burkini worn by Muslim women to cultural imperialism in the sense that they endeavour to culturally conquer French societies. They are accused of following Islamism by using their bodies to install their ideologies and to physically and symbolically prove that Islamism is conquering French territories:

Pour Mathieu Bock-Côté, l’exhibitionnisme identitaire est le vecteur privilégié de l’impérialisme culturel qui anime l’islamisme.

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6 http://www.lemonde.fr/m-actu/article/2017/02/03/le-jour-ou-la-france-s-est-divisee-sur-le-foulard_5074145_4497186.html
(For Mathieu Bock-Côté, identity exhibitionism is the privileged vector of cultural imperialism that drives Islamism.)

This article depicts Muslim women as ideological tools used by Islamists to convey and impose their culture in an exhibitionistic manner. The veil, according to Mathieu Bock-Côté, is a sign to make Islam visible (exhibitionnisme) within French society. Instead of being a forced and submissive means, the veil is deployed by Muslim women to ostensibly reveal their own identity as this extract indicates “Le voile témoigne d’une forme d’exhibitionnisme identitaire pour rendre l’Islam visible au cour de la cite (Le Figaro, Aug 9th, 2016). This visibility of Islam is strongly opposed to by a sample of French people considered as representative of French’s adult population in a survey published by Le Figaro (Waters, 2016).

French media in particular and Western thinking in general still revolve around and predicate their views on Orientalist views but do not keep up with the developments and changes that have taken place in the Muslim world. Thus, in another article entitled “En Syrie, les espoirs déçus des quatre épouses d’un djihadiste français” (In Syria, the disappointed hopes of the four wives of a French jihadist) (Le Monde, Feb 23rd, 2017), Muslim women are portrayed as subject to polygamy (four wives) and propagate terrorist ideas. They also can get married though they are minors « il trouve encore le temps de divorcer d’une cinquième épouse, et parvient à convaincre … une mineure de 15 ans de le rejoindre » (He managed to divorce the fifth one and get to persuade a minor of 15 years old to marry him.)

It should be noted that newspapers resort to quoting people supporting their views in order to give credibility and objectivity to their reports, thus following “quoting someone who agrees with us” technique (Kohn, 2003, p. 119). In this vein, the journalist quotes an Imam, Hassen Chalghoumi9, who views the burqa as “a piece of cloth unworthy of Islam”. Chalghoumi adds that the burqa is “a prison for women, a tool for sexual domination and Islamic regiment”. In this regard, another article by Eugénie Bastié, entitled “Le voile détruit l’universel feminine” (the veil destroys the feminine world), is the story of Hélé Béji and her experience with the veil. She paints the veil as a “béance qui ouvre la

‘guerre civile’ entre les femmes” (a deficiency that leads to a civil war among women), and it is viewed to pit women against each other and create clashes between veiled and non-veiled women. According to Van Dijk (1995), the writer here uses negative comparison (béance) to portray the veil and the warning strategy that urgent actions should be taken to avoid a civil war.

In his article headlined “Voile à la plage: entorse à la laïcité ou choc culturel? (the veil at the beach: violation of laïcité or a cultural shock)” and published on August 19, 2014, Alexandre Devecchio quotes Nadine Morano who pitted the veil with human rights. According to Morano, a veiled woman on the beach is exasperating: that is, in a state where human rights are respected, there should be no veiled woman. Morano then obliquely assumes that veiled Muslim women do not enjoy their human rights strangely enough, ignoring that this is their choice emanating from their free will. In light of this, Morano suggests that coming to France requires abiding by its culture and respecting the freedom of women.

This, however, can be contrasted to the conviction of those women to don the way they prefer. Thus, in a study on banning the Burkini in Belgium (Brems, 2018, p. 279), one of the Muslim women interviewed claimed that wearing the Burkini reflects an “agency about your own body and deciding yourself which part to show”. Likewise, in examining the protecting role of the hijab for Muslim women, Kertechian and Swami (2016, p. 2) concede that the “use of the hijab may protect women from appearance-based scrutiny and particularly from sexual objectification”.

6.2 The successfully-integrated Muslim women: Muslim women leaders and Muslim feminists

French print media brings to the limelight Muslim women and Arab women who defend and propagate French secularism. Thus, in an article headlined “Mabrouk, Slimani, Guirous, Bougrab: ces femmes contre les dérives de l’islam” (Mabrouk, Slimani, Guirous, Bougrab: These women against the deviations of Islam) published on September 19, 2017, Anne Fulda depicts them as young Muslims struggling to condemn the deviations of Islam as the author calls it. These women are portrayed as courageous and as militants who strive to combat radical Islam. In light of this, radical Islam refers to de facto mere religious practices Muslim
women abide by. These women, Mabrouk, Slimani, Guirous, and Bougrab, are cited as feminists endeavouring to fail Muslim women by defending French secularism. Muslim women with a veil or a Burkini do not fall within this category that is praised by the West as they respect some of their religious principles.

This point of unveiled Muslim women who comply with the French norms is almost missing in previous studies on French media discourse which largely imply veiled Muslim women, that is those that seemingly wear Islamic religious garb. This is because the phrase “Muslim women” is inclusive and does not necessarily eliminate those wearing the headscarf, Burkini, or Burqua from those not wearing them. The focus on women wearing these religious symbols emanate from the association of these symbols with oppression, threat and destruction of ‘vivre-ensemble’ (Thylin, 2016).

In the same vein, to criticize Muslim women, reporters of *Le Figaro* quote other Muslim women that share the same beliefs and orientations of the newspaper. For instance, a Saudi artist is quoted to criticize Muslim women practicing sport: “*Que tu ne devrais pas être là. Que cela n’est pas fait pour toi. Que ça n’est pas ton sport*” (You should not be here; this is not done for you, and this is not your sport). *Le Figaro* focuses only on prejudgment and stereotypes that were fixed to Muslim women especially in some particular countries where the freedom of women is limited as they are not allowed to practice some basic daily activities. This is because the situation of women in the Muslim world is highly improved. The newspaper sheds light then on Saudi Arabia where women hardly had access to driving and should not go out without a veil. That is, this leads the newspaper to publish articles whose headlines are the following:

Une Saoudienne emprisonnée pour avoir ôté son voile en public.  
(Dec 13th, 2016)  

(A Saudi woman jailed for removing her veil in public.)

Through spatialization strategy (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 46), the journalists refer to Muslim women in Saudi Arabia in terms of the place where they live.

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The focus here is on the act of removing the veil and not on the agent; the aim is to victimize the Muslim woman.

*Scandale on Arabie Saoudite: Une vidéo montre des femmes en train de s’amuser.* (Jan 2nd, 2017) (Scandal in Saudi Arabia: A video shows women having fun.)

Amusement and entertainment are seen as not part of women’s daily life in Saudi Arabia. This accentuates their inability to practice as any other western woman recreational activities.

In the same line of thought, the following article reiterates the same stereotypical argument, namely that oriental women need to be liberated from the shackles of oppression:

*Mona Eltahawy : «Femmes musulmanes, il faut briser la barrière de la honte»* (Le Monde, June 11th, 2015) (Mona Eltahawy: ‘We must break the barrier of shame’.)

*Féministe et musulmane, la journaliste américano-égyptienne prône une révolution sexuelle et sociale pour les femmes du Moyen-Orient.* (Feminist and Muslim, the US-Egyptian journalist advocates a sexual and social revolution for women in the Middle East).

The writer uses the strategy of authorization through legitimation. In other words, the journalist quotes Mona Eltahawy as “someone in whom institutionalized authority is vested” (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). This is done with a view to persuading the readership and claiming she is a credible source.

Very few articles refer to some leading positions of Muslim women as is the case with the following article:

*Une femme devient présidente de Singapour* (Le Figaro, Sept 13, 2017) (A woman becomes president of Singapore)

Musulmane et issue de la minorité malaise, la nouvelle dirigeante suscite déjà de vives critiques car elle n'a pas été désignée par les urnes.
The article reports a veiled Muslim woman becoming president of Singapore. That woman belongs to a Muslim minority in Singapore. The state uses this nomination as a sign against patriarchy and as an emblem of multiculturalism and diversity. However, the article reveals that her ascending to power was not out of elections but is done directly after disqualifying her competitors. This means that what she has achieved is based on the state’s support, and not on the votes. Without this, that Muslim woman would not have been able to win the presidency of Singapore.

7. Examples of Visuals Depicting Muslim Women

The following are two pictures taken from Le Figaro and Le Monde, which highlight some of the negative perceptions of Muslim woman in France:

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The image above reveals how men gaze at a Muslim woman wearing Niqab in India. She is seen as a stranger, intruding the Indian society. Although India is a country wherein Islam is the second religion, this image refers to the fact that Islam is gaining more space in India. The article accompanying the picture is about the legislation the Supreme Court of India enforces to ban the Triple Talaq (instant divorce). The newspaper here also focuses on a very detailed issue in Islamic culture, and how Indian feminists are able to win this cause, sidestepping then the involvement of Muslims in political and social life.

In Figure 3 there are two different attitudes toward women. While the old man seems shocked to see the girl riding the bike, the young boy is smiling. This shows a gap between generations. While the young man accepts the situation and celebrates it, the old man, who seems to be more conservative, sees the girl as violating the society’s norms. Here the girl is unveiled, which implies that France has problems only with the veiled women who do not conform to the French secular principle.

![Figure 3](image-url)

From the previous analysis of a variety of articles from *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*, almost no article reports the great achievements of Muslim women in France or in the West in general. There are de facto successful

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12 It is a religious practice whereby a Muslim man can divorce his wife by merely uttering “I divorce you” three times.
Muslim women in France who contribute markedly to the development of French politics and economy. The French print media hones in on only the discrepancies that exist between the Islamic culture and the Western one so as to show that Islamic practices and religion are incompatible with French secular values. Muslim women are also required by the French republic to assimilate to French culture. Put bluntly, they need to give up their culture and religion. It is clear that French daily newspapers strip Muslim women of all sorts of development roles as active citizens both in France working hand in hand with the autochthon, and around the world. That is, the two newspapers do not report Muslim women away from Islam as if their religion is what hinders them from being fairly and positively portrayed.

It is worth mentioning that the time span for this study witnessed a series of terrorist attacks in France which has spawned acrimonious debates about the integration of Muslims in France, raising thus their culture and its difference from the French norms. The female Muslim is an example of that controversy revolving around the assimilation to French culture; her body then becomes a “contentious site of cultural difference” (Özcan, 2012). Through their dress, Muslim women carry difference and revolt as well as submission.

8. Conclusion

Muslims have always been typified as enemies to the French civilization and as people who cannot integrate successfully into Western societies. Muslim women are not an exception as they are a fertile ground for stigmatization. This is reflected in how media presents them. Muslim women in the two French daily newspapers, Le Figaro and Le Monde, are reported as strangers that violate French secularism in that they stick to their culture. They are also highlighted only when they are associated with some culturally specific elements as getting married of a non-Muslim man -that is unusual for Muslims -or wearing the veil or when they are put in controversial situations in Islam as playing sports. These elements are highlighted to make a stark contrast between the Western culture and the Muslim one. However, in situations beyond their religious and cultural matters, they are portrayed positively though the number of articles is a few. Muslim women need to be reported extensively on how well they contribute to the French economic system. Religious matters are parts of one’s culture and they should be respected. Associating
Muslim women with their religious garb reduces them to cultural objects and only widens that gap between the different cultures, in the sense that female Muslims insist on defining their identity through “une repli identitaire” as the motto goes “You treat me differently, and I will show you that I am different!” (Salzbrunn, 2012, p. 693).

References


