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IMAGES OF MUSLIMS ON LEMONDE.FR DURING THE PERIOD OF TERRORIST ATTACKS IN EUROPE IN 2015–2016

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyse images of Muslims appearing in articles published from 2015 to 2016 on the website lemonde.fr. At this time, the country was faced with terrorist attacks that resulted in various government decisions and a complex emotional state of the nation. The study includes 617 articles from lemonde.fr, individually refined through 16 keywords. The quantitative and qualitative content analysis allowed for three main thematic categories of articles to be determined: Muslims as potential terrorists, the incompatibility of Islamic religious symbols with European values, and Islam as an obstacle to secularism in school. Muslims were represented as victims of discrimination or as criminals. These images negatively affected the perception of this religious minority in France and may have led to complications in intercultural communication.

KEYWORDS: *Islam, media effects, images of Muslims in the media, the image of Islam in the media*

Podobe Muslimanov na spletni strani lemonade.fr v času terorističnih napadov v Evropi med letoma 2015 in 2016

IZVLEČEK

Namen te študije je analiza podob muslimanov v člankih, ki so bili od leta 2015 do leta 2016 objavljeni v lemonde.fr. V tem času se je Francija soočala s terorističnimi napadi, na katere se je takratna vlada soočala s sprejemom različnih odločitev in zapletenim čustvenim odzivom prebivalstva. Študija vključuje šeststo sedemnajst člankov s spletne strani lemonde.fr z analizo vsebine šestnajstih ključnih besed.

Kvantitativna in kvalitativna analiza vsebine omogoča določitev treh glavnih tematskih kategorij člankov: muslimani kot potencialni teroristi, nezdržljivost islamskih verskih simbolov z evropskimi vrednotami in islam kot ovira sekularizmu v šoli. Muslimani so bili predstavljeni kot žrtve diskriminacije ali kot zločinci. Te podobe so negativno vplivale na dožemanje te verske manjšine v Franciji in bi lahko pripeljale do zapletov v medkulturni komunikaciji.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: *Islam, medijski učinki, medijske podobe muslimanov, analiza vsebine, verske manjšine*

1 Introduction

The growing threat of terrorism in the modern world affects the perception of religious minorities in different countries. Mostly, these changes affected Muslims whose religious ideologies are accused of propagating these tragic events.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which in terms of the scale and the number of victims exceeded the terrorist attacks known up to this point, were a turning point concerning Islam and Muslims, as well as to their representation in mass media.

America could not recover for a long time after these tragic events. People needed an answer and an enemy against whom they could direct their anger. Muslims became the scapegoat, and the acts of anti-Muslim violence among the population increased. Mass media, not understanding how to depict Muslims after this tragedy, rushed to extremes. It was the main challenge and test for journalism of the early 21st century.

Thus, the American mass media tried to smooth corners and speak as positively as possible about Muslims during this period. American television attempted to cover the lives of ordinary Muslims and Arabs, using a positive connotation in interviews (Alsultany 2013: 161). According to some researchers, the propaganda of such an exaggeratedly supportive attitude towards Muslims and Arabs has created a new kind of rejection and new forms of racism, which looked like anti-racism and multiculturalism on the surface. Many authors in their studies of Muslims images after the 9/11 tragedy spoke about how "positive" and "simplified" images negatively impacted upon followers of this religion (Alsultany 2013: 162).

In 2015–2016, the world again faced the problem of depicting Muslims and forming attitudes towards them through the mass media. A series of terrorist attacks, which shocked the world as a whole, hit Europe. France was the most prominent victim: the country suffered an attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo which left 12 dead on January 7, 2015, and a hostage-taking in a kosher shop in Paris on January 9, 2015. At the end of the year, on November

13, several terrorist attacks were carried out almost simultaneously in Paris and its suburbs: an explosion occurred near the Stade de France during the football match between France and Germany; a group of armed men opened fire on restaurant visitors in 10th and 11th districts of Paris; and the Bataclan concert club, during which 130 people were killed and 350 were injured. Eight jihadists committed the most massive terrorist attacks in the history of France.

As a consequence of the complex psychological state of the French nation and residents of all European countries, serious government measures were taken to ensure security. These measures were followed by extreme decisions, a state of emergency in the country, and ambiguous legislative initiatives (such as the deprivation of French citizenship to persons with dual citizenship of French origin and the banning of the burkini).

This study aimed to analyse the articles published in the online version of the major French newspaper *Le Monde* to study the representation of Muslims in this period. Such a detailed analysis made it possible to delve into the problem within the framework of one newspaper and more accurately determine the images of this religious minority created during this period.

Under the historical context and the experience of the American mass media, it was essential to evaluate and analyse in detail the editorial policies towards religious minorities during the crisis and in the relatively calm period between the tragic events.

2 Research methodology

In order to study the process of forming images of Muslims on the pages of French media, we chose the online version of *Le Monde*, which today is one of the most frequently visited media sites in France (Alexa 2019). The purpose of the study is to examine the representation of Muslims, formed on the pages of *Le Monde* during the period consisting of several terrorist attacks between 2015–2016, as well as the refugee and immigrant crisis. Selected years include the time of reaction to the first tragic event in *Charlie Hebdo*, a critical situation of the migrant influx, and massive, severe terrorist attacks of July and November 2016. The chosen timeline enabled an analysis of the editorial policy in publishing articles about this religious minority in the context of ethnic relations and compare the tone and the topics of texts throughout the period.

To accomplish the tasks mentioned above and achieve the goal, we used mixed-methods content analyses.

The first part of this study shows the results of quantitative content analysis. For this purpose we selected articles published in the online version of the newspaper

Le Monde on ethnic themes by the keywords: "multiculturalism", "stigmatisation", "racism", "nationalism", "intercultural dialogue", "Islamophobia", "Islamophobe", "antisemitism", "Immigration", "immigrant", "migranti", "integration", "assimilation", "minority", "discrimination", and "ghetto". After the articles unrelated to France were excluded, the sample amounted to 617 articles published from 2015 to 2016.

The choice of keywords was motivated by the desire to see the religious topics in the context of ethnic ones to provide a broader and more profound evaluation of the place that Muslims take in French society.

The manifest content of selected articles was coded according to thematic categories found during the reading. As a result, the thematic categories formed three significant groups: Muslims as potential terrorists, the incompatibility of Islamic religious symbols with European values, and Islam as an obstacle to secularism in school.

The quantitative content analysis also included the evaluation of the frequency of articles revealing the number of texts in which the term "Islam" was used together with the word "terrorism". The Google Trends tool was used as a means for a more in-depth quantitative analysis of the content, which made it possible to compare the popularity and exact wording of search queries about the burkini problem with the number of articles on lemonde.fr about this issue.

As a second part, the quantitative data were analysed using qualitative analysis. We turned our attention to key concepts and terms used in the articles related to the three found thematic categories. Besides, the main aim of this part was to define what was not said but implied (latent content). The quantitative content analysis let us determine the number of specific subtopics related to the image of Muslims in France.

The qualitative content analysis included: evaluation of topics and problems in selected articles, analysis of the texts forms, determination of the central theme and its subtopics in each article, as well as analysis of the modality of chosen texts.

As it was mentioned above, these two parts of the content analysis revealed three thematic categories defined by the actors (men, women or children) and two central roles of Muslims: the role of potential criminal and the role of victim.

3 Representation of Muslims in the media

France had the second-largest Muslim population in Europe after Germany in 2015 (McCarthy 2015). That is why when a series of terrorist attacks took place between 2015 and 2016, a tense situation established in the country between ethnic groups and religious representatives. A wave of discussions about Islam and terrorism swept mass media. The topic of cultural cohabitation became the most popular at this time.

It is no secret that terrorist attacks increase citizens' attention toward mass media. According to the report made in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2005:

"Modern terrorism is media terrorism. The media are attracted by extreme terrorist acts not only because it is their duty to report on any major event but also because of the dramatic and spectacular aspect of terrorism fascinates the general public. Today's terrorists exploit this and act in a way which will attract maximum attention around the world" (Jařab 2005).

The mass media act as the only source of information in these tragic and frightening circumstances which have a monopoly on the announcement of the causes and consequences of events. Accordingly, the media can promote a particular opinion, which is perceived by consumers as the majority opinion.

According to a study by Elizabeth Poole (2002: 217), mass media are responsible for the creation and development of a negative attitude toward Muslims. The author believes that "its role in the production of institutional and dominant discourses has resulted in the demonisation of Islam, portraying it as a threat to Western interests, and sustaining the ideology necessary to subjugate Muslims both internationally and domestically". The researcher also lists recutting topics within articles relating to Muslims in British media:

1. Attention to the financing of Muslim schools and religious education in them.
2. The desire to legally discriminate Muslims.
3. Attacks on the desire of Muslims to enter politics.
4. Focus on the relationship of Muslim men with non-Muslim women.
5. Extremist activity.

Another researcher, Suhrab Sadiki (2016: 95), noted that the media initially formed the negative concept of Islam in France. A Muslim in the press is a person who comes from a place where this religion is the main one. The researcher put forth the idea that the media do not pay attention to whether this person is a practitioner, a believer, or someone who does not share the principles of this religion.

The French people first encountered Islam during the Islamic Revolution in Iran, at the same time, associations between this religion and war appeared. Headlines in the media that used Islam, war, and cruelty in a single context also provoked this in parallel, and practically equalised both concepts. The wave of Muslim immigration to France during this period creates associations that migrants are connected with the Algerian war in the media. For two decades, in the public sphere, Islam had an image of problems, war, and immigration crisis. Only in the 1990s, the Islamic Salvation Front started to answer popular

questions asked by the French, while new difficulties with migrants living in the suburbs became evident and disquieting.

At this moment, according to Sadiki (2016: 100), the French media conducted lengthy discussions about the necessity of Muslims to “give up their faith to better assimilate”. In the mid-1990s, Islamic radicals appeared and again attracted negative media attention to Islam, which re-established the associative of Islam to cruelty and murder.

After September 11, Islam fell victim to prejudice and fear. Moreover, Muslims became the target of attacks by the Western World. The media blame Islam for irrationality and backwardness of its followers, and for threatening the Western way of life. Media also expressed fears of the clash between Islamic and Western civilisations.

The situation became complicated at the beginning of the 21st century with terrorist attacks in Madrid and London in 2005 and a scandal with cartoons of the prophet Muhammad. The current state of the issue is not much different from what it was 20 years ago. The media are persistent in pointing out Muslims' problems and issues with Islam, continuing to completely or practically ignore the peaceful aspects of the life of this religious minority. They are stepping up their attention to Muslims when terrorist acts occur. Also, because of the coverage only in moments of crisis, some Europeans today believe that all Arabs are Muslims, and all Muslims are bad.

According to *lemonde.fr* articles, media form this indecent image of Islam, and they are to blame for the prejudice against Muslims. In numerous texts published on the website, the accusations of mass media are revealed by readers. The media show people that “Islam is frightening, terribly frightening” (Chemin 2015), they also develop an idea that antimuslim acts are caused by the fear of Islam (Morcuende 2015). These messages stigmatise the Muslim population, converting them into enemies in the eyes of readers.

Diagram 1 presents the topics that are discussed in the texts published on *lemonde.fr* from the sample

Diagram 1. Sub-topics in articles selected by the keywords "Islamophobia," "Islamophobe," "Antisemitism."

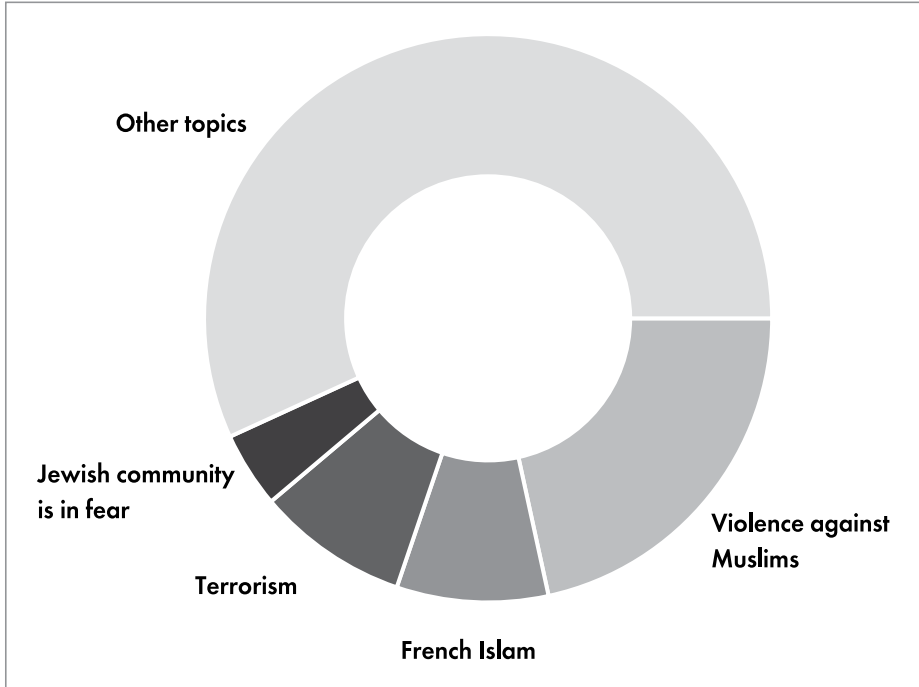


Diagram 1 shows that the violence against the Muslim population was the most frequent topic, which is explained by the choice of the keyword with the negative connotation for our website search ("Islamophobia"). The second most popular topic was the formation of a new Islam or the identity of French Muslims. The frequency of articles about terrorism associated with Islamophobia can be explained by the stigmatisation of this social group being suspected of extremist beliefs.

Comparing these results with topics on the keyword "Antisemitism", one can also see that these articles are also related to terrorism. However, the most numerous articles were written about the departure of French Jews to Israel because of the fear of radical Muslims.

4 Representation of Muslims as potential terrorists on lemonde.fr

Articles on the site of the newspaper Le Monde often mention Islam along with terrorism. The constant use of these two terms together leads to their unification in the minds of people. After analysing this phenomenon, we obtained the following results:

1. 118 articles on the site that talk about Islam without mentioning terrorism,
2. The site has 192 articles in which terrorism and Islam are mentioned together.
3. Islam and terrorism are used together in 62% of these 310 articles during the period 2015–2016.

The data obtained in the course of the study allowed us to make a conclusion about the popularity of online requests with words Islam and terrorism. This phenomenon is explained by the modern technology of promoting articles on the Internet: topics that obtained popularity before appear more often in the mass media as these sensationalised topics drive more clicks and advertisement revenue.

Poole (2002) identified one of the most popular topics about Muslims in the British media as “extremist activity”. The same trend is noticeable in coverage of this social group in the online version of the newspaper Le Monde.

Thus, despite the continued development of mass media and the formation of a specific editorial policy towards the topic of Islam in the media, the articles continue to draw a parallel between Islam and terrorism.

The content analyses of articles showed that Muslim men in 2015–2016 appeared as potential terrorists. They are often suspected and accused of involvement in radicalised structures and subjected to physical and psychological abuse. Mass media are trying to explain, with the help of various experts, the fact that terrorists were European citizens. The attitude of society and government bodies toward Muslims is seen as one of the explanations of this phenomenon. Journalists published biographies of terrorists as a method to understand the radicalisation (Suc et al. 2015).

In the summer of 2016, the media “agreed” on the anonymity of the terrorists. Le Monde refused to show photographs of criminals, while the Figaro and Liberation newspapers opposed the decision, considering such publications as part of the press’s objectivity (Houchard 2016).

After the terrorist attacks of January 2015, French society was called upon not to equate Islam to terrorism. However, after the November 2015 attacks, such calls were heard much less frequently, and a general panic followed, various government initiatives concerning minorities were seen as attempts to further

and officially these minority groups. One of these initiatives was the deprivation of citizenship for persons with dual citizenship who were born in France for participating in the organisation of terrorist attacks. This law had already existed in France before 2015; however, with the help of this initiative, state authorities sought to complicate and strengthen measures as well as increase the circle of people included.

The reaction of *Le Monde* to this measure was unequivocal: "Who can seriously agree that a kamikaze, who wants to detonate a bomb in the centre of the crowd, will take care of the loss of precious French citizenship?" (*Le Monde* 2015a). Deprivation of citizenship in this context can lead to new cultural problems. According to *Le Monde*, this decision does not correspond to republican values (Lozes 2016). Such a measure stigmatises French Muslims, especially of African descent (Hamidou 2016).

Thus, in the period 2015–2016, Muslims often appeared in articles on terrorism, which created an association between these two concepts.

5 Representation of Islamic religious symbols as incompatible with European values

In 2015–2016, the Muslim swimsuit complemented the already existing mediatised problem of the Muslim headscarf. In the early 2000s, mass media mostly supported the prohibition of the Muslim veil by inviting specialists who advocated an anti-veil law. Invited opponents of this state decision were represented by women, who were wearing the headscarf, and Muslim men. Thus, the mass media sent a message that only these categories of citizens can be opponents of such a law (Tevanian 2005).

In 2015–2016, Muslim women's clothing items, their desires and role in modern society were discussed in newspapers, magazines and also on television, as such, they became objects of close attention. Political and religious figures, philosophers, and feminists started to argue about the sacred symbols of Muslim women on the pages of mass media. The voices of Muslim women themselves, in this case, were heard only in 1 out of 5 articles on this subject in the newspaper *Le Monde*.

Discussion of religious symbols in the media also attracts public attention to this topic. During the selected period, the burkini ban became a significant media problem.

Burkini, according to the Cambridge Dictionary is: "a piece of women's clothing for swimming is in two pieces, and that covers the whole body except the face, hands, and feet". In August 2016, this topic replaced that of the headscarf bans in educational institutions, as well as various other "religious" symbols that

could be interpreted as “incompatible with the values of the French Republic and secularism”. The burkini confuses political leaders in at least two components. First, some see this clothing as a symbol of enslavement and lack of women’s freedom (an argument feminists also use), and second, this “religious symbol”, according to some local administrations, contradicts the values of the French Republic (which is, for example, secularism and liberty).

The issue of banning the burkini and other distinctive religious clothes is critical and acute in this period. This fact is explained by the reaction to the terrorist attacks, which put the state bodies in a difficult position. The government of the country, like the local authorities, felt that they had to take action to regain public respect.

Sillier Gartlan Hoff (2017) studied the debates on burkini in August 2016 and noted that in a single month the newspaper *Le Monde* published 46 articles on this issue. Our sample included far fewer articles on this topic since we used the website search of *lemonde.fr* through keywords illustrating intercultural communication issues.

The burkini problem arose in connection with the bans of local administrations of 2016, and media catalysed this issue into becoming a discussed topic throughout France. According to the Google Trend service, where we can see indicators of the popularity that a particular keyword has in a given region and period, burkini became a frequent search from mid-July 2016, and its rate only bottomed out again by mid-September 2016. In 2015, the topic almost did not appear in the search.

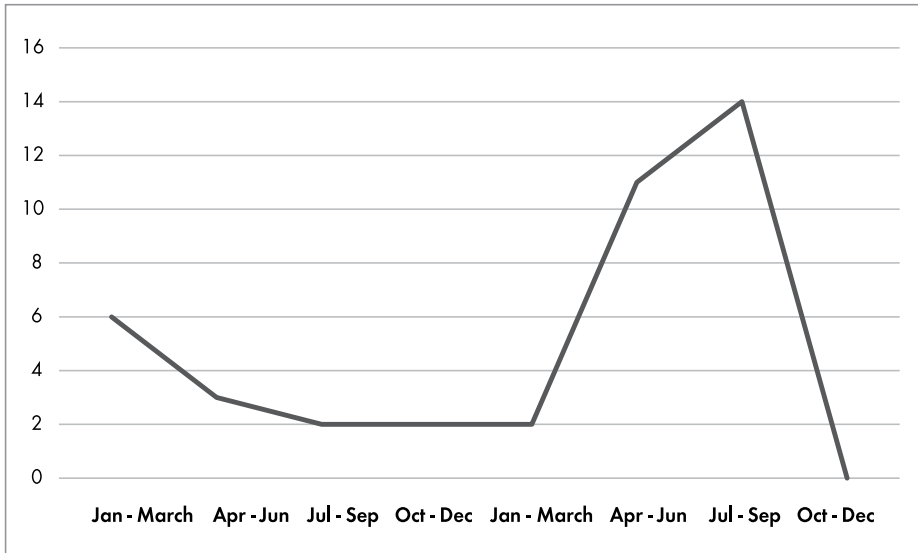
The requests themselves are worth attention: in 2015, the most frequently searched phrases using the word burkini were “black burkini” (*burkini noir*), “large burkini” (*burkini grande taille*), inexpensive burkini (*burkini pas cher*); in 2016 – “burkini Corsica” (*burkini corse*), “burkini photo” (*burkini photo*), “burkini Nice” (*burkini Nice*), “burkini prohibited” (*burkini interdit*), “burkini Cannes” (*burkini Cannes*), “prohibition of burkini” (*interdiction burkini*), “image of burkini” (*image burkini*), “sisco burkini” (*sisco burkini*), “burkini Marseille” (*burkini Marseille*).

As we can see, the number of popular queries in 2016 connected with the burkini increased, which was associated with the mediatization of this topic. The ban was carried out in the cities listed above. Many people were looking for pictures of burkini swimwear because they did not even know what it was. It suggests that the French did not hold prejudice against the Muslim swimsuit as it had not affected them on their beach holidays, until the media shed light on the problem, turning the discussion into a widely debated issue.

Diagram 2 presents data about the articles on ethnic topics in which we can see the problem of the burkini. The debate about this Muslim swimsuit began

long before the prohibition. However, during the period from March to September 2016, the burkini was discussed more frequently, and the news about the government actions and attempts to find the right solution to the issue appeared consistently.

Diagram 2. The number of articles in which the topic of burkini was discussed in 2015–2016.



Mediatization of the problem associated with the ban of the burkini takes the discussion to the political level. In the articles of this period, reflections on the Muslim bathing suit are called a “war,” as well as a “political problem”. The burkini issue is associated with the violation of legal rights and the values of the French Republic, thus translating it into the sphere of confrontation between the state and the individual. The removal of this topic from the sphere of religion and secularism allows us to speak about Muslim women in the context of gender rights and relations within the state. Opinion texts published on the site express the attitude towards the problem of the burkini as the stigmatization of Muslim women (Heinich 2016). Thus, the articles of the newspaper *Le Monde* allow us to judge the movement towards convergence of Muslims and the rest of society. The formation of a media boom around the problem of the burkini, statements of the Muslim children, and the prohibition of religious symbols in educational institutions bring a significant number of views and visitors to the sites of newspapers. A more extended mediatization was led by the issue of the Muslim veil, which we mentioned above. One of the most elucidating articles written on behalf of the

minority is a selection of stories of those who wear a headscarf (Dryef 2016), was published in August 2016. The authors of the article interviewed ordinary Muslim women in the centre of Paris about their life in France. Thus, the views of Muslim women on the prohibition of wearing a veil were reflected in the newspaper. The text talks about the choice of Muslim women and the perception of society. In addition, the articles contain a discussion of issues connected with tradition, fashion, parents' attitudes to the veil (including negative), and the prejudices of French society, which consider all Muslim women in Muslim headscarves to be terrorists.

Anne Chemin (2016) also cites the views of ordinary Muslim women through brief indirect and direct quotes, revealing the problems they face in everyday life. The most significant part of the article was awarded to the sociologist Nilüfer Göle, who represented an essential part of the movement for the education of Muslim women. Her presence in this article shows how mass media can facilitate dialogue between Muslim intellectuals, who take a serious position and respond to attacks in their direction.

In 2015–2016, this topic of the veil's ban at the university also appeared in articles within the sample. On April 19, 2016, the newspaper published the article "Banning the veil at the university adds a symbolic barrier to thousands of existing ones". The author of the text was Rosa Port-Royal (2016), a doctoral student at the University of Paris-13, who talked about her experiences with Muslim students and expressed her opinion on the banning at the university. The author emphasises that such government actions complicate access to higher education institutions for Muslims, making them feel guilty for the attacks that are associated in society with their faith.

The texts also raise questions of the prejudices of French society, whose members consider all Muslim women in the veil to be radical citizens.

6 Images of Muslim children on lemonde.fr

French schools have been accepting children of migrants from the end of the 19th century, however, based on recent research methods educational establishments have not yet been adapted to the continually renewing flow, and different types of migrants (Rigoni 2017: 40). It is especially difficult for this institution to define the meaning, functions, and type of secularism, which at this stage, everyone interprets in one's way.

School, without a doubt, is a crucial stage in the adjustment and socialisation of children, especially those who are trying to find themselves in a new culture. Our topic does not include criticism of school curricula and the weak representation

of the colonial past in textbooks. However, the theme of clothing, in particular, Muslim, has vague accusations of “too long skirt” (Le Monde 2015b) and other situations, makes us wonder whether government actions to support secularism and anti-discrimination policies are clear and understandable to school workers and journalists who write about these topics.

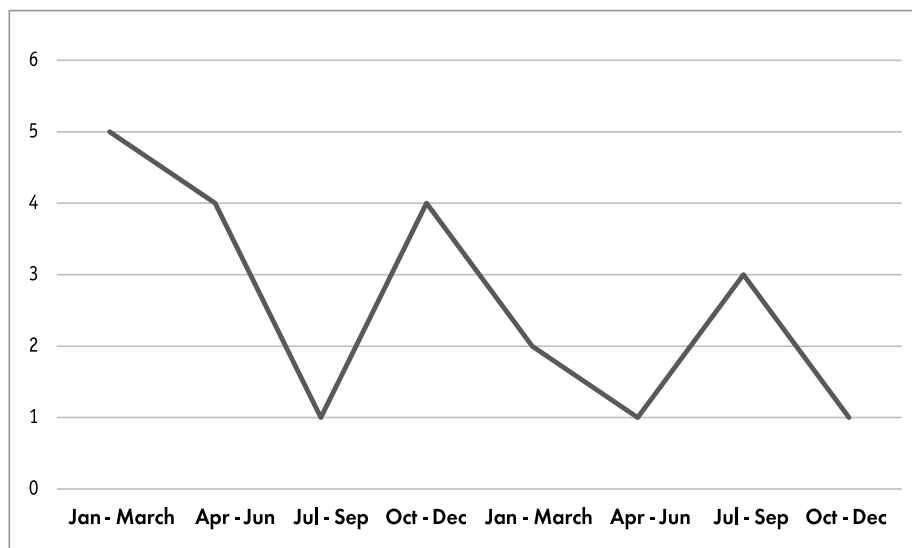
From the point of view of some specialists, the integration of migrants is complicated by the ignorance of the French colonisation period, as well as the incorrect image of Muslims in history. Articles show opinions about insufficient attention to the history of migration by schools (Battaglia 2015), which leads to an incorrect assessment of this period by children, mixed feelings amongst immigrants, and the stigmatisation of Islam in French textbooks (Collas 2016).

Religion and school, according to the articles published on the website, should be as separated as possible. This statement shows the main idea of a modern secularism policy defended by European intellectuals.

The issue of wearing religious symbols by Muslim children is a problem created specifically by the media (Tevanian 2005: 28). The articles on this topic do not contain the opinions of minorities themselves on this issue or the opinion of experts on wearing a Muslim headscarf in educational institutions (such as Nasira Guénif-Souilamas, the specialist in questions about women with North African roots in France). In the early 2000s, these discussions were held by only ardent opponents of headscarves among feminists and other representatives of various social and philosophical trends on TV and in newspapers (Tevanian 2005: 127).

Diagram 3 shows the number of articles addressed religion and school issues. We can note that the most active periods of coverage of these problems in lemonde.fr are January-March 2015, October-December 2015, and July-September 2016. This issue began to be discussed more frequently during terrorist acts; thus, the discussion was intensified at this time.

It is noteworthy that the very “victims” of discrimination rarely appear in lemonde.fr. Occasionally, the author, expressing his or her opinion, comes to the argument with quotations from Muslims, chosen from the context by herself/himself and confirming the main idea.

Diagram 3. The number of articles with the topic of religion and school.

Much like adult representatives of religious minorities, schoolchildren from this social group appear on the website from two sides: as the victims of the system and their misfortune or as hostile to French civil and social school laws. Immigrant children, most of whom belong to the Muslim culture, are often portrayed as unwilling to participate in the educational process (Baumier-Klarsfeld 2016) or unable to study for various reasons: they belong to a generation of immigrants (Battaglia and Collas 2016), and the French education system eliminates the motivation to study by discriminating and stigmatising them (Vincent 2016).

Some authors think that the blame for the lack of knowledge lies with the French schooling system, which cannot adapt to the reception of children from other countries (Baumard 2015). *Le Monde* often publishes articles about inequality in schools (Vincent 2016) and poor performance of immigrant pupils and workers. Such indicators stigmatise members of minorities, turning them into objects of statistics. This kind of social division creates conflict. These people are seen as an abstract media image of an immigrant, in which the minorities do not recognise themselves. On the other hand, the media could be a platform for dialogue. By using this platform, the majority and minority could resolve their issues.

The problems of Muslim children are often mediated, especially during the period 2015–2016, when society carefully monitored Islam.

Le Monde published articles about the arrests of children who expressed their radical views at school. In this case, the teacher, having heard such statements by the children, had to inform the school principal, who, in turn, had to decide:

to resolve the problem at the local level or to call the police. Notifying authorities is an extreme measure, which several teachers went to during the terrorist attacks, bypassing the necessary procedures. All this speaks of universal fear, which was directed against Muslims and other minorities. Thus, a teacher who was supposed to play his role as a "mediator between cultures" (Le Monde 2015c) became a servant of the law. Articles dedicated to this issue published exact quotes from children who "support terrorists."

Less mediatised, but also problematic, is the question of a pork-free menu for Muslim children in schools. Some local authorities (the mayor of the city of Chalon-sur-Saône) in France (Le Monde 2015d) tried to ban these meals, as they contradict the principles of secularism (Le Temps 2015).

7 Conclusion

The coverage of Muslims' life in a country where it is not the main one, has changed since the terrorist attacks of September 11. This date was a turning point in the perception of Islam; it complicated the problems of stigmatisation of this religion's representatives. One of the leading conductors of questions and answers in society is the mass media. They have the right to choose what story to tell, and how to prevent the current crisis and attacks on a specific category of the population under challenging circumstances. The image of the enemy, the one who disturbed the peace of the population and came to the peaceful life of people with war, is expected from the mass media during terrorist acts. Despite the fact that almost 20 years have passed since September 11, the mass media has not formed an editorial policy concrete enough to cover such incidents in order to avoid attacks and discrimination of Muslims in the country.

In its online version of the newspaper, Le Monde continues to accuse the mass media of prejudice against Muslims. The media construct the image of Islam, engendering fear of this religion, and creating prejudice.

The Muslim issue is portrayed in the media within the context of terrorist attacks in Europe between 2015 and 2016. The existence of Islamic radicalism is explained by a lack of recognition and a feeling of alienation. However, the media do not offer a way out of this situation, continuing to portray this problem as relevant, problematic and unsolvable. Positive articles on Islam are more likely to show a peaceful "branch" of this religion, speaking of modern Muslims as an exception, contrasting them against religious fanatics.

The opinion of Muslim women is practically not visible on the pages of Le Monde, while representatives of the majority often argue about Islamic symbols. Islam appears alongside terrorism in more than 50% of texts, even if they are not dedicated to the attacks of radicals.

During the period 2015–2016, in the online version of the newspaper *Le Monde*, Islam was discussed continuously along with issues relating to Muslim symbols and problems of communitarianism and secularism. Thus, Muslims appear in the newspaper as a religious minority trying to fight the existing problems in the new state. An interesting fact was that the themes coincide in the studies of different countries: Muslims continue to be portrayed together with extremism and terrorism, and they are condemned for wanting to enter politics and to finance religious education.

During the period of terrorist attacks in Europe in 2015–2016, the image of Muslims on *lemonde.fr* was constructed by mediatization of several events connected with them.

These events can be separated into three main groups: Muslims as potential terrorists, the incompatibility of Islamic religious symbols with European values, and Islam as an obstacle to secularism in school. Muslims on the pages of the newspaper were represented as victims of discrimination or as criminals.

Muslim men were mostly accused and were punished by anti-Muslim acts. In some articles, discrimination of Muslims was seen as one of the reasons for extremist actions. The attitude of the people and government of France to these children of an immigrant generation often explained in *lemonde.fr* the fact that terrorists were born and raised in France. Several articles during this period revealed the biography of terrorists could be seen as attempts to find the reason of radicalisation in actions of society itself. However, these articles also targeted Muslims as potential terrorists.

Religious symbols became the second topic that was connected with Muslims during the chosen period in *lemonde.fr*. The number of articles and constant appeal to the opinion of the French nationalist party led the readers to a conclusion about the incompatibility of Islam traditions (especially in clothing) with Republican values.

The media complete their image of Muslims by showing children who “approved terrorists’ actions.” Moreover, female Muslim pupils have the same problems as women with religious symbols, which are seen as impossible to support in French secular school.

Among all the articles revealing problems that Islam creates in French society, there are texts about representatives of this religion who feel like a part of France and live according to its laws. They try to convince non-Muslims that terrorism has no connection with real faith and religious canons.

The desire for mediatization of potentially popular topics creates a misleading image of ethnic and religious minorities, especially during a difficult period in the world’s history.

Muslims are a large part of French society; however, they are not considered as equals in the media and often seen as a threat or an obstacle to the secular and democratic life of the country. The media, in this case, instead of maintaining peace and creating communicational possibilities, produce new problems which have a short-term limited duration but long-term consequences for social stability and intercultural coexistence.

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