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**Menstruation in news media: The  
impact of media discourses on the  
menstrual taboo in France**

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# Abstract

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The aim of this thesis is to investigate how the news media can challenge a social construction when it covers an event related to a taboo. The main question guiding this thesis is how the news media discourses about the ‘tampon tax’ in France can challenge the menstrual taboo.

Every society is constituted of taboos which aim at maintaining order and hierarchies. However, these taboos oppress the ones who live with them, since they are reduced to silence and invisibility, which means that all their issues will be forgotten. The menstrual taboo is one of them and tends towards oppressing and stigmatizing women with the aim of keeping them away from the public sphere. Indeed, menstruation is considered as a threat for patriarchy so that women have to keep their periods invisible and controlled. The menstrual taboo has also consequences on women's health, well-being and even social status.

All the stereotypes about menstruation are widely spread through the media whose discursive practices reproduces these stereotypes and reinforce them. In mass media, menstruation is, in fact, either invisible or depicted in a negative way. However, in 2015 in France, menstruation has been under the spotlight thanks to the debate to lower the tax on menstrual products. This battle named by news media outlets and activists the ‘tampon tax’ has led to important media coverage and also to several demonstrations and activists actions. Although the debate was mainly an economic one, it has brought menstruation at the heart of the public sphere.

In this research, I used critical discourse analysis to analyse all the national French newspapers, online news media and two TV news which covered the debate about the 'tampon tax'.

Through this thesis, I found out that the discourses about the 'tampon tax' in the news media are either economic or feminist. Although these two discourses are very different, they both tend to reproduce gender stereotypes about menstruation and they also depict menstrual blood as an abject threat. I argue that the news media cannot challenge the menstrual taboo as

long as they represent menstruation as a threat for society and that activists can, however, use menstrual blood as a weapon against the power with the aim of getting freed from patriarchy.

**Keywords:** *menstruation, patriarchy, menstrual blood, news media, abjection, activism*

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# Introduction

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"Why did periods cause so many discussions this year?" (Le Huffington Post, 2015).

This question raised by the Huffington Post at the end of December perfectly sums up the media coverage on menstruation in France in 2015. Stories and social action such as a picture showing menstrual blood censored on Instagram or pads stuck on walls in India and Germany to denounce violence against women, have, in the past few months, given menstruation more and more visibility in the media. In France, it has even led to a passionate debate last autumn, when on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October, 2015, the National Assembly had to vote an amendment to lower the tax on hygienic menstrual products such as pads, tampons and menstrual cups. The latter were at that date submitted to the normal tax, which is 20%. Following a petition launched by the feminist group Georgette Sand in February 2015 to lower this tax to 5%, like any first necessity goods, the socialist deputy, Christine Coutelle, proposed this amendment as part of the finance bill 2016. After a debate in a mostly empty lower chamber, the Assembly decided to reject the lowering of the tax and created at the same time a lack of comprehension and anger from women and activists. What could have been quickly shelved, has instead triggered the beginning of what the news media called "the struggle for the 'tampon tax'" (Le Monde, 2015).

Along November 2015, feminist activists multiplied actions to lower the 'tampon tax': demonstrations organised by Georgette Sand, pads stained with tomato sauce and stuck on the wall of the Assembly or panties covered with fake blood and sent to politicians by the group Culotte Gate, allowed the touchy subject of menstruation to submerge the public sphere in very little time. All these actions led to a vote in favour of the lowering of the tax by the Senate on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November and, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 2015, the Assembly decided to lower the tax on hygienic menstrual products, which took effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 2016.

Through these actions, activist movements also managed to make menstruation visible. Whether it was in the media or just in the language, menstruation is usually never showed or designated (Rosewarne, 2012; Thornton, 2013). Even though it is a natural phenomenon that most women encounter, menstruation has been drown in silence by the

taboo surrounding it (Delaney & al, 1976). Between the shame and disgust provoked by their evocation, menstruation is often represented in pop culture like a villain which makes women out of control (Rosewarne, 2012). Due to this invisibility or the negative discourses about it, periods are often lived as something which needs to be hidden at the risk of being stigmatised (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2011). The menstrual taboo acts, indeed, as a feature of the social system (Schoemaker and Tetlock, 2012) which oppresses and discriminates women and has, thus, a deep impact on human rights. This is why breaking the taboo is essential.

Although the perception of menstruation has changed through times (Lupton, 2012; Thomas, 2007), it is still a universal taboo which has negative consequences on the lives of women at every level and more especially on their health, well-being, sexuality and social status (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2011). Even though menstruation has often been studied in the field of anthropology, the taboo around it has led to a lack of knowledge whether it be in the everyday life with the spreading of stereotypes, such as menses are dirty and, as a consequence, need to be controlled and hidden (Rosewarne, 2012) or in scientific fields. Although the reproductive cycle of women has been subjected to a wide medicalisation and a lot of research about the suppression of menstruation (Barnack & Johnston-Robledo, 2006), issues directly linked to menstrual troubles still suffer from a lack of knowledge (Giard, 2015).

Regarding the maintain of the menstrual taboo and the spreading of all the stereotypes related to it, several research studies point out the responsibility of mass media due to their central role in the public sphere (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2011; Rosewarne, 2012; Shailesh Yagnik, 2013). Indeed, the menstrual taboo is enforced and transmitted through discourses (Thornton, 2013). In the past, the media has highly contributed to the change of behaviour about taboo such as HIV/AIDS and homosexuality by framing it in another way (Shailesh Yagnik, 2013). This is why the representations of menstruation in mass media has become a key point for the ones who want to break this taboo (Bobel, 2011; Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2011).

In an article published in 2011 by Joan C. Christler and Ingrid Johnston-Robledo named "The Menstrual Mark: Menstruation as Social Stigma", solutions are suggested to end the stigma. They argue that the stigma of menstruation can be challenged by media



representations, especially in pop culture, activism and discussions (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2011).

## **Aim of the research and justifications**

- The aim of this research is to propose results, which can be used to analyse and break all kinds of taboo, thanks to media. Through this thesis, I would like to show that media can have the power to break taboos thanks to their discourses. In this thesis, representation will be considered as a form of discourse, so I will rather use the word discourse.
- This is why, I would like to analyse how media can challenge the menstrual taboo. Even if there has been several studies about it in India or even United States, the amount of researches about menstruation in media in France remains very poor.
- Due to a large amount of discussions provoked by the 'tampon tax' and the intensive media coverage in France, this research would like to focus on that specific case; especially since this debate was presented in the news as both a feminist and an economic issue, which is new for a topic related to menstruation.

## **Research questions**

The main research question is how news media discourses in France in 2015 about the 'tampon tax' can challenge the menstrual taboo. Through this research, I will try to answer to the following questions:

- How did the economic discourse in news media enforce the menstrual taboo with the 'tampon tax'?
- In that context, how has the menstrual taboo been shaped by the feminist discourse?
- And how did the menstrual taboo shape any discourses in news media about the 'tampon tax'?

To answer these questions, news related to the 'tampon tax' and published in French newspapers, online media and TV news will be selected. The data will be collected and analysed with the help of critical discourse analysis and theories from the fields of gender and feminist studies.

# Literature Review

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Menstruation has always been depicted as a curse for women (Delaney & al, 1977) and still remains a taboo topic, rarely addressed in the media (Rosewarne, 2012). In this chapter, I will discuss about the menstrual taboo, how it oppresses women and how media discourses are central in the reproduction of this taboo.

I will first discuss about the concept of taboo and then focus on the menstrual taboo. I will develop about its roles in society, its impacts on women's lives and how it takes effect through discursive practices.

With the aim of giving a better understanding about the menstrual taboo, I will then develop about the construction of the woman's body in Western society and discuss about the need to control it.

Finally, as discursive practices take effect and are spread through the mass media (Maigret, 2012), I will focus the discussion on news media outlets. I will develop about their biases and how their discourses tend towards oppressing women. I will then discuss about their relationship with feminist activists and why the news media are crucial to break the menstrual taboo.

## **1. Taboo and menstrual taboo**

To better understand the representation of menstruation in the media and how menstrual taboos shape media discourses, it is essential to first discuss taboos, their characteristics, and their role in society. Given that there are plenty of taboos in existence, each unique and different from others, we will focus on the menstrual taboo, its consequences and roles in society.

## 1.1 Taboo and society

In 1913, Freud devotes one of his analysis to the concept of taboo. In *Totem and Taboo*, the psychoanalyst tries to understand the prohibition of incest, which led him to understand what a taboo is. Although in his essay, Freud understands taboo through a psychoanalytical perspective, he gives us some clues to understand how the concept of taboo rules society. According to him, taboo is transmitted through generations. This shows how people perceive some phenomenon can change the reality. He uses the example of incest and how the perception of it, as something wrong, has led to the creation of some social rules. Using the definition of Wundt, Freud describes taboo as one the oldest non-written codes of humanity (1913, p.21). A taboo has a sacred, impure and even forbidden characteristic. He explains that the one who breaks a taboo becomes taboo oneself (1922, p.30) and in that way, one is turned into an (non-) example for the other members of society. Does it mean that a taboo is meant to keep order in society? If we follow the Freudian analysis, the answer is yes. This is also what Mary Douglas explains when she defines the concept of taboo (in Thomas, 2007). According to her, taboos are made to maintain order in society. They are seen as dirty and repulsive (Douglas, 1966). So the taboo is there to protect, which means that there is a sense of fears underpinning it. Wundt goes even further and does not consider the taboo as impure but as demonic (Wundt in Freud, 1913, p.52). A taboo embodies what is wrong, what is evil. To explain how people maintain taboos, Freud (1913, p.55) refers to moral consciousness, which is the internal perception of the rejection of some desires. Moral consciousness makes people aware of what is wrong and condemns some acts. This can also explain the unthinkable characteristic of a taboo. Every practice considered as a taboo remains very invisible in society, even if some social issues can be linked to it. Taboos are rarely evoked, indeed, because they hurt the moral (Schoemaker and Tetlock, 2012).

## 1.2 Menstruation case: a universal taboo

Although taboos are socially constructed and aim at maintaining order in society (Freud, 1913), it seems now important to focus on the menstrual taboo and its characteristics. I will first discuss the effects of the menstrual taboo, then its implications on the life of

women as a direct result from the taboo, and finally, I will discuss the role of the menstrual taboo in society.

### **1.2.1. A Taboo of exclusion and sexual discrimination**

In the menstruation case, one can notice that the taboo appears even in the language. This is, indeed, one of the characteristics of the menstrual taboo, which has been described like a communication taboo by Thomas (2007). Many words and expressions are used to talk about menarches without explicitly mentioning them, like ‘Aunt Flo and Cousin Red’, which allows us to argue that social interactions pertaining to menstruation appear to be shaped by this taboo. The same observation can be made about media – whatever the kind of media it is – since menstruation is a topic, which is rarely tackled or only cover in a negative way (Seale, 2007). In media, menstruation often appears as a burden and most of articles or reports dedicated to the topic are generally dealing with the negative aspects of menstruations, such as pre-menstrual syndromes ((Seale, 2007)). Sometimes, the suppression of menstruation is even pictured as something positive (Luke, 1997).

In the case of news media, it is even unusual to find a topic related to menstruation. Although the case of the 'tampon tax' got a great media coverage in the written press during the past two months in France, the most popular TV news made only one report about the debate, which is quite representative of the invisibility of menstruation in news media. It seems that the moral consciousness defined by Freud still affects the media whose discourses are, then, shaped by the menstrual taboo. Besides, media environment is considered as a moral space (Silverstone, 2006). This means that the media has a moral responsibility, but they are also supposed to embody moral beliefs. This is one of the reasons why menstruation, which is considered as morally shocking, is rarely or badly depicted in media. Moreover, mass media is culturally constructed and they depict an interpretation of reality which means that their discourses are actually discursive practices which embody ideologies (Maigret, 2012). The media discourses about menstruation will then have an impact on women’s social life.

However, these lack of or negative representations of menstruation have an impact on women. In the article *The Menstrual Mark: Menstruation as Social Stigma*, Ingrid Johnston-Robledo and Joan C. Chrisler analyse how menstruation acts as a social stigma on women. A

stigma is a mark that sets people apart from the others and marginalised them (Goffman, 1963). Goffman (1963, p.4) describes three different types of stigma: "abomination of the body", "blemishes of individual characters" and social markers associated to marginalised groups (for example gender, race, sexuality). Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler (2013) argue that the menstrual taboo belongs to these three categories. The secret around menstruations and the need to hide women's feelings and bodily sensitivity when they actually have their periods, is relating to some of the symptoms of the stigma (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2013). Although some women enjoy having their periods and live them as a source of embodiment of their feminine identity (Knight, 1991), most of the time, they feel ashamed. If we use the work of Freud, the stigma around menstruations clearly appears as a way of pressure to keep silence around this. A woman who is having her period become taboo. In their article, Chrisler and Johnston-Robledo use the closet theory to explain that when a woman is menstruating, she is in the closet (2013), because if she talks about it, she risks to be stigmatised. Delaney and al (1977) described the menstrual taboo as a taboo of exclusion.

They also describe menstruation as a sexual taboo, because one of the most common idea is that menstruation symbolise a period of abstinence (Delaney and al, 1977). Even though, there is no interdiction, sex during menstruation is seen as something that should not be done, because of its filthy feature (Eriksen Paige, 1977). In a patriarchal society, the main goal of intercourse is reproduction (Ussher, 2007), which is supposed to be impossible during menstruation. Menstrual blood is, incidentally, the signifier of the absence of pregnancy (Douglas, 1966). This is the reason why sexual intercourses during menstruation is seen as unclean and taboo, This idea, which has been conveyed very importantly by (the three monotheist) religions, emphasises the reproductive role of women in society (Lee & Sasser-Cohen, 1996) and heads toward representing menstruation and menopause as a failure of women's body (Lee & Sasser-Cohen, 1996, p.23). This conception is reinforced by the idea of dirtiness around it. Menstruation also participates in making women feel dirty and ashamed while having their periods. These ideas are very common in mass media and even broadcasted through advertisements for menstrual hygienic products, which keep on using, as commercial arguments, the need of freshness. The necessity for having no odour also contributes to women's feeling of filthiness during their periods (Luke, 1997).

### **1.2.2. The impacts of the menstrual taboo on women's life**

In the above mentioned essay, Freud tries to classify the different kinds of taboo, which exist in society. He qualifies the menstrual taboo as a "temporary taboo" (Freud, 1922, p.22) because it lasts only a couple of days per month. However, thinking that women suffer from the menstrual taboo only while they are having their periods seems to be a limited representation of reality.

The menstrual taboo has indeed, an impact on the everyday lives of women and that, in every societies as it is a universal taboo. For example, in some countries, girls cannot go to school while they have their periods which has direct consequences on their education, because they have to miss class and consequently, on their entire life. In Western societies, one of the most striking example is the case of endometriosis. A lot of women suffer from this disease but do not know because of the preconceived notion that it is completely normal to have painful and uncomfortable periods. Due to dimension of this taboo, there is a lack of discussion and representation about it and therefore a lack of knowledge, which leads to women suffering for years and even think that there is something wrong with them before having being diagnosed with the condition (Giard, 2014).

The menstrual taboo then, should not be seen as a "temporary taboo", because it has long-lasting consequences on the life of women and it affects every aspect of their lives, such as health and social well-being. Breaking the menstrual taboo is then, a matter of human rights (Thomas, 2007). However, the Freudian analysis seems important to understand the psychological effects of taboos and how they are internalised and perpetuated by individuals.

### **1.2.3. The role of the menstrual taboo**

Discourses about menstruation tend to represent it as a "woman thing" (Schoemaker and Tetlock, 2012). In media, most of the articles dedicated to menarches come, indeed, from the feminine press (Luke, 1997). For example, even when debates about the 'tampon tax' occurred in France, and even if most of the news media covered the topic, a few of them, like *Le Parisien* or *Le Figaro* chose to publish a longest version of their articles in their feminine media (*La Parisienne* and *Madame Figaro*), which implies that menstruation is a topic that only raises interest among women. In general, discourses about menstruation reinforce gender

difference. This idea is also shared by Erika M. Thomas (2007). In her article "Menstruation Discrimination: The Menstrual Taboo as Rhetorical Function of Discourse in the National and International Advances of Women's Rights", she specifically analyses the impact of the menstrual taboo on women's life. According to her, taboos are made by leaders to reinforce hierarchies, and more particularly gender hierarchy, in the hope for keeping stabled power structures and for avoiding division in society (2007, pp.67-68).

Moreover, this taboo really reinforces differences between men and women (2007, p.68). It creates an "us" and a "them". In that respect, the one who is seen as taboo is more or less put outside of society and becomes the Other (Thomas, 2007). According to Thomas (2007), this division is made purposefully. The menstrual taboo implied that menstruation are a part of the private sphere and do not belong at all to the public sphere, which means that, when a woman has her periods, her access to the public sphere must be restricted (Thomas, 2007, p.71). So the menstrual taboo is also excluding in that way. As the menstrual taboo appears to be universal within women, this explanation seems relevant to every societies but at different scales.

The public sphere is the space of democratic exchanges, where media are one of the main actors (Habermas, 1962). In a definition made by Nancy Fraser (1990), the public sphere is constituted of majority publics who enjoy a lot of visibility and of minorities that, she names, subaltern counter publics. The public sphere is then, a moving space of conflicts which is not stable, and where minority groups will sometimes make alliances against the majorities to try to get visibility (Fraser, 1990). This definition seems important to understand why some groups and issues which are related to them are over represented in media whereas others are not at all. The public sphere is, indeed, not equal, but suffers from gender division which has consequences on sexual minorities and also citizens (Lister, in Thomas, 2007, p.72). Thus, the restricted access to the public sphere to women is one of the symptoms of patriarchy, since this reinforces the power of those who have full access to it.

This also explains why menstruation is so invisible in the media. Menstruation is considered to be part of the private sphere and meant to stay locked there. This idea is wide spread through mass media. The exclusion of menstruating women from the public sphere makes, therefore, mostly impossible that menstruation can reach this space of visibility.



A couple of decades ago, women had no access at all to the public sphere, but with their emancipation, their access has increased Thomas (2007, p.74) notes that this fits with the growing of the hygiene industry and the scientific knowledge about menstruation. This is why, it is important that women get complete access to the public sphere to break the menstrual taboo and tackle the issues related to it (Thomas, 2007). Yet, nowadays, women keep on being rejected by public sphere, unless menstruations remain invisible and controlled (Thomas, 2007, p.76). Where does this need to control and keep the menstruation out of sight come from?

## **2. The construction of the female body and the need to control it**

One of the main explanations about this need of control comes from the construction of bodies of women in Western societies (Thomas, 2007). Discourses about the bodies are, indeed, not neutral, but gendered, especially regarding the female body which is seen as dirty and leaky (Thomas, 2007). To understand the idea of dirtiness and its impact on the representation of menstruation, it seems important to focus first on the concept of abjection. Then, this study will try to understand the representation of blood in Western society in order to discuss the control of the body, in a last section.

### **2.1. Abjection and body fluids**

One of the characteristics of menstruation is the disgust provoked by menstrual blood (Rosewarne, 2012). In films, menstruation is seldom pictured or evoked. When it happens, it is depicted as something disgusting, similar to defecation or urine. It appears in either comic or horror contexts (Rosewarne, 2012). In advertisement for menstrual products, the representation of menstrual blood is not showed at all and it has been for many years replaced by a blue liquid (Luke, 1997). Finally, when menstruation is mentioned in mass media, menstrual blood is also eluded. For example, most of the news media chose images of tampons box to illustrate the articles about the 'tampon tax', which implies that menstrual blood can be too shocking to be showed.

The media discourses about menstruation being something so dirty and disgusting that it is not to be showcased, seem to be directly linked to the concept of abjection defined by Julia Kristeva. Julia Kristeva (1982) argues that abjection designates what provokes disgust and what goes against the moral. She uses the example of body fluids, which are considered as taboo and as something that should not be mentioned. According to her, body fluids are considered as abject because they threaten boundaries between the inside and the outside, the self and the Other (Kristeva, 1982). To understand this better, we need to take into account that the body is a social construction (Blackman, 2013). The self is a concept that tries to unify the mind and the body. However, it is constructed through the Other (Blackman, 2013).

Yet, for Kristeva, body fluids are seen as neither the self nor the other. Because they cannot be controlled, they are seen as leaky and as polluting substances. This concept of polluting substances has also been developed by Douglas (1966) who argues that the body symbolises at the same time society and impure things, such as body fluids, are anomalies and do not conform to a social order. This is why, they are seen as polluting substances and as a danger for society, because they cross the body envelop and so, the social order.

In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Kristeva also describes the abject as more primitive and she explains that it is what get us closer to animal. The use of the concept of abjection emphasises the dualisms between mind and body, and natural and cultural (Blackman, 2013, p.94). In either case, the mind is always seen as the noble part, whereas the body is more seen as lower (Blackman, 2013). A woman who has her periods is seen as more primitive. The monthly event being out of women's control (Ussher, 2006), it is associated with the lack of power over oneself and animality. Abjection seems therefore to play a role in the construction of the female body and sexuality. This stereotype is very common in popular culture (Rosewarne, 2012) and seems to be reproduced and spread through mass media discourses. By keeping menstrual blood invisible and by choosing not to represent it at all, media reinforce and contribute to the idea of menstruation as abject. Therefore, media representation of menstruation is influenced by and shaped through the concept of abject, which is directly linked to moral. This explains why menstrual blood has been very rarely depicted, but also reinforces the menstrual taboo.

In her book, Kristeva (1982) argues that all body fluids such as menstrual blood, urine, defecation or semen are abject. However, this idea should be nuanced. Although, in general, all body fluids can be considered as polluting substances (urine and defecation in particular) and as taboo, I would argue that some are seen as more abject than other. It seems, indeed, that for example, breastmilk or semen are considered as less aversive than menstrual blood (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2011). In traditional heterosexual porn targeting men, for example, seminal display seems inevitable (Moore & Weissbein, 2010). However, other genres such as advertisement sometimes use the codes of the porn culture and it is not surprising to see allusion and/or representation of semen in some adverts (Gill, 2009). Tuck (2009, p.82) explains that semen used to be considered as "a purified form of blood". Menstrual blood, on the contrary, is considered as impure (Douglas, 1966). The notion of purity has played an important part in the construction of the female body in Western society

and seems to come directly from religion. On the other hand, there is another opposite trend, which tends to depict blood as a sign of purity (lineage) and even a symbol of power. Although nowadays the notion of purity does not appear as such in mass media, this ambivalence between the representations of blood and the representations of menstrual blood still exists.

## 2.2. The ambivalence of blood representations

Blood is a body fluid, which is subject to ambivalence in terms of meaning and representations. Although menstrual blood remains very invisible in media, blood is often depicted. In TV news, it is nowadays more and more common to see blood in reports about a murderer attacks or about blood donation, for example. The aim of showing blood is, obviously, not the same in these two examples. The same observation can be made in pop culture. It is, indeed, quite common to see blood in films and whichever the genre of film it may be. One may wonder if blood really is abject or if abjection only concerns menstrual blood?

Firstly, it is important to underscore that if blood can and is associated to horror and death, it is also paradoxically associated to life and power (Foucault, 1976). Blood relationships has been the foundation of any patriarchal societies (Weber, 2005). The incest taboo, and the laws which result from it, is actually based on blood relationship (Freud, 1913). Blood has also been used to determine social class and has been, therefore, used as a tool to create and justify social hierarchy and oppression. If we consider society as a reflection of the body (Douglas, 1966), I would therefore argue that blood is essential to make society works. Blood is seen as powerful because it is vital. However, when blood runs through the body in an uncontrollable way – like it is the case with menstruation – it then becomes an abject subject: it represents a threat for society and its social order. Besides female blood is, simultaneously, seen as a symbol of danger and divine (Douglas, 1966). It seems that if menstrual blood is used as a tool of oppression, it is also seen as a source of power (Knight, 1991). In different myths and beliefs, menstruation blood was represented as sacred, magical and powerful (Knight, 1991). In that respect, female blood was even used for some magical rituals (Knight, 1991; Ussher, 2006). Similarly, the phenomenon of menstrual synchronisation

between women who live together can be used as a way to unify them and to create a sense of solidarity (Knight, 1991). This can be perceived as a strength against men and therefore against patriarchy. So, to think about menstruation in terms of power acknowledges and reinforces the idea that menstrual blood can be a threat for the social order. Thus, this explains the need to control menstruation and body fluids in general.

### 2.3. Control of the body and discursive practices in media

To understand the need to control the body, it seems important to focus on the work of Michel Foucault. According to him, the body is an effect of power and discourse (Foucault, 1977). This idea seems to follow on from the general idea that Douglas presents about the body as a reflection of society. However, in the work of Foucault, the body appears more as the site of power relations. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), he analyses the emergence of the modern prison in Western society and coins the concept of disciplinary power. The particularity of disciplinary power is that it does not appear as restrictive or repressive. Through internalized norms, the subjects will be led to desire certain things or certain ways of being. The disciplinary power is then productive and these social norms act, indeed, as self-monitoring and self-regulating practices. They will transform the body to make it conform to social context, hence the concept of docile or disciplined body.

However, as said earlier, body fluids appear to be the only part of the body which cannot be fully controlled, nor disciplined. They seem to be an obstacle to the creation of the subject and this reinforces the idea that they threaten boundaries and the social order. The latter can explain why there is also a need to hide body fluids such as menstrual blood and try to keep them secret and invisible. Foucault's analyses show how these practices are integrated in each of us and the extent to which they affect the production and the assertion of the self. Their integration also contributes to the transformation of these unnatural practices into natural ones. Taboos seem to appear as a social feature, aiding surveillance and discipline. If we use the different points developed by Foucault (1977), taboos act like a prison since the one who lives with a taboo has to keep it invisible and secret. Then, the gaze and the discourses of peers regarding a taboo topic act as way of surveillance, policing the behaviour of each other. Finally, breaking a taboo leads to some forms of punishment.

The strength of the disciplinary power of a taboo, is its taken-for-granted characteristic (Ussher, 2006). The work of Foucault underlines the importance of discourses and how disciplinary power is internalised and how it becomes a norm (Woodward in Blackman, 2013). We can then talk about self-surveillance (Foucault, 1977). Although the work of Foucault gives us lots of clues to understand the importance of discourses, it seems regretful that he did not focused enough of his analysis on the media (Boyer, 2011). Due to its central place in the public sphere and omnipresence in the everyday life, mass media plays an important role in the spreading and the normalisation of the disciplinary powers. The discourses on menstruation in mass media is an example of discursive practice since they reproduce and reinforce the menstrual taboo and head toward the normalisation of the idea that menstruation belong to the private sphere, because they are too abject to be part of the public sphere.

In *History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Foucault also argues that, since the eighteenth century, female body has been the object of a high surveillance and regulation with the aim of controlling the sexuality of women. In that respect, thinking about the menstrual taboo as a disciplinary power underscores the patriarchal social context in which we evolve and which oppresses women. The female body has always been positioned in a negative way (Foucault, 1976). Through discourses, their body is signified by taboos and transgressions (Ussher, 2006), which raises a problem insofar as the taboo surrounding the female reproductive body (in other words, menstruating women) has been transformed into medical, scientific or even legal truths (Ussher 2006, p.15).

In the analyses of Foucault, it seems that everybody undergoes and accepts this submission. Yet, this state of passivity is not admitted by everyone. There are some examples that I will develop further which shows that there is a great amount of people who do not accept it and even struggle about it. Another reproach made to Foucault's study comes from feminist scholars, as he does not acknowledge that the body is also disciplined in a gendered way (Lee & Sasser-Cohen, 1996).

### **3. News media and discourses about women issues: a gendered construction of reality challenged by activists**

Now that we have a better understanding of how discourses construct and oppress the body of women and more especially how the menstrual taboo acts like a disciplinary power, it seems important to focus on news media and more especially how and why, they reproduce these discourses and how they are challenged by feminist activists.

#### **3.1. News media as a cultural product**

Due to their central position in the public sphere, mass media play an important part in the transmission of beliefs and knowledges. In the case of news media, their role is to give information to citizens about social issues, ideas and debate. They are not dissociable from democracy (Dahlgren, 2012). This is an idea supported by Arpan Shailesh Yagnik (2013) in his article *Reframing Menstruation in India: Metamorphosis of the Menstrual Taboo With the Changing Media Coverage*. According to him, the media is very powerful and has a real impact on public opinion. Silverstone (2006) even goes further as to argue that the media has a great impact on the everyday lives of people. Although the world exists outside the media, the latter provides a framework in which and within they construct a world visible in the eyes of everybody (Silverstone, 2006). In his article, Arpan Shailesh Yagnik (2013) focuses on this media framework and argues that media coverage can be powerful enough to change a taboo. He argues that framing theory is necessary to reach that aim. In fact, according to Erving Goffman (1974), a problem can become public and so, visible to anyone, only if a frame is built. The concept of framing has been first developed by Gregory Bateson who argues that a message cannot be understood without a reference to a metamessage (Menashe & Siegel, 1998). Frames are, in fact, necessary to make sense out of issues. The way a story is told and positioned within a frame plays a decisive role on how individuals and opinion leaders understand this issue and response to it (Menashe & Siegel, 1998). Depending on how a problem is framed, individuals have a different reaction and get more or less involved into this issue (Menashe & Siegel, 1998; Shailesh Yagnik, 2013).

However, the idea of framing highlights an important fact about news media: they do not reflect reality as they aim, but they rather offer a constructed representation of it, like any other kind of media (Gill, 2007). The news media is indeed, the fruit of a work of production. According to Rosalind Gill (2007, p.114) news reflect, actually, "the dominant cultural assumptions about who and what is important". The events depicted have been selected because they were considered as newsworthy (Gill, 2007). However, what is considered as newsworthy is determined by gender, class, sex, power, nationality and race (Gill, 2007). That means that news are not objective since they result from a subjective choice. Then, when a news are reported, the language and images chosen transform the "perceived world" into a "signified world" (Charaudeau, in Bertini, 2015). As a world is complex, this is essential to make it easier to understand. To transform an event into news in a simple way, categories will be used to make the world easier to understand (Maigret, 2012). Tuchman defines this as a "typification" which will lead to a standardisation of media discourses (Maigret, 2012). This work is made by journalists who are, before everything, individuals in a society whose norms, values, and beliefs they have internalized (Gill, 2007; Bertini, 2015). The framing and standardisation are obviously biased and head toward the reproduction and the spreading of stereotypes. Therefore, discursive practices as defined by Foucault will be fully integrated in the news media production and will lead to the reproduction and the spreading of one dominant discourse aiming at stigmatising and controlling women. That explains why menstruation is so invisible in the news media or is represented in a negative way. The topic and all the issues related to that have been considered as not newsworthy since it is something which has to stay invisible.

The use of framing theory to break the taboo, then, as advised by Shailesh Yagnik (2013), can actually lead to some biases and not be as successful as he predicted. In his article, he also argues that in the case of a taboo, we can usually observe different stages in the framing. In the stage one, there is no framing at all. In the case of the menstrual taboo, this stage fits to the invisibility of menstruation in media. Then, in the stage two, the framing is negative. Then, at the stage three, there is a positive framing and media will start to deal with health and social issues linked to menstruation. Finally, in the stage four comes the normalizing framing. That means that menstruation will be depicted as a bigger issue and media will depict "other aspects like social justice, human rights, empowerment, gender inequality, and development" (Shailesh Yagnik, 2013, p.629). Although this perspective is



interesting, this argument should be discussed, because due to the biases in the framing of an event, even if menstruation is framed as a development issue for example, it seems that the news will not escaped to stereotypes. In the case of menstruation, gender stereotypes carry a lot of weight in their representations.

### 3.2. Gendered representations of women and their issues in news media

News media are particularly subject to the reproduction of gender stereotypes. Broadly speaking, women remain very invisible in news media, especially if the news are about politics, government, business or economy (Gill, 2007). They are, indeed, mostly absent from the political or economic life and they are more likely to appear in news about health, social issues and arts, which are considered like feminine domains (Gill, 2007). Female politicians or experts are less invited to give their opinions in news media (Gill, 2007). When women are represented, they are depicted in another way than men and gender stereotypes are reproduced. More attention is paid on how they look like or their marital status, for example (Gill, 2007). In the case of menstruation, it will be portrayed as a concern of woman.

One explanation might be the lack or absence of female representation in power position (Gill, 2007). In that case, media would merely be a reflection of reality. However, news media discourse seem to be more representative of the public sphere dynamics. As said previously, the gender division tends to exclude women from the public sphere (Thomas, 2007). The direct consequences are the reproduction of this gender division, and all the stereotypes, which result from it, in news media and more generally in mass media. Thus, most of the news is, actually, designed by and for men (Gill, 2007) since the public sphere is dominated by them. This is why, issues related to women are underrepresented and topics which constitute a threat for patriarchy (such as menstruation or even feminist movements) are never represented or just in a negative way.

### 3.3. Representations challenged by feminist activists

Although menstruation suffers from a lack of representation in mass media, in 2015 in France, it has been several times at the spotlight and especially, in the news media. Whether it is to denounce the censor of menstrual blood in social media (Rupi Kaur, 2015), the presence of toxic products in tampons (Bèle, 2015), or the debate about the 'tampon tax', which enjoyed an important media coverage, it seems that menstruation is suddenly become newsworthy; yet, the menstrual taboo still exists.

With the aforementioned, the question now is: how did menstruation get this visibility? The common point about all these examples previously cited is activism. Thanks to social media and also to their actions, feminist and more especially, menstrual activists managed to get the attention of media and consequently, put some lights on the issues related to menstruation.

Feminist activists and news media seem, indeed, to have a love-hate relationship. From the eighties, media has started to represent feminist activists as responsible of women's precariousness and misfortune which has led to a negative representation of their movements and a discredit of their actions (Faludi, 1990). As for the feminist activists, they have understood and denounced since a long time the role of media in the oppression of women body due to their discourses representative of the patriarchal society (Gill, 2007). That being said, they also know that media discourses can be changed and it is possible to construct new discursive practices which will have a positive impact on women and free them from patriarchy (Bobel, 2012). So feminist activists try to offer an alternative to all these discourses and representations. Starting discussions about menstruation or representing them in another way than negative seem to be a way to resist and reject the injunction of the abject female body (Ussher, 2006).

Moreover, the media is also dependant of economic aspects. Although they aim at informing, there is also an audience race between the different media outlets, and they will look for sensational or spectacular stories or news (Maigret, 2012). Due to the big impact of media on everyday life, activists are aware of that and even have integrated the codes of media (Salzman, 2003). They will then organised happenings and other spectacular or sensational actions to make the news. One of the particularities of a taboo is the noise

provoked once it is broken. This is why, in her article, Boyer (2011) suggests to do the taboo to break it. In fact, she argues that activists bring visibility on the taboo by breaking it. It seems, indeed, that activists through their actions, bring the taboo to the public sphere and break the boundaries between the private and the public. In the case of menstruation, breaking the taboo would consist mainly to show menstrual blood in the public sphere. One example of activism is the use of menstrual blood in arts. Menstrual art is a real movement associate to feminist artists. The use of menstrual blood is not – or at least not only – aesthetic, but it is political. By breaking the taboo on purpose, these artists become real activists and aim through their creation at showing another representation of blood. They show that menstrual blood can also be used as a creative tool to create aesthetic thing. They deconstruct the idea of the abject which is associate to menstruation by and through mass media. Due to the exceptional character of their creation, they manage to get the attention of media.

So through their action, activists challenge the main representations of menstruation in media. By offering new representations which are different from the dominant ones, they aim at the re-appropriation of the body of women. Menstrual activists appear as a counter power and they are necessary to highlight the bias in discourses about female body (Bobel, 2010). It seems also important to note that social media are an important tool for them to get visibility, raise awareness about inequalities which result from the menstrual taboo and therefore catch the attention of media.

## **Conclusion**

By its depiction as uncontrollable, menstruation appears as a threat for society. The menstrual taboo is then, a tool of oppression on women and even a disciplinary power which aims at keeping them away from the public sphere and therefore at maintaining the patriarchal society. This is why, menstruation has been constructed as abject and impure. That makes menstruation unthinkable and not showable, because it is, consequently, seen as too morally shocking and dirty.

Due to their central place in the public sphere, news media seem, therefore, to be constructed with the aim of maintaining hierarchies and of representing reality from the

perspective of the dominant groups. Media discourses about menstruation are, therefore, discursive practices which oppress women by stigmatising them.

Activists challenge media representations of menstruation. Through their actions, they depict menstruation in an unusual way, which is not negative, while offering alternative discourses. These new discourses can help women to get freed from the taboo that encompasses their bodies. In so doing, they can emancipate from the patriarchal oppression.

However, we can wonder if the actions led by activists can have a long-term impact. For example, the case of the 'tampon tax' enjoyed a big visibility in all the French media. That being said, is that enough to break the taboo? Although menstruation were under the spotlight for a while thanks to it, we can wonder if there is not a risk that once it will be not a hot topic anymore, the menstrual taboo will be forgotten again. What are the intentions of the news media when dealing with a taboo topic like menstruation? Do they intend to have an impact on the taboo? In other words, do media deliberately aim at breaking the taboo?

Regarding the representation of activists who break a taboo by doing it, we can also wonder if there is not a risk of stigmatisation and marginalisation. That can go against their cause and reinforce the taboo. I will try to answer all these questions throughout my analysis.

# Methods and methodology

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The menstrual taboo is transmitted and reinforced through words and actions (Thornton, 2013) and is considered as a rhetorical taboo (Thomas, 2007). In her article "The Gendered Discourses of Menstruation" (1997), Haida Luke analyses both the discourses and the media representations of menstruation in the United States. She concludes that it is a matter of ideology, which impacts of the life of women. Although the methods she used is not very clear, the concept of ideology seems, however, important to develop a better understanding of the influence of the menstrual taboo on these discourses. Moreover, the aim of this thesis is to analyse how news media discourses can challenge the menstrual taboo. In that respect, I decide to lead a qualitative research for this analysis by using a critical discourse analysis approach to highlight the ideologies and power relations which are at stake at the heart of discourses about the 'tampon tax'.

In total, 55 articles and 3 TV news reports from 15 different news media have been analysed with the three dimensional model of Fairclough.

In this section, I will first develop the research design and then discuss with a critical discourse analysis as both methods and methodology.

## 1. Research design

In this part, I will first discuss the choice(s) of news media, and consider how the keywords have been sampled to find articles and finally, a list of all the news media will be analysed.

### 1.1. The news media

As previously said, the news media take up a central part in society. Due to their central position in the public sphere, they play an important part in the transmission of beliefs and knowledge. Their role is to provide citizens with information about social issues, ideas

and debate (Dahlgren, 2012). However, the news media is a cultural construction, which implies that their discourses have been shaped by the norms and values of society. Therefore, an observation of discourses in news media should give important clues about social structures, which also, reciprocally, shape them (Fairclough, 1992). This is why I decided to focus my analysis on the news media in France. As this thesis is focused on the 'tampon tax' in France and on the menstrual taboo in the French society, I did not choose to analyse the international news media.

This study investigates all the online versions of national daily newspapers and news magazines, online news media and the TV news. The latter has been selected to analyse the discourses all along the struggle for the lowering of the 'tampon tax' and shows if their discourses have always been the same from the beginning until the end or if there has been a change. For technical reasons, radio and regional newspapers have not been included in this analysis. Although social media take up more and more importance in society in terms of social changes – they have actually been used a lot during the debate about the 'tampon tax' – the news media is considered as the one who knows and reflects the most the reality. Moreover, news media also claims a certain objectivity (Bertini, 2007) which is not the case on social media. This is the reason why I decided to analyse news media discourses about the 'tampon tax'.

## 1.2. Sampling of keywords

As I want to analyse how media discourses can break a taboo, which would, therefore, probably has an impact on the behaviour of people in their relation to menstruation, I decided to focus on the news media, which reach the most people. I used the two most watched TV news in France (the one of France 2 and TF1). The articles and TV reports dates from February 2015 until January 2016.

To find the articles about the 'tampon tax' from the written press, I drew up a list of keywords related to the topic starting from a preliminary reading of the articles published about this topic.

I found 12 articles on Le Monde, 8 on Libération, 11 on Le Figaro, 12 on L'Express, 10 on Le Parisien, 2 on L'Humanité, 1 on La Croix, 4 on L'Obs, 8 on 20 Minutes, 1 on Les Echos, 6 on Metronews, 12 on Le Point, 1 TV reports on TF1 and 2 TV reports on France 2.

I also used the keyword "*taxe rose*" (pink tax), which hit more results but most of them were not linked to the 'tampon tax'.

The keyword "*culotte gate*" (panties gate) got 7 results. I found 1 article on 20 Minute, 1 on L'Obs, 2 on Le Figaro, 1 on Le Monde and 2 on Libération.

The keywords "*activism/activiste menstruel*" (menstrual activism/activist), "*tabou menstrual*" (menstrual taboo), "*protection(s) hygiénique(s)*" (hygienic products), "*protection(s) d'hygiène féminine(s)*" (hygienic feminine protection(s)), "*protection(s) menstruelle(s)*" (menstrual protections), "tampon", "*serviette hygiénique*" (pads), "*menstruations*", "*règles*" (periods) were used but got either no result in the news media or too many results which were not linked to the case.

I looked for these keywords in the research area of the website of each of the news media between the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February and the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2016. Then, articles directly related to the 'tampon tax' have been selected. When they were similar articles, I compared the differences and, if there were not any, I did not select the article for the analysis if it was already selected.

### 1.3. List of news media analysed

#### **Le Monde**

Le Monde is a national daily newspaper created in 1944. In 2010, the online version was visited in average per month by 5,2 million unique visitors (Le Monde). In 2015, the circulation of Le Monde was 267 897 copies and it was the second most sold newspaper in France (ACPM, 2016). Although it is supposed to be independent, Le Monde is considered as a newspaper close to the ideas of the moderate left politics. It belongs to the same group of The Huffington Post.

### **Le Figaro**

In 2015, Le Figaro was the most read national newspaper in France with a circulation of 311 326 copies (ACPM, 2016). Le Figaro, which has been created in 1826, is a right wing newspaper.

### **Libération**

Libération has been created in 1973 by Jean-Paul Sartre and Serge July. Its circulation was 88 375 in 2015 (ACPM, 2016). Libération is a left wing committed newspaper.

### **Le Parisien – Aujourd'hui en France**

Le Parisien – Aujourd'hui en France are actually the same newspaper, but Le Parisien is the Paris edition and Aujourd'hui en France is the national edition. However, the website for both is Leparisien.fr. In 2015, the circulation of Aujourd'hui en France was 138 999 copies. The newspapers is close to the ideas of the moderate right politics.

### **Les Echos**

Les Echos is a daily newspaper which has a focus on economy and finance. In 2015, the circulation was 126 645 copies (ACPM, 2015). Les Echos is right wing oriented and a liberal-conservator newspaper.

### **La Croix**

La Croix is a daily catholic news media. In 2015, its circulation was 92 280 copies (ACPM, 2016). La Croix is a moderate left politics newspaper.

### **L'Opinion**

L'Opinion is a liberal, pro-business and pro-european newspaper created in 2013.

### **L'Humanité**

L'Humanité is a newspaper created by Jean Jaurès in 1904. Its circulation in France in 2015 was 36 931 copies (ACPM, 2016). It is a communist newspaper.



## **20 Minutes**

20 Minutes is a national and free daily newspaper. In 2012, its circulation was 979 440 copies. 20 Minutes claims to be independent and neutral.

## **Metronews**

First a newspaper and a website, Metronews switched in 2015 as an online news media in France only. The website counts in average 4,3 millions of visitors per month and belongs to TF1.

## **L'Obs**

L'Obs is a weekly news media left wing oriented. In 2015, its circulation in France was 417 398 copies.

## **L'Express**

L'Express is a weekly news magazine. It claims to be independent and neutral but was at its creation in 1953, a part of Les Echos. Its circulation in 2015 was 410 493 copies.

## **Le Point**

Le Point is a weekly news magazine. Its circulation in 2015 was 377 492 copies. Le Point is considered as a liberal and conservator news media.

## **TF1**

TF1 is a private TV channel with the biggest audience ratings in France. Its TV news programme, especially the one at 8pm, is the most watched in Europe. However, the only report found about the 'tampon tax' has been broadcast in the 1pm news.

## **France 2**

France 2 is a TV channel which belongs to the public service. The TV news are the second most watched in France after TF1's. The two reports analysed for this thesis are from the 8pm TV news broadcast.

## 2. Critical Discourse Analysis as theory and method

In this part, I will first develop about critical discourse analysis. I will then discuss about the Fairclough's model and then about the limitations of critical discourse analysis.

### 2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

As previously said, the menstrual taboo appears through and within the language. This is why, I decided to choose a critical discourse analysis approach. Critical discourse analysis is only one amongst many other approaches to analyse discourses but, because discourses are actually never neutral, they show how identities and social relations are represented (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Indeed, the use of language, the grammatical structures or even the consonances are considered as constituted and constitutive of the social world. As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) explain, discourses also play an important part in the production of the social world and the maintenance of social patterns. Thus, discursive practices are the site of power relations (Foucault, 1975) and through these, the latter are created and reproduced. That being said, discourses cannot be analysed on its own and also need to be considered in its context.

This thesis does not aim at being neutral, but rather at finding solutions for social change; this is why the analysis is made through a critical discourse analysis approach following the model drawn by Fairclough. Critical discourse analysis is, in fact, politically and not neutral. It stands on the side of the oppressed social groups (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). This is an approach politically committed to social change, which heads towards highlighting the ideologies and hegemonies underpinning the discourses (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Moreover, discourse analysis is a way to analyse how discourses are constituted by social forces (Fairclough, 1992; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002) and how they are constitutive of new social practices. Highlighting the latter with and through an analysis can be a way to analyse how the menstrual taboo can really be broken.

Moreover, critical discourse analysis is very appropriate in both gender inequality and media studies due to its ability to address social problems and put in the light power relations

and discursive (Van Dijk, 1993). The use of critical discourse analysis in the media enables to emphasise all the biases, stereotypes, sexism or even racism (Van Dijk, 1997) and is therefore, relevant to analyse how discourses are shaped by the menstrual taboo.

However, to have a better understanding of the importance of behaviours in discourses, it can be necessary to complete with other theories. For example, standpoint theory seems to be a good starting point to understand subjectivity in the discourse production. According to the standpoint theory, in patriarchal societies, the production of knowledge is not an objective process, because they are produced from the point of view of men (Harding, 1997). When it comes to menstruation (that is to say a female only bodily phenomenon), this may raise problems. Even if they can try to imagine what it is and how it feels to have one's periods, men's experience of menstruation only happens in generalising discourses and representations. However, the problem remains unchanged because the latter ones are full of biases (as said previously, they simultaneously produce, integrate and spread the taboo). When men try to think about menstruation, they can only do so through all the stereotypes about it.

## 2.2. Fairclough's three dimensional model

To lead a critical discourse analysis, I built several analysis grids following the three dimensional model of Fairclough. Norman Fairclough (1992) describes the text as a first dimension – this comprises all the verbs, grammatical structures, lexical choices, transitivity, modality, metaphors or even comparison used in the text.

Transitivity, which is analysed through the use of passive voice, enables us to see when the agent has been omitted (Fairclough, 1992). The understanding of the reason(s) why a subject has been omitted from a sentence may be revealing of the writer's position. The analysis of modal verbs is a way to see the affinity of the speaker/writer with the discourse. This is necessary to see when the discourse is presented as a truth and when the writer creates some distance with what he/she is reporting.

Intertextuality is a concept drawn by Kristeva and allows the analysis of the different texts to be articulated within the same text. Citations, for example, is a kind of intertextuality.

Next, the second dimension is the discourse practice which is the part where the media production and consumption is analysed. The consumption part might be the hardest part to analyse here as I will not study the audience. However, we can assume that the interpretation made by the critical discourse analysis is the one that most of the audience understood.

Finally, the third dimension is the social practice which requires to contextualise the discourse analysed. This part is a way to see if the discourse is constituted or constitutive (Fairclough, 1992).

Then, I also tried to analyse the news media through the different concepts described in the literature review, such as taboo, menstrual blood and abjection.

### 2.3. Limitation

The main difficulty encountered by using critical discourse analysis was the problem of translation since all the articles analysed were in French. Indeed, some expressions and metaphors used in these articles had often two meanings which were difficult to transcript and translate. As a result, it can be difficult to use critical discourse analysis in two different languages.

# Analysis

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In this part, I will analyse and discuss the discourses I found in the news media. The 'tampon tax' has been framed either as an economic or a societal issue.

I will first analyse the economic discourse which aims at justifying the choice of the government and reinforce patriarchy by excluding women from the debate.

This discourse was present in all the news media which used wires from the AFP (France Press Agency): Le Monde, Le Figaro, L'Express, Les Echos, Le Point, L'Humanité or 20 Minutes. It even happened that several parts of the articles were exactly the same word for word. That can be explained by the fact that news media – and especially online news media – has to create continual news (Maigret, 2012). The important use of wires from the press agency confirms this necessity to go fast in the news production, even though this leads to a certain standardisation of the discourse.

The second discourse analysed about the 'tampon tax' in news media was the feminist one and it was the main one in Libération, L'Obs and Metronews. This discourse focuses the debate on women and inequalities. In this discourse, women were depicted as freed from the menstrual taboo.

Then, I will analyse the common points between these two discourses which are the reproduction of the stereotypes about menstruation. This analysis aims at highlighting which group were represented by these discourses, how these discourses shaped and has been shaped by the menstrual taboo, and more generally, to what extent news media can break the menstrual taboo.

# 1. The 'tampon tax' as an economic issue: a discourse shaped by the menstrual taboo

The discourse in all the news media, except *Libération* and *L'Obs*, were mainly economic. The most striking point in this discourse is the invisibility of menstruation. It seems, therefore, that the framing of the 'tampon tax' as an economic issue has been shaped by the menstrual taboo, but also that it has been a way to avoid talking about it. Women are particularly invisible in the economic discourse, which appears as a symptom of the menstrual taboo (Thomas, 2007), and as a consequence of the gendered construction of news media (Gill, 2007). Although the economic discourse has been used to take the side of the government, by reinforcing the menstrual taboo, it is also a discourse aiming at the no questioning of patriarchy (Thomas, 2007).

## 1.1. The economic arguments to justify the choice of the government

The economic discourse mainly supports and justifies the government's decision in rejecting a decrease of the 'tampon tax'. Most of the verbs and words used in these articles belong to the economic field, either to the taxation area or to the consumer one. For example, in *Le Monde*, *Le Point* and *Le Figaro*, the words "tax", "rate", "consumption", "goods", "products", "budgets", "service" and "taxation" are used several times and belong to the lexical field of taxation. This quote has been also used in all the news which used the press agency wire. It clearly frames the debate as a matter of economy: "The budget secretary of state Christian Eckert said that "the government does not wish that the tax rates do not change" as part of the budget project for 2016" (AFP, 15/10/2015).

Since France is currently said to be in an economic crisis, the reference to the monetary loss engendered by the decreasing of the 'tampon tax' may lead the reader or the audience to think that it actually is the best option for everybody. Moreover, since women are largely under-represented in the economic and political news (Gill, 2007), framing the debate in such a way is yet another way to exclude them and disconnect the debate from the

menstrual taboo. It is, therefore, an easy way to report the debate without going into the questions of inequalities.

In the economic discourse, modal verbs are rarely used. This linguistic (conscious or not) choice leaves no space for supposition, which implies that it is a discourse of truth. Most of the time, the economic arguments are used to justify the first choice of the government and they are often compared to the cost of the spending for women:

"The measure for the tampons, pads and other menstrual cups *was evaluated* at 55 million euros. In France, Georgette Sand calculated that these expenses *would represent* a few 1500€ in the life of every women" (Le Monde with AFP, 15/10/2015).

The employment of the conditional mood in the second sentence shows that the degree of affinity with the media is low. The modality is not the truth anymore since the conditional indicates that this number has not been verified by them (who hold the truth). However, the use of the past in the first sentence gives another meaning. Although it is a mere evaluation, contrary to the figure calculated by Georgette Sand, the doubt is reduced with the use of the past. It gives a bigger impact on the cost announced by the government. Modality of discourses is very important and has an impact on how the reader interprets it, but it also shows the degree of affinity of the media with what it actually reports (Fairclough, 1992). So, when the news media who used the press agency wire employ the passive voice to report the cost given by the government, they position themselves in agreement with that figure. With this grammatical structure, Le Monde breaks away from the words of Georgette Sand and they appear to be on the side of the government.

Moreover, this idea is confirmed in the parallelism between the cost for the government and the cost for every woman, which seems to give more faith in the choice of the government. On the one hand, there are the 55 million euros which have been estimated by the government. On the other hand, there is a 1500 euros, a number which appears as a small saving. This idea is emphasised by the use of the quantifier "a few" just before 1500€. In the article from Le Figaro, this part of the wire about the expenses for women's menstruation has even been removed. This may be explained as Le Figaro being a conservative and right wing newspaper. It is more likely that the readers share the same political idea and think that the shortfall for the government might be too much. However, the same tendency can be observed in Le Monde, which is not a conservative newspaper. In the



first article about the 'tampon tax', the subtitle for the second part of the article reads: "Calculated at 55 million euros". In this case, the 'tampon tax' is not even named and the media clearly wanted to emphasise the cost of the expenses for the government which tends to brush this female claim as a whim. By choosing this title, the article appears to stand on the side of the government.

*Le Monde* has also chosen to use the passive voice of the previously quoted sentence: "The measure for the tampons, pads and other menstrual cups *was evaluated*" (Le Monde, 15/10/2015). Transitivity is usually used in discourses as a way to omit the agent and therefore, to hide/tame its responsibility in the action (Fairclough, 1992). In this sentence, the real subject is the one who engages the action, the government. And yet, with the use of the passive voice "the measure for the tampons, pads [...]" becomes the subject. This grammatical structure highlights the responsibility of the 'tampon tax' in the expenses engendered by the government, where the responsibility of the government in this decision has been minimised.

The responsibility of the government in the over-taxation of what represents a monthly expense for women, has been regularly erased from the article through the use of impersonal pronoun or of metonymy – a literary device in which a thing is not called by its name, but by the name of something associated to its meaning (Fromilhagen, 2005) :

"In Bercy, one assures not being "autistic" before these questions" (Le Monde, 11/11/2015), "one asserts" (Le Monde, 11/11/2015), "We doubt about it" (Le Parisien, 11/12/2015), "one whispers at Bercy" (Le Parisien, 11/12/2015).

The only indication about the origins of these arguments are Bercy, which indicated that they come from the economy minister, but no name is given so there is no real responsible behind these words.

The idea that the government lacks money can be found in an interview of Christian Eckert (the budget secretary) given to L'Opinion, where he mentions this shortfall of 55 million of euros. He goes up to saying: "I don't have it". The media, then, quotes the politician:

"If it was two million, I might have had a different attitude", even if he confesses a doubt that "the prices would have lowered" (Christian Eckert in L'Opinion, 20/10/2015).

This article from L'Opinion was published after the first debate at the Assembly. This interview has then been re-used by Le Figaro, providing this interview with a greater impact. It highlights again the cost of the expenses for the government and its loss of income. As a communication strategy, it seems that the Socialist government wants to be depicted as the victim of an economic system in crisis, which forces its member to reject a decreasing of the tax. Although an equal number of female and male ministers composes the government, women are still largely under-represented in the Assembly, which might explain the lack of improvement and the quasi-lack of debate at this institutional level of French society.

## 1.2. The debate about first necessity goods: a way to avoid the discussion about the menstrual taboo

The main focus in the economic discourse was the debate about what constitute first necessity goods. Because it is not equally needed by men and women, the “first necessity goods” argument appeared as a way to discredit the arguments of feminists. In this part, we will first discuss how the issues related to inequalities have been ignored and then, how the consumer discourse is reinforced by the patriarchal ideology.

### 1.2.1. A discourse which ignored inequalities

During the debate, the discussion was mainly about what is a first necessity good. Focusing the debate on it has also been a way to avoid to tackle the menstrual taboo and its impact on women. In fact, as long as the debate stays framed as question of economy, women are completely invisible. As explains Rosalind Gill (2007), politics and economy are considered and depicted in the news media as a male domain. This can be explained by the fact that rationality which is seen as a male quality is associated to politics (Thomas, 2007), whereas women, due to the menstrual taboo, are seen as irrational (Ussher, 2006) which, therefore, does not fit with economics and politics values. Economy is also a domain which belongs to the public sphere, whereas menstruation are meant to be and stay in the private sphere (Thomas, 2007). This conception is, incidentally, used to keep women away from the

public sphere (Thomas, 2007). This is why, news media, which stood by the side of the government focused on the question: what is a first necessity good?

This question appears also as a way to make the debate easy to understand for everybody, but also to include all the readers in it, since this is an issue which relate to anyone and that, no matter if they are men or women. Incidentally, all the media which used the same AFP wire use this comparison made by Christian Eckert as a banal one: "He raised that a 20% rate was applied to shaving foam for men" (AFP, 15/10/2015).

The use of the verb 'raise' seems that the comparison is legitimate. Although this comment has been much criticised, here, there is no questioning about the nature of this comparison. It seems, incidentally, to be a way that there is no reason to denounce an inequality. Le Figaro even chose as a subtitle for the second part of its first article: "20% of shaving foam". The choice of this title emphasises that there is no inequality behind the tax on menstrual products since it is the same for shaving foam. In this article, Le Figaro uses an argument in favour of the reject of the amendment as a subtitle, just like Le Monde did. In the days following the debate and this article, the words of Christian Eckert provoked a polemic. After that, gender-neutral comparisons were used in the news media:

"For example, seeing properly is a necessity, so we should lower the taxation on glasses" one asserts" (Le Monde, 11/11/2015).

The use of gender neutral comparisons appears as a way to still justify the decision of the government about the reject of the 'tampon tax' without creating another polemic. It also aims at showing that the different taxation on products is not linked to the nature of it and therefore, it is not a question of gender equality. The TV news of France 2 even report this idea explicitly to explain the "tax incoherence" (France 2, 10/12/2015), the journalist explains that "this is not linked to the nature of products" (France 2, 10/12/2015). This is a way to deconstruct the feminist arguments.

Later, when the Assembly has voted the lowering of the tax, Le Figaro highlighted the idea that the tax creates inequalities by using the same structure process with subtitles: "Hygienic products for elderly people excluded" as a subtitle and this quote of the senator Jean-Claude Ruquier: "A normal tax at 20% on feminine hygienic products is an injustice". This two sentences written in big and bold appear mostly next to each other in the article. That emphasises the idea that exclusion of product for incontinence is an injustice and that the

lowering of the tax provokes injustice too. The last sentence of this part is incidentally about products for incontinence.

Other media, like L'Opinion, wrote in bold "Silence about nappies" and the media highlights also the failure of the movement which did not get the lowering of products for elderly people. This is also a way to emphasise a stereotype often used against feminist: feminism creates more inequalities (Faludi, 1990).

This idea is a part of the backlash against feminist movements which started in the eighties and portrays feminists as responsible of women unhappiness, but also that they aim at having power over men and therefore, their struggle leads to inequalities (Faludi, 1990). Through this discourse then, news media outlets like L'Opinion or Le Figaro fall within a patriarchal ideology since they are spreading ideas which aim at the protection and the maintaining of patriarchy. They also reinforce the menstrual taboo. The comparison with nappies and even product for incontinence join, indeed, the idea that menstruation is associated with defecation (Rosewarne, 2012). This idea is directly linked to the concept of abject which help at the spreading and the durability of the menstrual taboo and therefore, all the stereotypes related to this.

### **1.2.2. The case of the consumer discourse: a way to discredit the feminist movements**

The feminist movements have also been discredited by the news media who has framed the debate as a consumption issue, by trying to explain why there are the tax differences between different products of the everyday life. Two news media outlets used this focus: Le Parisien and the TV news of France 2. In their article and reports, the lexical field of consumption were used all along the article: "purchasing power" (Le Parisien, 2015), "consumers" (France 2, 07/01/2016; Le Parisien, 10/12/2015), "industrials" (Le Parisien, 10/12/2015), "taxation"(France 2, 07/01/2016; Le Parisien, 10/12/2015), "consumption" (France 2, 10/12/2015; Le Parisien, 10/12/2015).

Both news media outlets explain the difference of taxes as the result of "lobbying". This verb was also used to describe the feminist movement to lower the 'tampon tax'. In France, the term 'lobby' is not perceived as neutral and has a negative connotation, and thus,

leads to portraying feminists negatively. Throughout the framing of the 'tampon tax' as a consumer issue, once again, the question of patriarchy is not raised, menstruation as such is not evoked at all, and gender inequality is denied, since the tax difference is perceived as a result of lobbying. Denying the existence of gender inequality is also one of the effects of feminist bashing in the news media, and the false belief that there is no need to fight for gender equality anymore, since men and women are already equals (Faludi, 1990; Gill, 2007).

The articles from *Le Parisien* were classified in the category "economy" and one of them in the sub-category "your money", which implies that they speak directly to the readers and tell them what is happening with their money. This is a way to make everybody feel concerned by the topic and not only women. This helps to draw the debate as not a gender equality issue. Moreover, the news media made an article about it named "The Truth about the So-Called 'Tampon Tax'" which implies that until now, there were only lies about it and the tax did really exist. The article has the form of a question/answer segment and none of them include the social aspect of the tax such as gender equality or the menstrual taboo. They even started by saying that the 'tampon tax' does not exist and it is just the normal tax. This leads to the discredit of all the arguments of the feminist movements and erase again the questions of inequality.

They also seem to denounce a capitalist system when they say that it is actually the companies which produce tampons and pads which might earn more money thanks to this lower tax and women will probably not save money. The denunciation of capitalism can be interpreted in different ways. One would be that it is just another way to avoid denouncing patriarchy. However, it seems a bit simple to stop at that explanation. A lot of news media outlets in France belong to big companies. *Le Parisien* is one of them since they belong to LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy) which is one of a biggest French groups listed in the stock exchange. This affiliation plays, indeed, a lot of the independence of *Le Parisien* and therefore, their freedom of speech. As implies the standpoint theory, the ones who live under a system of oppression are the most aware and therefore, the more willing to denounce it (Harding, 1987). *Le Parisien* then, denounces capitalism because it is a system of oppression that has a direct and explicit impact on them, whereas the consequences of patriarchy have a more implicit impact, which does not affect everybody. Moreover, the menstrual taboo is created to perpetuate patriarchy, which itself leads to gender inequalities (Ussher, 2006). However, this article clearly contains a patriarchal tone, and this is why pointing out

capitalism as the real problem seems to be a way to not tackle the real issue here and even reinforcing patriarchy.

To emphasise its argument, *Le Parisien* quotes the president of the finance commission at the Senate:

"It is feared that the companies concerned, oligopolistic or quasi-monopoly, prefer to increase their margins rather than lower their prices." (Albéric de Mongolfier, 2015)

"According to him, the profit of purchase power would be at the best "10 euros per year per person" (*Le Parisien*, 10/12/2015).

Although a conditional is used in these two sentences, which implies that it is just an estimation made by a person who was against the lowering of the tax, and it is used as an argument to denounce that the lowering of the tax will not make a difference.

There is the same discourse in the news programs of channel France 2. In the first report they made, they claimed that the differences in taxation is not link to the nature of the products, but it is the consequences of the lobbies. They use the example of milk chocolate and chocolate cookies, and butter and margarine to illustrate their argument. These comparisons are not innocent since this is again on products which are gender neutral and that everybody use. Both media outlets highlight the cost of this amendment for the government. Through this discourse about consumption, they completely deny the social inequality behind the tax and they depict the feminist movement as pointless and with fake arguments which are representative of patriarchy and its ideology. France 2 made, incidentally, another report about the 'tampon tax' at the beginning of January, one week after the amendment had been put into effect. In this investigation report, the journalist tries to see if the cost of the hygienic products has been lowered. Even though a lot of them did, the report highlights that some supermarket did not change their prices. The report concludes with the following sentence pronounced by the journalist: "Bercy admits nothing obligates the supermarkets to lower the price. This discount will cost to the government 55 million euros. Not sure that the 15 million of women consumer are the only ones to enjoy it" (France 2, 07/01/2016).

Focusing the debate on first necessity goods seems to have been a way of avoiding to talk about the menstrual taboo and how it oppresses women and affects their life. As taboos

aim at maintaining the social order (Douglas, 2007), focusing the debate on another subject such as tax incoherence is a way to keep this system in position. All these discourses about economy or consumption head toward to maintain and even reinforce patriarchy since there is no questioning at all about it. In these two discourses, the existence of the menstrual taboo has been simply ignored. On the contrary, in these discourses, feminist movements are depicted as "lobbies". So this is clearly an example of how the menstrual taboo has shaped media discourse and how media discourses shape it.

### 1.3. The economic discourse to keep women and menstruation away from the public sphere

The main consequence of the economic framing is the invisibility of women and the minimisation of the feminist movement in the news about the 'tampon tax'. Indeed, when the issue about 'tampon tax' was classified and addressed as an economic topic, women were rarely mentioned. However, from the moment it became a society issue, women were the main actors in these articles. So it seems that women are excluded from the political or economic life and that these latter are disconnected from social issues. I would argue that this disconnection is also a part of the taboo. The menstrual taboo excludes, indeed, women from the public sphere. This exclusion reinforces the power of the leaders and gender divisions (Thomas, 2007). Moreover, menstruation are considered as a part of the private sphere. So in that case, focusing the articles on economy and politic which are part of the public sphere seems to have been a way to keep women away from this debate and to decentre the debate from them. This is why, these discourses did not contribute either to the breaking of the taboo or to social change since they have just led to the consolidation of the current system and the maintenance of the power of the leaders.

If we focus this analysis on intertextuality and more especially on direct and indirect discourse, we can observe that feminist activist were not often mentioned and even less quoted. Analysing intertextuality is a way to see who gets to speak and who have access to discourses which is representative of power relations (Fairclough, 2012). In most of the

articles with an economic discourse, the words of feminists were reported through indirect discourse which gives them less time and space in the debates. Le Figaro did not even mention them at all in the first article.

Le Parisien give an expert in taxation, who is a man, the floor and use also direct discourse to quote the minister of Economy, Michel Sapin. The indirect discourse is used only once to mention the feminist associations. This is typical of the representation of women in news media. They are, indeed, very invisible and rarely invited to comment or give their opinion about a news, even if they are experts (Gill, 2007). News media outlets prefer to interview male experts as Le Parisien did, especially if it is an economic or political issue (Gill, 2007). This is even emphasised by the use of direct discourse to quote Christian Eckert. By this process, he became the main actor of the debate, even if, he has been talking in the name of the government. This give the idea that activists have been left outside of the political debate. The use of indirect discourse seems, incidentally, to be a way to restrict to feminists the access to the public sphere. They seem, indeed, to be less present in the debate than the ones who are quote with direct discourse.

This is one of the consequences of the menstrual taboo. In this debate, feminists introduced themselves as menstruating women, therefore, they have a restricted access to the public sphere (Thomas, 2007), so that they cannot disturb the current social order. This is why, media which focused on an economic discourse used a lot of direct discourses mostly to report the opinion of the politicians about the tax. For example, Le Figaro extensive quotes instead of paraphrases. In one of its articles, at least the half of the articles deals with the arguments of the ones who wanted to keep the tax at 20%, whereas indirect discourses were mainly used for the arguments of activists.

In general, the use of impersonal pronouns and of transitivity have also minimised the role of the activists in the debate. For example, in the article of 20 Minutes:

"More than a hundred panties stained with red have been sent to François Hollande and the Prime Minister Manuel Valls" (20 Minutes, 03/11/2015).

In Le Figaro also, the role of the feminists has been minimised: "The action has been launched on social media" (Le Figaro, 04/11/2015)

Through the use of passive voice, the agent, which in this case are the feminists, have been



omitted. So it reduces their degree of participation and responsibility behind the mobilisation. Again, it gives a smaller extent to their actions and it heads toward giving them less space in the public sphere.

## **Conclusion**

So, in the case of the economic discourse about the 'tampon tax', the discursive practices have been completely constituted. This means that they were influenced by the social structure (Fairclough, 1992), this is to say, patriarchy. In the economic discourse, only the ones who have power, in that case male politicians, get to speak. At any moment, the menstrual taboo has been questioned which is also an influence of the societal forces on the discursive power. Therefore, the discourse has been shaped by the menstrual taboo and there was no chance that this could later be broken.

## **2. The 'tampon tax' as a social issue: a constitutive discourse shaped by the ones who experience the taboos**

The second type of discourse about the 'tampon tax' is a feminist one. It was the one mainly used in news media such as Libération, L'Obs and Metronews. Unlike the economic framing, in this case, activists and women get access to discourse. News media gave them space to deliver their truth about 'tampon tax' and how it fits into a system that oppresses them and their body. The discursive practice was constitutive of the social world and aimed at breaking the menstrual taboo.

The following part will first analyse the importance of intertextuality and more especially, the way direct discourse connects the debate to the social issues, linked to the tax. It will then focus on the phenomenon of destigmatisation of women and observe how the tax has been used to denounce oppression on their body.

### **2.1. The importance of direct discourse in the denunciation of inequalities**

As previously said, intertextuality gives an indication about who is talking but also about power relation since we get to know who has access to these discourses (Fairclough, 1992). This is even more striking when a news media uses several times direct discourses. It gives, indeed, more spaces in the media discourses to the person who is speaking and a greater extent to his/her arguments.

When the 'tampon tax' was mentioned in the media as a society issue, the focus was mainly on gender inequalities and women's rights. More spaces were given to the activists. This is also typical from the gendered construction of news media. From the moment a news is framed as a social issues, women are more visible (Gill, 2007). Therefore, the focus was on women and inequalities and the discourses were feminist like in news media like Libération or L'Obs. For example, Metronews made an article which was a report of the feminist

demonstrations for the lowering of the 'tampon tax'. This article is mainly composed of direct discourses from feminist activists which are at the demonstration and denounce the inequalities between men and women. For example, the media quotes Alice, one activist present at the demonstration organised the 11<sup>th</sup> of November:

"At one moment, it is politicians who has to do the job" she adds, "that means remove this inequality which weighs upon half of the population" (Metronews, 11/11/2015).

The use of direct discourse gives a greater extent to her argument, especially as Metronews used neutral verb like "add" to report her words. It helps to draw the articles from the point of view of the ones who lives the taboo and give, therefore, a better understanding in the issues related to it (Harding, 1987). The use of direct discourse is also a way to make visible menstruating women in the public sphere. Due to the menstrual taboo, they are, indeed, in the closet (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2013). When news media interview women who demonstrate for the lower of the 'tampon tax', they are out of this closet. The menstrual taboo was therefore denounced in these articles and especially when the speech was given to activists. Libération even talked about a "stupid taboo".

L'Obs and The Huffington Post use a lot of tweets in their article to express the opinion of the citizens, and thus represent the debate through their opinion. So, in the articles they published after the reject of the amendment at the Assembly, they decided to show the incomprehension and critics of people face to that decision. L'Obs who used a variety of tweets, divided them in three categories: the reaction about the decision, people who think that it is a masculine decision and people who reacted to the comparison with shaving foam.

Using tweets in an articles seems to be a way for the media to express its opinion, but it also gives the floor to women which have been closeted by the menstrual taboo and therefore oppressed by patriarchy. So, the discursive practices here are not influenced by the societal forces anymore, since the ones who speak are the oppressed one. So, the discourse is not constituted, but constitutive, since it contributes to new social practices (Fairclough, 1992) which are here the freedom of speech in the public space of menstruating women. This discourse, which falls within the feminist ideology, is, therefore, more focus on menstruation and the impact on the life of women.

## 2.2. A discourse which ends the stigmatisations of women

Menstruation acts like a closet on women because of the stigmatisation they expose themselves if they do not hide themselves while they are having their periods (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2013). The feeling of shame is one of the stigmas it provokes. However, from the moment women were visible in the debate about the 'tampon tax' and so, out of the closet, they were not stigmatised anymore for that and the feeling of shame were not associated to them neither.

In fact, when the 'tampon tax' was covered as a social issue, the activist movements were described as "funny" (Libération, 28/10/2015). For example, all the articles from Libération are written using humour to describe the activist movements. The articles use derision on several occasions. The titles even often play with humour. For example: "From rap till petitions, who wants to frame the tax tampon off?". This title already implies that the article is written with the ton of humour. It is a reference to the Disney film "Who framed Roger Rabbit?". The use of humour seems to counter the feeling of shame which is the one associated to the menstrual taboo. Women are not ashamed anymore and they are even able to laugh about their menstruation. This break the menstrual taboo and all the stigma around it, since women appear in the public sphere to talk and protest about an issue linked to menstruation and they are not stigmatised.

Paradoxically in the feminist discourse, shame was evoked and associated to talk about politicians:

"Today, still, tampon embarrasses. Not the ones who wear it. But the ones who talk about it" (Libération, 28/10/2015).

Here, the shame is not put on women, but on the politicians, especially as "the ones" in French is not a gender neutral word. The first one is used in the feminine plural, whereas the second is employed in the masculine plural. In this specific case, men became the ones who are stigmatised because of the menstrual taboo. They are the ones who feel ashamed. So when the discourse focused on and from the perspective of women, the stigmatisation generated by the menstrual taboo switched sides.

### 2.3. The tax as an allegory of women's body

One characteristic of the feminist discourse was the personification of the tax. In different articles, the tax and even menstrual products were described as a person. It also happened several times that the tax was described as a tax on the body of women. For example L'Obs quotes several times a Twitter user who says "I pay taxes on my uterus" (L'Obs, 15/10/2015). This is also mentioned in the beginning of Le Monde's article: "The periods of women will still be taxed at 20%" (Le Monde with AFP, 15/10/2015).

There are two interesting elements here. The first one is the use of the passive voice. As mentioned before, the omission of the agent changes the perspective on the responsibility. Menstruation is presented as undergone, insofar as it is a natural biological phenomenon. The use of this grammar device emphasises the idea that the subject, "the periods of women", is completely passive. Moreover, in the Twitter comment, a metonymy is used to talk about the tax on menstrual products. The use of "the periods of women" gives the idea that it is a tax on their body and the use of the passive voice seems to indicate that this tax subjects their body and that women are passive. This rhetorical devices indicate that the tampon tax enslaves their body.

The idea of passivity is commonly associated to women and femininity in the patriarchal ideology (McRobbie, 2012). Passivity is used as an argument to give power to men.

The second interesting element is that we talk about a tax on the body of women. We can find the same idea in the first article of L'Obs, which decided to quote an internet users' comment to explain the anger and the incomprehension of people after the rejection of the tax: The online media uses the same quote in the headline of the article and in one of the paragraph: " I pay taxes on my uterus" (L'Obs, 15/10/2015). In Libération, the idea of the body is also present in all their articles. Tampons and pads are personified and the journalist even says that "a uterus is more expensive than a phallus". They also talk about "coup de vulve" (*translation: "vulva punch"*) to describe the feminist actions.

Through this process of personification which was mainly seen in the feminist discourses, the body of women became also central in the debate. The tax on menstrual products was no longer a tax on a random product, but a tax on the body. This has helped to

draw the idea of oppression on women and that their bodies are subjected to and through this tax and so, by the economic system. This can also explain why women were rarely mentioned when the discourses about the 'tampon tax' was economic. The economic discourses seem to fit in an oppressive system over women. The common idea that everybody has to pay taxes and that, whatever the nature of the products may be. This economic system tends to oppress and subject women. This disciplinary power as defined by Foucault (1977) secures the current power and hegemony underpinning this discourse (Fairclough, 1993) which is, in this context, patriarchy. Connecting the body to the tax seems to be a way to denounce the oppression on women and their body. The female body has, indeed, been constructed through discourses as something that needs to be controlled (Thomas, 2007) and the menstrual taboo, which embodies a disciplinary power (Foucault 1977), is a way to control and repress this body. Therefore, when pads and tampons are personified, when the body is evoked, the tax becomes an allegory of the menstrual taboo, which oppresses women and their body.

In several articles, a member of Georgette Sand has been quoted. She tries to explain why the government was opposed to the lowering of the tax. She talks about the "fear to touch the tax" and a "dysfunction" of the French taxation. This idea of dysfunction has been present in all the discourses. These terms are usually the ones associated to menstruation (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2013). If the tax is understood as a way to control women, it necessary contributes to maintaining the social order (Thomas, 2007). This idea can be found in both the articles from *Le Figaro* and *L'Opinion*. They equally quoted Christian Eckert's confession about his worry concerning a possible reduction of the tax, which will "open the Pandora box" (Christian Eckert, 2015). He believes that such a claim will lead to other amendments to lower tax on other products. Using the myth of the Pandora box, he implies that women are the mother of all evils of the world. He directly links it to the menstrual taboo. To him, menstruation is to be controlled in regard to the threat it represents for social order (Douglas, 1966; Thomas, 2007). This tax is one of the many ways to control it.

## **Conclusion**

So, the feminist discourse has enabled women to come out of the closet to denounce the inequalities, which oppresses them and which may directly be linked to the menstrual taboo. This discourse has been constitutive of new social practices since it led to new social practices. Menstruation does no longer seem to appear as a stigma on women, but rather as a taboo, which makes men feel ashamed and scared. This change supports the idea that the menstrual taboo is made to maintain patriarchy.

### **3. The news media which reproduced the stereotypes on menstruation**

Although the feminist discourse appears as constitutive of new social practices, it also appears as being constituted of social forces, in a similar way as the economic discourse. Even though both discourses were opposed since one was on the side of women and the other one on the side of government, they both reproduced the stereotypes of the menstrual taboo to build up their arguments.

This part will analyse how the discourses failed to be constructed out of the patriarchal matrix. Firstly, a focus on the debate about the 'tampon tax' will be used to highlight gender division and stereotypes. Secondly a discussion about the way menstrual blood has been depicted will show how it appears as a threatening abjection in every articles.

#### **3.1. The reproduction of gender stereotypes and division: the effects of the menstrual taboo**

When covering the 'tampon tax', all the media showed to depict it as a concern for women. This approach is one of the most common stereotypes about menstruation (Schoemaker and Tetlock, 2012). Menses, indeed, are always depicted in that way in mass media (Schoemaker and Tetlock, 2012; Rosewarne, 2012). This emphasises the biases in the news media framing (Bertini, 2015) and seems to be one of the direct consequences of the categorisation made by the news media (Maigret, 2012). For example, *Le Parisien* classified most of the articles in the section of the website named 'La Parisienne', which is a kind of web magazine for women. Framing an event as a concern for women is a way to report the world in a way that is quickly and easily understandable for everybody (Maigret, 2012).

Another example is again the use of the passive voice to talk about Christine Coutelle: "This amendment against the "tax tampon", [...], was carried by the president of delegation of women's rights at the Assembly, Christine Coutelle" (AFP, 15/10/2015). The passive form is



used to emphasise her functions and more especially, who was behind the amendment. It is a way to associate this amendment as an issue related to women's rights only. It implying that this debate is of female interest only.

Libération even argues that men could not understand this issue and only women politicians could make the difference. All the articles published about the fight against the tax, point out several times that during the first vote at the Assembly, it was mainly men who were there and the debate was "piteous" (Libération, 2015). Although this approach aims at denouncing the very little number of female deputies represented in both the Assembly and the Senate, it reinforces gender division, which acts in favour of the patriarchal society to strengthen its power despite and thanks to divisions (McRobbie, 2012).

The most striking example of gender stereotypes can be found in the case of TF1. The TV channel made one report in its TV news on this topic. The report shows the incoherence of the taxation. Both the TV news host and the journalists seem not to understand the decision about the tampon tax. The report questions the reasons why hygienic products are not considered as first necessity goods. However, it tends toward the reinforcement of gender differences. By only interviewing women consumers in a supermarket, they narrow their argument. The main explanation provided is that men are the ones who vote these amendments and they do not care about female hygiene. All the women interviews point out the responsibility of men in what it is called by the journalist a "taxation incoherence". This idea is emphasised by examples which, in the collective imaginary, are not gender neutral: the viewer learns that the tax on football games tickets is lower than the one on hygiene products. To accentuate this idea, the report even shows a shot with a stadium, before going back to the supermarket. A woman interviewed said: "I don't know how they do, them, but us, we need hygiene" (TF1, 2015).

Although the denunciation of the responsibility of men in taxation can, at first sight, fit in a feminist discourse, the mention of "us" and "them" fits more in a patriarchal matrix. As Thomas (2007) explains, gender division reinforces hierarchy in society, instead of narrowing gaps.

All these ideas and images of women in supermarket taking care of the shopping and men who have the power and take the decision contribute to the spreading of gender stereotypes. It also avoids the questions of the menstrual taboo, which is only reinforced. It

keeps menstruation out of the public sphere and maintains the taboo and the lack of knowledges about it. By denouncing the tax differences, the report reinforced the menstrual taboo, which in turn contributes to the gender division (Thomas, 2007; Ussher, 2013), which consequently reinforces patriarchy.

## 3.2. The abject menstrual blood as a weapon against the power

The representations of the struggle for the lowering of 'tampon tax' took another turning point in the media from the moment the group Culotte Gate started to send panties with fake blood to politicians. Through this action, menstrual blood became visible within the public sphere. All the articles about this news eventually used the lexical field of blood, and even of menstrual blood: "red blood", "blood", "bloody". Moreover, all of these articles represent it as something abject, which is associated to the emotional side of women and constitutes a threat for society.

### 3.2.1. The menstrual blood as driven force and a weapon

One interesting point about menstrual blood is that all media represents it as both a driving force related to anger and as a weapon against the power. For example, L'Express and Le Monde used the lexical field of 'battle'. The title of the article of L'Express (11/11/2015) is even "panties with blood sent to the government". The noun "blood" is clearly connoted to a violent battle, and recalls images of injured people. All along the article, blood is seen as a weapon "Ready to use painting, tomato sauce and other red liquids to be heard". Yet, with this sentence, the journalist argues that to get a stronger representation, activists need first to be seen in the public sphere. The use of blood, as a shocking, taboo yet as a bodily fluid, became a way to create a polemic and to get some visibility. The article goes also further in the idea of the fight, since the media describes the activist as combatants and Christian Eckert as injured, who is "upset" and "hurt" as quoted several media. L'Express (11/11/2015) opposes both in a parallelism which emphasises the idea of a bloody battle. The article of L'Express is a good example of the representation of the menstrual blood in the media during the debate for the

lowering of the 'tampon tax'. In this struggle between the government and activists, menstrual blood became, indeed, the main weapon against the power.

All the articles published by *Libération* and talking about activists also make reference to blood as a form of strength: "fair sex do not speed along turnip's blood" (*Libération*, 27/10/2015). This metaphor suggests that blood is the driving force that gives all their energy and power to activists to fight against the government. In a general way, blood is also used in all the media to describe anger. This feeling is pictured all along *Libération's* articles. Several media talk about "coup de sang" ("fit of anger" but literally translated in French as "fit of blood") or "a red anger". The feminists are also described as angry too and this idea is expressed through expression like "they see red" – literal translation of the French "voir rouge" which means 'to be angry'. The association of anger and blood provides a feeling of violence, which helps to represent the debate about the 'tampon tax' as a fight which provokes very strong emotion. This is also one of the main stereotypical representations of feminist in mass media (Faludi, 1990), which always depict feminists as angry and bitter women.

Moreover, using menstrual blood to talk about the anger of women is also a way to reinforce stereotypes about menstruating women: they are out of control (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2013). So this association between a violent emotion and menstruation fits into the menstrual taboo. This is questionable at different level since this stereotype is used to keep women outside of the political life – women being too irrational and out of control to be part of it (Thomas, 2007). This representation falls, therefore, into a patriarchal matrix.

### **3.2.2. The object menstrual blood as a threat**

When dealing with blood and more especially menstrual blood, the object invades the debate. When journalists talk about activists sticking pads coloured with ketchup, they say: "dirty pads" (*Libération*, 28/10/2015; *Le Figaro*, 04/11/2015) or "'The Enraged Vulvas' papers the approaches of the national Assembly with pads and tampons soiled with ketchup" (*Libération*, 28/10/2015). This gives the idea that blood is dirty. There is another example in an article about the demonstration against the 'tampon tax' published in *Libération*. The journalists talk about "shocking disguises and slogans". *L'Express* (11/11/2015) talks about "an initiative which is going to make its mark on people's mind" (*translation: make a big impression*) to talk about the action of the group Culotte Gate. This expression has a double

sense. It can be seen as something shocking that everybody will remember, but the idea of "mark on people's mind" recalls the image of blood which also makes visible marks.

Menstrual blood is even described as a threat by Le Figaro and as a way of pressure in all the media. In an article in which Christian Eckert appeared as a victim of the feminists: "Feminists would have threatened to send used hygiene protections to him by postal way" (Le Figaro, 21/10/2015). Menstrual blood appears here as a threat and it even seems that it can be something dangerous.

Some media, like Le Figaro, play with the feeling of disgust. For example, in an article about Culotte Gate, Le Figaro (05/11/2015) called the activists of the group "Culotte Gateuse" which is a play on words. "Gâteuse" in French means to regress to childhood but it is also a way to call someone who suffers from dementia and incontinence. This conveys the idea of a childish movement but also of menstrual blood as similar to urine or defecation. This association is one of the stereotypes about menstruation and contributes to the disgust it may provoke and of the idea that menstrual blood is something dirty.

In a different article published on the magazine part of the website, Libération makes a plea in favour of the lowering of the tax. The two journalists ask: "Could we imagine women innocently going to work, with red between their thighs?" (Libération, 28/10/2015). This rhetorical question plays with the image of the abject to argue that tampons and pads are first necessity goods. This question aims at drawing an image, which will repulse the reader and make him/her think that the lowering of the tax is a right thing to claim, and that menstrual products are, indeed, first necessity goods.

So the abject is actually used and seen as a way of pressure on the power in all the articles representing the activist movements. This can be analysed by using the concept of abject drawn by Kristeva (1982). Menstruation is so abject in our society that the disgust it provokes and its horrifying nature makes it powerful. When activists decided to send knickers or stick pads with fake blood, they actually make use of the abject nature of menstruation. They contribute to the spreading of the taboo in order to break it, as advises Boyer (2011). This led to a big reaction of the media since a lot of them covered the news. In such a context, the polemic and activism has been described as a liquid and even as a leaky product, which spreads throughout the world: "the debate about the 'tampon tax' arrives in France" (Le Monde, 28/02/2015). Le Monde (11/11/2015) even talks about a debate which "makes ink

leaking" (*translation: lead to extensive press coverage*). So through these assimilations with menstruation, activist movement has been seen as a threat for the social order. In general, the vision of menstrual blood in the media, even if it was fake blood, has been seen as a potential danger to the power. This fit with the idea that female blood is a threat for patriarchy (Douglas, 1966).

This is probably why a lot of media try to remove the abject aspect by talking about "red" stains instead of blood. This is like a self-censorship, which contributes to the maintaining of the menstrual taboo. In the articles based on the AFP wire, the word "blood" is never evoked. Instead, *Le Monde* and *20 Minutes* talk about "pants stained with red" or "stained with red painting". In *Le Figaro*, the word "blood" appears only in the title. After that, there is no more mention to blood – even if the article focuses on it. The two TV news I analysed did not even cover this news and the religious newspaper *La Croix* chose not to show at all images from the activist movements. The news media used instead a picture of a woman in a supermarket. Most of the media tried to avoid shocking public moral. In this case, we can clearly say that the menstrual taboo shapes the discourses, because it seems that, to acknowledge that it deals with blood – even fake one – is already considered as too shocking and probably as going against the moral. So we can note here a plurality of discourses within the same media, since news media like *Libération*, which denounced several times the menstrual taboo, also uses the word "red" to talk about menstrual blood. That means that doing the taboo does not necessarily completely break it.

Although the feminist discourse tried to denounce the effect of patriarchy, it did not manage to avoid the stereotypes, which reinforced this system. That means that in every media, the patriarchal ideology is present and has spread through stereotypes such as menstruation being a female concern only and the abjection that menstrual blood produces. The menstrual taboo can be said to act like a disciplinary power since it is meant to control women and it has been spread and internalised throughout discourses (Foucault, 1967). The normalisation of the menstrual taboo seems, therefore, to make mostly impossible its representation outside the patriarchal matrix, especially for something which is constructed in a gendered way such as news media – this is why one could argue as far as saying that all discourses reproduced these stereotypes.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this analysis, whenever media dealt with a taboo topic, they did not necessarily break it. With the coverage of the debate as an economic issue, the real problem has not been tackled. It even tends towards a reinforcement of the power. In that case, the menstrual taboo has not even been challenged and has only been ignored, because the discursive practice was constituted by the patriarchal ideology.

In the feminist discourses, the articles focused on inequalities toward women and misogyny. These articles denounced the role of patriarchy through the discourses of women who were, then, out of the closet. It seems that the taboo can be broken when the speech is given to the ones who experience it. In this case, the ones who undergo the taboo can report the inequalities and issues they face. It may lead to a change because their discourses constitute a social world which is different from the dominant one.

However, all these discourses reinforced the stereotypes about menstruation and gender divisions – yet, at different degrees – which can lead to the reinforcement or the support of the menstrual taboo. To break a taboo, it seems therefore necessary to construct a discourse outside the system of oppression, which actually is secure by the taboo itself.

# Conclusion

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## Summary

The critical discourse analysis of French news media discourses concerning the 'tampon tax' revealed that during the debate, two kind of discourses, an economic and a feminist one, emerged. They have proved to be, at the same time, contradictory and sharing common points.

On the one hand, the economic discourse appeared as the most spread. This discourse mostly justified the first choice of the government – that was to reject the amendment for lowering the 'tampon tax'. When the 'tampon tax' was framed as an economic issue, women were removed from the news media, even activists who fought to get this amendment remained invisible, unlike men who were often quoted and interviewed. This seems typical of news media which are cultural productions and which therefore head toward the reproduction and the enforcement of dominant groups and norms. The interesting point about this discourse is that gender inequalities were not even mentioned. The economic discourse has, indeed, reduced to silence women and the issues they encounter, in the same way usually done by the menstrual taboo. The feminist movements and their arguments were also invisible and discredited in that discourse. So, when news media framed the 'tampon tax' as an economic issue, their discourses were constituted of the patriarchal ideology. The discursive practices were, therefore, the reproduction and the reflection of the patriarchal social structures.

On the other hand, when news media framed the 'tampon tax' as a society issue, the discourse was feminist. In that case, women and menstruation were depicted as freed from the taboo. The shame, which is usually associated to the stigma of menses, became in that discourse a matter of men. One characteristic of the feminist discourses in news media was the space given to women. News media like Libération or L'Obs used, indeed, many interviews of activists for their articles. This method confirms the idea that the use of intertextuality challenges the dominant discourse. Giving the floor to women seems to have

been a way to let menstruation enter the public sphere. Women were, therefore, unlocked from the closet. Moreover, when news media focused on women and questions of inequalities, the menstrual taboo and its oppression on female body was more denounced. The 'tampon tax' was often described as an allegory of the female body. In that case, the discourse was constitutive since the discursive practices contribute to reshaping the social structure. Although this discourse has highly contributed in the reshaping of the menstrual taboo and was the more willing to break it, it has also been constituted through the patriarchal structure.

This being said, none of the news media discourses about the 'tampon tax' managed to escape the patriarchal matrix, since stereotypes about menstruation were used in all the articles and reports analysed. Menstruation was constantly used to reinforce gender division and stereotypes, even in the feminist discourse. Yet, this is one of the effects of the menstrual taboo which aims at reinforcing gender differences so that men can keep their power (Thomas, 2007). Thus, the 'tampon tax' was described either as a debate which only concerns women or as an issue that men cannot understand.

Moreover, all discourses also depicted menstrual blood as abject and, as a threat for social order. Every article described it as a weapon potentially dangerous and massively used by activists to be heard and to counter the political power/order. A few of them did not even write the word "blood" but used instead expressions like "stained with red" (AFP, 2015). La Croix and the analysed TV news did not show images where fake menstrual blood used by activists appears. Menstruation is still represented throughout discourses using dangerous images, as a threat for patriarchy. As long as this idea will be spread in media, the menstrual taboo will keep on existing insofar as the concept of abject helps to maintain this taboo updated.

So, it seems that news media can break the menstrual taboo as long as they let the ones who live the taboo talk about it. By so doing, they produce also discourses about the taboo, which implies that the tabooed individuals have to find a way to the public sphere themselves. In the case of the 'tampon tax', activists played an important role in bringing visibility on their cause. However, the production of news media does not escape to biases, especially when they only published a wire of the press agency. When articles were written by a journalist of the newspaper redaction, the discourses were less constituted and a little more constitutive. So the constraints of production, and especially the necessity to produce information quickly and



ceaselessly, leads to the reproduction of stereotypes and heads toward the reinforcement of social structures.

## **Discussion**

Throughout this analysis, it appeared that the menstrual taboo can still be broken but it is a process which will require time. To go further in this specific analysis, several points can be developed for future researches. For example, to see if the media coverage and discourses about the 'tampon tax' has helped to break the taboo or at least to give a positive representation about it, an audience analysis could also be relevant.

Moreover, managing to represent menstruation without reproducing gender stereotypes remains a challenge, but due to the democratisation of gender studies, these discursive practices might be easier to identify and therefore to debunk.

However, as long as menstruation will be signified by the concept of abject, it seems mostly impossible that the taboo surrounding it stops. Blood still provokes disgust, and the idea of dirtiness and of danger are still conveyed. The discourses about menstrual blood during the debate about the 'tampon tax' proved that there is still a huge ambivalence towards blood representations.

News media have, indeed, depicted menstrual blood as such a disgusting fluid that it represents a threat. Disgust is a very strong and violent feeling that anyone has already experienced. Therefore, to challenge disgust concerning menstrual blood appears like something very difficult to achieve, which will probably take years. Media discourses will have, indeed, to shape and reshape the social structures through discursive practices. Moreover, this feeling is actually the one used to justify the reason why menstruation has to stay in the private sphere and should never be shown. The stigma about menstruation coming directly from abjection, it seems therefore useful to change discourses and meaning about menstrual blood to break the taboo. However, the analysis shows that even the feminist discourse, which aims at breaking the menstrual taboo and at ending patriarchy, represented menstrual blood as a threat. It would be, then, necessary to analyse blood representations in

media from a feminist perspective with the aim of suggesting another way to represent menstrual blood.

However, the debate about the 'tampon tax' and its representation in the discourses of news media proved that its abject nature menstrual blood can also be a powerful weapon. This confirms the idea that blood has always had different meanings. If we consider society as a body, blood is a requirement to work properly. It is only well considered and represented in a positive way in media, as long as blood runs in a controlled and surveyed way and stays within this society. Blood donation is a good example of a positively depicted way by media (Copeman, 2009). However, from the moment blood leaks in an uncontrolled way and crosses the boundaries of society – it is the case in a murderer attack but also in the case of menstruation, as explained in this study – it becomes abject and evokes horror and even terror. From the Foucauldian perspective, one understands that blood used to be a symbol of power in classical society. The idea of purity of blood prevailed and it was directly connected to the right of death, since the latter was performed through blood (Foucault, 1978). However, there has been a transition from the right of death to the power over life. The latter one is exercised through sex, which is at the intersection between regulation of the population and the disciplined body (Foucault, 1978). We can wonder if menstruation does not connect the right of death with the power over life - especially as the concept of purity is also directly linked to menstrual blood (Douglas, 1966) and menstruation has been controlled, through medicalisation, as a way to regulate population with, for example, birth control. This can explain why menstrual blood is represented as both a threat and a power. By using the idea of the right of death, we can also wonder if the leaking of menstrual blood symbolises the death of patriarchy. That would explain why it has also been represented by news media as a weapon during the struggle for the 'tampon tax' when feminist activists decided to use fake blood in their actions. . So, what if women were using this weapon against the power? Could menstrual blood be used as way to attack patriarchy and therefore free women from oppression? These questions could be explored through further analysis by using the concepts of Foucault.

Some researchers have already analysed the menstrual blood as a threat for society (Douglas, 1966), whereas other researches about menstrual activism argue that periods can be empowering (Bobel, 2011; Knight, 2006). Although the female blood seems to fascinate as much as it disgusts, the number of scholars who developed its political power is very low.

And yet, the analysis of the representations of menstrual blood in media as a political weapon appears now as an interesting question, which could give some hints on how to break a taboo, with or without the aim of destroying the system of oppression maintained by this taboo. Using blood representations in a political battle can be a spectacular and sensational way to appear in the public sphere, which will therefore bring the attention of media. Even though the violence sets off by the vision of menstrual blood can, certainly, hurt the moral, it might also be thought-provoking and lead to further discussions.

For further researches, it would be interesting to analyse menstrual blood both in all kind of media and not only in news media. The point of view of activists could be very fruitful too to understand their position on the use of blood as a weapon against the power or if it is only a means of communication.

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Alliance pour les Chiffres de la Presse et des Medias. Available at: <http://www.acpm.fr/>  
[Accessed 16 April 2016]

# Appendices

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## Corpus

This is the list of all the articles analysed for this thesis. They are classified by media and chronological order.

### Le Monde (Date of analysis 5 April)

- Le Monde with AFP. (2015). Le débat sur la taxation des tampons et serviettes périodiques arrive en France. [online] 28 February. Available at:
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- **Le Monde. (2015).** La baisse de la "taxe tampon" votée à l'Assemblée. [online] 11 December. Available at: [http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/12/11/la-baisse-de-la-taxe-tampon-votee-a-l-assemblee\\_4829868\\_3224.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/12/11/la-baisse-de-la-taxe-tampon-votee-a-l-assemblee_4829868_3224.html)

### **Libération (date of analysis 6 April)**

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### **Le Figaro (date of analysis 7 April)**

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- L'Express with AFP. (2015). Taxe tampons: "Laissez-nous saigner sans nous surtaxer!". [online] 11 November. Available at: [http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/tva-des-tampons-quotient-conjugal-hommes-et-femmes-inegaux-devant-l-impot\\_1734707.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/tva-des-tampons-quotient-conjugal-hommes-et-femmes-inegaux-devant-l-impot_1734707.html)
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- Schmitt, A. (2015). La taxe tampon maintenue : "Je paye donc des taxes sur mon utérus". [online] 15 October. Available at: <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/societe/20151015.OBS7716/la-taxe-tampon-maintenue-donc-on-doit-s-arracher-l-uterus-avec-les-mains.html>
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- Hamet, L. (2015). "Taxe tampon" : avec la baisse de la TVA, les prix des protections hygiéniques vont-ils vraiment baisser ? [online] 11 December. Available at: <http://www.metronews.fr/info/taxe-tampon-avec-la-baisse-de-la-tva-a-5-5-les-prix-des-protections-hygiene-vont-ils-vraiment-baisser/molk!3eK9EU2FKMjIw/>

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## Analysis grids

In this thesis, I used the three dimensional discourse analyse of Fairclough and I combine it with the main concepts about menstruation. I built analysis grids only for the the first and second dimension.

### Dimension 1: Text

Media (Name of the article, website or tv channel)	Arguments	Language (grammar, words,..)	Image	Metaphor/Comparison	Lexical field	Tone

<b>Transitivity</b>				
<b>Verbs modals</b>				
<b>Intertuality</b>				

In this grid, I collect all the data which were connected to these concepts:

Blood	Abject	Menstruation	Stigma

**Dimension 2: discourse practice**

For that part, two grids have been built understand media production and consumption

**Media production:**

Media (Name of the article or tv channel)	Type of media (website ? TV news? Public service?)	Political opinion of the media	Date	Author	Production rhythm	Time of the topic (only for TV news) or size of the articles	Rhythm of articles publication about that topic	Genre

**Media consumption**

Media	Date	Hour of diffusion for tv news	Audience (age, sex, class...)