

Lund University

Department of Social Anthropology

SANK02

Autumn 2016



## The Burkini as a Symbolic Threat:

*Anthropological Perspectives on the Ban of the  
Burkini on French Beaches 2016*

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## **Abstract**

The Burkini, a swimwear that covers the entire body except but the face, hands and feet, was banned from French beaches in 2016 and created a heated debate in French and international media. This study focuses on the politics of the Burkini, where politicians' arguments against the Burkini are divided into three major themes: (1) the Burkini as oppressive, (2) the Burkini as a threat to the social order, and (3) the Burkini as against 'vivre-ensemble'. The study aims to discuss the French Burkini ban with the help of anthropological theories of symbolic categorization. Mary Douglas' theory of the body as a symbol was utilized to analyze the material, together with the concept of dress. Through the symbolism of dirt and pollution 'Muslims' were positioned as dangerous outsiders threatening the safety of the French people and the social order in French society. The Burkini was also used as a 'reversed mirror' through which the moral code of the nation was promoted; where bodies should be uncovered on French beaches and women's sexuality should be freely available. The rhetoric reveals how the Burkini was used as a political tool to create and reproduce symbolic boundaries between 'Muslims' and the imagined national community in France. This thesis highlights the use women's bodies in an elitist discourse to construct a symbolism that legitimizes a continued domination and discrimination of Muslims in France.

*Keywords: Anthropology; Burkini; Symbolism; France; Muslims; Citizenship*

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## 1. Introduction

A swimwear that covers *too much* skin gets banned on French beaches!?

The Burkini, a swimwear that covers the entire body but the face, hands and feet, was found so provocative and offensive that it had to be removed from several French beaches during the summer of 2016. Police were actioned to enforce these new bylaws restricting women from covering too much skin, in the form of a headscarf or Burkini, on several French beaches. The controversial ban created a national and international debate that extended beyond the Burkini as swimwear; where media and politicians jointly politicized and constructed various meanings of the clothing. However, the Muslim female dress is not a new topic in the French media. Previously, the ban of Muslim headscarves in public schools in 2004, and full face veiling (*burqa* and *niqab*) in 2011 have been heatedly debated in French media.

Although I was initially unaware of these previous debates, the discussion of the Burkini in Swedish media and the justification of the Burkini ban informed my interest in this topic. Why does the Burkini – a piece of fabric designed to enable women to go swimming evoke so much debate and emotion? The design is very similar to the wetsuit that my friends and I wear when we go surfing in Sweden, covering all our body apart from the face. Although some people think that we are mad going surfing in the cold water no one has ever questioned our outfits. There are plenty of divers and surfer all around the world wearing a similar dress, which has never been viewed as a problem or a threat. Evidently, there must be something about the symbolism of the Burkini that engage so many people and urge them to express their opinion publically.

The first ‘anti-Burkini’ decree put forward by David Lisnard, the Mayor of Cannes, stated on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July, reveals a strong opposition to the Burkini:

A beachwear ostentatiously manifesting a religious affiliation, while France and places of religious worship are now the target of terrorist attacks, is likely to create a risk of disturbing public order (gatherings, clashes etc.) it is necessary to prevent.

Access to beaches and bathing is forbidden to count the signing of this Order until August 31, 2016 to any person not properly dressed, respectful of morality and secularism, respect the rules Hygiene and safety of bathing adapted to the maritime public domain. Wearing clothes while swimming with opposite connotation to these

principles is also prohibited. [...] Any violation will be subject to a trial Proceedings and will be punished with a fine first class, 38 euros. (The World, 2016b)

This statements strongly contrasts with the narrative of the origin of the swimwear. The Burkini was designed by the Australian designer Aheda Zanetti in 2004, who explains that it was developed to be in line with Islamic code of dress with the intention to enable and encourage Muslim women to participate in sports (URL 1). More than 700,000 swimsuits have been sold since 2008 and are used by women worldwide (Zoya, 2016). Zanetti explains that the Burkini is not only for Muslims estimating that over 40% is sold to non-Muslim women whom for various reasons want to cover their skin (Zoya, 2016).

The politics of the Burkini will be discussed in this thesis; analyzing the symbolism used in the rhetoric of the first anti-Burkini decree along with other arguments against the Burkini on French beaches

### **1.1. Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this essay is to discuss the French Burkini ban with the help of anthropological theories on symbolic categorization. In order to understand the symbolism of the Burkini ban, I will analyze and compare the rhetoric of French politicians arguing for the ban, and further discuss the symbolic boundaries which are (re)produced in this debate. My main research question is: How can we understand the French Burkini ban from the perspective of anthropology, and more specifically by an analysis of the symbolism involved in French politicians anti-Burkini rhetoric? With a starting-point in Mary Douglas theorizing of the body as a symbol for society I aim to answer the following research questions:

1. How is the Burkini and the Muslim women wearing the Burkini portrayed by politicians arguing for the ban of the Burkini?
2. How can we contextualize the politics of the Burkini - the arguments for the Burkini ban from left and right political parties?
3. What can the anti-Burkini rhetoric tell us about ideas of gender and sexuality in France?
4. What can the anti-Burkini rhetoric tell us about French citizenship and nationalism?

## 1.2 Previous Studies

In order to guide these research questions further, it is essential to examine the current academic field of the symbolism of the veil. I found a vast amount of previous research on the topic, discussed in the context of both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. A large amount of anthropological literature has more specifically discussed the veil and the Muslim headscarf in the French context (Scott, 2007; Bowen, 2008; Joppke, 2009; Hopkins, 2014). The veil or the Muslim headscarf has been a recurrent topic in French politics; from the '*l'affaire du foulard*' ('the debate about the headscarves', see chapter 2.4) during the late eighties and early nineties, the ban of Muslim headscarves in French public schools in 2004 and the ban of full face veils in France 2011. These debates have been examined and incorporated in the work of several anthropologists over the years. Scott (2007), Bowen (2008) and Joppke (2009) all discuss the French ban of Muslim headscarves in public schools 2004, analyzing the debate and how it relates to different discourses in the French society. Scott (2007) discusses how, in France, the veil in France relates to secularism, racism, individualism and sexuality, and provides a thorough understanding of the historical context of its politics. She also proposes that the ban of the Muslim headscarf in public schools, which is justified by the protection of *laïcité* (French secularism), is grounded in a hidden discourse of racism and further reveals a contradiction in the French system of gender equality and sexuality (ibid). The French word *laïcité*, the French version of secularism, refers to a separation of the church and the state, and more generally a strict separation between politics and religion (Jansen, 2009: 475).

Similarly, Bowen concludes that the ban of the headscarf reveals the view (and concern) of Muslims living in France. Bowen (2003) discusses the place of Islam in France from the colonial rule to *l'affaire du foulard* 1989 up until the ban of the Muslim headscarves in schools from 2004. He argues that the headscarf debate is related to three major anxieties in France: a growth of communalism<sup>1</sup> at the expense of social mixing, the increased influence of international "Islamism" in France, and the denigration of women in the poor suburbs (Bowen, 2003:4-5). Joppke (2009) compares the politics of the veil in France, Germany and Britain where he primarily focusses on the liberal discourse and response to Islamic practices and the veil in these countries. All of these studies conclude that the veil or the Muslim headscarf has become the symbol of Islam, further symbolizing the threat of fundamental Islam in France.

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<sup>1</sup> Communalism, in French *communautisme*, refers to the closing of ethnically defined communities on themselves; a priority of the group over the national community and a refusal of integration (Bowen, 2007: 156).

More recent studies have further elaborated on the restriction of veiling in the public sphere as a way to control women's bodies. Ramínez (2015) compare the restriction of dress and the enforcement of a certain type of dress in non-Muslim and Muslim countries and argues that both is about the control of women's bodies, although by different means. Billaud and Castro (2013) make a comparison between laws banning veiled women and prostitutes from public spaces in France, arguing that these laws manifest a new form of French nationalism reproduced by the drawing of sexual boundaries (see chapter 3.3.2). Several studies discuss how the veil has become a symbol of Islam's supposed oppression of women and a symbol of gender inequality, positioned in opposition to the contemporary identity marker of gender equality in many European countries (Scott, 2007; Roggeband and Lettinga, 2016, Towns et al, 2014). Roggeband and Lettinga (2016) explain that the argument of gender equality is increasingly used in the anti-veil debate in order to show the incompatibility of Islamic culture in order to justify further restrictions on Muslim minorities.

Numerous studies have discussed the "Western" rhetoric of unveiling as a means to 'save' the oppressed Muslim women (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Mahmood, 2001; Scott, 2007). Abu-Lughod (2002) a prominent anthropologist, elaborates on the concept of victimization of veiled women and how it is used in the rhetoric to justify U.S intervention in Afghanistan. Mahmood (2001) further discuss how the victimization of veiled women often incorporates a denial of women's agency. She describes how these women are attributed a 'false consciousness' in the feminist liberal rhetoric, and thus perceived as non-autonomous subjects unable to talk for themselves and incapable of expressing the 'true' meaning of the veil, that is, the submission to patriarchy.

Chakraborti and Zempi (2012) discuss the veil as a visible marker of a Muslim identity, and how an imagery has been created around the veil as signifier of the Islamic culture's threat to democracy in France and other European countries. Chakraborti and Zempi (2012) further argue for an emergence of a cultural racism - a new form of racism which is not focusing so much on skin color but specifically targets veiled women due to their visibility in the public space. The media can be seen as playing a crucial role in the imagery created of the veil as a symbol of Islam's threat to Western values and the Western way of living (Khiabany and Williamson, 2008). Khiabany and Williamson (2008) argue that the media plays an important

role in constructing an image of Islam and the veil as homogenous and non-progressive, and as a threat to Western 'modern' values and Western ways of living.

Although these previous studies provide an historical context and valuable insights of the politics of the veil relating to nationalism, sexuality and citizenship in France, no previous anthropological research has been conducted on the 2016 ban of the Burkini. Intending to fill this gap, this thesis will focus on the Burkini as reported in French media whilst incorporating insights and comparing it to previous studies. I do not propose to give a complete picture of the politics of the Burkini but by focusing on this from the perspective of anthropological symbolism I intend to elaborate on previous discussions of the symbolism of the veil, and its significance in the national discourse in France.

### **1.3 Theory**

To explain how the ban of the Burkini may be linked to a national discourse in France, I will turn to the work of sociologist Yuval-Davis (1993) and her theory of gender as fundamental in the symbolical reproduction of nationalism. Yuval-Davis outlines the concept of nation and links it together with gender relations and the symbolism of the female body. She states that the female body is fundamental in the biological, cultural and symbolical reproduction of nations, and that the control of women is fundamental for the order of society (Ibid: 622-623). She argues that gender relations are significant in all dimensions of the national project; in the construction of citizenship, in the cultural construction of collectives and their boundaries and the control of women as biological reproducers as essential in policies directed towards the control of the actual size of various majority and minority populations. In this thesis I will focus especially on the role of the Burkini ban in the creation of symbolic boundaries between non-Muslims and Muslims in France.

Yuval-Davis (1993) further explains the concepts of nation and nationalism, concepts that will be discussed in this essay. Using Anderson's (1983) term, Yuval-Davis (1993: 624, 626) explains national projects as 'imagined communities', which involve a process of continuous reconstruction of boundaries dividing the world between 'us' and 'them'. Yuval-Davis (1993:624-625) further explains that these symbolic boundaries are reproduced by a process of inclusion and exclusion, defining who belongs and who does not belong to the national community. She argues that this can be seen in debates and the fear of immigration, and also as systemic exclusions of minorities within the boundaries of the state (Ibid: 625). People are thereby identified as members or non-members of a society, and Yuval-Davis (1993: 627)

further states that particular cultural clothes or style of dress and behavior, and especially gender symbols are important in this differentiation.

I will focus more specifically on the concept of 'dress' to elaborate on the symbolism of the Burkini and why a covered female body is perceived as a provocative threat on the beaches in France. Here I will use Entwistle's analysis of "Dress as an embodied practice, a situated bodily practice which is embedded with social world and fundamental to micro social order" (Entwistle, 2001:34). She explains that dress, which lies at the margins of the body, marks the boundary between self and others, individual and society (2001:37). Drawing from Entwistle's (2001) work, I will discuss dress as a visible marker of social belonging and a marker of Otherness, more specifically looking at how the Burkini relate to the dress code of French beaches.

Mayer (2000) elaborates on Yuval-Davis (1993) theory, not only linking gender and nation but also sexuality. She argues that nation, gender and sexuality are socially constructed and that they play an important role in creating one another in the process of constructing 'us' and 'them' categories and the exclusion of 'the Other' (Ibid: 1). Mayer (2000: 2,6) argues that sexuality is essential for the reproduction of nationalism and that the control of women's sexuality is a vital way to reproduce the nation, 'defend its moral code' and control the (sexually) deviant Other. An example of this is found in Mayer's (2000) book, where Allen (2000: 309, 315) argues that the U.S military symbolizes the American nation, embodies the best values and ideals of the American citizenship and stand as a defender of the nation. He argues that the exclusion of women and homosexuals in combat units in the U.S military is based on a fear that gender and sexual diversity in the military would threaten the nation; national values and especially the nation's loyalty to heterosexuality and traditional gender roles (Ibid: 323). He further argues that the exclusion of women and homosexuals in the military excludes these groups from full membership of the nation but that they, as marginal groups and outsiders (as opposed to the ideal male heterosexual citizen), are strategically used in the process of defining the terms of U.S membership and national belonging (Ibid: 323). Mayer's (2000) theory of sexuality and its importance in nation-building (in the construction of 'us' and 'them') will be utilized to explain the view of Muslim women, as well as feminine and sexual norms in French society.

A symbol is something that stands for or represents something else (Bowie, 2000:36). Symbols are culturally constructed and the meaning of most symbols are therefore generally not universally recognized (Ibid). However, all humans have bodies and the body is thus often symbolically used to maintain, contest and negotiate social boundaries (Ibid: 36, 62). In order to understand the symbolism of the Burkini, I will use Mary Douglas' theories about dirt and pollution discussed in her prominent book "Purity and Danger" (1966). Douglas explains that every cultural system involves an exaggerated differentiation of categories, which are achieved through everyday actions of separation, purification and demarcation. She argues that "The body can stand as a symbol for any bounded system" and that the body can therefore be used to create and maintain these boundaries in a society, as well as to represent boundaries in a society which are understood as threatened. I will use this theory to understand how the regulation of Muslim women's dress, in particular the ban of the Burkini, can be seen as symbolic demarcation of boundaries within French society.

Douglas (1966) explains that ideas of purity and impurity are central in the creation of symbolic boundaries and the maintenance of social order within a society. She argues that notions of pathogens and hygiene express a symbolic system rather than 'pure dirt' and that 'Dirt is matter out of place' (Ibid: 36). A reference to hygiene and/or dirt can thus be seen as a way to point out that which is ambiguous or in the margins of society and, hence, a dangerous threat to the social order (Ibid: 36-38). Douglas (1966: 36-37) argues that pollution ideas are used to influence people's behavior so that the social order is protected from transgressions of boundaries which cause disorder. That which is recognized as causing disorder has potentiality and thus symbolizes both danger and power (Ibid: 101). Douglas (1966:130) further links hygiene and pollution regulations with moral, where she argues that some (but far from all) aspects in a society, which are morally inappropriate, can be highlighted by pollution rules. She explains that pollution beliefs can be applied to uphold the moral code in several ways. When moral rules are obscure or contradictory pollution beliefs can clarify the issue (Ibid: 131-132, 143).

Douglas (1966:33-35) uses the example of the relationship between the Havik *Brahmins* and the *Untouchables* in the Indian caste system to illustrate this connection between pollution, boundaries and social order. Hinduism is traditionally founded upon a hierarchy of different groups, so called 'castes', where Brahmins are the social group highest up in the hierarchy whereas the Untouchables stand outside the caste system because they are considered so

highly polluted (and therefore assigned to take care of all the ‘dirt’ in society such as defecation and death) (Bowie, 2006:41-42). Douglas (1966:33-35) describes how Brahmins’ lives are restricted by different purity rules which separates them from the Untouchables whom are considered dirty and polluted. Direct, and even indirect contact with an Untouchable may carry pollution to a Brahmin. In this way, through a collaboration between the different casts (and the Untouchables), is the symbolism of dirt, the fear of pollution and its consequent purity rules used to regulate the contact between the two groups and maintain the social and hierarchical order in society.

By applying Douglas’ theories about the symbolism of the body in the maintenance and creation of boundaries in a society, I aim to convey the symbolism and hidden discourse of the ban of the Burkini and hence the control of Muslim women’s bodies in French political debates.

#### **1.4 Method and Delimitations**

I have used a combined set of methods as the basis of my analysis, including a qualitative literature review, and collecting empirical material from media. In addition, I carried out a short interview with a Swedish woman in her thirties who grew up in France and speak French fluently. The controversial ban of the Burkini has stirred a widespread debate in both French as well as international media, and an immense amount of news articles have been written on the topic. I have limited the data to include only French media as the focus of the essay is on the French debate and specifically the rhetoric of French politicians arguing for the ban of the Burkini. As this study focuses specifically on the Burkini ban I have further restricted the data collection to the period from July 2016 until September 2016, a period during which time the Burkini ban decrees were ordered and later challenged by the French State Council.

I have used second hand sources in the form of websites and newspapers, and to reduce further biases and interpretations I have, as far as possible, looked at interviews conducted by the writer of the article him/herself. I have used Google’s search engine simply writing “Burkini ban” and “Burkini France”, using ‘a snowball strategy’ following links from one news article to another. This strategy led me to the following French newspapers (with political affiliation placed in brackets): *Libération* (left), *L'Express* (centre), *Le Point* (conservative), *Le Parisien* (centre), *Le Monde* (liberal), *Le Figaro* (conservative) (URL 2),

*La Provence* (not disclosed) (URL 3). As I do not speak French nor have the resources to use a translator I have read the English version of *Le Monde* and translated articles from the other newspapers using Google translate. Although this translation has enabled me to access the French debate I am aware of the limitation of this, as Google translate is not a very sensitive language tool for expressions, slang et c. When found necessary, and in order to make citations more understandable I have made minor corrections in the translations, without altering or losing any meaning.

In the analysis of the French media discourse I found recurring topics and themes describing the Burkini as; (1) oppressive to women, (2) a threat to the social order and (3) against ‘*vivre ensemble*’. From these themes I retracted the following keywords which have been used in the search for literature: victimization, agency, gender equality, sexuality, unveiling, criminalization. I combined these with the initially utilized and more general keywords such as veil/ Muslim headscarf, Burkini, Islamophobia, France, Muslims, symbolism, symbolic boundaries.

In the analysis of the anti-Burkini debate I am aware that the meaning of the political statements discussed are my interpretations and that there are many different ways to interpret these texts. Attempting to reduce potential biases, I have incorporated several citations (although obtained indirectly from newspapers) and some images in this essay. I acknowledge that my different statuses influence my interpretations, that being a Swedish white female student in my early thirties no doubt influences the way I perceive the statements of the primarily fifty-plus white French male politicians. What is also important to mention is also my view of the Burkini and the Muslim headscarf; I consider it each person’s choice, no matter the sex, race, religion or skin color, to cover or not to cover one’s skin or hair and I am personally opposed to the Burkini-ban in France. I do not claim to know the ‘true meaning(s)’ of the veil or the Burkini for the women wearing it, but leave it to them to express this and encourage further studies where veiled women’s voices may be heard. Due to the limitations of this thesis in terms of its time-frame, I was unable to do so.

I have chosen to use the terms *veil*, *hijab* and *Muslim headscarf* interchangeably in this thesis. Although I realize that these may hold different connotations and meanings, I have chosen to use the terms as presented in the empirical material.

## **1.5 Disposition**

In this first chapter I have presented the research problem, purpose and questions, along with introducing the theories and methods applied in the thesis. Chapter 2 provides a background about the French context, including a short summary of the Burkini debate, the recent terrorist attacks in France along with an outline of the historical politics of the veil in France. In chapter 3 and 4 I will analyze politicians' arguments for the Burkini ban and their view of women wearing the Burkini. Chapter 3 discusses the political rhetoric of women wearing Burkini as victims of oppression, linking it to French ideas of gender and sexuality. Chapter 4 discusses the Burkini as a threat to the social order, linking it to a fear of Islamization. Chapter 5 discusses the Burkini as against 'vivre-ensemble', linking it to French citizenship and integration politics. The final chapter consists of concluding remarks.

## 2. Background

In order to understand the rhetoric used in the Burkini debate it is important to understand the French context in which the Burkini ban was implemented. In this chapter, I will therefore give a brief summary: first outlining the Burkini ban in France 2016. Secondly, I will describe the recent terror attacks in France and the perceived threat against France. Thirdly, I will describe the French colonialism of Algeria and the perception of veiled Algerian women during this period. Finally, I will provide a summary of *l'affaire du foulard*, the ban of Muslim headscarves in schools in 2004 and the ban of full face veils in 2011. First of all, let me present some statistical data in order to have a better understanding of the empirical material, when referring to the Muslim population in France. France has one of the largest Muslim populations in the EU. In 2010 there were 4.7 million Muslims living in France, which equates to approximately 7.5% of the country's total population (Hackett, 2016).

### 2.1 The order of events of the Burkini ban

The Burkini initially stirred up debate in the French media in the summer of 2016 when the association *Marseille Smile 13* advertised for a “Burkini day” to be held in a Speedwater Park in Pennes-Mirabeau on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September, 2016. It was described as a private event for women and children only, and as an exceptional occasion allowing women and children to swim together wearing the Burkini. This event, advertised on Facebook, created a political controversy where politicians criticized it as a “Disorder of public order” and “A provocation given the current context<sup>2</sup>” (Dagorn and Sénécat, 2016). This led to the event being cancelled on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August and the Facebook page deleted (Le Parisien, 2016).

A couple of weeks after the attacks described in the next section (2.2), on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July, the first ban of the Burkini was announced by David Lisnard, the mayor of Cannes. (The World, 2016b). This was followed by similar “anti-Burkini” decrees in 31 other French municipalities along the French coast line and in Corsica (The World, 2016a). Below, image 1 shows the 31 cities that adopted an ‘anti-Burkini’ decree and those whose municipal police have established

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<sup>2</sup> Recurrently in the anti-Burkini debate the ‘context’ refers to the emergency and the recent terror attacks in France

minutes<sup>3</sup>. In dark green, cities in which the municipal police established minutes; In light green, those where an order was taken but where no verbal reports were issued<sup>4</sup>.



Image 1: Map indicating the 31 cities that introduced a Burkini bans and the cities which issued formal ticketing for infringement.

Source: *Le Monde* August 26 2016 (URL 4)

Despite the Burkini bans political support for the ban was suspended by the State Council in Villeneuve-Loubet on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, concluding that “there was not any risk of disturbing public order as a result of the clothing adopted for bathing by certain persons. In absence of such risk, the mayor could not take a measure prohibiting access to the beach or swimming” (Decoders, 2016). However, the ban of the Burkini in the thirty other municipals with similar decrees remain in force until they’ve been challenged in court, and mayors have announced that they will continue to enforce the ban (Decoders, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Establishing minutes is interpreted by the author as meaning the municipals in which the Burkini has been banned, however did not issue formal ticketing.

<sup>4</sup> The author interprets this as meaning that no fines were given.

The support of the Burkini ban was divided among French politicians, varying between as well as within political parties. Despite the State Council's ruling, the Socialist Prime Minister Manuel Valls continue to support the ban (Cheutin et al, 2016), whereas several of his ministers disagree with the ban; quietly distancing themselves from the ban as in the case of Axelle Lemaire (Secretary of State) and Bernard Cazeneuve (Minister of Interior). Others, more strongly objected to the ban as in the case of Najat Vallaud-Belkacem (Minister of Education) and Marisol Touraine (Minister of Social Affairs and Health) (Berdah, 2016). Valls, although supporting the Burkini, ban did not want to legislate against the Burkini on a national level (Bonnefous et al, 2016).

Politicians from right-wing parties, such as Marie Le Pen (president of the National front) and Sarkozy (leader of the Republicans) on the other hand, argued for a national legislation against the Burkini and further argued for a total ban of the veil in public spaces (The World, 2016d; Jocard, 2016a). Le Pen took a strong stance against the Burkini, arguing that it is a threat to the "soul of the nation" (Jocard, 2016b), and Sarkozy announced that he was ready to change the French Constitution in order to do so (The World, 2016d). The Burkini debate not only divides the left Socialist party but also the right, where Alain Juppe and Jean Leonetti belonging to the Republicans disagree with the Republicans leader Sarkozy, and are against a legislation against the Burkini and the veil in public spaces (Bonnefous et al, 2016).

In addition to the political view of the Burkini, a survey made by *Ifo* for the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, may give an indication of the public opinion (however far from conclusive). The *Ifo* survey, which was conducted between 22 and 24 August 2016, asked 1001 French people the following question: "The Burkini is a woman's bathing suit covering the torso, as well as part of the limbs and the head. Are you supportive, opposed or indifferent to the wearing of the Burkini on the beaches?" (URL 5). The results showed that 64% of the participants French are opposed to, 6% are in favor and 30% indifferent to the presence of Burkinis on French beaches (URL 5).

## **2.2 Recent terror attacks in France and the perceived threat towards the nation**

France has been subjected to several attacks in the last years, escalating during 2015 and 2016. These attacks are often referred to as so called 'terror attacks' by media and the French government, and may be defined as "the calculated use of violence (or the threat of violence)

against civilians in order to attain goals that are political or religious or ideological in nature” (URL 6). As specific terrorist attacks are not the focus of this thesis I do not intend to give conclusive description of these events. However, by discussing three of these events I will provide some insight to context and the perceived threat towards France and the French people.

The attack at *Charlies Hebdo* (a French left-wing satirical magazine) in Paris on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2015, was followed by an attack in a kosher supermarket two days later (Fassin, 2015:189). The Kouachi brothers, killing 12 office workers including 5 cartoonists, wanted revenge for satirical images offensive to Mohammed and insults against Muslims (ibid). On the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2015 a march was organized consisting of 4 million people and politicians from all political parties (apart from Front National whom were not welcome) in France carrying banners stating *Je suis Charlie* (I am Charlie) (ibid). Fassin (2015: 189) explains how the attack was perceived as a threat to French values, against the fundamental values of *liberté* and *laïcité*, relating to the attacks violation of freedom of speech and the antireligious content of satirical cartoons produced as the Charlie Hebdo office. He argues that the march and the *Je suis Charlie* movement clearly focused on the assaults on the offices, and consequently overshadowing the killing of four Jews in the supermarket (ibid: 190). Fassin (2015: 190-191) highlights the hypocrisy of this; whilst state officials call for the protection of the principles of *liberté* and *laïcité*, they were at the same time offending these same principles by denying or ignoring the killings of the Jews in the supermarket.

In the end of 2015, on the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> of November, there was a second major attack in Paris, killing 130 people in a concert hall, a stadium, restaurants and bars (BBC News, 2016). The so called Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attacks, and once again terror attacks gave rise to an enormous media coverage and strong political statements (CNN, 2016). President Hollande declared that “France is at war”, and only a few days later were French fighter jets reported bombing several sites of the so called Islamic State in Syria (ibid). The American newspaper *CNN* reports that analysts had stated that the timing of these airstrikes were not likely to be a coincidence, however this was not confirmed by the French government (ibid).

On the 15th of July 2016 a Tunisian man drove a lorry through a crowd celebrating Bastille Day on a pedestrian side-walk in Nice, killing eighty-six people. The event was announced by President Hollande as “An attack whose terrorist nature cannot be denied” and the so called Islamic State later claimed responsibility for the attack (BBC News, 2016). French officials were quick to make a link to terrorism despite that this connection was not confirmed (Lewis, 2016).

The terrorist attacks of 2015 and 2016 followed by the proclamation of a ‘State of Emergency’ (Cossalter, 2016) which provided the French state with exceptional legal power to impact upon individual’s rights of privacy and freedoms (URL 7). It was in the context of the recent terrorist attacks and the subsequent state of emergency that the first Burkini ban was implemented two weeks later, 27 km away from the killings in Nice.

### **2.3 Perceptions of Muslim women and the veil during French colonialism**

To be able to understand the perceptions and symbolism of the veil in contemporary France it is essential to go back to the joint history of France and veiled Muslim women. This brings us back to French colonialization of Algeria in 1830-1962, and the representation of Algerian women before and during the Algerian War of Independence. The Algerian war lasted for seven years, from 1958 to 1962, in which Algerian women’s bodies and dress played an important part (Perego, 2015).

Fanon (1965: 37-38) explains how Algerian women became a central target for the French military, who aimed to conquer the women in order to destroy the structure of Algerian society and its capacity for resistance against colonial forces. He explains that gaining the control over Algerian women by removing their veils and winning them over to French values was seen as a way to gain power over the Algerian men and to disintegrate the Algerian culture at its core (Ibid: 39). Perego (2015:353) describes how the French government portrayed the Algerian women as victims of patriarchal oppression and in the need of ‘saving’. They launched a campaign to ‘liberate’ and ‘modernize’ the Muslim women, positioning themselves in the favorable position of liberators (ibid: 356-37). Perego (2015: 356-357) argues that this was as strategic move used as propaganda in international media, in order to legitimize their further presence in Algeria. The main target for this ‘liberation’ was the veil, where ‘unveiling’ the Algerian woman was viewed as a means for liberation and a ‘proof’ of modernization and that the Algerian women were ‘becoming’ more French (Ibid).

Scott (2007:46) explains how Algerians were marked as a different race - a people who needed to become 'civilized'. They were seen not only as different but inferior to the French (ibid: 48). In addition, Perego (2015: 356) describe how Algerian women were active agents in the war resisting French colonization, and that the veil was also used by Algerian women to smuggle weapons, packages and letters. The aim of 'unveiling' Algerian women was also seen as a military strategy in order to remove this type of resistance and potentially lethal threat (ibid).

In addition to the political symbolism of the veil that emerged during the Algerian war, Fanon (1965: 43) describes how the veiled woman carried connotations of a sensuality, sexuality and hidden secrets to the European men. He argues that the veil lead to frustration for the European man as it allowed the Algerian women to see without being seen (Ibid:44). He further argues that the wish to unveil these women was further linked to a sexual attraction, the wish of the European man to bring this 'secret', beauty and sexuality within reach (Ibid:44). Scott (2007:58) describes how the veil was equalized to a prison, further constructing the imagery of the harem in which women were either prostitutes or slaves to their husbands and families. The Arab women were stereotyped and viewed as a homogenous group by French colonizers (ibid). As outlined in below (in chapter 3 and 4), the symbolism of the veil during French colonialization and the debates carries a strong resemblance to symbolism of the Burkini.

#### **2.4 'L'Affaire du foulard' and French bans of Muslim dress**

The initial debate about Muslim headscarves in French schools referred to as *l'affaire du foulard* and was initiated in 1989 when three Muslim girls refused to remove their headscarves in school and were consequently expelled (Scott, 2007:21-22). Scott (2007: 22) describes how this gave rise to a huge media controversy about whether girls should be allowed to wear Muslim headscarves in public schools. In 1994, the debate flared up again when the minister of education, Francois Bayro, put forward a decree that "ostentatious" signs of religious affiliation would from now onwards be prohibited in all schools (ibid: 27). Scott (2007: 30) describes that when the wearing of headscarves was brought up in the political agenda for the third time in 2003 an investigating body called the Stasi Commission was put together by President Chirac to gather information and write a report (the Stasi Report), considering the recommendation of a law against headscarves in schools (ibid: 32). Scott (2007: 33) states that supporters of a law banning headscarves in schools insisted it necessary for women's emancipation, a way to fight the patriarchal oppression of Islam

against these women. French supporters also argued that headscarves were incompatible with the principle of *laïcité* (ibid: 97), and finally motivated by the protection of this principle the French government in 2004 passed a law against wearing of “conspicuous signs” of religious affiliation in public schools (ibid: 34-35). All Muslim headscarves covering the woman’s hair and head were consequently prohibited in schools, including the *hijab*, *chador*, *niqab*, and *burqa* (and the Burkini if worn in school) (image 2).

As explained in the introduction chapter, the French word *laïcité*, the French version of secularism, refers to a separation of the church and the state, and more generally a strict separation between politics and religion (Jansen, 2009: 475). Jansen (2009: 475) explains that *laïcité* is a historical principle of the French Republic, leading back to the struggle between Catholicism and Republicanism during 1870-1905. Historically, schools were an important institution for the cultivation of *laïcité* from which religion along with priests and nuns as teachers were banished in the 1880’s (Scott, 2007:98-99). The school became the central institution for assimilation into French society, a place where children from various background were to be molded into one common French republican identity (ibid: 99).

In contemporary France, *laïcité* is a fundamental value of the French Republic, and especially a principle of the French education system (Freedman, 2004:6). However, Jansen (2009:482) argues that the Stasi commission redefined *laïcité* when motivating the law against conspicuous religious signs in schools in order not to impose pluralism but in order to fight communalization (*communautarisme*) and aggressive proselytism<sup>5</sup>. Jansen (2009: 482) argues that as a result of this does *laïcité* not only imply the neutrality of the state and the separation between church and state, but also the state’s role in defending the freedom of individuals against all proselytism. The historical vision of the school as a place where a common citizenship was formed, was replaced by a view of the school as a place where students had to leave their communal identity at home and conform to the national identity which the school was supposed to model (Scott, 2007: 103). On this basis, the Muslim headscarf, a visible marker of identity, had to be removed in order to enforce secularism and protect the French Republic against of fundamentalist Islam, its enemy (ibid:106)

Seven years later, in 2011 a law was passed in France, prohibiting full face veils in all public spaces (Lægaard, 2015). Although it was formulated to target *all* full face veils which make

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<sup>5</sup> Proselytism can be the act of becoming or the condition of being a convert to an opinion, political party, or religious group (URL 8)

identification of the person impossible, Lægaard, (2015: 203-204) argues that it was specifically targeting Muslim dress such as the *burqa* and the *niqab*, whilst yet allowing the wearing of a *chador* and *hijab* (image 2). In contrary to the previous ban of headscarves in schools in 2004, the full-face veil ban was not justified on the basis of laïcité or to the Muslim dress as a manifestation of religion (ibid: 204). The concealment of the face was instead considered to be incompatible with the fundamental requirements of living together in French society (ibid: 204). Although initially questioned, the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) supported the law due to its threat to the public order (public safety, health and morals) and for the protection of the rights and freedom of others, consequently ruling against the individual freedom of religious expression (ibid: 204). An important point in the history of the politics of Muslim dress in France is that recurrently it is the *female* Muslim dress that can be seen as the prime target for French legislations. With this French context in mind the following chapters will discuss the politics of the Burkini in France.

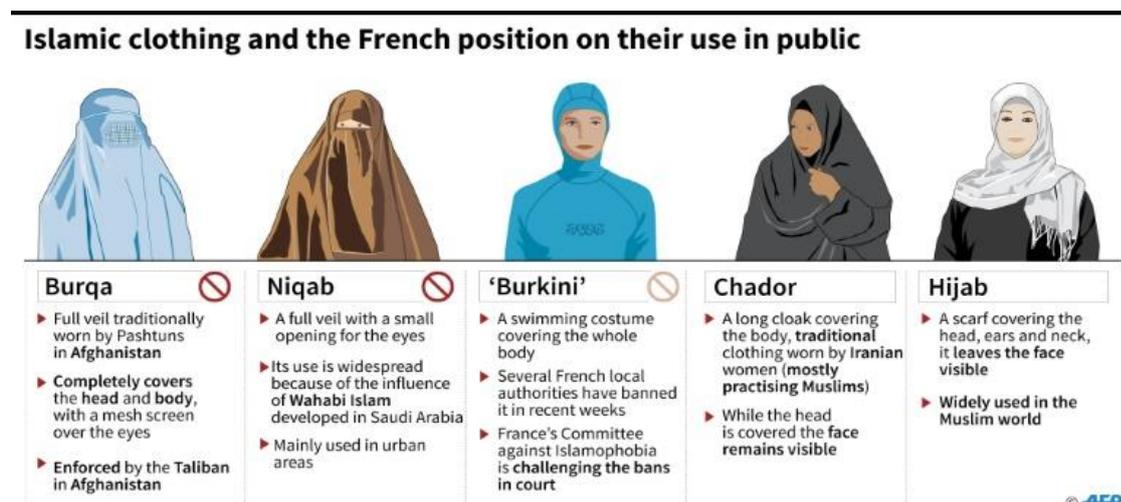


Image 2: French laws on Islamic clothing in public

Source: *Joburg East Express* (by AFP) August 23 2016 (URL 9)

### 3. The Burkini as oppressive to women

In this chapter, I will outline how political arguments against the Burkini position women wearing the Burkini as victims to patriarchal oppression.

#### 3.1 Victimization of women

Manuel Valls, the French prime minister of the Socialist party, and Laurence Rossignol, the Minister of Women's Rights, have both condemned the Burkini, describing it as a political project of fundamentalist Islam based on the subjugation of women (Gerard, 2016; Cheutin et al, 2016). In an interview with *Le Parisien* Rossignol explains her view of the Burkini:

Behind this, there is a deeply archaic vision of the place of women in society and therefore the relationship between men and women. There is the idea that, by nature, women are impure and immoral and should therefore hide their body, lock, erase, erase the public space. (Gerard, 2016)

She further argues that, "It is not only the case of those who wear it as it is for me the symbol of a political project hostile to mixing of men and women [mixité<sup>6</sup>] and empowerment" (Gerard, 2016). With these statements, she positions women wearing the Burkini as victims of oppression in the need of liberation, by the French Republic (Gerard, 2016). This view of veiled women leads us back to the portrayal of Muslim women during French colonialism (Perego, 2015), as discussed in chapter 2 (section 2.3). Similar to Rossignol, Sarkozy views the Burkini as oppressive to women, arguing that: "If we do not put an end to this, the risk is that in ten years, the girls of the Muslim faith who do not wear the veil or Burkini will be stigmatized and will be under the daily pressure of the entourage" (The World, 2016d). In this statement Sarkozy not only expresses his view of the Burkini but extends the argument to include 'the veil' as oppressive, further portraying *all* Muslim girls as potential victims of religious oppression. The silencing of veiled Muslim women, their victimization and the denial of their agency appears to continue in French media and the political discourse. Billaud and Castro (2013: 83) describe how the media discourse during *l'affaire du foulard* not only created a victimization of the Muslim woman, but positioned her against her oppressor – the Muslim man. Blidge (2010:15) explains that this view of the headscarf - as a symbol and

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<sup>6</sup> The French term mixité refers to the mixing of the sexes, in affaire du foulard the veil was seen to deny this instead, according to the Stasi commission, expressing Islam's enforced a separation of the sexes (Scott, 2007: 157)

oppression of women's oppression by Muslim men - was created by feminists and politicians who largely neglected the veiled school girls' own meaning and instead jointly claimed to know the 'true' meaning of the headscarf.

Mahmood (2001: 203) discusses the concept of agency and how it is used and viewed by feminists. She claims that the concept of agency is often described as synonymous with resistance to relations of domination, but argues that it should rather be viewed as "A capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and created" (ibid). She discusses the women's mosque movement in Egypt, and how they aim to cultivate certain qualities and follow practices and ideals associated with a tradition that historically has positioned women as subordinate (Ibid:205). She argues how women's participation in these kind of movements are attributed to a "false consciousness" by social science and humanist scholars, which positions these women as non-autonomous subjects (Ibid:205). She questions the universality of the desire to be free from domination, as incorporated and neutralized in the liberal feminist discourse (Ibid:206). Mahmood (2001: 217) further argues for the importance of the incorporation of different models for agency; where agency does not always have to be progressive and synonymous to resistance of domination – which can stand for the capacity to withstand, suffer and persist. She argues that desires, aspirations and capacities should be viewed as culturally and historically created, and that, for example, the meaning of the veil or shyness cannot simply be seen in terms of domination or resistance (ibid). The act of veiling or shyness can also be viewed as a conscious self-discipline in order to develop piety (Ibid). She further argues that in order to understand those (non-liberal) practices, we must take in consideration the desires, motivations, commitments and aspirations of the people who value these practices (ibid:225). Instead of assuming that the Other's desires are the same as 'our' liberal ones, we should open up for alternative meanings of practices such as veiling. As in the anti-Burkini debate, as with the Egyptian pious women, women on French beaches can be seen as denied agency and attributed this "false consciousness", I found no discussions about the alternative meanings of the Burkini in my research. Although I was unable to find any feminist discussions of the Burkini, the liberalistic assumption about the desire to be freed or liberated is recurrent, where the ban is an ironic means to 'liberate' the veiled women from their oppression. What if the decision to veil is not something forced upon them, nor an act of resistance? What if there are women who simply do not desire to 'equal' or 'free'?

Scott (2007:71) further explains that in this imagery of Muslim women as victims of Islamic patriarchy, the Muslim community was depicted as a homogenous group in opposition to French values, as against gender equality. Although Valls and Rossignol do not directly address Muslim men, through creating a generalized imagery of the Muslim woman as a victim they can similarly be seen to position the Muslim man as someone who controls and oppresses women. In this light, the creation of an image of Muslim women as victims not only denies their agency but further positions Muslim men as oppressive and sexist, and similarly as in *l'affaire du foulard* positions 'Muslims', as against gender equality (Scott, 2007)

The idea of liberating Muslim women is not unique to France but recurrent in the Western discourse, where the rhetoric of the 'war on terrorism' since 9/11 incorporates a fight for the rights of Muslim women (Abu-Lughod, 2002:784). Abu-Lughod (2002) discusses how American interventions in Afghanistan are justified by the means of saving the Afghan women. The veil can be seen as the main target of 'the West's' liberation of the Muslim women both in France and Afghanistan, and unveiling women as a way to liberate her from the oppression and Islamic fundamentalism (ibid). But, as Abu-Lughod (2002:785-6) points out, no consideration was taken to the meaning of the veil for the women wearing it, and the agency of women wearing the veil is completely neglected. Similarly, during the French colonialization of Algeria veiled Algerian women were portrayed as victims of patriarchal oppression (see chapter 2, section 3).

Whilst Muslim women wearing the Burkini were portrayed as victims, their voices were rarely heard in the French political debate. When some of their testimonies were finally encouraged and printed in *The New York Times*, Manuel Valls questioned the seriousness of this article, arguing that it gave a false image of France (The World, 2016e). In these testimonies women state, in contrary to the arguments against the Burkini, that the Burkini has given them more freedom whereas the Burkini ban and the anti-Burkini debate have led to further stigmatization of them as veiled women and Muslim (Dremeaux, 2016). Several women explain that they do not feel safe in France anymore, where some see leaving France as the only solution (Dremeaux, 2016).

The silencing of women wearing the Burkini in France can be seen as a denial of their agency, ignoring alternative meanings of the Burkini as understood by women wearing it. Billaud and Castro (2015:89) explain that the victimization of veiled bodies consequently positions these

Muslim women as unable to speak for themselves, something which further legitimizes state intervention. The victimization of Muslim women wearing the Burkini can thus be seen as a justification for the Burkini ban.

Despite the intention of liberating women, Abu-Lughod (2002: 789) describes these “projects of saving women” not as emancipation, but as a reinforcement of the sense of ‘Westerners’ superiority. Similarly, Ramírez (2015: 674) argues that the liberation of Muslim women has become an important argument for supporting various forms of domination, which will be further discussed in the next section. The symbolism of the Burkini and the victimization of the Muslim women can be further understood by the historical context of French colonialism (see chapter 2.3). Similar motives regarding the removal of the veil during colonialization, can be seen in the justification of the Burkini ban. The Burkini ban thus indicates a continuation of the politics of the veil in France, from French colonialism to contemporary France.

### **3.2 The control of women’s bodies**

Prime minister Manuel Valls continued to support the ban even after it was been denounced by the State Council, arguing that the ban of the Burkini is not about restricting individual freedom, as “There is no freedom that traps women!” (The World, 2016e). In a similar tone, the Minister of Women’s rights Laurence Rossignol describes that the Burkini: “It is rather the beach version of the burqa, for it is the same logic: it is about enclosing, concealing the bodies of women to better control them.” (Gerard, 2016). By drawing a parallel between the Burkini and the Burqa, Rossignol denies the fact that the designs are markedly different; the Burqa covers the entire body including the face whereas the Burkini has a tighter fit and leaves the face uncovered (image 2 in chapter 2. section 2.4). She further denies the fact that the burqa and Burkini are two different styles of Muslim dress, coming from different traditions and having different meanings. In her statement, Rossignol not only denies the diversity of Muslim dress as a possible expressions of *different* social belongings, but she also takes the right to formulate and condense their different meanings to one single meaning.

Pictures of armed policemen forcing veiled women to publically undress on the French Riviera were circulating in French and international media in the summer of 2016, further fueling the already heated debate (Durup, 2016). I will focus on the media reporting of two of these events. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of August a 34-year old woman was approached by male police officers on the beach of Cannes. She describes how she was sitting on the beach with her

family wearing a hijab when three policemen approached her, she received a fine of 11 euros because she was not wearing "A proper outfit respectful of good morals and secularism" (Liberation, 2016). She explains that she was not there to be provocative or even go into the water, and says that she refused to pay the 11 euro fine she was given (Liberation, 2016). Mathilde Cousin, a journalist for *France 4*, observed what happened, she describes how the police had said that "it is only applying to the law" and how some people have applauded the police and shouted "go home!" to the woman (Liberation, 2016).

A similar event occurred a week later, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August on the beach of Nice. Again, the woman was not wearing a Burkini but a tunic and matching blue headscarf on the beach. This time, a sequence of photos posted in *The Daily mail* shows how a woman resting on the beach was approached and surrounded by three armed policemen, how she removed her tunic in front of them after which she was given a written fine by one of the policemen (Image 4 and Appendix 1). These photos (Image 4 and Appendix 1) were criticized by the politician Julien Dray from the Socialist Party, whom accused them of being staged with the aim to "divide France" (de Boni, 2016). Christian Estrosi, the deputy mayor of Nice in charge of security, defended the action of the policemen and argued against the distribution of these photographs in the media (Morin, 2016). He argued that they are a "Manipulation that denigrates the municipal police and endangers its agents" and further announced that he had filed a complaint to prosecute those who published these photos (Morin, 2016), this despite the fact that taking photos of police is a right protected by French law (Durup, 2016). Notably is that in both these cases the women were not wearing the Burkini but a hijab. This indicates that the Burkini ban seems to extend to a more general law against Muslim headscarves on public beaches.

Ramírez (2013) argues that the restriction of Muslim women's dress in non-Muslim countries, and the requirement to wear a particular dress in Muslim countries, is about the same thing – the control of women's bodies. The photo below exemplifies Ramírez's point. I mean that the photos (picturing policemen forcing a woman to undress, image 4 and appendix 1) are viewed as provocative and give rise to strong reactions because they convey a similarity between the Muslim man forcing women to veil and the French police forcing women to unveil publically, and that this reveals what the Burkini ban is really about – the control of Muslim women's bodies. This hypocritical imagery is represented in a caricature made and posted on Facebook by Khalid Albaih on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August (Image 3).

Image 3 pictures how women's bodies are equally controlled by men, in France in the name of freedom whilst in other places in the name of religion and chastity.



Image 3: Caricature depicting the hypocrisy of the Burkini ban in France  
Source: *The Express Tribune* August 26 2016 (URL 10)

In the early 1900s women's bodies were policed on beaches in both England and America; in England bylaws urged women to wear a 'decent' dress that prevented too much exposure of skin; while on American beaches women could even get arrested by the police for revealing too much skin (Horwood, 2000). Similarly, Muslim women who do not follow the present dress codes on French beaches are verbalized (given a fine) and thus symbolically positioned as 'bad' women. This resemblance and hypocrisy was highlighted by putting these images together; the police forcing a Muslim woman to undress and the police measuring the length of the swimsuit in the early 1900's. The image (image 4), posted by Matthew Riddle on Twitter the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, reveals the inconsistency of the Burkini ban - a regulation that instead of liberating women can be seen as a continuation of the control of women's bodies through specific rules of dress for women in the West.

David Lisnard, the mayor of Cannes, strongly opposed this image (Image 4), arguing that an improper parallel had been made, because "At the time, men were also covered on the beach" and that "The Burkini is not a neutral outfit!" (L'Express, 2016b). He seems to miss the point

made, that in both these instances policemen control *women's* dress and bodies and that the same parallel cannot be made with men's swimwear. His statement also raises the question if there is any form of dress that is completely neutral? Entwistle (2001: 37), argues that dress is a visual metaphor for identity, and lying at the margins of the body it marks the boundaries between self and other, individual and society. Dress, like the body, as a marker for identity can thus never be neutral (Douglas, 1966: 101). It provides an important link between individual identity and societal belonging (Entwistle, 2001:47). From this viewpoint, neither the Burkini nor any other swimwear on French beaches can be seen as 'neutral outfits'.



Image 4. Almost a century apart, policing of women's dress and bodies on the beach in 2016 and early 1900's  
Source: *The New York Times* August 24 2016 (URL 11)

Ramírez (2015: 681) explains that both the question of veiling and unveiling is a political act by the state through its police force that involves the domination of women. She argues that the regulation of headscarves, in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries, inscribe laws to the female body and is a way to reinforce the ideas of women as the inferior sex in the social order (ibid:681-682). Ramírez (2015: 681-682) further argues that the ban of headscarves in the West involves a normativization of the body of the Other - a way to impose an assimilation policy where the Muslim woman must remove her headscarf in order to become

a member of society. She explains that dress codes are an attempt to normativise and define a classificatory system for women – differentiating between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women (ibid: 681). Consequently, Muslim women who don’t follow the present dress codes on French beaches are given a fine and thus symbolically positioned as ‘bad’ women.

The recent terror attacks in France, discussed in chapter 2, have been described as a shock to the French society, leading to the proclamation of a ‘State of Emergency’ (Cossalter, 2016). Ramón (2015: 672) states that when there is a crisis in society, the control of women’s bodies is a way to discipline the population and regain order. Douglas (1966:116) explains that the body can symbolize society, and is thereby often used to create and maintain boundaries, and to represent boundaries that are threatened in a society. From this perspective, the restriction of Muslim women’s dress and, hence, the control of their bodies in a time of crisis (like after the terror attacks) may be seen as a way to reestablish boundaries within French society. In the anti-Burkini debate, the ‘context’, referring to the terror attacks, in addition to the oppression of women are used to justify the ban (The World, 2016b). Yuval-Davis (1993:627) argues that women often symbolize national and collective ‘honor’. The act of undressing can further be seen as a symbolic act, removing the dress linked to modesty in Islam is a way to not only humiliate the Muslim women but the whole Muslim community - a form of punishment or scapegoating.

Yuval-Davis (1993: 623) describes both ethnic and national communities as ‘imagined communities’, that divide the world between ‘us’ and ‘them’. She argues that women are often given the role as cultural transmitters and symbols of a national or ethnic collectivity, where women’s behavior and dress are thus given more importance than that of men (ibid:627). Yuval-Davis (1993: 623-4) explains that various aspects of gender relations play an important role in nationalist projects, arguing that the control of women is often fundamental in the social order of a society. She explains that women’s citizenship is dualistic, arguing that even if women are always included in states’ social, political and legal policies there is basically always specific legislations for women (ibid: 626). Women can thus be seen as special kinds of citizens and the Burkini ban a women-specific legislation, that prohibits only Muslim women but not Muslim men from the beaches, despite the fact that it is the women who are portrayed as the victim and the man as the oppressor. Even if women are not the ‘problem’ in the form of a terrorist or oppressor, it is through the control of women’s bodies that the ‘problems’ are dealt with.

The symbolism of the Burkini ban and the control of women's bodies can be further understood by applying Mary Douglas' idea of "The body as a symbol for any bounded system" (1966:116). As mentioned, she explains that the body is universal, something that everyone can relate to, and is thus often used to create and maintain boundaries in society, and also represent boundaries in a society that are threatened. Statements of the Burkini as inappropriate, provocative and archaic positions the veiled female bodies as something that transgresses boundaries, and therefore needs to be removed from the 'modern' public space. Douglas' theoretical thinking illuminates the boundaries of the veiled Muslim bodies and how they can represent boundaries within society – the regulation (enforced by the rhetoric) of the visibility of veiled female bodies can thus be seen as a way to reproduce boundaries within French society. The Burkini ban, leading to an exclusion of veiled Muslim women bodies from the public beaches, can be seen as a symbolic exclusion of veiled women from the membership of French society. However, following Yuval-Davis (1993) theory of women as cultural reproducers of a collective, the exclusion of the Muslim women's bodies from the public sphere can further be seen as a symbolic exclusion of not only the veiled women but the whole 'Muslim community' from the membership of the 'imagined community' of the French nation.

### **3.3 French ideas of sexuality and gender equality in the exclusion of the Other**

In this section I will discuss what the rhetoric of politicians arguing for the Burkini ban can tell us about ideas of femininity, sexuality and gender equality, and how this is related to a national discourse in France.

#### **3.3.1 Gender Equality**

In an interview with *La Provence* Manuel Valls again explains his view of the Burkini:

The Burkini is not a new range of swimwear, fashion. This is the translation of a political project that is counter to society based in particular on the subjugation of women [...] That is why I voted in favor of the 2004 law banning religious symbols in schools, or 2010 on the full veil in public spaces. I do not accept this archaic vision. There is the idea that, by nature, women are harlots [prostitutes], impure, they should be completely covered. It is not compatible with the values of France and the Republic. Faced with provocations, the Republic must defend (Cheutin et al, 2016).

The above statement positions veiling practices as a symbol for archaic values opposed to the values of the French Republic; portraying the Burkini a provocative threat against gender equality, and banning it as a way to defend the French Republic. Chakraborti and Zempi (2012:269) confirms this symbolism of the veil, arguing that the veil is not only the symbol of Islam but also the symbol of gender inequality in the West. Gender equality has been represented as an essential value of the French Republic (Roggeband and Lettinga, 2016: 240). Consequently, the description of the women Muslim wearing the Burkini as oppressed may be seen as a way to position ‘Muslims’ in France not only against gender equality but also as against French values.

Sharing the view of the Burkini as archaic and oppressive to women, Rossignol explains how the ban will be effective, “the efficiency is to recall mixing of the sexes [mixité] and gender equality” (Gerard, 2016). Scott (2007: 157) explains how the term ‘mixité’ was previously used during the debate about Muslim headscarves in schools. She describes how opponents argued that the Muslim headscarf denied a mixing of the sexes and signified a strict segregation of the sexes in Islam (ibid). Similarly, the recurrent use of the word mixité can be interpreted as a view of the Burkini as a means of gender segregation, and by banning it Rossignol aims to make sure that French gender relations are enforced.

In the Burkini debate, Valls and Rossignol belonging to the socio-democratic Socialist party (URL 12), are not the only ones with a rhetoric that positions them as defenders of gender equality. Similarly, Lionel Luca belonging to the Republicans, a conservative political party (URL 12) explains what he wants to achieve by prohibiting the Burkini: “By putting an end to what I call dress apartheid, I protect Muslims and women. I am astonished by the silence of the feminist organizations on the subject” (CS, 2016). Similarly, Marine Le Pen, President of the Front National, a far rightwing nationalist party in France (URL 12), also condemns the Burkini on the premises of its incompatibility with the treatment of women in France, saying that “France does not enclose the body of the woman, France does not cover half of its population under the false pretext and heinous that the other half would fear temptation” (Jocard, 2016b). In the Burkini debate the significance of gender equality can be seen in the rhetoric across the political scale.

Gender equality arguments in the rhetoric against the veil can be seen as a continuity in France, where Roggeband and Lettinga (2016: 240) explain that gender equality is increasingly used as an argument by different actors in policy debates not only concerning headscarves but also honor-related crimes in France. They explain how gender equality arguments emerged during *l'affaire du foulard* in the late 1980's, became central in the rhetoric against Muslim headscarves in schools, and was later used in arguments against full face veil in public spaces in France (Roggeband and Lettinga, 2016). They argue that this was initially a right-wing political discourse, in which gender equality arguments was used selectively in order to show the incompatibility of migrant culture with French culture (ibid:256). In this discourse the hijab/burqa, along with honor-related violence, was strategically framed to signify the incompatibilities of Islamic culture, as a way to justify further restrictions on immigrants and Muslim minorities (ibid). Ezekiel (2006) (in Roggeband and Lettinga, 2016) argue that the politicization of the veil intensified at the same time as the right-wing Front National gained more support. Roggeband and Lettinga (2016:256) further argue that Front National's nationalistic discourse, since the mid-1980's, has spread to the center-left and that the rhetoric of immigrants as a 'problem' have spread across the political scale (Roggeband and Lettinga, 2016: 256). The Burkini can be seen as a continuity of this nationalistic discourse in France, backed up by politicians from across the political scale – agreeing on the Burkini as oppressive and against gender equality.

In France gender equality has become integrated with national identity, similar to other European countries such as the Netherlands (Roggeband and Lettinga, 2016) and Sweden (Towns et al, 2014). Yuval-Davis (1993) explains that particular clothes, dress and behavior and especially gender symbols are important in the differentiation between who belong and do not belong in society, between 'us' and 'them'. In this view, Valls and Rossignol's support of the Burkini ban – which includes the regulation of Muslim women's dress and behavior along with arguments of the Burkini as being against the values of the nation and more specifically gender equality, can be seen as a part of a nationalistic discourse. Despite their intention, their rhetoric can thus be seen in line with Marine Le Pen's National Front nationalistic agenda. As mentioned, it may be seen as a symbolic exclusion of 'Muslim's' from the French community. Ramón (2015:676) explain that the media debates about the Muslim headscarf in Europe not only excludes but also re-inscribes place of the Muslims population as inferior, justifying legislations against them due to some of their inherently immoral ways and or values.

### 3.3.2 Sexuality

On the question if Rossignol considers the Burkini to be suppressive to women she answers “The control of women's bodies and their sexuality was the central issue of traditional societies. With emancipation, women have had to overcome this control.” (Gerard, 2016). Rossignol’s statements not only reveal her view of women’s position in Islam but also reveals something about norms of sexuality in French society. Rossignol is the Minister of Women’s Rights whom is supposed to strive for gender equality, but here she not only denies Muslim women their agency, but further portrays French ‘modern’ women as liberated. French women are supposedly in control of their own bodies and sexuality. If this is the case, is France no longer a patriarchal society, but a society where men and women are socially, economically and politically equal? If wearing the Burkini and the covering of the women’s body is enslavement, does that mean that Bikini and the visibility of skin on French beaches symbolize the emancipation of women?

Similar to gender or sexual equality, Fassin (2015: 512) argues that sexual liberty has become a fundamental value of the French Republic. He argues that people who don’t share this value are not only positioned as different but also defined as inferior and less evolved (ibid: 512-513). Similarly, Scott (2007:156) explains that in the debate about Muslim headscarves in schools, the French gender system was not only viewed as superior but the only tolerable way for men and women to relate to one another (see Mahmood’s (2001) discussion in chapter 3, section 1). A similar rhetoric can be seen in the anti-Burkini debate where Rossignol’s and Valls’ description of the Burkini as archaic and oppressive towards women (Cheutin et al, 2016; Gerard, 2016) jointly indicates a view of ‘Muslims’ as less evolved and inferior as they don’t share the ‘modern’ French value of sexual liberty and equality. Scott (ibid: 167-168) argues that both Islam and the French system is patriarchal but have two different ways to deal with sexuality; Islam makes the rules of gender relations explicit by the visibility of the veil whereas in the French gender system there is a denial of the sexual inequality that exists in society. She further argues that the veil becomes ‘ostentatious’ not as a religious sign, but because it makes visible the differences of sexuality (which are denied) in French society (ibid: 172).

The wording of the arguments against the Burkini in France may further reveal the link between the Muslim headscarf and sexuality, where the anti-Burkini decree put forward by David Lisnard, the mayor of Cannes, states that the Burkini is “A beachwear ostentatiously

manifesting a religious affiliation, while France and places of religious worship are now the target of terrorist attacks, is likely to create a risk of disturbing public order (gatherings, clashes etc.) it is necessary to prevent .” (The World, 2016b). The word ‘*ostentatious*’ (in French ‘*ostentatoire*’) is characterized by pretentious, showily or vulgar display (URL 13). As mentioned briefly above, it was similarly used in the law banning headscarves in public schools 2004. Scott (2007: 153) argues that it also can mean immodest – a reversal of the meaning of the veil in Muslim juristic tradition. She further argues that this word reveals a view of the veil as having a sexual connotation (ibid:153).

When the place for regulation now has moved from the school to the beach which is a place for undress in France I argue that this sexual connotation can be seen as even more direct. As mentioned, Yuval-Davis (1993:627) explains that the sexual behavior of women is often used in the differentiation between different ethnic groups. Rossignol’s description of the Burkini as a means for the control of women’s sexuality can be seen as a way to position ‘Muslims’ as sexually deviant and thereby highlighting the difference between ‘Muslims’ and non-Muslims in France.

Billaud and Castro (2015) explain how laws banning women from the public space in France, not only relates to veiled Muslim women but also to prostitutes. They explain that prostitutes and veiled Muslim women in France are similarly excluded from the public space, victimized and denied agency (ibid:88). Billaud and Castro (2015:82) mean that the law of soliciting that was implemented in France 2002 is linked to the law banning religious symbols in schools 2004 and the law against full face veil 2011. They argue that these new policies of (in)visibility reveal a reconfiguration of French nationalism where gender differences and sexual norms are used to define national boundaries (ibid:98). The justifications used to motivate state interventions concerning prostitution can be seen as a “reversed mirror” of the motivations used during the debates of the veil (ibid:84). Billaud and Castro (2015: 86) argue that the state’s control over prostitution have been repositioned, and that this reveals a larger shift in French politics which involve a transformation of immigration policies, implementation of “purification” programs in the city and a criminalization of people living in the margins of mainstream society in France. They argue that these policies reflect a reshaping of nationalism in the context of globalization, economic recession and European integration – factors which all can be seen to threaten the Republic’s sovereignty, national values of solidarity and equality (ibid: 86).

The link between veiled women and prostitutes can be further explained by Mayer's (2000) theories of the importance of gender and sexuality in the creation and maintenance of nationalism and a national identity. She explains that nation, gender and sexuality are all socially or culturally constructed categories, and that because of this they are important in the construction of one another by creating a differentiation between 'us' and 'them', and further an exclusion of the Other. Gender and sexuality can be viewed as classifications in power systems which reward some behaviors and individuals whilst punishing other, where heterosexual men are generally rewarded whereas women and gays are often punished (Mayer, 2000:4). This is explained to be the consequence of the fact that the construction of a nation depends on a moral code often based on masculinity and heterosexuality (ibid:12). Mayer (2000: 10) explains that this moral code, the 'model' members, are often propagated in media, public speeches and expressed by national leaders through writings. Billaud and Castro (2015: 91) explain that French Republican discourses portray veiled women as oppressed by their culture and religion, and prostitutes as victims of patriarchy and capitalism, positioning both groups as sexually oppressed and against the French values of freedom and dignity. National boundaries can thus be seen as reproduced and strengthened by propagating the moral code with reference to sexual norms and the exclusion of the sexually deviant Other.

The photos published in *the Daily mail* (see appendix 1) that pictures police ordering a woman to undress may indicate the "dress code" and norms of behavior on French beaches. In the photos, the people standing 'off' the beach on the street are dressed in shorts and t-shirt, whereas women lying on the beach are wearing bikinis and men are topless and dressed in shorts. Presuming that the photos are somewhat generalizable for the dress of "normal" French women, they indicate that women should wear bikinis and thus be largely undressed. The opposite, the notion of covered bodies on French beaches, is revealed in David Lisnard's description of the Burkini "these outfits [...] suggests that the body or face, the woman is impure and that the human eye is dirty" (L'Express, 2016b). This indicates that women's (and men's) bodies should be visible and sexually accessible on French beaches – that sexual availability is the suggested French norm or 'moral code'. However, the sexual availability of sex workers who exchange sex for money is not welcomed, and as discussed are banned from French public spaces. This indicates that French women should not only be sexually available, but that this sexuality needs to be free of charge. The opposite, that women's bodies and thus

their sexuality are 'hidden' (covered), or that women's sexuality are not freely available (sex cost money) is thus considered immoral and thus a threat to the French nation.

The control of women's sexuality through norms of (un)dress is captured in a drawing called "La loterie de l'indécence" or "The lottery of decency" (image 5) posted on Twitter on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August by the user @LaSavageJaune. The hypocrisy of Lisnard's statement that the Burkini suggests that women are "impure" can be shown in this drawing, revealing how women's bodies and sexuality are similarly judged and controlled through norms of dress in French society. Revealing how women are viewed as indecent both if being *too* covered or *too* uncovered, and thus not compatible with the suggested 'moral code' of the nation.

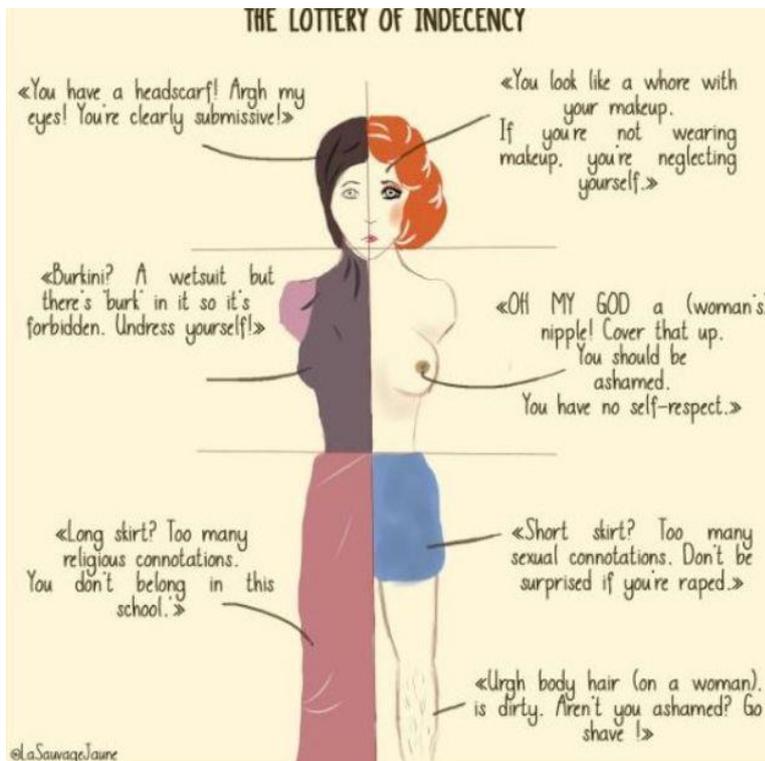


Image 5. The control of women's bodies through norms of dress (and undress)

Source: *Buzzfeed News* August 18 2016 (URL 14)

Entwistle (2001:33) explains that the appropriateness of dress further varies in different situations and occasions, explaining that whilst the bikini is considered enough to ensure women's decency on beaches in the 'West', it would be considered highly inappropriate in other public places or at the work place. Women in France seem to be balancing on a very narrow line; not revealing too much skin, nor too little skin, undressing on beaches but covering up when walking home late in the evening. Being sexually available but never at the

cost of money, women's sexuality should be free but a woman must yet be 'decent'. In opposite to the veiled women, the 'French woman' is viewed as not only sexually liberated but also equal to the French man, this rhetoric can be seen to reinforce the moral code in France – women as sexually available and equal, and free of charge!

Despite the rhetoric of 'gender equality', the anti-Burkini debate is predominantly voices of white men – there's mainly *male* politicians that are arguing for the Burkini ban and there's *policemen* who force women to undress on beaches. Not only the voices of veiled women but also the voices of French women are largely unheard from the debate. What does this tell us about gender equality in France? A place where men claim the right of women's bodies and dress, is that the 'moral code' that France wants to promote?

In the anti-Burkini debate, politicians (predominantly men) position themselves as defenders of the nation. The dichotomy of 'victim and savior' and the positioning of the Burkini as against French values and sexual norms can be viewed as means to justify the intervention of (male) mayors and the legislation that evidently exclude veiled women from the public space and restricts their freedom. Whereas the Burkini ban excludes veiled women from beaches, the anti-Burkini debate can be seen as strengthening the national boundaries in France and creating a Muslim enemy - through the rhetoric that contributes to a symbolic exclusion of veiled women from the membership of the nation.

#### **4. The Burkini as a threat to social order**

In this chapter I will discuss the ways in which the Burkini is perceived as a threat to the social order in France and what this can tell us about the political view of Muslims in France.

##### **4.1 The criminalization of Muslim women**

In contrast to the view of Muslim women wearing the Burkini as victims, politicians from conservative and right political parties describe it as provocative behavior and make a direct link between the Burkini and Islamic fundamentalism. David Lisnard, the first mayor to implement the Burkini ban, explains his reasoning for the ban, “I simply forbid a uniform that is the symbol of Islamic extremism. We must stop wanting to caricature this order. We live in a common public space, there are rules to respect” (The World, 2016b), arguing that it is his responsibility to protect society (L’Express, 2016b). Migoule Thierry, General Manager of Services shares Lisnards view, describing the Burkini as an “Ostentatious outfits that reference allegiance to terrorist movements that make war on us” (The World, 2016b), thus making a direct association between the Burkini and the recent terrorist attacks in France.

These statements suggest that the symbolism of the Muslim dress has expanded or strengthened in relation to the terror attacks. Scott (2007) describes how the veil became the visible symbol of the intolerable difference of Muslims in French society during the debate about the ban of Muslim headscarves in schools 2004. Now, with the context of terror attacks in France 2015 and 2016 it seems as if the Burkini has become a stronger symbol of Islamic extremism and violence. It is viewed, not only a threat to secularism, but as a threat to the safety and the physical lives of the French (non- Muslim) population. Lionel Luca describe women wearing the Burkini as active agents of Islamic fundamentalism, “Women who engage in this practice are - consciously or not - the accomplices of those who make war on us. They are alibis, screens of those who soon will ban the girls from going to school.” (CS, 2016). Women wearing the Burkini are thus portrayed as accomplices of Islamic fundamentalists affiliated with the terrorist attacks in France 2015 and 2016. Schneider and Schneider (2008:352) explains that criminalization is the process by which media, state authorities and some other citizens define a certain group in society as ‘criminals’, further creating a threatening criminal imagery. The above rhetoric linking the Burkini with terrorism and further making statements of this in public can be seen as exactly this, a criminalization of Muslims in France.

The criminalization of Muslims is not a new phenomenon in countries with a Muslim minority, Tufal and Poynting (2013) discuss the creation of a criminal imagery of the Muslim minority in the UK and Australia. They examine how a rhetoric of so called ‘ethnic crime gangs’, sexual violence, and Islamist terrorism have been used to create a criminal imagery of the Muslim Other in both these nations (ibid:44). They explain how this followed different violent events such as the ‘Rushdie Affair’<sup>7</sup> 1989 in the UK, the involvement in the 1990-91 Gulf war, and further intensified since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the following ‘War on Terror’<sup>8</sup>. Just like the terror attacks in France, preceding the Burkini ban, these violent events can be seen as causing disorder in society and consequently requires the reestablishment of the social order by redrawing of boundaries within society (see chapter 3, section 2).

Tufail and Poynting (2013:44) argue that there has occurred a shift in the meaning to ‘integrate’; where the responsibility of the state to accommodate integration has been reduced and instead the responsibility lies on Muslim immigrants’ ability to adapt and assimilate into society. They further argue that that Muslim communities have been depicted as ‘criminals’ upon their failure to accept British and Australian values and integrate (ibid). Tufail and Poynting (2013: 46) gives the example of sexual assaults in the westerns suburbs of Sydney in 2000 and 2001 where the offenders were pointed out as members of Muslim communities. They explain how their background was highlighted in media and that the sexual assaults were racialized and referred to as ‘ethnic gang rape’ (ibid). This racialization incorporated accusing entire Muslim communities in Australia for the disrespect of women, hatred of western culture and violent sexual aggression directed against western women. These Muslim communities were positioned as resisting to integrate; not conforming to Australian values or laws, and refusing to identify with the nation (ibid). Tufail and Poynting (2013:46) argue that these accusations of Muslim communities’ refusal to integrate are similarly present in anti-Muslim racism in Britain and Western Europe. This link between criminalization and a perceived refusal to integrate can be seen in the anti-Burkini rhetoric. In an interview with French Newspaper *Le Point* Lisnard argues against the view of the ban as discriminatory or Islamophobic (Cordelier, 2016). Contrarily, he equates the Burkini with the Nazi military uniform, arguing that the Muslims are the ones whom discriminates and excludes, and that it

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<sup>7</sup> The Rushdie Affair, or the Satanic Verses controversy of 1988 in England, was the violent aftermath of a publication that divided the Western World and the Muslim faith (Moddod, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> The War on Terror is a colloquial term used to describe the reactions of the United States (and associated ally countries) to the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 (Mayer, 2009)

is his responsibility to protect the society from this threat (Cordelier, 2016). In the anti-Burkini debate Muslim men are positioned as oppressors and Muslim women as victims or potential accomplices. This criminal imagery can be seen as strategical tool to ‘prove’ the refusal of ‘Muslims’ to conform to French values and, hence, their resistance towards integration into French society. I will further elaborate on the anti-Burkini debate and French integration politics under chapter 5.

#### **4.2 The fear of Islamization**

Islamophobia can be defined as “a fear or hatred of Islam that translates into ideological and material forms of cultural racism against obvious markers of Muslimness” (Chakraborti and Zempi, 2012: 271). Chakraborti and Zempi (2012:271) argues that cultural racism is mainly directed against minority communities who wants to keep some form of cultural practices and make a demand of being different and respected for how they are, including differential markers that go beyond the color of their skin. They further explain that cultural racism is based on the differentiation of ‘us’ and ‘them’, used to exclude (not only people with different skin color) the ‘culturally deviant’ Other. As discussed in chapter 3, the reference to Islam as archaic and oppressive to women can be seen in the anti-Burkini debate. David Lisnard uses a similar rhetoric but sharpens this argument, “These outfits are a strong and aggressive ideological marker of Islamist radicalization which suggests that the body or face of the women is impure and that the human eye is dirty” (Cordelier, 2016). In his statement Lisnard expresses his fear of the Burkini as related to the culture of Islam, where Muslim dress and the covering of women’s bodies is portrayed as a sign of radicalism. Chakraborti and Zempi (2012:271) explains Islamophobia as new form of racism, which is used to legitimize violence against *visible* Muslims, thus specifically targeting women wearing the veil (a visible marker of being Muslim). Further stating that Islamic religion, tradition and culture increasingly is viewed as a threat to democracy in France and other European countries (ibid). Although Lisnard denies that he is being Islamophobic (The World, 2016c), he states that he wants to exclude women in Burkinis from French public beaches because he views them as an (visible) ideological marker of Islamist radicalization – is this not Islamophobia, legitimizing violence against Muslim women due to their dress and identity marker?

The 'anti-Burkini' decree put forward by Lionnel Luca the Mayor of Villeneuve-Loubet, stated:

The access to beaches is prohibited on the territory of the commune, from the 15th of June till the 15th of September, to anyone not wearing adequate clothes in accordance with the usual standards of behavior and with the principle of secularism, as well as respecting the hygiene and safety rules governing the use of public sea waters. It is strictly prohibited to wear, while bathing on the territory of the commune, clothing whose connotation violates the above-mentioned principles (Cossalter, 2016).

In an interview with *Le Point* he further explains "These garments, when worn all day - or even days - pose a real health problem. Moreover, it is absurd to bathe dressed: it makes it very difficult for a possible rescue." (CS, 2016). In the above citations the Burkini is described as unhygienic, raising a concern of the emergence of microbes and the safety of rescuers. The concern for the safety of rescuers can be seen as hypocritical as the Burkini, in Australia, was a dress designed to enable Muslim females to be lifeguards themselves (Taylor, 2016; image 6). But how can we understand this reference to dirt, in what ways is the Burkini any more unhygienic than a wetsuit for example? A swim wear which like the Burkini also covers the entire body and head (when it's cold a hood is worn to keep the head warm), yet the wetsuit is not banned or depicted as a health problem.

The statement can be seen as an attempt to further strengthen the concern of the Burkini as a direct threat to the surrounding people and environment. The description of the Burkini as unhygienic and as a health problem positions the women wearing the Burkini as polluted. The dress is not only considered dangerous to its wearer but also to the surrounding public due to its potential spread of microbes. Mary Douglas (1966:36) describes that 'our' ideas of dirt relate to microbes which can be dealt with through hygienic procedures. However, Douglas (1966: 36) argues that our notion of dirt is not solely based on hygiene but symbolizes that which is against the social order in a society, defining "dirt as matter out of place". She explains that dirt is that which is ambiguous and transgress boundaries, and thus needs to be removed in order to reestablish boundaries and order in a society (Ibid: 35-36). According to this theory, the portrayal of the Burkini as unhygienic and potentially polluted positions women wearing the Burkini as dangerous transgressors which disturb the social order on French public beaches. I mean that the concern of hygiene and the fear of Islamism

(Islamophobia) are closely interlinked, expressing a fear of contamination and converting, where the anti-Burkini ban is a way to stop the spread of ‘dirt’ – that is Islamic fundamentalism, which is perceived as a safety concern to the French people. This also explains why the Burkini as a visible marker of Muslim identity is considered a health threat whereas the wetsuit (worn by divers and surfers) is not.



Image 6. Australian lifeguard wearing a Burkini at North Cronulla Beach, Australia

Source: *The Sydney Morning Herald* August 19 2016 (URL 15)

In an interview in *Le Figaro* Nicolas Sarkozy enforce the view of the Burkini as a dangerous threat to the French Republic: “Wearing the Burkini is an act which is political, militant, provocative. Women who wear it test the resistance of the Republic” (Meeus, 2016). Explaining Douglas (1966), Bowie (2000:43) states that humans constantly aim to create patterns of meanings from our experiences. She explains that once a pattern has been established new experiences gets filtered through and work to reinforce this pattern whereas that which do not fit in is ignored (ibid). She further explains that humans dislike that which is ambiguous or anomalous as it challenges the very foundation of our systems of meaning (ibid). Douglas (1966) proposes various ways of dealing with anomalies; ideas, objects, behaviors or people who do not conform the dominant classifications (Bowie, 2000: 44-46). She suggests that one way to deal with anomalous behavior or individuals may be to label them as dangerous (ibid:46). I mean that this is occurring in the politics of the Burkini as exemplified by Sarkozy’s statement above where the Burkini is portrayed as a dangerous threat to the future of the French society and its population. As discussed previously, wearing the Burkini on French beaches may be seen as against the norms of dress on French beaches

and thus a deviant or anomalous behavior. Describing the Burkini as pollutive and a potential health risk (see Lionel Luca's statement previous statement) is one way of portraying the Burkini as dangerous. Another way is to describe the women wearing the Burkini as militant, accomplices to Islamic fundamentalists, and thus portraying the Burkini as a direct violent threat to society, as in the above statement of Sarkozy. A third way is to portray the Burkini as immoral and a threat to the core values, the very foundation, of the nation, as stated in the first Burkini decree, ordered by David Lisnard, the mayor of Cannes: "Access to beaches and bathing is forbidden [...] to any person not properly dressed, respectful of morality and secularism [...]" (The World, 2016b).

The reference to values and moral, as exemplified by Lisnard's statement above, is continuously present in the politics of the Burkini, positioning Muslims as immoral and against the French moral ways. Douglas (1966:130-131) argues that pollution rules works to highlight that which is morally inappropriate and enforce the moral code. She explains that when moral principles are conflicting, a pollution rule be applied to reduce this conflict by providing a more straightforward focus for concern (ibid: 134). I argue that the major conflicting moral principle of the Burkini ban is that whilst it is implemented to 'liberate' women it does the complete opposite by restricting women's freedom. This conflict can be seen as reduced by the reference to pollution – by describing it as a potential health threat and as an expression of the spread of fundamentalist Islam.

Douglas (1966: 40-41) explains that labelling something as dangerous is a way to shut down other interpretations and to enforce conformity to this view. In this light, the rhetoric of the Burkini as a threat (to health, safety, moral) can be seen as a way to influence the French public to take a stance against the Burkini and thus hindering people to realize that the Burkini, without its symbolic load, is neither a carrier of the plague nor bombs but just a piece of cloth.

## 5. The Burkini as against ‘vivre ensemble’ in France

In this chapter I will discuss the view of the Burkini as against the ‘French way of living together’ and what this can tell us about ‘Muslims’ accessibility to French citizenship

### 5.1 ‘Vivre ensemble’ – the ‘new’ Laïcité

The ban of Muslim headscarves in public schools in 2004 was argued necessary in the name of laïcité, French secularism (Scott, 2007). Similarly, the Burkini was described, by both left and right politicians, as a restriction of freedom and against the principle of laïcité (Cheutin et al, 2016; Cossalter, 2016; Jocard, 2016a; The World, 2016c). However, the rhetoric seemed to have changed since 2004, where politicians’ arguments for the Burkini ban instead of referring to the Burkini as a threat to laïcité often argued the Muslim swimwear to be against the ‘*vivre ensemble*’ (‘living together’) (Cordelier, 2016; CS, 2016; Le Point, 2016, L’Express 2016b). David Lisnard, the mayor of Cannes, explains that the ban of the Burkini is about “not so much secularism but the ‘vivre-ensemble’ republican” (L’Express, 2016b). Similarly, Lionel Luca, the Mayor of, argues for the ban of the Burkini as “A mayor, he must preserve living together [‘vivre ensemble’]” (CS, 2016).

The phrase ‘vivre ensemble’ can be directly translated into English as ‘living together’, but as an emic concept it requires further explanation in order to understand its meaning(s). As I was unable to find a sufficient explanation of this concept in France today (also taking in to account the possibility that its meaning may have changed over the years) I decided to ask one of my French friends, familiar with the French culture and media, of her interpretation of the meaning of this phrase. A Swedish girl in her 30’s growing up in France explained her interpretation of its meaning as “to live together in the same society, e.g. referring to different cultures, to live together without necessarily interact but yet respect each other, live in peace kind of... peaceful/ respectful coexistence” (Odevall, C. 2016, personal communication 7 December). Describing the women wearing the Burkini as being against ‘vivre ensemble’ may thus be interpreted as another way to say that wearing the Burkini is a sign of Muslims resistance and disrespect of French values, of not accepting the French terms of ‘living together’. If Muslims are saying ‘no thank you, we don’t want to be French on your terms’, then which are these terms to become ‘fully French’?

Similar to the rationale of Burkini debate, Lægaard (2015: 204) outlines how the ban of the full face veil (burqa and niqab) 2011 was justified and found legitimate on the basis of being against living together (*vivre ensemble*) in the French society, stating that ‘The voluntary and systematic concealment of the face is problematic because it is quite simply incompatible with the fundamental requirements of living together in French society’ (ibid). However, upon analyzing the French government’s and the European Court of Human Rights’ (ECHR) statements justifying the ban of the premises of ‘living together’ Lægaard (2015: 2017) concludes that few and inadequate explanations were given to explain *why* a full face veil is incompatible with living together and what these conditions really are. Similarly, in the Burkini debate there is a lack of clarification and explanation of what ‘*vivre-ensemble*’ encompass and in what ways the Burkini threatens this ‘way of living’. It seems as if ‘*vivre-ensemble*’ is highly emic term; a concept which is meaningful and understood by people in France without further explanation, but from the perspective of an outsider, like me, the meaning of the term is not that straightforward.

Although it I was unable to find a satisfying explanation of the concept ‘*vivre-ensemble*’ and in what ways the Burkini was seen a threat to it in the anti-Burkini rhetoric in France, similar discourses seem to take place in the UK and other European countries. Khiabany and Williamson (2008) discuss the debate over the Muslim veil in British media, specifically focusing on the discourse in the British tabloid the *Sun*. One of the themes in this discourse was the refusal of ‘our way of life’, which Khiabany and Williamson (2008:71) argues presents a false homogenous image of the British culture, Islam and the veil, whilst ignoring diversity. They state that the *Sun* had published several articles which warned against the British way of life and Western civilization, portraying the veil as a threat to the nation and British values (ibid:74-75). Khiabany and Williamson (2008:77) argue that in Europe there is a current discourse of society as comprised of various ways of life and a move towards assimilation (from multiculturalism) which is consistent with the national myths in each of these states. They state that in Sweden and Norway the debate is about the cultural barrier, in Denmark about the ‘intolerant culture’, in the Netherlands about standards and values, in Germany about *Leitkultur*<sup>9</sup>, in Spain about safety and security, in the UK ‘community cohesion’ and in France it’s about *laïcité* (ibid). Khibany and Williamson (2008: 77-78) argue

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<sup>9</sup> The German language term *Leitkultur* is a politically controversial concept, first introduced in 1998 by the German-Arab sociologist Bassam Tibi. It can be translated as ‘guiding culture’ or ‘leading culture’, less literally as ‘common culture’, ‘core culture’ or ‘basic culture’ (URL 16).

that in all these debates an imagery is created which positions (a singular) Islam in opposition to a homogenous, ‘hereditary’ and imagined national culture. Although the rhetoric seems to have changed from *laïcité* to *livre-ensemble* in France, the Burkini can be seen to be a continuation of these discourses in Europe where ‘Muslims’ are portrayed as a homogenous group in opposition the modern and only ‘right way of living’.

## **5.2 The Burkini as a threat to the “modern” France**

As explained earlier, politicians from left and right political parties arguing for the Burkini ban disagree on the Burkini’s link to terrorism, positioning the women wearing the Burkini as a victim and an accomplice to terrorism respectively. However, politicians from both right and left political parties supporting the Burkini ban seems to agree on its presence on French beaches as a threat to ‘vivre ensemble’ (Cordelier, 2016; CS, 2016; Jocard, 2016a). Politicians use very strong words when arguing against the Burkini, describing it as: discriminating (The World, 2016c) and communalizing (Jocard, 2016a) in the sense of prioritizing the ‘Muslim community’ over the nation; archaic (Gerard, 2016) and incompatible with the values of France and the Republic (Cheutin et al, 2016). For instance, Lionel Luca, the mayor of Villeneuve-Loubet (Alpes-Maritimes) explains his view of the Burkini, as follows:

“By prohibiting the wearing of these outfits, I wanted to stop, through dialogue, proselytizing. By putting an end to what I call a dress of voluntary apartheid, I protect Muslims and women. I am also astonished at the silence of the feminist organizations on the subject.” (CS, 2016). Sarkozy further stresses the protection of the “way of life transmitted by our grandparents and our parents’ attacked by the “tyranny of minorities”, and further express a concern of an increased presence of veils in the public sphere, stating that there are “entire neighborhoods in France where we have never seen so many veils.” (Goer, 2016). The Burkini is thus portrayed not only incompatible with French values but also as threat and refusal to conform to the ‘ordinary’ French way of living. Chakraborti and Zempi (2012:275) explain that the veil has become a symbol of Islam, further arguing that veiling practices have been reduced to a threatening set of symbols of ‘otherness’ and difference. The politicians’ description of the Burkini as a threat to ‘vivre ensemble’ confirms this view, portraying the Burkini as a marker of difference and resistance to the ‘French way of living together’ – rather than that of compliance and assimilation. The above statements reveal a view of the Burkini not only as an expression of resistance by the women wearing it, but also as a symbol of the ‘Muslim community’s ‘self-segregation’ (lending a term from Tufail and Poynting, 2013) in France.

In the rhetoric this marker of differentiation can be seen as related to veiled Muslim women, and the visibility of her covered body in the public sphere. Abu-Lughod (2002: 785) argues that veiling can be seen as liberating for Muslim women as it allows women to participate and be a part of activities in the public space without contravening conventions of her particular community, modesty, and custom. The Burkini could thus be seen as a dress which enables Muslim women to be present in the French public space, to participate and share the activity of spending time on the beach and go swimming, whilst conforming to the Islamic dress code. In my view, is this not an act of assimilation? Is this not a sign of a more “modern” Islam and not a sign of an emergence of a more fundamentalist Islam?

Not according to the French politicians arguing for the ban. As cited before (chapter 3), Manuel Valls argues “[...], I do not accept this archaic vision. There is the idea that, by nature, women are harlots [prostitutes], impure, they should be completely covered. It is not compatible with the values of France and the Republic. Faced with provocations, the Republic must defend” (Cheutin et al, 2016). The word ‘archaic’, in French ‘archaïque’, may be defined as that which can be used to describe something that is very old-fashioned and needs to be changed, with synonyms of ‘primitive’, ‘ancient’ or ‘obsolete’ (URL 17). Consequently, the wording of this statement reveals a view of the Burkini as a sign of backwardness and non-progression, positioned in opposition to the French modern and progressive society. This imagery can be seen as a continuation of French colonialism in Algeria, where France positioned itself as “modern” in relation to a “traditional” and non-progressive Algeria (see chapter 2.3). Similarly, the rhetoric of the Burkini can be seen as a tool for reproducing a favorable image of France as modern, moral and progressive.

However, the Burkini can be seen as a relatively new form of dress, described by Franklin (2013:409) as a “refashioned technique” which shows that younger Muslim women are not passive followers of tradition but on the contrary take action and transform traditional forms of veil dressing in a way the older generation may not do. He further states that designers of Muslim dress have created an international market for veils worn by Muslim women all over the world (Ibid). Ironically, the attempt to ban the Burkini in France resulted in increased sales internationally, where designer Aheda Zanetti said that the online sales of the Burkini went up by 200% during the Burkini ban in France and its concurrent attention in international media (BBC News, 2016). The Burkini as a fashion, developed with the aim to enable women to participate in ‘secular’ activities (URL 1), could in this light rather

symbolize a ‘modernization’ countering the image of a stagnant and non-transformative Islam given in the anti-Burkini debate. I mean that the Burkini as a potential expression of Islam’s modernization could be seen as disrupting to the historically rooted and jointly created imagery of France as modern and Islam as traditional. The Burkini can thus be seen as a threat to the foundational dichotomy upon which the French national identity rests, and consequently needs to be removed and be replaced by an imagery that instead reinforces this view.

Valls statement suggests the Burkini as ‘archaic’ relating to a sexual oppression of women in Islam, and for this reason is incompatible with French values. Which are these French ‘modern’ values, repeatedly referred to in the debate, that the Burkini not only is considered incompatible with but also inferior to? The answer of this questions leads us back to chapter 3, and the Burkini as a symbol of sexual and gender inequality. Scott (2007:79) claims that French integration is based on assimilation politics, where the only way to become ‘French’ and a member of the nation is assimilation. She further argues that ‘sexual incompatibility’ (the different ways that sex and sexuality is represented and managed in France and in Islam) have become the main argument of Islam’s inability to assimilate into the French society (Ibid:173-4). Similarly, Fassin (2010: 512) argues that a new politics of national identity has emerged in France, one which is based on what he refers to as ‘sexual democracy’ and where Frenchness is primarily about sexual liberty and gender equality. He further argues that the French motto, prior the election 2007, has been redefined from ‘Liberty, equality, fraternity’ (Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité) to *sexual* liberty, *sexual* equality and instead of fraternity now laïcité, and more specific *sexual* secularism (Fassin, 2010: 513). Positioning the Burkini as archaic and against sexual liberty and gender equality may thus be a way to say that these women (and the Muslim men who supposedly oppress them) cannot belong to the ‘French community’ before the Muslim women have ‘evolved’ and become sexually liberated as the French ‘modern’ women. This implies that once the Muslim woman remove her veil she’ll become sexually liberated and thus accepted as ‘fully French’. However, is it really that ‘simple’<sup>10</sup>, that the removal of dress can give access to French citizenship and cultural ‘Frenchness’? And what if ‘being French’ on those terms is not something which is sought after, that all ‘Muslim’s don’t want to conform to French gender relations, no matter how ‘progressive’ they may be described to be?

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<sup>10</sup> Obviously, removing the veil cannot be perceived as ‘simple’ (relating to identity and social belonging) but practically it can be seen as a relatively thing to do to remove a piece of clothing.

### 5.3 Racialization, Power and French citizenship

Lionel Luca explained to defenders of the Burkini that

They are the ones who discriminate, it is they who are isolated in a ghetto, it is they who are guilty of discrimination, not we who on the contrary defend the Muslims in their practices [...] I think that Muslims want to be alone and they refuse to be held hostage by those who believe speak for them. (The World, 2016c).

This statement not only depicts the Burkini, but the whole ‘Muslim community’ in France as a ‘problem’ and, as mentioned earlier, causing their own segregation in and from French society. In this view, the problem lies with ‘them’ the Muslims and *their* refusal to integrate, and not with ‘us’ or the French integration politics. In his statement, Lionel Luca further describes ‘Muslims’ as a homogenous group in France, a rhetoric which is recurrent in the Burkini debate, and as mentioned earlier in other European discourses. Consequently, groups of different ethnic and national origins, religious schools and political views are not recognized and diversity is ignored. This lumping together of different social groups into one racial category as ‘Muslims’ can be seen as a form of racialization, explained by Winant (1994:59) in Bashi (1998: 963): “The concept of racialization signifies the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group”.

Al-Saji (2010) argues that media representations of veiled women provide a negative mirror in which a positive image of ‘western’ identity and gender may be reflected and constructed. In this mirroring where the veil plays a central role, she argues that a form of racialization and ‘cultural racism’ takes place. She makes a comparison between the veil and skin color; arguing that the veil is viewed both as a marker of Muslim culture and provides an explanation for its inferiority, in a similar manner as skin color is viewed as a visible marker of racial difference and biological determinism (ibid: 889). In this way, she argues that ‘cultural racism’ may be viewed as a continuation of ‘color racism’ (ibid: 890). Ali-Saji (2010) explains that dress can be seen as an extension of the body, and that the ‘cultural racism’ taking place in representation of the veil thus involves a racialization of the whole body. Ali-Saji (2010: 889-890) argues that the perception of veiling as homogenous and historically unchanging reinforces the representation of Islam as homogenous and non-progressive, whereas western dress is seen as historically transformative and representing the progress of western societies. Similarly, Chakraborti and Zempi (2012) use Huntington’s

thesis (1997) ‘class of civilizations’ which proposes Islam and the West as two social structures at war with each other. They argue that women’s veiling practices are used to illustrate Islam’s completely ‘different’ culture, where the veil symbolizes the boundary between the ‘West’ and “Islam”. As I will demonstrate further down, different tropes (table 1) discussed in this thesis, were used in the Burkini debate to reproduce this boundary and demark the difference between the French and Islam’s values and culture.

Race can be defined as “a symbolic category, based on phenotype or ancestry and constructed according to specific social and historical contexts, that is misrecognized as a natural category” (Desmond and Emirbaye, 2009). Similar to gender, sexuality and nation that are not fixed categories but continuously reproduced (Mayer, 2001), Desmond and Emirbaye (2009: 336) describe race as a symbolic category which is constantly recreated in society. For example, the “Indian” was invented during European colonialization of America, lumping all indigenous people together under this one label to be killed, expelled and exploited (ibid: 338). The racial categories of white and black was similarly invented in the context of English and American slavery, where blackness became associated with lack of freedom, inferiority and social death whilst whiteness was associated with freedom, superiority and life (ibid:338). Although ‘Muslim’ is not a new racial category, the rhetoric in the anti-Burkini debate can be seen as reproducing the racial category of ‘Muslims’ and ‘French’, and by positioning ‘Muslims’ as inferior recreating a racial hierarchy in French society. This racial hierarchy can be seen as a continuation from French colonialization in Algeria; during which Algerians was marked as a different race inferior to the French (see chapter 2, section 3)

Desmond and Emirbaye (2009: 344) explains that racial domination manifests as institutional and/or interpersonal racism. They further argue that institutional racism can be seen as a contestation of power; *symbolic power* to classify one group as ‘normal’ and other groups as ‘abnormal’; *political power* to deny certain groups basic rights and thus enforce segregation and inequality; *social power* to deny people of color full inclusion or membership in society; and final *economic power* which privileges certain groups in terms of work, wealth a property accumulation (Desmond and Emirbaye, 2009: 345). Some of these power contestations can be seen, and have been discussed previously in this essay, relating to the Burkini ban; where symbolic power was used in the portrayal of the French as the norm (gender equality and sexual liberty) and the Muslims as (veiled and thus sexually) deviant; political power was

used as the ban worked to exclude veiled women from the public sphere of French beaches; and finally social power to deny veiled women full inclusion and membership in society.

To explain the use of symbolic power in the anti-Burkini rhetoric I will now turn back to Douglas discussion of anomalies as potentially dangerous, as discussed in chapter 4. Douglas (1966:95) argues that disorder is potentially destructive to existing patterns in a society and for this reason symbolizes both danger and power. She explains that people at the margins of society even if they haven't done anything morally wrong are ambiguous and dangerous, and are therefore viewed as having potential powers (ibid:96). Douglas (1966:98-99) argues that people with marginal statuses give rise to the same reactions worldwide; that once a behavior has been classified as abnormal, this behavior also becomes intolerable. She further argues that these people living outside the power structure, are considered as a threat to those with the power in society, and by marking them as dangerous and as possessing uncontrollable powers this legitimizes suppression of these people (Ibid: 105). The Muslim minority population can be seen as such a group who lives at the margins of the French society, and in the light of Douglas theory this further explains why they are considered dangerous by different politicians. It explains why politicians, sitting on a lot of power in French society, are so concerned with classifying the Burkini as dangerous and potentially powerful and threatening (terrorists!), as to legitimize their suppression and protect their own power.

In essence, the 'real' debate is not about the 'liberation' of veiled Muslim women. Rather it is a reflection of the anxiety over perceived threats to 'national identity' and the 'Western way of life' (Chakraborti and Zempi, 2012: 277), and adding to this – politicians' power in French society. Mayer (2000:12) state that the nation is constructed by elites. The Burkini debate can be seen as a discourse that allows for the (male) political elite to construct the moral code of the nation, where different tropes or binary oppositions can be seen as important in the differentiation of proper and inappropriate behavior – relating to men and women, masculinity and femininity.

Table 1. The Culture of Islam vs. The French Way of Living

<b>The religion and culture of Islam</b>	<b>The French way of living</b>
Archaic	Modern
Traditional	Liberal
Oppression of women	Freedom of women
Immoral	Moral
Islamic fundamentalism	French
Covered/ Hiding bodies	Uncovered/ Revealing bodies
Religion	Laïcité
Gender inequality	Gender Equality
The men as oppressors	The men as defenders and liberators
Control of bodies	Freedom of bodies

Source: My own table

The imagery created in the Burkini debate can be seen as revolving around these tropes and binary oppositions. Mayer (2000:6) states that nationalism is based on difference and a process of inclusion and exclusion, where internal hierarchies often occur along lines of gender, race, class, sexuality. By highlighting the tropes used in the Burkini debate, I mean that it is evident that the anti-Burkini debate contributes to a discourse in which the symbolism of women's bodies and dress are used to position the culture and religion of Islam in opposition to the French national culture.

## 6. Conclusions

The aim of this thesis has been to gain a deeper understanding of the politics of the Burkini ban in France 2016. This thesis has discussed political arguments against the presence of Burkinis on French beaches; analyzing the rhetoric used in the Burkini decrees and statements made in French media. The debate was generally divided between politicians representing left and right political parties. Socialist politicians arguing against the Burkini portrayed women wearing the Burkini as agentless and passive victims oppressed by Islamic patriarchy. In their view, the Burkini is an expression of gender inequality and sexual restriction of Muslim women. Politicians from the Right supporting the Burkini ban depicted women wearing the Burkini as potentially active accomplices to Islamic fundamentalism, creating a link between the Burkini and the recent terrorist attacks in France. The Burkini was perceived as a threat to the French society; signifying the spread of (fundamentalist) Islam in France and as a direct threat to the physical safety of the French people.

In both instances, the French elite, made up of French (mainly male) politicians, constructed an imagery of 'Muslims' in France as the sexually and culturally deviant Other. At the same time, they put themselves in the favorable positions as defenders of the French nation and its values. The politics of the Burkini evidently involve a French nationalistic rhetoric, in which the value of gender equality and sexual liberation can be seen as central. A construction of French women as sexually liberated and gender equal is created and positioned against sexually suppressed and gender unequal Muslim women. It reveals a political view of French gender relations not only as superior but as the only 'right' way for men and women to relate to each other in society. 'Muslims' who visibly defy from this by wearing the Burkini (or another Muslim headscarf), covering their bodies, are consequently viewed as less evolved, less civilized and in the need of 'liberation' and 'modernization'. This shows a continuation of the rhetoric during French colonization of Algeria used to justify a continued presence of France in Algeria. In addition, the description of the women wearing the Burkini as active accomplices in Islamic extremism creates a criminal imagery that can be linked to the use of the veil to smuggle bombs and weapons during the Algerian war. The positioning of women wearing the Burkini as linked to terrorism, and/or as victims without agency, can be seen as a way to legitimize violence of the French state against veiled Muslim women, including police officers forcing veiled Muslim women to undertake the humiliating act of public undress on French beaches.

I further argue that the Burkini as a fashion and new style of Muslim dress can suggest a 'modernization' of Islam which threatens the historically rooted and jointly created imagery of France as modern and Islam as traditional and less progressive. Consequently, the constructed symbolism of the Burkini as an expression of Islam's archaic, oppressive and uncivilized ways can be seen as a means for France to further justify its domination and discrimination of Muslims in France. I argue that the public act of undressing or 'unveiling' Muslim women on French beaches is a symbolic act that enforces this domination over 'Muslims' in France, but is also a way to impose male superiority over women.

Despite their political affiliation, politicians seem to agree on the Burkini as against 'vivre ensemble' or the French way of living together, a concept that, I suggest creates an imagery of a homogenization of the French people and the idea of one single way of living together in France. This idea further suggests that the 'Muslim' or 'Islamic way of living' is not only different but 'wrong' and less progressive, and that the only way to belong to the French national community is through assimilation. For this purpose, the Burkini and other forms of Muslim dress, viewed as a symbol of Islam, consequently needs to be removed (or at least challenged). However, 'Frenchness', cannot be achieved by the removal of the Burkini or the veil in the public sphere. In the anti-Burkini rhetoric 'Muslims' are described as a homogenous group in France, ignoring social diversity and consequently reproducing a racial category. I argue that this racialization of 'Muslims' in the anti-Burkini debate creates an idea of racial hierarchies where 'French' are superior and 'Muslims' are inferior. Is it possible for someone with a different appearance, such as another skin color, language, dress, ever be 'fully' French? Or, will he or she remain excluded from the membership of the French community, and consequently having less power and opportunities?

The Burkini and the body of the Muslim women are used to reproduce these symbolic boundaries within France. As a dress and extension of the body the Burkini has been portrayed to be against the norms of dress and consequently positioned as an 'anomaly' on French beaches. The Burkini has been used as a 'reversed mirror' through which the moral code of the nation has been promoted; the idea that bodies should be uncovered on French beaches and women's sexuality should be freely available. Through the symbolism of dirt and pollution this 'anomaly' and 'problem' has further been dealt with by positioning 'Muslims' as dangerous outsiders which threaten the safety of the French people and the social order in French society. As far as my research shows, the timing of the Burkini ban was not a

coincident. It indicates that the recent terror attack has weakened people's trust of France as a safe and protected place, it has created a greater need to demark symbolic boundaries as a means to reestablish social order and political power. My research further suggests that the Burkini ban was a power contestation of the French male elite politicians (who attempt to construct the moral code and hold the power to define the boundaries of the nation), they who decide who belongs and who does not. Whilst positioning themselves as 'defenders of the nation and its women' they do the opposite, dominating and restricting the rights and freedom of women living in France.

For being an 'innocent' swimwear, the Burkini's symbolism has been highly politicized in the anti-Burkini rhetoric: symbolizing the spread of Islam and Islamic fundamentalism in France; the resistance of 'Muslims' to conform to French values; and the incompatibility of 'Muslims' to the French way of living. A dress can never simply be a piece of material, but it is as Entwistle (2001:34) states, an 'embodied practice' that expresses social belonging and is a marker of Otherness. Although alternative interpretations of the Burkini were denied in the anti-Burkini debate, Aheda Zanetti's intentions with her design of the Burkini along with women's testimonies in *the New York Times* suggest that the Burkini may give Muslim women greater freedom and the possibility to take part in the French society. Does this not imply that the wearer of the Burkini aims to express a belonging to the French community, to those French women and men sunbathing and swimming at the beach, rather than a belonging to Islamic fundamentalism? Despite the Burkini's similarity to a hooded wetsuit the Burkini is described as dirty, immoral, archaic and threatening not because of its aesthetics or functionality but because it is a useful tool for French politicians to reproduce and strengthen symbolic boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims, and in turn define and reproduce a French identity. Today in contemporary France archaic methods of control are being utilized by the few to ensure power remains *ad infinitum*.

Many studies, like this thesis, have from different theoretical standpoints researched the political discourse of the Muslim female dress. Although valuable, I suggest that future studies in this area should focus on the women affected by political discourses, to let voices of these women be heard and let them formulate their own meaning(s) of what they are wearing.

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**Appendix 1: Photos of a woman forced to remove her headscarf on the beach**







Reference:

Allen, Peter., Thornhill, Ted., Summers, Chris. 2016. Get 'em off! Armed police order Muslim woman to remove her burkini on packed Nice beach - as mother, 34, wearing Islamic headscarf is threatened with pepper spray and fined in Cannes. August 23. *The Daily Mail*. [https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=fr&u=http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/08/24/les-photos-d-une-femme-contrainte-d-enlever-son-voile-a-nice-suscitent-emoi-et-incomprehension\\_4987497\\_3224.html&prev=search](https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=fr&u=http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/08/24/les-photos-d-une-femme-contrainte-d-enlever-son-voile-a-nice-suscitent-emoi-et-incomprehension_4987497_3224.html&prev=search). (Collected 2016-12-04)