Dominant Ideology and Racism in the French Media: a Critical Discourse Analysis on the Case of the Denaturalization Law

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Field of study: Political Science
Level: C
Credits: 15 credits

Thesis Defence: Spring 2016
Supervisor: Ariel Young

Department of Government
Bachelor’s Thesis in Political Science
Wordcount: 11562
Pages: 33
Abstract

This study focuses on how minorities are stigmatized in the French media. It limits itself to the case of the proposal of the denaturalization law and the consequent discourse about it. The subject is introduced through a short background on the law and its relevance to the possible racist nature of the debate, followed by some background on racism in France, an overview of the theory on new racism and how it can explain stigmatizing discourses. Critical Discourse Analysis is used as the method to uncover said discourses as it is a method related to the in-depth analysis of implicit dominant ideologies and power-structures. The study analyzes twenty articles from two French newspapers in order to determine how stigmatizing discourses are expressed. The results in the discussion show recurrent racist narratives that systematically denigrate and stereotype Muslims and immigrants. They also show a pattern of the dominant culture negating space to minorities.

Keywords: Racism; Dominant ideologies; Stigma; Critical Discourse Analysis; Islamophobia; France; Minorities
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1. Introduction

November 13th 2015 Paris suffered a terrorist attack in which 130 people died and left hundreds wounded (BBC, 2015). The terrorists targeted a concert hall, a stadium, restaurants and bars. In light of these events, just three days later, the leftist French President François Hollande revived an old right-wing proposal (Mouillard, Sylvain, 2015); “La déchéance de nationalité” (Stripping of nationality).

In his speech, the President expressed the intent to make constitutional changes to include French born citizens with dual-nationality to the existing law in the penal code. The current law already permitted the coerced revocation of nationality to naturalized citizens; for example, those who have lived in France for a period longer than five years or married to someone with a French nationality. Revocation may only happen in the case that an individual is found guilty of attacks against the interest of the nation, attacks against public administration committed by employees with a public function, failing to serve the obligations given through the national service, or to have served for the profit of another state through acts incompatible with the quality of the French and prejudicial to the interests of France (Soullier, Lucie, 2016).

The president’s proposal became an extremely popular and debated topic in the French media due to its right-wing origins. It was controversial as it would constitutionalize a law that would differentiate between citizens of dual and single nationality. There was also a lack of consensus on the whether or not it should be added to the constitution or simply added to the penal code. Moreover, there was controversy surrounding the discourse of possibly including individuals with only one nationality into the law to not create a differentiation between citizens in the constitution but risking a breach of human rights by creating stateless individuals. This was followed by the scandal of the resignation of the justice minister Christiane Taubira, who resigned in disapproval of the proposal.

On March 31st 2016, the proposal was buried as the President could not get the Assembly and the Senate to reach an agreement over the legislative text even though the measure of revoking the nationality of terrorists had bipartisan support as well as support from the majority of the French population (20 Minutes, 2016).

This study focuses on the discourse related to the nationality denaturalization law in two French newspapers, Le Monde and Le Figaro, as they are the two biggest daily newspapers,
and also covers most of the French political spectrum, Le Monde being affiliated with the left and Le Figaro with the right (Le Monde, 2006). In the case of the French media, the limitation to two of the biggest newspapers is supported as sufficient by Jennifer Fredette’s book *Constructing Muslims in France*. She explains that the media is highly centralized to the Parisian region. Where other countries might have media outlets in each state, France has “three, four papers; three, four newscasts; there are the same journalists you see everywhere; it is a little group that sticks together and shares information, jobs, etc” (Fredette, Jennifer, 2014, p. 32). French politicians, writers about public affairs, television personalities, and philosophers are much more likely to read one another’s work, be related to one another, or be the same person than it is the case in most countries. This helps produce a single way of thinking (Fredette, Jennifer, 2014, p.33). Thus the analysis of the two biggest newspapers from both sides of the political spectrum may provide an image of French media as a whole, as opinions rarely vary that much within the fringes of the political left-right spectrum.

The study aims to answer the question: *How is the stigmatization of minorities expressed in the French media on the discourse of the denaturalization law?* This paper will use earlier literature on the stigmatization of Muslims in France and on the theory of “new racism” to seek to understand how minorities can be stigmatized through the media even as the proposed law itself did not pass. The theory contends that traditional racism which focused on genetic differences, so-called eugenics, has reinvented itself to resonate more with modern times and thus targets instead cultural, national or religious differences (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.313). It refers to an ideological discourse that has become so naturalized that it is no longer seen as ideological but has become normative and is seen as common sense (Brookes, Heather Jean, 1995, p.464). The study thus concerns itself with how a discourse that might seem inoffensive might hold inherent racist, stigmatizing ideologies that could contribute to the stigmatization of minorities in France, such as Muslims, Arabs and immigrants.

Denaturalization policies have been misused in the past, for example during the Second World War. Nazi Germany used the law as anti-Jewish tactics during the transitional period from 1936 to 1941 (M, Dean, 2002, p.218). Whilst the measure started as a tool aimed at political opponents, its use grew to incorporate increasingly more Jewish individuals (M, Dean, 2002, p.221). In 1940, the Gestapo finally renegotiated the spectrum of the law to make all Jewish individuals “subject to the preconditions for denaturalization (M, Dean, 2002, p.227). Whilst I do not claim that the French proposal has the ulterior motives of replicating Nazi Germany’s history, theory on new racism contends that discourses that are considered to
be racist will streamline and modernize its ideologies so as to permit old ideas to reproduce themselves in current events in which they will obscure the exercise of dominance (Brookes, Heather Jean, 1995, p.464). The relation between discourses on a person’s right to citizenship and the potential underlying discriminatory ideals should not escape us.

The legal consequences of the coerced revocation law might not have led to any major change in the French penal system. Its enactment would have been mainly symbolic in nature due to the practical impossibilities that such a law would have had, such as the question of the state’s responsibility over its own citizens, the eventual deportation of terrorists to countries in which they might face the death penalty, as well as the fact that should terrorists truly care about keeping the French nationality all they would have to do is abandon the other nationality.

However, whilst citizenship is a legal reality, it is also a nationally defined normative ideal, and those who are seen to not fit the norm may find their status undercut in ways that are not easily remedied by formal rights protection. Thus, even though policy makers would attempt at a denaturalization law that would not be discriminatory, the debate arisen from it might lead to the stigmatization of because of its symbolic nature and who the debate around it will focus on. The subject of embedded racist discourse in the context of the French law is relevant to analyze as it may show the naturalization of racist discourse within Western society against minorities and its potential stigmatizing effect, which eventually harm and undermine the not only the rights but also the economic and social realities of said minorities under the pretext of security, or incompatibility of the ethnic groups with the dominant culture. In the worst case scenario, this can lead to the unlawful persecution and racial profiling of minorities as has happened in post 9/11 US (Saghaye-Biria, Hakimeh, 2012, p.509).

Another consequence of concealed racists discourse is the risk that in the heat of the moment after the November 13th attacks, human rights and the rights of minorities will be undermined by public demands for action on the part of the government. This can put pressure on the government to look for populist solutions in an attempt to find an easy answer to a complex issue, hoping it will satisfy the public outcry and in the process scapegoating minorities. Studies on new racism underline “the importance of producing knowledge and practices that will ultimately help abolish race as a category of exclusion” (Romm, Norma R. A, 2010, p.12). It is thus the hope of this study to explore further on how racism is reproduced, how discourses on nationality can stigmatize minorities and to broaden the knowledge that contributes to better social equality for minorities.
Islamophobia and the discourse regarding the cultural and religious incompatibility of Islam and western democracy has become a prominent discourse that has led to the “last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West” (Saghaye-Biria, Hakimeh, 2012, p.510). In France, the main political parties did not generally speak on immigration, the debate on nationality and national preference was started by the far-right party Front National which claimed priority should be given to people of French origin and excludes the rest. In the party program for the elections of 1997, the right wing coalition UDF did not openly express a policy regarding immigration, however a report from their commission emphasized that cultural differences were only accepted if compatible with the “French cultural model (…) as it is inadmissible to remain in France whilst being associated with a foreign state, arab-islamic” (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.310). The government then proposed a denaturalization law, similar to the latest one, that was also buried, following the recommendations of the sociologist Patrick Weil (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.312) the same sociologist that would years later again advise against a denaturalization law, this time to the leftist president Francois Hollande (McPartland, Ben, 2016). The discourse in the right polarized Islam and French culture and the impossibility of being both. Van Der Valk concluded that the mainstream Right enacts racist bias and enforces a positive image of the French and a negative presentation of the rest (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.310-311).

Critical Discourse Analysis has been used previously to expose racist discourses by dominant groups in the media (Brookes, Heather Jean, 1995; Teo, Peter, 2000) however, the case of the French denaturalization law discourse in the media has not been analyzed through CDA. Also, where Brookes study focuses on the representation of Africa in British news and Teo the representation of Asian immigrants in Australian news, this study also takes into account the timing of the discourse in France; its context connected to a crisis- the terrorist attack- that might have an effect on the intensity and aim of the discourse. Thus, the case of the French discourse surrounding the denaturalization law was chosen as it seemed like a discourse that would present dominant ideologies prominently. According to Fredette’s *Constructing Muslims in France*, a method of undercutting a group’s status is by attacking one’s standing as a citizen. This method can be just as subtle and pervasive as social slights, but reaches a far wider audience and are hard to challenge once such attacks have been made. Fredette argues that the standing of Muslims as citizens of France is primarily undercut by elite discourse (Fredette, Jennifer, 2014, p. 25). These discursive attacks on Muslim citizenship, whether in form of a bad joke, a direct criticism, or a parliamentary debate premised on the need to
address Muslim integration problems, foster a pervasive climate of prejudice. This exposes Muslims to routine indignities and may be seen as a justification for material advantages (Fredette, Jennifer, 2014, p.26) Thus even if the denaturalization law itself might not be discriminatory, the discourse surrounding it is expected to attempt to define who is included within the confines of said nationality. The case is for that reason expected to be a representative example of discourses that debate national identity and values in the West, specifically France, and how dominant groups might define that identity through underlying discriminatory ideologies that eventually lead to the stigmatization of minorities.

The result of this study can be generalized to cases that focus on the defamation of Muslims in Western countries, to debates on the right and “deservance” of citizenship and more broadly the narratives that dominant ideologies use in order to stigmatize minorities. However, in this case, the arguments through which the defamation is presented will most likely be manipulated to have a cultural resonance with the French public and its republican ideologies and thus it is unlikely that they will be the same for similar cases in other countries.

I will first go through the theoretical background on racism and stigma that the study is based on, followed by a history of racism and discrimination in France. Then a description of the method used, critical discourse analysis, and its relevance to answer the research question. Then I will provide for the criteria chosen for the selection and analysis of the newspaper articles, succeeded by an analysis of the results and a final discussion and conclusion on their interpretation and meaning to the broader discourse on racism and the stigmatization of minorities.

2. Theoretical Underpinnings and Previous Research

2.1 Stigma

This essay adopts the definition of stigma put forward by Link & Phelan’s article *Conceptualizing Stigma*. According to the article, stigmatization of a group of people is the result of a combined series of factors that lead to the structural and reproducing discrimination of groups. The first factor is the labelling of human differences, followed by dominant cultural beliefs linking labels to unwanted or negative stereotypes. Third, the labeled persons are depicted as a different groups, in an “us” vs “them” manner. As a result of this labeled persons face status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes. Lastly, stigmatization depends on access to social, economic, and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled
persons into distinct categories and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion and discrimination (Link, Bruce G. & Phelan, Jo C., 2001, p.367). It is thus the understanding of this essay that stigmatization occurs in a uneven power position, where the dominant culture can create stigma that leads to the continued reproduction of unequal social equality between groups. In the following section it will be explained how stigma occurs in modern societies that may openly oppose the unequal treatment of minorities but still engage in stigmatizing discourses that reinforce structural differences.

2.2 New Racism

This study adopts the theory on racism and new racism to explain some of the mechanisms on how discrimination and stigmatization reproduces. It argues that racist and discriminatory discourse at all levels of society will contain “the positive presentation of the in-group and the negative presentation of the out-group” (Van Dijk, Teun A., 2001, p.362) resulting in the stigmatization of groups. In the case of France the traditionally Christian “native” majority as the in-group and Muslims, implied Arab and North African immigrants, as the out-group. The theory explains that this negative/positive dichotomy between the dominant culture and the minorities emphasizes the differences as the in-group being the norm and the out-group being characterized as foreign to said norm. The Others, as the out-group is named, is thus associated with deviance, violence and illegitimacy. In social conflicts, the in-group’s crimes will be euphemized and the victims blamed and questioned (Van Dijk, Teun A., 2001, p.362).

As indicated earlier, new racism is more elusive and implicit. Individuals that perpetuate racial hierarchies may not regard themselves as racists (Romm, Norma R. A, 2010, p.1) Those culpable of conducting racist discourse in its new form will probably uphold the values of democratic egalitarianism yet express themselves in a way that distance themselves from ethnic minorities usually by blaming victims for their circumstances (Teo, Peter, 2008, p.8). The reason for this is that “racism” is associated the old explicit overly bigoted values that are now no longer seen as acceptable (Romm, Norma R. A, 2010, p.34).

New racism claims that the elimination of “legal” inequality had the effect of leading the dominant group, traditionally Christian and white, to believe that racial inequality itself was eliminated. It allowed them to deny the existence of racial discrimination as a continuing source of social inequality. The formal denial of legislative racial discrimination has led to the denial of societal discrimination, and the inequalities between groups are blamed on the cultural differences of minorities (Leach, Colin Wayne, 2005, p.441)
New racism is a symptom of post-colonial ideology where “the power of dominant groups is integrated in laws, rules, norms, habits, and even a quite general consensus” (Van Dijk, Teun A., 2001, p.355). This new form of racism emerged after the Second World War in most of Western Europe, “characterized by intolerance toward that which is defined within the national story as “alien”, as perpetuated by the media, political stances on immigration. National values can be used to set limits on multiculturalism, while allegiance to the defined, hegemonic values becomes a factor in assessing the merits of different categories of migration as well as a necessary condition for the settlement of immigrants” (Romm, Norma R. A, 2010, p.4). Consequently racist discourse has changed from a biological basis to a discourse focused on cultural differences. Such discourses then perpetuate the propagation of racism (Romm, Norma R. A, 2010, p. 45)

Racism is thus defined as a “complex, multifaceted system of domination and exclusion that produces social inequality between different ethnic groups”, a system that is produced and reproduced through the discourse of the dominant groups (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.313). In the case of France it is undoubtedly the Christian white western culture and with its republican individualistic ideology that is dominant, and Muslims and migrants the minorities.

The continuity of the Us versus Others discourse contributes to the persistence of dominant culture patterns of representation in media discourses (Van Dijk, Teun A., 2001, p.355). It is important to point out that such racism is not the prejudice of any one individual but refers to an ideology that transcends single individuals and transpires through social practices and discourses, and as said earlier, it changes with time as it adapts to new economic, political and socio-cultural conditions (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p. 313). The theory contends that discourses at the micro-level, for example media reporting on a specific debate, are at the same time the reproduction of ideals at the social macro-level (Van Dijk, Teun A., 2001, p.354). This means that in the case of the denaturalization discourse, racist underlying ideologies in an article will be the manifestation of greater dominant culture ideologies. My hypothesis is thus that the discourse in the media that started around the denaturalization law will be the ideological dissemination of earlier racist discourses carried by Front National and later other right wing parties and the strengthening of the national identity as exclusive to the dominant group. The naturalization of this racist discourse will be renewed so as to resonate with modern French culture and conceal its racist nature. The discourse will now be seen as deprived of dominant ideology, yet aimed at maintaining the power structures and dominance of the white majority over minorities, in this case, binationals, de facto Muslims.
2.3 History of discrimination within French legislation on nationality

Exclusive legislation based on the assumed degree of assimilability of ethnic and religious groups can be traced back in France to the early 19th century. As Algeria became a French territory, French nationality became a possibility for its citizens, however, it remained virtually closed to native Muslims, making a distinction between the “assimilable” groups and the rest (Weil, Patrick, 2008, p.53).

In the 1930’s, the debate on assimilability of certain ethnic groups becomes an established hierarchy by which the origin of immigrants is distinguished according to their degree of assimilability. This new system was based on eugenics, the study of races, biology and anthropology; influenced by new American legislation that had reduced the number of immigrants through quotas according to origin (Weil, Patrick, 2008, p. 73).

As previously stated, Nazi Germany used denaturalization laws to target Jews, this was also the case in French occupied territory under the puppet Vichy regime until the liberation in 1944 (Weil, Patrick, 2008, p.110). However, discriminatory legislation did not stop with the fall of the Vichy. In 1945, the high advisory committee on population had approved a directive that made it possible to select immigrants through quotas calculated according to their “degree of assimilability” (Weil, Patrick, 2008, p. 153) similar to pre-Vichy legislation.

2.4 Stigmatization of Muslim in contemporary France

Discrimination based on ethnic or religious origin only became a political question as a part of the discourse of young people from immigrant families in the 1980’s but didn’t become salient until the second half of the 1990’s when the sociological research center raised questions on multiculturalism. French social scientists often argue that Republicanism impedes racism because it emphasizes civic participation regardless of group differences. Yet, while the French political culture discourages racism based on color, it strengthens another kind of prejudice by distinguishing between those who share the common Republican and French culture (“the natives”) and those who do not (immigrants) (Lamont, M., 2003, p.41).

While there are different types of republicanism, the French elite today support the difference-blind, abstract republicanism that is critical of pluralism and sees multiculturalism as a threat to national unity and the common good. Thus the key components of French republicanism include the rejection of any form identity politics and a strict sense of secularism (Fredette, Jennifer, 2014, p. 20). The distinction between “the natives” and “immigrants” is also
reinforced by traditional anti-Muslim feelings in Christian France, by the longstanding faith that French culture is superior, and by a colonial history that the French believe puts them above people from their former colonies (Lamont, M., 2003, p.41).

Until the 1990’s, France was received a reputation for a functioning system of individual integration, however, as the young people from minorities began to disproportionately suffer from unemployment, the French model of individualistic integration model became increasingly controversial. The same model that was supposed to be liberating was becoming repressive, since it required everyone to conform to the universalistic model but at the same time denies some the ability to participate in this universality, which requires economic and social integration. Thus, young people from minorities find themselves not only marginalized and excluded in economic terms but also diminished and ethnicised by their inability to embody this abstract universalism in the way that the majority understand it (Duprez, Dominique, 2009, p.755). This discrimination manifested itself in the unemployment crisis between 1990 and 1995 where the unemployment rate for men was disproportionately higher if they lived in the inner cities, because of the stigma attached to those areas (Duprez, Dominique, 2009, p.756).

The previously mentioned book, Fredette’s Constructing Muslims in France, studies the discourse of elites in France and how they help shape and reproduce the stigma attached to Muslims, it reveals the French elite’s assumptions on the nature of Muslim citizenship in France (Fredette, Jennifer, 2014, p.10). Fredette argues that there is no one French Muslim identity in France, still the French elite often speak of it as one, and depict it as a threat to the nation. This points to a power relation where the elite use such power to create identities and to judge if said identities are deserving of citizenship (Fredette, Jennifer, 2014, p. 5). This elite discourse that tends to exclude and marginalize French Muslims is hard to counter, as those debated about often stand outside institutions that would enable them to challenge and reject the identities imposed on them, and even with the same power a united counter-narrative would be hard-found as Muslims in France constitute such a diverse population (Fredette, Jennifer, 2014, p. 13).

As the elites criticize this abstract Muslim identity, they create another identity, the one of the good French citizen, who is deserving of rights and threatened by the outsider (Fredette, Jennifer, 2014, p. 6). Recent examples of this type of discourses was the debate preceding the ban on niqabs proposed by the Sarkozy administration, a debate that depicted the use of the
niqab as uncivilized, backward and extremist. Later, Sarkozy suggested a larger debate on the compatibility of Islam with France, which was widely felt as discriminatory by Muslims in France (Fredette, Jennifer, 2014, p. 7). This study sees the denaturalization law as a possible case where, whether or not the law is discriminatory, the potential discourse from it might be.

3. Methodological Approach

This study uses critical discourse analysis as a method to understand and uncover the underlying power-structures and reproduction of racism against citizens of dual nationality, understood to be the Muslim minority in France, in the discourse surrounding the denaturalization law.

Critical discourse analysis sees ideology as the means to support unequal power relations; the method is used to investigate how language transfers ideology through social institutions (Fernández Matínez, Dolores, 2007, p.127), in the case of this study, the media. Critical discourse analysis is a method that not only seeks to understand prejudice, dominance and hegemony manifested through the use of language, but has also ulterior motives to incite changes in the way power is used by revealing how the misuse of such power is reproduced in social relationships (Fernández Matínez, Dolores, 2007, p.126). The reason why critical analysis is important is that the discourses that we encounter everyday are not only the manifestation of ideals but contribute also to the reproduction of ideals that can affect the way we look at groups, events and places that create the dominant mindsets. Discourse does not only reflect ideals but produces and reproduces them (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.9,11). The term “critical” thus emphasizes the need to unpack the ideological foundations of discourses that have become naturalized (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.12).

The critical part of discourse analysis focuses on data that enacts discourses that might seem neutral or natural but in fact represent “unequal encounters or embody manipulative strategies” (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.12). Discourse is seen as the creation of meanings from mental models expressed through language. These models embody opinions with an ideological basis and bias, which are mapped by what is expressed, how it is expressed as well as what is not expressed (Van Dijk, Teun A., 1998, p.205). In practice, it means that an individual’s type of lexical style is a “means of ideological expression in discourse” and changes depending on contextual factors such as age, gender, class, position, power and social relation. The attitudes and ideologies of these different factors are seen as contextual frames that form a type of lexical style, whether the users are aware of their own position in society and ideological
stance or not (Van Dijk, Teun A., 1998, p.206). By analyzing this lexical styles and structures one can uncover the ideological basis and meanings expressed in the discourse (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.11).

4. Analytical Framework

4.1 Article selection and material

We have established that racist discourse disseminates and reproduces through language in social exchanges and institutions. Discourse express meaning and is the manifestation of beliefs and underlying ideologies (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.317), and in order to unpack the meaning hidden in discourse one needs a systematic approach to uncover it. To conduct this systematic analysis, this study will draw mainly from the analytical frameworks in Van Der Valk’s research on right-wing parliamentary discourse on immigration in France (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003) and Teo’s critical discourse analysis of racism in the Australian press (Teo, Peter, 2000). Van Der Valk’s study becomes relevant not only in the cultural context which is discourse in France, but also because of its political nature and similarity to the one in this study. Teo’s systematic research then completes with the relevant issue of how to understand meaning in press articles and discourses as they may differ from political debates as they have different rules of rhetoric and purpose.

The articles are found by searching “déchéance de nationalité” in both newspapers’ search-engine, thereafter, 10 articles from each newspaper will be selected. As the aim of this essay is to depict the how and not to what extent racism stigmatizes minorities, all articles related to the law were read but only the top ten articles that reveal one or more of Van Dijk’s principles were chosen. The overall model of racist discourse that will be looked for when choosing articles is based on Van Dijk’s four basic principles (Van Dijk, 2000, p.317), which are:

- Emphasize positive things about us.
- Emphasize negative things about them.
- De-emphasize negative things about us.
- De-emphasize positive things about them.

Following is a list of the articles chosen. They are separated into three types; informative, analytical or opinion. The criteria for informative is for articles which limit themselves to quote or forward information without any obvious interpretation. Analytical for articles that not only forward information but also make some more outward attempt to interpret it without
taking a stand in a debate. Opinion is for articles that take stands on one side of a debate.

There is also a short description of the main theme in each article.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author/Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Main theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>Déchéance de nationalité : l’idée qui passe mal à gauche</td>
<td>Bekmezian, Hélène 2015-12-04</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Assesses the position of politicians within the leftist party on the denaturalization law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>Explosions à Bruxelles : la récupération politique a déjà commence</td>
<td>Bekmezian Hélène 2016-03-22</td>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>Covers politician’s tweets after the attacks in Brussels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>Laïcité : les positions « décomplexées » de Valls</td>
<td>De Montvalon, Jean Baptiste 2016-01-28</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Analyzes the stance of vice-president Valls on “laïcité” or the French version of secularism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>Le Front national lie les attentats à la crise des migrants</td>
<td>Faye, Olivier 2015-11-16</td>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>Covers the remarks made by members of Front National, who link the November attacks to immigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>Guerre de religion dans la chapelle socialiste</td>
<td>Fressoz, Françoise 2016-01-22</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Analyzes the two opposing positions within the socialist party on secularism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>Etre français, par-delà le droit du sang et du sol</td>
<td>Héran, Francois 2016-01-07</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>Debates on how being French is more than a right but a set of values inherited through adequate socialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>« L’urgence d’une législation antiterroriste adaptée ou d’un “Patriot Act” à la française »</td>
<td>Roucaute, Yves 2016-11-25</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>Argues for the necessity of a French version of the American anti-terrorist policy Patriot Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>Les fractures intellectuelles de l’après-Charlie</td>
<td>Truong, Nicolas 2016-01-08</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Analyzes the political debate between “intellectuals”, the separation allegedly being between republicans and leftists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>L’appartenance à une nation implique des droits, mais aussi des devoirs</td>
<td>Zarka, Yves Charles 2016-01-07</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>Deliberates on the balance between security and liberty in light of the possible prolonged state of emergency and the denaturalization law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>Yves Michaud : « La politique des bons sentiments et de la compassion mène à l’aveuglement »</td>
<td>Guerrin, Michel/Yves Michaud 2016-04-28</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>Argues against the rise of identity politics and legislation and states that too much collective freedom has been conceded for the sake of muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Figaro</td>
<td>La déchéance de nationalité est une tradition républicaine!</td>
<td>Courtois, Stéphane 2016-01-08</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>Argues for the legality of the denaturalization law based on its usage in previous periods of unrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Figaro</td>
<td>Fragile victoire</td>
<td>Du Limbert, Paul-Henri 2016-02-10</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>After the approval of the denaturalization law by the national assembly, the author analyzes the political landscape on the likeliness for the law to pass through the senate</td>
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<td>Le Figaro</td>
<td>Déchéance de nationalité: le FN dénonce le «cynisme» socialiste</td>
<td>Galiero, Emmanuel 2015-12-21</td>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>The article quotes the FN leadership and their skepticism towards the willingness of passing the denaturalization law</td>
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<tr>
<td>Le Figaro</td>
<td>Bruno Retailleau : «Au Sénat, la ligne rouge, c'est l'apatridie»</td>
<td>Waintraub, Judith 2016-02-12</td>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>Quotes majority leader in the senate, Bruno Retailleau, saying the senate will no pass a law that leaves people stateless</td>
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<tr>
<td>Le Figaro</td>
<td>Les non-dits de la déchéance de nationalité</td>
<td>Halevi, Ran 2016-01-15</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>Argues that denaturalization has been an idea that originated from the leftist movements and not from the extreme right parties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Le Figaro</td>
<td>Tariq Ramadan veut devenir Français</td>
<td>Le Figaro 2016-02-06</td>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>Quotes the intentions of swiss islamologist Tariq Ramadan to become French as a “good” example of integration to republican values</td>
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<tr>
<td>Le Figaro</td>
<td>J-C Lagarde pour la déchéance des terroristes</td>
<td>Le Figaro avec AFP 2016-01-06</td>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>Quotes the leader of the right-wing party UDI saying that he would support a denaturalization law whether or not it leads to the creation of statelessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Le Figaro</td>
<td>Déchéance de nationalité : les Français contre leurs « élites »</td>
<td>Perrault, Guillaume 2016-01-13</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>On the separation and controversy between the political, and intellectual opinion and the popular one as the vast majority of the population supports the denaturalization law</td>
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<td>Le Figaro</td>
<td>Perpétuité réelle et débat politique en trompe-l’œil</td>
<td>Tabard, Guillaume 2016-03-25</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>Debates on the similarities between the policy proposals by the left after the Paris attacks and after the Brussels attacks and how in their rushed endeavor to react they tend to rely on impractical solutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Le Figaro</td>
<td>Double nationalité : la vraie question</td>
<td>Thibaud, Paul 2016-01-25</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>Argues that the true solution to solve the question on nationality would be to limit dual-citizenship as, the author argues, it leads to lack of fidelity and ambiguity towards the host nation</td>
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4.2 Tools for interpreting meaning

When an overall impression that an article includes one or more of these principles, this study will use the analytical tools provided in Van Der Valk and Teo’s framework to uncover the linguistic devices that could point out the aspects of the articles that contribute to the reproduction of racist discourse.

The first characteristic that will be analyzed in the articles is the headline. Information in articles is organized according to its prominence, where the most important is situated at the top and the least at the bottom (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.13). This means that the headline will function as a way to form and lead the reader’s socio-cognitive representations with respect to macro-structures, in other words, it will decide how the reader interprets the information given according to the ongoing and past discourses in their particular society (Brookes, Heather Jean, 1995, p.463) and contextualizing the information according to relevant background knowledge to create meaning (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.14). This macro-structure summarizes the article’s ideology and lead’s the reader to disregard other interpretations of the information, thus the information “comes packaged with the interpretation” (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.14). As journalists are aware that the articles are rarely read past the headline and the first few lines, every word will be carefully chosen in order to maximize the effect with the reader (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.15) thus by analyzing the headlines of the articles chosen, we will be able to glance at the ideological pattern of the rest of the article.

The second linguistic device that is relevant for the analysis is generalization. Generalization denotes attributes of a specific individual or group to a larger less specific group. It is often used trivially by journalists as a convenient tool to describe the object of the news without going into uninteresting overly specific details, yet its repetition in regard to general groups when referring to specific cases can point to an ideological bias (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.16). Continuous attribution of a certain characteristic to a group of people can be suggestive of stereotyping; the larger the group who’s being labeled the more severe the stereotyping. The most likely unintended consequence of stereotyping is that “people who stereotype others tend to see them not only as less variable but also less complex than themselves” (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.17). This kind of categorization affects our perception of the meaning of what an individual does, depending on what stereotype we have learned (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.17). An example of this is the case of the teenager Ahmed Mohamed from Texas, who was arrested in school for bringing a home-made clock (BBC, 2015). It is unlikely that the teacher would
have felt threatened and resorted to calling the police if this clock had been brought by a teenager of non-Muslim descent. It becomes clear that stereotyping in the media can lead to negative consequences for the out-group, thus it is important to bring it in the analytical frame to uncover racist discourse.

Other linguistic devices that will be of importance are rhetorical fallacies and rhetorical tools such as metaphors, irony, rhetorical questions, repetition, euphemisms and exaggerations. These are more common in political debates but due to the existence of opinion pieces such as editorial articles, op-eds, and columnist articles in the press, it is not uncommon to find not only informative but also argumentative texts in the newspapers. Rhetorical tools serve towards “the persuasive communication of preferred models of social events, and thus manages how recipients will understand and especially how they will evaluate such events” (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.320), they can thus lead readers away from or into the ideological interpretation intended by the writer.

Rhetorical fallacies are defined by Jeremy Bentham in the Handbook of Political Fallacies (1962) as “an argument employed or topic suggested for the purpose, or with the probability of producing the effect of deception, or of causing some erroneous opinion to be entertained by any person to whose mind such an argument may have been presented” (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.328). Fallacies serve to emphasize or de-emphasize ideological meanings and enable different interpretations through implicit strategies (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.320). Some fallacies function as a way to convince of a preferred interpretation and are therefore often useful in argumentative texts. Although fallacies are inherently illogical arguments, their use can delegitimize other interpretations of an event, consequently it’s no wonder that they are often abused. Fallacies that “frequently occur in discourse on ethnic issues are populism, overgeneralization, setting up straw men, the fallacy of the slippery slope, the ad hominem fallacy and the fallacy of compassion” (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.320). Another fallacy that might arise due to the timing of the denaturalization law is the fallacy of danger. The use of this fallacy means to suppress discussion of an issue by creating groundless alarm, it is a form of the straw man fallacy (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.329). Referring to the terrorist attack or future potential attacks could be used thus to suppress discussion of the consequences of the denaturalization law. Related to this fallacy are counter-factual arguments. These are argumentative tools that are based on hypothetical scenarios, created “in order to better predict expected negative consequences that are used to persuade the audience
of the necessity of specific policy measures” (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.320), in other words, “if…then” scenarios.

The last characteristic of an article that can be interpreted as a part of racist discourse is on which and how the article relies on different sources of information. Quotes and references are frequently used to give an impression of reliance and truth from what is considered legitimised sources. This view that only “experts” are entitled to opinions whilst the subjects of discourses are just sources of experiences leads to an established structure where “quotations becomes a gate-keeper device that admits only those in position of power and influence while shutting out the opinions and perspectives of those deemed by society to be powerless” (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.20). Quotation becomes a tool that empowers those who are quoted yet those who are the subjects of the discussion do not get the chance to contribute or refute what is said about them. As these experts being quoted are predominantly Christian and white, there is a systematic exclusion of the out-group considered to be less reliable and thus it is only the interpretation of the in-group that is put forward in the articles (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.40). As few Muslims are currently successful in the centralized French media, this means they are not allowed to speak for themselves or create their own images in France (Fredette, Jennifer, 2014, p.32)

Ultimately, the linguistic tools that might accentuate the underlying racism in an article might enforce one or more of Van Dijk’s principles, nevertheless, the overall tone of the article, the context, its timing and its aim will provide some idea of how the denaturalization law is interpreted overall by the French media and consequently the French public.

5. Analysis

The analysis will be presented firstly by going through the headlines and how they might enforce Van Dijk’s principles through the aforementioned characteristics that uncover implicit racism, or other more explicit methods. Secondly, narratives in the texts that are found to be significant to the reproduction of racist discourse, again identified through the discourse analysis methods, will be analyzed. The narratives that were found to be recurrent through the articles are split into different sections; Islam vs secularism, immigration and defining French nationality and values.
5.1 Headlines

As mentioned before, headlines can influence the way a text is interpreted, each word is carefully selected to maximize impact and emphasize the article’s ideology. A majority of the headline’s from the selected articles simply quote politicians or political parties’ opinions on the debate (Bekmezian, Hélène, 2016; Galiero, Emmanuel, 2015; Le Figaro avec AFP, 2016; Waintraub, Judith, 2016; De Montvalon, Jean Baptiste, 2016; Faye, Olivier, 2015). Depending on the political party or individual that is quoted different ideologies might come across to the reader; however, as established in earlier literature (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.20), there is a constant in that the people quoted are part of what is considered the “established experts” sphere, politicians or professors, usually of European background. The subjects of the debate, the binationalis and immigrants only gain a space in the debate under fringe circumstances, as when the Swiss Islamic theologian Tariq Ramadan announced his intention to become a French citizen (Le Figaro, 2016). Whilst quoting politicians as a way to form a headline might not necessarily reproduce racist ideologies, some racist views do come across when the politicians themselves express racist ideologies. This is the case with one of the articles that paraphrases the leadership of the far-right party Front National, who links the November attacks to immigration (Faye, Olivier, 2015). As this indirect quote is not analyzed nor contested in the headline, nor inside the article for that matter, this can lead to the strengthening of cognitive patterns that stigmatizes immigrants and those perceived to be immigrants.

Two of the articles’ headlines situate the context of the debate on the law around religion and secularism (Fressoz, Françoise, 2016; De Montvalon, Jean Baptiste, 2016). Fressoz’s article calls the ongoing debate within the socialist party a “religious war” whilst De Montvalon’s article refers to the simplistic position on secularism that the vice-president Valls has. The usage of “religious war” in the context of the denaturalization law can be considered an exaggeration, but it is also evidence that the denaturalization debate is not simply about the revocation of nationality for terrorists but also a debate on the compatibility of religion-implicitly understood, Islam- and what is alleged to be a society based on secular values. The negative implication of religious war creates an interpretation for the rest of the article that Islam is in conflict with the secular values of the Republic, thus creating a sense of threat in the viewer towards Muslims.
A third type of headline that seems to be frequent, especially in opinion pieces, is the debate that tries to demarcate what it means to be French, with headlines such as “To be French, more than the right of birthplace or the right of blood” (Héran, François, 2016) and “To belong to the nation implies rights, but also duties” (Zarka, Yves Charles, 2016). The debate on what actions and values relate to a nation and thus define who may belong to it can lead to the emphasizing of the good in Us and the bad in the Others. In the context of the attacks, the terrorist actions will be defined as foreign, implying that French are incapable of such actions, even though most the terrorists are born and/or raised in France. As this debate is held again by individuals belonging to the dominant group, it can lead to a definition of what French values are and ought to be that excludes non-dominant group ideas that might be perceived as linked to the terrorist actions.

5.2 Islam vs Secularism

A recurrent narrative that is put forward in the articles is the supposed dichotomy between Islam and secular values. One author explicitly expresses this opinion: “When we open our eyes, we are forced to recognize that Islam is not compatible with democracy” (Guerrin, Michel, 2016). In other articles the dichotomy is expressed more implicitly through the debate on whether or not Islam can be a part of a secular society. (De Montvalon, Jean Baptiste, 2016; Fressoz, Françoise, 2016). The debate carried in these articles has a tendency to generalize Islam and Muslims. Guerrin’s article again more explicitly expresses that most Muslims believe it’s a crime to be an unbeliever, that sharia surpasses any other law and that the attacks on freedom of speech and equality originate from these dogmatic views. He also claims that Islam refuses any interpretation of the religion, that any effort for reform is destroyed and thus explains the “backwardness” of their history. The attribution of this simplistic and extreme view of Islam to the whole of the Muslim community is a generalization that undermines the historical complexity and denominational diversity of a community that is more than a billion people strong. The negative connotation of attributes such as “backwardness” further stigmatizes Muslims. Guerrin also claims that in Christian Europe, theism and deism have become rational. Guerrin is thus creating a positive perception of what he assumes to be part of French culture, Christianity, whilst creating a negative perception of the Others’ culture, in this case Islam.

In the less explicit debate on secularism, the question asked is if the secular state has conceded too much to Islam (Fressoz, Françoise, 2016). Whether for or against a stricter
secular state, the subject debated in the articles is Islam and no other religion, which can lead to a pattern where Muslims are viewed as a threat to secularism. Arguments that take into account the marginalization and harsh circumstances of Muslims in France are undermined and delegitimized. The French vice-president Valls is quoted in an article showing support for a philosopher that announces that one should not be afraid to be called islamophobic, the vice-president then ensues by calling it an uncompromising defense of secularism which he agrees with. Directed at social researchers that attempt to understand the reasons as to why someone would become a terrorist, the vice-president then proceeds to say “There is no explanation that will do, as explaining is a bit apologetic” (De Montvalon, Jean Baptiste, 2016). The same line of thought is brought forward in Truong’s article that quotes the American essayist Paul Berman who refuses the logic of “deep causes”, in other words, there is no social or cultural reason behind terrorism (Truong, Nicolas, 2016). This attempt to understand is further ridiculed in Thibaud’s article who uses the ad hominem fallacy and reproaches the intellectual approach of being a moral pushover and panicking analogy (Thibaud, Paul, 2016). Guerrin’s article also addresses the issue and claims that when giving rights to specific ethnic or religious groups; it can lead to an endangerment of the collective governance (Guerrin, Michel, 2016). This is a form of the slippery slope fallacy, where there is a fear that granting some rights to Muslims, that do not affect the rest, will eventually lead to a situation where the majorities’ rights are threatened. Guerrin then quotes Harvard professor Roberto Unger who claims that there is a trend in which democracies impose restrictions on the majority rather than restrict the power of dominant minorities. Here again, Guerrin seeks to legitimize his opinion by quoting someone from the “established experts” sphere. Another article that undermines the debate related to the possible stigmatization of minorities due to the law uses the fallacy of danger. Courtois’ article argues that the debate stigmatizes those who are judged to be “islamophobes” and should instead focus on taking measures towards the “Islamist menace” and the “civil war” that France is facing (Courtois, Stéphane, 2016). The suggestion that France is facing a civil war seeks to make the debate on the stigmatization disproportionately unimportant and gives the reader the impression that the threat from terrorism is not just a few individuals in France but a large community within its borders, possibly interpreted as the Muslim community.
5.3 Immigration

Another recurrent narrative in the articles is immigration. One article argues that the revocation law is insignificant as the real issue relating to terrorism is the increase in immigration (Roucaute, Yves, 2015). The author makes the rhetorical question if the measures proposed are coherent with the decision to let in thousands of migrants without controlling their passing, their intentions or their desire to become French. He then asks, again rhetorically, that if these “young” migrants who prefer to flee than to fight for their liberty, how can they then assimilate to the values of the country of Charles de Gaulle [leader of the French rebellion army against Nazi Germany] and fight as patriots for him? (Roucaute, Yves, 2015). Firstly, the author creates a link between terrorism and immigration, implying that those who arrive might intend harm to the interests of France. He then not only generalizes who these immigrants are but draws a similarity between the war fought by the French forces during the Second World War and the wars from which the asylum-seekers come, most likely Syria, arguing that they refuse to fight for their liberties. This similarity is questionably flawed as the war in Syria is no longer the popular movement for liberties that it started as during the Arab Spring. Unlike the liberation war in France where Nazi Germany was a clear invader, the in civil war in Syria has no clear aggressor. The fight between Assad, ISIS and other rebel groups is not a clear-cut scenario. It is thus hard to guess, which side the author thinks the young migrants should join. There is also the assumption that all migrants are young men, ignoring the part consisting of women and children. The author as a result positively emphasizes the French, claiming that they, unlike the immigrants, would be willing to fight as “patriots”. The rhetorical questions used by the author also provide a sense to the reader that they are legitimate concerns despite their factual flaws and generalizations.

Three articles use quotes from Front National party members. One who is quoted saying “How many attacks does it take to take the necessary measures, specifically stopping immigration and ending Schengen” (Bekmezian Hélène, 2016), another similarly attributing the attacks to the Schengen agreement(Galiero, Emmanuel, 2015) and the last one indirectly quoting the leader of the party Marine Le Pen saying that immigrants disseminate through the cities and villages of France and then linking the attacks to migration (Faye, Olivier, 2015) . Here again there is evidence of a systematic negative generalization of immigrants. The fact that it is not mentioned that the attacks are committed by French born or raised terrorists shows also evidence that either these terrorists are not perceived as French due to their
backgrounds or that they are considered as French but, in line with Van Dijk’s principles, there is a systematic de-emphasizing of negative aspects of Us.

The reasons for the negative stereotyping of migrants become clearer in Zarka’s article, here again through a rhetorical question he asks, in the context of the attacks, about the capability to welcome migrants without compromising the internal cohesion and traditions of the country (Zarka, Yves Charles, 2016). Here again the rhetorical question biases the reader into thinking that the dominant group’s traditions are threatened by immigrants, that they are incompatible. The terrorist attacks are still being seen as a foreign problem linked to migrants, the issue is framed as a foreign culture incompatible with French values.

5.4 Defining French Nationality and Values

The last recurrent more general narrative is the attempts to define French nationality and the non-critical approach to what is considered to be part of French culture and values.

Several articles emphasize the fact that someone who has or plans to commit a terrorist act is non-deserving of the French nationality. One article argues for the revocation law regardless of the creation of a stateless individual, even if he considers the measure purely symbolic (Halevi, Ran, 2016). He reminds the reader of the power of symbols, referring to human rights and their spreading after the French Revolution, the same human rights which he, ironically, is arguing against, as the right to a nationality is one of them. Another article quotes the president of the center-right party UDI who also argues for the revocation law to apply to all, not only binational. The article directly quotes him asking “Why should our national family be imposed to retain, with his rights and the honor of being French, someone who doesn’t want to have to do with us? (...) one cannot impose on us, French people, individuals that want to fight everything that we are, everything that we believe in, everything that we represent” (Le Figaro avec AFP). This line of discourse exalts French nationality and unity through the usage of the words “honor” and “national family” and the continuous usage of the pronoun “we”. Once more, the terrorists are carved out of the French demos, who are attributed only positive characteristics.

The positive French and negative foreign definition is intensified in Thibaud’s article. He argues in a broader discourse; the impossibility of belonging to two nations. On one side, French, an open nation, and on the other, a nationality often defined by Islam. This, he says, makes the migrant flow one-way, from Africa to Europe. These migrants, he continues, get
their citizenship whilst refusing, for many of them, to blend into the population, an indicator that they refuse the transmission from their nationality of origin (Thibaud, Paul, 2016).

Thibaud creates a contradiction between the nationalities of the binationals. He assumes that the migrant flow comes from the fact that the countries are defined by Islam. By attributing a positive characteristic to France and putting the other nationality as opposed to it, he is in fact emphasizing the negative in the Others, the foreign nationality, as well as creating negative impression of Islam. The generalization that these migrants refuse to “blend in” and the assumption that there is a need for a “transmission” from one nationality to the other is again evidence of the author placing the debate on the incompatibility of Islam and the migrants culture against what he considers being French, in an Us versus the Others interpretation.

6. Discussion

In this study I looked at how stigmatizing discourse manifested itself in the French media, specifically during the ongoing debate regarding the coerced denaturalization law. This was done through critical discourse analysis, which enabled me to look for the underlying dominant ideologies in the articles studied. Van Dijk’s four principles were used as the main criteria for what could be considered racist discourse. Different lexical tools such as rhetorical fallacies, quoting patterns and generalizations were used to identify dominant ideologies and racist discourse.

The results of the study appear to be in alignment with theory of positive self-representation and negative representation of the Others. Racist discourse in the French media was found, as told in the hypothesis, to target two non-mutually exclusive minorities, immigrants and Muslims.

When the discourse surrounding the denaturalization law focused on the culprits of the November 13th attacks, some of the articles attributed their actions to their foreign background whilst de-emphasizing or disregarding their history and upbringing in France. Their supposed second nationality or background from an arabo-islamic country was emphasized to be the meaningful factor in their choice to commit the attacks. Subsequently the debate situated them as part of the Others whilst de-emphasizing any factors related to their French background.

The individuals discussing the terms under which someone should be considered French, or compatible with French values, are usually part of the dominant group. In agreeance with Peter Teo’s study and Fredette’s book, binationals, Muslims and immigrants were not granted
space to discuss and refute claims made about them. Instead they became the subjects about which others discussed. As a result of this, the dominant group was the only one able to negotiate what should be perceived as French values, consequently defining those values within the confines of their own culture, excluding Muslims and other migrant cultures.

Under the guise of the macro-debate on what secularism means and what kind of secularism France should practice, the debate focused solely on Islam. Again in accordance with Fredette’s book, it often generalized Muslims and undermined objections about the islamophobic nature of debates. This supports Hakimeh’s claim that Islamophobia “has become the last form of denigration of a foreign culture in the West” (Saghaye-Biria, Hakimeh, 2012, p.510), at least the last accepted form of somewhat open denigration. There was a continuous negative representation of Islam as opposed to the positive representation of Christianity. This debate leads to a cognitive pattern that identifies the political actions of Muslims as anti-secular and threatening whilst the political actions of Christians are simply seen as political. This pattern could be seen in the debate on French same-sex marriage, where the main and substantial opposition was constituted of Catholic-based organizations (Massillon, Julien, 2013). These religious groups were politically active yet the debate on the threat to the secularism and religious-based legislation was not noticeable. This supports Peter Teo’s argument that stereotyping leads to the different perception on the meaning of what an individual does (Teo, Peter, 2000, p.17). The trend of the dominant culture referring to a stricter definition of secularity consequently leading to the stigmatization of Muslims is supported also by an earlier study. It argues that without a pluralist view of secularity that recognizes that for “religious people, faith is a central part of their identity, (...) secularism will involve discrimination against minorities” (Romm, Norma R. A, 2010, p.47).

There was a systematic delegitimization of the endeavor to understand the reasons as to why some young French citizens become terrorists. This was done through rhetorical fallacies that disregard the arguments of researchers as far-fetched without truly addressing them. Consequently, the discourse de-emphasized the negative self-presentation whilst positioning the terrorists as part of the Others. This can be compared to Van Der Valk’s study where the there was a delegitimization of the political left’s arguments in favor of immigrations policies, and consequently a legitimization of the anti-immigration proposals of the right (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.341). As these articles are also taken from a leftist newspaper, it can be said that to some extent the anti-immigration discourse is not politically dependent but normalized across political margins. Van Der Valk’s study also found that Right wing
discourse systematically generalized immigrants as criminals (Van Der Valk, Ineke, 2003, p.340). This is supported in this study, where the prominent suspicious attitudes towards migrants seem to have spread. Immigration was regularly seen as the underlying reason for the terrorist attacks, framed as a foreign problem. The results sustain earlier studies on French racist discourse which argue that the rise of the far-right party Front National has increased cultural racism as the discourse depicting the Others negatively and threatening to us becomes less controversial and “enters the range of acceptable language and policymaking in society” (Romm, Norma R. A, 2010, p. 80).

The results show that racism within the French media is not restricted to the far-right outlets. It also shows through the methods of CDA that there are islamophobic and anti-immigrant attitudes are hidden behind a discourse that has become naturalized. As the discourse is carried usually by people of the dominant culture, the minorities are systematically cut out from negotiating French identity and nationality. The minorities’ cultures are thus presented as something foreign and threatening to the dominant cultures values. Here comes the old dilemma of the majority of the demos deciding who the demos is, and consequently risking the exclusion of minorities. Although the denaturalization law itself was not passed, the discourse provided a platform to question the legitimacy of French Muslims as citizens. In congruence with Fredette’s conclusions, Muslim’s status was constantly attacked and diminished leading to possible stigmatization.

7. Conclusion

This study can claim that racism within the discourse of the denaturalization law exists and how it manifests itself across political boundaries. However, as the articles were chosen through criteria that defined racism, the results cannot be generalized to the entire discourse. The extent to which racism is prominent in the media and how representative such views are of the main public opinion would need a method more quantitative in nature. Such an analysis might show that the racist discourse, whist cross-political, is not common. However, previous research has already shown that the stigma for Muslims in France is real. There is also a divergence that is unaccounted for, that is to what extent the discourse disseminates from the political sphere to the media and from the media to the public, especially considering the centralized nature of the media in France. Thus what might be true for the articles chosen might not be representative of the publics’ views.
Nevertheless, the in-depth method has shown the persistence of specific racist narratives, such as the polarization of secularism and Islam, are prominent when discussing the terms of national values. These narratives can contribute to future studies when seeking to identify what can be considered as racist discourse in other Western societies and to show caution when discussing the values that we attach to our national identity.

This study cannot claim that the denaturalization law itself was racist, thus its policy implications are limited. It can however say that whether or not such a law passes, the discussion that arises from it, especially in the context after a terrorist attack, can lead to a discourse that has implications in the reproduction of racism that can affect already exposed minorities to further disenfranchisement and social injustices.
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