Master Thesis

Islamophobia

The causes. A case study on France.

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Abstract

The aim of the following thesis is to analyze the causes of Islamophobia in France by using the integrated threat theory with the purpose of finding out what makes people have a negative attitude towards Islam/ Muslims and if this causes lead to a more restricted/ woebegone life for Muslims in France or not.

The usage of the integrated threat theory will help with analysing the causes of Islamophobia and giving an argumentation based on the analysis. The analysis focused on connecting the research problem with the theory. Hypotheses were then formulated based on this theory in an attempt to explain the research statement. The validity of the hypotheses in this context was then investigated, by delving deeper into an explanation of the proposed statements along with criticism. Following this, I determine whether the hypothesis has a negative or a positive outcome, that ultimately leads to a conclusion.

Contents

1. Introduction

Islamophobia reflects the negative attitude and bias towards Muslims that people have in general. A "fear of the unknown" and the insecurity towards Muslims that has not only been developed but also has been continually increasing over the past few decades, is mainly related to several terror attacks of the past that were initiated by extremists belong to the Islamic community. Events such as the 9/11 terror attack in the United States and the Charlie Hebdo shooting of Paris in 2015 caused fear and insecurity among people around the world and in France towards Muslims.

The following thesis starts with the Introduction chapter which gives an overview of the research structure of the thesis, the problem formulation including the research question, the objective of the thesis and the limitations faced during the writing procedure. The introduction chapter(s) also gives information about the methodology. Within the methodology section, I provide a clear explanation and overview about my choice of data, my choice of research and my choice of theory, including solid reasoning behind the choice of all the above-mentioned research elements. The second chapter of the thesis is the theory chapter, where I am naming, describing, and explaining my theory of choice, namely, the integrated threat theory by Stephan and Stephan.

The third chapter is called empirical overview. In this chapter I name some of the most relevant facts and developments related to my thesis context. I name and explain several definitions of the word Islamophobia and present the definition that personally fits me the best. Furthermore, the chapter contains historical background information regarding Islamophobia in France and demographic information on Muslims in France. I also give a brief overview about Marine Le Pen and the National Rally right wing Party of France, because I refer very often to Le Pen and the word "right- wing politics/ leader/ party".

The fourth chapter of the thesis is the analysis chapter. Hereby, I link the theory with the problem statement and analyse this based on the formulated hypotheses. Though several hypotheses can be proposed to explain Islamophobia in a wider and

more general context using the integrated threat theory, I have decided to focus on formulating only two that I felt were most fitting in this context, i.e., Islamophobia specifically in France. Apart from this, efforts were also taken to conduct research without bias; the chapter focuses on analysing the issue from a neutral standpoint by making up arguments for both sides without hastily drawing any conclusion.

The last and fifth chapter is the conclusion chapter where I give the declaration to my research question. This was done by carefully connecting the research statement and the underlying problem it poses to the integrated threat theory which is central to this thesis. By explaining Islamophobia using the above-mentioned theory, several connections could be made to explain the current state of affairs in France as well as possible explanations behind the laws that were passed in the nation which posed a hindrance to innocent Muslims' everyday lives. The conclusion drawn was not based solely on the theory or a one-sided argument but rather on the underlying analysis and hypotheses formulated within this thesis. Relevant examples of significant historic events that initially stirred Islamophobic traits in people's minds have also been cited in this chapter to form a connection between those and the analysis, thereby ensuring that this research is not merely contemplative.

The thesis will help to accomplish to get an understanding of what makes French people have a negative and fearful/ hateful attitude towards Islam/ Muslims by looking at the causes of Islamophobia and relating those factors to the integrated threat theory.

1.1 Problem formulation

The general problem is that Islam is seen as a threat in France, and that Islamophobia in France has several causes, especially after several terrorist attacks like 9/11 in the United States and the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris on 07th January 2015. This influences the picture that French people have about Islam/ Muslims and affects the French politics as well as society in a very radical and anti-Islamic way. Therefore, this research is looking at reasons and causes of Islamophobia with the focus on France.

The research explores Islamophobia in France answering the following research question:

The causes of Islamophobia. A case study on France.

One wonders what the root cause of Islamophobia is. The issue splits France into two big parts: Extremist (Islamophobic, racists, radical right parties) vs. innocent Muslims suffering under this situation and being judged. Why is Islam seen as such a "threat" in France?

1.2 Objective

The ultimate aim of the following thesis is to analyse the causes of Islamophobia with particular focus on France. The WHAT? It is crucial to understand the reasons behind Islamophobia to get an understanding of the concept, which also helps us understand how these causes influence the life of French Muslims "suffering" under Islamophobia and if the causes lead to a more restricted life for Muslims in France.

The thesis has the objective to investigate the causes of Islamophobia in France and consequently to answer the following research question: *The causes of Islamophobia. A case study on France.* While fulfilling this research, I faced several limitations that the reader needs to be aware of.

1.3 Limitation

The first and foremost imitation is the language barrier. Since I do not speak French fluently, I had to limit my research to work mostly with documents written in English related to my research topic and also had to use articles that were translated from French into English. Therefore, the selection of my sources have been quite specific in nature. Being able to speak French on a professional level would have eased my research because I would have been able to use first-hand documents, speeches, news, and academic French literature related to Islamophobia and access data regarding the Muslim population in France. As a result, I would have had a greater variety of data to use for my research. As evident from my explanation above, it should be quite clear to the reader that I have been dependent on limited data and translated texts.

The second limitation encountered is a lack of data. While I was trying to research demographic data on Muslims in France, I came in conflict with the French law. The French law from 1978 does not allow the collection of any kind of race/ethnical/ religious related data since this is a private matter:

"A 1978 law regarding "data files, processing, and individual liberties" explicitly prohibits the collection and processing of personal data that reveals, directly or indirectly, the racial and ethnic origins, or religion, of any persons" (Gilbert & Keane, 2016)*.*

Therefore, there is no more updated data (last one from 2015 on BBC!) on any kind of demographic data related to Muslims in France. Other statistics found are based on estimations and not on measured data and therefore are not usable in my context. I want to work with facts and exact data and not with estimations. It is quite a bit of a challenge for me to find out how many Muslims there are currently in France, where they are mainly from (if there is a change in immigration), for what reasons they are in France and why they came but also in which cities they live (if there are changes/ shifts from inside the country out or vice versa).

The third limitation I faced during this research was the change in my research question. Initially, my research question was about the **rise and causes** of Islamophobia in France. Eventually, after reading through multiple academic

research papers and following a meeting with my supervisor Mr. Wolfgang Zank – who told me that the word 'rises' equals 'statistics and facts', I had an eye-opening realisation that my research question needed to be rephrased accordingly. Therefore, I decided to solely focus on the causes of Islamophobia in order to provide proper research.

The fourth limitation is the downscale of my choice of theories. In the beginning, I was focusing on four theories. With the scope of time and the deeper research into the topic, I figured out that the "integrated threat theory" fits the best to my research and is the main reason behind the several causes of Islamophobia in France. Thus, I narrowed down my choice of theories. However, I still briefly mention the "contact theory" because the contact theory and the threat theory are very much related to each other, with an underlying similar context. Towards the end of my thesis, I do provide a deeper explanation regarding my decision to focus mainly on the threat theory and not on the contact theory.

The fifth limitation faced during the writing procedure of the thesis is that I initially wanted to conduct interview among a few French people but also among the once having family in France. Due to the fact of the limited time scope, this plan fell "into the water". Furthermore, I think it is hard to find specifically people from France that are willing to talk about Islamophobia and the right-wing situation in France. The topic is very sensible which might lead to the limitation of answers or people now even willing to respond. The topic is sensible due to the fact that it deals with moral, value, religion and someone's view on a different "concerning" culture within France. I would have liked to hold the interview between the French and Muslims French people to get an insight on the situation from both perspectives.

The five mentioned limitations have an effect on the structure of the thesis which I am very much aware of.

1.4 Methodology

This section of the thesis explains the methods used to gather information for the research. The research paper has the purpose to understand the causes of Islamophobia in France. As a result, it is essential to understand the word Islamophobia, the historical context and demographic information about Muslims in France.

Thus, the following methods have been used:

1.4.1 Choice of data and choice of research:

The data used within this thesis is secondary data. As Emma Smith stated in her book, secondary data can be defined as follows:

"*Secondary analysis is the re-analysis of data for the purpose of answering the original research question with better statistical techniques or answering new research questions with old data* (Smith, 2008, p. 4)*.*

This definition shows that with relation to this thesis, that the research statement which is a "new research question" will be answered with "old data", i.e., with data that already exists. In order to be able to answer the research statement of this thesis, already existing data has been used, primarily due to lack of transparency in recent data sources, but also due to the prevailing relevance of existing data. The data used and processed within this thesis is in fact entirely based on secondary data. Also, no new data sources have been created or used.

The secondary sources were:

- Newspaper articles: this source has been used in order to gather relevant information on the terror attacks mentioned in this thesis, speeches of the right-wing politics, demographic information on Muslims in France and the bans for Muslims, e.g., hijab ban, street prayer ban, etc. (France 24, BBC News, the New Arab)
- Journalistic articles: several journalistic articles and academic literature have been read, compared, and used in the context of defining Islamophobia,

looking at the causes, explaining and defining the theoretical approach and analysing it. Articles have been researched, compared, and chosen via Google Scholar and the Aalborg University Library.

- Reports: like the European Report on Islamophobia 2020, showing statistics and incidents, examples and the "Islamophobic" situation in whole Europe, where the section on France has been used specifically due to the relation of this thesis. The main focus was on the incident section with examples of Islamophobic attack and the media section in order to provide examples how the politicians in France use Media and speeches to spread "Islamophobia".

Within this thesis paper the empirical data chosen is based on online newspaper articles, journalistic articles, and reports. Specifically, articles containing parts of speeches of right-wings leader in France with regard to Islamophobia and their attitude and mindset towards it. The main report used within the context of this thesis is the European Report of Islamophobia. The report helps to get a proper understanding about incidents in France regarding Islamophobia, statistics on Muslims in France, Demographical knowledge, and speeches of right-wing leaders with regard to anti- Muslim tendencies. The report has been used in order to be able to provide proper examples regarding Islamophobia in France within the analysis chapter. Journalistic articles have been used in order to get an understanding about Islamophobia on an academic level and from the perspective of scholars. These articles helped to analyse the phenomena of Islamophobia in France. Furthermore, the academic literature helped to come up with the chosen theory: Integrated threat theory which helps to understand the phenomena behind the causes of Islamophobia in France.

Once all necessary information has been gathered through secondary data, an analysis based on the two created hypotheses in the Analysis Chapter has been done. A qualitative research approach has been conducted in the thesis.

This thesis is qualitative research because the main technique in this thesis is producing descriptive data by analysing the theory and causes that lead to Islamophobia and describing the same. A case study with focus on France, underlying definitions, as well as explanations are used to explore the causes of Islamophobia in France and find its meaning by looking at the consequences for the

ones suffering under Islamophobia. The qualitative approach in this thesis helps to understand what makes people Islamophobic and eventually why.

1.4.2 Choice of theory: Integrated threat theory

In the theoretical Framework, the integrated threat theory will be described that helps to interpret the cause of Islamophobia in France.

In the case of this research with the topic of the causes of Islamophobia in France, a decision was made to mainly focus on the Integrated Threat Theory. During the research, it was clear that the Integrated Threat Theory describes/ is one of the main phenomena behind the causes. The integrated threat theory helps to understand and describe the causes leading to Islamophobia and is one of the biggest factors influencing the mindset of the people.

Although I initially wanted to focus on the contact theory as well as the integrated threat theory, I decided to focus primarily on the latter since it became clear to me after deeper research that for this particular case (Islamophobia in France), the contact theory inherently has many loopholes in explaining my problem statement. One of the main reasons for this decision is the fact that France has the biggest Muslim population[1] in the European Union, and if the French people wanted to be able to have contact with their Muslim population, their fear and prejudices towards the out-group should reduce significantly, at least as proposed by the theory. However, there is a contradiction here, since despite having a high probability of getting into regular contact with people from an Islamic background, the problem of Islamophobia in France has been quite high. From academic research, one can say that the French people have not really made use of this opportunity to readjust their unfair views and get rid of their bias towards the Islamic community as the problem is still prevalent. Therefore, the decision to place a higher focus on the integrated threat theory was made in this case, even though the contact theory is relevant for the wider context of the problem (Islamophobia in general). Nevertheless, the contact

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[1] This data is based on the most recently available data on BBC News, 2015 (Iqbal, 2015). France also does not have transparent demographic data, which poses a limitation for this research (See for more under demographic background information: Muslims in France under Chapter 3.3)

theory has been mentioned a few times, although not in as much detail as the threat theory. In fact, the two theories also do have quite a few similarities to each other, in the sense that they both essentially point out the positive effects of getting in touch with an out-group to create a positive mindset towards that group.

The Integrated threat theory initially created by Stephan and Stephan contains four categories of threat that explain and predict negative or prejudicial attitudes towards an out-group. Those four types are called: realistic threat, symbolic threat, negative stereotype, and intergroup anxiety (Croucher, 2017).

While the fear of the intergroup anxiety arises from shame, embarrassment, ridicule and/ or exploitation or the group having "a history of antagonism" or little to no personal contact with out-group, negative stereotypes carry different factors. Negative stereotypes are grounded on a common assumption of the in-group about the out-group. Realistic threat is a threat that the in- group perceives from the out-group with regard to factors like "economic, political power, physical-/material well-being". The last threat is the Symbolic threat. The Symbolic threat is the threat that the in-group has about the out-group due to several differences in "morals, values, standards, beliefs and/or attitudes between the in-group and the out-group" (Croucher, 2017). This causes an eventual threat to the belief and morals of the in-group.

In this thesis, the main focus lays on the Realistic and Symbolic threat due to the fact that those two threat factors explain the causes of Islamophobia the best.

2. Theory

2.1 Integrated threat theory

The threat theory on the other side is simply about the fact that positive interactions between people reduce the prejudice and threat as in the contact theory (Dekker, 2020). Therefore, this theory is highly relevant in this context.

The integrated threat theory was proposed by Walter G. Stephan and Cookie White Stephan (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). The theory says that there are four types of threat that play a role in creating prejudice. The four types of threat are realistic threat, symbolic threat, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p. 25).

Realistic Threat:

Realistic threat is a form of threat, seen as a real threat in the eye of the in-group towards the out-group. The threat is a "perceived threat" to the existence of the ingroup, such as war, threats to the political and economic strength of an ingroup and the physical or material well-being threat the ingroup or its members are facing (e.g., health). Thus, a realistic threat can lead to prejudice, irrespective of whether or not a "real" threat exists (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p. 25). Croucher states that negative attitudes and discriminatory behavior are the motivations of the in-group to protect its interests (Croucher, 2017). In the case of France, people were scared of Muslims/Islam especially due to the terror attacks in the United States and in France and threat, as well of all kinds of prejudices and negative stereotypes towards Muslims occurred.

Symbolic Threat:

Symbolic threat is regarded as differences of a group on morals, values, standards, beliefs, and attitudes. These are threats to the worldview of the in-group. The cause of such a threat is that the in-group believes that only its own system is morally true and right. According to the scientists, this type of threat is about an out-group posing

a threat to the central values of the in-group. The example here is simply that the French believe that the beliefs, morals, and values of Muslims are too different from the French way and therefore leads to the symbolic threat in the way of prejudices towards Islam/Muslims.

Intergroup Anxiety:

The third type of threat, namely, intergroup anxiety is about the fact that people belonging to the in-group feel personally threatened in an interaction within the out-group because they might think that the interaction can lead to a negative outcome for themselves, e.g., embarrassment, rejection or ridicule (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p. 27). The reason behind this is the feeling of threat and the result of not liking the out-group.

Negative Stereotypes:

The fourth type of threat is that concerning negative stereotypes. Hereby, the in-group has negative assumptions and feelings towards the out-group. This is due to the fact that the in-group thinks that while interacting with the out-group, negative consequences may occur. Almost all outgroup stereotypes are presenting a threat to the ingroup because the aim of a stereotype is to present a basis for expectations regarding the way members of the stereotyped group will behave. This will go so far that consequently a negative, conflictual, or unforeseen interaction is most likely to happen. The essence of threat is "the fear of a negative consequence" and this is precisely what negative stereotypes create (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p. 27). An example to clarify this type of threat is e.g., a group of young French boys might be scared to interact with a group of French Muslim girls. The young French boys fear negative consequences such as punishment, rejection from those girls and their families due to the difference(s) in tradition, belief, and the way of living. As a consequence, those young French boys will have this negative stereotype in mind that once they get in touch with a Muslim girl, a fight or rejection from the girl or her family might come.

While talking about the integrated threat theory and the four factors that are part of the integrated threat theory, it is also important to mention that once an in-group perceives an out-group as a threat, there are effects on a behavioural, cognitive, and an emotional level (Croucher, 2017). On the behavioural level, the threat can lead to protests, conflicts, prejudice, voting down etc. (Croucher, 2017).

Looking at the cognitive level, the perception of the threat affects the perception of the individual of the out-group which consequently comes out as negative stereotypes, intolerance, etc. (Croucher, 2017). At the emotional level, threats from the out- group can lead to many different emotional reactions e.g., anger, fear, humiliation (Croucher, 2017, p. 7)

2.2 Contact theory

As explained before, the contact theory is named a few times within the thesis but not in- depth. The contact theory is simply about the proposal that more interaction between two groups can help reduce prejudices and conflicts (Pickel & Öztürk, 2018).

As a result, prior contact with Muslims reduces the prejudice and negative stereotype towards that "unknown other" and helps towards are more welcoming and open attitude towards Muslims.

Another aspect of the contact theory is that if different groups share a common goal, and the in-group and out-group are interdependent from each other, the common goal can reduce the bias towards each other and help create a positive attitude According to contact theory, when different groups share common goals, and their relation is cooperatively interdependent, intergroup relations can reduce bias (Jung, 2011).

In the case of France that would mean that if the French people and the French Muslim would share the common goal of living in peace with each other, no matter their background; belief; origin; value and norms and accept each other the way they are, the bias towards the French Muslim can be reduced. The bias might even be able to vanish. Due to the unfortunate fact that France states that the norms and beliefs of the Muslims and in Islam do not fit the French way and view and morals,

the negative stereotypes stay, and the contact theory does not serve its purpose. That is when the Integrated threat theory comes into debate.

In the next chapter, called empirical overview, this thesis will attempt to explain the validity of the integrated threat theory, as well as the cognitive, behavioural, and emotional consequences of the same, via explanations of significant historic events, and their connection to Islamophobia, before which various definitions of Islamophobia, including my own, are first presented to the reader. Following this, demographic information about Muslims in France is also presented in order to give a factual overview about the current state of affairs regarding the Muslim population in France. A small overview will also be given about Marine Le Pen and her party, the National Rally due to the fact that her name and the party are mentioned very often within the context of the thesis topic.

3. Empirical overview

To understand Islamophobia better, this chapter will be introduced with definitions from different perspectives about the term 'Islamophobia'. Furthermore, a historical background on Islamophobia in France will be given. This will help to understand the way Muslims immigrated, especially from Northern Africa to France, decades ago. A small overview will also be given about Marine Le Pen and her party, the National Rally due to the fact that her name and the party are mentioned very often within the context of the thesis topic. The chapter will be rounded up with limited demographic factors about Muslims in France to get a better picture and understanding of the Muslim situation in France.

3.1 What is Islamophobia?

There are different discussions and definitions when it comes to Islamophobia. One of the definitions is from the Cambridge dictionary stating Islamophobia as follows:

"Unreasonable dislike or fear of, and prejudice against, Muslims or Islam: Since the attack, there has been an increase in Islamophobia and racist abuse in one of the UK's most ethnically diverse cities" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)*.*

To resume, according to the Cambridge dictionary, Islamophobia is a dislike/fear/prejudice towards Muslims/ Islam.

Looking at the academic perspective of defining Islamophobia, Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, two research professors from the University of Vienna and Georgetown University stated in their European Islamophobia Report from 2020 that Islamophobia can be defined as "anti-muslim racism" (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2020, p. 11)

Bayrakli and Hafez state that Islamophobia "is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilising, and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed 'we' (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2020)".

Islamophobia works by creating a "static Muslim identity"; a judgment which is associated with negative terms and generalization on all Muslims (Bayrakli & Hafez,

2020). Furthermore, the term Islamophobia explains more about the Islamophobe than the Muslim/Islam itself (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2020).While attempting to explain/understand the term 'Islamophobia', it is always crucial to determine whether the 'Islamophobe' himself or herself is a Muslim or not.

Another academician, Mr. Stolz, research professor from the University of Lausanne, claimed that the term Islamophobia was not formulated until the end of the 1980s (Stolz, 2005, p. 548). Instead, alternative terms like "Anti-Islamic racism" and "Anti - Muslimism" had been in usage (Stolz, 2005, p. 548). According to Stolze "Islamo-phobia means "fear of Islam"" (Stolz, 2005, p. 548). The terms were created in accordance with terms "xenophobia" and "homophobia" (Stolz, 2005, p. 548). Stolz states in his report that a simple definition of Islamophobia would be:

"Islamophobia is a rejection of Islam, Muslim groups and Muslim individuals on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes. It may have emotional, cognitive, evaluative as well as action-oriented elements (e. g. discrimination, violence) (Stolz, 2005, p. 548)*.*

according to the article "Islamophobia: What's in a Name?" in the Journal of Muslims in Europe. Bangstad traces the roots of Islamophobia far back into history. Bangstad states that the concept of Islamophobia can be traced back to "French Orientalist scholars and colonial bureaucrats in French West Africa as early as 1910" (Bangstad, 2016). According to Bangstad, "the current usage of the term and its introduction to academic literature in English may be traced back to the late Edward W. Said's (1936-2003) 1985 essay "Orientalism Reconsidered" (Bangstad, 2016) Said's answer to the critics of his book Orientalism was defining "Islamophobia as an "hostility to Islam" which in "the modern Christian West has historically gone hand in hand, has stemmed from the same source [and] has been nourished at the same stream as anti-Semitism"" (Bangstad, 2016)

The real and official "boom" of the term Islamophobia as it is used nowadays came in 1997 with the Runnymede Trust Report - Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All. "The Runnymede Trust report referred to Islamophobia as "the shorthand way of referring to the dread or hatred of Islam—and, therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims"" (Bangstad, 2016)

In the meantime, 10 years later, Chris Allen made a definition of Islamophobia stating:

"An ideology, similar in theory, function and purpose to racism and other similar phenomena, that sustains and perpetuates negatively evaluated meaning about Muslims and Islam in the contemporary setting," noting that "we know less than we should" about the "dimensions, intensity, and prevalence across time, space and social groups" of Islamophobia" […]" (Bangstad, 2016).

According to Bleich, who wrote his article about "What Is Islamophobia and How Much Is There? Theorising and Measuring an Emerging Comparative Concept" Islamophobia has mainly evolved based on a political concept and is still used for political purposes. Researchers used the term "to identify the history, presence, dimensions, intensity, causes, and consequences of anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim sentiments" (Bleich, 2011).

The concept of Islamophobia is still in a developing state within social sciences and therefore there is no clear definition of the term yet. It is "extremely difficult to compare levels of Islamophobia across time, location, or social group, or to levels of analogous categories such as racism, anti-Semitism, or xenophobia" (Bleich, 2011). As a result, it is hard to identify the causes and consequences of the concept.

Bleich defines Islamophobia as "indiscriminate as indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims" (Bleich, 2011). Nevertheless, Bleich states that using the definition of Islamophobia depends very much on the type of research question one is looking at. Therefore, the definition of Islamophobia is quite heavily dependent on the context.

Based on the above-mentioned definitions of Islamophobia, one can see that there are several different ways of defining Islamophobia. There is no fixed definition, and every academician defines Islamophobia differently in his/her own terms by including/excluding parts which are crucial for the definition. That makes it hard to find the real definition of the word "Islamophobia" and to understand its meaning.

My personal definition of Islamophobia is very much related to the definition of Bleich. I agree that Islamophobia is about the negative attitude and emotion towards Islam and Muslims. I am adding to the definition of Bleich that the concept of Islamophobia is a racist and judgmental attitude towards the Islamic culture and people with a Muslim background. Non- Muslim people are facing a threat once they hear the word "Islam" or "Muslim" and tend to make a direct connection to

"terrorism"; "suppression"; "no freedom/ no rights/ inequality" without knowing about it.

3.2 Historical background about Islamophobia in France

During 1936, the well-known left-wing Popular Front party suggested to prolong equal human rights to 24,000 "French Muslims," but the turmoil of European population in Algeria criticised this initiative and stopped it (Filiu, 2020).

In 1944, the Free French gave "equal rights to 65,000 out of 7.5 million "French Muslims," but this limited gesture, compared to the 1 million "Europeans," was too little and too late to stop the rise of Algerian nationalism that eventually erupted in a liberation war in 1954. The post-WWII Fourth Republic did not survive this colonial conflict and, after a coup in Algiers in 1958, was replaced by the Fifth Republic, whose founder and first president, Charles De Gaulle, negotiated the independence of Algeria in 1962" (Filiu, 2020).

In 1956, France abandoned its territory over Tunisia and Monaco and put focus on its metropolitan territory. However, due to the need for low-cost labour to withstand the industrial growth, lead to mass immigration from Maghreb to France influenced (Filiu, 2020). In 1968, 600,000 North Africans had immigrated to France.

Challenged by increasing joblessness in 1974, France banned economic immigration from North Africa. With a second generation of French immigrants born and raised in France, the program known as "family reunion" improved the nature of this population. After 25 years of right-wing governments, the Socialist François Mitterrand was selected to be president by 1981 hoping to fulfil the expectations of this second generation (Filiu, 2020).

Due to many incidents related to police brutality and racist violence in 1983, different marches for equality inspired by the United States occurred. During "Marche des Beurs" (= Arab) 100,000 people united in Paris to fight for the equal civil rights. Activists required to be included in the process of voting in local elections for foreign residents, an application was included in the policy of the Socialist party. The Socialist party claimed that if the first-generation immigrants would become part of

politics, the easier the integration of the second generation of immigrants would be (Filiu, 2020).

In contrast to its purpose, these marches and applications led to a disturbing reputation of Muslim people in France, which led to popularizing right wing parties. By 1986, Le Pen won the parliamentary elections and entered the National Assembly. Despite 4 million Muslims out of 57 million French residents, Le Pens party formed the propaganda emphasizing the "Muslim invasion" of France. Due to that France still bans ethno-religious statistics, the real number of the Muslim population in France is unknown (Filiu, 2020).

France hosts both Europe's largest Muslim and largest Jewish community, the latter estimated at half a million people. Since the French liberation in 1944, the Jewish community had a representative part, the CRIF (a synonym of Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions (Filiu, 2020).

The Ministry of Interior came up with familiar idea to promote Muslim religious leadership – a Muslim equivalent of the Consistory rather than of the CRIF – that was addressing issues conacring Muslim community in France. These include the training of imams, certification of halal food, the planning of trips to Mecca, Muslim graveyards, this new institution was known as the French Council for the Muslim Faith (CFCM) (Filiu, 2020).

While creating a representative body for French Muslims, there were many concerns on this topic. Since France's Muslim community is wide, with people from different continents and traditions a representative that aimed to address all the issues of France's Muslims seemed to be hard (Filiu, 2020).

The first representative body for Muslims was founded in 2003 after an election controlled by the French administration where separately all mosques would send their delegates according to the size of their mosques (Filiu, 2020)

Minister of Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, wished that uniting Muslims in France would support his own presidential ambitions. Jacques Chirac, his opponent, and the president had been re-selected in 2002 with 82% of the votes against Le Pen. Jacques, eager to rule over Sarkozy, empowered in 2003 an institutional body "the implementation of the principle of laïcité in the Republic" (Filiu, 2020)

After five months, this body suggested that Eid al Adha and Yom Kippur, the most significant Muslim and Jewish holidays would be replaced in the French calendar with two Christian holidays. Although there was a long list of suggestions, Jacques chose to accept only one suggestion stating that visible religious signs in public schools should be banned. Even though different religions were mentioned in this law, Felio argues that this law was clearly targeting the Muslim veil (Filiu, 2020).

Felio claims that Jacques Chirac had followed such a hard line to prove that Nicolas Sarkozy was too "soft" on Islam. A year later, the president of France had reached exceptional popularity among the Muslim community for opposing the U.S., invasion in Iraq, and the "veil law. Increasing popularity among the right party, and emphasizing its anti-Islamic discourse brought serval waves of jihadi terrorism attacks that have repeatedly shocked France since 2015 (Filiu, 2020). Sarkozy became the president in 2007, followed by François Hollande in 2012 and Emmanuel Macron in 2017, the latter after defeating Marine Le Pen, Jean-Marie's daughter, with this time only 66 percent of the vote" (Filiu, 2020).

The constant success and growth of the far right, and the "wide dissemination of its anti-Islamic discourse, have only benefited from the wave of jihadi terrorism that has repeatedly struck France since 2015" (Filiu, 2020).

3.3 Marine Le Pen and the National Front

The topic of Islamophobia is very closely connected to the right-wing politics in France. Therefore, it is worth mentioning this within the thesis.
First of all, background information will be given about Marine Le Pen, who is the leader of the National Rally- the main right-wing party in France.
Marine Le Pen is mentioned several times during the thesis and therefore important to name in this context. In a later stage, a brief overview will also be given over the National Rally.

Marine Le Pen

Marine Le Pen, actually Marion Anne Le Perrine Le Pen was born on August 5, 1968, in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France. She is a French politician who succeeded her

father, Jean Marie Le Pen as the leader of the National Front (now: National Rally) in 2011. Le Pen was the party's candidate that put herself twice as a candidate for the French presidential elections, in 2017 and 2022.

Le Pen was the youngest of sibling of three girls. Her childhood was mainly influenced by the political career of her father. Her father had very controversial views and was as a consequence the target of a bomb attack in 1976, which heavily damaged the apartment building the family Le Pen was living in. This event influences Le Pen heavily. The political view and acts of her father would form Le Pen's own politics and her mindset. In 1991, Le Pen got a degree in Law and specialised into the criminal law in 1992 which lead her to a career of an attorney in Paris from 1992-1998.

In 1998 she extended her career by joining the administrative arm of the National Front. The National Front is the French party that her father founded in 1972 and was and is until today the main right-wing opposition within France conservative parties. Le Penn was a director of the party's legal affairs until the year 2003 and followed up by coming the National Front's vice president. A year after, Le Pen applied for a seat in the European Parliament and made a successful run for it. Hereby, she joined her father in the "nonaligned bloc" (Ray, Marine Le Pen, 2022).

Le Pen fought force and back for the French parliamentary elections and was finally elected into the European Parliament in 2004 where she is the MEP representing the North West region of France (BBC News, 2017).

Besides the bomb attack on her father, that destroyed the apartment building the family was living in, Le Pen got also traumatized when her mother ran off with another man while Le Pen was just 16. These incidents influence her in a traumatic way and created the personality she has today.

The "loss" of her mother was a big drama for Marine Le Pen.
Le Pen and her mother were very close, by sharing the same rhythm, the love for cooking. Le Pen followed her mom in any way. As a consequence, the "loss" of her mom left a big scare in Le Pen.

This lead Marine Le Pen very close to her father. Marine, the youngest daughter in the hose Le Pen, got deeply connected with politics from a young age by joining her father to meetings and rallies.

Le Pen campaigned the first time with her father when she just had the age of 13.

With the time the relationship of Le Pen and her father turned into anything but peace. This lead so far, that a public fight of the two lead the Nation Front into a crisis.

This fight went too far that while Mr. Le Pen gave a radio interview in April 2015 and stating that "an old anti- Semitic slur" the Nazi gas chambers were still a detail of history. Marine Le Pen reacted negatively on the comments of her father and Mr. Le Pen was as a consequence expelled from the National Front in August 2015 (BBC News, 2017).

Within the following years of her career steps, Le Pen created herself a name within the National Front and her success rose. As a consequence, she managed her father's presidential campaign in 2007. Le Pen was serving in a number of regional and municipal campaigns and was leading the National Front to a regional strong and representative party, which helped her during the regional elections in 2009.

Pen benefited and came from the shadow of her father and emerged into a national figure in France within her own "right view". Step by step, she distanced herself from part of her fathers and the party's to extreme views and focused on her own. Le Pen was very much welcoming and supportive towards the anti-immigration attitude of the National Front, she recreated the party's traditional view and stance on Euroscepticism and the French nationalism. Le Pen was criticising the anti-Semitism, which pushed the party on the edge, very hard. Given with the talent of making a good picture in front of the TV with her charm and the ambition and know-how about politics where she profited from her father, she easily succeeded her father in the 2011election as the "new" National Front leader (Ray, Marine Le Pen, 2022).

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In May 2011, Le Pen was chosen to represent the National Front in the 2012 presidential elections where she was competing again Nicolas Sarkozy, and the Socialist candidate Francois Hollands. The following year, in April 2012 Le Pen won the third place in the first-round election by receiving more than 18 percent of the votes. Although she did not earn and made it to a second round, this success made the National Front profit a lot by representing a party candidate that almost gained success during the presidential elections. She even topped her father's numbers of vote in 2002 when he runoff his "rival" Jacques Chirac (Ray, Marine Le Pen, 2022).

Le Pen continued to lift the National Front's image and her personal success just showed her increased acceptance as a member of the party and "the most important" alternative choice for France's other two main parties.
In the times of economic struggle in France, the Socialist party of Hollande dropped from their position and Le Pen with the National Front started to enter the area of seeing the European Union rather as an obstacle than a benefit.

During the local elections in March 2014, the National Front and the politicians related to the party, were very successful in a lot of mayoral elections.
Le Pen "capitalized on an anti-establishment streak that was growing in France, and the elections for the European Parliament in May 2014 demonstrated just how widespread that sentiment was" (Ray, Marine Le Pen, 2022).

For the first time ever in the National Front's history, the party placed as first in a national election by gaining more than one-fourth of the votes and pushing Le Pen into the international light of the most known politician when it comes to Euroscepticism.

The National Front party attract a record of 6.8 million voters which made Marine Le Pen the authority that turned the National Front into a party as part of the government (BBC News, 2017).

In the 2017 presidential election Marine Le Pen made it into the second round with a record of just a little below 7.7 million votes.
Le Pen lost to Emmanuel Macron (current president of France) by a large margin, but nevertheless got decent number of 34.5 percent of the votes for herself, taking over the 17.8 percent of her father in the 2002 elections when the far-right party reached the "run off" (BBC News, 2017).

One can say that the strategy Le Pen used so far with the National Front took her into the right way and the success direction, especially after taking the lead of the party over her father, a man with "Xenophobic behavior", during the 2011 elections. This might yet not have been enough of make her the president of France, but she and her party are on the best way to do so and get there (BBC News, 2017).

After her loss of not becoming the president of France, Le Pen called for a total transformation of the National Front, which meant to let the party flourish under a re-launched p

Political force and another name for the party.

National Front

The National Rally is the leading right-wing party in France where Marine Le Pen is the leader. In order to understand the party here some basic background information about the party is provided. The National Rally with Marine Le Pen as the leader play a big role in the presence of Islamophobia as one can see further on in the thesis.

National Rally, French Rassemblement National (RN) from 1972-2018; now National front is the far-right French political party founded in 1972 by Francois Duprat and Francois Brigneau. The party is mainly associated with Jean- Marie Le Pen, the

father of Marine Le Pen, who was the leader of the party from 1972 until 2011. After 2011, his daughter Marine Le Pen became the leader of the National Front after succeeding her father.

Since its creation, the party strongly supported French nationalism and the control on immigration and got many times accuses of Xenophobia and anti- Semitism (Ray, National Rally, 2021).

In its beginnings, the National Front "dwelt on the fringes of French political life, representing a uniquely French twist on western Europe's maturing neofascist movement (Ray, National Rally, 2021)

The party revitalized slogans that were used by French fascist in the 1920s, while actually and in its origin, it was aiming at veterans of the Algerian War and the followers of the right- wing populism of the Poujadisme movement (=anti- tax revolt) led by Pierre Poujade in the 1950s (Ray, National Rally, 2021).

Mr. Le Pen was very closely connected to the Poujadisme where he won a seat in the National Assembly in the election of 1956 which was the sign of the highest success of the movement.

The National Front was facing slow electoral success but did not make it because Mr. Le Pen failed to collect 500 signatures in order to secure himself a place on the presidential election (Ray, National Rally, 2021).

This was a "slap into the face".

In the 1980s the luck of the party started to turn by showing a strong position in the mayoral elections in Paris and Dreux where it won 10 seats in the European Parliament.

This was the steppingstone of the party. Further advances of the National Front followed into the political mainstream during the 1986 French legislative elections. During these elections the party won approx. 10 percent of the votes and 35 seats in the National Assembly.

Although the National Front would continue to collect approx. 10 percent of the total votes, the return of the two- round majoritarian voting in 1988 made the party fail of sending more than a few representatives of this legislature.

Mr. Le Pen did better during the 1988 presidential elections whereby he gained close

to 15 percent of the popular vote and retaining all 10 of seats in the European Parliament in 1989.

Le Pen went on being one of the most split personalities in the French politics throughout his serving time. Some of his comments that he used in public where about minimizing the Holocaust, which consequently caused him fines and big criticism.

After succeeding and winning over her father in January 2011, Marine Le Pen became the new leader of the party. Le Pen distanced herself from the extreme views of the party that made people associate the party with the traditional and conservative view of her father and the National Rally. Nevertheless, Marine Le Pen went on representing immigration- especially with regard to Islamic countries- as a threat and risk to France.

This point points out while the description and understanding of Marine Le Pen and her party is very relevant in this context. Marine Le Pen basically uses Islamic countries to create Islamophobic tendencies in her country and as a return to gain power. Islam/ Muslims and anti-immigration are her power tools and weapons to stay and enjoy her high status.

Marine Le Pen who is very talented when it comes to Media presence, led the party to a very high success. The party broke a record in the first round of the cantonal elections in March 2011 which made the party for the first time ever the leader in two districts.

In the first round of the presidential elections in 2012, Marine Le Pen gained the third place behind Sarkozy and the Socialist Francois Hollande. Despite the fact of not earning a place in the second round, Le Pen got 18 percent of the votes for herself which made it the highest-ever-first round score in the history of a National Front presidential candidate.

She did what her father wanted but could not reach.

Until today, Le Pen remains a prominent and successful figure in the French political branch. She still continued to reshape the National Really a as special and alternative party to France's major mainstream parties.

Once Hollande's dropped, the National Rally gained, and the party performed exquisitely well during the local elections in March 2014.

As successful as March 2014 was for the National Rally, the best was yet to come. In May 2014, the National Rally made it first on the elections for the European Parliament. Approx. one- fourth of the vote was for the National Rally "the FN rode a wave of Eurosceptics to its best-ever performance in a national election" (Ray, National Rally, 2021) .

A bad fight between Marine Le Pen and her father in August 2015 led to a "kick-out" of Mr. Le Pen from the party.

<u>Other right-wing parties in France</u>

This section gives a brief and short overview about the French right-wing parties that are also existing besides the National Rally.

The far-right French politics is in possession of two parties: the Rassemblement National (before: Front National) founded by Jean Marie Le Pen and at the moment led by his daughter Marine Le Pen, and the Mouvement pour la France (About-France.com, 2022).

The National Rally is a classic example of an extreme right-wing party, comparable to Germanys AfD (=Alternative fuer Deutschland) or NPD (= Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands). The National Rally bases its positions on national preference, law and order and anti-immigration policies (About- France.com, 2022).

During the 2017 presidential elections, Marine Le Pen made it into the second round with her party showing the success of the right-wing party in the democratically country of France.

The counter party to the National Rally, called Mouvement pour la France is a sovereigntist party. The party is seen as a moderate right-wing party and attracts rather conservative traditionalists like for example its leader Phillipe de Villiers, who is an aristocrat and former Gaullist minister. Both parties have more or less the same goals: to step out of the European Union or the "massive curtailment of the EU's role" (About- France.com, 2022)..

Another small and rather new sovereigntist party in France is the Debout La France (meaning: Stand up France), which is led by the former Gaullist parliamentarian Nicolas Dupont- Aignan (About- France.com, 2022).

Looking at the 2022 presidential elections, one can say that the political success of the far right has been disturbed by a another new far right candidate, Eric Zemmour, who is a former journalist working as a lone candidate outside any political party. There is an assumption going around that a new political party of movement will rise on the background of Eric Zemmour (About- France.com, 2022).

Rather than Marine Le Pen who already has the folk and her party standing behind her, Zemmour is a single candidate pointing at anti-immigration, with little attention to policies who look at different things rather than immigration. In January 2022, he gained popularity with approx. 10 percent which is quite high for a single standing candidate (About- France.com, 2022).

To sum up, one can see based on the here given information that the far-right movement in France is very active. The National Rally with Marine Le Pen as the main leader, after the success over her father during the elections, has gotten even such high votes that the party is represented in the European Parliament.

By using anti-immigration policies and holding Islamophobic speeches Le Pen targets her audience at the core. The former lawyer who is often called a "telegenic" is very successful and strong in her speeches. Her word choice is very harsh and direct and therefore successful, especially among the audience that fears "the unknown" .

3.4 Demographic background Information: Muslims in France

To get a closer picture of the Muslim population in France, this section contains basic facts and figures. The most updated data about the Muslim population in France is from 2015, which was provided by the Brookings Institution and published on BBC News.

The data on the Brookings Institution website does not exist anymore but this information is now available only on the website of BBC News. The explanation for this is the French law from 1978 which does not allow the collection of any kind of race/ethnical/ religious related data since this is a private matter:

"A 1978 law regarding "data files, processing, and individual liberties" explicitly prohibits the collection and processing of personal data that reveals, directly or indirectly, the racial and ethnic origins, or religion, of any persons" (Gilbert & Keane, 2016).

Therefore, most of the current statistics are rather estimations based on surveys or the work of research centres.
Here some facts: France has an average of five million people with Muslim origin living it its country (Iqbal, 2015). The estimation is that more than 50% of the Muslim population in France is under the age of 24 (Iqbal, 2015).

The majority of Muslim people "came to France in the contemporary era, in the wake of the colonial wars of independence (1954-1962)" (Iqbal, 2015).
Most of the Muslims in France are from North Africa, primarily from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia (Maghreb) (Iqbal, 2015).

Looking at France, the heaviest concentration of Muslim people is in the outlying suburbs (banlieues) of Paris, Marseille and Lyon (Iqbal, 2015). In the European Union, where an estimated number of 15 million Muslims are living (back in 2015!), France has the largest population of Muslims, like approximately one third of the total (Iqbal, 2015).

Within the following chapter, analysis, hypotheses are formulated by forming connections between the Integrated threat theory (that is central to this thesis) and the information provided in the empirical overview section.

4. Analysis

Hypothesis 1: *Islamophobic prejudices are caused by individuals who feel threatened by Muslims due to differences in culture, religion, and beliefs, mostly because an in-group perceive Muslims as a threat towards their traditions.*

Explanation: The above-mentioned hypothesis is based on the symbolic threat theory, which is categorised as one of the four subsections of the integrated threat theory, which states that the perceived symbolic threats by an in-group are based on differences in morals, values, standards, beliefs, and/or attitudes between them and the out-group (Croucher, 2017). People tend to have negative stereotypical attitudes or fear towards phenomena that they do not fully comprehend, i.e., 'a fear of the unknown'. In this sense, Muslims are perceived as outsiders and are often not given a fair chance to integrate into society Muslims are seen as the least integrated minority in Europe due to the fact that Islam and Muslims are perceived as "something" that does not match with the norms and values of Europe (Maxwell & Bleich, 2014). In the case of France, the traditions and secularism of France conflict with the values and norms of Islam and Muslims (Maxwell & Bleich, 2014). Therefore, the local inhabitants see them as a threat/risk. The contact theory proposes that more interaction between two groups can help reduce prejudices and conflicts (Pickel & Öztürk, 2018). Based on this theory, this perception could change if anti-Muslims in France actively make an effort to try and understand Muslims – general acceptance and contact with people from this culture could positively shape their mindset and perhaps even alter previously negative stereotypes. The media, especially if controlled by right wing leaning or conservative parties in general, tend to publicise 'sensational' negative pieces of journalism depicting Muslims as villains and focus on their narrative rather than information. For example, acts of violence that have been previously committed by religious extremists from an Islamic background creates a negative image for all Muslims in the mass media (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2020). However, what is often overlooked by the public is that these acts and extremist views are also shunned by Muslims themselves since they are not truly representative of all Muslims or Islamic culture (Pickel & Öztürk, 2018).

Therefore, as suggested in the contact theory interaction with most commonfolk from an Islamic background would teach people to be more accepting of Muslims and stop perceiving them as a threat with an unfair prejudice (Jung, 2011, p. 115).

Criticism: This hypothesis explains one of the possible causes of Islamophobia, particularly in France, and has been formulated primarily from the threat theory. For this case (Islamophobia in France), the focus is on symbolic threat(s) as perceived toward an out-group by the in-group. From the perspective of an in-group member (Frenchman), this supposed 'threat' is justifiable since they believe that it is within good reason to be cautious towards an out-group member (Muslim), especially having witnessed harmful acts by other out-group members, e.g., the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris in 2015 or 9/11 in the United States. On the other hand, this general classification, i.e., viewing Muslims as a threat, is quite harmful for the other members of the out-group (innocent Muslims), who do not intend to cause any disruption to the in-group and are at risk of being negatively stereotyped based on their mere existence. Based on this analysis, one can say that, though there is some credibility in an in-group member being cautious, or even perceiving an out-group member as a 'threat' in this case, that supposed 'threat' is subjective and it often is the case that the in-group members hold negative stereotypical views due to a 'fear of the unknown'.

The contact theory has also been mentioned since it holds some significance in this context. As mentioned above, it basically states that having more contact with individuals from a certain culture will reduce or even alleviate negative stereotypes and irrational fears towards that culture. As with any hypothesis, this one comes with its own pros and cons. One of the main drawbacks here is oversimplification, e.g., it would not suffice to simply get in touch with Muslims. In order for this theory to produce positive results, there has to be a significant Muslim population within a nation who view them as outsiders in the first place. But the theory can directly be criticised by taking an example of France – though the country already has a population of around five million Muslims (Iqbal, 2015).Islamophobia still remains prevalent with issues such as the Hijab ban, Burkini ban at the beach, etc. (Brayson, 2019).

People also need to be made aware that other cultures have their own unique and positive attributes and need to be educated on concepts of 'extremism', especially to learn to distinguish it from the general representation of a certain religion/culture. However, this does not in any way diminish the validity of this hypothesis. Even though the solution presented here is seemingly simple, I believe that it does have a high probability of success over time.

Hypothesis 2: *Islamophobic tendencies are mostly spread/created by right wing/conservative politicians and/or media to spread fear, fit their agenda and gain power by using the in-group's fear of the out-group as a tool.*

Explanation: This hypothesis is based on some of the principles of the integrated theory, such as ethnocentrism and intolerance:

Quote Stephen M. Croucher, 2017:

"On the cognitive level, the perception of threats influences an individual's perceptions of an out-group, which can lead to negative stereotypes, ethnocentrism, intolerance, and hatred" (Croucher, 2017).

Croucher theorises that an in-group's perception of the out-group as a threat can lead to severe behavioural, cognitive and emotional effects. The emotional effects of these perceived threats, such as anger, resentment and fear have been used as a tool by right wing parties to gain power and popularity from the public by spreading Islamophobic messages and portraying Muslims as a 'threat' to society. When politicians then make a promise to alleviate this alleged threat, they gain support from nationalists and individuals with strong patriotic emotions, which leads to altercations between the in and out groups that ultimately ends up with extreme behavioral (discrimination, protests, violence, voting down certain policies) as well as cognitive effects (negative stereotypes, intolerance and hatred) (Croucher, 2017).This strategy seems to have worked well for France so far as can be seen from historic political events of significance and ongoing political tensions, e.g., (knife attack, and more academic examples), etc. An example of this has also been given below, describing one Marine Le Pen's speeches to the citizens of France.

The following example is used in order to clarify how the media is used by the right-wing parties, here Marine Le Pen from the National Rally, to create threat. Marine Le Pen stated during an interview with the radio station RTL (far right presidential candidate of the National Rally (former: National Front) that the majority of France is in favour of the hijab ban. Quote:

"It's a measure that the French people have been asking for, with 85 percent of the population wishing to no longer see the wearing of the headscarf in the streets," she said.

"[French people] have understood that in the last two decades that the headscarf has been used by Islamists as a uniform, as an advanced demonstration of fundamental Islam," Le Pen claimed (Staff, 2022)

Her alleged claim(s) against Muslims seems to reflect her perspective rather than the facts. The source of the statistics that have been provided by her also seem and remain unclear. In addition to this, there also seems to be a contradictory view from the media regarding support for Le Pen – it has been claimed a vast majority of the French public find the president 'worrying' , with a majority of 51% ,whereas she claims that a staggering majority of the general population are against the headscarf (hijab) (the Vibes.com, 2022) . Therefore, on the one hand, though she makes it seem as though the majority of the general French population are in favour of the hijab ban and thereby support her and her views, on the other hand there have been sources from the media claiming concerns regarding Le Pen being in a position of power (alleged claims are that nearly 51% of population find her worrying) (the Vibes.com, 2022). There has also been a bizarre justification for the support of hijab ban from those in power, including public statements that were released mentioning fines to be imposed on those wearing headscarves, in a similar fashion to fines imposed on those that are found to be not wearing a seatbelt (the Vibes.com, 2022). The absurdity of this analogy is astounding since the problem poses an unfair comparison - while one is a piece of garment worn by an individual due to his/her own personal beliefs that poses no real threat to anyone else, the other is a serious matter of safety concern and poses real danger to all parties involved (e.g., in the case of a road accident where either one or both parties are not wearing seatbelts). Moreover, this speech by Le Pen also seems to go against the 1978 French law

which bans any kind of transparency on ethnical/racial/religious information (Gilbert & Keane, 2016) which could potentially expose a person's beliefs or origin.

As can be seen from her claims and choice of words, one can say that her political views lean towards conservative radicalism. Furthermore, it is also unclear why she supports laws such as the hijab ban when it does not seem to have any impact on her life or on (French) society in general. A more worrying aspect of this whole speech is the fact that she has made extremely strong claims without providing proper sources for her statistical numbers of supposed surveys from the public, which she knows can have serious consequences and increase Islamophobia for irrational reasons (unjustified fear). Another example of this type of an extreme political view is when she compared Muslim Street prayers to Nazi occupation of the nation (France) during World War 2. During a campaign speech in 2010 in Lyon, Le Pen stated:

"I'm sorry, but some people are very fond of talking about the Second World War and about the occupation, so let's talk about occupation, because that is what is happening here," she told National Front supporters" (BBC News, 2015)

Since 2011, the praying for Muslims in Paris was banned (BBC News, 2015). These examples support the hypothesis stated above and reflect problems of Islamophobia in France, with particular emphasis on how right-wing politics worsens the problem at times due to their representation of Muslims in the media, provoking negative emotions such as fear and hatred among the citizens. This is also reflective of both the cognitive and emotional effects within the integrated threat theory.

Criticism: It is unclear why the hijab, which in essence is just another piece of clothing to non-Muslims, is seen as a symbol of threat by the out-group in this case. This again conforms to the symbolic threat theory. Even though one can argue that conservative politicians do have valid reasons to be cautious towards the Islamic community, or even perceive them as a threat due to significant attacks from their members in the past, their support of laws which infringes some of the fundamental rights of innocent Muslims is questionable, e.g., bans on wearing a hijab, niqab, burka and/or burkinis, praying in public, etc. It then leads one to question whether the views of these politicians are driven by logic and real threat or by an agenda to

gain power and support from the public with a false premise of 'protecting' them from potential threats that Muslims may be capable of.

In this way, the integrated threat theory is being misused by right wing parties to serve their purpose. In other words, it becomes a false representation of this theory since the factors of the symbolic and realistic threat theories are being used as a weapon to defend their point of view rather than rationalising it.

Therefore, while it is clear that one can criticize the theory by pointing out factual reasons for conservatives' views regarding Islam, it can also be argued that concerned political parties have been known to take it too far by provoking the public to act out negatively against Muslims on the basis of irrelevant reasons. When the mere existence of an out-group is viewed as a threat by the in-group for irrational reasons, new prejudices are created and previously held negative stereotypes become stronger.

Furthermore, an unfair bias towards Islamic communities can be observed in some of these laws. For instance, nuns can be seen wearing a headscarf (the outfit of Roman Catholic nuns – 'habit') as well, but the headscarf worn by Muslim women (chaldor/hijab) are frowned upon and even banned due to potential threat as perceived by the in-group. The reasoning for the support of these bans by the right-wing parties is mainly due to opposition of religious symbols, but they fail to place the same amount of severity on other religions. These examples are further in favour of the hypothesis proposed above.

5. Conclusion

This section sums up the various arguments used throughout this research work and concludes the thesis by giving various examples of relevant instances of realistic threat as well as symbolic threat. Given below are two events of historic significance, namely the 9/11 attack and the Charlie Hebdo shooting of Paris, that had a major impact on the mindset of people regarding Islam/Muslims and can be used to explain possible reasons behind the origin of Islamophobia globally as well as in France.

<u>Terror attacks</u>

While going forth and back through several academic literature regarding Islamophobia in France, one of the main reasons coming up regarding Islamophobia in France are the historical terror attacks. Especially the 9/11 attack in the United States and the Charlie Hebdo shooting in 2015 in Paris, France:

"93 percent of those interviewed are now anxious after the attacks of January 2015" (Lebourg, 2018)*.*

This statement in the research of Lebourg shows that almost every French citizen is fearful after the January 2015 shooting. On the 07th of January 2015 two Algerian French brothers entered the office of the satiric magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris, France. The brothers were armed and killed 11 people at the office. After this, the attacks continued, and further people were killed on the 08th and 09th of January 2015. The two brothers belonged to the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL). The background of the attack was the reprint of the Prophet Mohammed cartoon by Charlie Hebdo in February2006. This is against the rules of Islam because Islam has the principles of aniconism, prohibiting to use or visualize living creatures or religious figures (Petrikowski, 2022).

The 9/11 incident in the United States did not just influence the United States but also caused fear and insecurity in Europe and the rest of the world. During 9/11, which is related to the date September 2011 where airline hijacking took place, and a suicide attack was committed by 19 militants (Bergen, 2022). Four planes were hijacked at the same time by small teams of hijackers. These planes were used to

crash into landmark buildings in New York and Washington DC. Two planes destroyed the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York by flying into them. The third plane destroyed the Western part of the Pentagon in Washington DC and the fourth plane crashed into a field in Pennsylvania after passengers prevented the trial attack on the Capitol building in Washington DC. The attack was related to the Islamic extremist group al- Qaeda of whom Osama bin Laden was the leader against the United States and was the deadliest terror attack in the American history so far. The attack had the purpose of addressing New York and Washington D.C. The effect of 9/11 was immense. Around 2,750 people were killed in this unforgettable event. The aim of this attack was to show that the United States are not as strong as they seem to be. Osama bin Laden wanted to show with al-Qaeda that the United States and its confederates are the reason for conflicts in the Muslim world (Jackson, 2021).

These two major incidents created fear not just among the French but also worldwide. Consequently, people started to fear Islam and Muslims because the stereotype that Islam equals terrorism took over the mindset. Besides the fear and insecurity caused by terror attacks among the French society, one can say that the right-wing parties, like National Rally with Marine Le Pen as leader are misusing these incidents to gain power and the trust of the society.

Traditionalism

Traditionalism is another concept worth mentioning. According to Stolz, traditionalism is the base of Islamophobia and Xenophobia. Stolz states that:

"Tradi- tionalism is said to be a syndrome involving cognitions, attitudes, values and habits which are linked to the desire to conserve traditions in the face of a rapidly changing world" (Stolz, 2005)*.*

This means that people with a traditional mindset try to keep traditions even in a fast-changing world. For traditionalists, modern development is a threat to their traditions and to society and therefore they try to often prevent it by using violence or anger. Stolz has found out that there are two main causes for traditionalism: rapid social change and traditional family socialisation.

Rapid social change means that specific "categories of individuals (e. g. the aged, people with poor education or people who are not very mobile) have more to lose than gain from rapid social change" (Stolz, 2005).Consequently, these specific individuals are scared that their educational, social, and cultural gain might lose value within this fast-changing world. They fear the loss of something valuable and traditional to them. As a result, those individuals fight for their tradition in the "old-fashioned" way they are used to, e.g., verbally, and physically, usage of xenophobic tendencies.

Traditional family socialisation is the second cause for traditionalism. Traditionalism is a forced value transmitted by the family. It is a very common way of how someone reacts to and receives the world. Stolz says that "the traditionalist syndrome" is usually transmitted by force from the family. It shows that if parents have xenophobic or like in this case Islamophobic tendencies that children of this parents will take over this way of thinking with a high percentage and live with this attitude. The influence of the family culture and its beliefs in its traditions is so strong over generations that the next generation born grows up with these traditions without being aware of it. This leads to prejudices and stereotypes towards other cultures; traditions and beliefs and creates a fear towards the unknown. Traditional people think that the way they live and see and perceive the world based on their traditions is the only morally right way. Thus, someone with a very conservative and traditional French background has a bigger chance to judge a Muslim than someone who is world open. Traditionalism is often used by conservative and right winged parties with the argument of preserving the traditional good old norms and values that the country is based on, and not letting this destroy another culture/belief. Therefore, these parties mostly address the elder generation and areas with rather uneducated people.

Media

A last reason worth and important to mention when it comes to the origin/causes of Islamophobia one has to shift the view on the Media. The media plays a huge role in spreading messages to the world, regardless of whether they are good or bad. Media is used mainly by politicians to spread their message and to reach their desired and targeted audience. The power of the media is immense.

With regard to France, the media has served as a tool for the right-wing parties to gain power. The right-wing parties use the Media as a powerful tool to get the attention of its folk, to demonstrate events happening around the world, to engage in extremism and to attack other countries/ politics or happenings reckless: be it immigration, refugees, war, religion, equality, etc.

In France, Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron have used the media several times to spread negativity towards Islam and Muslims. Here are two examples presented by the European Islamophobia Report 2020:

Marine Le Pen, the head of the French right wing party National Rally reacted with a letter to the minister of interior affairs after an imam in Lyon called for the prayer during the pandemic as a sign of solidarity and support (note: the same day the church was ringing the bells as a sign for Annunciation which is another religious way of calling someone for a prayer). As a reaction to this event, Le Pen stated:

"*We are thus witnessing a new escalation in the illegal occupation of the public domain by groups that seek to seize every opportunity to reject the principles of laicism of our Republic and thus openly defy the Republican state* " (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2020, p. 329)

Emmanuel Macron, the president of France said in his speech "*The Republic in Action"* regarding the Anti – Separatism Law on the 02ⁿᵈ of October 2020 (note: these are extracts of the speech):

"*The problem is Islamist separatism. It is a conscious, theorised, politico-religious project, which takes the form of repeated deviations from the values of the Republic, which often results in the constitution of a counter-society and whose manifestations are the dropping out of school of children, the development of communities sporting and cultural practices which are the pretext for teaching principles that do not conform to the laws of the Republic. It is indoctrination and through it, the negation of our principles, equality between women and men, human dignity. The problem is this ideology, which asserts that its own laws are superior to those of the Republic"* (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2020, p. 330).

Both politicians have a very radical way of expressing themselves against Muslims/Islam. According to their speeches the culture and belief Islamic people

have do not match with the one of France and the French National Identity. Le Pen as well as Macron present Islam as a way of threat, something very different and something that should not be accepted as it is because it does not match the French culture and picture.

Media points only at aspects which are related to problems and to negative outcomes. It is always easier to point at the "problematic" French neighbourhoods instead of the Seine or the beautiful Parks in Paris. The Media is pretty much used to shape the mind of the folk by going deep into the topics such as immigration, religion, belief, values, and norms. The speeches like the one from Macron or Le Pen are presented, shared, and spread all over social media, television, and the newspaper to create "fear" about Muslims.

Some take this with humour, and some react to this kind of speeches with anger, and in the worst case with attacks. Hereby, the politicians reach their goal: they reach the desired audience, the once in favour of the right- wing and the other side of the audience, those who might react with violence because they feel offended and not welcome. The "hurt" ones (extremists) who tend to react with violence are then portrayed as villains by the politicians, who will profit from this since the media and politicians can point at those Muslims/ people with an Islamic background and say that they don't match with the country's values.

The media full of negative news coverage of terrorist attacks, etc. shapes the image of all Muslims and intensifies and confirms the existing anti-Muslim attitude. This results in the fact that not just French people, but many Europeans associate Muslims with terrorism.

All the factors mentioned in this chapter are factors that lead to/influence and cause Islamophobia in France. The effects are partly so strong that the right-wing parties in a democratic country like France gain more and more power through the people. The fear and anger towards Islam are big and Islamophobia just develops further and further.

From the above-mentioned points, one can conclude that threat perception, be it realistic or symbolic, is the core reason for Islamophobia in France. The examples cited here are examples of realistic threats, giving politicians a valid reason to be cautious towards Muslims. However, the dark side of this cautiousness is that unfair

bias and irrational fear towards the Islamic community is made worse by the same politicians by using real threat incidents as a tool to provoke negative reactions from the in-group, especially targeting those with traditional and conservative values. This conclusion conforms to the hypotheses proposed in the analysis section, shedding light on the consequences of radical right-wing parties' influence on the media and public, as well as the perceived symbolic threats by an in-group towards an out-group. Therefore, it can be concluded that both the hypotheses proposed are relevant in the context of this research statement. To sum up, the cause(s) of Islamophobia do(es) have a background of realistic threats, however, the perceived symbolic threats amplify the issue, at times out of proportion. One can then say that the causes of Islamophobia can be mainly traced back to terror attacks, traditional ways of thinking (by both the in-group and out-group) and the media (used by the right-wing politicians).

The level of Islamophobia in France is quite a "hot" topic. The analysis of this thesis paper showed the reader that the fear of Muslims, the perceived threat, and the prejudices as well as negative stereotypes totally influence the behaviour towards the French Muslims. France, as well as many other countries in the European Union and beyond view Muslims as violent, compare them to terrorists (! Terrorist/Extremists who misuse Islam for their extreme behaviour and have nothing to do with Islam) and "freedom takers" because they fear their physical and traditional well- being in danger, as well as their cultural values and morals in risk. These emotions are once again misused by the media and right-wing leaders as a tool to grow more Islamophobic and Xenophobic tendencies and to gain the ultimate power in the country.
Normally a democratic and free country as France has to go against the concept of Islamophobia and Xenophobia by letting people with a "neutral" / world-open mindset teach about Islam and other Religions and cultures to take the fear of its folk. As a result, the informed citizens may have less tendencies to negative stereotypes and prejudices and thus fear towards Muslims and it might be "the solution" to avoid fear of Islam in France.

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