Representation of French Muslim Minorities in a New Zealand Newspaper*

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ABSTRACT

The relationships between race, religion and poverty have created a dangerous equation in France, and their destabilising effects are visible in current French society. Based on an analysis of news coverage, however, this study suggests that the newspaper, *The Press* downplayed a major social crisis facing Muslim minorities by focusing on an imaginary issue, Islamism, in the context of suburban rioting in France. This study also recognises that *The Press* proposed a two-dimensional framework: racial discrimination and Islamism. The Islamism framework, however, most of the times overlapped the racial framework and the Muslim community was linked with fundamentalism and extremism. Besides this, the social position of the people involved in the suburban protest was devalued through narratives suggesting that they were anti-social.

Keywords: Muslims, Islamism, riots, France

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to examine the representation of the 27 October to 15 November 2005 suburban riots in France in a New Zealand newspaper, *The Press*. The riots shook French society and sparked debates on issues such as multiculturalism, assimilation, ethnicity, Islamic fundamentalism and race relations. The links between race, religion and poverty created a dangerous equation in France, their destabilising effects being visible everywhere in current European society in general, and in French society in particular (Cesari, 2004: 23). Some argue that in France, religion has little influence (Willaime 2004: 375) and there is an ongoing traditional distrust of it in society (p. 377). In France, religion and sectarian symbols are considered to be a threat to the integrity of the Republic (Wieviorka, 1999), and the presence of Muslims has become the central focus of this threat (Wieviorka, 2000: 159). Therefore, Muslims are recognised as "casualties of the integration process" (Roy, 1994; Poulter 1997: 50). While other religious groups and their religious symbols (e.g. Sikh students wearing turbans), and their movements (e.g. Sephardic Jews injected into French Judaism,

or evangelical Protestantism and the charismatic movement (Roy, 2007: 29) have been clearly evident since the 1980s, the French *laïcité* (secular democracy) has identified Islam as its enemy (Roy, 2007: 29). Islam has become the focus of French anxiety, possibly because "it has a demographic weight beyond that of other movements" (Roy, 2007: 30), and the total effects of Muslim migration have not been accepted easily by French society (Cesari, 2002: 36). An earlier study recognises that while the French prefer bilingual or multicultural ideas, their attitudes towards African Muslims are unfavorable (Lambert *et al.*,1990: 408). In the 1970s and 1980s, the French took little policy initiative to integrate the immigrants or to repatriate them to their "own countries" (Bleich, 1998: 86), but assimilation into French society was expected of immigrants (Bleich, 1998: 81).

Immigrants are likely to be subjected to harsh stereotyping, discrimination (Alba and Silberman 2002: 1170) and suspicion in a host society (Sayad, 1987; Alba and Silberman, 2002: 1170), and this is what has happened in the case of immigrants to France. An earlier survey suggests that most French people are against the presence of immigrants in their country, a favoured suggestion being to send all immigrants back to their countries of origin (Breichon and Mitr, 1992: 67). There is a fear that 'non-conformist' Muslims will encourage fundamentalism, although many are descendants of French colonialism, mostly in North Africa, and are French citizens. Fear of Islamic fundamentalism also has erupted throughout France and has been strongly reinforced by a long-term xenophobic attitude towards immigrant Muslims. Besides this, some French leaders have described immigrants as "foreign invaders" (for example, the leader of National Front Marie-France Stirbois stated her victory in the 1990-election was a victory against "foreign invaders"), and this might be seen as an effort to alienate the descendants of French colonialism. In this process, Muslims are isolated inside French society and live in what the French call the "suburbs of Islam" (Pipes, 1995).

Some political parties (e.g. France's National Front) use anti-Islamic discourse in their slogans, and that their (French) identity needs to be defended, thus presenting a position of anti-Muslim immigration (Cesari, 2004: 29). The current xenophobic attitude has its foundations in the 1930s because of the crisis caused by high unemployment (Odmalm, 2005: 19). However, France did not close its doors to all immigrants. Consequently, an early 1970s estimate shows that the number of migrants in France was three million (Castle and Miller, 2003). The rate of immigration varied and depended on the demand of the French labour markets (Oldmalm, 2005: 19-20).

As a constitutionally secular, democratic and social republic, France discourages any formation of "communities" of immigrants and strategically encourages social integration (Safran, 1991). However, some argue that France has failed to integrate its Muslim community, and regards this community as a potential threat to French society (Pauly, 2004: 4). Others recognise that there is no conflict between national feelings of belonging and transnational, religious or ethnic identities, and that the French representation of Islam (e.g. non-conformists) differs greatly from the reality (Brouard and Tiberj, 2007: 19).

France has the largest Islamic presence of any country in Western Europe, and some 90% of Islamic descendants are of North African origin; most of them originally from Algeria (Pipes, 1995). As mentioned, not all immigrants are Muslims, but this community is

synonymous with "other" or "non-white" (Diop and Michalak, 1996: 71), and France faces a problem with these "others" (Europe Report, 2005). For example, from the 1930s onward, the French thought immigrants were taking advantage of their welfare state (Odmalm, 2005), and the current perception is that immigrants are reluctant to become members of mainstream French society. As a result, they have been perceived as a potential threat (Brouard and Tiberj, 2007: 1). This has increased doubts over the assimilation of immigrants, mainly those originating in the Maghreb or North Africa. Muslims, however, are hardly alone in challenging the cultural status quo in France, and their (Muslim) culture is not free from government control. For example, a woman was denied French citizenship because she wore a burqa, which was represented as being against French values, despite her being loyal to France and having a French husband and children (Chrisafis, 2008; Bennhold, 2008). The denial also ignored the freedom of choice of her personal practice. Under this process, Muslims are marginalised in France, which has been driven in large part by widespread misperceptions of Islam (Pauly, 2004: 2). However, also it is argued that Muslims in France have begun to speak and they are no longer the silent citizens they were in 1970s (Roy, 2007: 5).

The October-November 2005 riots in France and the arrest of a couple of 'jihadists' has reinforced the perception that Muslim jihadism or radicalism is present in French society, and political Islamism has mobilised these Islamists (Europe Report, 2005, for example, also identifies this symptom). Besides, in recognising Islam as a threat, from 11 September 2001 onward, France has widened security surveillance in mosques, and some illegal restrictions have been imposed on Islamic construction (for example, building a mosque) and practices (Fareen, 2007: 8-9). However, "the automatic association of ethnicity, Islam, and poverty was widespread in Europe long before 11 September just as was the resurgence of xenophobic and race-oriented nationalism" (Cesari, 2004: 22). Racism and Islam have been linked in current French issues relating to immigration. In contrast, however, some argue that the descendants of the immigrants, "no longer see themselves as the custodians of a native culture" (Roy, 2007: 5). Others argue that "global culture flows" create difference and "an intensified sense of criticism or attachment to home politics in displaced populations" (Bloul, 1996: 235), and these displaced people have become, purposively, a hot topic for media and politicians alike. In media depiction, terrorism becomes a symptom inside the Muslim community and over the past few years, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and bombings in Madrid and London have sparked fears that Europe is breeding its own crop of indigenous jihadists (Giry, 2006). Consequently, immigrant communities are assaulted by the desires and fantasies depicted in the mass media (Bloul 1996: 235). It is against these backdrops that this paper will examine how *The Press*, a metropolitan newspaper published in New Zealand, represented the suburban riots involving Muslims in France in 2005 and what implications this representation has for issues of race, ethnicity, religion and national identity in France.

2. STUDY AIMS

This paper aims to examine *The Press*'s representation of the French Muslim minorities, specifically how this mainstream New Zealand metropolitan daily assigns meanings to events and social interactions related to the riot. This newspaper covered this issue

extensively, which no other New Zealand newspaper did. As mentioned, little scholarly attention has been directed at the suburban riot 2005 in France, particularly within a Kiwi (New Zealand) media context. This paper aims to address this gap.

To analyse the representation of French Muslim minorities, this study poses two questions: (1) Was this rioting an anti-government configuration at a moment when a French election was at hand; (2) Does this newspaper represent this rioting as a protest against social discrimination? This study will also look at how the issue of rioting has been linked to religious issues, and critical social issues (i.e., social discrimination or unemployment) have been undermined through an imaginary issue (i.e., Islamism), within the framing capacity of a newspaper.

3. METHODOLOGY

To analyse the coverage of suburban rioting in France from 27 October 2005 to 15 November 2005 in *The Press*, this study has fixed its timeframe from 28 October to 18 November 2005. All related news and views (editorial and opinion pieces) have been examined. In mapping the timeframe, it was expected that as the rioting started on 27 October 2005, the event would first become the focus of news reports on the 28 October 2005 issue of *The Press*. The choice of 18 November 2005 as the end of the timeframe for newspaper analysis, three days after the rioting ended, was to allow for the publication of late reports.

This study will use critical discourse analysis, which explains links between language use and power. Besides this, the language that the media uses and the consumption of language in a society are inter-related (Richardson, 2004: 1). Discourse analysis explains how explicitly language users relate context and text (Van Dijk, 2008: 3) and "the press typically have a special context category that places current events in their political, social or historical context" (Van Dijk, 1988; Van Dijk 2008). In addition to this, in many cases, through its language and other capacities (for example, page make-up), the media plays an instrumental role in countering an opposition ideology, as a potent strategy (Van Dijk, 2008b: 37). Therefore, language and symbols play a very important role in a media-society and language is central to the process by which meaning is produced (Hall, 2001).

Framing is a strategy used to explain data in this study. In this connection, Entman (2004: 5) defines framing as "selecting and highlighting some facets or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution." Entman (1993) also holds that news framing defines the problem, states a diagnosis, passes judgment and reaches a solution, and these functions suggests which elements are important (from the point of view of the media). Media framing functions through placement, repetition, and the particular focus placed on an event. "The words and images that make up the frame can be distinguished from the rest of the news by their capacity to stimulate support or opposition […]" (Entman, 2004: 6). Framing can be understood through repetition. This repetition, however, might not be as important as highly resonant words or images (Entman, 2004: 6).

Tankard (2001: 101) identifies 11 framing mechanisms, which include: headline and kickers, subheads, photographs, photo captions, news leads, selection of sources or affiliations, selection of quotes, full quotes, logos, concluding statements or paragraphs of

articles and statistics, charts, and graphs. Story selection in the news media determines the availability of news and suitability of news. Frames "tap information already stored in the long-term memory that individuals [have] judged as significant" (Johnson-Cartee, 2005: 27), and the news has a big impact as people act upon it without considering why, how and in what context it is produced (p. 41). Media plays a role in the political and social world of which it is a part (Gitlin, 1980; Ruddock, 2001; Spencer, 2005; Bruck, 1989) and can focus or downplay a specific social group according to its interest. Besides, the powerless groups in a society become news only if their activities produce social or moral disorder (Gans, 1979: 81) in the point of view of social power-elites, and in the mass media issues relating to race, culture, religion, gender and sex are highly subjective (Gist, 1993). All these ideas, help to frame an issue within a society and shape the reality. This reality is produced within a cultural meaning and those that produce it provide the information as to what should be taken seriously (Schudson, 2003: 190). Reality is created by their (media) selected languages, images and through their own social and psychological perspectives and through the media's selectivity "a news story adopts a certain frame and rejects or downplays material that is discrepant" (Gitlin, 1980: 49).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Press published 22 news articles including five opinion pieces (including one editorial) on the suburban riots in France. The riots, involving the descendants of Arab and African immigrants, began on 27 October 2006, mainly in suburban areas on the outskirts of France's capital city, Paris, where the rioters have lived for years with their families. Most of them were born in France and are French citizens.

All selected stories have appeared in the international and editorial/column pages of the paper. The rioting issue was given prominence in the newspaper, occupying the top-half of the relevant page on most occasions. It has been treated as the lead story or second lead story in the international news section of the newspaper, which, in this case, is titled *World*. In addition, to gain the readers' attention, the rioting issue has been covered using large fonts, photographs and long headlines (for example, banner and five-column news stories).

The Press focused its attention on understanding the 'rioters' social and psychological situation in France and the riot's consequences for Europe. The newspaper implied that images of French ghettos in flames caused increasing discomfort across Europe and raised fears the violence could spread across borders. It suggested that London, Berlin, Amsterdam, Rome, and other cities with large immigrant populations were on the lookout for any signs of copycat urban violence (9 November 2005: *Other cities uneasy*). This story presents statistical figures of Muslim immigrants living in the Western society.

The social panic, agony, and root of the unexpected circumstances (in France), however, were portrayed in the newspaper. This newspaper used the term 'trapped' to symbolise the situation facing immigrants in French society. It highlighted the confrontation between the state and the rioters. It reported that, "ignoring the government threat of a curfew; youths rioted for the 12th night in France" (9 November 2005: *Riots go on despite curfew threat*) and "The nightly protests against racism and unemployment dropped markedly in the greater

Paris region, where violence had escalated to the point of shooting at police, but continued unabated in other parts of France". It reported that renewed violence followed a warning by the French Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin, that he would take a firm line against lawbreakers. That line included police reinforcements and curfews not seen in France since the Algerian war of 1954-1962.

In one story (4 November 2005: *Suburbs ablaze with anger*), an immigrant Muslim involved in the riots was interviewed. In this story, he represented all immigrants living in France. The story said that the rioter (Mohammed) was opposed to then Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy. Once again, it reported that French President Jacque Chirac called for calm and implicitly pointed the finger at Sarkozy, "who is a foe [of President Chirac] as well as leader of his [Chirac] centre-right UMP party".

This suggests that their anger was not an outburst resulting from long-term racial discrimination; rather it was an aimless 'riot', which later became a protest over two deaths. In this scenario, the French authorities cannot be blamed too much, as the 'deaths' were 'accidental'. Notably, the newspaper reported two 'accidental deaths', although the deceased were killed when French police chased them.

This report also suggests that the French President was anti-Sarkozy (but in favor of Primer de Villepin), and that the interviewee, Mohammed, was an opponent of the Interior Minister Sarkozy's political line. Therefore, he saw the riot as a symbol of protest against Sarkozy (but not the president). This might also be taken as evidence of an intention by the rioters to destabilise France in the context of the next French election, in which Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin was, like the interviewee Mohammed, against Sarkozy, who was seeking to be president. From this, the conclusion might be drawn that the protest of Mohammed has been symbolised as an outrage against Sarkozy and not against de Villepin or Chirac and to mobilise the current image of Sarkozy that he is a failure as an interior minister. Therefore, Sarkozy needs to be rejected in the upcoming French election. It is, however, acknowledged that the riot issue was not just a protest against Sarkozy or someone else. Rather, it was a reaction against a long discrimination, which suddenly was brought to prominent attention in the world media.

The newspaper reported anti-Sarkozy sentiment inside and outside of the government, with President Chirac stating he understood the "profound frustrations" of the immigrant districts, and that "the absence of dialogue and escalation of disrespect would lead to a dangerous situation" (4 November 2005: *Suburban ablaze with anger*). The report suggests: "[Chirac's] message was aimed at Sarkozy's 'zero tolerance' law enforcement", this being explicit recognition of a clash between government factions and the fact that the immigrants had been caught in the sandwich of French politics for decades.

The Press recognised that the rioting developed into a broader challenge for the French state. Its reports on the rioting laid bare discontent simmering in suburbs where African and Muslim immigrants and their French-born children were trapped by poverty, unemployment, discrimination, crime and poor education and housing. It reported that, "The Chirac government has come under increasing pressure to halt the riot, sparked by frustration among ethnic minorities over racism, unemployment, police treatment and their marginal place in French society" (8 November 2005: *Chirac vows to restore order*). In this regard,

The Press started printing reports on the immigrants' misery. The scariness of the situation is conveyed in reports that Aulnay-sous-Bois, the suburb where the riots began and which is only a few kilometers from the Eiffel Tower, resembled parts of Baghdad (5-6 November 2005: *Erie calm in suburb*).

The newspaper repeatedly indicated that policies of integration or assimilation had failed in France. In this connection, a story (12 November 2005: *Fires of disintegration burning in the West*) is worth mentioning. The headline indicates that integration of immigrants (not only) in France (but also in the whole West) had failed. In France, due to state policy and the carelessness of state leaders and policy advisors, the idea of integration failed and the consequences of this "disintegration" were apparent across Europe.

The newspaper presents that the cost of the violence was greater than the cost of damage caused by 7 July 2006 London terrorist bombing, and suggested that "Britain and France face roughly the same problem at the moment". Putting official French attitudes in context, the newspaper quoted comments on earlier riots in the United States, in 1992, by then French-President Francois Mitterrand. In a story dated 12 November 2005 (*But, what a country is this?*), Mitterrand's comments that the Los Angeles riots could never happen in Paris, because "France is the country where the level of social protection is the highest in the world" were reported. This suggests that French pride must have suffered due to the 2005 riots. And, it was recognised that halting immigration was not a solution. France had had a restrictive immigration policy for two decades, and the rioters were mostly French-born.

The Press reports that Chirac spoke publicly on the crisis only once (12-13 November 2005: *Suburban violence wanes*). This meant he was not interested in dealing with the situation and did not want to send a message to the general people who might have calmed down after hearing reassuring and reasonable words from the head of state. "The crisis has led to collective soul-searching about France's failure to integrate its African and Muslim minorities", the newspaper stated. In addition, it reported that Sarkozy, the interior minister, vowed to dismantle gangs and bands of drug traffickers that, he said, "make up a tiny minority but poison everyone's lives". Therefore, this soul-searching was in part related to 'gangs' involved in anti-social activities (for example, drug trafficking) inside France, but there is a danger that such associations diminish the position of minorities. *The Press*, however, recognised in its reports that: "It is an established fact youths from the housing estates, who are mostly French citizens, often face blatant discrimination as soon as they present a foreign looking face or name to a prospective employer or landlord" (5 November 2005: *Riots a recurring feature*). The solution lies not only in talking about drug trafficking and the like, but also, as indicated earlier, in helping a community rooted in poverty and unemployment and facing social discrimination (for example, colour or origin), whose problems have been ignored in France. By printing references to 'gangs' in the context of the riots, and reporting their involvement in anti-social activities (for example, drug trafficking or stealing cars), the newspaper risked misleading its readers regarding the social situation of the rioters (as a whole) and the background to the protests.

In another story (12-13 November 2005: *Suburban violence wanes*), the newspaper reported that France started a long holiday weekend as two weeks of 'civil disturbances' appeared to die down, but a police chief said he feared rioters might be planning protests in central Paris. It needed to be mentioned that the riots were a protest against discrimination throughout France, which was sparked by and entangled with the unexpected killing of the two youths by the French police. Therefore, the riots could have been depicted in other ways (for example, protest), not just as a "disturbance". In labeling the rioters 'gang members' or such, and reporting their protest as a 'disturbance', the newspaper discredited the aims and objective of those raising their voice in protest.

The only editorial published in *The Press* (14 November 2005: *France aflame*) recognised that "the government has shown negligence in not having defused the pressures erupting, and had been ineffective in containing them. The challenge is insufficient to overturn the basic institutions of the state, but it could bring the government down". The editorial recognised that the riot was unpopular and weak. There was no support for it from other sectors of society (e.g. students). *The Press* suggested that the French government was rigid and its policy of secularism had failed for many reasons. It said that "it is by no means certain that the rigid French state, sustained by notions of secularism that act against special attention for racial groups, will be so successful or want to learn lessons from other countries". Thus, the French government's overly rigid position regarding racial and other policies was depicted. Another story (5 November 2005: *Riots a recurring feature*) indicated the difference between the haves and have-nots in French society, suggesting that 'Paris people' are aloof to the immigrant suburbs, mentioning that many residents of the rich inner city only know of such areas from highway exit signs they speed past as they travel in or out of town, with this being a sign that not only the government but also the whole of French society is psychologically distant from the immigrant communities.

Reports in *The Press* suggested that the French promise of liberty, equality and fraternity had failed. It was suggested that members of the immigrant community could not take part in politics because of their colour and were not welcome in French society as they had Muslim names. The newspaper also said that debate regarding integration and separation of church and state was limited to Paris, which might indicate that a system of secularism has yet to be established in French society. In mentioning 'immigrant community', however, the newspaper did not mention any other existing community inside French society (for example, Buddhists as a religious community or Chinese as an ethnic community). In the context of the event in question, the newspaper represents 'rioters' as 'Muslims' or 'Islamic' through its narratives.

Therefore, the general focus on such issues was on affiliation of Muslims, which might be seen in the linking of the riots and Muslim minorities. This linking of *The Press*'s reporting is as follows: One report in *The Press* stated (7 November 2006: *Ghettos burn with rage*) that "in this land unto its own, women are forced to wear headscarves and the authorities in one district have been persuaded to introduce a daily period of 'women only' bathing at the municipal pool to satisfy a fundamentalist imam."

The report links Islamic fundamentalism in France with the wearing of headscarves by women, and suggests that wearing them is an expression of extremism (i.e. the result of

force, not a symbol of religious/cultural preference,). The question of hijab/headscarves might be seen from a different angle if it is the preferred choice of women. As it is argued that the hijab might not be recognised as a religious symbol, but rather as a cultural manifestation (Poulter, 1997: 45). Current French regulations do not allow the wearing of the hijab in schools or universities. In this respect, the term "force" is not unreasonable, as in France we see people protesting against current France law, under which Muslim women cannot use the hijab or head-scarf (but they want to). The hijab, for the most part, is a cultural or religious symbol. As a religious symbol, we cannot ask a Buddhist monk not to wear a specific (colour of) cloth or a Hindu (married) woman not to use vermillion on her forehead. Besides this, displaying a religious symbol should not be seen as a hindrance to the expression of a secular spirit. So many countries where religious symbols did not hinder this spirit (for example, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand). Consequently, it might be said that France has failed in the protection of human rights and the proper establishment of democracy, concepts they argue for in other parts of the world. Rioting in France is not a Muslim fundamentalist issue. As an expert says in the context of describing the cause of the riot: "I am not surprised by what has happened. Given the way these kids live, I wonder why it doesn't happen more often" (7 November 2005).

Along the same lines, a report in *The Press* said (9 November 2005: *Fatwa tells rioters to go home*) that the sight of bearded Muslim activists with megaphones urging rioting teenagers to stop destroying property and go home "in the name of Allah" unnerved many in France. The term "bearded", which could be taken to mean that any bearded Muslim was some type of "Islamist" or political "jihadist", is misguided. A person or organisation cannot be judged by the fact of keeping a beard or something similar. We see many Muslims keeping beards because of their religious point of view. In the Islamic community, people come forward to appeal for the betterment of their society. Some of these people are likely to be bearded, but that should not be an issue. However, while such men offered edicts to the rioters, "the mainstream Muslim Council said such edicts equated Islam with the current vandalism" (9 November 2005: *Fatwa tells rioters to go home*), which means that their activities were not supported. This was an indication that the relationship between the riots and any Islamist influence was to be downplayed. The newspaper, however, reported that "there is a widespread belief, denied by the authorities, that the unrest is being fostered by the Islamists. There are also fears that extremists might use the power vacuum to strengthen their hold on some suburbs" (9 November 2005: *Fatwa tells rioters to go home*). Through publishing this statement, the newspaper gave credence to the idea of there being Islamist influence in the rioting (a proposition which the French authorities did not believe, although, the newspaper report indicated otherwise), which in turn suggests that Islamists are active in France, at least inside the Muslim community.

In another story (12-13 November : *'If you wear a skirt you're in trouble'*) in *The Press,* it was reported that, "with nightly scenes of rioting beamed around the globe, the world has learnt that France's bleak suburbs are enclaves of gang wars and macho rules. The girls living there have known this for years". It was reported: "Not many girls have taken part, and many say they are fed up with consecutive nights [of] violence. Pressure is mounting for Muslim women to wear veils. Forced marriages that snatch them from college and career

– where they can do much better than their male schoolmates – are on the rise." Also, this report remarked that the families of the girls and the community in which they live discouraged their education.

The two sentences quoted above suggest that Muslim youths are involved in crime and girls/women are not safe in their society, and the rioters were not supported by their own (Muslim) community because they were criminals. The reporting in the newspaper downplayed the cause behind the uprising, that is, it was a demonstration against the widespread discrimination against immigrants in French society; rather, the focus was on the 'violence' of anti-social 'immigrant youths' involved in criminal activities. Also, newspaper reports suggested that the Muslims (rioters) community is against female education. Again, it can be said that it is not Islam or Muslims as a community or religion that should be blamed for restraining their girls; rather it is the ignorance behind a social policy that does not ensure their proper education. Islam is not against female education. The French authorities vowed to establish law and order in the context of riots or violence, but they could not ensure it even when society behaved more reasonably. The suburban rioting, however, occurred not because of their criminal activity; rather it was a protest against social discrimination. Such issues, however, were devalued in the context of focusing on Islamism in *The Press*.

It was also suggested that formal attempts to recognise Islam as France's "second religion" had failed. The newspaper doubted "whether Frenchmen even contemplate the possibility that African and Arab immigrants and their offspring who make up their underclass, and who are both perpetrators and victims of these riots, could ever be truly French, even if they hold a French passport [and millions do]". The paper once again recognised that "Muslim immigrants are clearly harder to integrate" (12 November 2005: *Fires of disintegration burning in the West*). It feared that Islamism might appear in France through its immigrants, as it reported that "it's pretty clear that large, unintegrated, ungovernable and unemployed Islamic communities in Western Europe will continue to incubate radical Islam" (12 November 2005, *But, what a country is this?*). Understandably, this story indicates anxiety not only about French Muslims, but also about all Muslim communities across Europe, as they are difficult to manage ("ungovernable") and do not follow any rule ("unintegrated"). Questions as to how they are ungovernable and why they are unemployed might arise. The only editorial, however, on the subject run by the newspaper said (14 November 2005: *France aflame*): "How far radical Muslim is motivating the riots is unclear". This editorial took a balanced position in identifying the influence of Islamists on the riot, as it did not offer any evidence linking the riots to Islamic radicalism.

Through news stories, the newspaper depicted the position of immigrants in French society. While commenting or reporting on Islam or Muslims, it recognised that this society suppresses its women. The newspaper identified signs of radical Islamism inside France. It implied the cause behind the social disintegration was cultural and religious, factors that did not allow these migrants to be assimilated (12 November 2005: *Fires of disintegration burning in the West*). It also generates the perception that Islam is harder to accommodate and is incompatible with other belief systems. For example, it said, "France's secularism sits badly with a religion that believes its own laws take precedence over others" (12 November

2005: *But, what a country is this?*). This position implies that Islam is outmoded and undemocratic, which contradicts the view of many scholars (for example, Johns and Lahoud, 2005; Tibi, 2008). Besides this, reports on Islamism in *The Press* overlapped the explanation that before starting the riots the hopes and dreams of the young people involved were being denied; they lived in a situation where they saw no possibility of upward mobility because of their skin colour, religion, surname or address.

In addition, the newspaper reported them as members of 'gangs' and frequently made reference to them being involved in drug trafficking and other anti-social activities, which also devalued their social position in the eyes of the readers. Therefore, readers might have been disinclined to have any sympathy for them and to view the riot issue as a part of their anti-social activities. In the context of religious orientation, *The Press* reports indicated a link between the riots and Islamism. In all of it's reporting, the newspaper focused on a two-dimensional framework: the rioting and links with social discrimination, and the rioting and links with religious fundamentalism (in other words, Muslim extremism or Islamism). However, the way in which the issue was framed put the focus not so much on the contention that it was social discrimination that provoked those involved to take to the streets in protest, but rather it was their way of life or religious affiliation that was behind this 'gang' rioting. It is worth mentioning that focus on the issue of Islamism is reinforced when the world witnesses the *popular peril of Islam*, which is mostly a media creation. To the media, this *peril* is a hot issue, which stimulates sales and creates a false fear across the world. Also, this study agrees with the idea, recognised in Wilson II *et al.*(2003: 46), that the news media perceives racial and ethnic minorities as *problem people*.

6. CONCLUSION

These responses suggest that the subject of Islam or Muslims was only reported when a relationship with violence, Islamism, extremism, radicalism etc. was involved. The causes behind the riots are rooted in history, and could or should have been a much earlier focus of the French Government. The newspaper also gave another impression – that there is a focus on Islam, or Islamic society, only when there is a crisis situation (e.g. violence, disturbance, riot), but other issues (for example, education, unemployment) of Muslim society never gain the level of media attention that radicalism does. The way in which this issue has been focused on has created a false-perception that Islamism and extremism are present in France's immigrant community, and as a religion Islam is undemocratic. The position of the rioters in French society was diminished, with them being labeled anti-social activists in newspaper reports. All of these have helped create a perception of Islamism being an issue; reports in *The Press* identified the rioters have links with Islamism. The deep-rooted discrimination suffered by the rioters in French society was devalued in most of the cases in order to accommodate an imaginary view that Islamism existed within the life and practices of the Muslim minority in France.

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