Political Symbolism and Muslim Identity: Analyzing the Impact of Marine Le Pen's Policies

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to provide an overview of how Marine Le Pen, a politician who has shifted public perceptions of Muslims in France using mass media texts, especially in altering perceptions of Muslims in France by employing the Hypertext, Interactivity & Link theory by McDonald & Stevenson. Through a qualitative method and interpretative paradigm content analysis, the research found that Le Pen utilizes mass media as a tool to subvert politics that should be unifying, turning it into a divisive instrument based on religious, ethnic, and racial factors. With six million Muslims in France, Le Pen's political position carries a dual risk: widespread religious conflict if successful as president and the potential for internal political conflict if unsuccessful. Further analysis highlights the urgency of a profound understanding of the impact of this anti-Muslim strategy, including the risk of escalating religious conflicts and shifts in political paradigms. The implications encompass threats to political and social stability, emphasizing the importance of understanding mass media dynamics and the role of racial politics to maintain harmony in French society in the future, even globally.

Keywords: Hypertext, Islamophobia, Political Symbolism, Social Media.

A. Introduction

In domestic politics, conflicts arise when leaders and alt-right administrations seek majority support and garner legitimacy for divisive policies. To achieve this, they leverage the media as a singular political force. Take, for instance, Marine Le Pen, the presidential candidate for the 2022 French election, who made a viral statement proposing the ban on the use of hijab for Muslim citizens in France if elected president. Instantly, this statement triggered strong reactions from various quarters, including political opponents like Marcos. The text and context played by Marine Le Pen are strongly suspected to be directed towards issues of race and religion, particularly concerning the Muslim community in France.

Substantiate a strong set of primary elements is needed as supporting arguments; in this context, combining how to perceive issues of race and religion through text and the role of social media in the cultural context of French society. This paper is constructed based on a strong argument about the extreme pluralistic approach taken by Marine Le Pen. Statement after statement uttered becomes the subject of analysis to achieve a degree of analytical understanding. As we know, politics begins its cosmogony from a perfect state, which later becomes imbalanced due to social power operations. The media is enslaved as a tool of political propaganda. There is no limit to the number of editorials that will be written, but this is related to how paradigms and a set of scientific studies view this issue as a political tourism destination and a threat to Muslim citizens in France.

This paper focuses more on the texts written by the media about Marine Le Pen's statements; from there, the issue of race and religion begins, causing fear among the Muslim minority. The symbolism of race and religion is evident by examining the political context intertwined with religion; this thesis statement is strongly suspected as an issue and a violation of political communication messages. As information; when the mechanism of fear begins to gain political support, some perceived different beliefs will soon be eradicated. For Marine Le Pen, such regression indicates that religious issues are strategically positioned. Being a minority and different is also considered wrong because the comparison is with the entire non-Islamic population in France, or conversely, Islam and Muslims in France are considered as the standard identity of a nation. The use of terrorist stereotypes to generate fear and legitimize ideological policies is not a new phenomenon. In France, the ban on hijab has existed since 1989; from here, we can see what political message is embedded when Marine

Le Pen's ideas are rekindled. Will there be a resurgence in the Islamic view of potential security risks, or is it purely a power struggle?

Marshall (2021) The journal "Celebrity, Politics, and New Media: An Essay on the Implications of Pandemic Fame and Persona" strongly asserts that media and politics are inseparable from the play of rhetoric and propaganda, in various ways. Undoubtedly, media currently holds the most prominent position.

On the other hand, Buike Oparaugo (2021) provides a different perspective in the research titled "Media and Politics: Political Communication in The Digital Age." According to Buike, media and gender mutually emphasize each other, whether through symbols or verbal communication. However, Buike still allows room for the public to make objective judgments about the content of the news. Additionally, Heather Savigny (2019) in her study titled "The Violence of Impact: Unpacking Relations Between Gender, Media, and Politics" emphasizes the role and messages of media across the political spectrum; media merely conveys messages. Unfortunately, there is no emphasis on whether there is a dimension of propaganda or not; she simply outlines the function of media in political science studies.

This research is essential as it reaffirms the interconnection between media and politics through rhetoric and propaganda. Gaps in research that have not been explored are also identified, particularly in the use of religious paradigms providing another perspective. This implies opportunities for a more in-depth understanding of the interaction between media and politics.

B. Method

The research design employed in this study is qualitative with a content analysis approach. The researcher analyzed by tracing words or concepts related to the relationship between a text and possible characterizations of the text's meaning. The researcher interlinked meaning, text, and context to reveal the data collection strategies. Texts from social media were used for the analysis. To analyze the data, the author collided the data with theory, resulting in the formulation of a new framework. Prior to the analysis, the author conducted coding by labeling and categorizing the data according to the research findings. Coding was divided into three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The conclusion was drawn inductively, referencing the analyzed data.

Primary data utilized in this research encompassed texts from social media, while secondary data were extracted from journals discussing texts and racial issues.

Secondary data were only used as supportive, comparing or seeking gaps to be utilized as additional data. All existing data were coded and discussed, with a focus on texts, meanings, contexts, and interpretations. This approach allowed for a thorough exploration of which texts were considered pioneering in propaganda and what meanings were interpreted, aligning well with the research focus.

C. Results dan Discussion

The initial findings stem from the serious accusations articulated by Marine Le Pen as a leader of the National Front (a kind of left-wing ideology party). From here, we can observe how the history of the past flows through the Islamic diaspora to France. While acknowledging the existence of the Muslim minority in France, linking Marine Le Pen's history directly to her policy of banning the hijab requires further investigation. There is a need for a political communication and historical study to uncover the common thread between the National Front and Marine Le Pen's hijab-banning policy. Let's not forget; the next significant actor is the role of social media, which stands between the two sides, exposing the aspects experienced by Marine Le Pen as a Christian candidate who vehemently opposes the hijab. (Frédéric Deslauriers, 2019). To assert that this is not hatred seems somewhat challenging.

As an anti-Islamist individual, the presence of Marine Le Pen is deemed a threat that needs to be monitored by Macron's faction as the legitimate leader. Specifically, the right-wing of the National Front party is the target of diabolism (negative politics) or demonization, in a continuous effort to discredit it as a result of its association with fascism and Nazism, reflecting a thick history of primordialism in the politics of racial and religious interests. (Moreno Esparza, 2015). In this research, the author aims to provide an overview of the religious issue manipulated by Marine Le Pen to enhance popularity for political purposes.

The second finding involves media texts that explicitly state the prohibition of the Hijab. This becomes a limitation to the existing multiculturalism in France, and data obtained from this aspect explains that the cultural limitation is gradually diminishing due to religious issues surrounding the Hijab ban. The intended limitation lies in the thin and conflict-prone boundary between Islamism, Radicalism, Islamophobia, and the prohibition of the Hijab. All these aspects are now considered similar, even by Marine Le Pen's group, and are included in the symbolic political basket (referred to by the author as Hate Politics). These issues are packaged and cooked as a means to shake Macron's leadership. Media, as a tool for conveying messages, should position

itself not as a supporter or a denier but as a space that creates a calm atmosphere, free from horizontal conflicts.

Text	Meaning and Context
Prohibition of Hijab	Contradictions arise with the culture and beliefs of society. The constructed context involves politics and power.
The prohibition of Hijab will be enforced by the police, similar to the use of seat belts.	Religious elements are juxtaposed with societal norms and safety regulations. The constructed context here revolves around discipline

Figure 1

The interconnection of Islam and multiculturalism is marked by the increasing wave of Islamophobia, a term that has been used to denote acts of intolerance, discrimination, unfounded fear, and racism against Islam and Muslims. In 2007, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, stated that "Bigotry and prejudice, especially towards Muslims, are common in Europe. Europeans are surprised when shown that bigotry, prejudice, and stereotypes are sometimes present in their attitudes toward others." The 2008 World Economic Forum's Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue indicates a rise in tensions between Islamic communities and the West. (John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin, 2011).

Connection to this, Marine Le Pen's statement seems to imply serious accusations regarding the position of Muslims in France. It is astonishing that a significant number of Muslims believe that the West does not respect Islam, while a contrasting view is maintained by many Westerners, who believe that they do respect Muslims. This goes beyond mere communication disturbance; the conceptual framework in the relationship between Muslims and France is still trapped in a circle of suspicion. Nevertheless, not all French citizens oppose, and there are some who still respect Islam by not supporting the ban on the Hijab. In terms of Symbolic Political Communication, there are aspects that help build a common foundation and broaden shared perspectives, but this occurs in the context of religion and not in the political domain. Conversely, the political realm is intertwined with religious elements to garner support in the 2022 elections. (National Research Council, 2001).

In this context, the media's stance concerning Marine Le Pen's statement appears

to be neutral towards the Muslim community in Europe. However, the repercussions of Marine Le Pen's statement give rise to a series of complex issues. There is no straightforward way to address pluralism, multiculturalism, and the future of Western societies without discussing the position of Islam and Muslims in the debate.

The same applies to the Muslim world. In an increasingly interconnected world, Islamophobia, like other forms of intolerance and discrimination, cannot be viewed in isolation from what is happening around us. For example, Islamophobia did not suddenly emerge after the events of 9/11; undoubtedly, there is a series of events behind it that prompted the occurrence of Islamophobia. (Khaled A. Beydoun, 2018). The scattered texts on social media are interpreted as symbols of political power, thereby generating meanings that describe the thoughts of individuals. This holds a special value for anyone expressing themselves on social media.
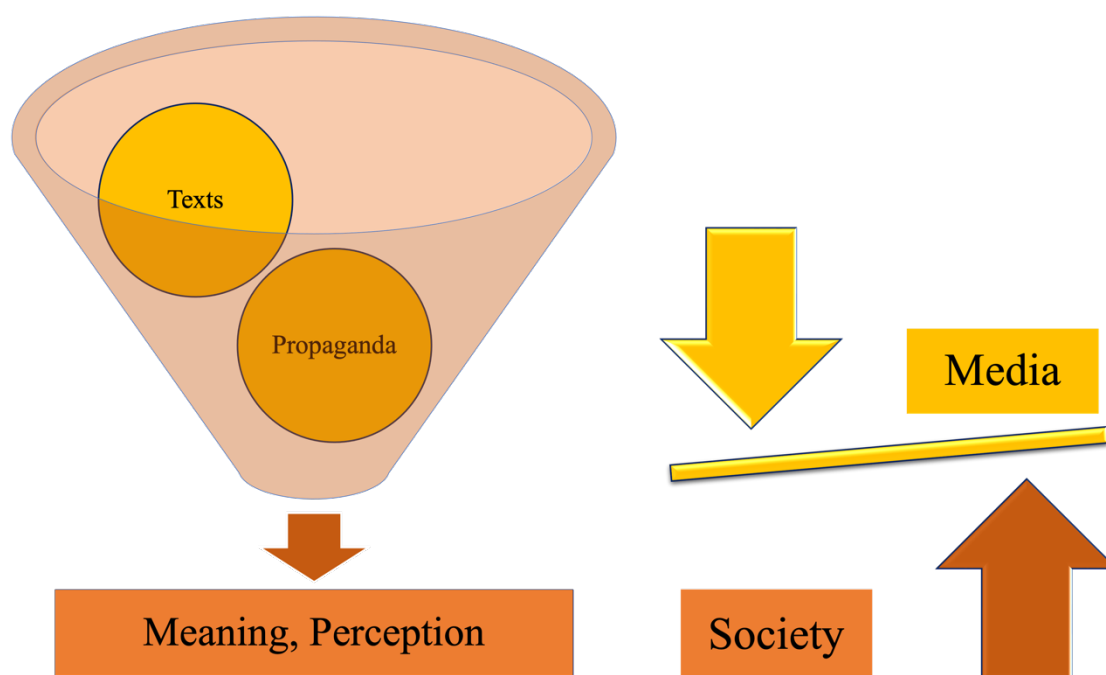

Figure 2

Propaganda and texts are within the scope of social media, resulting in meanings and interpretations that can be translated by anyone, depending on the context. The meanings generated by the media sometimes have two implications: first, to blow up the issue, and second, to blur the ongoing issue. To measure the discrimination occurring in France, there must be consistent policies encompassing culture, politics,

and the future of France. (Douglas Pratt and Rachel Woodlock, n.d.). As a minority ethnicity, the vulnerability of Islam within French society is considered disadvantageous. Islamophobia critically reaps controversy during Macron's term, depicting that Islam is not well-integrated and is perceived as a cultural threat by some members of society. (Group & Muslims, 2016). The Muslim population in France reaches six million, which is relatively small compared to the total population of France, totaling 67.8 million.

Symbolic politics indeed serves as a strategic tool to either decrease or increase someone's popularity, often achieved through the dissemination of controversial statements. In this context, the political analysis utilizes the symbol of banning the use of the Hijab by Marine Le Pen to boost her standing against Marcos. Symbol, epistemologically, represents a message conveyed through both textual and non-textual elements. In this analysis, the verbal expressions of Marine Le Pen serve as political symbols strategically employed to emphasize her political stance as a presidential candidate in France.

Islam is perceived as a symbol of extremism, and Marine Le Pen sees this as an opportunity to garner support for the 2022 elections, utilizing political propaganda disseminated through social media. Marine Le Pen is aware of the low integration challenges faced by European countries in accommodating the Muslim population. Therefore, she hopes to capitalize on her policy to secure victory in the presidential election. The lack of a unified legal and political framework regarding the protection of Islam becomes an opportunity to outshine Macron as the incumbent. This transcends mere politics; it becomes a matter of political strategy grounded in animosity towards specific ethnicities and religions. (John L. Esposito And Ibrahim Kalin, 2011)

The author contends that France's integration strategy has failed to instill a sense of loyalty to the international identity among Muslim subjects. Additionally, the high level of socio-economic losses faced by the Muslim community remains relatively elevated compared to the native population in France. The position of Islam, particularly with its Hijab, has been exploited by political elements, deeming the Hijab as a symbol of terrorism and danger, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 events. (Derek Chollet and James Goldgeir, 2008)

This argument indicates that European countries, especially France, perceive their relationship with the Muslim community as still threatened by terrorism, leading to an intensified dialogue with moderate elements within the Muslim community. Anti-discrimination laws, citizenship initiatives, and immigration and security policies

need to be tightened to prevent religious conflicts.

In the political context, there are evident weaknesses in the discussion. Politics, as a tool of democracy, should not employ cunning methods. France, being one of the democratic nations in Europe, should manage political preferences as the primary path towards collective prosperity, ensuring that political practices do not violate oaths and positions. The author tends to describe as if the loss of politics is due to religious interference. The evacuation of politics from the social and religious levels is a characteristic of the current conjuncture. Many uses of symbolic politics aim to produce regimes that suppress identity and societies that lack rules and political ethics. As a political entity with a legal concept, symbolization identifies it as a true form of tolerance to enhance convergence between the murky assumptions of democracy and the legitimacy of power (Houlding, 2006). However, what occurs implies a series of identification steps that transform politics into law and law into a divisive community.

The current issue is the point of antagonism in the political constellation in France, where civil rights to religious freedom are considered to undermine political arguments. According to the author, it is not about the difficulties people face in freely wearing the hijab; rather, it is a political issue. In the author's view, Marine Le Pen sacrifices a specific community to gain power under the pretext of combating Islamism. The anti-hijab movement is used to transform basic social practices, institutions, and regimes of visibility, so decisions or policies do not guarantee the basic rights of the French community. This needs to be monitored, as citizens with equality should not have their rights revoked for any reason; this is what is referred to as social welfare. (Colin S.Gray, 2007).

In an attempt to politicize Marine Le Pen's voice, the issue of identity is considered a singular point of leakage regarding religious and social violations, also seen as an act of harassment against certain groups. The author presents this argument based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), guiding the author to maintain arguments based on facts written in the media. Is this political propaganda? Certainly! Her criticism of the hijab is known to increase fears that Marine Le Pen will gradually eliminate Islam. Marine Le Pen's strategy shifts Macron's plan to maintain the hijab. If analyzed, Macron might support Marine Le Pen if he were on her side, but due to political competition, the hijab is used as a symbol to send a message to the world that France is not playing games against Islamization.

Hypertext propaganda can bring about changes in the behavior of French society. Of course, this is an assumption that has yet to be scientifically proven but can be observed empirically. French society that is anti-Islam will undoubtedly support Marine Le Pen, leading to a religious and political war, thus fearing that ethnic and religious divisions will further escalate. To change political behavior, there is no need to go through each one individually; just make statements in the mass media (Anthony R. Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson, 1997).

As seen in Figure 3, a foreign media outlet portrays Marine Le Pen's reason for banning the hijab as a fight against Islamization. This is a deliberate and widely crafted narrative aimed at deceiving the public and provoking sentiments to garner support.
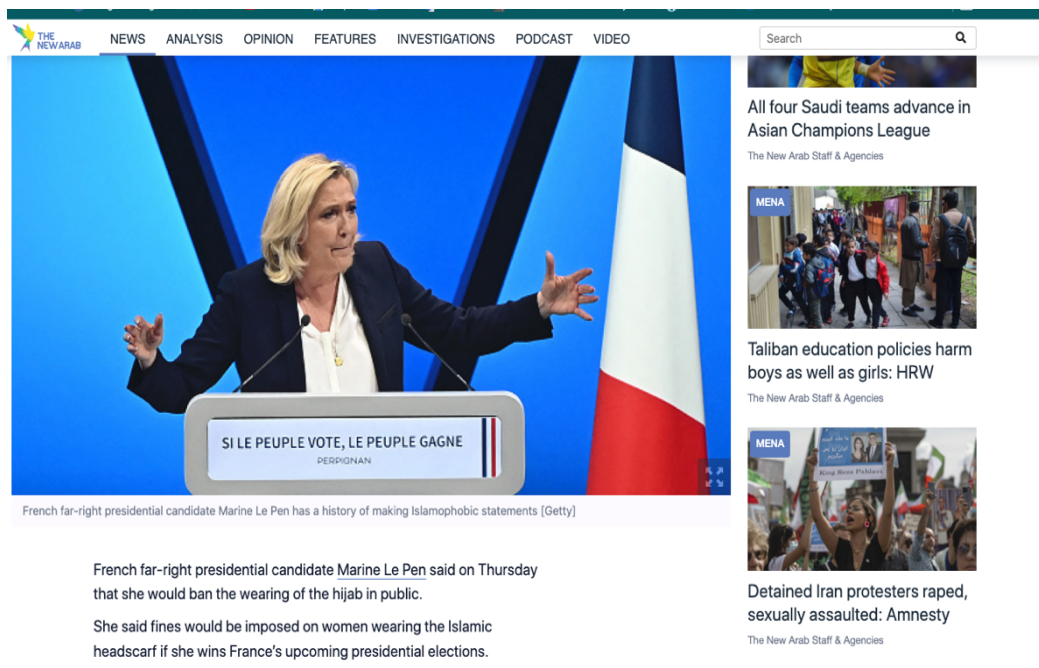

Figure 3

French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen history of making Islamophobic statements
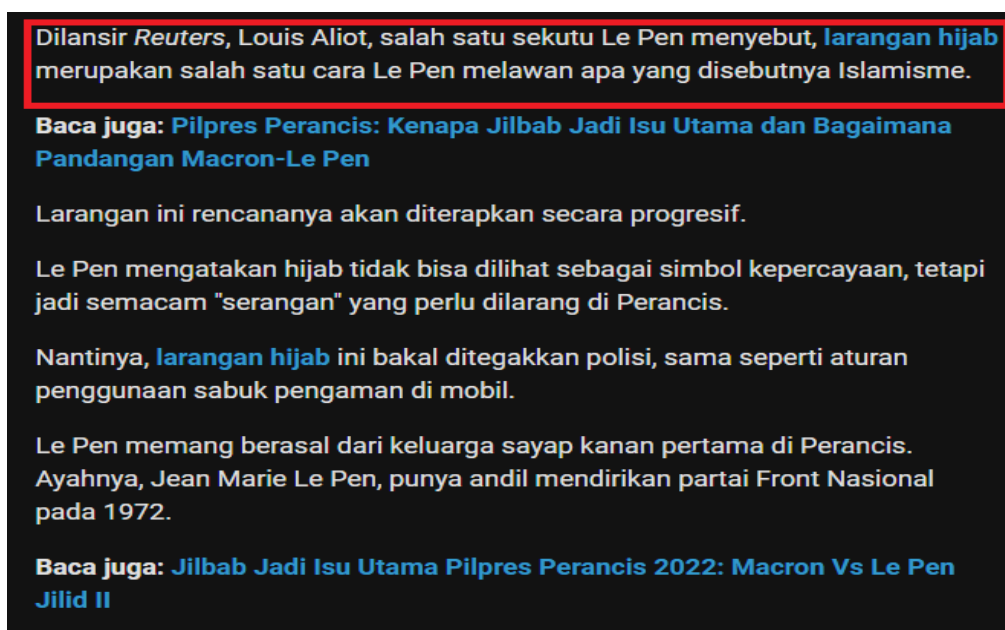Source; https://www.newarab.com/news/frances-le-pen-vows-ban-public-hijab-if-elected

Figure 4
News Regarding the Plan to Ban the Hijab by Le Pen
Source; https://www.kompas.com/global/read/2022/04/20/203000670/apa-alasan-capres-
perancis-marine-le-pen-ingin-melarang-hijab-

From all the results presented and discussed in several studies, the author concludes that, this is an aggressive war against Islam. Marine Le Pen may argue that France is not a Muslim country; however, the right to religious freedom in a country should be guaranteed by the government. Religion and the state are indeed supposed to be separated to avoid various controversies that could exacerbate internal issues. (Leonie B. Jackson, n.d.). The world views this as the universalization of metaphors or symbolism containing agitation. Political messages are mobilized by authorities and political experts to diminish trust in Islam. This request certainly creates tension from certain groups. While it might be acceptable as a personal request, as a political message, it can convey the idea that France is liberal and misogynistic. (Horror Journalism Practices in Jurnalrisa, 2021).

It is possible that Marine Le Pen's policy is considered a form of greater communication crime than contemporary selfishness. Marine Le Pen exploits the weaknesses and decay of French society's knowledge about Islam to garner votes for her political career. France will undergo moral depoliticization if this happens, a common mechanism that is always exploited, taken advantage of, and used as propaganda. This argument is certainly not justified because global trust will

experience a deficit, leading to the circulation of votes of no confidence in a government. (Moreno Esparza, 2015).

D. Conclusion

The ideas put forth by Marine Le Pen regarding Islam in the French political landscape are overall criticized as violations of cultural and political norms. The implementation of policies and communication in line with France's cultural diversity values is crucial. The increasing Islamophobia reflects disapproval toward the Muslim community, accompanied by rejection of Islam's efforts to uphold its religious values.

Marine Le Pen perceives Islam as a cultural threat and utilizes political propaganda, particularly through social media, to reinforce her views. Despite the Muslim population reaching six million, Le Pen regards them as symbols of extremism, creating social inequality and dissatisfaction that could potentially impact future social stability.

France's integration strategy towards the Muslim community has not succeeded in creating the necessary international identity, leaving behind disloyalty and dissatisfaction that could potentially influence future social and political stability.

Limitations of this study include a lack of direct focus on individual Muslim experiences and insufficient consideration of diverse political perspectives. For the future, more in-depth and inclusive research is needed to explore the direct impacts of policies on the daily lives of Muslim communities. Further analysis of social media's role as a political propaganda tool and a holistic approach considering global, social, and economic factors should also be considered for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of this issue.

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