

BANNING VEIL IN FRANCE: A DEFIANCE OF BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS PARADIGM-A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WEEKLY MAGZINES FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE UNITED STATES

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France, a secular state, claims to bestow freedom of religious practices, but the ban on wearing veil by Muslim women seems contradictory to the principle of Laicite (separate State from the Church). This is a debatable issue since Islam is the second most practiced religion in France. In view of September 11 attack this study examines perspective of the Western press which claims to be free, independent and follows objectivity, on French government's position banning wearing of veil, which is the basic human right to practice their religion. Content analysis was used to scan and compare 42 articles on the veil issue carried out in 'The Economist' and 'Time', published from the UK and US respectively from 2004 to 2010. The hypothesis 'Western press is presenting the issue of veil banning in France in a neutral way' was tested by One Way ANOVA and rejected. The result also reveals that British magazine was more biased in its coverage as compared to the American. The study concludes that these magazines were not practicing freedom and their articles supporting French government's stance and ignoring human rights.

Key words: Press Coverage, Banning of the Veil, France, Western Press, Human Rights and Media.

Introduction

The attack of 11 September 2001, being a unique act of aggression, was reported by media on a massive scale. Round-the-clock satellite television news, instant worldwide reaction and debate made possible by the Internet affected the entire world generally but Muslims particularly. Soon after the incident, Islam was linked to terrorism. Negative stereotypes of Muslims were reported in media and security measures created Islamophobia among the Western nations. In the same vein it raised the issue of Muslim identity as well as social and religious discrimination in the West. A study focused on 'Islamophobia, a dread or hatred of Islam', conducted in United Kingdom indicated that discrimination against Muslims has increased in recent years.¹

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Controversy surfaced on March 2004 when a French woman was banned to wear headscarf on public places². On the recommendation of an inter-ministerial commission established by the president to study secularism, integration, and the place of religion in the country, the French Government in March 2004, passed a law prohibiting the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols including Muslim headscarves, Jewish skullcaps, *Sikhsgurpal* and large crosses--by employees and students in public schools. In June 2004, the European Commission on Human Rights ruled that the law implemented in September 2004, did not violate the freedom of religion. Some Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh leaders, human rights groups, and foreign governments raised voices concerns about the law's potential to restrict religious freedom. Further on 14 September 2010, Senate of France passed another act of parliament resulting in the ban on the wearing of face-covering headgear, including masks, helmets, balaclavas, *Niqab* and other veils covering face in public places, except under specified circumstances. The ban also applies to the *Burqa*, a full-body covering, if it covers the face too.

Indeed, the ban was imposed by France on wearing of all face-covering headgear and headscarves, *Sikhsgurpal* and skullcap of Jews as they all symbolize different religions and most of the criticism was diverted towards Muslim women for wearing veils (*Hijab*). Global politics linking Islam to terrorism complicated legitimacy of symbolic representations of Muslim identity, as indicated by the legislation banning veil in public schools and other state institutions in the West. Association of veil with political concerns was also evident in the news media. Veil as a symbol of oppression was evident in the French media. Dramatic and extraordinary events have power to change public opinion as well as attitudes towards certain events and media plays an important role in this regard. A visible change in public opinion towards Muslims after 9/11 was observed and ban on veil is considered a continuous link.³

The Guardian (2001) wrote 'the Islamic dress code, in particular for Muslim women, is often subject to negative connotations'. Some commentators see it as an instrument of oppression and persecution, linked with suffering which impedes the personal growth and social development of women. Some support the banning of the headscarf (for example in public

institutions including schools), as ‘a vital protection of young women against a repressive symbol forced on them by a male-dominated society’. Ahmed Leila (1992) argues that the veil is now laden with meanings. She contends ‘it is just one issue in Muslim women’s struggle for equality and that it is as much a matter of women’s rights as the social prescription of particular items of clothing to Western women’s struggles’. She considers women (Muslim as well as non- Muslim) should reject the Andros centrism and misogyny of whatever culture they find themselves in, but this does not mean that they must adopt the values of another culture or reject Arab culture or Islam comprehensively.⁴ United Nations Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 22 indicates:

‘for most people, religion is more than a set of beliefs, given that they often translate their beliefs into action. People choose to observe their beliefs in a variety of ways including the construction of places of worship, the display of symbols, the observance of dietary regulations, and participation in rituals associated with certain stages of life’.⁵

The head covering and wearing of distinct cloths are also the means in which people observe their religious beliefs. Many people from a broad range of faiths wear religious symbols or dress as a manifestation of their religious beliefs, whether from religious requirement or personal choice. For example, Sikh men wear turbans; Christians may choose to wear a cross; and some Brethren and Hasidic Jewish communities prescribe strict dress codes. The origin and purpose of wearing religious dress or symbols differs from religion to religion. Often within religions there are different elements or sects who adhere to stricter dress codes than others.⁶

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom expressed concern that the so-called ‘headscarf ban’ would violate France’s obligations as a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as other international law commitments that guarantee the freedom to manifest belief both publicly and privately.⁷ International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRF Act) designates the promotion of religious freedom for all persons as a core objective of US foreign policy. US advocacy for religious freedom is grounded advance respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms worldwide. The vast majority of the

world's population professes some religious belief or identification. The right to believe or not to believe, without fear of government interference or restriction, provides an essential foundation for human dignity, robust civil society, and sustainable democracy.⁸ This principle holds a central place in American culture, values, and history. It is also a global concern; both the United Nations Charter references to religious rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights are more significant. They articulate the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief.

Article 18 of 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights' European convention on human rights states 'everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change religion or belief and freedom to manifest religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance'. Even the debate over the dress code is addressed by the human right commission, including that every individual is free to wear modest dress in keeping with a faith without hurting any other community.⁹

The rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, manifestation of religion or belief and the rights of minorities to profess and practice their religion in community with others are also contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). It's article 18 (3) and 27 state 'while the freedom of thought, conscience and religion cannot be derogated from the right to manifest religion or belief can be limited, but only if such limitations are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others'. In terms of women's rights, a fundamental aspect is individual autonomy and choice. These are violated both where women are forced to wear a head covering and where they are banned from doing so.¹⁰

Both men and women are required to dress modestly in Islamic society. Traditional and contemporary forms of Islamic dress conform to a general understanding of modesty based on the Hadith, popular tradition and traditional forms of costume construction. The body is covered in varying degrees depending on whether one is alone, with a spouse, among relatives or friends of the same sex, or in a mixed setting. While the Islamic dress code applies to both men and women, it is Muslim woman who wears

the face veil (niqab), headscarf or burqa and has recently become the focus of attention in a number of countries and in a variety of contexts. For example, French legislation to ban all ‘ostentatious’ religious symbols in public schools sparked enormous debate about the right to wear the headscarf.

France is a secular state and claims to grant human rights to its citizens and immigrants under the Article 10 of the Declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen: ‘Nobody is to be held accountable for his/her opinions, even religious ones, provided that their manifestation does not upset the order established by the law’¹¹. In view of the Declaration every French woman should be free to cover or uncover her body parts. Islam is the second most widely practiced religion in France and Ipsos/MORI poll in 2011 showed that 3% of their population proclaimed themselves as Muslims.¹² It may be noted from his document that France has the largest proportion of Muslims in the European context, followed by the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Italy.

The controversy raised the question of assimilation of Muslim minorities in Western nations, national identities of Western nations, protection of basic human rights and potential threat of Islamic terrorism. Ban on the veil also initiated debate on religious discrimination, violation of basic human rights to practice religion and civil rights in France.

In line with the above debate the present study aims to analyse the Western media coverage of the banning of the veil in France with reference to human rights. It also investigates if the Western media was neutral in its coverage and adopted a balanced approach to give equal treatment to the government and victim standpoints. Keeping in view the nature of the study hypotheses outlined were:

Hypothesis H₁: Western press (magazines only) is neutral in covering the banning of the veil in France.

Hypothesis H₂: American magazine’s coverage of banning of the veil in France is more neutral as compared to European magazine.

To investigate the Western perspective on the issue, two weekly magazines of elite press were analyzed including ‘The Economist’ and ‘Time,’ published from the UK and US respectively from 2004 to 2010. Altchull (1984) defines elite press as objective, independent, responsible and enjoying vast

circulation. To mark the objectivity of covering the controversy under study all the related articles published in selected magazines during six years were examined.

Studies on veil and media

Islamic Fiqh describes ‘the ultimate goal of veil is righteousness of the heart’.¹³ The purpose of veil in Islam is primarily to inspire modesty; both in men and women. Women are cautioned in the Holy *Qur’an*, Surah Al-ahdab, Verse No: 59, to lower their gazes and cover their heads and to pull their coverings over their bosoms. Men are also instructed to lower their gazes and to observe the dress limitations.¹⁴ Hadith narrations are also focusing this Islamic value as an obligation for Muslim woman to reach the level of dignity as a respectable member of society. Numerous studies have been conducted by scholars of different schools of thought on the wearing of a veil by Muslim women.

In contemporary Western media, the veil remains a symbol of Muslim women and their oppression by tribal, primitive, and conservative upholders of Islam.¹⁵

The association of Muslim women with the veil persists in western popular imagination which feeds and fuels the prevailing feature in the discourse surrounding orientalist women such as oppressed and tradition-bound existence. This feature often serves to underpin the ‘rescue’ motif. In this motif, the white male explorer seeks to rescue the imperilled coloured woman and save her from the brutality of her cultural traditions.

Studies have shown that Muslim women do not necessarily associate veil with oppression or gender equality while refuting traditional gender roles.¹⁶ A study ‘veiling in France’ explores how Muslim immigrant women from North Africa view themselves and the veil in French society. Findings reveal that younger and more educated women see the veil ‘as a matter of personal liberty and cultural expression. Killian points out that these women have also adapted to French culture because they use a distinctly Western discourse of individual rights and personal freedom to support their position.’¹⁷

The research studies have well-documented that veil by Muslim women in Europe and America affirms their ethno-religious identity and minority status. In fact, the subject of veiling and its place in the educational system particularly in the European

setting has been the focus of intense debates, in the light of religious rights, human rights and secularism.

A study explored media coverage to Afghan veiled women concluded 'media was bias in the selection of images of women throwing off their burqas, almost 60% of the women were covered but the media was so obsessed with unveiling as a symbol of success of western interventionism that headlines and images were highlighted'. Byng examined the US media representation of the ideological interests of Western nations concerning symbolic representations of Islam in public following 11 September 2001 and concludes that American newspaper media positioned France, Britain, and the USA as ideologically alike in spite of their different framings of religious freedom. Reporting supported the interests, values, and hegemony of the West with representations that created the common sense that Muslim women would not veil in public. The tenacity of beliefs shown in western media indicates that 'Islamic veiling is intrinsically incompatible with the women's agency in the construction of their identities'.¹⁸

An impact study 'representation of veil through media' confirms that media users perceived veil as antisocial, defiant, threat and oppressive to women.¹⁹ Minorities and immigrants are generally portrayed as a problem or a threat, and often associated with crime, violence, conflict, and unacceptable cultural differences.²⁰ Negative media portrayal of veil and social exclusion of veiled Muslim women corresponded to efforts to prohibit veiling in Canadian and French public schools.²¹

Method

Content analysis was applied to scan and compare the Western press covering the issue of veil ban in France. Articles of 'The Economist' and 'Time', magazines (print edition) during 2004 and 2010 were used for this analysis because both reputed publications have the ability to influence public opinion. 'The Economist' boasts of having influential executives and policy-makers among its readers whereas 'Time' has the world's *largest circulation* as a weekly news *magazine* and has a readership of 25 million, 20 million of which are based in the United States (psaresearch 2013). The selected time span is significant as veil ban has its roots since 2004 when French Parliament approved a Bill named 'Application of the Principle of Secularity'. This new law enforced on 2 September 2004, banning all 'ostentatious' religious symbols in

state schools and the enactment denies Muslim schoolgirls the right to wear the 'hijab' (traditional Muslim headscarf) in French public schools. The new enactment stirred controversy within the Islamic world where the law considered an example of 'Islamophobia' and the West's intolerance towards the religion of Islam.²² Whereas 2010 was a crucial year when the French Parliament passed an Act resulting in the ban on the wearing of face-covering headgear, including marks, helmets, balaclava, *Niqab* and other veils covering face in public places, except under specified circumstances. The ban also applies to the *Burqa*, a full-body covering, if it covers the face.

The methodology is divided into two sections. The first section is quantitative, where the number of articles appeared in 'The Economist' and 'Time' were recorded in response to veil ban in France and determined particular patterns in relation to language and the basic human right of freedom to practice their religion. All issues of 'The Economist' and 'Time' magazines from 2004 to 2010 were looked at and 42 articles were recorded with reference to the topic. The study then classified recorded articles as positive, negative, neutral or balanced by an assessment on the basis of language used and the way these are constructed.

- **Positive (+)**

Positive articles in the database are those that highlight veil as acceptable and veiled women have equal civil and human rights to practice religion like French women, support veil as the modest dress of Muslim women, equally draw attention to ban on other religious symbols e.g. Sikhgarpal and Jew skull cap and observe objectivity and use non-inflammatory language.

- **Negative (-)**

There are articles that reveal a lack of understanding of the issue, represent veil as symbol of humiliation, oppression, disgrace of women, threat to secularism, mark of separation, obstacle to assimilation of Muslim women in French society and represent veiled women as subordinate to men and isolated mortals. Articles ignore ban on other religious symbols, support ban as it protects sovereignty of the State and provide biased information and disseminate notion of Islamophobia.

- ***Neutral/ Balance (0)***

Articles that are neither positive nor negative, and give equal and objective coverage to victims and French government's stance regarding banning of veil.

Statistical Test 'One Way ANOVA' was applied to test reliability of the hypothesis on 0.05 as level of significance.

Bar charts were used to illustrate numerical findings.

The second section comprises of qualitative analysis of the patterns established by the quantitative analysis. The significance of the articles written in response to the ban on veil in France and how this shapes the issue with reference to the basic human rights of freedom to practice his/her religion represented overall in these magazines' articles was analyzed. This part not only focused on what has been written about the issue but assessed the language used which directly or indirectly contributes to the construction of positive, negative or neutral representation of the issue. This means that adjectives used to describe the issue affects the tone of the article. Also, the inclusion or non-inclusion of various voices and opinions, such as veiled Muslim women or their supporters contribute to how the account is constructed. The qualitative findings helped to determine the overall impression and meanings the readers are likely to derive from these articles.

Findings and Analysis

This section has two parts. The first part, quantitative analysis contains a series of figures (bar charts) to determine patterns in articles. The second part, qualitative analysis examines theme in detail i.e. representation of the issue with reference to basic human freedom that was identified as a result of reading through each article in the database for the quantitative analysis.

Quantitative Analysis of the Articles Published in Selected Magazines

Quantitative findings show that total 42 articles were published in the selected magazines on banning of veil in France from 2004 to 2010. The different styles in covering the issue by 'The Economist' and 'Time' reflects the general approaches of the two magazines. The bar chart (Figure 1) makes clear that 'The Economist' published 20 articles (47%) whereas 'Time' published 22 articles (52%). This indicates that 'Time' gave little more coverage to the issue as compared to 'The Economist' but on the whole this issue did not get large coverage by the Western media.

S No	Name of Journal	Percentage
01	Time	52%
02	The Economist	47%

Figure 1: Articles Published on Issue ‘Ban on Veil in France’ in ‘The Economist’ and ‘Time’

Analysis of articles in ‘The Economist’ shows that 4(20%) articles belonged to the positive category, 11(55%) fell in negative category and 5(25%) were related to neutral category i.e. covered the issue in a balanced way (Figure 2). The data depicts that most articles published in ‘The Economist’ were negative and provided biased information. It represented veil as symbol of threat to secularism which disseminated notion of Islamophobia, consequently did not create better understanding of the issue. The findings also demonstrate that only one-fifth of the articles were objective and neutral in their approach and discussed the issue with reference to human rights.

Name of Journal	Percentage of Articles Neutral	Percentage of Articles Positive	Percentage of Articles Negative
The Economist	25%	20%	55%

Figure 2: Articles Published on Issue ‘Ban on Veil in France’ in ‘The Economist’

Evaluation of articles published by ‘Time’ on the issue during specified period revealed that 5(23%) articles belong to positive category and 8(36%) fell in negative category however, maximum 9(41%) were identified as neutral (Figure 3). This elucidates that most articles by ‘Time’ magazine portrayed objective and balanced picture of the issue. It also published 5 articles which discussed the issue in the light of basic human rights and freedom of practicing their religion and tried to create better understanding of the issue. But one third of its articles represented veil a threat to the Western society.

Name of Journal	Percentage of Articles Neutral	Percentage of Articles Positive	Percentage of Articles Negative
Time	41%	23%	36%

Figure 3: Articles Published on Issue ‘Ban on Veil in France’ in ‘Time’.

Figure 4 shows the comparative picture of both magazines’ coverage. It is visible that overall, ‘Time’ magazine’s representation of the issue ‘ban on veil in France’ was balanced

and neutral (41%) as compared to ‘that of ‘The Economist’ (only 25%). Results show that American magazine has covered the issue objectively and in less discriminatory manner in comparison to European magazine.

Name of Journal	Percentage of Articles Neutral	Percentage of Articles Positive	Percentage of Articles Negative
The Economist	25%	20%	55%
Time	41%	23%	36%

Figure 4: Comparison of the Articles Published in 'The Economist' and 'Time'

Data indicates that during six years of time, 288 issues were published by each magazine which makes 576 issues in total. Articles published with reference to the topic under discussion were 42 only which confirms that these elite magazines did not give a large coverage to the issue.

Qualitative Analysis of articles published in selected magazines

This section covers qualitative analysis of patterns established by the quantitative analysis. The qualitative findings helped in determining overall impression and meanings the readers are likely to derive from articles published in targeted magazines on banning of veil in France.

The qualitative analysis of articles revealed that provocative language was generally used about the veil, which is evident from the findings that 55% articles by ‘The Economist’ and 36% by ‘Time’ fell in negative category. The following terms were normally used by both the magazines to describe veil; ‘veritable walking prisons’, ‘a coffin that kills individual liberties’, ‘mark of subservience’, ‘a sign of debasement of women’, ‘symbol of death’, ‘a danger to society as a hindrance to the process of assimilation’, ‘sign of the political exploitation of Islam’, etc.

Most articles published in ‘The Economist’ and a few in ‘Time’ during the specified period endorsed the French parliamentarians’ stance and how they described the veil. ‘The Economist’ published an article on 12 October 2006 which said that;

‘the row over veils has aroused massive public interest and is starting to resemble the anguished debate that took place in

France over the ban on headscarves in schools. It began when Jack Straw, leader of the House of Commons, revealed on October 5th that he asked veiled women who came to see him at his constituency in Blackburn to show their faces. Mr Straw said that he opposed passing laws on what to wear, but that veils make talking harder and emphasis separateness, and are therefore bad for community relations. He was backed this week by Gordon Brown, the chancellor of the exchequer, who added that immigrants should learn English and familiarise themselves with the Magna Carta’.

The article further wrote;

‘Compared with previous clashes between the government and Muslims, the response to Mr Straw's plea for visible noses and mouths has been muted. The Muslim Council of Britain said Mr Straw was playing into the hands of people who hated Islam’.

The French President was quoted by ‘The Economist’ on 25 June 2009 and 14 January 2010 as saying:

‘The burqa was not welcome on French soil; it is not a religious sign, but rather a sign of subservience, a sign of debasement of women’.

Same article also reported a prominent Muslim politician Fadela Amara, the cities minister and the founder of a women's rights group as saying;

‘A coffin that kills individual liberties and a sign of the political exploitation of Islam’.

Another article published in ‘The Economist’ on 14 January 2010 said that mainstream French Muslim leaders are clear about its origins. It wrote;

‘It is “an invasion of Salafism”, an ultra-puritan branch of radical Islam’.

The deputies of a parliamentary inquiry called veil as;

‘Veritable walking prisons’. (The Economist, 25 June 2009)

Whereas ‘The Economist’ 23 November 2006 reported that Britain’s former Prime Minister Tony Blair termed veil as a;

‘Mark of separation and testimony to the oppression of Muslim Women’.

It is evident that by and large these articles shared the statements of politicians, parliamentarians and specialist of the Muslim affairs and did not contain any healthy debate about the

concept of veil. They either discussed veil as symbol of threat to secularism or highlighted government debate on the issue and ignored to discuss it with reference to 'The Universal Human Rights' and 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,' which bestow human rights and freedom to practice religion. The coverage of veiling practices of Muslim women also seems to link veiling to the fear or threat that provoked by the attacks of 11 September 2001 and Islamic terrorism. Findings show that both magazines coverage supported and reinforced the France government's stance more as compared to the victims' stand point. It can be said that Western magazines coverage was imbalanced and lacked explanation in the wider context as it did not examine the issue in the framework of human rights and opinions of veiled women.

'The Economist' and 'Time' (Time, 03 May 2010. The Economist, 17 June 2010) published statement of Dounia Bourar, a specialist in French Muslim Affairs Crumbly (Council of the State –an independent body that advises French government on the legality of policies);

'There's a real sentiment that Islam in France is now officially under suspicion--or attack--and this ban will drive some angry and brooding Muslims toward the very extremist cults forcing women under veils'. She told a parliamentary inquiry that 'although no more than 2,000 women in France covered their face, the phenomenon is growing. Many of the veiled women were young. Intelligence sources say two-thirds are French nationals, and nearly a quarter converts. Many come from North Africa, where there is no face-covering tradition.'

This report adds to the misunderstanding that French government imposed ban on veil out of fear to control the expansion of conversion of non- Muslims to Muslims. This 'fear-based' coverage entailed that 'we' should 'fear' 'them' because they are fighting against Western culture and values. Such comments disseminates notion of Islamophobia, which consequently cannot create better understanding rather help in giving impetus to religious and social discrimination against Muslims. Prior studies also validate that veil is stated as a symbol of debasement and danger to assimilation of Muslims in the Western society. Media portrayals are central to creating common sense of understandings of a wide range of social events and issues including veil by

Muslim women in the West (Altheide, 2000). There was yet another allusion in 'New York Time' and 'Washington Post' stories about the veiling practices of Muslim women – one that linked veiling to the fear and threat that were provoked by the attacks of 11 September 2001 and Islamic terrorism (Byng, 2010: 119).

Both the magazines ('The Economist' 22 April 2010 and 'Time' 23 April 2010) also projected the socialist parliamentarian Pierre Moscovici's fear;

'We're talking about maximum 2000 women, meaning this law risks to reignite conflicts between religions and communities. I fear this law stigmatizes (Muslims) and it will be inapplicable'.

Many critics perceived this ban not as hurdle for Muslim women only but an attack on Islam as well. A statement published on 17 September 2009 in 'The Economist' by Ms Heremans says;

'A number of very conservative families moved their daughters to the school. By 2007, about 15 girls came to school wearing all concealing robes and gloves, with only their faces showing. I said you are stigmatizing yourselves; you're breaking with society by wearing those clothes'.

The coverage of veiling practices of Muslim women also seems to link veiling to the fear or threat that provoked by the attacks of 11 September 2001 and Islamic terrorism. Certainly, this type of coverage cannot create a better understanding of the issue but enhances the fear, hatred and religious discrimination among communities.

Findings revealed that not a single article highlighting ban on other religious symbols like Sikhgarpal and Skull Cap of Jews positively or negatively was published in both the magazines. The magazines focused ban on veil by Muslim women only and ignored the wearing of other religious symbols and face-covering headgear, including marks, helmets, balaclava, and other veils covering face in public places. This is an example of biasness of the Western media towards Islam and veiled Muslim women.

The quantitative findings divulged that in some of the articles the approach of 'The Economist' was neutral and positive whereas 'Time' remained neutral in most of its articles published on the targeted issue. In few articles they published supportive statements for the victims including US President Barak Obama statement;

‘It is important for the Western countries to avoid impeding Muslim citizens from practicing religion as they see fit for instance by dictating what clothes a Muslim should wear’ (25 June 2009).

‘The Economist’ also published comments by Marnia Larreg, an Algerian Professor of Sociology and a supportive feminist’s on 3 September 2009;

‘Democratic governments should not impose dress code by law. Veil is a form of empowerment for Muslim women, and who dismiss charges of sexual oppression as elitist western concepts’.

Dounia Bourzar, told and ‘The Economist’ published on 20 June 2009;

‘Any public ban on veil risks being unconstitutional’. ‘The burqa debate is not secularity vs Islam but manipulation and oppression vs dignity’.

Similarly ‘Time’ on 24 November 2006 published the statement of Government spokesman LCU Chatel Crumley;

‘It took aim at a symbol of a community’s withdrawal and rejection of our values and a violation of the dignity of women’. He earlier said ‘coverings symbolize modesty, humility, devotion to their faiths and subservience to no one but to their God’.

It also highlighted the statement of Salma Yaqoob, a councillor in Birmingham;

‘Wearing the veil is a private matter’. (The Economist, 12 October 2006).

The findings indicate that the magazines criticized the ban too but their ratio is far less in comparison with the articles encouraging the ban on veil in France. Nevertheless ‘Time’ remained more neutral than ‘The Economist’.

Hypothesis Testing

Statistical test ‘ONE WAY ANOVA’ was applied to examine the hypotheses. Hypothesis H₁: Western press (magazines only) is neutral in covering the banning of the veil in France.

Hypothesis H₂: American magazine’s coverage on banning of the veil in France is more neutral as compared to European magazine.

The results showed (Table 1) sig. value is 0.32 with degree of freedom two, which is greater than set level of significance 0.05 so

it rejects alternate hypothesis H_1 and accepts null hypothesis H_0 . The Western press (magazines only) is not neutral in covering the banning of the veil in France. Thus, it concludes that the Western magazine's coverage is found to be biased regarding the targeted issue.

The H_2 : American magazine's coverage on banning of the veil in France is more neutral as compared to European magazine is accepted through the value of F ratio and null hypothesis was rejected. The value of F was 1.151 which is less than two. The true variance showed difference between groups and within groups was also not significant. The European magazine did not portray ban on veil in France in a neutral way as compared to the American press. Results showed that 'Time' gave more neutral coverage to the issue as compared to 'The Economist.'

Table 1: Hypotheses Test by One Way Anova

Magazines	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.584	02	0.292	1.151	0.327
Within Groups	9.892	39	0.254		
Total	10.476	41			

Conclusion

Though the Western press claims to be one of the most proponents of the freedom of expression, yet the analysis in the wake of the study under consideration reveals that the reporting by the European magazine was not free of bias regarding veil ban on the Muslim women in France. It was evident from the analysis of articles published in both the selected leading magazines of the world were slanted, used provocative language and projected stereotype approaches regarding wearing of the veil. Instead of digging deep into the concept of the veil and its ban, the magazines based their articles merely on statements. However, the coverage on veil ban in France in 'Time' magazine was balanced as compared to 'The Economist' magazine to influence readers but it disregarded human rights and freedom of expression and freedom in practicing religion.

It is evident from the analysis that 'The Economist' magazine projected the Western perspective of the veil ban by the French

government while ignoring the basic human rights of the veiled women living there. Instead of promoting religious harmony, both the magazines presented veil as the tool to disintegrate the French society. The veiled women were presented as alien and threat to the Western culture. The analysis puts forward that both these magazines promoted hazards of the veil, which gave vent to the detrimental thoughts against the Muslim women in a multi-cultural society of France. Negative portrayal of the Muslims has been one of the hottest topics for the Western media since 9/11 in 2001 and both the magazines in question toed the similar lines to defame them.

The present study is based on data collected and examined from the content of a magazines published from the UK and the other from the US. Hence it is unfair to promote a general perception about the Western press. However, the study concludes that the European magazine was not objective in covering veil ban on the Muslim women in France yet the American magazine's coverage was relatively neutral.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following;

- This study has applied content analysis however semiotic and critical discourse analysis can also be used
- France is a multi-cultural society but perceptions about Muslims in this society have not been debated as yet. In future, following the notion of multi-culturalism, the veiled Muslim women should be interviewed to come across their point of view.
- Future research can also focus on pictorial display of veiled Muslim women in the press.

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