Muslim Women in the Spanish Press: the Persistence of Subaltern Images

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In: Faegheh Shirazi (edited) *Images of Muslim Women in War Crisis.* Austin: The University of Texas Press.

Prior to March 11, 2004, Muslim women were generally depicted by the Spanish press as subordinate and submissive. This chapter explores how and in what ways the terrorist attack in Madrid impacted the media's representation of Muslim women. As I began researching this topic, the assumption was that their image had been re-framed as part of a larger threatening aggressor group: Muslims. If this were the case, it might coincide with the new forms of Islamophobia that already had been identified in Europe. The metamorphosis from an old Islamophobia anchored in colonial relations to a new breed, tied to the attacks and to identifying Islam with terrorism (Geisser, 2003), would be of primary interest. Had the events of March 11 eradicated the subordinate image of Muslim women, supplanting it with a new and more threatening image—that of a veiled aggressor?

Islamophobia: A New Brand of Racism

To begin with, it seemed evident that the train bombings had to some degree transformed Maurophobia, a phenomenon closely tied to Spain's colonial and post-colonial relationships with Morocco,[1] into Islamophobia. Unlike Maurophobia, in which Islam was never a relevant factor, Islamophobia (as a new type of racism) used Islam alone as a primary basis for discrimination. According to Pnina Werbner:

[1] This idea, supported by Martín Corrales (2004), implies that being Moroccan connotes a series of characteristics that justify exclusion. This construct dates from Spain's first incursions into Morocco.

> What we have, then, uniquely in the case of contemporary Islam, is an oppositional hegemonic bloc which includes intellectual elites and the consumerist masses, as well as 'real' violent racists, like members of the British National Party, who exploit anti-Muslim discourses to target Muslims in particular (as statistics show) for racial attacks.

What is the media's role in all of this? Discourse is the form of racism through which the élites explain themselves, according to Van Dijk (2006). The press writes and gathers, in different genres, the constructions and images of Islam. In fact, they naturalize them and make them appear to be consensual questions, which ensures their legitimate reproduction.

Moreover, a coterie of "specialists" have begun to proliferate, representing themselves as the expert voices on Islam in various news publications. This is as common in other European nations as it is in Spain. For example, Geisser (2003) points to the French intellectual who has created discourse that "naturalizes" exclusion, contributing significantly to Islamophobia. This type of specialization has also arisen in Germany (see Hafez, Hörner and Klemm, 2000).

In Spain, journalists pontificate on Islam when, in fact, they may have no real personal experience or expertise in this area. Each of Spain's major newspapers includes a staff of writers generally acknowledged as academically qualified and intellectually capable. With the exception of one author at *ABC*, however, these are persons whose academic and/or professional backgrounds stray far from Islamic studies; i.e., they are not specialists in the field.

To make matters worse, the general tendency of the press is to lean right, especially in regard to immigration issues—an unfortunate phenomenon pointed out by Van Dijk in his assessment of the Dutch case.[2] As immigration concerns become politicized in Spain and as the presence of terrorist groups wreak havoc in the name of

Islam, Spanish newspapers have promoted an ultraconservative level of discourse. A newspaper's tendency to voice concerns on behalf of the political right reinforces and legitimizes the sensation of a threat, one of the main thematic categories of racism (Van Dijk, 2007).

Furthermore, everything that refers to Moroccans—to *moros*—the secular object of phobia in Spain, leaves its stain on Islam and is perceived as Muslim. An increasingly collective sense of fear coupled with vague, implied threats lends legitimacy to Islamophobia which its ancestor Maurophobia never enjoyed.

Muslim Women and Journalistic Discourse

From the beginning of Europe's relationship with the Middle East, the West has used the theme of discrimination to further its own political agendas. European travelers, politicians and writers have labeled Muslim women as oppressed. Their observations of this particular Arab-Muslim social construct has facilitated arguments regarding the overall inferiority of Arabs and Muslims (See Ahmed 1993; Abu Lughod 2002; Ramírez, 2006) and allowed colonial masters to condemn the conquered peoples. Another overriding Western theme, which buttressed the belief in Arab inferiority, concerned the incompatibility of democratic values and Islam (Said, 2005).

For the first time in Spain's history, the March 11 attack showed a Muslim woman, the only one accused, cloaked in aggressiveness. Up to that point, the press had depicted Muslim women as subordinate and powerless, stereotypes that suddenly conflicted with this newer, assertive image. The headscarf, in particular, received significant scrutiny. Muslim women wearing a headscarf represented all that was rural, ignorant, and rigid. The Spanish press viewed the headscarf as nothing less than a symbol of obscurantism and portrayed the women wearing headscarves as victims of

[2] Van Dijk (2006) notes that when Dutch newspapers began to disassociate themselves from (arguing against) racism, they simultaneously began to support anti-immigration policies.

behind-the-scenes manipulation—never once entertaining the possibility that the headscarf might be a well-considered, highly personal decision. Through the lens of the Spanish press, one habitually viewed Muslim women in contexts of instability, passivity and poverty, contexts that seemed incompatible with a newer more assertive image. Could these women in headscarves, portrayed by the press as hopelessly victimized, be moving beyond the 'oppressed' stereotype? Given that the Muslim headscarf consistently attracted media attention and debate, I decided to base a substantive portion of the chapter on news articles addressing this very issue.

Three Spanish newspapers were analyzed: *El País*, *El Mundo*, and *ABC*. Some 2,182,000[3] individuals read *El País* daily. It is the second most widely read newspaper and the first leading paper for daily news. The paper's politics align with the Spanish Socialist party and as such, it has followed a trajectory towards social democracy, which is its current position. As for the issues of immigration and Islam, *El País* maintains a laical stance—without, however, proposing changes in the relationship between the Spanish government and the Church.

El Mundo is the second leading paper for general news and has a daily readership of approximately 1,443,000. In its initial years, *El Mundo* was considered a liberal publication, presenting a leftist critique of Socialist Government and has slowly evolved towards supporting the conservative Popular Party. For some years now, the publication has fallen in line with the Spanish right, although its readers hail from backgrounds similar to those of *El País*—and to a large extent, are individuals disappointed by *El País'* accommodating position (i.e., towards the Socialist Party). The positions of *El Mundo* regarding the relationship between Church and State are similar to *El País*, even nearer to laicism 'à la française'.

[3] The data on the number of readers for each paper come from the General Media Survey from the Association for Media Research, General Summary for October 2007 to May 2007.

The third newspaper, *ABC*, maintains a faithful following of readers, although the numbers are more modest: approximately 681,000 daily. *ABC* is monarchical and Catholic; its social model reflects the values of the Catholic Church, especially concerning the relationship between Church and State and the traditional family. *ABC* is comprised of Spanish nationalists who stay very near to the Spanish right (specifically, the Popular Party), although the Church is its main referent point.

To analyze the impact of the March 11 attacks on media discourse around Muslim women, I selected pertinent articles from March 11, 2004 to November 1, 2007 and contrasted their content with articles dating from September 1, 2000 to March 10, 2004. In researching the different newspaper genres, I looked at three separate sections of each publication: feature articles, the (reader's) opinion pieces, and the editorials.
The following table tallies the number of stories that appeared in the three dailies regarding the headscarf issue.

	Total		Articles (News)		Opinion		Editorials	
	2000-2004	2004-2007	2000-2004	2004-2007	2000-2004	2004-2007	2000-2004	2004-2007
EL PAÍS	64	63	51	55	8	4	3+2[4]	4
EL MUNDO	66	25	52	23	9	1	5	1
ABC	99	177	77	136	17	31	5	10

The key words I used to scan the material were *velo/veil* and *pañuelo*/*headscarf*. These two words were frequently mixed in with articles mentioning *chador* and *hijab*. Concerning terminological use (and misuse), I discovered an article written by the ombudsman of *El País*[5] in which she concluded there was no difference between calling

[4] These two articles are from the Ombudsman.

the *hijab* a headscarf or veil. *El País* even dedicated a double page to the different names for the *hijab*, depending on its form. The most careless reporting overall on this same topic was made by *ABC*, which referred to the *hijab* as a 'shador' in its editorial[6].

As Rabah (1998) has noted, the use of one or another term is not accidental. In Spanish, the Islamic veil—*velo*—has a stronger connotation than *pañuelo*—which can translate to scarf, headscarf, or handkerchief. The word *velo* is much more specific, referring to a scarf that women place on their heads to enter a church or to signify mourning, compulsory in Spain as recently as forty years ago. Interestingly, *velo* also connotes anything that hides the view of another thing; that is, that keeps something obscured. In *El País*, the word *pañuelo* took prominence. *El Mundo* and *ABC* preferred *velo*, *chador* or *hijab*.

The journalistic discourse in these three dailies is usually quite moderate, including the articles and editorials. Even *ABC*, the newspaper closest to the Church, generally eschews aggressiveness towards Islam. However, post-March 11, the discourse in the opinion sections began to assume a distinctly vitriolic tone. Moreover, pejorative references were used to describe girls wearing the headscarf such as 'little girl' Shaima[7] and 'little girl' Fatima. These are old expressions, connected to the folkloric speech of the Gypsies and the poor in Andalusia.

Unfortunately, no counter-discourse was presented to balance the negative images put forth concerning Islam, Muslims in general, or Muslim women in particular. In short, with respect to the question of Islam and Muslim women, one might expect that the dailies, given their disparate political positions, would offer opposing

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[5] "¿Velo o pañuelo?" ("Veil or headscarf?"), by Malén Aznárez, Ombudsman, *El País*, December 21, 2003.
[6] *El Mundo* editorial, March 19, 2007.
[7] Used in, among others, opinion articles by Susana Fortes in El País (October 21, 2007); or 'little girl Fatima' ("la niña Fátima") in the article by Manuel Delgado, "The little girl in the headscarf" in El Mundo, February 19, 2002; 'little girl Elidrissi' in the article by Federico Jiménez Losantos in El Mundo,

arguments. However, this was not the case. The tone of and information contained in the articles, as well as the editorials, hardly differs among the three papers. What is most interesting here is that the columnists at the three dailies, all with separate ideological positions, do not differ essentially in their approaches to Islam. This consensus about Islam lends legitimacy to stereotypes and fixed images, so that consensus becomes a criterion of truth.

The Headscarf: Protest and Publications

In Spain, women wearing the headscarf have become an obvious symbol for transplanted Islam. News coverage of Muslim women in the Spanish press deals almost exclusively with the issue of the headscarf. Protest over the presence of Muslim girls wearing headscarves in Spanish public schools first took place in February 2002; this protest occurred in a small town 50 kilometers from Madrid. A second similar protest arose during October 2007 in the Catalan town of Girona. Between these two events, France passed a law regulating the use of religious symbols in French public schools (summer 2004). This law attempted to establish a universal norm regarding the Muslim headscarf. In general, it can be said that the Spanish papers were, for different reasons, extremely critical of the French headscarf law, especially from a civil liberties perspective.

News pertaining to the controversial French law first appeared in June 2003. *El País* treated the topic as cause for profound dissent in France, focusing primarily on the call from feminists and intellectuals to reinforce laicism.[8] In general, *El País* hinted that the problem was related not to Islam but to the fractured relationship between different religions and the French State.[9] In fact, almost a year later, *El País* followed

February 18, 2002; 'little girl Fatima" in "The blonde was a brunette" by Ignacio Camacho, in ABC, February 18, 2002.

[8] *El País* article, December 8, 2003

[9] *El País* article, December 17, 2003.

the case of two French girls expelled from school under the headscarf law. They were introduced as daughters of a professor who had emigrated from Algeria to work at Peugeot—a fact that made the family more familiar, and therefore more acceptable to the average Spanish reader. The newspaper also emphasized the solidarity of the girls' classmates.[10]

El Mundo followed France's 'headscarf problem' as well, noting that many Muslim groups felt discriminated against and pointing out that other religious symbols were allowed in French public schools. *El Mundo* presented this headscarf affair as an imposition by the French government. The paper claimed that Chirac had banned headscarves, yarmulkes and crucifixes in school, "despite protests from Muslims",[11] and that the holidays of Yom Kippur and Eid ul-Adha could not be celebrated as such. It also pointed to the dissent of France's Green Party on this issue, emphasizing that no real political consensus had been achieved. Furthermore, the paper suggested that Chirac's concern about moving the headscarf law forward appeared to be based on electoral concerns.

ABC focused on the union of three religions against the headscarf law,[12] but only in response to the demands of the moment, and ended by calling attention to the electoral importance of Muslims and the fact that policies had to change to adapt to them.[13]

The Headscarf and March 11

As for the March 11 train bombings, *El País* published an obituary of each one of the 192 victims—including that of a 13-year-old Moroccan girl. The obituary portrayed her as an adolescent like any other, highlighted her friendship with Spanish

[10] *El País* article, October 21, 2004.
[11] *El Mundo* article, February 19, 2003.
[12] *ABC* article, December 17, 2003
[13] *ABC* article, January 16, 2004.

girls, and tiptoed around the fact that she wore a headscarf. The text read, “She was proud of the headscarf that covered her hair,” although in the newspaper's photograph she was not wearing one. The article also reported that she seldom spoke Arabic, thus positioning her as a Spanish girl and not as a foreigner. The features (dress and language) that distinctly identified her as a Moroccan seemed purposefully blurred.[14]

El País also ran an article about another Muslim woman, Naima Oulad Akcha, sister of two of the terrorists who blew themselves up in an apartment in Leganés;[15] Naima was accused of collaboration in the bombings. *El País* emphasized the fact that she was single and very religious.[16] Furthermore, it described her physically as “covered from top to bottom by a veil and the headscarf”, a circumstance that “caused problems when taking her photograph for the police file without her headscarf.” The headline describing her read: “A Live-in Housekeeper.” The accused was introduced as a woman who strictly adhered to the clothing requirements of Islam, although her religion was not overtly mentioned. In addition, the news article associated her with work that many Moroccan women engage in when they come to Spain alone—domestic service—and in its more precarious[17] version, live-in work.

In the case of the teenage victim, an attempt is made to conceal her Muslim identity, bringing her closer to 'us,' while in the second case, that of the accused, the opposite process occurs. She is presented as a person who puts her beliefs above societal norms, resisting removal of her headscarf for the headshot. The accused is

[14] *El País* article, March 24, 2004.
[15] Three weeks after the March 11 attack, on April 3, authorities surrounded an apartment in Leganés, near Madrid, where suspects in the train bombings were living. Apparently, police had studies the activity of the suspects' cell phone cards, which had been identified in the attack. Surrounded by the police with no chance of escape, seven of the alleged terrorists committed suicide amidst hymns and declarations of martyrdom.
[16] *El País* article, May 14, 2004.
[17] By precarious, I mean that the female employee's wellbeing and perhaps survival is entirely dependent on the good intentions of her employer(s).

clearly one of 'them.'[18] It must be noted that Naima Oulad Akcha was finally exonerated, but the tone and content of the *El País* article suggest that she had already been found guilty.[19]

In *El Mundo* an interview appears with the mother and two sisters of one of the terrorists involved in the March 11 attack. The sisters, 25- and 27-years old, respectively, are described as living "a Western lifestyle." The article is entitled "Muslim Women without a Headscarf".[20] The mother's choice to wear a headscarf is ascribed to her age and, in a lighter tone, to the fact that her hair is falling out. This implies that the only headscarf in the family is 'deactivated' and therefore, not a potential threat. The three women are introduced as members of a working class family. Reference is made to "their bosses", which automatically places them in a subservient position. The women are worthy of the appreciation of their neighbors and employers, who continue to treat them well despite the fact that they are related to terrorists. Although the paper mentions that these women pray five times a day (as devout Muslims), the point is made that they "do not go to Mosque every Friday". Again, by underscoring the fact that the sisters avoid wearing a headscarf, the paper is eager to show the 'normalcy' of this family.

To understand the newspaper's motivation for doing so, one must remember that *El Mundo* upheld the thesis, along with the Spanish right, that March 11 was an attack by Basque pro-independent terrorists, and *not* Islamists.[21] But what is most interesting is that both *El Mundo* and *El País* adopted the same strategy; that is, they decided the

[18] Van Dijk (2006).
[19] See Tello (2007).
[20] *El Mundo* article, March 3, 2004.
[21] Between the March 11 attack and the elections on March 14, the Right, which was in power at the time, held that the attack had been the work of ETA. If they had admitted from the beginning that Islamic terrorists were responsible, the Spanish people would have known that the bombings had been an act of revenge by Al Qaeda for the Spanish government's support of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. In fact, protest against Spain's collusion with North American imperialism was clear in subsequent elections that turned

best way to exonerate Muslims in articles or printed interviews was to minimize the impact of their 'being Muslim'. In this way, Islam, usually symbolized by the headscarf or by an incompatibility with democratic values, was made invisible in order to play on the readers' sentiments. The reverse strategy was utilized when the opposite goal was desired.

The 2002 and 2007 Headscarf Affairs

As previously mentioned, the initial headscarf controversy took place in 2002. The case involved a teenaged girl (Fatima) who had been asked to leave, first by a semi-private Catholic school and then by a public school, for wearing a headscarf. At least this is how the press presented the issue. What really happened was revealed in later interviews with teachers employed at the public school. Apparently the young girl arrived in Madrid during the middle of the school year and was placed by the Municipal School Commission[22] in a semi-private religious school. The nuns did not look kindly upon the girl attending school in a hijab, and the student was informed she had to remove it. The girl then left the religious school. Later, the Territorial Head of Education[23] decided to enroll the girl in a public school, undermining the Commission's decision. But the Parent Teacher Association at the public school questioned this decision, complaining that when the semi-private schools had problems, the public schools were invariably shouldered with responsibility for admitting "difficult students". At that same time, the director of the public school made distinctly provocative comments, referring to the headscarf as discriminatory.[24]

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against the Popular Party. Throughout the entire trial of those accused in the March 11 attacks, the Right, which ultimately lost the 2004 elections, continued to maintain that ETA was responsible.

[22] This concerned the authority of the Board of Education (an organization dependent on City Hall) which, among other responsibilities, places students in public and semi-private schools in the municipality.

[23] This body is dependent on the Madrid Autonomous Community. Its tasks include training teachers and school inspections.

[24] See Mijares and Ramírez (2008).

Overall, the newspapers placed special emphasis on the director's negative attitude rather than on the issue of the schools' authority. As for the girl in the headscarf, *El Mundo* emphasized that she had arrived in Spain with her mother and sisters only four months earlier from a village deep inside Morocco. Moreover, she was portrayed as introverted; neither of her parents could speak Spanish. The journalists who tried interviewing the girl had met with resistance. She would not even give them her name, but only repeated, "No, no, no." In this same *El Mundo* article, girls without headscarves were shown to be better adapted to Spain. The article reads, "The only feature that betrays their Moroccan origin is their eyes." According to the writer, these same girls without headscarves expressed themselves more articulately; and their families had resided in Spain significantly longer.

ABC's handling of the Moroccan teen's story was similar. The journalist attempting to speak with the girl's mother found "a frightened woman who did not dare respond under any circumstances."[25] In the same *ABC* article, one of the neighbors commented that "the girl's father always forced his wife and daughter to cover their heads and that it was a very, very conservative family."

El País, however, handled the story differently, reporting that the neighbors "assured [journalists] … the people were normal". Ali Elidrissi, the father, worked in construction. "I make a good living", he was reported as saying."[26] The intention at *El País* was to present the Moroccan family, their customs and their coexistence with neighbors in the town as normal:

> Until last week, the Elidrissi family was unknown to their neighbors. And some [of their] neighbors seem very unenthusiastic about the arrival of foreigners. But other neighbors, like the owner of an electrical appliance repair store located across from Fatima's house, do not hesitate to defend their Moroccan neighbors. The owner doesn't know the

[25] *ABC* article, February 16, 2002.
[26] *El País* article, February 16, 2002.

> Elidrissi family, either, but affirms, 'In the neighborhood, we all get along well, because the Moroccans are not difficult people.' As far as the Muslim community's way of dressing, they [the neighbors] note that only older women wear the headscarf and 'not all of them.'

Opinions vary, however, and a gas station employee cannot refrain from making a face when asked about the Moroccans. He claims, "People here are indignant, because we can't let them impose their customs on us." The woman filling up her car can't help but smile. "It's not that big of a deal", she responds.

Another *El País* article alludes to a group of young girls enrolled at Juan de Herrera School preparing for Fatima's arrival. They eagerly ask the school principal when Fatima will arrive, as they are ready to "make friends with her".[27] In short, although the paper emphasized the family's immigrant status, at the same time *El Pais* portrayed the family as working and coexisting harmoniously with their neighbors. Opposing positions, like those of the gas station attendant, were purposefully minimized and treated as an anecdote.

It should be noted that *El Mundo* took advantage of Fatima's story to publish the following assessment: Muslim girls share a drop out rate with Gypsy girls.[28] In fact, the article reports that between 65% and 70% of girls who are "Islamic in religion or Gypsy by race" leave school around the age of thirteen. Here the image of Islam in Spain is associated with a 'disturbing difference' (San Román, 1997.) The Socialist city council member who supplied the drop out information to *El Mundo* emphasizes higher school absenteeism among Moroccan girls than boys. He explains, [This is] "because they (the girls) leave their studies to do things at home, a situation made worse by immigration from Islamic countries which constitutes a 'real headscarf and a real shame'".[29]

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[27] *El País* article, February 18, 2002.
[28] *El Mundo* article, February 20, 2002.
[29] In 2003, the Colectivo Ioé published a study on Moroccan immigration demonstrating that school absenteeism was higher among Moroccan boys than Moroccan girls (Colectivo Ioé, 2003.)

However, this contradicts a 2003 study published by the Colectivo Ioé showing that school absenteeism was actually higher for Moroccan boys than girls. To point the finger accusingly at girls is to doubly stigmatize them—for leaving school and for belonging to the subordinated group (women) who are forced to leave. *El Mundo* published information from the council member as if he were a reliable source, someone who possessed supporting documents, which he did not. Additionally, the council member stated that "the girls themselves end up taking off their headscarves after spending some time with their schoolmates." This pronouncement assumes that the hijab is related to something that the girls import from their country of origin, a negative habit they abandon as soon as they learn to adapt.

In October 2007, the second headscarf affair unfolded in a public school in Girona (Cataluña). According to a news item in *El País*,[30] a seven-year old girl (Shaima) was ordered to take off her headscarf. The phrases 'little Muslim girl' and 'Islamic headscarf' were used in the article. No reference was made to the parents' nationality. According to *El País*, the parents insisted that their daughter wore a headscarf because she wanted to, because it was her personal choice. In other words, she had not been coerced. The school principal affirmed that the school's rules and regulations rejected any discrimination among the students and that wearing the headscarf was unacceptable. The Head of Education for the province, however, called for tolerance and respect towards the use of the headscarf.

This led to a revival of the debate on the headscarf in Europe and a reminder of the rules.[31] The same day, *El País* presented a bit more of Shaima's story. The family had emigrated first from Morocco to Switzerland —where 'things were very bad'—and then to Spain. The mother was shown wearing a *chador*; the family's economic situation

[30] *El País* article, October 2, 2007.
[31] *El País* article, October 3, 2007.

was unstable. The *El País* article emphasized that the girl wore a headscarf to emulate her grandmother, with whom she had lived in Rabat.

On October 4, 2007, all of the political parties expressed their opinions on the headscarf. The PSOE (Socialist Party) was against regulation. The political left (United Left, IU) opted for a French-style law as long as it applied to Catholics as well. The traditional right, in the name of maintaining individual culture, championed a general regulation. That same day, Spain's government dodged the headscarf question, not wanting to open a Pandora's box around all other religious symbols. At the same time, Spanish theologians refrained from condemning the headscarf.

News coverage offered the impression that in Shaima's case, the 'responsible party' was the girl who personally wanted to wear the headscarf while in Fatima's case, the father was clearly the force behind his daughter's behavior. In Shaima's case, *El País* represented the family's situation as precarious, even nomadic. After all, the family had threatened to leave Spain if their daughter's headscarf crisis were not resolved. This piece of information is particularly revelatory: *El País* portrayed the family as willing and determined to emigrate once again if the situation did not improve. This dramatic report, carrying overt and subtle messages, implied that the family would readily accept being uprooted once again rather than conform to minimal social requirements. *ABC* mentioned the story, but only superficially. *El Mundo* refrained from reporting Shaima's story at all.

In short, *El Mundo* and *ABC* handled the first headscarf affair almost the same way. Both suggested that the root causes lay in economic instability and in the family's immigrant ("recent arrivals") status. In making the Muslim-Gypsy comparison, the press related the use of the headscarf to educational failure. *El País* took another position, however, normalizing the family situation, and turning the father, mother and siblings

into familiar people, much like the reader. The second headscarf affair was handled much more tangentially by *El País* and, in *El Mundo's* case, not at all. *ABC* provided ample space to the second event, connecting the story with a defense of its own interests.

Muslim Women in the Press: Editorials

In general, editorials appearing in Spanish newspapers before and after March 11 were quite moderate with respect to Muslim women and the hijab—especially in the case of *El País* and *El Mundo*. Solutions were proposed in the editorials that championed dialogue and integration. However, tolerance towards the headscarf in school did not include the assumption that Muslims were free to dress as they wish.

El País championed permissiveness for the headscarf in school. In a February 2002 editorial[32] regarding Fatima's case, the relationship between the hijab and discrimination against women was raised—and any comparison with female circumcision, as the Popular Party Labor Minister had attempted, was rejected. In the last editorial (October 14, 2007) relating to Shaima's case, the position remained the same: girls should be allowed to go to school wearing a hijab, and under no circumstances should this right be legislated. However, the two editorials differed in that the 2007 piece responded to the issue entirely from a legal perspective without exploring the larger significance, or lack thereof, of the headscarf controversy.

El Mundo took a similar position, starting from the premise that the headscarf (which it termed a 'chador' until 2003), though discriminatory,[33] should in no case be prohibited or regulated. In another editorial, *El Mundo* proposed integrative solutions with respect to the use of the headscarf in those schools that require a uniform.[34] A

[32] *El País* editorial, February 17, 2002.
[33] *El Mundo* editorial, February 16, 2002.
[34] *El Mundo* editorial, February 18, 2002.

March 19, 2007 editorial from the same paper appeared more aggressive,[35] taking a firm stand against certain types of female clothing associated with Islam. This was in response to two niqab-clad women in a Madrid mall. Images of social instability and economic poverty could not be overlaid on these women. After all, in the newspaper photo they are pushing a little boy in an expensive stroller and spending freely with a credit card. Since they could not be tied to the traditional images of Muslim women, *El Mundo* found a way to connect them to fundamentalism and obscurantism instead.

Of the three newspapers, the *ABC* editorials most clearly oppose use of the headscarf. Stating that the headscarf law has upset certain Muslims in France, the paper comments on the issue as a:

> … revealing symptom of how each person faces their role when it comes time to share the same social space in a country whose immense majority forms part of what is known as Christian culture.[36]

ABC clearly states that the headscarf (which it indiscriminately refers to as *shador*) represents discrimination against and subordination of Muslim women.[37] Their assertions leave no doubts:

> The use of the Islamic headscarf could be, of course, a discretional exercise of individual freedom, but in its natural context, which is not European, it symbolizes a way to order society in accordance with directives that, despite being internalized by women, are opposed to the equality of the sexes.[38]

In summary the editorials appearing in *El Mundo* and *El País* argue proximity, in the sense of demonstrating a marked degree of tolerance towards the headscarf, whereas *ABC* suggests that it should be prohibited altogether.

Opinion articles as Elite Islamophobic Discourses

[35] *El Mundo* editorial, March 19, 2007.
[36] *ABC* editorial, March 6, 2005.
[37] *ABC* editorial, December 4, 2006. Also see ABC editorial, October 3, 2007.
[38] *ABC* editorial, March 6, 2005.

Studies on Islamophobia like those by Geisser (2003) consider the actions of the new 'intellectuals' of Islam to be fundamental and irrefutably, there are numerous interested parties belonging to different political currents. It seems evident that after March 11, the lid was removed from Pandora's box and Islamophobes found it much easier to use aggresive vocabulary against Muslims.

This section analyzes two types of opinion articles: those that address the question of the headscarf and those that focus on Islam and its relationship with the West. In this discourse, there is little difference among the three newspapers. The old stereotypes regarding Islamophobia are present in each, while almost no contrary discourses take on or question this stereotypical language.

In *El País*, other (dissenting) voices are heard on occasion, but they are an absolute minority in terms of number and proportion. While there is a paucity of specific discourses on Muslim women, they are presented in the general framework as representatives of obscurantism. For example, in an *El País* opinion piece entitled "Women without attributes,"[39] the author supports admitting girls (who wear a headscarf) to school, despite the fact that the hijab:

> … is not a simple piece of cloth that the child wears to imitate her mother, but a symbol of the dogma, training and silence that awaits her.

The author implies that providing the Muslim girl access to education:

> … may be the only way that within a few years we will see little Shaima with her face uncovered, having become an adolescent who can dress as she wishes, even showing her belly button if she wants, feeling proud of her body and her mind […]

The assumption here is that wearing the hijab is synonymous with being poorly educated. If the girl were educated, surely she would remove it. With a few exceptions, all of which attempt to contextualize the headscarf in quite specific political, legal and

[39] "Mujeres sin atributos" (*Women without attributes),* Susana Fortes, *El País*, October 21, 2007

social structures,[40] those few individuals who defend the right to wear a headscarf do so from a legalistic perspective or as a strategy to prevent exclusion and to minimize cultural differences.[41]

Feminist discourses appear in *El Pais* opinion articles arguing that children wear the headscarf because of tradition, a phenomenon that can be explained away as "[an] obsession for loading women's heads (physically and symbolically) with cultural traditions …"[42] One author poses the following response in questioning why girls wear the headscarf: "Why? Maybe because immigrant families succumb to the pressures of the clergy, of gossipy neighbors, of all the miserable, repressive sort of people that Spanish society knew in the 1940s and 1950s. Why do we let them succumb now without finding the least support or the least condemnation in the society that surrounds them?" Finally, this same 'feminist' author alludes to a letter sent to the newspaper from a 19-year-old Muslim girl who claims to wear the headscarf based on personal choice. The author then recalls that at age nineteen she, too, made many foolish decisions. In short, there can be no reasonable explanation for wearing the headscarf: either families are pressured to make their girls wear a headscarf or it is all youthful silliness. No one considers the possibility that Islam lived in this way corresponds to well-considered decisions. The question is reduced to either coercion on the part of the clergy, or ignorance that will pass with education.

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[40] For instance, "Multiculturalismo e islamofobia", (*Muliculturalism and Islamophobia)*, Gema Martín*, El País*, March 1, 2002; "Olvidadas" (*Forgotten Women),* Ángeles Ramírez, *El País*, March 11, 2006; "Sexismo neolocolonial" (*Neo-colonial sexism*), Ángeles Ramírez, *El País*, October 8, 2006.

[41] "El desvelo del velo" (*The unveiling of the veil)*, Eugenia Relaño, *El País*, November 1, 2007; "El pañuleo de las musulmanas y la vorágine culturalista" (*Muslim Women headscarf and culturalist vortex*), Andrés Pajares, *El País*, February 20, 2002; "Cuando la amenaza es un pañuelo" (*When the threat is a headscarf*), Jordi Sánchez, October 8, 2007.

[42] "La tradición sienta mal a las mujeres" (*Tradition doesn't suit women well*) by Soledad Gallego-Díaz, El País, October 12, 2007. Gallego-Díaz is not just a columnist, since she holds a position at the paper, making her opinions more like an editorial than those of other columnists.

In another *El País* opinion article entitled "The eight-year-old girl who wanted to cover her hair,"[43] the choice to wear a headscarf is connected to female circumcision, comparing what would happen (hypothetically) if a young girl said she wanted a female circumcision.

The columnists in *El Mundo* also take a firm position against the headscarf, connecting the issue with broader discussions around the meaning of Islam and its relation to the world and Western values. Those opinion articles that appear to hold alternative positions are not so much defending the headscarf as criticizing certain social sectors for their mismanagement and articulation of the problem.[44] In an article entitled, "Allowing the Islamic headscarf is encouraging communitarianism," the author, Ivan Tubau,[45] connects integrism[46] with the Muslim headscarf in France. "Should the French government give in to the threat of integrism by removing the prohibition against the Islamic headscarf, the Jewish yarmulke and the Christian cross?" In yet another *El Mundo* piece[47], the writer makes wild assertions between the choice to wear a headscarf and potential fanaticism:

> … the spectacle[48] made me think, especially because I read a report about an alarming number of young French girls converting to an extremist form of Islam based more on fashion than on [religious] conviction.
>
> …When a young girl decides to wear the headscarf as an anti-establishmentarian statement and not because of her authentic religious belief, this is serious because she can easily become a full-blown fanatic, as we have seen throughout history with other religions.

Like the other two papers, columnists at *ABC* also voice strong opposition to Muslim girls' right to wear the headscarf. In an *ABC* article from February 2002,

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[43] Empar Moliner, *El País*, October 8, 2007.
[44] "Occidente en un pañuelo" (*The West in a headscarf*), by Antonio Galeote, *El Mundo*, February 24, 2002; "Niña y pañuelo" (*The little girl and the headscarf*), by Antonio Gala, *El Mundo*, February 19, 2002.
[45] *El Mundo*, September 4, 2004.
[46] In Spanish, *integrism* refers to religious fanaticism and is especially linked to Islamic terrorism and the ideological basis for such terrorism.
[47] "La teta y el velo" (*The Breast and the headscarf)* by Zoe Valdés, *El Mundo*, March 1, 2004.

Ignacio Sánchez Cámara[49] offers his opinion on the headscarf, which he regards as neither aesthetic nor opportune. He also fears that at some point in time, some adolescent will appear in the costume of a shackled slave because, as he suggests, "the roads of submission are infinite." Likewise, he lays responsibility for the headscarf on Spanish society which fails to offer positive moral alternatives, and attacks those individuals who, while speaking ill of crucifixes and other Catholic symbols, worship the headscarf. It is clear that Cámara's opinions are not far from some of those set forth earlier in *El País*. Further on,[50] the same author takes a detour to avoid positioning himself against the presence of religious symbols in schools. He does this precisely by connecting the headscarf to the marginalization and exclusion of Muslim women.

Although opposed ideologically, two individuals—Mario Vargas Llosa (from the independent secular right) and Jiménez Losantos, (a well-known Spanish neocon)—published very similar opinions on topics related to Muslim women. In the autumn of 2007, Mario Vargas Llosa wrote an article for *El País* describing the headscarf as:

> … the symbol of a religion where discrimination against women is still, unfortunately, stronger than in any other, a traditional defect of humanity of which democratic culture has managed to free itself in part […] And if the issue is respect for all cultures and customs, why does democracy not also allow planned marriages and ultimately, female circumcision of girls, which millions of believers in Africa and other places in the world practice? [51]

The author deftly slips from a discussion of the headscarf to the issue of female circumcision, which he connects with Muslim believers. Five years earlier, Jiménez Losantos had made the following observation in *ABC*:

> Behind the headscarf is a jail. If we don't understand or don't want to understand that Islam is an implacable system of repression and

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[48] The writer is referring to the "spectacle" of veiled girls in French cities.
[49] "Ni estético ni oportuno" (*Neither aesthetic nor opportune*) by Ignacio Sánchez Cámara in *ABC*, February 18, 2002.
[50] "Multiculturalismo contra integración" (*Multiculturalism against integration*) by Ignacio Sánchez Cámara in *ABC*, March 5, 2002.
[51] "El velo no es el velo" (*The Headscarf is not a headscarf*), *El País*, October 7, 2007.

> submission of the woman to the man and of women to the men in their families, clans or Mosques, [then] all the controversy unleashed by the hijab, veil, headscarf or chador … is an absurd anecdote.[52]

While Losantos' language is slightly more radical, his message resonates with that of Vargas Llosa.

In early 2007, *ABC* printed an opinion article by Serafín Fanjul—a weekly contributor to the paper and one of the few writers with credentials in Arab studies—warning of the dangers of a proposal to concede moral recognition to the descendents of the Moors expelled from Spain in the 17th century. Why? Because this could mean "automatic entry into Spain through the front door, with flags unfurled and triumphant, of any Moroccan who can bribe someone in his extremely corrupt bureaucracy to falsify his roots."[53] Warning of the "hyper-birth rate of the Moroccans already here," and the potential for invasion, the author sensationalizes two particular fears associated with Muslim immigration.

Another article from the same author[54] responded to the controversial comments made by Pope Ratzinger regarding Islam, comments for which the Pope later had to apologize. Fanjul, a weekly contributor to *ABC*, calls for a revision of the traditional relationship between the Islamic world and Western Christianity, suggesting that:

> Arab literature from all times—and I mean *all*—is loaded with threats, condemnation, jokes, improprieties and curses against Christians and Christianity. And against the Jews. From oral literature (proverbs, popular tales, children's songs) to historical articles, poetry and miscellaneous works …

At *El País*, the author who has written most prolifically on Muslim values and Islam's relationship with the West is the political scientist Antonio Elorza. While his articles cover Spain's contemporary political affairs, his primary focus has always been

[52] "Detrás del velo" (*Behind the headscarf)* by Federico Jiménez Losantos, *ABC*, February 18, 2002.
[53] "Immigrantes y moriscos" (*Immigrants and Moors*) by Serafín Fanjul, *ABC*, January 4, 2007.

Basque nationalism, a focus veering sharply from Islamic issues. From September 1, 2000 to March 11, 2004, only 12% of the articles by Elorza dealt with Islamic questions. After that date and up to November 1, 2007,[55] the percentage rose to 30%. A study of his work shows that there were no notable changes in his discourse from 2000 to 2007 in spite of March 11, except that he added some documentation to back up his theories.

A central, consistent argument in Elorza's work is that Al Qaeda's terrorism is justified by Islamic orthodoxy.[56] Al Qaeda's terrorist strategy "is … adopted by integrist sectors that create it out of a partial but Orthodox strategy coming from the Koran and the Hadith" (October 22, 2001). In this way, Elorza establishes a genealogy of integrism from Islamic sources (April 16, 2004 and October 10, 2001), an integrism that comes to light when they (Muslims) are threatened.[57] After all, according to Islam, the believer is obligated to fight against the infidel (April 3, 2002).

In the same April 3, 2002 article, Elorza hints that being overly tolerant (with regard to the headscarf) is tantamount to being an accomplice of Zawahiri. He also claims that the Muslim religion has a strong capacity to envelop the believer, a phenomenon that tests the mechanisms for integration in countries hosting Muslim immigrants. For Elorza (September 25, 2002), two obstacles prevent Muslims from desirable democratic adaptation: "the spirit of violence tied to the recommendation for jihad and the essential inferiority of women."

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[54] "¿Es cobarde occidente? (*Is coward the West?)* by Serafín Fanjul, *ABC*, September 19, 2006.
[55] These are the dates that delimit the timeframe for this article.
[56] "La ignorancia del infiel" (*The ignorance of the infidel*) by Antonio Elorza, *El País*, October 22, 2001; "Las dos caras del Corán" (*The two faces of the Koran)* by Antonio Elorza, *El País*, September 25, 2002 and "Religión y violencia" (*Religion and violence*) by Antonio Elorza, *El País*, April 16, 2004.
[57] "Velos y quebrantos" (*Headscarves and suffering)* by Antonio Elorza, *El País*, April 3, 2002.

Conclusion

The classic media conceptualization of Muslim women as secondary, subordinate, and powerless is still dominant in Spain. Wearing the headscarf—that most obvious of Muslim symbols—is explained away by immigrant status and inadequate education, as well as a failure to integrate. In this respect, the representation of Muslim women in the Spanish press neatly fits within pre-existing images of former Maurophobic constructions.

Depending on the intended impact or desired journalistic effect, Muslim women have been presented by the Spanish press in one of two ways: either they wear the headscarf or they do not. The absence of a headscarf signals adaptation, modernity and culture. Its presence is perceived as a threat to democratic values. Young girls or women choosing to wear the headscarf are never represented as capable of making their own choices. Rather, the press calls attention to Fatima Elidrissi's father or Shaima's grandmother or relatives living in Morocco or the fundamentalist clergy. These are the responsible ones, the ones who form the real threat—and not the girls, who have no voice or free will.

In general, the Spanish press has afforded no thoughtful analysis to the deeper significance of the headscarf nor attempted to provide a forum for those women who wear it. The manner in which the Spanish press exploited the headscarf issue after March 11 reveals much about the hijab's utility. When the newspaper's intention was to bring readers closer to the Muslim woman (or women) featured in an article, the headscarf was made invisible—thereby creating a sense of sameness and solidarity. When the press wanted to accentuate feelings of opposition and alienation, the hijab became a central focus. In this way, the headscarf issue was manipulated to reinforce

tension between 'us' and 'them' and to drive a wedge of incompatibility between Western values and the Muslim worldview.

Of the three newspapers analyzed, *ABC* (monarchist, religious, traditional and right wing) portrayed Muslim women (especially Moroccan women) as prisoners of an unstable life and victims of ignorance. *El Mundo* (right wing, strongly opposed to the Socialist party) did the same. The focus of *El País* (Social Democrat) was more integrative in that the paper made some effort to present 'normalized' Moroccan families. However, with the passage of time, even *El País* began handling Muslim-related issues much like the other papers.

From an editorial perspective, while *El País* and *El Mundo* argued for tolerance around the headscarf issue, *ABC* remained absolutely opposed to permitting the headscarf in school. The three papers appeared most similar in their opinion articles. The different columnists, although situated along lines that reflected their papers political leanings, paradoxically maintained very similar positions when discussing the Muslim headscarf. They broadened the field only in the conception of Islam and its relationship to the West, which never veered very far from the views of Huntington and the clash of civilizations. By arriving at and maintaining the same hypotheses, all of the papers lent credibility to their positions and successfully constructed arguments reflecting élitist racism.

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