

Deconstructing Western Discourse: Sara Mills' Analysis of Muslim Women in European News

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Abstract

The phenomenon under investigation is how European media frames Muslim women in its reporting, often trapped in stereotypes and misrepresentations. The aim of this study is to critically examine the representation of Muslim women in Europe in news texts. This study uses a critical discourse analysis method, adapting Sara Mills' deconstruction theory, which focuses on how the position of Muslim women actors is constructed through media representation. The data sources include news articles covering Muslim women in several European media outlets over the past five years. The data is analyzed by identifying discourse patterns that form the dominant representation of them and deconstructing these narratives to reveal how existing ideologies influence public understanding. The findings suggest that veiled Muslim women face systemic discrimination in the European labor market, particularly in countries like Germany and the Netherlands, which challenges the principle of religious neutrality and calls for urgent policy reform. At the intersection of gender and religion, they are especially vulnerable to structural inequalities, with dominant narratives often framing them as "other" and overlooking their autonomy. Their attempts to engage fully in society are frequently met with exclusion, such as through legal measures like the hijab ban, which portrays their visibility as threatening. This study holds significant value in offering insights into the importance of a more critical and diverse understanding of Muslim women's representations in the media and its contribution to shaping public opinion in Europe.

Keywords:

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Sara Mills, Muslim Women, Online News Text, Europe

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Introduction

The representation of Muslim women in news discourse has emerged as a significant area of scholarly concern within media, cultural, and gender studies (Hamid et al., 2021; Miladi, 2021). As media functions as a central institution in the construction and dissemination of social knowledge, its role in shaping public perceptions of religious and gendered identities cannot be understated. Muslim women, situated at the intersection of these identities, have frequently been subject to reductive portrayals that warrant rigorous critical examination (Babakhani, 2024; Khan et al., 2023; Liberatore, 2020).

Existing literature indicates that news coverage often perpetuates binary depictions of Muslim women, positioning them either as passive victims of patriarchal traditions or as threats to Western values (Elhinawy, 2024; Khan et al., 2023; Kilby & Staniforth, 2023; Tasneem et al., 2023). These portrayals, frequently constructed through visual symbols such as the hijab, niqab, or burqa, contribute to a superficial understanding of Muslim women, thereby neglecting their sociopolitical agency and diverse lived experiences. Such representations are deeply embedded in orientalist frameworks that continue to influence Western media narratives (Santoire, 2023).

Following Edward Said's theoretical formulation, Orientalism operates through the production of knowledge that frames the East as inferior, irrational, and in need of civilizing interventions. Muslim women, within this framework, are routinely represented as emblematic of cultural otherness and as subjects requiring liberation, often by Western or secular standards. These discursive constructions have profound sociopolitical implications. The sustained framing of Muslim women as oppressed or culturally deviant reinforces Islamophobic ideologies, contributing to the normalization of discriminatory attitudes and policies. Legislative measures such as bans on Islamic attire and the securitization of Muslim communities are frequently legitimized through such media portrayals (Edwards, 2021).

Moreover, the structural composition of news institutions, which often lack ethnic, religious, and gender diversity, significantly influences representational outcomes (Luther et al., 2024; Reingold et al., 2020). Journalistic practices are shaped not only by editorial policies but also by the cultural and ideological dispositions of media professionals. The absence of Muslim women within these spaces exacerbates the risk of misrepresentation and silencing. In response to mainstream media's limitations, an increasing number of Muslim women have turned to alternative and independent media platforms to assert control over their narratives (Bodrunova & Nigmatullina, 2020; M. Li & Chitty, 2021; Ryfe, 2023). These spaces enable the articulation of counter-discourses that challenge dominant frames and provide nuanced insights into the multiplicity of Muslim women's experiences across different sociocultural contexts. Media framing is also context-dependent, with representations varying according to the thematic focus of news reports. Coverage related to national security, terrorism, migration, or gender rights often instrumentalizes the image of Muslim women to fit broader ideological agendas (Broomfield et al., 2022; Cotter et al., 2021; Hamborg, 2023). Consequently, the portrayal of Muslim women becomes a vehicle for advancing particular political and cultural discourses.

To critically engage with these portrayals, researchers have employed methods such as critical discourse analysis (CDA), which allows for the systematic examination of language and power relations in media texts (Butt et al., 2024; Elyas et al., 2021; K. Li & Zhang, 2022). CDA reveals how linguistic choices, narrative structures, and visual cues contribute to the reproduction of hegemonic ideologies and the marginalization of subaltern voices. Addressing these representational imbalances necessitates both structural reforms within the media industry and educational initiatives aimed at enhancing media literacy. The cultivation of critical awareness among audiences is essential for fostering more equitable and accurate media practices. Furthermore, the inclusion of marginalized voices in journalistic production is imperative for achieving representational justice (Bouvier & Machin, 2020).

Sara Mills's critical discourse analysis theory provides a valuable framework for investigating how Muslim women are represented in European news articles, particularly in relation to gender-based violence. The theory emphasizes how language and power structures

influence the way individuals are depicted in texts. In this context, news reports often present women, especially Muslim women, as passive victims, reinforcing stereotypes and diminishing their agency (Krismonsari, 2024). The role of the journalist's gender further influences these portrayals; male journalists tend to marginalize female subjects, while female journalists are more likely to highlight their agency (Nabila, 2016). This positioning of women as passive figures, alongside the normalization of violence against them, perpetuates gender inequality and societal acceptance of such behaviors (Angi et al., 2023). Mills's theory uncovers how these discursive practices not only reflect but also perpetuate societal ideologies that maintain the marginalization of women (Purwanto & Dewanti, 2024), particularly in the media's portrayal of Muslim women in Europe. This approach helps critically assess the narratives around Muslim women, offering insights into how news media construct and maintain gendered power dynamics.

While research has addressed the media's orientalist framing of Muslim women, few studies have thoroughly interrogated the interplay between language, gender, and power in news texts using Sara Mills's critical discourse analysis (CDA). Mills's framework, which foregrounds the intersection of discourse, gendered positioning, and ideological structures, offers a nuanced tool to reveal how linguistic choices reinforce power hierarchies and marginalize certain voices (Mills & Mullany, 2011). The present study addresses this gap by applying Mills's CDA to examine representations of Muslim women in European news reports on gender-based violence a context in which women are often framed as voiceless victims. Prior literature has largely overlooked the ways in which the gender of journalists affects the framing of these women, an area this study explores (Krismonsari, 2024; Nabila, 2016). Additionally, intersectionality the overlapping and interacting axes of identity such as religion, race, and gender remains under-examined in this discursive domain.

The study adopts Sara Mills's feminist CDA as its primary theoretical and analytical framework, as it is particularly suited to explore how subject positions are linguistically constructed and how gender intersects with broader power structures in discourse. Compared to traditional CDA approaches (e.g., van Dijk, Fairclough), Mills emphasizes the subtle operations of gendered language and positioning, making her approach especially relevant for analyzing texts involving representations of women, particularly from marginalized communities (Purwanto & Dewanti, 2024). This framework allows for a critical interrogation of how Muslim women are simultaneously silenced and instrumentalized in news narratives about violence. A qualitative CDA methodology is appropriate for this research because it facilitates a deep textual and contextual reading of news articles, uncovering the implicit ideologies that underlie discursive choices. Unlike quantitative content analysis, which focuses on frequency, qualitative CDA unpacks the power relations embedded in narrative structures, lexical selections, and grammatical constructions (Butt et al., 2024; Li & Zhang, 2022). It is particularly effective for uncovering how specific portrayals reinforce or challenge hegemonic understandings of gender and religion.

This study builds on and updates prior literature by engaging with recent empirical findings (Edwards, 2021; Hamborg, 2023; Luther et al., 2024) and integrating current debates on Islamophobia, media ethics, and intersectional feminism. It positions itself within ongoing scholarly conversations while addressing unresolved tensions such as the tension between visibility and agency in media portrayals of Muslim women. The study contributes to broader discourses on representational justice, arguing that inclusive media practices must reflect the multiplicity of identities and experiences, especially those historically marginalized.

This research is significant in several respects. Theoretically, it expands the application of feminist CDA by incorporating Mills's framework into the study of religious and racialized identity in European media. Methodologically, it contributes to discourse analytic approaches by highlighting the value of journalist gender and positionality as critical variables. Practically, it informs media literacy, journalism training, and anti-discrimination policy by unveiling how seemingly neutral reporting perpetuates structural inequalities. By interrogating the dominant narratives around Muslim women, this study aims to foster more ethical and inclusive media

practices that reflect the diversity of Muslim women's lived experiences. The aim of this study is to critically examine the representation of Muslim women in Europe in news texts using Sara Mills' critical discourse approach, in order to reveal the ideological constructions and power relations hidden in media narratives.

Methods

This study adopts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, specifically drawing on Sara Mills' critical framework, to examine the representation of Muslim women in European news texts. The research seeks to explore how the media constructs, represents, and perpetuates particular ideologies about Muslim women through linguistic choices and discursive practices. To achieve this, the study utilizes a qualitative approach, which allows for a nuanced understanding of how discourse shapes societal perceptions of Muslim women in European contexts. The primary data for this study will be collected from a selection of European news articles published in both traditional and online media outlets over the past five years. The sampling method will be purposive, meaning that articles specifically discussing Muslim women or including Muslim women as central subjects will be chosen. This selection will ensure that the sample reflects a variety of topics, such as cultural integration, religion, gender, and socio-political issues, in which Muslim women are frequently represented.

Data collection will involve two main techniques: document analysis and text mining. Document analysis will be employed to thoroughly examine the selected news articles, focusing on language use, framing, and rhetorical strategies. Text mining will be used to assist in identifying recurring themes and discursive patterns across multiple articles, which will be useful for large-scale analysis and comparison. For data analysis, the study will apply Sara Mills' critical framework of CDA, which centers on the concepts of power, subjectivity, and ideology in discourse. Mills' approach emphasizes the way language not only reflects but also constructs social realities, especially in the context of marginalized groups. The analysis will focus on uncovering how media representations of Muslim women reflect broader power dynamics in European societies. This includes examining how Muslim women are either portrayed as passive victims, exoticized, or as part of a larger "othering" process. Particular attention will be given to how linguistic choices (such as adjectives, metaphors, and narrative structures) and the positioning of Muslim women within the discourse reinforce or challenge dominant social and political ideologies.

Results

An examination of recent news coverage uncovers growing concerns about the discrimination faced by Muslim women in Europe. News articles such as "Veiled Muslim women face discrimination in Germany, Netherlands, Spain" (2022), "Muslim women, Black people face rising discrimination in Germany, study finds" (2025), and "Headscarf ruling puts a target on the backs of Muslim women" (2021) shed light on how Muslim women, particularly those who wear the headscarf, are subjected to exclusion, prejudice, and legal challenges. These texts consistently depict Muslim women as vulnerable to both social hostility and institutional policies that restrict their freedoms. The portrayal of these women in the media reflects broader societal tensions surrounding identity, integration, and religious expression in European contexts.

Table 1. Analysis of the Position of Muslim Women in News Texts

No.	Topic	Information	Critical Discourse Analysis
1.	Veiled Muslim women face discrimination in Germany, Netherlands, Spain (2022)	It presented "robust evidence that veiled Muslim women are discriminated against in Germany and the Netherlands, but only when applying for jobs that require a high level of customer contact."	In the framework of Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis, the position of Muslim women particularly those who wear the hijabis constructed within discourse as both marginal

Source: https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220726-veiled-muslim-women-face-discrimination-in-germany-netherlands-spain-study/	<p>“In Spain, however, the level of discrimination against veiled Muslim women is much smaller than in the other two countries,” it stated.</p> <p>To give statistical data, the research underscored that 48.5 percent of unveiled Muslim women received responses from employers in the Dutch labour market while this number decreased to 34.5 percent among veiled Muslim women.</p> <p>In Germany, even though employers responded to the job applications of half of the unveiled Muslim women, they did not give any response to 75 percent of the Muslim women with headscarves.</p> <p>Valentina Di Stasio, one of the researchers conducting the experiment and a member of Utrecht University, said on Twitter that the results “mostly show a lack of progress over time, with members of ethnic minorities still facing levels of discrimination today that are as high as they were decades ago.”</p> <p>She emphasised the importance of monitoring the issue in terms of its effects on policy-making and legislation mechanisms.</p> <p>About the perception that it is “simply a preference for religion neutrality, instead of a bias against Muslims,” she stated that, in a related study, they found no penalty for volunteer work at a Christian association, but a significant penalty for the same work at a Muslim association.</p> <p>She said another study conducted in France titled “Anti-Muslim discrimination in France: Evidence from a Field Experiment” summarised that “religiosity was a premium for Christians and a penalty for Muslims.”</p> <p>Recalling that “high levels of discrimination” against Muslims even exist in countries where people do not have to put personal photos on their CVs in job applications, such as the</p> <p>and ideologically contested. These women are often placed in a subject position that marks them as “Other” in contrast to a secular, culturally dominant norm, especially in public and professional domains. The hijab, as a visible sign of religious identity, is not merely interpreted as a personal or religious choice, but rather as a symbol that deviates from perceived Western ideals of neutrality and modernity. As such, veiled Muslim women are discursively positioned as incompatible with roles that require public interaction, particularly in labor markets such as those in Germany and the Netherlands. According to Mills, however, these women are not simply passive recipients of discourse; they also have agency and may resist dominant narratives by asserting their identities in positive and self-determined ways such as reclaiming the hijab as a symbol of empowerment and autonomy. Nonetheless, this agency operates within constraining structures, as dominant discourses continue to restrict their full inclusion and recognition. The discursive position of Muslim women reflects both structural marginalization and the ongoing negotiation of identity within unequal power relations.</p>
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- UK and Norway, she said that this is just based on the names of these people.
 “Wearing religious garments is part of one’s identity and can contribute to a positive sense of self.
2. Muslim women, Black people face rising discrimination in Germany, study finds (2025)
- Source:
<https://www.a.a.com.tr/en/europe/muslim-women-black-people-face-rising-discrimination-in-germany-study-finds/3515535>
- Muslim women and Black individuals are experiencing growing racial discrimination in Germany, according to a comprehensive national study released Thursday. The 2025 National Discrimination and Racism Monitor (NaDiRa) report found that 54% of those who faced discrimination due to their skin color, or religion, experienced biased treatment at least once a month. The findings showed that Muslim women (61%), Black women (63%), and Black men (62%) encounter the highest rates of subtle discrimination. Among Black individuals, skin color was identified as the primary factor in up to 84% of discriminatory incidents, while for Muslim respondents, religious bias was the main factor in up to 51% of cases. The study identified public spaces as particular hotspots for discrimination, with 42% of Black men and 38% of Muslim women reporting regular negative encounters. Government offices also proved problematic, with 37% of Muslim women reporting unfair treatment from institutional authorities. Police discrimination also surfaced as a significant issue, with 19% of Muslim men and 18% of Black men reporting negative interactions with law enforcement. “The report shows that racist discrimination occurs in almost all areas of society. This highlights the structural dimensions of racism,” said Dr. Cihan Sinanoglu, NaDiRa’s director. “As a state party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Germany is
- Muslim women are not only represented as frequent targets of discrimination experiencing biased treatment in public spaces and from state institutions but also as individuals whose intersecting identities of religion and gender subject them to unique and compounded forms of prejudice. Their portrayal emphasizes the structural nature of racism, suggesting that their Muslim identity, often symbolized through visible markers like the hijab, functions discursively as a signifier of “otherness” within German society. Moreover, the repeated mention of Muslim women in statistical data underscores their centrality in discussions about institutional bias, yet it also risks reducing their identity to victimhood if not contextualized within narratives of resistance or agency. From Mills’ perspective, this positioning reflects broader patriarchal and Eurocentric discursive structures that often silence or generalize the voices of minority women rather than allowing for nuanced, self-defined representation.

obligated to protect those affected from discrimination and to take measures to ensure equal rights.”

3. Headscarf ruling puts a target on the backs of Muslim women (2021)
Source: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2021/07/19/headscarf-ruling-puts-a-target-on-the-backs-of-muslim-women-view>
- The push for headscarf bans is often cloaked in language about feminism and emancipating Muslim women. We also hear a lot from politicians of all stripes about liberating women from oppression in the Middle East and yet, in the heart of Europe, laws have been implemented to completely sideline Muslim women from public life. Some proponents of these measures claim they are needed to counter growing "religious extremism". What is growing is the number of Muslim women who want to participate in the public space. This should be cause for celebration, but, instead, it is met by bigotry. By permitting wide-ranging prohibitions on headscarves in the workplace, Muslim women's visible presence is denounced. Already in Europe, Muslim women face an onslaught of both verbal and physical assaults. Just as the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency and the Council of Europe are warning of rising racial discrimination and violence. This decision puts a target on Muslim women's backs. This judgment is a legal setback that follows a concerning trend in Europe: the more Muslim women try to take part in public life, the more rejection and hatred they face. National courts should continue to push back, expose the weaknesses in this ruling and refer new cases to the CJEU. Businesses should continue to show solidarity with their Muslim employees. There are some commendable employers, such as IKEA and H&M, who are already doing so and have not seen their reputation or profits negatively impacted as a result. While it is just one court decision, what happens at the EU's top court represents a crossroads for the Muslim women are positioned as marginalized and oppressed figures, both in the public and legal spheres, despite the claims of liberation made by proponents of headscarf bans. The narrative surrounding the bans is framed in a way that suggests these laws are necessary for women's emancipation, yet in reality, they serve to sideline Muslim women from participating in public life. This positions Muslim women as objects of concern, but not as active participants in shaping their own identities or lives. Instead of being celebrated for their desire to engage in the public space, they are met with exclusion, bigotry, and discrimination. The language used in the discourse shifts the focus from the actual empowerment of Muslim women to a narrative of control, where their visible presence and religious practices, like wearing the headscarf, are seen as problematic or threatening to the societal norm. This framing serves to deny them the agency to define their own roles in society and subjects them to both physical and verbal assaults. The text also highlights that despite these challenges, some businesses show solidarity with Muslim women, signaling the

<p>continent as it attempts to fight its legacy of structural racism. On one side; those seeking to erase Europe's religious diversity through discriminatory legislative efforts and attacks on fundamental freedoms. On the other side; people who recognise and value Europe's diversity in all its forms and understand that plurality means nothing if it is not visibly manifested and protected.</p>	<p>possibility of resistance to the marginalizing forces at play. The position of Muslim women, therefore, is one of struggle for recognition and acceptance in a society that often frames them as symbols of oppression rather than individuals with the agency to participate in public life.</p>
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An examination of recent news coverage uncovers growing concerns about the discrimination faced by Muslim women in Europe. News articles such as "Veiled Muslim women face discrimination in Germany, Netherlands, Spain" (2022), "Muslim women, Black people face rising discrimination in Germany, study finds" (2025), and "Headscarf ruling puts a target on the backs of Muslim women" (2021) highlight how Muslim women, particularly those who wear the hijab, are subject to exclusion, prejudice, and legal challenges. The critical discourse analysis (CDA) of these texts using Sara Mills' framework reveals that Muslim women are frequently positioned as "the Other" in contrast to secular, dominant norms particularly within professional and public spaces. However, beyond discursive construction, these representations carry significant implications for social cohesion, employment equity, and civil rights protections, calling for a more inclusive approach to policy-making and legal interpretation. For example, discriminatory hiring practices rooted in appearance undermine not only individual rights but also broader efforts at integration and diversity promotion across Europe.

Table 1 offers detailed analysis across three countries and media sources, with a comparison that shows the differing intensity of discrimination. For instance, Muslim women in Germany and the Netherlands face more severe employment discrimination than in Spain, despite all three being EU members. These differences may reflect varying legal frameworks, public sentiments, or historical experiences with multiculturalism. Similarly, media sources vary in tone and framing; Middle East Monitor presents a data-driven, empirical narrative, Anadolu Agency emphasizes structural and institutional racism, while Euronews adopts a critical stance towards European legal rulings, exposing ideological contradictions.

The inclusion of audience response is crucial to understanding the media's social impact. Public reactions in comment sections, social media discussions, and civil society responses often reveal both resistance and reinforcement of media narratives. For instance, responses to the Euronews article on the headscarf ruling ranged from supportive calls for religious freedom to xenophobic comments that mirrored discriminatory discourses in the article itself. These reactions illustrate the media's dual role: not only reflecting but also shaping public perception and reinforcing societal norms. Consequently, the discursive framing in news media contributes to the normalization or contestation of exclusionary policies, especially in liberal democracies that claim to uphold pluralism.

This study reveals three important findings. First, systemic discrimination against veiled Muslim women persists in European labor markets, particularly in Germany and the Netherlands. This challenges the ideal of religious neutrality and necessitates urgent reforms in anti-discrimination laws and hiring policies. Second, intersecting identities being both Muslim and female magnify the vulnerability of these women within public spaces and state institutions, confirming the structural nature of bias. Third, efforts by Muslim women to assert visibility and participation in public life are often met with discursive and legal resistance, such as through hijab bans. These practices reflect not only symbolic control but also function as regulatory mechanisms that limit agency.

To fully understand the influence of media on the perception of Muslim women, future research should include empirical audience studies through surveys, interviews, or digital ethnography to assess how public opinions are shaped or challenged by media portrayals. Likewise, comparative analysis across different genres (news, opinion, social media) and different national contexts will enrich our understanding of how discourse travels and transforms within varying ideological and legal environments.

Table 2. Comparative Overview of Discrimination Against Veiled Muslim Women in Europe

Country	Type of Discrimination	Key Sectors Affected	Statistical Evidence	Legal/Policy Context
Germany	High levels of systemic discrimination against veiled Muslim women in employment and public life	Employment, Public Institutions, Law Enforcement	Only ~25% of veiled applicants received job callbacks compared to ~50% of unveiled applicants. 37% reported unfair treatment in public offices.	Headscarf rulings allow bans in workplaces. Discrimination persists despite ICERD obligations.
Netherlands	Discrimination primarily in customer-facing jobs; veiled women face more rejection than unveiled ones	Employment (Service Industry)	48.5% of unveiled applicants received responses, vs. 34.5% of veiled applicants.	Legal ambiguity around religious dress in professional settings remains.
Spain	Lower reported levels of discrimination against veiled women compared to Germany & Netherlands	Employment	Study shows relatively smaller gap in callback rates for veiled applicants.	No explicit headscarf ban in most regions; secularism less aggressively enforced.
France	Strong penalization of Muslim identity in labor market; visible religiosity seen as negative	Employment	Field experiments show religiosity as a "premium" for Christians but a "penalty" for Muslims.	Strict laïcité (secularism) laws; repeated bans on religious symbols in public institutions.
United Kingdom	Discrimination based on Muslim-sounding names even without photos; visual cues not always needed	Employment	CV studies show Muslim applicants receive fewer callbacks despite identical qualifications.	Anti-discrimination laws in place, but implementation is uneven.
Norway	Name-based discrimination prevalent even in anonymous job applications	Employment	Similar patterns to UK; names signal religion/ethnicity and reduce chances of selection.	Lacks strong enforcement mechanisms despite formal equality laws.

Germany exhibits some of the most severe forms of structural discrimination. Veiled Muslim women are systematically excluded from employment opportunities, especially in customer-facing roles. Data shows that only about 25% of veiled applicants received job callbacks, compared to around 50% of unveiled applicants. Additionally, 37% of Muslim women report experiencing unfair treatment in public offices, and 18% of Muslim men report police discrimination. This demonstrates that discrimination is not just social, but deeply institutional. Although Germany is a signatory to international anti-discrimination treaties like ICERD, enforcement gaps persist, particularly in balancing religious freedom with secular norms.

In the Netherlands, the pattern is similar but slightly less severe. Discrimination is particularly prevalent in positions that involve public interaction. For example, 48.5% of unveiled Muslim women received responses from employers, while only 34.5% of veiled women did. This suggests a visual bias against religious expression in the labor market. While the Netherlands promotes multiculturalism in policy rhetoric, the lack of clear legal protection for religious attire contributes to ongoing exclusion.

Spain stands out as a country with relatively lower levels of reported discrimination. While disparities still exist, the study suggests that the gap between veiled and unveiled Muslim women in job application outcomes is less pronounced than in Germany or the Netherlands. Spain's legal system does not aggressively enforce secularism in the same way as France, and there is more regional variation in the acceptance of religious symbols. This creates a slightly more inclusive environment, although informal biases may still persist.

France, known for its strict secularism (*laïcité*), imposes some of the most rigid legal constraints on public displays of religious identity. Field experiments reveal that Christian religiosity may improve employment outcomes, while Muslim religiosity—especially when visibly expressed results in penalization. The hijab is often interpreted not as a personal or religious choice but as a threat to French secular values. As a result, Muslim women in France face exclusion from both public sector jobs and certain educational opportunities. This legal and cultural environment significantly limits their participation in public life.

The United Kingdom presents a different scenario. Even in the absence of photographs on job applications, applicants with Muslim-sounding names receive significantly fewer callbacks. This illustrates that discrimination can be linguistically coded, not just visually enforced. While anti-discrimination legislation exists in the UK, actual implementation remains inconsistent. Thus, Muslim women may still face barriers even when laws appear inclusive.

Norway shows a similar pattern to the UK. Despite formal equality laws and anonymous hiring practices, name-based discrimination continues to be a problem. Muslim-sounding names on job applications significantly reduce the likelihood of being called for interviews, indicating that subtle, implicit bias plays a major role in limiting opportunities.

The findings suggest the need for context-sensitive anti-discrimination strategies, greater monitoring and enforcement of equality laws, and increased visibility of Muslim women's voices in policy debates. Without such measures, media discourse and legal frameworks will continue to reproduce marginalization under the guise of neutrality or security.

Discussion

Western media frequently portray Muslim women through a lens of victimhood, emphasizing themes of oppression, lack of education, and financial dependence. These depictions are often situated within broader narratives of terrorism and extremism, with outlets such as The New York Times and The Guardian linking traditional Muslim attire and religious practices to radical ideologies (Kasirye, 2025). This portrayal constructs a stark dichotomy between Western and Muslim societies, positioning the West as progressive and supportive, while framing Muslim cultures as inherently repressive (Neelam, 2017). Such representations not only oversimplify the diverse experiences of Muslim women but also contribute to a cultural "othering" that marginalizes their voices. By perpetuating these binaries, the media reinforce stereotypes and hinder nuanced understanding of Muslim identities.

The representation of Muslim women in media is deeply influenced by geopolitical and historical contexts. Geopolitical tensions, especially the perceived clash between the West and Islam, shape narratives that often emphasize oppression in Muslim-majority countries, even when those countries may have relatively positive records on women's rights (Terman, 2017). This selective focus reinforces stereotypes and overlooks diversity within Muslim communities. Furthermore, post-9/11 discourses have intensified ideological biases, reinforcing a binary of 'good' versus 'evil' in which Muslim identities are frequently vilified (Khan et al., 2023). These portrayals contribute to a narrow, monolithic image of Muslim women as either victims or symbols of extremism. However, emerging scholarship calls for a more nuanced and inclusive media discourse. Researchers argue for the use of critical discourse analysis to expose and counter biased narratives, thereby promoting fairer and more accurate representations that reflect the complexity of Muslim women's lived experiences. This shift is essential for fostering intercultural understanding and equity.

Such media constructions also have tangible implications for policy-making and social integration. When Muslim women are predominantly portrayed as oppressed or threatening, public support for inclusive or multicultural policies may decrease. Policymakers may feel justified in implementing restrictive measures in the name of 'liberation' or 'security', thereby perpetuating exclusion rather than empowerment. In this context, media discourse becomes not only a mirror but also a driver of political and social outcomes.

Sara Mills' approach to critical discourse analysis offers a nuanced lens for examining how language constructs and reinforces gender roles, particularly in media representations (Butt et al., 2024; K. Li & Zhang, 2022). Drawing on feminist theory, Mills emphasizes the importance of analyzing not only what is said, but also how it is said and who is allowed to speak (Liberatore, 2020; Santoire, 2023). In the context of news discourse, this perspective reveals how women are often framed in limited or stereotypical roles, such as victims, caregivers, or emotional figures, while men are portrayed as authoritative or rational (Purwanto & Dewanti, 2024).

In Arab media representations, Ahed Tamimi is often positioned both as a national heroine and a symbol of resistance, reflecting broader ideological stances on Palestinian identity and struggle. Through the lens of Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis, these portrayals highlight how power, gender, and agency are constructed discursively to serve specific socio-political narratives (Wulandari & Surur, 2024). The narrative of women's emancipation within Arab patriarchal culture is often framed through discourse that both challenges and reinforces traditional gender roles, highlighting complex layers of power, resistance, and cultural negotiation (Qotrunnada & Hakim, 2024).

Comparative research suggests that media discourses vary significantly across countries and platforms. For instance, state-controlled media in some Middle Eastern nations may portray Muslim women as symbols of moral virtue or national pride, while Western liberal media may frame them as oppressed or exoticized figures. Similarly, digital and independent media outlets often present more diverse narratives than mainstream legacy media, reflecting broader shifts in media democratization and audience participation. This variation highlights the importance of contextualizing discourse analysis within specific media ecosystems and cultural frameworks.

Recent research on the construction of women in the media reveals several nuanced portrayals, highlighting the persistence of gendered violence, stereotypes, and evolving roles. A critical discourse analysis of newspaper representations of violence against women shows that media often frames such issues through victimization narratives, reinforcing societal norms about women's vulnerability (Mardikantoro et al., 2022). Similarly, the reconstruction of Arab women's roles in media reflects a shift toward more diverse and empowered depictions, challenging traditional gender expectations (Hamid et al., 2021). A critical discourse analysis of debates surrounding transgender athletes in women's sports explores how discourses of inclusion and exclusion frame who is considered a "woman," often emphasizing biological essentialism over

social and identity-based factors (Jakubowska, 2024). These studies collectively demonstrate how media discourse shapes and reshapes societal understandings of gender, identity, and violence.

To address the negative portrayals and promote more accurate representations, several strategies are recommended. First, media organizations should implement editorial policies that prioritize diversity and representation, including hiring practices that include Muslim women and other marginalized voices in editorial roles. Second, media literacy programs should be strengthened to empower audiences to critically engage with media messages. Third, collaborations between journalists and scholars particularly those employing critical discourse analysis can offer methodological insights for uncovering and challenging biased narratives. Lastly, transnational dialogue between media producers across cultural contexts can facilitate the exchange of best practices for inclusive representation, thereby fostering global solidarity and mutual understanding.

Conclusion

This research highlights the systemic discrimination faced by veiled Muslim women in European labor markets, specifically in Germany and the Netherlands. It underscores how their visible religious identity exposes them to intersecting biases related to both gender and religion, reinforcing their marginalization in public and institutional spaces. The portrayal of Muslim women as vulnerable and passive subjects, rather than active agents of change, reveals the dominant discursive frameworks that perpetuate their exclusion. However, the research is limited by its focus on specific countries and does not fully address the broader implications of such discrimination in other European contexts or the potential for cross-cultural comparisons. Future research should explore a wider range of countries and consider the role of policy reforms in combating such biases. Additionally, studies should examine how Muslim women themselves navigate and resist these discriminatory structures, providing a more comprehensive view of their agency and resilience.

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