**Abstract**

*Terrorism as an unprecedented and long-term threat to national security poses by a securitised terrorist ‘Other’: the securitization and crystallization of exceptional extraordinary powers in France.*

Are French counterterrorism strategies a colonial legacy?

In anxiety-inducing times, when threats to national security are constantly delineated in political discourses, media and everyday conversations, there is a need to evaluate the way political decision-makers frame threats. I offer an empirical analysis on the French response to terrorism, resting upon an in-depth critical discourse analysis on the delineation of the threat, the terrorist enemy, and the normalisation of counterterrorism policies in the aftermath of Paris attacks in November 2015. Of critical importance is the shift in the delineation of the threat in discourse from an exceptional and unprecedented threat to a permanent and long-term threat. Thelanguage of securitization culminated in political discourse establishing a state of emergency and declared a war against the terrorist enemy in November 2015. Indeed, delineated as a long-term threat, measure of extraordinary powers was extended for a 2-year application and the War on Terror per definition has vocation to last in the long-term. Not only does the language of war perpetuate a climate of anxiety amongst citizens but leads to question the tenability of establishing such measures against a socially and politically constructed terrorist enemy. The existential threat narrative has long been criticised by Critical Terrorism Studies literature and in particular the demonisation of the enemy. Following a decolonial approach and critical orientalist lens, I provide a critique of this securitised enemy construction. The terrorist enemy has long been delineated as an ‘other’, dehumanized, demonized, and resting upon a binary construction of identities ‘us versus them’ shaping the rhetorical narratives of security.

Significant, yet under-explored, France is a key case in understanding how an ongoing state of exception and quest for security in the name of counterterrorism shapes decision-making and elite discourse resting upon a colonial continuum. It leads to question: what remains from the colonial matrix when constructing and responding to the threat of terrorism? The main purpose of the paper is to examine the progressive evolution of the securitizing language, as a strategic process to serve political interests, shaping a particular depiction of the threat of terrorism and its counter measures. Also, it has for purpose to question the application of this way of thinking and countering terrorism to a broader framework: the European Union.

Declaring a state of emergency has long been the ‘*go-to*’ political tool for French political actors, gradually normalising the exception and securitizing the everyday life at the expense of rights and liberties’ protection. It questions the initiative launched by Macron in November 2020 to other European member states’ leaders to push for a more common and collaborative response to terrorism. Indeed, is France going to be the example to follow by the EU in terms of European perspectives on countering the threat of terrorism by its member states and what might be the consequences?

**Introduction**

The construction of polarised identities in political discourse is integral to and essential feature of the securitization language and security politics (Campbell 1998), which aims at legitimizing counterterrorism policies. Identities of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ are discursively constructed through the language of counterterrorism (Jackson 2007, 395) as a manifest political consequence of picking one mode of representation over another (Campbell, 1998). The discursive construction of the ‘other’ is argued by the terrorism scholarship to be very much event- and policy-driven, which I seek to demonstrate that it is also embedded in a context. While it is an essential feature for political actors to build a binary self-other identity, I do not intend to provide an in-depth analysis on the political construction of the French national self, but rather to investigate the depiction and framing of the terrorist ‘other’ informing the colonial legacy of the French counterterrorism strategy. Critical to (re)constructing and maintaining a national self-identity as a collective identity, the notion of difference is embedded in political discourse via a series of identity markers: those who belong to a ‘shared and imagined community’ (Anderson 1963, 6) and those who do not.

The paper seeks to discuss how the French political construction of a terrorist ‘other’ informed the coloniality of power, contemporary forms of imperialism and colonialism remaining in the French approach of counterterrorism?

Terrorism research was highly influenced by the 9/11 and Anglo-Saxon centred led by an English hegemonic case study and research. The thinking behind the analysis is therefore to widen the spectrum and engage with a new case study: the French construction of the terrorist ‘other’ and counterterrorism measures, from a decolonial and orientalist critical perspective. While CTS scholars engaged with research on hearing of marginalised and silenced voices and incorporating those voices within their analysis (Holland 2016, 209)[[1]](#footnote-1), the orientalist and coloniality of power within Western hegemonic security powers require further investigation. The Otherness metanarrative is an essential component in understanding the political construction of terrorism, counterstrategy powers and structures. There is a necessity to widen the CTS research scope and examine ‘other-centric’ research which focus on the phenomenon of political language depicting terrorism. The thinking behind of the analysis is to provide a critique of the Western hegemonic construction of the terrorist ‘other’ as a modern taboo and a marker of Western identity. Western hegemonic powers fix meaning in discourse inextricably linked to power of representational practises in identity-making (Doty 1996, 8-10), those hierarchies and forms of exclusion remain invisible in mainstream approaches to security and still constitute an additional layer of power relations (Adamson 2020). Moreover, it is produced within a context, whether political, historical, cultural, and national. Said (1995) demonstrates that the discourse was ever-changing, largely influenced by the context in which it is produced. Therefore, the identity self/west versus other/east is not static, rather entrenched in an historical, social, intellectual, and political process (Said 2003, 332). Employing a decolonial approach in the analysis of political discourse signifies examining the field of terrorism - deeply rooted in exclusionary practices, racial politics, entrenched social and political hierarchies - and observing the racial hierarchies, imperial and colonial settings/histories that are still embedded in discourse and shape the response given to terrorism by political actors.

The paper aims at analysing the understanding of the racial othering through various components of the French political discourse. The understanding of discourse, for the purpose of the analysis, rests upon a system of meaning-production constructing new realities, as a site of construction of meaning (Foucault 1975, 32-33). It structures signification and construct social realities, defines subject and establish relational positions, produces subjects authorised to speak and act, legitimises knowledge and political practice (Jackson 2007, 396). First, it finds significance within the French political language game through the construction of the terrorist radical ‘other’ underlining an orientalist narrative by decision-makers to construct ‘Islamic terrorism’. Not only does the analysis covers the orientalist narrative of the ‘Islamic terrorism’ but clearly illustrates the use of meta-narrative of civilisation barbarism to dehumanize, depersonalise, depoliticize the terrorist enemy ultimately creating a hierarchy of civilization, nourishing the orientalist and racial discourse on terrorism. Those narratives question the political interest in implementing counterterrorism measures based on those orientalist and racial assumptions. Last, the analysis will draw upon and seek to demonstrate the colonial continuum of the French counterterrorism strategy. The state of emergency post-V13 considered as a ‘new’ counterterrorism approach, originates from the French colonial context of the Algerian War, furthering the internal other and the idea of ‘suspect community’. Those components can be traced back to historical settings and excavate coloniality of power within French counterterrorism approaches and discourse, as a contemporary forms of colonialism and imperialism. The distinction between colonialization and colonialism/coloniality is essential (Ekeh 1983) and the latter is explained as a movement, a process that perpetuates in the social structures, powers and social formations emanating from colonization - defined as a moment, a period (Vergès 2019, 27-28).

**1. The depiction of the terrorist enemy: the orientalist construction of the French political discourse**

1.1 ‘Islamic radical terrorism’: understanding the racial othering process

To emphasise the negation of the enemy ‘other’ and promote the superiority of the self-identity, political actors deploy a series of core terms to delineate the terrorist enemy, the ‘other’ through the narrative of ‘Islamic radical terrorism’. As Jackson (2005) underlines within his analysis of post-9/11 discourse, it is a very common discursive strategy from Western hegemonic powers. As a matter of evidence, the French political discourse delineates terrorism using various labels: ‘Islamism’, ‘extremism’, ‘obscurantism’, ‘fanatics’, ‘jihadists’, ‘jihad’, ‘jihadi-terrorism’, ‘radicalism’, ‘extremists’, ‘fundamentalism’, ‘dividers’ ‘Salafists’, to depict the terrorist enemy without providing any definition of those concepts. Those core labels are yet culturally loaded, highly deployed by the political decision-makers, and function therefore to construct the radical ‘Islamic terrorists’ in opposition to the self (Jackson 2007). To further mark the binary self-other, the enemy comes from an outside, the political actors delineate the obscure beliefs of the terrorists, the wrong ideology followed by them which render them external and outsider, to emphasize the negation of ‘other’ which, ultimately, furthers the orientalist construction. The argument here is not to downplay the consequences of terrorism but rather to illustrate the orientalist construction of terrorist by hegemonic powers. The terrorist ‘other’ is located and built in the opposite position of a ‘self’, ‘us’, ‘we’ embodied by values such as freedom, liberties, fraternity, solidarity, unity; feelings such as love and care, everything that the ‘other’ is not according to the political actors portrayed as a ‘divider’. Empirically, post-Charlie Hebdo attacks, the terrorists are depicted as ‘external’ in whatever forms it undertakes - culturally, politically, and territorially. Post-V13, the political framing evolves to depict terrorists as the enemy within, external culturally and politically, but within the territory, to still demarcate the difference.

War acts on Friday were decided and planned in Syria; they were organised in Belgium, perpetrated in our soil with French accomplices. (Hollande 2015a)

… this radical Islamism, these jihadists, who was also born in our suburb, in our *quartiers populaires*. (Valls 2015c)

Political actors through discourse play an important part of responsibility in building knowledge about Islam and Arabs which further stigmatise them and increase Islamophobia amongst the population. From the in-depth analysis of the political discourse, the discursive construction of terrorism post-Charlie Hebdo emphasised the depiction of terrorists as a ‘killer’, ‘individus’, ‘Islamists’ which further evolved post-V13 to a depiction of ‘dividers’, ‘extremists’, ‘Salafists’, ‘fundamentalists’. As reported by Attalai and Moussi (2020), Islamophobia is a political phenomenon, shared by the entire political spectrum, which resulted on the aftermath of Paris attacks, just to name one example, in closing 19 places of worship.

Salafism demonstrates … which got inspiration from radical jihadism … how Salafism demonstrates a real danger, and we need to fight it, hence our wish to dissolve a few groups, close mosque, deport radical imam … (Hollande 2015a)

As Jackson (2007) demonstrates on two orders of critique, the discourse of Islamic terrorism and in particular the terrorism-extremism nexus works to produce knowledge that terrorism and religion are linked. It reinforces discrimination, impacts the Muslim community, and illustrates the argument developed on the orientalist construction of ‘terrorist other’ by Western hegemonic powers, as a long tradition. Not only does it lead to the closure of places of worship, but also emergency powers implemented by the decisions-makers are applied in a disproportionate and discriminatory manner, that is to target Muslims via the use of house arrest, and police raids solely based on religious practices and beliefs (Perolini 2017) and therefore contributes to further polarised the French society (Louati 2017). Tuastad (2003) demonstrates that such narratives and politics of representations of Arab and Islam highlight the hallmarks of orientalism by fundamentally dividing the East and the West, the self and the other and essentially define what is the knowledge/power nexus of orientalism, embedded in contemporary French political discourse. Said (1995) notes that the oriental ‘other’ reflects deeper socio-cultural fears and stereotypes that can be traced back to the imperial age, a long tradition of orientalist scholarship on the Middle East and Arab culture and religion. The discursive assumptions rests upon a long tradition of cultural stereotypes, representations and depictions of Islam and Muslims in French political discourse. Not only does it depoliticize Islam linking terrorism to extremist forms of religion, but also depoliticize the terrorist enemy delineated as a sub-human, monster, savage, and barbarian to legitimate the construction of the War on Terror’s counter-violence (Jackson 2005, 75).

1.2. ‘Individus’: dehumanization and depersonalization processes

The political discourse participates in dehumanizing the terrorist embedded in a civilisation-barbarism’s meta-narrative which further demarcate the self from the other to impact and influence the public audience’s perception on terrorist threat. Scrimin and Rubaltelli (2019, 2707) argue that blatant and explicit dehumanisation process impact terrorist events’ perception by people, and people’s perception of an out-group. Dehumanisation was first observable in a context of conflict and mass violence (Kelman 1979), it involves the denial of full humanness to depict ‘others’, the cruelty and suffering that is linked to their actions (Haslam 2006, 252). Conceptualised by Kelman (1979), dehumanisation involves denying a person ‘identity’ - defined as the perception of the person as an individual, independent, and distinguishable from other - and ‘community’ - defined as the perception to see the other as part of an interconnected network where individuals care for each other[[2]](#footnote-2). Dehumanisation framework is understood as an extreme phenomenon to call for acts of violence (Haslam 2006). Additionally, I focus on the dehumanisation process within political discourse, related to a perceived threat of terrorism and the promotion of the out-group via depersonalisation, depoliticization, bestiality and irrationality depiction.

A specificity of the French case study is the label ‘individus’ embedded in political discourse to refer to terrorists. The French wording ‘individu’ should be understood as a generic way to describe someone. Employing ‘individus’ suggests a distinct identity and within the perspective of this study it suggests a distinct identity from the ‘self’. The terminology of ‘individu’ is used systematically within the French political discourse post-Charlie Hebdo and V13 attacks. To unpack the French juridical meaning of ‘individu’, it refers to someone whose identity is unknown, or someone that need to be kept anonymous as convicted for crimes. Such wording suggests a certain type of dehumanisation which I argue is taking the form of a depersonalisation of the subject/individual. That is, the terrorists are removed from any identifiable characteristics that makes him/her a unique individual with individual characteristics, emotions, feelings, and human identity markers. The categorisation of the terrorists as ‘individus’ participates to the depersonalisation process. While victims are thoroughly named and described within the discourse, terrorists are correlated to inhuman, savage, monster, ‘individus’, suggesting a political choice to not identify them with human markers ultimately uncovering a ‘process of not naming’.

… the one – I always struggle to pronounce their names – the one who operated, the one who killed the police officer … (Valls 2015b)

… this brutality… this monstrosity… this cowardice because there is unspeakable cowardice… Yes, I’m talking about monstrosity. There is something incomprehensible to humans about this coldness. (Taubira 2015)

The narratives of ‘individus’ underlining a strategical discursive process of depersonalising the terrorists is extensively used by French political actors, to even associate them with the lexical field of monstrosity, cowardice, and brutality. On the contrary, the French and the victims are detailed: they are human beings, united, suffering, crying, and shouting, they have feelings and families. The processes of othering and dehumanisation are highlighted with the use of specific terminologies, used to depersonalise the terrorist as the denial of humanness and their exclusion from the human species (Haslam 2006), trying to not name them, with sub-human’s behaviours, and distinguishing them from the citizens. All those characteristics help the political actors to (re)construct a dichotomy between good and bad, ‘good’ encompass the French citizens and ‘bad’ encompassing the terrorists. By embedding political discourse within dehumanisation narrative, it denies any form of identity, independence, and community to the terrorists. The application and employment of the terminology ‘individu’ consequently participate to the othering process enshrined into political discourse. It indicates that dehumanisation is associated with a diverse assortment of individual differences (personality traits, ideologies, attitudes) and contextual factors (emotions, motives, threats, social positions) rather than being driven by hate or hatefulness (Halsam and Loughnan 2014).

Terrorists do not express feeling and emotions as would do ‘our civilization’, as its defining principles. They act with cold blood, and therefore strengthens the lack of personality, identity, and community – they belong to their own community of terrorists but are not worth being depicted as human, as a sort of hierarchy and superiority of ‘our’ civilization in comparison to the external ‘other’. It is particularly significant to reflect on Césaire’s development and critique of the constructed superiority of the West, in Europe, where the West is (re)producing constantly its ‘race superiority’ (1995, 33). Ultimately, it uncovers a political strategy in creating characteristics of barbarism which entail irrationality and bestiality correlated to the terrorist’s depiction. Killing defines the very nature of the terrorist (Jackson 2005, 153) and suggests bestial characteristics linked to the terrorist identity. Combining the civilization and barbarism narratives to delineate the two opposite identities therefore underlines what the literature labelled: the metanarrative of civilisation-barbarism. Dehumanising the terrorists means emptying them of any political content, their act is defined by their nature, they kill, torture, kidnap innocents’ people because they are monsters and ‘because this is what evil do’ (Jackson 2005, 153).

They... behaved ... like soldiers, like killers. Their modus operandi is that of people trained to kill. (Valls 2015a)

There are those who leave, who are formed to kill and to terrorise. (Valls 2015b)

What I see is the mark of savagery. Individuals who in cold blood murder… individuals who, with such savagery, point blank, in cold blood, are capable of murdering… are extraordinarily dangerous individuals, inhabited by savagery… No matter what has caused them inspiration, what inspires them is savagery, it is crime, it is barbarism. (Cazeneuve 2015)

The rhetoric of savagery and barbarism stress depersonalisation and dehumanisation of the terrorist depicted as nothing else than a savage, a murderer, and barbarian. Those narratives help the production of the enemy, the bestial and irrational characters of the terrorists are very much entrenched in post-Charlie Hebdo discourse, further illustrated post-V13, purposively using those themes to construct an enemy, a dangerous entity, and a polarised identity in comparison to the ‘self’.

Not only the terrorist is depicted as wrongdoers, inferior in moral and cultural terms but are also portrayed as a radical other. As Jackson (2005) argued, the most noticeable features of the language of counterterrorism is its appeal to identity produced by political actors to demonize the terrorist as an evil, barbarian and inhuman. He demonstrates that the discursive construction of the identity of the terrorist as a radical other is not a natural consequence, rather has several political objectives, especially to make the WoT more admissible to the wider public and policies curtailing human rights that would otherwise not be legitimate under normal circumstances. Therefore, the discursive construction of the terrorist identity has a political purpose: removing terrorists from any personality, humanity, and serves to constructing counterterrorism measures. For the WoT to become acceptable, narratives of the radical otherness and the production of the ‘other’ help the justification of policy formulation (Wilhelmsen 2017). It is not only a question of legitimation of measures that justify curtailment and breach of human rights and civil liberties, or the construction of an exceptional threat and enemy as underlined by scholars, but it also underlines the phenomenon of orientalist construction as a survival of colonization.

To conclude, the dehumanisation process is highly identifiable within political discourse and is correlated with various individual differences to depersonalise the terrorists, such as personality traits, ideologies, behaviours, and contextual factors such as threats, objectives and emotions which underpins terrorism and the terrorist threat (Haslam and Loughnan 2014). To deepen the analysis, not only does it depersonalise and dehumanize the terrorists, but it also depoliticizes the terrorist, to stress on the dangerousness and irrationality of the terrorist, to further demarcate the ‘them’ from ‘us’.

1.3. Depoliticization of the terrorist enemy

While seeking for depoliticization of the terrorist enemy, the depiction of the terrorist enemy in political discourse is highly politicised. Depoliticization is defined by Tsoukala (2008) as a terrorist attack deprives of any political objective, which turns the terrorist act as a goal, only having for purpose to inflict pain and suffering to ‘our’ civilization according to the decision-makers. Reflecting on poststructuralism, language is not a neutral medium serving to communicate information. Rather language fixes meaning in discourse, political language possesses a power to construct meaning, that is hegemonic rhetoric are linked to representational practises which represent people via the language game to produce binary, where one element is privileged over the other element (Doty 1996, 8-10). The superiority-inferiority identity-making nexus reflected through the metanarrative civilisation-barbarism represents a regime of truth for political actors and therefore is also used as a mean to depoliticize the terrorist. Terrorist acts are for the political actors not about politics, but rather an irrational hatred and fanatical ideology to destroy our civilisation (Tsoukala 2008, 64), labelled as ‘dividers’ (Hollande 2015b).

Depoliticization must also be understood as ‘racial’ (Haslam and Loughnan 2014), and the analysis of French political discourse helps shedding light on an orientalist construction of the terrorist ‘other’ through the constructed nexus inferiority-superiority of identities. Orientalism is defined as positioning the West at a superior point of civilization, and the orientalism scholarship was originally developed in the service of imperialism and colonialism (Said 2005) infused throughout areas of European life such as political arenas. It is a way to establish boundaries between the West and the East, where the ‘other’ Orient from the East is constructed by the West as inferior, the East is everything the West is not, based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between East and West (Khalid 2017). By depoliticizing the terrorist enemy, the ‘other’ is in an inferior position, to classify civilization, an ‘outsider’, a ‘divider’ reduced and voided from political content, but rather driven by irrational hatred and violence. Combined with the civilisation-barbarism narratives, it leads to a hierarchy of civilisation. That is a classification of civilisations, where the self is at the top of this hierarchy and the terrorists are excluded from this civilisation hierarchy, to further distinguish the self from the uncivilised other, a hierarchy of values where the West is seen as superior, the civilised society is superior from the one of the terrorists (Zulaika and Douglas 1996).

While some argue that depoliticization regards the Muslim community because of the depiction of Islam by political actor (Johnson 2002), I argue that it is due to the depoliticization of the enemy, to remove them from any justifiable or legitimate political goals to their acts. Consequently, it leads to the depoliticization of the Muslims and Islam because of the depiction ‘radical Islamist’ by the decision-makers, correlating terrorism to Islam. In sum, decision-makers will depict terrorists as having ideologies based on hatred, synonymous of violence, inhuman behaviour, and therefore emptying them from political content and purpose. The inhuman behaviour is constructed as aiming to destroy ‘our civilisation’, ‘our values’, and prove their dangerousness, savagery, irrationality, and monstrosity. Therefore, depoliticization, depersonalisation and dehumanization narratives are co-constitutive, one concept reinforces the other within discourse. Hence, depoliticization is not only targeting Muslims, but also a way for political actors to discursively construct the terrorist identity as an orientalist construction West versus East.

Ultimately, it illustrates a continuous colonial and imperialist legacy in Western societies (Toros 2016; Zulaika and Douglas 1996). Depoliticising their aims and goals is not only an essential feature in the legitimation of counterterrorism policies (Jackson 2005) but also underlines a colonial continuum in French security policies. I used Said’s orientalism as well as Khalid’s (2017) work as a model to demonstrate how to read political discourses and the political-language game on ‘Islamic terrorism’, that claim to know the ‘East’ by discursively constructing it, and their use of persistent racialised assumptions along an East/West binary, self/other nexus.

**2. The coloniality of power: French counterterrorism measures and its impacts**

The West (re)produces and shapes representations, (re)create binaries purposively implying the superiority of the West through discourse by depoliticizing, dehumanizing, and depersonalising the terrorist enemy ‘other’. Indeed, the narrative of ‘Islamic terrorism’ is deeply entrenched in discursive constructions of Western society (Jackson 2007) and is nowadays an illustration of contemporary forms of imperialism. Noteworthy, the use of representational politics has devastating consequences and impacts the Muslim community, fraught with islamophobia, racial and orientalist assumptions by the Western hegemonic powers (Majozi 2018). Moreover, within the French counterterrorism approach, the orientalist construction of the terrorist enemy and coloniality of counterterrorism powers produce an ‘internal racial other’.

2.1. ‘Déchéance de nationalité’: a French nationality ladder?

Discourse excludes and silences some modes of representation over the other as a continuum and contemporary forms of imperialism and colonial structures illustrated within the French discourse on terrorism. I build my argument on decolonial perspectives and orientalist critical lens to explore the framing of terrorism made by the French political actors to shed light on the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion and politics of representation in global counterterrorism research. Decolonial approaches allow scholars to investigate how and why the field of security studies legitimises some voices while silences others (Adamson 2020). Investigating this through a decolonial lens excavate the history of such exclusions and their connection with colonial, racial and imperial legacies. In practice and reflecting on the French case study, there is a legacy of racial politics which needs to be examined from a decolonial perspective and deconstruct the orientalist construction of the identity ‘other’, as a continuum embedded in nowadays terrorism’s discourse. As a preliminary of the analysis of the French orientalist construction, the concept of ‘déchéance de nationalité’ should be contextualised, analysed within its historical settings and genealogical roots. It originated in 1848 with the abolition of slavery in France allowing to exclude the French nationality to those who practices slavery.

The law of 1993 introduced within the Code Civil (article 25) the ‘déchéance de nationalité’ with various limits, implementing/respecting the international principles on prohibiting statelessness, as it will only be allowed if the person is dual-national. On the aftermath of Charlie Hebdo attacks, terrorism brought back to the political table the debate on and concept of ‘déchéance de nationalité’. The ‘déchéance de nationalité’ illustrates the moral, cultural and identity inferiority of the ‘other’s’ depiction and goes far beyond political narratives post-Charlie Hebdo attacks. Nor that it reinforces the nexus self/other, but also serves to strengthen the Western identity’s discursive construction, as a superior identity culturally, morally, politically in comparison with the ‘terrorist other’ (Khalid 2017). The orientalist construction of identities escalated, and the debate rises within the political arena post-V13, to discuss to render someone suspected and/or convicted of terrorism to be denied the French nationality, whether dual or single nationality holder[[3]](#footnote-3). The speech made by Hollande on the 16th of November 2015 escalates and questions the colonial continuum of counterterrorism powers and the racialisation of the terrorist ‘other’.

The deprivation of nationality must not result in making someone stateless, but we must be able to deprive of their French nationality an individual sentenced for an attack on the fundamental interests of the Nation or an act of terrorism, even if he was born French, I say “even if he was born French” when he has another nationality. (Hollande 2015a)

Discursive construction post-V13 emanating from political actors suggest racial politics, to differentiate the one that deserves the French nationality, and therefore the one who does not (Lambert 2021, 257). It also suggests a coloniality of power and structure within the French approach to counterterrorism with the so-called ‘déchéance de nationalité’ measure, which finds its explanation on the means implemented to control nationality and territory. The ‘déchéance de nationalité’ ultimately illustrates the superiority-inferiority nexus and would create a hierarchy of the French nationality, producing an ‘enemy within’ by removing his/her French nationality to reinforce the superior identity of the French national-self. The Défenseur des Droits argues contra the ‘déchéance de nationalité’ for French who only have one nationality, as it would ultimately serve to create a distinction: the contested French nationality and the uncontested one, stigmatising further French people with other origins, distinguishing ‘the French with immigrant background’ and the ‘French by birth’ (Toubon, 2015; Geissier 2015/6). Indeed, the ‘déchéance de nationalité’ is discussed to be widen and applied to French nationals who only had one nationality, (i.e., the French one) as being suspected and/or convicted with terrorism. That is possible, for Hollande at that time, and is justified by political actors based on the ‘supposedly’ alleged immigrant background that could be given to those terrorists, or the nationality of the country they presumably ‘originated from’ even though they never lived there or assimilated to that country before, similar to what was done during the Algerian War when the French authority was sending Algerians ‘where they are from’ or their ‘country of origin’, assuming they were never French (Lambert 2021, 79). Therefore, it further distinguished ‘French by birth’ and ‘French with immigrants backgrounds’, considering that the French by birth ‘pure souche’[[4]](#footnote-4) cannot be suspected or convicted of terrorism? Allowing this ‘déchéance de nationalité’ would create a sort of ladder of Frenchism called ‘scale of Frenchness or purity of identity’[[5]](#footnote-5) (Geissier 2015/6, 11) and is juridically, morally, culturally wrong. This political debate only revives what was discussed during the War in Algeria and the difference of nationality and citizenship, deeply embedded in a colonial matrix. The political orientalist discourse functions to construct and maintain national identity, defining the ‘self’ through negation (Jackson 2007, 420). Noteworthy, Quijano (2000, 2007) notes that race is significant when discussing coloniality of power and structures. Discourse on the ‘déchéance de nationalité’ only (re)inforces and increases Islamophobia and stigmatisation to create an ‘internal other’, emphasised on the aftermath of Paris attacks and suggest that race as a criterion of activation of the ‘déchéance de nationalité’.

2.2. State of emergency as a colonial legacy from the Algerian War: race, a criterion for its activation?

Race is not only a criterion to activate the ‘déchéance de nationalité’ but is also significant in the application of emergency powers within the French context. On the night of Paris attacks, Hollande declared a state of emergency in France. The hypothesis underlines in this section seeks to demonstrate the colonial legacy of the national French counterterrorism measures embodied by emergency powers, the impacts on the French Muslim community, and what is labelled by Quijano (2000) coloniality of power. Not only does the discourse on terrorism constructs an external terrorist other, but also excavate a colonial matrix of power and relations to depict an ‘internal racial other’. Race is a phenomenon and an outcome of colonial domination (Quijano, 2000) and was placed as a criterion to classify the population in the power structure of society during colonialization which evolved today to new racial geo-cultural identities embedded in Western hegemonic powers. Race is significant when reflecting on the application of emergency powers in France, which the latter is a colonial legacy originating from the Algerian War. Race demonstrates the coloniality of power and structures in France, that is the application of emergency powers results in depicting and targeting an internal racial other. What should be understood by colonial continuum, or colonial legacy? It suggests an historical continuity between the colonial period (colonization) and the following one (Lambert 2021, 42), referring to what was previously defined between a period and a movement, it also signifies the colonial structures within nowadays French society (ibid, 231). A concrete example is the emergency powers as a ‘survival’ from French colonial empire (Vergès 2019, 18).

The Law of 1955 was created within the context of the Algerian War, following a series of terrorist attacks by the *Front de Libération Nationale Algérien* in November 1954 and gave birth to what is called: ‘le regime d’état d’urgence’. Empirically, and reflecting upon historical settings of those emergency powers, French decision-makers declared the state of emergency for four examples culminated to 8 declarations of emergency powers, since the promulgation of the Law of 1955. That is, during the Algeria War context and its creation (1955-1962) in Algeria (what formed the colony of Algeria, the Algerian department), during the revolt against colonial powers in France’s Outre Mer territory, that is Kanaky (1985), Wallis, Futuna (1986), and the Polynesian archipelago iles du Vent a Ma’oji Nui (1987), during the riots in the *quartiers populaires* (2005-2006), last for the case of Islamic terrorism post-V13 (2015-2017).

While I will not go into depth on the application of emergency measures[[6]](#footnote-6), I want to illustrate the continuum of the colonial matrix, the coloniality of power and structure, not only in terms of the state of emergency but who they target with those measures: ‘racialised internal other’ or so called ‘racialisation of the bodies’ (Lambert 2021, 136). It leads to question why the state of emergency is a racial politics and argued to embody a colonial continuum? Both are intertwined, in the sense that, racialisation of the bodies is genealogically based within the colonial history, the state of emergency measure has been applied in historical colonial context and is entrenched to ordinary law today (c.f., SILT bill 2017). Therefore, it illustrates the coloniality of a legal measure (Lambert 2021, 136). Empirically, state of emergency targeted the securitized Algerians fighting against the colonial power, then the securitized Kanak seeking for independence, reproduced against the securitized youth from the *quartiers populaires* for the majority issued from families who experienced French colonization, French with immigrant’s background, and then towards securitized Muslims assimilated by the Government to terrorism since 2015 (Lambert 2021, Mechai and Zine 2018). In 2005, a shift can be noticed, the enemy is depicted by political actors to be inside the French metropolitan borders with the youth in *quartiers populaires*, then in 2015 the securitized terrorist enemy is inside, terrorists are born in France and perpetrating acts of terrorism inside the French borders – as an expression of the colonial continuum. Another essential element to illustrate the racial character of emergency powers is the focus on Islam and religion within the political debates. Reflecting on the Algeria application for instance, police forces did not profile and arrest Algerians who ‘look like non-orientalised’ that is if they were wearing ‘European clothes’ (Lambert 2021, 64), in 2005 political actors argued that the youth population in the *quartiers populaires* were trained and manipulated by ‘radical Islamists’ (ibid, 235), in 2015 the Sentinelle forces profiled French Muslims, closed places of worship, profiled women wearing the hijab, men with beard and/or white converted to Islam (Mecha**ï** and Zine 2018). Additionally, political debates were oriented to ban the hijab in public space, every time emergency measures were activated and implemented (e.g., in 2004 in schools, in 2010 public spaces, 2017 ban of the burkini, etc.). Last, another reflection which can demonstrate the racial and colonial continuum of counterterrorism approaches is the comparison made between Islamic terrorism in 2015 and terrorism perpetrated by white terrorists such as Bretons and Corses in the 60/70s. To deal with their calls for independence, the French Government never activated nor implemented emergency measures.

Emergency powers in the hands of the executive is structured by racism and is central to it, racializing the bodies and nowadays the Muslims bodies, the French Muslim community. While colonization is over, structures and powers did not disappear (Vergès 2019, 27-28), coloniality is a process and a movement embedded in French counterterrorism approaches. The so-called ‘état d’urgence’ is revealing the colonial continuum, the use of colonial powers, continuously applied as a contemporary persistence racializing spaces and bodies.

### 2.3. “Good versus bad Muslim’s” narratives

Not only does the discourse construct an external ‘other’ while depicting the terrorist enemy but also construct internal differences. It is not only through the discourse on ‘Islamic terrorism’ or implementation of counterterrorism measures but also with a narrative of ‘good versus bad Muslims’, produced by the Western hegemonic powers. This subsection draws upon those discursive assumptions argued to be rooted in a racist and Islamophobic Western epistemological narrative which links terrorism and Islam (Majozi 2018, 180). It leads to vilifying Islam and the Muslim community and produces a discourse on who is ‘a good Muslim’ and who is ‘a bad one’. This narrative is a political discursive strategy (Johnson 2002, 224) argued to be politically and culturally loaded. Jackson (2007, 423) demonstrates that political rhetoric is one of the consequences of it considering the ubiquitous public discourse which depicts Islam and Muslims as a source of terrorism, extremism, and threat, despite the other side of the discourse emphasising that there is a need to protect the ‘good Muslims’ against the one who distorted Islam (Hollande 2015b).

To analyse the narrative of ‘Good versus Bad Muslims’ embedded in post-Charlie Hebdo and post-V13 attacks’ discourse, I build it on Breen-Smyth’s work (2014) and her re-definition of ‘suspect community’ adding a decolonial approach to her analysis. There exists a range of studies investigating the effects of counterterrorism measures on ‘suspect communities’ and draw upon Hillyard and other’s application of the term ‘suspect community’. While Hillyard (1993) argues that legislation and security practises produced the ‘suspect community’ sub-group, Breen-Smyth (2014) re-defines it by reflecting on contemporary counterterrorism security practises, to fit with the reality experienced by this politically and culturally designed ‘suspect community’ to avoid the fixed characteristics perception. That is

… as a group of people, or a subset of the population constructed as ‘suspect’ by mechanisms deployed by the state to ensure national or state security … These mechanisms are directed at one specific population by an ethnic, religious, racial, national, or other market and the threat to that security is seen as emanating exclusively or primarily from them. The nature of the marker is contextually determined … This creates in the public mind a suspiciousness of people apparently in that category and renders them a ‘suspect community. (Breen-Smyth 2014, 231-232).

There are serious consequences of the creation of ‘suspect community’ by authorities, it renders suspect people who may be innocent to become the target of repressive and punitive measures such as surveillance, profiling, and therefore seriously impact the identified and politically constructed sub-group known as ‘suspect community’. The community exists in public suspicious mind as constructed and (re)produced on imagined fears embedded in political actor’s discourse on security, insecurity, and terrorism (Nickels et al., 2012). Not only it is produced through political discourse and the public suspicious mind but is also historically based upon a colonial, imperialist legacy, orientalist representation of the ‘other’, reproduced by political actors in their contemporary counterterrorism approaches: the Muslim ‘others’. Political actors employ narrative to distinguish terrorists from ‘good Muslims’ to diminish the effects of ‘suspect community’ while using counterterrorism policies which target the same people they seek to protect in their discourse. Counterterrorism approaches impact the Muslims community and securitized subgroups, the Muslims community lives under pressure to be perceived as ‘good Muslims’ (Breen-Smyth, 2014), which require from them political performance and/or to manifest their positions to be detached from this ‘subgroup of the population that is singled out for state attention as being ‘problematic[‘s]’ (Pantazis and Pemberton 2009), a vision embedded in Western society.

The French decision-makers create a distinction by protecting the French Muslim community, to mitigate the use of politically and culturally loaded labels depicted in the previous section and diminish the effect of the ‘suspect community’. In practice, the counterterrorism approaches continue to duplicate the ‘suspect community’ idea, being the principal victims of counterterrorism measures of surveillance, profiling, targeting (Perolini 2017) and ultimately discriminate Muslims (Kundnani 2015). I focus on one specific manifestation of racial othering, based on the context of its production and construction by the political actors which are the Arab/Muslims embedded in political discourse on terrorism. The context matters for the analysis of ‘racial othering’ (Selod 2018, 4) for decision-makers to (re)produce a discourse that racialized their bodies, those same bodies, argued by the Western hegemonic powers through their counterterrorism approaches, threaten security and justify the surveillance, and suspicion. This is particularly significant within the practice of state of emergency measures in France, from the 14th of November to the 31st of October 2017: 19 places of worship closed, 9700 ‘fiches S[[7]](#footnote-7)’ profiled Muslims for radicalisation (out of 25.000), 12.000 people registered in FSPRT[[8]](#footnote-8); 4469 house searches, particularly targeting the French Muslim community through house raids, house arrests, closure of places of worship, profiling, and increased surveillance. Reflecting on Breen-Smyth’s work (2014) on ‘suspect community’ and the definition of ‘racial othering’ by Patanzis and Pemberton (2009, 649), the race, ethnicity, religion, class, language, bodies, dress, ideology, or any combinations serve to delineate the sub-group and therefore also construct and produce an internal ‘other’, constructing internal differences (Khalid 2017, Tickner 2002, 39). Internal differences find illustration with the narratives on the ‘déchéance de nationalité’, colonial continuum of emergency powers, and political debate post-V13. Therefore, contemporary national security policies portray and depict Muslims as an internal ‘other’, treated with continuous suspicion, and illustrate how the French political actors continue to demonise a racial ‘other’ (Fekete 2004). Muslims are constantly constructed within the French political discourse following an orientalist approach and as a race based on markers commonly associated with Islam (De Koning 2016), conceptualised as an internal and inferior ‘other’ (Smith 2016).

**Conclusion**

To deepen critical terrorism research scholarship, the analysis illustrated the embedded colonial and imperialist matrix emanating from hegemonic discourse on terrorism. The French case study not only does shed light on orientalist counterterrorism discourse, but also underlines a colonial matrix embedded in nowadays’ society and political decisions. Particularly significant in French counterterrorism approaches, the discourse post-Charlie Hebdo and post-V13 attacks demonstrates a colonial continuum in the application of counterterrorism powers, labelled by Quijano (2000) as the coloniality of power and structure. Not only does it depict a terrorist ‘other’ from an orientalist standpoint, but it also leads to (re)produce an internal racial other, racializing, stigmatizing, profiling the Muslim community, and (re)enforcing what was labelled the ‘suspect community’ (Hillyard 1993, Breen-Smyth 2014).

The first part of analysis underlined a political orientalist discursive construction of terrorists post-Charlie Hebdo and V13 attacks, dehumanized using various core labels from barbarians, to monster, to savage; depersonalised the terrorist enemy, and depoliticized that is voiding terrorists from any political content. Additionally, the discursive constructions examined highlighted the (re)construction of ‘racial othering’ via the use of the ‘Islamic terrorism’ narrative, that is the decision-makers is associating terrorism and religion through politics of representation of Islam and Arabs, depoliticizing their ideology, and reducing it to savagery and irrationality. Not only through ‘Islamic terrorism’ the otherness metanarrative was underlined, but also through the ‘déchéance de nationalité’. The ‘déchéance de nationalité’ narratives brought back to the political debate a sort of French nationality ladder, differentiating the French by birth and the French with immigrant background, that would have enabled the political actor to remove French nationality based on race. Combined with the narrative of ‘good versus bad Muslims’ ultimately securitized the bodies and strengthen the constructed ‘suspect community’ in public’s mind. Because of such orientalist political rhetoric, it leads to stigmatise and racialize the French Muslim community as being the target of counterterrorism measures through profiling and increased surveillance.

The second part of the analysis aimed to uncover the coloniality of power and structures of counterterrorism approaches. The state of emergency implemented on the aftermath of Paris attacks is an illustration of the coloniality of power in France, originated during the Algerian War, its application was driven by racial political arguments enabling its activation: Algerians, New Caledonians, ‘banlieusards’, Islamic terrorists. Reflecting on emergency powers, the analysis showcased its genealogical roots and its application post-V13 increasing the validation of the hypothesis that race is an actual criterion for its activation taking into consideration the previous application, as a continuum of colonial powers.

To conclude, emergency powers application is structured by racism and is central to it. The ‘état d’urgence’ reveals the colonial continuum, the use of colonial powers, continuously applied as a ‘colonial survival measure’, its contemporary persistence racializing and securitizing spaces and bodies. While colonization is over, structures and powers did not disappear (Vergès 2019, 27-28).

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1. See Breen-Smyth and her work on ‘suspect community’ (2014), Toros on the process of negotiation with terrorists and structural violence that surrounds counterterrorism approaches (2012), Khalid and her investigation on how gendered and orientalist identity categories are created and how they are deployed to make military interventions in the WoT legitimate (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Definition used for the purpose of the study. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Eventually, the French Senate refused this bill as it would render the person convicted or suspected stateless, for various reasons. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. French pure strain (my translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. My translation from ‘échelle de francité ou de pureté identitaire’ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Context-dependent, the state of emergency can take various forms, last for a different amount of time, applied differently. Types of measures applied are house raids, house arrests, internal camps, curfew, surveillance, searches, Sentinelle forces, prison, filing, etc. For further depth, please refer to Lambert’s book (2021). For instance, the longest application of the state of emergency was during the War in Algeria (761 days) and the threat of terrorism post-V13 (717 days). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Fiche S translated as S card (stands for State Security): as a mechanism used by the authorities to flag an individual to be considered as a serious threat to national security. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. FSPRT - Fichier de traitement des signalements pour la prévention de la radicalisation à caractère terroriste. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)