**Language of Islamophobia in right wing British newspapers**

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British Muslims have been at the centre of Western political and media discourse in the past two decades, thanks to terrorism and increased number of Muslims in the West. Research on Muslims in the media suggests that Islam and Muslims are positioned as ‘threat to security’ by a section of the British news media that implies Islam as incompatible to mainstream British way of life. The present study uses Critical Discourse Analysis method to examine how three right wing British newspapers *The Sun, The Daily Mail,* and *The Daily Telegraph* use language to position Islam and Muslims as culturally unassimilable and complicit to terrorism. Considering the complexity of what Islamophobia means, the paper investigates whether the language used in news articles and opinion columns is overtly or covertly Islamophobic.

# Media and British Muslims

Muslims had been living in the Western world for many years, but the events of 9/11 changed the perception towards them dramatically, largely due to the huge interest of the Western media towards Islam and Muslims. According to Hoover (2012, p. 76-87), the media were and are the source of ‘our’ knowledge of ‘them’ (the Muslims) and Te theand ‘their’ knowledge of ‘us’ (the West). Most people in the West have little knowledge of Islam or the cultural practices of Muslims, and are largely dependent on the media. Research on media representation of Muslims overwhelmingly show that a large section of the British media fails to portray Muslims in a fair manner.

Negative representation of Islam and Muslims did not begin after the tragic events of September 2001. Said's work (1997) examined the origins and repercussions of the Western media's representation, and found misrepresentation of Islam due to the media’s misperceptions about the religion. However, the negative portrayals increased manifold in the 21st century due to the increase of terrorism committed by people calling themselves Muslims and the increase of Muslim presence in Western countries.

In one of the first works on Muslims in the media after 9/11, Poole (2002) concludes that the British media portray Islam and Muslims from an ideological standpoint considering them as a threat to Western interests. In her later study Poole (2006, p. 43), observes the ‘Islam versus West’ attitude in the British media, and says:

“The creation of a dichotomy between Islam and the West is a consequence of this, presented in the press along a series of binary oppositions in which the West stands for rational, humane, developed and superior, and Islam for aberrant, underdeveloped and inferior”.

It is becoming increasingly evident how a section of the British news media position British Muslims as a ‘threat to security’ and consider their practise of faith ‘incompatible’ with the mainstream British way of life (Moore et al., 2008; Poole & Richardson 2006). While analysing 974 newspaper articles about British Muslims between 2000 and 2008, Moore et al. (2008, p. 3) observed that 80% discourses, particularly in the tabloids, associate Islam and Muslims with threats, problems or in opposition to dominant British values. A Cambridge University study (Hargreaves 2016) argues that media reporting on Islam and Muslims is contributing to an atmosphere of rising hostility towards Muslims. This involves a mixture of inaccurate stories, scaremongering (in particular with the headline and choice of stories) and discriminatory coverage. Al-Azami’s work (2016) found women's rights, women's clothing, terrorism, and interpretation of Quranic verses frequently featuring prominently in the media, often from ethnocentric perspectives. Baker et al.’s (2013) comprehensive linguistic analysis of British newspapers’ coverage of Islam and Muslims found the media’s attitude towards Muslims as counterproductive with some “…explicitly Islamophobic representations, particularly in the right-leaning tabloids” (p. 254) and concluded that the reaction to terrorism related activities by the media has played into the hands of the terrorists.

Most British newspapers are affiliated with a particular political or influential group, and as news reporting is socially, economically and politically situated, there is a ‘particular angle’ through which the news is produced (Fowler, 1991, p. 10). Fairclough (2003, p. 23) also agrees to this notion and suggests that newspaper reporting is ‘a product’ of a ‘social practice’ that is produced with the consumer in mind to whose curious minds these reports would appeal. In a scathing criticism of tabloids, media critic Greenslade (2004, in Johansson 2007, p. 7) calls the tabloids as

“….illiberal, reactionary, negative, pessimistic and infected with a sentimentality which appeals to readers’ emotions rather than their intellect. They play to the gallery. They whip up the mob. (…) They appeal to the basest of human instincts”.

**Colonisation, Orientalism and Islamophobia**

The term *Islamophobia* has recently become a significant subject of academic, political and media discourse in the Western world. It is still an evolving term in academia with considerable differences among academics as to what Islamophobia actually means. Before exploring this term in contemporary contexts, it is important to discuss the evolution of this concept. Historically, Islamophobia is deeply rooted in colonialism, imperialism and orientalism with the first usage of the term found in the 1920s in the form of criticising European orientalists’ distorted interpretations of Islam, which Hajjat and Mohammed (2013) termed as an “orientalist critique of Orientalism” (in Skenderovic and Späti, 2019, p. 134). López (2011) highlights the early twentieth century as the period of clash between ‘Christian Europe’ and the ‘Islamic orient’ that brought the relationship between colonial power and Islam at the forefront of Western political rhetoric.

Since the publication of Edward Said’s seminal book *Orientalism* in 1978, the relationship between the West and the Muslim world has become a central focus in academic, political and media discussions and debates. Said highlights the asymmetrical relationships between the West and the East in terms of power and dominance focussing on ‘othering’ as a foundation of longstanding stereotypes by the West on the so-called Muslim ‘orient’. ‘Orientalism’, according to Said (1978, p. 2,3), is “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident,’” and “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient”. There is an evident Islamophobic root in the orientalists’ view of the East, particularly the Arab Muslims, and among many sub-concepts embedded in Said’s *Orientalism* is the modern Islamophobic Western stereotype of Muslim men as misogynistic oppressive terrorists who want to destroy the Western world and subjugated Muslim women who are subservient to men behind their hijab or veil.

According to Green (2015), Imperialism is one of the major reasons for Islamophobia in the West suggesting that the depiction of Muslims by Western scholars and politicians as ‘uncivilised’ and ‘inferior’ is the foundation of post 9/11 Islamophobia. Kumar (2012, p. 33) argues that orientalist worldview is intrinsically connected to colonial conquest in which, “the ‘West’ is seen as a dynamic, complex, and ever-changing society that cannot be reduced to its key religion or any other single factor, while the ‘Orient’ or the ‘world of Islam’ is presented as unchanging, barbaric, misogynistic, uncivilized, and despotic”, and therefore, “….. it is the responsibility of the West to intervene in these static societies and bring about change”.

Western hegemonic approaches against Islam and Muslims can also be linked to Hall’s (1997) work on cultural representation of race where he makes a distinction between dominant heteronormative cultures and those without power. According to Hall, the “racialized discourse is structured by a set of binary oppositions” between 'civilization' (white) and 'savagery' (black) where whiteness is characterised by civilised culture of …. “refinement, learning and knowledge, a belief in reason, the presence of developed institutions, formal government and law, and a 'civilized restraint' in their emotional, sexual and civil life”, while blackness is related to natural instinctiveness that are reliant on “custom and ritual, and the lack of developed civil institutions” (p. 243). Contemporary definitions of Islamophobia closely match Hall’s notion of racial and cultural inequalities in Western societies.

**Islamophobia – A Complex Term**

Having discussed how colonisation, orientalism and Islamophobia are linked, we will now focus on Islamophobia in the context of a post-immigration reality where terrorism and increasing Muslim presence in Europe have created a renewed tension between Islam and the West characterised by anti-Muslim rhetoric among far-right politicians and a large section of the media. One of the complexities of how *Islamophobia* is contextualised in contemporary discourse is to determine whether it is significantly different from other forms of racism, i.e., whether or not people are targeted only because of their Islamic faith – similar to that of Anti-Semitism.

Although the word ‘Islam’ refers to the religion, ‘Islam’ in *Islamophobia* has undergone semantic extension and is mostly related to hatred shown towards Muslims. One of the reasons for Islamophobia, like other forms of hatred like *homophobia* and *xenophobia* is socio-psychological as hatred can come from the fear of people who are different. Whitbourne and Halgin (2012) uses the ‘in-groups, out-groups’ theory to describe this phenomenon where people tend to denigrate others who do not fit into their own group, and thus demonstrate their hatred towards the ‘other’ by means of verbal or physical abuse.

The first academic definition of *Islamophobia* in the context of post-immigration Europe can be found in the 1997 Runnymede Trust’s report, which defined the term as, “… a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam—and, therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims” (p. 1). The Runnymede Trust revisited the term in 2017 and found the concept to be much more complex and multifaceted due to the changed circumstances. Focusing on how it is manifested, it redefined Islamophobia as a form of racism. This redefinition conforms to Modood’s assertion (1997) that *Islamophobia* is a form of ‘cultural racism’, as Muslims are identified due to their non-European and non-white descent with a ‘perceived homogenous foreign culture’. Similar conclusion has been made in 2018 by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims in its report saying, “Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness”. This definition has been endorsed by the most influential British Muslim umbrella body The Muslim Council of Britain, 49 British academics who research on Islam and Muslims, and two major British political parties - The Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats (islamophobia-definition.com).

Zúquete’s (2008, p. 323) definition also includes the socio-psychological dimension covering both the language and the Western mindset calling it “… a widespread mindset and fear-laden discourse in which people make blanket judgments of Islam as the enemy, as the ‘other’, as a dangerous and unchanged, monolithic bloc that is the natural subject of well-deserved hostility from Westerners”. Stolz (2005) looks at both psychological and consequential dimensions of *Islamophobia*:

“Islamophobia is a rejection of Islam, Muslim groups and Muslim individuals on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes. It may have emotional, cognitive, evaluative as well as action-oriented elements (e.g. discrimination, violence)”. (p. 548)

The European Monitoring Agency on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) argues that the term needs to be looked at from a semiotic perspective citing the example of how an image of a woman in hijab is immediately identified as a Muslim woman whose visible presence in the West is a major reason why Muslim women are the victims of an overwhelming majority of Islamophobic attacks.

However, some scholars criticise the use of the term. Hall (1997) suggests that ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslims’ are complex terms and to use them intermittently would be too simplistic. Halliday (1996) prefers the term ‘anti-Muslimism’ considering *Islamophobia* as a term that refers to hostilities against the religion rather than its followers. Other scholars, for example, Malik (2005), considers *Islamophobia* as an over-hyped term that provides power to Muslim leaders, or that the term had been invented by ‘Islamists’ to condemn any criticism of Islam (Fourest & Venner, 2003; Bruckner, 2003 in Lopez, 2011, p. 556).

**The Study**

This paper investigates how right-wing British newspapers use linguistic devices to position Islam and Muslims as culturally unassimilable in Britain and examines whether the language used in these representations could be considered Islamophobic or whether they are merely irresponsible journalistic practices. According to various definitions in the previous section, Islamophobic media content will be deliberate attempts by media practitioners to demonise Muslims due to their Islamic faith. However, it will be unfair to suggest all negative media portrayals of Muslims to be Islamophobic. For example, the main finding of Baker et al.’s (2013) study on the British media’s attitude towards Islam suggests subtle and ambivalent language in the media that ‘...indirectly contributes to negative stereotypes’ (p. 255) against Islam. These negative representations may not be motivated by Islamophobia, yet are consequential against Muslims, and therefore, could be considered irresponsible journalism. The data analysis in this paper will show the difference between overt and covert methods used by the media in their negativity against British Muslims. Overtly Islamophobic content will try to directly link an individual’s Islamic faith to a crime, while covert mechanisms will include suggestive language and other indirect mechanisms that eventually imply a Muslim’s faith to a particular act. These concepts will be explained while analysing the data.

The main purpose of the study is to analyse the linguistic power exercised by the media in their process of achieving linguistic and cultural hegemony. Although Fairclough (2003) and other linguists extensively analysed media discourse on politics and current affairs, apart from a couple of studies (e.g. Al-Azami, 2016; Baker et al., 2013), there has not been many studies in Britain that looked at the media representation of Islam or Muslims from a linguistic perspective.

The study will use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an analytical method. It is one of the sub-fields of Discourse Analysis where the power relationships are extensively studied with a view to uncovering the covert mechanisms of social inequality and dominant ideologies. CDA analyses the way dominant groups use language that appear to be common sense or inevitable. The overall approach of this method is anti-hegemonic where the language used by the dominant groups is analysed, “…… to investigate how written and spoken discourse in a social and political context contribute to power abuse, dominance and inequality” (Al-Azami, 2016, p. 35).

The study will analyse one article each from *The telegraph, The Sun,* and *The Daily Mail.* This include two opinion columns in *The Daily Mail*  and *The Sun* and one news report in *The Telegraph* based on an attitude survey conducted on British Muslims. Right-leaning newspapers were chosen for this study due to their ideological position of right-wing populism that underpin their editorial policies. As Greven (2016) suggests, right-wing populism creates antagonism against minorities creating an atmosphere of us versus them (in Thompson, 2021, p. 35). In a report by the Centre for Media Monitoring of the Muslim Council of Britain, all three newspapers had disproportionate amount of ‘misleading’ or ‘irrelevant’ headlines against British Muslims. While the average percentage was 6%, misleading or irrelevant headlines in *The Sun, The Telegraph*, and *The Daily Mail* were 16%, 13% and 10% respectively. The articles and opinion columns were chosen due to the relevance and public interests of the events and surveys they represent.

CDA as an analytical method requires in-depth qualitative analysis of the language used in the media, therefore, only a small sample from a vast body of media representation of British Muslims has been chosen for analysis in this paper. By analysing both news articles and opinion columns, the study will investigate whether there is a difference in the language between these two types of media representations in newspapers. The news article will be analysed first followed by the opinion columns.

**Data Analysis**

***The Telegraph* article: “British Muslims becoming a nation within a nation, Trevor Phillips warns”, 11 April 2016.**

This article is based on an ICM survey on 1,000 British Muslims conducted for Channel 4 by Trevor Philips, former chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, highlighting that British Muslims live away from the mainstream and have some views that contradict with British values. Despite a number of positive aspects coming out from the survey, the headline and the presentation of the article portray only the negative points. The usual adjectives that sensationalise matters disproportionately could be found in the form of expressions such as, ‘truly terrifying’ referring to some Muslims’ views on terrorism despite the actual views, though somewhat problematic, may not be as terrifying as the article suggests.

The article begins with an image of three women in *niqab* (full veil) – a common image in the media while depicting Islam or Muslims, though the survey and the article have no mention of *niqab* at all. This type of image, according to Poole (2009, p. 45), reinforces the stereotype of Islam as a patriarchal religion that oppresses women. Karim (2006, p. 118) calls visual signifiers such as this to relate Islam as a ‘medieval’ religion with ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ at its core. Publishing such inappropriate images has negative potential consequences as multimodal discourse such as this can influence audience perception (Fairclough and Chouliaraki, 1999, p. 146).

The reporter uses an exaggerated adjective ‘ground-breaking’ for the survey that consists of only1000 participants without justifying in what way the survey could attract such praise. The article begins in a sensationalising manner through a self-contradicting comment from Trevor Philips, the author of the report, “*We are in danger of sacrificing a generation of young British people to values that are antithetical to the beliefs of most of us, including many Muslims”.* If many Muslims hold similar views to most others, then it is not clear why there is so much worry. Another problem is singling out young people when there is no mention of participants’ age in the article.

Kundnan (2007, p. 30) argues, “….in the cacophony of voices that make up this new media-driven ‘integration debate’, it is Muslims who are routinely singled out: it is their cultural difference which needs limits placed on it; it is they who must subsume their cultural heritage within ‘Britishness’; it is they who must declare their allegiance to (ill-defined) British values”.

Numbers and statistics have been included to vindicate the claim that Muslims have ‘terrifying’ views. However, the report suggests that 4% Muslims have ‘some sympathy’ for terrorism, which means 96% do not. Secondly. The word ‘sympathy’ is not a synonym of ‘support’ as it could also mean that the respondents are sympathetic for the reasons people do such act, but are not supportive of it. For instance, a survey for Sky News conducted by a polling company Survation in 2015 found that “approximately 14% of non-Muslims had sympathy for Muslims fighting in Syria” (Al-Azami, 2016, p. 215).

The second statistic suggests that 25% “understand why British school girls could be attracted to become ‘jihadi brides’ overseas”. ‘Understand’ is even less problematic than ‘sympathy’ as it could merely suggest that they know why this is happening rather than support it. The next number refers to more than 50% Muslims not agreeing that Muslims should do more to tackle extremism. It is not clear what ‘more’ refers to in the question as many Muslims might feel that they are doing their part and it is the responsibility of the state to do the rest. Therefore, there is not much evidence of a terrifying statistic here either. Finally, just over 52% participants’ views about homosexuality is considered a serious matter when this is not an exclusively Muslim issue. All religions consider homosexuality as a sin, but the article seems to single out Muslims as having this problematic view. For example, Gross (2008, p. 77) found an unambiguous condemnation of homosexuality in The Roman Catholic Church and many Protestant churches. A Pew Research Centre survey on American Christians in 2013 found that 59% White Evangelical Christians believe that homosexuality should be discouraged.

The final two statistical information in the article is as follows:

*39 per cent agreed “wives should always obey their husbands”, and 31 per cent said it was acceptable for a man to have more than one wife.*

These refer to interpretation of Muslim family matters where different schools of thoughts may lead to different conclusions. In both cases, overwhelming majority of respondents do not have these views, even in densely populated Muslim areas where deprivation, lack of education etc. should also be factored into while analysing such data. For example, what ‘obey’ means is subject to interpretation. Secondly, accepting polygamy may have come from religious allowance, but is not a highly practiced phenomenon in the Muslim world and not popular either, which is reflected in 69% respondents not accepting it. According to Johnson (2005, p. 583), “…some have determined that, actually, Islam does not condone the practice of polygyny, and that Muhammad intended to impress monogamy as the Muslim ideal”. Therefore, writing a report based on some opinions given by participants in a particular context without deeper insights into the actual statistics and the background of participants is not responsible journalism, rather, it has the potential to create unnecessary fear about Muslims.

Finally, it is not clear why the following outcome of the survey was not highlighted in the headline or at the beginning where a completely different picture of British Muslims is portrayed:

*But the survey also found that a large majority of British Muslims – 86 per cent - felt a strong sense of belonging to Britain, compared with a national average of 83 per cent, and that among Muslims 91 per cent felt a strong sense of belonging to their local area - again, a higher finding than the national average of 76 per cent.*

If 86% British Muslims, more than the national average, felt a strong belonging to Britain, then it is unclear why Trevor Philips advocated for “more muscular approach to integration than ever” and found the attitudes of British Muslims so terrifying.

This article is an example of irresponsible journalism. Although not overtly Islamophobic, it has elements of Islamophobia due to some linguistic elements and the way only negative aspects from a small survey has been highlighted without a balanced portrayal of its findings. It is also interesting to note that the report’s author Trevor Philips had been suspended from the Labour party for allegations of Islamophobia (BBC, 9 March 2020).

***The Daily Mail* column: “She's not the same little girl who ran away - and that's what worries me”. 15 February 2019.**

This analysis will prove why this opinion piece by Richard Littejohn is one of the worst examples of Islamophobia in the British media. Here, the author strongly argues why Shamima Begum, a British girl from Bethnal Green, London, who fled to Syria and was married to an ISIS fighter, should not be allowed to return to the UK. This issue had wide media coverage at the beginning of 2019 and people had varied opinions about her repatriation, so the author’s opinion about her return cannot be considered problematic. The main concern this article raises is the inflammatory language used to depict Islam, Muslims, Muslim women’s clothing and the area Shamima Begum were brought up that has the potential to further escalate the already increasing Islamophobia in Britain.

Van Dijk (1998, p. 31) says that words and phrases in opinion articles, “… may be chosen that generally or contextually express values and norms, and that therefore are used to express a value judgment.” He further argues that journalists’ opinions are the product of their ideologies, “…which in turn influence the discourse structures of opinion articles” (ibid, p. 21). Richard Littlejohn is one of “….the best-paid columnist in the country” (Conboy, 2007, p. 87) who has a track record of writing provocative articles against Muslims (Al-Azami, 2016), and his anti-Muslim ideology is overtly manifested in this opinion piece.

The author’s use of the phrase ‘radical Islamism’ is significant. Many journalists use the term ‘radical Islam’ referring to individuals interpreting some aspects of Islam in a radical manner, but ‘Islamism’ highlights ideology as suggested in the definition by Mozaffari (2007, p. 7):

“Islamism’ is a religious ideology with a holistic interpretation of Islam whose final aim is the conquest of the world by all means”.

The author uses this term to suggest that this ideology is not only prevalent in Syria, but also in the Bethnal Green area and in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, and goes further by calling Tower Hamlets an ‘Islamic Republic’. Even if this is said in a sarcastic manner, it can create a sense of fear among the readers who live outside Tower Hamlets. The Islamophobic nature of this claim comes from the fact that 38% of the population in Tower Hamlets are Muslims, the highest in the UK (Tower Hamlets Borough Profile 2018), and the author’s unambiguous statement that the area is ‘a hotbed of fundamentalism’ where ‘Islamist vigilantes’ are seen, “..menacing women walking alone in ‘immodest’ clothing and terrorising corner shops selling alcohol” is not only Islamophobic, but validates far right extremists’ anti-Muslim rhetoric. No supporting evidence or example has been given to support any of these claims. Elements of sarcasm can be observed here, but that is so subtle that many readers may not notice this as these exaggerated statements have been presented as facts. There was no sarcastic tone in the author’s claim that the girls in Bethnal Green were susceptible to ‘extremist views being peddled in their own backyard’. Again, there is no evidence or example to substantiate this claim - who these extremists are, in what way extremist views are expressed, what those extremist views are – nothing has been explained. These are not only Islamophobic claims, but harmful for community cohesion.

Another important phrase to discuss here is the author’s suggestion that ‘creeping Islamification’ is taking place in the area through ‘a virtual Muslim monoculture’, which seems to suggest that the minority 38% Muslims in Tower Hamlets are completely dominating the 62% majority non-Muslims, where even the Mayor himself is a non-Muslim. ‘Creepy’ is an adjective that refers to being frightened about something and using this word with the noun ‘Islamification’ is an example that the writer is acknowledging his own Islamophobia. A synonym of this term often used by right wing media and far right politicians is ‘Islamisation’, which, according to Hedges (2015), is “….. often based upon a misapprehension of the actual situation, and presents what many term an ‘alarmist’ case for huge and imminent cultural changes, stoking potential fears about loss of cultural identity.” This type of superficial portrayal of a group of people who are less than 5% of the UK population lead to conspiracy theories, like the report by *Hope not Hate* in 2019 on more than 10,000 people that found more than **32% respondents believing the statement that ‘there are no go areas in Britain where sharia law dominates and non-Muslims cannot enter’, with the figure being 47% with the Conservative Party voters.**

The article begins with some predictions what might happen if Shamima Begum would be allowed back to the UK, about which the author later suggests that he was ‘half-joking’. In these opening lines, Richard Littlejohn predicts, albeit in a satirical tone, that Shamima would eventually strap “…half a pound of Semtex under her burka” and detonate it on a London Tube train. Suggesting that a Muslim women’s clothing would be used for detonating a bomb is another example of overt Islamophobia. As Salaita (2008, p. 88) highlights, “In the world in which Muslims are represented [ … ] terrorism can be reduced to the articulation of visual symbols that signal the threatening presence of Islam”. Whether publishing photos of veiled Muslim women in articles related to Islam or Muslims irrespective of their relevance to the said article, or publishing articles that suggest Muslim women are oppressed, or claiming that *burqas* would be used as garments to hide bombs as mentioned in this article, there are abundance of examples in the media that demonise Muslim women’s clothing. Apart from instances of some Muslim women joining as ISIS brides and a couple of incidents where one or two Muslim women played some role in terrorist attacks, there are few examples of Muslim women’s direct involvement in terrorism. Yet, Muslim women are victims of majority of Islamophobic attacks (Tell MAMA report 2018). Therefore, provocative suggestions on Muslim women’s clothing such as this can lead to a rise in hate crimes against innocent Muslim women. For example, the same Tell MAMA report also says that since the publication of Boris Johnson’s newspaper column comparing *burqa* with ‘letter boxes’ and ‘bank robbers’, there had been a 375% rise in attacks on Muslim women in Britain.

***The Sun* column: “Why did Channel 4 have a presenter in a hijab fronting coverage of Muslim terror in Nice?” 18 July 2016.**

This overtly Islamophobic opinion piece was written by the controversial former editor of *The Sun* Kelvin MacKenzie after the terrorist attack in Nice in 2016 in which he accuses Channel 4 for allowing a hijabi Muslim woman to be the news presenter after the terrorist attack. MacKenzie is known for being provocative, and his most infamous journalistic practice remains the coverage of the Hillsborough disaster where *The Sun,* under his editorship, blamed the 96 Liverpool football fans for their death, which was proved to be false and later confirmed by the Hillsborough Independent Inquiry (2012) that they were ‘unlawfully killed’. He represents a typical British right-wing tabloid’s pandering towards their readership, whom he himself called ‘right old fascists’ (Chippindale & Horrie, 2013), and the sensationalistic nature of his article conforms to what Johansson (2007, p. 99) describes as the ‘melodramatic handling of news’ by the tabloids.

In this article, MacKenzie makes a clear link between the news presenter Fatima Manji’s Muslim faith and Islamic headscarf with the terrorist attack suggesting that just because she happens to be a Muslim, she should be disqualified to present the news on the attack due to being guilty by association (as the terrorist was a Muslim), and therefore, she is indirectly responsible for the attack. The writer in this article is unequivocal in his Islamophobic claims with the headline itself using ‘Muslim’ as an adjective before the head noun ‘terror’. Usually, albeit problematic, the term mostly used in the media to collocate with ‘terror’ is ‘Islamist’, referring to a political ideology, but here, the writer implies the whole Muslim community to be responsible for the terrorist attack. The strapline beneath the headline asks whether it is appropriate to have a Hindu news presenter to present the news on the attacks on the Sikh community in Golden Temple in Amritsar, India. This analogy is problematic for two reasons. First, the attack on the Golden Temple in 1984 was perpetrated by the Indian military after being ordered by the then Indian government rather than the Hindu community attacking the Sikh community. Secondly, there is no evidence to suggest that no Hindu presenter was used for the TV coverage of that attack in India where the overwhelming majority of the country are Hindus. This not only shows that the writer’s arguments lack cogency, but also manifests his ignorance of the events that he uses to strengthen his arguments.

MacKenzie highlights the popular mythical notion that ‘All terrorists are Muslims’ by saying:

*Was it appropriate for her to be on camera when there had been yet another shocking slaughter by a Muslim?*

*…. all the major terrorist outrages in the world currently being carried out by Muslims*

# After 9/11, this propaganda has been at the forefront of right-wing politician and media rhetoric suggesting terrorism to be a Muslim monopoly, and this is the position of the writer who claims in this article that Islam is a “…clearly violent religion”. However, according to Britain’s top counter-terrorism officer, the fastest-growing UK terrorist threat comes from the far right (*The Guardian* 19 September 2019). As Corbin (2017, p. 458) suggests, this notion of “all terrorists are Muslim” and “white people are never terrorists” has its root in Orientalism (Said, 1978) where the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy is created by the West to demonise Muslims of the Orient.

“The general basis of Orientalist thought is an imaginative and yet drastically polarized geography dividing the world into two unequal parts, the larger, “different” one called the Orient, the other, also known as “our” world, called the Occident or the West” (Said, 1981, p. 4).

Mackenzie contradicts himself by initially suggesting Fatima Manji as an implied perpetrator of the terrorist act because he was outraged that she was asked by Channel 4 to present the news of that particular day as scheduled, but later suggesting that she herself was a victim of a ‘male-dominated’ religion where hijab is “..a sign of the slavery of Muslim women”. This is another common topic of Muslim demonization in the media where one-sided assertions are made about women being oppressed in Islam without considering Muslim women’s perspectives on the issue. Kesvani (2014) argues that the terms like 'patriarchy', 'misogyny' and 'medieval' et cetera are used for Muslim women often without their viewpoints to ‘shut out the people who have been portrayed as the victims in all of this’. The writer in this article has failed to provide any evidence to justify the ‘slavery’, and this type of marginalisation of minority voices is termed as “….. dangerous ignorance about people of colour and a continuance of discrimination and injustice” by Campbell (1995, p. 7). Without any cultural understanding of gender issues in Islam, this type of assertion can be construed as ethnocentrism (Al-Azami, 2016; Said, 1981). Camilla Khan, a former head of communications of the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), which is an umbrella body of Islamic Societies in British universities, summarises this attitude as follows:

“Much of this debate is centred on women, and how we are the ones who are disadvantaged by such an arrangement, a sort of pseudo-feminist calling. As a female Muslim leader, I find this problematic and deeply worrying - allow us to have our own voice”. (The Huffington Post, 4 December 2013)

Mackenzie’s efforts to create divisions within the society is manifested by the following statement made at the end of the article:

*……. I think the rest of us are reasonably entitled to have concerns about what is beating in their religious hearts. Who was in the studio representing our fears?*

The writer here makes a clear distinction between Muslims and the rest of the population by saying ‘their religious hearts’. and ‘our fears, thus creating divisions between communities, which Richardson (2004, p. 33) terms as “rhetorically 'Other-ed'”. ‘Othering’ is “a process (...) through which identities are set up in an unequal relationship” (Crang, 1998, p. 61). Despite being born in the UK, Fatima Manji and millions of her fellow British Muslims, who are overwhelmingly proud to be British (Policy Exchange 2016), are not considered the same as non-Muslim Britons by the writer.

The language used in this article is a clear manifestation of Islamophobia without any covert mechanisms employed by its author.

**Conclusion**

The definition of Islamophobia may not be universal, but the existence of Islamophobia is real and increasing in Britain at an alarming rate (Tell MAMA 2018). The common threads in all the definitions are the hatred and fear shown against Muslims as a consequence of viewing Muslims differently from the wider community as the ‘other’. The discussions above demonstrate that some sections of the British media play a significant role in this othering by portraying a negative picture of British Muslims through their negative news reporting and by publishing opinion pieces that are sometimes explicitly Islamophobic. As Al-Azami (2016) argues, on many occasions these media representations are the only way for a non-Muslim to have exposure to the Muslim community and these types of representation can influence their opinions on Muslims in a significant way. Elgamri (2008, p. ix) summarises this point saying, “What people read, see and hear in the media influences and shapes their opinions about Islam and Muslims”.

According to a recent survey (Pressgazette 2018) *The Sun* has the highest readership in the UK with monthly reach of 33.3 million, closely followed by *The Daily Mail* (31.8 million). These are the two newspapers that regularly publish articles and opinion pieces with inflammatory language against Muslims as found in the opinion pieces analysed in this paper. The potential consequence can, therefore, be severe. Van Dijk says:

“It is not surprising that, as a result of such coverage, the white readers get a seriously biased version of ethnic affairs. Because the average readers lack access to alternative definitions of the ethnic situation, and because alternative interpretations are hardly consistent with their own best interest, they will generally accept such mainstream definitions as self-evident”. (1996, p. 20-21)

This paper, through linguistic analyses of three newspaper representations, show how overt and covert Islamophobic language is used to represent British Muslims through portrayals of surveys or through opinion columns. The paper concludes that negative news reporting is not directly Islamophobic as a reporter has to consider the credibility of their source and seemingly avoid giving their own opinions. However, the article analysed in this paper shows how the reporter selectively took some information from a small survey and inflated some results to suggest Muslims as culturally unassimilable in Britain. Their irresponsible journalistic practice is further highlighted by avoiding facts and figures that actually show the patriotic feelings of British Muslims.

Opinion columnists, on the other hand, have the liberty to write what they wish and not worry about the authenticity of their arguments. Newspapers give disclaimers that opinion pieces are not necessarily within their editorial policy, which provide freedom to both the columnist and the newspaper editor. While it could be assumed that readers may believe news reports more than opinion columns, Coppock et al.’s study (2018, p. 59) found that opinion columns, “… were persuasive to both the mass public and elites, but marginally more persuasive among the mass public”. Linguistic analyses of opinion columns by two right wing columnists published in two widely circulated right wing newspapers demonstrate explicit Islamophobia that pander to dangerous extremist anti-Muslim propaganda, which can eventually affect community cohesion.

It is true that the small sample of articles and opinion columns analysed in this paper cannot be taken as an exact representation of reality. However, there is no dearth of news reports that portray one-dimensional representations of surveys on Muslims and opinion columns that attack the whole Muslim community when a terrorist happens to be a Muslim. More research focusing on Islamophobic language in right wing British media can provide substantial evidence to support the view that both Islamophobia and irresponsible journalism are prevalent in the British media and both are unhelpful to build a fairer society.

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