Media, Racism and Islamophobia: The Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Media

Amir Saeed*
University of Sunderland

Abstract

This article examines the representation of Islam and Muslims in the British press. It suggests that British Muslims are portrayed as an 'alien other' within the media. It suggests that this misrepresenatation can be linked to the development of a 'racism', namely, Islamphobia that has its roots in cultural representations of the 'other'. In order to develop this arguement, the article provies a summary/ overview of how ethnic minorities have been represented in the British press and argues that the treatment of British Muslims and Islam follows these themes of 'deviance' and 'un–Britishness'.

> What they (media) exercise is the power to represent the world in certain definite ways. And because there are many different and conflicting ways in which the meaning about the world can be constructed, it matters profoundly what and who gets represented, who and what regularly and routinely gets left out; and how things, people, events, relationships are represented. What we know of society depends on how things are represented to us and that knowledge in turn informs what we do and what policies we are prepared to accept. (Miller 2002, 246)

This article looks at how the media in the UK represent one minority group, Muslims. Although theoretically speaking British Muslims are a heterogeneous group comprising of many different ethnic backgrounds (Poole 2002). Modood (2005, 2006) further notes that this heterogeneity is further complicated by political, cultural and socioeconomic factors. Modood (2003, 2005) suggests that the category 'Muslim' is as internally diverse as other group categories such as 'British' or 'Christian'. However, despite these reservations, it is a useful classification for identifying 'visible minorities' (Modood 2003) who are the subject of public anxiety. This public anxiety can manifest itself most clearly in media representations of Muslims and Islam thus the importance of analyzing and debating such representations.

In order to do this, the article will suggest that recent social and political concern over Muslim minority groups can be understood as a

form of cultural racism (Modood 1997). It will be argued that Muslims are thought of and represented as 'un-British'. This echoes previous research into national identity in the UK that argues that non–white minority groups in the UK are thought of as un–British (Gilroy 1992). These concerns about who is and who is not 'British' have in recent years grown to wider debates about the problems of a multicultural society (Cottle 2006; Fekete 2002; Modood 1992, 2003, 2005). These concerns over who is 'British' can be understood in relation to the media treatment of minority groups. The article reviews previous research into the media portrayal of minority groups concentrating on press treatment of British Muslims and/or Islam. It is suggested that the representation of British Muslims echoes previous research on how minority groups are portrayed in the media. In many respects, the media representation of minority groups is a 'double-edged sword'. First, it marginalises minority voices, thus, they are virtually ignored or invisible (Saeed 1999). Simultaneously actual representation of minority groups is often construed in negative discourses (Hartmann and Husband 1974). When these frameworks are applied to audiences who have little social contact with minority groups, the role of the media as sole provider (or primary definer, Hall 1978) becomes crucial (Van Dijk 1991). Cottle argues that the media hold a powerful position in conveying, explaining and articulating specific discourses that help represent (and misrepresent) minority groups (Cottle 2000, 2006).

As late back as 1993, Ahmed noted that many Muslims voiced concern of the negative representation of Islam and Muslims by the Western media. However, following on from such incidents as the Rushdie affair, the first Gulf War and 9/11, interest in media representations of Islam have grown. An ever-increasing body of research has argued that on the balance the images, representations and discourses relating to Islam/ Muslims in mainstream Western media tend to be negative and hostile (Poole and Richardson 2006). Various studies have examined the specific relationship between media and Islam (Ahmed 1993; Runnymede Trust 1997); the representations of Muslim minorities in the West (Allen 2005; Poole 2002) and other on Muslims/Islam in the global media (Poole and Richardson 2006; Zelizer and Allan 2002). Ideologically, these constructions can be traced back the expansion of Western imperialism where a dichotomy of 'West' versus 'East' was constructed (Said 1978).

In short, this article provides a summary of previous research into the British press's representation of minority groups and then argues that British Muslims and Islam are depicted in a similar way. These representations can be linked to issues of changing discourses of racism and to issues of national identity. Thus, research into the press portrayal of British Muslims shows that they are represented as the 'alien within' British culture.

National and international concern

Recent academic research into the British media's coverage of issues relating to immigration and asylum has drawn attention to the underlying themes of race and nation that dominate media reporting (Finney and Peach 2004). It may be added that Gilroy has claimed that in the past 20 years the 'new racism' has successfully distanced itself from crude notions of biological inferiority and instead forged links between race, nationhood, patriotism and nationalism. It has done so by defining the nation as a unified cultural community, a national culture ethnically pure and homo-geneous in its whiteness (Gilroy 1992, 53). For example, Greenslade has claimed that the general response of the British press to asylum and immigration is typified in the following remark by Charles Moore, the distinguished former editor of *The Times* newspaper:

> Britain is basically English speaking, Christian and white, and if one starts to think it might become basically Urdu speaking and Muslim and brown, one gets frightened. (Greenslade 2005, 6)

Although Moore's comments were made in the context of *The Spectator* ('Time for a More Liberal and "Racist" Immigration Policy', *The Spectator*, 19 October 1991), a relatively small circulation magazine noted for its outspoken and unashamedly right-wing views, Greenslade is nevertheless correct in claiming that such views are highly symptomatic of the British press's general approach to questions of asylum and immigration.

Throughout the years, Britain's black and other ethnic minorities have tended to be portrayed in terms of a limited repertoire of representations and within contexts characterised by conflict, controversy and deviance (Cottle 2002). In the 1960s and 1970s, studies observed how immigrants were reported in relation to problems of 'numbers' and tensions of 'race relations' (Hartmann and Husband 1974; Troyna 1981). In the 1970s and 1980s, representations tended to criminalise Britain's black population – ignoring social inequalities and growing anger at police tactics – and the 1990s have witnessed attacks on anti-racist groups, vilifications of black representatives and the seeming endorsement of 'new racism' by prominent politicians – actively disparaging attempts to further multicultural and anti-racist agendas (Murray 1986; Van Dijk 1991). The current represen-tation of asylum seekers and British Muslim communities appears to follow this trend of problematising non-white communities as un-British (Saeed 2004). Although it has to be stressed that not all asylum seekers are non-white, furthermore, recent media debate about Eastern European migrants to the UK seems to suggest that certain white communities are problematised by the media.

Hall et al. (1992, 298) have observed that in recent times biological notions of race have been replaced by cultural definitions that draw on discourses of national belonging and national identity. This has led to a

new form of 'cultural racism' associated as much with ethnicity as race. In this context, Gandy (1998) has suggested that the concept of ethnicity was first employed by social scientists and policy-makers as a way of shifting the definition of race away from the biological and towards the cultural. His views are supported in this respect by Mason (2000), who holds that ethnicity is a more appealing concept than race not merely because it is inherently social but also because ethnic categories are defined partly through the conscious efforts of those who belong to them.

For example, Modood (1992) reminds us that the term 'British' is practically 'quasi-ethnic' in its close identification with whiteness. He goes on to claim that the right of individuals and communities to be culturally different in Britain is often neglected in favour of the expectation that they be absorbed or assimilated into the homogeneous host culture. Likewise, Mason (2000, 15) has observed that the distinguishing criterion for belonging to a designated 'ethnic minority' group is normally skin colour. Thus, the conflation of ethnic identity with skin colour can lead to the classification of second- or third-generation immigrants – who may be culturally indiscernible from their white neighbours – as 'ethnic minorities'.

Thus, people with non-white skin in Britain have habitually been designated as outsiders (or other), as 'ethnic minorities' whose culture is alien and incompatible with that of the host nation. Furthermore, it could be suggested that the issues of asylum seekers/refugees has been conflated with the issue of (Islamic fundamentalist) terrorism to create a new form of racism. Racism, has many authors have noted, does not remain static but evolves and adapts to circumstance and situation (Mason 2000; Solomos 2003). For example, national research in the 1980s signalled that fewer people in the USA thought blacks to be racially inferior. This did not mean that racism disappeared completely. It was argued that instead of 'classical' racism, new and more subtle types of racism began to emerge. The same circumstances were detected in Europe (Saeed 1999).

West and the rest

However, it should be noted that at times 'new racism' is not always covert and at times it seems to echo discredited biological assumptions about 'race' and the perceived superiority of the West. This link can be most clearly seen in the appropriation of Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. He argues that that a new cold war is taken place based not on economics or politics but on culture. He continues that Islam with its innate propensity to violence poses the most serious threat to Western civilisation. It is clear for Huntington that Islam is and Muslims are inherently inferior while this argument is based on religion and culture the essentialist argument forwarded is similar to the biological reasoning

forwarded in the nineteenth century to justify colonialisation and imperial war.

Sardar and Davies (2002, 49) illustrate how Huntington's thesis has been appropriated,

> On December 3, 2001, issue of the *National Review*, with a drawing of George Bush as a medieval crusader on the cover contained an article headlined 'Martyred: Muslim Murder and Mayhem against Christians' in which the author cites with the approval the conclusion in Samuel Huntington's book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*: The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilisation whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power.

This example echoes this media representation of the War on Terror and Islam may well help explain why many Muslims look upon the War on Terror as a war on Islam. However, as Halliday (1996, 1999) clearly points out even prior to Huntington's thesis Islam was presented as a threatening other. Said's *Orientalism* (1978, 286–287) provides the classical framework in understanding relationships between the 'West' (and the 'Rest') and Muslims in particular.

Said (1985) focuses primarily on the Middle East – the territory occupied principally by Muslims. What he argues is that European domination took not only political and economic forms, but also a cultural form. It involved the construction of a particular discourse, *Orientalism*, whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them' or 'the other') (Said 1985, 19).

He further argues that in this context, Islam was regarded as medievally backward. Different discourses varyingly articulated this. In the science of anthropology, Arabs were held to be inferior, while in political discourses, tests were woven around the paternalistic idea that colonial subjugation would not only benefit the West but also the Orient itself.

In a similar manner, Hall (1992a) suggests that European contact with populations elsewhere involved a process of representations and with European expansion, a construction of the West's sense of itself through its sense of difference from others. The consequence was the emergence of a discourse which represented the world as divided according to a simple dichotomy the West/the Rest (Hall 1992a).

Miles (1989) provides two examples of this division

> The first is based upon colour. In the act of defining Africans as 'blacks' and 'savages' and thereby excluding them from their world, Europeans in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were representing themselves as 'white' and 'civilised'. The second is based upon culture, European representations of the Islamic world extensively utilised images of barbarism and sexuality in the context of a Christian/heathen dichotomy. (Miles 1989, 34–5)

While Donald (1992) summarises the argument on the development of this discourse thus:

> First chains of characteristics are attributed to these categories. Thus Westerners are depicted as civilised, logical, rational, virtuous, sceptical, empirical and dedicated. Orientals, on the other hand, are shown as gullible, cunning, prone to intrigue and flattery, lethargic, stupid, irrational and childlike. Second these various attributes are taken to define that which is essentially Oriental, an essence that is then ascribed to nature. The West has a natural affinity with self government, the East a natural affinity with despotism. Finally these representations are presented as fixed and unchanging identifications for the reader of Orientalist discourse: the West is us, and the Orient them. (Donald 1992, 75)

Orientalism has, however, been accused of embracing the very 'discursive structures' of which it critiques (Malik 1996 cited in Ferguson 1998) in its failure to consider any 'tensions or contradictions in the meanings to be negotiated' from the texts to which it refers (Ferguson 1998, 71). Despite this, Orientalism provides a wealth of resources and historical documentation that demonstrates how the ideologically constructed knowledge of the Orient was both supportive and reflective if the dominant ideology of the European imperialist elite in not only securing but also justifying the exploitation of 'Europe's greatest and riches an oldest colonies' (Said 1985, 1). The exploitation of the Orient's resources and peoples was legitimated through the ethno centric language of Christian European identity that propagated the myth that the predominantly Muslim (and other non-Christian religions) peoples of the Orient were irrational, uncultured, uncivilised, barbaric and ultimately inferior. As Stuart Hall (1992a, 318) notes, the colonial discourse of 'the West and the Rest'

> [...] continues to inflect the language of the West, its image of itself and 'others', its sense of 'us and "them"', its practices of power towards the Rest' through 'the languages of racial inferiority and ethnic superiority which still operate so powerfully across the globe today'.

Media and race

One example of this can be seen in the media's representation of 'race' and ethnicity. In relation to race and ethnicity, the media provides information where public knowledge is fragmentary. Although there are some 2 million black people in Britain, they live mainly in a few major population centres and, therefore, the white majority's contact with them is often slight (Van Dijk 1991). Research into the media's treatment of race over the years has suggested that its reporting has been limited in its themes and negative in its content. Research into minority representation in the British context can be summarised in two distinct but complementary stages (Saeed 1999). First, immigration issues have been formulated as a 'problem', or to use Thatcher's words a fear of 'swamping'. Second,

minorities who were born in Britain have also been perceived to be 'problems'. From the 'criminal mentality' of the Afro-Caribbeans (Hall 1978), to the 'cheating Asians' (Sivanandan 1982) and the 'Islamic funda-mentalists' (Ahmed 1993) minority communities tend to be represented in negative ways. The most recent surveys of the media (Spears 2001) clearly show that the media is biased and at times overtly racist in its attitudes to asylum seekers:

> As soon as asylum seekers are described as 'illegal immigrants', it is a small step before the debate spills over to the issue of immigrants generally, and the very notion of Britain as a multiracial society is called into question. (Kundnani 2001, 50)

However, exceptions can be found; commentators have recently begun to uncover, for example, the changing cultural representations of ethnic minorities in British television across the years. These indicate that repre-sentations are far from historically static and tend to give growing expression to the surrounding cultural politics of 'new ethnicities' and 'hybridities' and multiculturalism (Hall 1992b; Ross 1996). Indeed Cottle (2000, 28) notes that the term 'multicultural' and its relationship to cultural identity may be crucial in understanding the media's role in representations of ethnic minority groups.

Media as 'elites'

In *Policing the Crisis*, Hall (1978) subscribes to a neo-Marxist model of media racism. Hall considers that the primary definers of what is 'important news' and what the 'correct' perspective on what news should be (such as from politicians, business leaders, etc.) are in fact very important. The ideas of such people have hegemonic value in society and in the media, the latter because their ideas become integrated into concepts of news values, and professional journalism, and so on. In short, the official sources of the media establish the initial interpretation of the topic (Miller 1993). Hall (1978, 95) says the media constitute a 'machinery of representation' determining.

> ... what and who gets represented and what and who routinely gets left out (and) how things, people, events, relationships get represented ... the structure of access to the media is systematically skewed towards certain social categories.

They are thus able to 'command the field' in all 'subsequent treatment' (Miller 1993). Schlesinger (1991) argues that this hegemonic model is too bound to the concept of the dominant ideology, and fails to recognise that, in many instances, there is no single definition of an issue or an event's meaning. The primary definition thesis for Schlesinger, 'tends to understate the amount of conflict among those who principally define the political agenda' (Schlesinger 1991, 64).

Miller (1993) also criticises primary definition model for a number of reasons and concludes that:

> [...] this model misconceives the relationship between the media and the state because it sees that output of the media as guaranteed in advance by the structural relationship between the media and official sources. (Miller 1994, 258)

For Schlesinger and Miller, it appears that structures of access to the media, through which primary definitions emerge, shift over time as the political environment changes; and that primary definitions are the product of complex processes of negotiation between competing social actors. Van Dijk (1987, 1991, 1993) links the idea of 'primary definers' to the notion that media constitute an 'elite' in society. While accepting that the media have conflicts with other social actors he argues that in terms of race and ethnicity an ethnic consensus is prevalent. Van Dijk (1987) argues that these other social actors can be termed elites. These elites are predominately white and have various types of power and control, whether political, economic, social or cultural. These sociopolitical elites are in control of the decisions that directly affect the daily lives of ethnic minority individuals (see Van Dijk 1993 for a full discussion of elites). In short, when ethnic information is relayed or involved, few other sources of information which can match the power of the elites can contest this 'ethnic consensus' (Van Dijk 1987). Cottle (2000) offers some criticism of this argument noting that historical and structural factors that lead to exclusion may not be grounded in ideological racist thinking.

A question of numbers, a question of threat

Early research has examined the media concern about 'race' as a problem and the racialisation of 'immigrants' in particular, throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Forms of content analysis have been employed by a number of studies in relation to the local and provincial press (Bagley 1973; Critcher 1977; Troyna 1981), national newspapers (Hartmann and Husband 1974), the entertainment media (Hartmann and Husband 1974), as well as local radio (Troyna 1981). In addition, Bagley (1973), Hartmann and Husband (1974) and Troyna (1981) have attempted to investigate the impact of these media portrayals on representative audiences, while Van Dijk (1991, 1993) has attempted to employ discourse analysis along with concepts of symbolic racism to discuss theoretically the impact of media representation.

Harman and Husband (1974), in their study of racism and the mass media, have explicitly paid attention to these information sources for what people find out about ethnic groups. In their analysis of the national press between 1963 and 1970, they found that race relations coverage tended to focus on signs of racial conflict and to give very little attention to the access of black people to housing, education and employment, 'competition for which would seem to be among the underlying

roots of tension' (Hartmann and Husband 1974, 132). In short, immigration and social problems were redefined as a 'race' problem. On the whole, minority groups were not represented as being part of British society, but as outsiders who preferably should be kept out. Hartmann and Husband (1974) note that rather than call their book *Race and the Mass Media*, it is called *Racism and the Mass Media*, because they argue that it is not 'race' but 'racism' that is the problem of race relations in the UK and its media.

Hartmann and Husband discovered that when social contact with non-white people was limited, knowledge about ethnic affairs was derived from the media. The authors conclude that

> ... the perspective that coloured people are presented as ordinary members of society has become increasingly overshadowed by a news perspective in which they are presented as a problem. (Hartmann and Husband 1974, 44)

The 'alien' within

If 'race' has continued to be signified as an 'external threat' in relation to immigration 'scares', periodically resulting in headlines with emotional metaphors, such as 'swamping', 'tidal waves' and 'floods', throughout the 1960s and 1970s and continuing up to the present (Gordon and Rosenberg 1989; Searle 1987), other studies have also noticed how the growing number of British-born second- and third-generation minorities have been subjected to representations of the 'alien within'. This began with the so-called 'criminalisation of black youth' (Hall 1978) and, it could be argued, continues with the reactions to the Muslim community in recent years (Wahab 1989). Hall (1978) by employing the notion of the 'moral panic' argues that 'race' and 'crime' news converged. He notes that the causes of crime were rarely mentioned or discussed, rather the outcomes. In short, the violence was highlighted and it was suggested that this was inherent to West Indian culture (Gilroy 1992), thereby at odds with the 'British way of life'. Troyna (1981) notes that the media's treatment of black people was chiefly organised around the idea of the 'outsider within'. She also noted that the impression created was still basically negative and ideological: in 'the media's representation of reality, cultural differences are disparaged and the British black population seen as a problem to, and essentially different from the mainstream of the society' (Troyna 1981, 183). Indeed, Van Dijk (1992) argues that stories about specific minorities are readily applied to all minorities by the indigenous white population. Thus, all minorities are categorised as homogeneous despite them having cultural differences.

British and Muslim?

During the late 1980s and continuing into the 1990s, interest in the whole Muslim community in the UK increased significantly. Beginning

with national issues such as the Rushdie affair and international matters such as the 1991 Gulf War, a series of events brought Muslims into the media spotlight and adversely affected the Muslim population in the UK. New components within racist terminology appeared, and were used in a manner that could be argued were deliberately provocative to bait and ridicule Muslims and other ethnic minorities. Many social commentators have noted that media language has been fashioned in such a way as to cause many to talk about a 'criminal culture' (Poole 2002; Saeed 1999).

The perceived support among British Muslims of bin Laden, Palestinian suicide bombers and Kashmiri separatists have been further fuelled by these recent events in the North of England. The disturbances in the North of England have in some quarters been presented as a particular problem with the Muslim community and not with the British Asian community as a whole (Saeed 2004).

Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in particular have been represented in the media as separatist, insular and unwilling to integrate with wider society. Furthermore, the old stereotypical image of 'Asian passivity' has been replaced by a more militant aggressive identity that is meant to be further at odds with 'British secular society'. The concept of culture clash have been reintroduced to imply that British Muslims are at odds with mainstream society (Ansari 2003; Modood 1994, 1997). Modood (2003, 2005) further suggests that the emphasis placed on Muslims lack of willingness to integrate with British society has led to the questioning of the whole concepts of multiculturalism.

> The extent of the 'backlash' against multiculturalism − the political accommodation of post-immigration minorities − will be familiar to many with even a passing interest in the subject. True, multiculturalism has always been controversial and contested its critics are far from sharing a single view of what is wrong with it. But two additional factors have coalesced to make their critique more powerful and more important to address today: its association with Muslims, and its linkage to arguments about national identity. (http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-terrorism/multiculturalism_4627.jsp)

Islam and the media

Said (1981) claims that he is not comfortable of speaking of 'Islam' and 'Islamic' as the terms have been misused in Muslim and Western societies as a 'political cover' for much that is not religious (Said 1981, 54–56). Various authors have noted that Islam and Muslims are treated homogenously in Western media and depicted as the opposite of the West (Akbarzadeh and Smith 2005; Halliday 1999; Poole 2002; Runnymede Trust 1997; Sardar and Davis 2002).

There is a complexity of reasons why the Western media has a certain unsympathetic view on Islam (Poole and Richardson 2006); Said (1981)

argues that the main reason is that the West has its 'own' 'experts' (reporters, commentators, academics/scholars, etc.) commenting on Islam; making statements about it, explaining it and so on. The problem he says is that 'we' the West, represent 'them' (the East), hence, 'they' are not representing 'themselves'. Saeed and Drainville (2006) argues that such

> ... binary conceptions not only depict all things oriental as 'other', but also define Islam as the 'other' religion to Christianity. With the 'other' constantly described as inferior, even barbaric, it is easily accepted by a Western audience that terrorism stems from Islam. (Saeed and Drainville 2006, paper presentation).

In his book *Covering Islam*, Said looks at how the definitions of Islam today are predominately negative saying, 'The West is radically at odds and this tension establishes a framework radically limiting knowledge of Islam' (Said 1981, 163). For example, this was highlighted when a Danish newspaper published caricatures of Prophet Muhammad suggesting he was a terrorist, among other things. It could therefore be argued that these publications suggest that Islam is the root of terrorism.

On the other hand, if one looks closer at the religion of Islam one can find that it is interpreted in multiple ways in the universe of Islamic cultures, societies and history, ranging from China to Nigeria, from Spain to Indonesia, etc. (Said 1981, 56). Moreover, Said (1978, 286) notes that 'if the Arab occupies space enough for attention it is as a negative value', that is, that 'they' are portrayed as a constant threat to the Western's free and democratic world. It is further argued (Said 1981, 26) that '[i]t is only a slight overstatement to say that Muslims and Arabs are essentially covered, discussed, apprehended, either as oil suppliers or as potential terrorists.'

Moreover, he notes that:

> In newsreels or newsphotos, the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent rage and misery, or irrational gestures. Lurking behind this is the menace of jihad. Consequence: a fear that the Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world. (Said 1978, 287)

This is of course a massive generalisation (Ferguson 1998), but is nonetheless relevant in current world affairs, especially the way Arab/Muslims are portrayed in Western media. Another criticism of the media is that they tend to treat Islam and the West as opposites and different. Although neither the West nor Islam exists as monolithic entities, journalists and politicians insist on framing the current situation in these terms (Abukahlil 2002, 18). This distinction is useful to the media in maintaining the stereotypes it creates of Islam as 'other' and 'different'.

Ghareeb (1983) points out that not all journalists write from a bias point. In a similar to vein to Cottle (2000), Poole (2002) raises a valid point about the homogenisation of Western media:

> I take issue with the homogonenisation of the west and its Media. Different countries have different political circumstances and motivations which are reproduced and reconstructed in their social systems, including that of the media. Yet neither are media systems homogenous. The 'media' incorporates a range of communication modes and within these, there are numerous genres, different affiliations, priorities and constraints. (Poole 2002, 19)

Although the considerations raised here are valid and must be noted, the point remains that the media do indeed present negative images of Muslims and Islam. Such images are transferred to the public at large, therefore the media is guilty of reinforcing anti–Muslim racism. Hartman and Husband (1974) conducted a widely quoted survey to find out what people know and how they found out about ethnic groups. In areas where there were few or no ethnic minorities, the media scored highly in how people found out and formed their opinions about ethnic minority groups. Van Dijk (1991) argues that the media successfully reproduces racism not so much because the media audience always take on board the opinions of the media, but rather because the media 'not only set the agenda for public discussion ... but more importantly they strongly suggest how readers should think and talk about ethnic affairs' (Van Dijk 1991, 245). Cottle (2000) also provides a useful summary of research into media and 'race' that examine the impact on the audience, contexts of media production and also the media in relation to broader multicultural politics.

> Prior to the upsurge in interest/debate about Islam/Muslims following the events of 9/11, Madrid bombing and the current ongoing War on Terror, Ahmed (1993, 9) had argued 'very often the news shown about Muslim centres around negative stories'.

Post 9/11 has seen a dramatic increase in newspaper coverage about Islam and Muslims. Whittaker's research (2002) noted the extraordinary increase in the number of articles containing the word 'Muslim' before and after 9/11. These findings were summarised by the Islamic Human Rights Commission (Saied et al. 2007, 15) and are reproduced in Table 1.

This increase in reporting at times included supportive and more balanced views of Islam/Muslims; however, the increase in overall representation was on the whole not indicative of a more positive view of Islam or British Muslims. Karim (2003) suggests that Western media homogenises the Muslim population and fails to look at the varying traits/differences of the global Islamic 'ummah'. Furthermore, Nahidi (2003) argues this misrepresentation is compounded by the attention focused on Muslim extremists/fundamentalists. Thus, it could be suggested that the 'preferred reading' of these discourses highlights the 'otherness' of Muslims/Islam from mainstream society.

Similarly, Whittaker (2002, 55) notes that Muslim representation in the British press can be characterised by:

Table 1. Articles Containing the Word 'Muslim'

Newspaper	2000–2001	2001–2002	Percentage of increase
The Guardian	817	2,043	250
The Independent	681	1,556	228
The Times	535	1,486	278
The Daily Telegraph	417	1,176	282
Daily Mail	202	650	322
Daily Mirror	164	920	561
Daily Express	139	305	219
The Sun	80	526	658
Daily Star	40	144	360

Unsurprisingly, the broadsheets, especially *The Guardian* and *The Independent* showed more interest in Islam/Muslims both before and after the event but the increase in every newspaper was dramatic.

four very persistent stereotypes that crop up time and time again in the differ-
ent articles. These tells us Muslims are intolerant, misogynist. Violent or cruel.
And finally strange or different.

Likewise, Richardson's (2001) empirical research on the broadsheet press
also implies British Muslim communities are absent or invisible except in
negative contexts. Richardson further suggests that British Muslims rarely
feature as 'informed commentators' on news stories rather as participants.
The consequence of this is that concerns/issues that effect the British
Muslim communities are absent in the broadsheet press.

These finding that assert that the media overwhelmingly associate
Muslims/Islam with negative connotations have been reproduced in
research throughout Western media. Karim (2002) notes that negative and
distorted images of Islam dominated US media since the Iranian revolution
of 1979. The Council on American Islamic Relations (2002) noted that
media distortion of Islam had led to an increased number of 'hate crimes'
on Muslims throughout the USA. Gerges (1999, 51) notes:

According to Professor Richard Bulliet of Columbia University, Americans
have quite readily accepted the notion that acts of violence committed by some
Muslims are representative of a fanatic and terroristic culture.

Similar findings that highlight the negativity of Islam/Muslims are have
been found in media research conducted in Canada (Elmasry 2002),
Australia (Manning 2006) and throughout the European Union (Fekete
2002). Allen and Neilsen (2002, 47), on research on the 15 European
Union states, summarise that

[T]he media's role cannot be overlooked, and it has been identified as having
an inherent negativity towards Muslims and Islam.

Islamophobia

Sardar argues that Islam has essentially created a problem for the Western universal project of globalisation by its refusal to be subsumed with Western ideals and networks of politics and culture (Sardar 1999). This refusal to comply with the West and their way of life, not having the same shared values or the same common sense beliefs has on a certain level resulted in a fear of an assumed Islamic threat.

Allen (2005, 49) raises the issue that a new type of racism has emerged that is largely based on culture and religion rather than colour:

> While racism on the basis of markers of race obviously continues, a shift is apparent in which some of the more traditional and obvious markers have been displaced by newer and more prevalent ones of a cultural, socio-religious nature.

Elizabeth Poole (2002) describes how this contemporary manifestation of this Orientalist discourse and constructions of the 'other' as mentioned previously has been defined as 'Islamophobia'.

> The word 'Islamophobia' has been coined because there is a new reality which needs naming: anti-Muslim prejudice has grown so considerably and so rapidly in recent years that a new item in the vocabulary is needed. (Runnymede Trust 1997, 4)

Weedon describes Islamophoia as 'unfounded hostility towards Islam ... unfair discrimination against Muslims individuals and communities' (2004, 165). It could be argued that Islamophobia came about because of a desire, by Western powers, to prolong the ideology of white supremacy:

> [...] claims that Islam is totally different and other often involve stereotypes and claims about 'us' (non-Muslims) as well as about 'them' (Muslims), and the notion that 'we' are superior. 'We' are civilised, reasonable, generous, efficient, sophisticated, enlightened, non-sexist. 'They' are primitive, violent, irrational, scheming, disorganised, oppressive. (The Runnymede Trust 1997, 6)

Halliday (1996, 160), however, notes that a distinction must be made between Islamophobia and anti-Muslimism

> The tone of this rhetoric is often alarmist, and encompasses racist, xenophobic and stereotyping elements. The term 'anti-Muslimism' is used here to signify such a diffuse ideology, one rarely expresses in purely religious terms but usually mixed in with other rhetoric's and ideologies ... It involves not so much hostility to Islam as a religion ... But hostility to Muslims, to communities of peoples whose sole or main religion is Islam and whose Islamic character, real or invented, forms one of the objects of prejudice. In this sense anti-Muslimism often overlaps with forms of ethnic prejudice, covering peoples within which there may be well a significant non-Muslim element, such as Albanians, Palestinians or even Caucasians.

In short, it appears that what Halliday is arguing is that 'anti–Muslimism' is almost a new form of racism that discriminates not only on physical traits but also religious characteristics. For Halliday, the term 'Islamophobia' is inaccurate because it is too uniform. Halliday (1999) points out that usage of this term implies that there is only on Islam and that all Muslims are homogenous. In short, Halliday (1999, 898) is proposing that Islamophobia as a term suggests fear of Islam as a religion not fear of the people who follow Islam

> The attack now is not against Islam as a faith but Muslims as a people, the latter grouping together all, especially immigrants, who might be covered by the term.

However, Halliday does acknowledge that such academic debates might not prove fruitful for victims of such prejudice. Furthermore, Fekete (2002) and Abukahlil (2002) point out that post 9/11 some of the critics of Muslims have actually questioned the Islamic concepts of jihad and the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad. For Modood (1992), the catalyst for the emergence of anti–Muslim racism was the Rushdie affair that saw the emergence of Islam as a religion questioned. Post 9/11 these debates became entrenched in the aforementioned *Clash of Civilizations* debate.

Therefore, the terminology of 'Islamophobia' should also encompass the effects of such hostility on both the individual Muslim and the wider Islamic community. Islamophobia, like the colonial discourse of its pre-decessor, Orientalism, does not allow for diversity; contradictions and semiotic tensions are ignored as the homogenising ethnocentric template of otherness assumes that there is only one interpretation of Islam. This homogenous perception of Islam is purported by Bernard Lewis (2004, 255) who argues that:

> For Muslims – as also for most medieval but few modern Christians – the core of identity was religion ... and the basic divisions of mankind were religiously determined.

The above can be seen as an example of contemporary *neo-Orientalist thinking*. First, this is indicative of Western ethnocentric thinking that homogenises Muslim identity, borrowing from the established conventions of traditional Western identity defined first and foremost by religion (i.e. Christianity) to which Lewis refers. However, in using this referent, followed by the negation that this is no longer the case with modern Christians, it is also suggesting that Islam or the people of Islam, are somehow less advanced than modern Christians, which once again repackages the historical conceptions of the Orient as 'uncivilised', 'uncultured' and 'irrational'. As Stuart Hall (1992b, 281) argues to the detriment of Lewis: 'No single identity ... could align all the different identities into one, overarching "master identity", on which a politics could be securely grounded.'

A good example of how these ideas relate to the media's coverage of race and immigration can be seen in a recent *Daily Mail* article penned by columnist Richard Littlejohn. In a column entitled 'If they hate us so much, why don't they leave?', Littlejohn invokes a very particular notion of what constitutes the 'imagined community' of the British nation, against which he defines a threatening *other*, in this case young British Muslims. 'Young Muslims ... are encouraged to put loyalty to their faith above personal responsibility to their country of birth. They are brain-washed into treating any misfortune which befalls any Muslim in the world as personal insult.' He goes on: 'For a larger number of Muslims, their faith is incompatible with Western freedoms and democracy' (http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/ newscomment. html?in_article_id=399515&in_page_id=1787).

Such comments lend weight to Said's view that politicians and journalists in the West often feel sufficiently qualified to paint psychological portraits of millions of 'Orientals' as if they are a single, homogeneous mass. (Said 2003 [1978], 48). The implicit reasoning being Littlejohn's remarks, although he doesn't say so explicitly, is that 'they're all the same' and 'they don't belong here'. Islam comes to symbolise, in Said's words, 'terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians' (2003, 59).

Littlejohn concludes his column with a simple suggestion: 'If we promise not to profile them at the airport, they should leave ...' Littlejohn's use of the term 'we' is especially interesting and is characteristic of much media comment on asylum, race and immigration. To whom is he referring? Presumably he means the security staff who's job it is to profile suspected terrorists at airport terminals; or perhaps he means the state apparatuses which decide and authorise such security policies in the first place. Either way, what is interesting is the way 'we' are identified with them – 'we' the audience *are* the authorities whose job it is to suspect and profile every Muslim or non-white traveller (and they are us). It is 'we' who must be wary of Muslims and non-whites.

Post-9/11 conclusion and discussion

The idea of images of Muslims as non-British is developed by Poole (2000) who asserts that the focus in British newspaper articles is predominantly global; therefore, the image of Islam is predominantly 'foreign'. She goes on to detail the images that are presented in the British media regarding Muslims:

> The way these topics are framed then, gives rise to the expression of a few central defining due to their involvement in deviant activities; that Muslims are a threat to British mainstream values and thus provoke integrative concerns; that there are inheritant cultural differences between Muslims and the host community which create tensions in interpersonal relations; that Muslims are increasingly making their presence felt in the public sphere. (Poole 2002, 20)

Gilroy (1987) argues that the media discussions have led to a way of thinking that ethnic minorities cannot fully participate in British culture because they are presented as 'other'. Representations of ethnic minorities in the media have been contextually framed by these discourses of the 'other'. Furthermore, these discourses imply that Muslims are alien to indigenous culture, therefore they cannot adapt to the 'British way of life'. In short, they cannot be British because their culture is at odds with it (Gilroy 1987, 43).

In a similar vein, Balibar writes:

[T]he racial-cultural identity of 'true nationals' remains invisible, but can be inferred (and is ensured) *a contrario* by the alleged, quasi – hallucinatory visibility of the 'false nationals': the Jews, 'wogs', immigrants, 'Pakis', natives and blacks. (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, 60)

Halliday (1996, 1999) points out that this notion of an 'Islamic' threat has recently taken a more 'inward' direction centring on Muslims living in the West. Halliday (1999) illustrates how anti-Muslim sentiment has fostered and found voice in countries across the West (and also in Israel and India). Fekete (2002) and Halliday (1996) both provide useful summaries and commentary on a number of anti-Muslim, anti-immigration and anti-Islam statements written and supported by leading members of the political community in the West. Faisal Bodi writing in *The Guardian* (21 March 2003) argues that

The inordinate fear planted in our minds first asked us to make an imaginary connection between 9/11 and Saddam Hussein, now demands that we invent more mental dots to connect terrorists with asylum seekers. Seeing a political opportunity, the right has fused the less popular xenophobia with the more popular Islamphobia.

Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992, 55) further relate this exclusion to issues of Britishness,

Since the Rushdie affair, the exclusion of minority religions from the national collectivity has started a process of racialization that especially relates to Muslims. People who used to be known for the place of origin, or even as 'people of colour' have become identified by their assumed religion. The racist stereotype of the 'Paki' has become the racist stereotype of the 'Muslim fundamentalist'.

However much they seek to identify themselves as British, young Muslims regularly find that other assume them to be first and foremost Muslim. In Britain today, especially after the events of 9/11 and the beginning of the so-called War on Terror, it is now Muslims who have been identified as a group of potentially 'false nationals' and systematically constructed as the other. A discourse has been produced that directly links British Muslims with support for terrorism, fundamentalism, 'illegal immigration' and an 'Oriental' stereotype of the East. British Muslims are repeatedly implored

by voices in the media and by politicians of all sides to make more strenuous efforts to 'integrate' into British society, and reassert their loyalty to the British state in a manner that no non-Muslim anti-war group would ever be instructed.

In conclusion, this article has attempted to show that the media constructs ethnic minorities as the 'other' and that they are alien outsiders to the 'British way of life'. This construction is rooted in ideological thought (Orientalism) and manifests itself in a 'new racist' thinking (Islamophobia) that suggests that British Muslims (regardless if they are British citizens or not) are still tied to 'foreign' culture (backward?) of Islam.

The role of the media in representing Muslims/Islam is crucial to how British Muslims are treated as British citizens. Cottle (2000, 2) eloquently summarises the connection between representations and belonging,

> It is in and through representations, for example, that members of the media audience are variously invited to construct a sense of who 'we' are in relation to who 'we' are not, whether as 'us' and 'them', 'insider' and 'outsider' ... 'the west' and the 'rest'.

Short Biography

Amir Saeed is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Sunderland. His research interests are in race, ethnicity and media power.

Note

* Correspondence address: St. Peters Campus, University of Sunderland, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR6 0DD, UK. Email: amir.saeed@sunderland.ac.uk.

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