

Racism, Islamophobia and Western Media: An Analysis How Western Media Portrays Muslims and Islam in the West

Mr. Abdul Basit*

Abstract

This article is a meta-analysis that investigates how Muslims and Islam are portrayed by the Western media. It purposes that the Western media often represents the Muslims as murderous, frame out as terrorists and also present the incorrect information about the Muslims and Islam. The paper presents the pragmatic evidences about the treatment of Western media with Muslims and Islam that follows the particular pattern of framing based on deviance. In this article the secondary data has been used to dig out the clear concept of Islamophobia. However, as scholarly inquiry into this topic remains relatively embryonic, this article seeks to contribute new thinking and ideas about, how to better comprehend, conceptualize and subsequently understand the Islamophobia. This article suggests the modernized tactics to reduce the discriminatory structures and the disruption of mechanisms that propagate racism. In this affection, particularly in the background of independent and human rights based framework, it is responsibility of the media to check information which conveys regarding racial identities is truthful, ethical and transparent.

Keywords

Racism, Islamophobia, Western Media, Islam and West

Introduction

Islamophobia is not a contemporary issue; its traces can be found before the introduction of the media and globalization. However, the

* Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, National University of Modern Languages (NUML) Lahore, Pakistan

binary of “us” and “them” in Western media - both print and digital – became visible after the events of 9/11, an act of terrorism linked to the Muslims. The 9/11 attacks led to the depiction of Muslim community as responsible for terrorism across the world, particularly in the West. The attitude of the Western media promoted the sentiments of xenophobia and hatred against the Muslim community.

The binary of “us” and “them” cannot be defined without referring to Edward Said’s Orientalism. Said’s orientalism is a well defines critique of Muslim narrative in the West. For Said, Orientalism is the ideology upon which the relation between Islam and the West is based. It is pertinent to mention that orientalism is neither a philosophical or linguistic entity but a product of both. The idea of Orientalism was originated in Said’s landmark study *Orientalism*. Said (1978) argued that, the Western thought about the Islamic world is inspired by its relation to imperialism. Thompson (2016) points out Said’s ‘Orient’ as a constituted entity is forged by the scholars having imperialistic concerns. Orientalism is also a state of mind which makes the orient different and “other”. In some texts orient has also been assumed as the antithesis of the occident or the West such as in the works of Poorebrahim (2012).

Said (1987) mentions that these constructions ideologically can be sketched from expansion of Western imperialism where ‘West’ versus ‘East’ dichotomy was constructed. Moreover, Hall (1981) argued that the construction of West’s sense is the result of the emergence of a discourse which represented the world as divided according to a simple dichotomy to the West. Hence, Said (1981) contended the reasons how the concepts of Islam are primarily negative and resulted that the West is radically at odds which establishes a framework that limits knowledge of Islam.

In August 2016, an Imam (Prayer leader) and his apprentice were shot and killed in New York City near a mosque. In December the same year a man entered a mosque in Zurich, Switzerland, and started firing indiscriminately, two were killed including perpetrator. In January 2017 nine people were killed in the mosque of Quebec City in Canada. There are several other instances of these Islamophobic terrorist acts. In most of these events, the place to be attacked was chosen as Mosque; the place of worship for the Muslims. And the strategy opted for the implementation of these events clearly mirrors that of a military invasion or operation.

Often xenophobes, who promote anti-Islam sentiments, are found terming their hate speech as freedom of expression. The propagation of hate speech may be a reason for any Islamophobic, xenophobic, racist or any other derogatory behaviour. Be it anywhere in the world whether it was the Holocaust or any Islamophobic act, the real force behind these acts was the rhetoric of hate (Awan, 2016; Buchowski, 2017; Skolkay, 2002).

Significant similarities between pre-Nazi anti-Semitism and the xenophobic views towards Muslims have been pointed out by Cora Alexa from Norway and Sabine Schiffer from Germany holding the similar views. This view is not only shared by these two scholars but John Esposito, Edward Said and Sipco Vellenga have the similar thoughts regarding the issue. Vellenga argues that “Islamophobia is, just like anti-Semitism, deeply rooted in European history.” (Esposito, 1997; Said, 2008; Vellenga, & Wiegers, 2013).

Problem

Media is a social agent that has ability to change community perceptions and its influence can seriously impact on minority groups by imperilling their peaceful existence. It is the need of hour to look at what the Western media publishes, says and shares; and how people perceive information about Islam and Muslims. More often the Islamophobic views of the Western media influence the masses to have anti-Islam views resulting in violent activities towards the Muslims. It is observed by the scholars that the Western media often presents the Muslims as an orthodox and terrorist community on the basis of cultural differences, religious grounds, ideology, geography, gender and race (Dunn, Klocker, & Salabay, 2007; Morey, & Yaqin, 2011; Saeed, 2007). However, nowadays when anti-Muslim hate crimes have reached the new heights of Islamophobia; it is very important to explore the roots of this problem. Hate speech is not freedom of expression if it instigates hate sentiments against religious or ethnic group. Islamophobia and racism or any other derogatory behaviour may be the result of propagation and dissemination of hate speech through media (Alfarauqi et al. 2018; Olteanu et al. 2018).

Question

How the Muslims and Islam are represented in the Western media? How the hate speeches give rise to the hate sentiments against Muslims and Islam? And how the narrative of Islam as religion of terrorism gets promotion in the Western media?

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how the binary of 'Us' and 'Them' is constructed in the Western media. This study aims to analyse how Muslims and Islam are represented in the Western media?

Methodology

In this article secondary data has been used to investigate how Western media portrayed Muslims and Islam in the West. It purposes that the Western media often represents the Muslims as murderous, frame out as terrorists and also present the incorrect information about the Muslims and Islam. Theoretically; framing theory of media has been adopted to explore how the hate speeches give rise to the hate sentiments against Muslims and Islam and how the narrative of Islam as religion of terrorism is built by the Western print media by using particular frames.

Defining Racism and Islamophobia

Racism, on side, is the discriminatory practices and on the other side it is bigoted ideologies, attitudes, opinions and beliefs. It is a manifestation which is understood at the individual, societal and institutional dimensions. It should not be analysed as character of individual person or agency as it is a much more complex phenomena (Ter, 2002). Castles and Miller (1993) demarcated racism as making assumptions regarding person's character, abilities or behaviour on social bases with different markers. Racism is the belief of dominance of one race over other, which often results to bigotry and discrimination towards people based on their race and ethnicity. Racism is the main cause behind deliberate suffocation of diverse cultural environment into extermination. The unseen daily version of racism needs to be viewed as extremely hazardous menace (Rinaudo, 2013). Barash and Webel (2009) argued that a society perpetrate violence against members when it

ruthlessly blocks their growth and adversely affects their sense of well-being. Galtung (1996 & 2004) studied that “violence can be divided into three forms e.g. direct, structural and cultural”. When there is a sender it would be a direct violence, which is performed as an actor who anticipates these consequences of violence. A few examples regarding direct racist violence are racial jocks and comments negating development of harmonious ethnic affiliation. Indirect violence comes from structure itself, that’s why it is a structural violence. A legal system that does not uphold the social rights of specific group of citizenry due to ethnic affiliation bleak practice of cultural norms and exercising self-rule of traditional law are few examples of cultural violence in the context of racial discrimination. Lastly, cultural violence is symbolically related in science, education, language, ideology, media and religion (Galtung, 1996; Galtung, 2004).

Term of Islamophobia as a construct has been used over a decade with different meanings. It is also used in a particular situation; thus giving diverse interpretations of the construct, therefore Islamophobia is conceptualized with some different variations. Bleich (2012) defined Islamophobia as “indiscriminate negative attitude or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims”. Sheehi (2010) argued that Islamophobia is not episodic phenomenon, to the contrary; it is a sustained campaign that finds its roots and origins with the rise of the unipolar world. Allen (2017) stated that there is a very real need to better understand Islamophobia in all its component forms; particularly at the global ideological level and the means by which Islam and Muslims are conceived.

Saeed (2007) investigated that the Western media portrayed the Muslims as an ‘alien other’, which is the main cause of ‘racism’ explicitly, Islamophobia and has its strong roots in cultural representation of the ‘other’. He also stated that the Western media depicted the Muslims and Islam in deviance theme which is un-Britishness. Alghamdi (2015), Benzehaf (2017), Iqbal (2010) and Powell (2011) contended that Western media represents the Muslims as murderous, frames out as terrorists and also presents the incorrect information about the Muslims and Islam. Particularly after 9/11 this false representation in the Western

media developed the new concept of ‘Racism’ namely as, Islamophobia (Alghamdi, 2015; Ciftci, 2012; Iqbal, 2010; Powell, 2011).

‘Islamophobia’ was used in UK by Runnymede Trust in its report titled as “Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All”. The report documented the various aspects of Muslims and Islam in biased approach to the Europe. Likewise, the Mayor of London launched a project in 2007 for studying Islamophobia. The title of project was “The Search for Common Grounds: Muslims, Non-Muslims and the UK Media”. It also redefined the definition of Islamophobia given by Runnymede as “a shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam and therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims” (Greater London Authority, 2007, p.110).

An organization FAIR (Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism) defined Islamophobia as “a neologism used to refer to fear or prejudice towards Muslims and Islam”. Similarly, FAIR defined Islamophobia as “Islamophobia as a form of racism”¹. Likewise, CAIR (Council on American Islamic Relations) argued that “Islamophobia is based on baseless hatred and antagonism towards Islam culminates in discrimination of Muslims”².

Media and Racism

The media has vital and pivotal role in promoting political, historical and social problems. Moreover, media has substantial power to contour opinions and manipulate people’s perception about race, racism and xenophobia. In the modern world, the media has intimating mission of reporting of the complex and complicated issues in their respective context, challenges, developments and obstructions by ensuring that, this information is clear, concise, comprehensive, understandable, balance and accurate.

Hall (1981, pp.30-31) said that the media is not only a strong source of beliefs regarding race but also a place where these notions are composed, processed, enhanced and propagated. Media is also effective to influence positions of identification and knowledge for us which helps us with ideological truths oriented from our inner selves.

¹ www.fairuk.org

² www.cair.com

Davis and Gandy (1999) argue that at the development stage of media and film, Africans struggled to express their identities, opinions, stories and beliefs. The reason was that white people monopolized the theatre; that's why they decided what image of blacks to portray. Kulaszewicz (2015) discusses that the term 'black' has become a racist micro aggression as it states the mind to merge the term with negative meaning. It has exposed the justification and criminalization patterns as, in the media; black men are represented as violent and criminal.

Mickler (1997) and Bullimore (1999) argue that a vital and important role is being played by media on the composition of indigenous personalities. Langton (1993) argues that racist terminologies were used historically for the classification of aboriginality. However, recently, it is not palatable to consume the racist terminology which was used in past. On the other hand, now a days, aboriginality of fair skinned is mostly discussed.

Augoustinos et al. (2002) discusses that the several linguistic practices are often used for legitimizing racism. Denial of racial intentions and the inciting of social and liberal principals are included in these practices. However, when social problems are constructed and portrayed in a particular manner; definitely media has impacts on the people's perception (Dijk 1993; Dijk, 2006; Marjoribanks, 2006; Morris, 2005; Liu and Mills, 2006) argue that journalists habitually deny of the fact of making racist and discriminating remarks. They also refuse to accept of having any such intentions. In spite they adopt defensive stance of being understood incorrectly. They also claim that, they told the truth as a journalist they understood it.

At personal, cultural, political, intellectual and social level, on which fight to defeat racism has occurred. It is a damaging and dangerous element of human behaviour that is present in cultures of the world. While racism is also recognized at macro social levels; Talwar (2012) studied that the destructive expression of new racism is being practiced in more organized form at specialized places and schools. He mentioned that the reason in increase of racism in certain areas is growth of Islamophobia in society; particularly practicing in classrooms. Rinaudo (2013) stated that the collective emotional bearings are part of the cultural network of group and comprise of shared emotional

experiences towards the other. Cultural violence in racism is linked with feelings of fear towards other.

Theoretical Perspective and Islamophobia

Framing is a multidisciplinary theory which permits the historic study of media effects on individuals and audiences. Ardevol (2015) argued that framing theory has developed in the field of sociology and practiced in a prompt development from 1960s. There are four elements in a framing theory that involves in the communication process e.g. the sender, the receiver, the message and culture.

In this article, the framing concept relates to the practices of Western media in which they portrayed the Muslims and Islam as murderous; frame-out as '*Jihadi*' and portrayed as racial identity. This falsification can be linked to the development of a term 'racism' namely Islamophobia that has its roots with the construct of 'other'. Awass (1996) mentioned that in news articles Islam was derogatory linked with fundamentalism and terrorism. He revealed that, Islam was associated with Middle Eastern people and their culture as '*jihadi*': factually misrepresentation. He also argued that, Islam was portrayed as threat to the Western society which was misunderstanding. He concluded that, this fictional, misrepresentational and false information developed the negative perceptions of the people, divided the society and created fear in the community.

Poole and Richardson (2006) found that the media images regarding to Islam and Muslims in the mainstream Western media are negative. McQuail (1994, p.331) argued that the process of opinion formation have the same tone which media has targeted for its audience. Continuation of this process happens owing to major effects on audience finally resulting in the social reality construction in an organized and predictable way.

Entman (1991, pp. 6-27) itemized that construction of social reality is result of media frame as well as internal frame of an individual that are schemata of information processing paying of vigorous role in this process. Likewise, the decisive opinion of an individual is a fusion of media frames to whom they are exposed to and their individual frames. However, in this esteem, the efforts of Tuchman (1978), Berger and Luckman (2000) are greatly acknowledged on the social establishment of

reality debate. Though, Lippmann (1922) recognized the importance of individual schemata many years before and characterized it 'the pictures inside our heads' by pronouncing that concept as 'meanings are in the minds'.

McCombs et al. (1997) contended that there is relation of framing effects and agenda setting. Instead they found out that framing is the extension of agenda. They consumed the term 'second level agenda setting' and also explained the effect of the attributes of the issue. Tuchman (1978) emphasizes that media vigorously established the frames of reference which the audience uses to understand the major events happening around them. Though, this practice of understanding is complicated which underlines the new experience on already existing meaning structures that are used by Luhman (2000) in his work.

Entman (1991, p.7) revised the 'information processing schemata' to individual frame comparing with media frames. Luhmann (2000) argued that the media is regulated by the internal code of information for selection of news rather than external values of truthfulness, objectivity and knowledge.

Islam and Muslims in the Western Media

Karim (2003) mentioned that, since Iranian revolution of 1979 US media misrepresented the Islam and portrayed negative image. The Council on American Islamic Relations (2002) founded about media impacts that; USA media distortion of Islam had led to increase the number of 'hate crimes' against Muslims. Moreover, Saeed (2016) stated that the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 raised the perception of Islam within the public discourse; thus this perception, however, appears to be mainly based on negative representations. Akbarzadeh and Smith (2005) argue that media plays an important social role in the society with the ability to influence people. Moreover, they say that journalists are too shaped by various social forces which contribute to their understanding of Muslims and Islam. Media has ability to create different meanings and representations of Muslims and Islam.

Karim (2003) discusses that a coherent set of journalistic characteristics have developed about 'Muslim terrorism' which strengthens stereotypes as fatal Muslims and further incorrect

information regarding Islam. Said (1997) also discusses the image of Islam in the Western media as 'laden' and explains, "not only patent inaccuracy but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural and even racial hatred."

Following the events of 9/11, the North American media revealed in heightened from the structural flaws that critical media scholars have for decades identified and analysed. Steuter et al. (2009) and Altheide (2006) argued that Herman and Chomsky (1988) significantly deciphered the delicate functions of media frames and filtered those powerful systematic influences money and power which form or misrepresent journalism cornering dissent and permitting government and influencing powerful private interests to setup of their narrative with the help of media, which is apparently neutral. Consequently, media is oriented towards profit making tactics which is everything but journalism.

In a study; that was conducted in Australia by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission on the discriminatory practices towards Arab and Muslim: Australians has also stressed that after 9/11 antagonistic acts of physical mishandling and oral abuse has increased substantially towards Muslims and Arabs (HREOC, 2004). There are manifold studies which have noted in wake of the 9/11 occasion, media of North American region intensified pre-existing stereotypes about Muslims and Arabs (Inbaraj, 2002; Pintak, 2006; McChesney, 2002). Pintak (2006) studied that the *Jihadi* journalism was constituted after 9/11 due to the biased approach of the American media and such skewed journalism hall mark the post 9/11 era. In Canada Muslim experiences showed that media rhetoric incited the racist reaction.

Saeed (2016) conducted a research and wrote a book under the title of 'Islamophobia and Securitization' that explores the experiences, encounters, responses and reactions to Islamophobia and the British state's counter terrorism agenda through a narrative study of female Pakistani and British Muslim students with Pakistani heritage in universities across England. The findings are important here to illustrate the nature of discrimination encountered by the Muslim Pakistani female students in a socio political context that continue to securitize and problematize both their ethnic and religious identities. Saeed (2016) stated that, Britain's imperialist history of Islamophobia is situated

within an ideological orientalist struggle where the heart of Islamophobia is the maintenance of the violent hierarchy between the idea of the West and Islam. A survey of CAIR found that after 9/11, 60% of Muslim population of Canada suffered discrimination and at least 82% were in the knowledge of the fact that one fellow Muslim experienced racism (CAIR Canada, 2002). Rane & Ewart (2012) resulted that the tenth anniversary coverage of 9/11 was done with the background of 'reconciliation'. Television networks of Australia used dominant frame which were expressing the relations of US and Australia. These included a common Worldview, shared experiences of causalities in the attacks and united reaction to the war on terror. However, it was evident that mentioning of confidence building measures with the Muslim community was absent.

Steuter and Wills (2009) conducted a study on the coverage of Canadian News Media to Afghan and Iraq war; headlines were studied for the way how media portrayed the image of 'enemy' that was fashioned and framed in mainstream media. The study revealed that the brutal language was adopted by the media against enemy leaders, Arabs and Muslim citizens at large. Canadian media also mediated constructions of Islam and Muslims; rallying known metaphors in representation, which constructs enemy-other that is against humanity. Media frequently presented the animal metaphors which create prisoners exploitation, racist reaction and genocide.

In Australia a survey was conducted by Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commissions in 2003 in which Poynting and Noble (2004) found that two third respondents had personally experienced abuse and violent behaviour which indicates the rise of racism since 9/11.

Media Ethics and Policies

Media personals and organizations are regulated by the strict policies, legislative frameworks, self-regulated ethical principles and also by the international regulations. The SAHRC (South African Human Rights Commission) declaration is to stress the Human Rights Commission by saying that the society is the best regulator of press freedom which esteems the human rights that's why press has the identical responsibility to give respect to human rights as everyone else

in society (Glaser, 2000). Likewise, Sanders (1989) cited that in 1983 the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of the Racial Discrimination demonstrated the importance of mass media in combating racism. The committee suggested that before dissemination of content media has check and balance to ensure the quality of content that produced. It is very important and necessary for media to confirm that messages which has been transmitted by the mass media is combating racial discrimination. This is danger which threatens all systems propagating ideas on the modern world. The tendencies of those who are in authority mislead the public; particularly in order to presents the foreigners as responsible for all ills.

Rinaudo (2013) stated that, racism is prolonged conflict and act of social violence that has nature of visible and invisible behaviour. It becomes rooted into the socio psychological infrastructure of cultures by making it difficult to eradicate. Gopalkrishnan (2013) commented that there is need to stress on the leadership to focus on the messages being disseminated in the media and also control the public faces of the public institutions. Media agencies strongly uphold democratic traditions and respect for diversity and difference, each crisis can set society back and have harmful impacts for everyone. Sutton et al. (2007) concluded that, to reduce racial and ethnic biases the media designers should understand the structure, content and delivery of the message are like to operate.

Conclusion

In summary, the discussion in the light of recent developments across Britain, Europe and the USA, it illustrates that Islamophobia is increasingly becoming an unchallenged and acceptable part of the British and Western social psyche. In the selected studies it is concluded that the hate speeches give rise to the hate sentiments against Muslims and Islam. Western media often built narrative of Islam as religion of terrorism. It is also founded that the binary of “Us” and “Them” in Western media - both print and digital - was created after the events of 9/11; an act of terrorism linked to the Muslims. The 9/11 attacks led to the depiction of Muslims as the sole community responsible for terrorism across the world, particularly in the West. It is also argued that the general attitude of the Western media promoted the sentiments of xenophobia and hatred for the Muslim community.

As adolescence is the heavy user of media that's why; advertising, news media, cinema and TV play a bigger role in their socialization. Media must have sense of responsibility to portray the image of others but individual have the option of turning media off. The issue of racism will get solved if it is realized that the white values are not the absolute values; there are many other cultures and identities. The modernized approach focuses on the reduction of racist structures and mechanisms that propagate racism and Islamophobia. Likewise, in the democratic environment and human rights based society, the media has responsibility to ensure the information and contents either they are transparent, accurate and ethical before spreading in the society about race and racial identities.

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