

# Twenty Years of Gender and Islam in the British News

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*This research is a qualitative analysis that focuses on the representation of gender and Islam in the news from 9/11 to the Afghanistan Withdrawal through the reporting of the 'Muslim woman' and the 'Muslim man' character tropes which are the imagined existence of Muslim women and men in the real world. The British news is represented by The Times, The Guardian, The Daily Mail, and The Telegraph and they all contributed to the inaccurate and misinformed depiction of Muslim men and women in the Western news media. The 'Muslim woman' was presented as a weak victim who is oppressed by her religion and by Muslim men whilst also being a danger to state and social security. The 'Muslim man' is seen as an abusive 'Islamist' fundamentalist who is constantly at risk of being radicalised and becoming a terrorist. The British press uses various journalistic practices to keep this narrative alive in the media to this day.*

## Introduction

In 2021 American, British, and NATO forces were compelled to leave Afghanistan drawing a close to the twenty-year conflict between them and the Taliban. The Taliban is the 'Islamist' fundamentalist group who established control of Afghanistan in 1996 and lost it in November 2001 when the US led a military campaign with British support after the attack on the Twin Towers in America in September 2001, otherwise known as 9/11. During the time after 9/11 and the initial occupation of Afghanistan the British, American and European news industry was rife with negative attacks on the Taliban and extreme radical 'Islamists' which led to media attacks on Islam and Muslims then extended to public discourse (Baker et al 2013; Mertens and Smaele 2016; Poole and Richardson 2006). As the conflict in Afghanistan developed and expanded the news framing of Islam and Muslims was built alongside it and was embedded in the foundations of other news stories about Islam and Muslims. The 'Western' news media constructed Muslim men, women, and their faith through a series of negative, stereotypical, misinformed and misrepresentative news articles which has led to the same types of discussions, public policies, and societal views of them – the Muslim 'other'.

This project seeks to understand and analyse the representations of Islam and gender in the British news media based on reporting from 9/11 through to the Afghanistan withdrawal. This recent historic event was covered by the media for several months and even at the time

of writing, (October 2022) nearly a year on, we are still seeing coverage of the new ‘Taliban government’ in Afghanistan. The decision for American and British forces to leave Afghanistan was a financial one at best and the willingness to leave vulnerable people in the hands of violent self-claiming religious zealots at its core. However, to debate the reasons surrounding the withdrawal is another essay entirely, in this essay the focus is on the British news agencies who reported on this period of unrest and other news events throughout the last twenty-years that have contributed to a stereotypical framing narrative of Islam and gender. My initial goal was to highlight certain themes and topics to discuss from a lengthy quantitative research period, but I found that many of the themes I initially encountered have been so prevalent in everyday reporting of Islam and Muslims that I shifted my focus to look further back. How Muslim men and women are presented in the British press highlight many misleading Orientalist ideas around Islam and Muslims, and the themes that are explored here demonstrate how the ideologies and biases in reporting have changed very little since Islam was forced into a scathing spotlight after 9/11.

My experience in the field of Islamic studies has spanned six years where I have studied it in an academic capacity relating to other fields of research, such as sociology, ethics, cultural studies, language, literature, anthropology, and history. I have largely focused on Islam and media studies when it comes to my own research into the field, so I do have an established knowledge base for the research I have conducted in this essay. Having previously researched the representation of Islam in the news articles and tweets on *Twitter* during the 2017 and 2019 terror attacks at London Bridge, I am aware of how deeply ingrained negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims are in ‘Western’ society and the impact this has on public perceptions and discourse surrounding Islam and Muslims.

This essay will start with an exploration of literature on Orientalism and how it has shaped public discourse and media commentary on Islam and Muslims whilst evaluating scholarly contributions to the representations of Muslims in the news through quantitative and qualitative studies which will then be further confined to the issue of gender representations, Islam and the news. The methodology section will provide an overview of the methods used to analyse the news articles used in my research by exploring the concepts of the ‘Muslim woman’ and the ‘Muslim man’ in ‘Western’ discourse and how previous research helped build my research parameters. The findings in this essay have been organised to present the four themes most commonly associated with the ‘Muslim woman’ and ‘Muslim man’ in the British press’ reporting on gender and Islam. Firstly, the ‘Muslim woman’ is weak and needs

to be saved as she is often attacked and defenceless, cannot stand up for herself, and therefore needs to be rescued by the 'West'. Secondly, the 'Muslim woman' is oppressed by Muslim men and Islam as she has no rights, is controlled and her 'Islamic' clothing is oppressive. Thirdly, the 'Muslim woman' is dangerous as she is converting the 'West', a security threat, and is supporting her radical extremist husband through various practices. Lastly, the 'Muslim man' is violent and an extreme radical who is a terrorist, has abusive tendencies, and holds 'Islamist' fundamentalist views. These findings are discussed with scholarly input to establish their analysis of the British press' sustained Orientalist framing of Muslim men and women, and the essay will conclude with a brief summary along with suggestions for future research and solutions to the problem faced in this research.

## Literature review

### Islam in the news

Before we can discuss scholarly debate on Islam in the news, we must first address some of the historical ideologies that underlie our societal views of this particular religion in this particular context, which is to say we must define the Orient, Orientalism and the West. The concept of the Orient has existed since antiquity and is "almost a European invention" that Europe and America define themselves against (Said 2003, p. 1). In a geographical sense the Orient is the majority of the continent of Asia and North African countries, according to Said, but this geography has since shifted as the entry in the Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Place Names (Everett-Heath 2020) has is defined as, "The countries east of the Mediterranean Sea which, to the Romans, were 'the East' from the Latin *oriens* 'the quarter where the sun rises' or 'the east'. The term is now generally taken to mean 'East Asia'." This book's definition has come about in the last decade, as far as I am aware, and does not account for the historical definition relating to the countries Said mentions in his study of Orientalism. 'Orientalism' is another term that needs defining as it has different meanings, according to Said: it is a field of academic study; it is the epistemological distinction between the Orient and the Occident (East and West) seen in different literatures; and it is a style of ruling the Orient since the late eighteenth century that enables the Occident to manage and produce the Orient. This essay combines the last two definitions to mean Orientalism as the first is an academic field whilst the others focus on the relationship between the Occident and the Orient. This leads us to defining the 'West' of the Occident which in itself is defined

against the 'East' or the Orient. It is generally taken to physically be the North American continent and most of the European continent, but it is more than borders that define the 'West' and the 'East' and for the purposes of this study I have defined both. The West or Occident shall reference Eastern Europe and North America as spaces that share in ideologies, religion, societal values, histories, and language, whilst the East or Orient references the Middle East and North Africa with the same shared characteristics. One of these characteristics is Islam which takes centre stage in the concept of Orientalism as the Eastern Islam is one of the biggest challengers to the West's Christianity (Said 1997;2003). Their shared history, both in religion and war, means that the West and Christianity has put itself against the East and Islam many times with seemingly no end in sight. I am aware that the definitions I am using for these terms are generalising at best, however these terms are accepted in scholarship who give similar definitions to mine (Kahf 1999).

Said described Orientalism as, "The enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage - and even produce - the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period," (p. 3) this speaks to the influence the Occident had over the Orient and how it was used to control perceptions of it. Another defining feature of Orientalism is the West's assuredness in their own superiority over the East leading to them, "overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter." (p. 7) This assures that Orientalism is still thriving today in many of the same areas mentioned by Said and especially in the media where it is an unconscious influence that can impact writing, photography, editing, and sources safely in the knowledge that the West's media narratives are correct. Said's other book *Covering Islam* (1997) speaks to this relationship as he writes that "Islam has always been seen as belonging to the Orient," (p. 4) and with the Occident controlling the accounts of the Orient it seems they control how Islam is presented and perceived in the media too.

From the conception of Islam in mainstream media there was a lack of understanding and underlying Orientalist ideologies which influenced this ignorance to everyday lived Islam, "in no really significant way is there a direct correspondence between the 'Islam' in common Western usage and the enormously varied life that goes on within the world of Islam," (p. 1) meaning that Muslims are reduced to nothing more than their religion rather than their complex lives all over the world. Throughout the years there has been a development of common tropes surrounding Islam and Muslims in the news and even during the time this

book was published it seems these stereotypes were thriving as he writes, “there is an unquestionable assumption that Islam can be characterized limitlessly by means of a handful of recklessly general and repeatedly deployed clichés.” (p.11) Said notes that Christianity and Judaism did not suffer this same treatment as the social and media culture attribute destructive acts to the nature of Islam and Muslims, but when similar violent acts are performed by those of different religions and nationalities this characteristic is not inherent in their nature therefore implying a clear structure for the mistreatment and subjugation of Islam in Western media.

There have been many critics of Said’s Orientalism as Halliday points out that at the time of his (1993) writing fifteen years had passed since Said’s publication in which “a great deal of writing and fire” have “ragged” on (p. 149), but Halliday does say that Said was late to the game and the field was dying off before he published his book and created a new debate. This cannot necessarily be called a critique and Halliday himself claims he takes no stance in the debate, however claiming that Said was making a fuss when the issue was practically over does take away from the lengthy span of time in which orientalists, society and others spoke about the Orient exactly as Said described. His work cannot be ‘too late’ when it exposes past and future knowledge production of the Orient as Orientalist in nature. One of Said’s biggest critics was Bernard Lewis who critiques Said’s Orientalism relentlessly calling it “false”, “absurd”, claiming he deals with “fantasy or invention”, he asked if Said “devised one of those alternative universes beloved of science fiction writers?” and accused him of transmuting events to fit his own theory (1993, p. 108-109). He continued to speak out and criticise anti-Orientalists for the duration of his career by defending orientalist studies and those who study them (2004). However, Said’s main grievance was against the unseen Orientalism that underpins Western society, so this issue was never entirely about orientalists conspiring against the Orient but rather the West unconsciously holding Orientalist values that permeate all areas of society. Hallaq (2018) does give some credit to scholars who tried to critique Said’s work as “valuable scholarly engagement” he nonetheless states, “Yet, none attempts to provide an account that improves on or displaces Said’s work, much less set new terms for the debate.” (p. 8) Hallaq’s response to Said’s critics seems to be the general consensus for those who study Orientalism or engage with it in any meaningful way as many of the literature looked at in this research accepts Said’s work and its influence, especially on Islam in the news. Richardson (2004) explains how orientalism permeates the news as, “journalism should be approached as the inseparable combination of social practices,

discursive practices and texts... the social and ideological meanings which journalistic texts variously presuppose, draw upon, imply and therefore (implicitly and/or explicitly) support.” (p. 227) These processes are commonly unconsciously done but it does lead to the majority of negative and misunderstood news stories today about Islam and Muslims.

When it comes to general narratives surrounding Muslims and Islam in the media, Richardson (2011) suggests six common plots seen in the media: (1) Muslims are all the same, (2) being ‘Muslim’ is the most important characteristic of a person, (3) Muslims are incompatible with non-Muslims, (4) Muslims are inferior to non-Muslims, (5) Muslims pose multiple threats, and (6) Muslims are impossible to work with due to all the above factors. All six of these narratives found in the media have Orientalist roots and an understanding that Muslims and Muslimness are a problem. The dubbed ‘Muslim problematic’ has been used increasingly over the years to refer to the problem that Islam and Muslims pose in the West for various reasons which impacts the lives of British Muslims. Morey and Yaqin’s research looks at different types of media and how Muslims are framed after 9/11 and they found that with the constant stereotyping and negative images of Muslims across different medias, including the news, has led to increased hostility and suspicion of Islam (2011). Islam and Muslims have also been accused of separatism as Poole (2002) found that news stories focused on British Muslims had prominent discourse of, “inclusivity, economy, separatism and loyalty.” (p. 248)

### **The news on Islam**

Reeves and Keeble (2015) provide a detailed guide to news production from detailing the basics of reporting to how a newspaper is constructed. They also make the point that newspapers have become increasingly more competitive creating pressure to “conform to the dominant news agenda” (p. 102). With newspapers constantly checking what news their rivals are producing there becomes a limitation on the “range of views and experiences expressed” leading to news stories conforming to a certain narrative that is confirmed by other newspapers. This is a dangerous process as the news media is more important than ever in informing Britain on religion as religious literacy is declining due to lack of participation, however religion is still a significant subject of interest (Taira et al 2012). This means that there’s more likelihood of uniform reporting on an issue and even the possibility of using the same sources and statistics that will build an unbalanced picture of an issue. We can see how this has caused problems when it comes to the reporting of Islam and Muslims as there is a

general consistent framing of it across different newspapers. Knott et al (2013) write about the representation of religion in British media and dedicate an entire chapter to Islam's depiction specifically as Islam is seen as a terrorist threat, a threat to British values, a perpetrator of wars, and encourages "preachers of hate." (p. 86) Therefore Islam and Muslims are framed as the violent 'other' which seeks to destroy the West which is a sentiment reiterated in other quantitative research including: Poole (2002; 2016), Poole and Richardson (2006), Richardson (2004) and Baker et al (2013).

Poole's research was based before 9/11 and so does not give us any data about coverage of Islam afterwards however she did add a preface to her book which discusses some themes she explored lightly in the aftermath of 9/11. She found that Islam was a central focus of sensationalist news coverage which was used to frame British Muslims as an inside threat and "their loyalty [was] under question and a loyalty to both Islam and the UK deemed to be incompatible." (p. 15) This again emphasises Said's work of the West and the East and Richardson (2004) found that this constant reiteration of the incompatibility of the two is logged in the 'collective cultural memory' and reinforced in the stereotypical reporting of Islam and Muslims creating an increased possibility that future reporting will continue this negative framing. Research analysing news coverage from 1998-2009 found that there was a sustained negative image of Islam and Muslims overall in reporting by the British press (Baker et al 2013). They do try and defend journalists by insisting they are not Islamophobic, but journalists do not need to be overtly prejudice in order to have those prejudices which are ingrained in our society, and they do not question.

With the amount of different research aspects in this field Poole and Richardson decided to gather different scholars' work to give a reflection of "the whole cycle of the journalism communication process" as they explore the context and production of news, its output, and the practices of its audience (p. 3). They determine that the news frameworks of Muslims directly affect audience understanding and public perceptions which feeds back into public policy that further subjugates Muslims to legislation and prejudice. This all adds to dominant public discourse as Tsagarousianou (2016) demonstrates the popular discourse in Europe surrounding Islam is that it is threatening and needs to be defended against which is expanded on by Poole's (2016) work that finds common themes related to Islam after 9/11 are terrorism, violence, and cultural differences.

## Muslims and gender representations

Gender theorists such as Judith Butler and Simone De Beauvoir contemplated the philosophies and thoughts behind gender, womanhood specifically, and this led them to become two of the biggest writers on gender theory in the West. Butler's *Gender Trouble* introduces her theory of performative gender which simply explains how being a 'woman' is a performed aspect of a person rather than a biological characteristic therefore true gender does not exist and is instead produced. Butler's theory draws on Foucault's idea of the body and how it is a "useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body," (Rabinow 2020. P. 173) one's body is therefore politicised, economised and used within power relations contributing to the 'knowledge' of the body rather than the science of it.

De Beauvoir then is known for her infamous quote, "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one," and bases her work off the Marxist idea of false consciousness which he relates to how the working class buy into a false consciousness, a group sociological identity that separates them from others. Butler would theorise that this identity is performed rather than a natural phenomenon and De Beauvoir would be inclined to agree as she uses this idea but applies it to women instead as she observed that women collude in their own oppression by not breaking free of this false consciousness. Whilst these are celebrated feminist works, they do also provide a commentary on how gender is created and maintained in societal discourse which can be applied to how gender and Islam are produced in society and the media. The concept of gender and Islam is used by the press to create narratives concerning society and gendered Muslims are actors within these narratives

Khiabany and Williamson (2011) demonstrate how gender is used as a division between the West and Islam as the West positions itself as morally opposed to the way Islam oppresses women, "distinguish the values of the West in binary opposition to those of Islam, on the basis of the issue of gender equality." (p. 174). With their chapter focusing on how the veil is seen they state that veiling in Islam is considered by 'Western' media to be oppressive therefore substantiating that claim that Islam is backwards and inferior to the 'West'. With the media's damaging portrayal of Islam, issues such as gender and Islam have been used to start wars, as the authors highlight how Muslim women were oppressed by the Taliban hence the *need* for the invasion of Afghanistan. These news events are not treated as isolated incidents of dangerous men but rather lend to the narrative that Islam supports the "un-



freedoms” of women and is a threat to ‘Western values’. This lack of freedom and oppression is a sentiment reaffirmed by many Western institutions and literatures, Clyne (2002) found that even ‘Airport literature’ confirmed the view of Muslim women as oppressed victims because the authors failed to “separate Islam from the various cultural practices” (p. xv) that makes these books so shocking and consumer worthy and they did little to help the reader understand women in Muslim societies.

Muslim women living in traditionally non-Muslim societies also have their voices skewed or go unheard in the sea of literature written *about* them rather than *by* them. This is the subject of Cheruvallil-Contractor’s research (2012) which sought to resolve the disconnect between “women’s rights in foundational Islamic texts, their realities in Muslim communities and their perceptions in pluralist society,” (p. 156) and by ignoring the experiences or religious standpoints of Muslim women society marginalises them – as we see in the West.

In Western media we experienced a narrative shift after 9/11 where strong Muslim women’s voices were silenced in favour of a narrative that tells of Muslim women’s victimisation and oppression at the hands of extreme ‘Islamists’ to aid the social discourse in supporting the ‘War on Terror’ (Stabile and Kumar 2005). More than this the Western media erased the history of women’s suffrage to attack Islam by claiming that ‘Western values’ hold women’s rights so highly in esteem that they are willing to go to war over the matter thus forgetting the history of Western feminism in the shadow of a sexist Orientalist framing of Muslim women (p. 775). Stabile and Kumar claim that the US reporting of Afghan women was “an elaborate ventriloquist act, in which they [Afghan women] serve as the passive vehicle for the representation of US interests.” (p. 778) Other aspects of Western journalism help create the framing of Muslim women after 9/11 as Mitra (2020) demonstrates that Afghan photojournalists were made to help maintain the image of oppressed women by those with more power than them who wanted to sustain the view of Muslim women in the ‘visual gatekeeping chain’. Through hierarchies that superseded the photojournalists and their need of an income they had little choice but to take the photos that would aid in stories misrepresenting Muslim women in Afghanistan.

Muslim men have their fair share of misrepresentation and negative stereotyping too with them often presented as violent extremists who abuse Muslim women. Immediate searches of ‘Muslim men in the media’ do not produce a lot of scholarly debate of the representation of Muslim men in the media which is likely due to the media’s fascination of Muslim women,

Baker et al (2013) found that Muslim women were referred to almost twice as much as Muslim men in the media (p. 197). This effects the perception of Muslim men in society as the differentiation of Muslim masculinities is not discussed in public discourse and the range of issues that can impact Muslim men's experiences and identity is seemingly invisible in the public eye (Dwyer et al 2008).

## **Foucault's knowledge and power**

Some European sociologists have orientalist ideals underpinning their work, those such as Marx and Weber viewed Asia, the Middle East and Islam as less than the West and backwards according to Lockman (2010). However much of their work was produced from the works of orientalist scholars, some of whom had never visited the Orient themselves, so their production of knowledge about the Orient was flawed before they started. In his work *Orientalism* Said refers to Michel Foucault as he commented on many subjects across his career including those of knowledge, power, and sexuality. Foucault talks of the wide reach of power not as a repressive force used to deny people and things but as a force that "induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse... a productive network which runs through the whole social body" (Rabinow 2020, p. 61) and we see this power in action through Orientalist works and the medias adoption of these ideologies to inform knowledge production in the current Western societies. Foucault alludes to how power operates in our society and how seemingly 'non-political' organisations, or groups should be "unmasked" so that we can challenge their role in the spread of "political violence" and their apparent unbiased views, (p.6) which would include institutions such as the news. With Foucault's ideas of power, knowledge and sexuality all being used as productions in society I argue that the news uses these three concepts to establish and maintain the characters of the 'Muslim woman' and the 'Muslim man' in the British news press.

## **Methodology**

The main theory I wish to portray in this research is the concepts of the 'Muslim woman' and the 'Muslim man' seen in the British press are based on stereotypical reporting with underlying Orientalist biases which perpetuate certain themes within news frameworks about Islam and Muslims. The 'Muslim woman' has been discussed in terms of British policy discourse relating to Prevent and the initiatives set up by the National Muslim Women's

Advisory Group (Rashid 2016). She is a historical figure written into Western literature from the medieval era (Kahf 1999) and a construction in the Orientalist Western mind based on the intersection of power and gender, class, religion, and race (Zayzafoon 2005). One ethnographer could not reconcile the ‘Muslim woman’ talked about by the American media and in popular discourse with the Muslim women she spent her time observing and interacting with, so her book *Do Muslim women need saving?* is her response to these misconceptions and the ‘Muslim woman’ the West has produced (Abu-Lughod 2013). In all these cases the ‘Muslim woman’ is seen as a victim of oppression by her religion and culture. The ‘Muslim man’ on the other hand is presented as the paradigm of violence and aggression in the West (Sjö 2013) and there is little research done on the construction of the ‘Muslim man’ especially in Western media. By the end of this essay, I hope to have added to the definitions of both these characters. Their development can be seen as an extension of Foucault’s and Butler’s theories of the body being a productive and subjective form as the case of the ‘Muslim man and woman’ shows that they both produce media and are subjected to it in a process that eliminates certain narratives to fit the one that maintains the overall Orientalist outline of the ‘Muslim man and woman’.

My approach to this research task was purely qualitative and spanned the years from 2001 which marked the beginning of mainstream reporting on Islam and Muslims with 9/11 and the beginning of Afghanistan war, to 2021 which saw the most recent news event involving Islam and Muslims with the end of a twenty-year occupation of Afghanistan. Many studies have looked at the quantitative aspect of news reporting on Islam and Muslims in the news (Baker et al 2013; Mertens 2016; Poole 2002; Poole and Richardson 2006; Richardson 2004) with the data to evidence the overwhelming negative representation and misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims in the news this study focuses on the qualitative analysis of news stories to understand how Muslims are presented through their gender. I wanted to get an overview of news events that combined to give an imagining of the ‘Muslim man’ and ‘Muslim woman’ so I was focused more on the overall narrative that qualitative analysis could provide. Mitchell (2012) mentions the narrative-centred analytical approach which he describes as “the evolving narrative combined with analysis of the language, the structure, and the images, as well as the use and choice of interviewees characterise this approach. In other words, how has a news story been covered? What makes up the story and what has been left out? How has it evolved, developed or fragmented?” (p. 8) I took the narrative-centred approach and combined it with critical discourse analysis (CDA) because when it comes to

analysing the news the most frequently used method in qualitative studies is CDA which involves identifying different constructions of news texts. Firstly, there's the textual analysis concerning lexis, syntax, modality, rhetoric, and narrative. Secondly, there's two levels of analysis relating to (1) the representation of actors and use of clauses to describe actions, events, and processes, and (2) the organisation of these clauses to demonstrate the range from the micro (lexis and syntax) to the macro (rhetoric and narrative) level of textual analysis. Lastly, texts serve many functions including meta-functions where they connect the text as a whole; represent the physical, social and mental world; and produce societal values and attitudes among readers (Richardson 2007).

My focus in this research was to show a pattern of gender-based themes that are prevalent in British reporting on Islam and Muslims which establish the 'Muslim woman' and the 'Muslim man' as characters in the news. This focus came about as a result of recent events with the Afghanistan withdrawal and the ongoing news cycle as a consequence, so it is very much still active at the time of writing. As the withdrawal symbolised the end of the Afghanistan war which started after 9/11, I wanted to explore the narrative of the 'Muslim woman' and 'Muslim man' that had been produced during this time. So, I set my parameters, the earliest news coverage I will use is from 12 September 2001 as this is when stories covering Islam and Muslims spiked becoming part of the mainstream media conversation (Baker et al 2013; Poole and Richardson 2006) after 9/11 and the latest coverage I will use is to 30 September 2022, making it just over twenty years' worth of news coverage. I decided to use the Nexis UK database to gather my articles as I can collect articles from different newspapers into one place as well as use key words and filters to narrow down my search results to my specifications. Some of the key words I used included:

For general searches	For specific news events
Muslim	Burqa ban
Islam	Shamima Begum
Woman/women	Grooming gangs
Man/men	Trojan Horse
Radical	Taliban
Abuse	Afghanistan
Oppress*	

Danger*
Burqa
*allows for different conjugations of the word

These key words were the result of research conducted by Poole, Richardson, Mertens and Baker et al who found that Islam and Muslims were commonly associated with violence and extremism. Since Islam has been reported on frequently and often within the frame of violence or terrorism many words have come to hold similar meanings so whilst I may use only certain words to search with, they are often used alongside/instead of other words (Knott et al 2013). The words used to find specific news events narrowed down searches so I could focus on these news stories more as the stories lend themselves to the themes that I found in my initial analysis of the Afghanistan withdrawal articles. The inspiration to concentrate on these news events came from my own experiences with the news because as a member of British society and a news consumer within that society I have remembered certain incidents which were reported on heavily. As stated previously I filtered the results by time periods starting no earlier than 12.09.2001 up to 30.09.2022, when searching for Afghanistan withdrawal stories searched from 01.07.2021 until 30.11.2022 and for stories surrounding 9/11 I searched from 12.09.2001 to 01.01.2002 to show immediate reactions from the news to the situations taking place. For specific news events I was able to use the graph feature detailing the total amount of times the searched words were used, from this I could follow the spikes in the graph to find the most quantity of articles I could use.

The selection of newspapers and news sites was made based on their political affiliation (Smith 2017), so I included a right-wing conservative paper (*The Daily Mail*, *Mail on Sunday* and the *MailOnline*) two newspapers considered centrist (*The Times*, *times.co.uk*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *telegraph.co.uk*), and a left-leaning liberal paper (*The Guardian*). *The Telegraph* and *The Times* are considered by some to be more conservative leaning newspapers (Baker et al 2013) but even if this is the case then conservative newspapers have a larger readership, and their framing of events carries across other newspapers more (Poole 2002, p. 247) meaning that their stories could appear to sound more conservative due Reeves and Keeble's (2015) observations on the media copying other media.

In terms of the type of news story I did not want to limit myself to any particular type of news, whether it be only soft features, hard features, opinion pieces or a colour features

(Reeves and Keeble 2015, p. 35), all types of news contribute to an overarching narrative, and this is what I wanted to explore.

Whilst some of the biggest news events in the British press have involved terror attacks perpetrated by extremists claiming ‘Islamist’ ideologies, I did not want to involve stories directly reporting on these attacks because these are stories that need to be analysed in their own contexts. My previous research on the news and Twitter coverage of the 2017 and 2019 attacks at London Bridge show that Islam was at the forefront of these attacks and there was a constant focus on the Muslimness of these attacks and attackers in 2017, but by 2019 *The Guardian* newspaper had moved away from these notions more so than *The Daily Mail*. This quick overview demonstrates how entangled Islam was with the coverage of these events so separate research would be needed into the representation of gender and Islam in terrorist coverage.

Since this research did not require any interviews with participants, I did not need to seek ethical approval from an ethics board however it is important to highlight some ethical aspects that underpin the values of this research. I used the *British Association for the Study of Religion*’s ethical guidelines which were published in 2019. Firstly, I had to be aware of the socio-political environment that my research was taking place in as it involves a marginalised population of Britain, and I cannot conspire in “common structural oppressions” (p. 1). Since my research heavily focuses on the negative consequences of imperialism and other such oppressions, I was sure to avoid potential collusions. Secondly, I had to retain professional integrity that held true to the basic precepts of “honesty, rigour, transparency, and respect.” (p. 2) I have held these principles in high regard throughout every aspect of my research which was conducted lawfully, responsibly, and within the scope of my professional competence. Thirdly, although the guidelines for the conduct of research mostly reference fieldwork or participant-based research I have adapted some of the guidelines to fit into my research model. Therefore, I have shown respect for the religious communities in which my research may impact (British Muslims) and have tried to maintain minimal risk of repeating past trauma to these communities however as my research includes the analysis of past news stories this risk cannot be completely avoided. Finally, I have given recognition where it is needed and have been “diligent and honest” (p. 5) in my references to other scholar’s work.

From a reflexive and positionality standpoint, my previous experience in analysing newspaper coverage has given me biases against British reporting on stories involving Islam

and Muslims because my findings found that there are still Orientalist and Islamophobic ideologies that underpin some journalists' work. However, I believe this gives me an even greater analytical eye when using critical discourse analysis as I'm more likely to identify subtle biases in reporting. Another positionality I face is my opinion of certain British newspapers as, again due to my previous research, I found right-leaning newspapers were more likely to express Islamophobic viewpoints than left-leaning ones. As I already have experiences dealing with these politically affiliated newspapers, I am aware of their positions towards Islam and reporting on religion which could impact my ability to give as fair an analysis on their articles as I can. With my previous research focusing on terrorist related activities in only two newspapers I am increasing my source collection pool as well as purposefully avoiding terrorist related events so I can have a broader scope of analysis and a wider variety of stories thus avoiding as much cross over as possible from my previous research.

## **The 'Muslim woman' is weak and needs to be saved**

A popular trope in the British press is the idea that Muslim women are weak and need to be saved. This is part of the identity of the 'Muslim woman' who exists in Western ideology but nowhere else in the World and is used as a battleground for differing ideas, "Muslim women's bodies are used to frame symbolic 'wars of words' between dichotomies that are perceived to be antagonistic – religious versus secular, faith versus reason, 'East' versus 'West', oppression versus liberation and 'indigenous British' versus 'migrant British'." (Cheruvallil-Contractor 2012) These notions of the 'Muslim woman' have sprung from the combination of Orientalism and patriarchal views which have sustained the reporting of the 'Muslim woman' as a defenceless victim, unable to stand up for herself, and in need of saving by the West.

## **Muslim women are defenceless victims**

Women and children are often grouped together in discourses surrounding violence and we see this in reporting on the Afghanistan Withdrawal which add in the extra pleas for help by women to save them. One *MailOnline* article quotes an Afghan women begging for "rescue" by the British and states her life is meaningless without her husband who is safe in Britain (Williams and Nicol 2021). Whilst this story is deliberately trying to exploit the readers empathy for this woman it also puts partial responsibility onto the reader as these are the

wives of British interpreters that we as a nation have failed to “protect wives and children against revenge from insurgents.” Even stories covering incidents of British Muslim women being harassed focused all its attention on Muslim women being weak victims as an article for *The Guardian* (Chrisafis 2001) writes how Muslim women were repeatedly attacked and victimised after 9/11 with example after example displaying the abuse these women faced with very little referencing how they defend themselves. Although the article uses a wide range of sources with direct quotes from these women about their experiences, it feels as though there are an overwhelming number of cases emphasising the victimisation and fragility of Muslim women. This feeling is only supported with the lack of investigation into some of these crimes and asking for official statements from individuals involved in these incidents therefore making this article a list of attacks by ‘British’ people against ‘Muslim’ women who had no hope in defending themselves and perpetuating the weakness of the ‘Muslim woman’.

Due to harmful reporting of the ‘Muslim woman’ after 9/11 many Westerners today still assume this image of Muslim women and view them as weak and even uneducated (Sacirbey 2010) therefore this is reflected in the reporting of the Afghanistan Withdrawal in 2021. These reports that focus on the ‘Muslim woman’ being attacked and threatened take away from another narrative which of one of the Muslim female activists who fight against these situations and help the victims, some of whom are Muslim women (Abu-Lughod 2013). The framing of the ‘Muslim woman’ as weak consequently overshadows or eliminates news stories of Muslim women being strong and active in a climate that paints them as passive. We see this eradication of strong Muslim women’s voices in other areas as well, Cheruvallil-Contractor compiles Muslim female literature in her book where she seeks to “give voice” to these women creating a commentary on Muslim women and their history in their own words. The news media would be wise to allow the ‘Muslim woman’ to do the same to change the inaccurate discourse but then the ‘Muslim woman’ would no longer exist in the Western conscious.

### **Muslim women cannot stand up for themselves**

There is no woman left untouched by the idea of the weak Muslim woman as is shown in the exclusive interview the *Mail on Sunday* with Osama bin Laden’s mother, Alia Ghanem, where she is presented as a frail old woman who never leaves her home, is in a constant state of worry, and is powerless in her own situation (Batarfi 2001). Even though she was the



mother of the West's number one enemy at the time she was still painted as a sympathetic mother who unable to cope in the situation. This framing was seen in reports from 2021 with headlines clamoring to tell the reader of the dire situation these women are in and how they are unable to do anything about it. A headline from *The Guardian* (2021) says, "Please pray for me': female reporter being hunted by the Taliban tells her story," whilst another claims, "Nowhere to go': divorced Afghan women in peril as the Taliban close in," (Ahmadi 2021) and a *MailOnline* (Pleasance 2021) headline uses young girls to reinstate how hopeless girls and mothers are, "Advancing Taliban are going door-to-door and forcibly taking girls as young as TWELVE to be sex slave wives for their fighters as they sweep across Afghanistan." The women Cheruvallil-Contractor (2012) interviewed in her study expressed their views of the media in which she found some central themes. The first was that the media was overtly negative and used women as a way to justify this negativity by using stories like those talked about above. The second was that the media also used news stories that "showcased conflict between Muslims and the West," (p. 112) like the Trojan Horse Affair which was a news event that not only demonstrated the weak character of the 'Muslim woman' but created tensions between Britain and British Muslims.

The Trojan Horse Affair dominated British news for months and has been used as an example of the sinister plotting of terrorists, a reference for tougher British state security, and a way to scapegoat the British Muslim population. Articles that referred to the 'Muslim woman' or girls largely focused on the alleged segregation in schools and the content children were learning in schools made statements like "a woman's place is in the home." (Clarke-Billings 2015; Pearson 2014; Robinson 2014) During the Trojan Horse Affair many accusations were made including Muslim women being attacked by other Muslim women or Muslim women being shouted at by Muslim men which led to others, including the authorities, stepping in for both these incidents to 'save' the victims. Regarding the later incident a podcast created by *Serial* and *The New York Times* attempted to unearth the Trojan Horse Affair to find out what really happened and as a result of their investigative journalism they found some worrying behaviours that perpetuate the weakness of the 'Muslim woman'. The incident which involved a female teacher (Amina) being shouted at turned out to be a small occurrence which was exaggerated by a non-Muslim woman (Sue) who went on to court to testify about it, however Amina who was the apparent victim of this 'attack' was never contacted or asked about this incident Sue states that "No one would speak out" when asked why Amina did not comment on the incident but then goes onto say that she did not ask Amina to speak as she

did not want to ruin her career. This is evidence of the same assumption made by two different groups of people – Sue and those she told of this event - that Sue was telling the truth of a likely scenario and Muslim women would not stick up for themselves therefore presuming they're weak. This is clearly an Orientalist outlook as Amina herself says that “if this incident was as serious as Sue’s fantasy... I am perfectly capable of raising the issue if that was my intention.” (Reed and Syed 2022, 00:35:20-00:39:00) Although Reed and Syed are not academic scholars, they did reveal the underlying Orientalist biases present in the public, the same member of the public who was used as a source multiple times by the British media (Clarke-Billings 2015; Pearson 2014; Robinson 2014). As a result of the Trojan Horse Affair the British government implemented the teaching of Fundamental British Values in schools which underlined the public discourse of the Muslim ‘other’ and the threat they posed to Britain (Poole 2016). The introduction of these values can also be seen as yet another tool used to help the ‘Muslim woman’ who cannot speak up for herself as now she does not have to with British values doing it for her.

### **Muslim women need to be saved by the West**

Muslim women have often been used as an example of the backwardness of Islam and Islamic society (Cheruvallil-Contractor 2012) and when Muslim women are discussed in the British media they are not seen as British but as ‘other’ and this is seen in different facets of the press from headlines to language to photos and to the choice of story. Women that Cheruvallil-Contractor interviewed stressed that the British press does not cover stories of everyday Muslim women and their successes but rather they focus on how Muslim women are different to others emphasising the difference between Islam and the West.

Even when women are showing courage and resilience in extreme situations they still fall under an umbrella of helplessness as one article from *The Daily Telegraph* describes the working conditions of female doctors in Afghanistan under Taliban rule where they are clearly frustrated with the male orientated work environment, but the headline does not portray any of this, it states, “Women doctors pray for freedom,” (Rennie 2001) even though not a single woman mentioned in the article admits to doing this. The connection between the content and the headline appears to come from a comment from a doctor who says, "We hope Europe and America will found schools in Afghanistan, then women will be able to study... When we have peace and security, we will be able to take off our burqas and work freely. Afghanistan's women are waiting for peace." This quote ends the article and displays a key

characteristic of the 'Muslim woman' not being able to help herself and needing to be saved specifically by the West thus solidifying the image in readers minds of weak Muslim women begging to be helped. A less subtle article by the *MailOnline* has multiple women in Afghanistan pleading for Britain to help them (Williams 2022) otherwise they will be "destroyed" by Taliban fighters whose ideals are still a part of Islamic thought. With these images of the 'Muslim woman' constantly needing to be saved there is very little room for stories that focus on the other aspects of Muslim women and Muslim women themselves are tiring of the same tropes. Cheruvallil-Contractor (2012) writes, "the media were preoccupied with a certain type of Muslim woman, whose stories were recurrently told to reinforce a dominant image of Muslim women who either needed to be rescued or who were in a constant state of conflict with pluralist society," (p. 111) implying that the British press is creating this picture of women needing to be rescued. This can be due to any number of factors but during the 9/11 era it was to rally support for the war in Afghanistan whilst during the Afghanistan war it was to gloat about all the progress the West had made there and how loved they were by Afghan women, as they were rescued, and their rights restored.

Weakness is then a defining characteristic in the 'Muslim woman' and her need to be saved by the West has been present from throughout news events for over twenty-years. The victimisation of Muslim women has been done to them through the media, public discourse and public policy and their efforts to combat this stereotype or create opportunities for their own benefit have gone unnoticed and unreported.

## **The 'Muslim woman' is oppressed**

One of the most common themes of reporting on Muslim women in the media is their oppression by Islam and Muslim men. Following on with the concept of the 'Muslim woman' it appears that she also has no rights, is controlled, and wears clothing designed to oppress her and leave her with no choices. These are all things being done to Muslim women in which they so not have a say and the majority, if not all, of the articles here are not written by Muslim women and few hold their voices as sources even. This is because British press again seek to frame the conversation around Muslim women and are convinced of their oppression at the hands of their religion which is reflected in their reporting, "the media were exceedingly biased in their representations of Muslim women." (Cheruvallil-Contractor 2012, p. 113)

## Muslim women have no rights

There has been an ongoing conversation that includes women's rights and Islam in the Western media, and this conversation has not changed for over twenty years. After 9/11 Boris Johnson had an article published in *The Daily Telegraph* that was essentially imperialist Western propaganda that raved against the treatment of Muslim women by Islam, this is the focal point in this piece and even admits it is the biggest division between the West and its enemy, Islam, "And what is the biggest single difference between their culture and Western culture? That's easy: it's the treatment of women." (Johnson 2001). According to Johnson, women have very little rights within Islam, and they are withheld their rights across the 'Muslim world': they cannot be educated, they cannot hold jobs, they do not have access to healthcare, and are subjected to assault. This discussion is still happening today with the Afghanistan withdrawal, "the Taliban insist they will protect human rights - particularly those of women - but only according to 'Islamic values', which are interpreted differently across the Muslim world." (Newman 2021) With frequent reference to women being forced to stay at home, not being allowed an education, and being killed, there is an insinuation that this is happening across the Muslim world. This being seen as the treatment of Muslim women in the Muslim world is common enough therefore suggesting that 'Islamic values' do not respect a woman's human rights. We see this again with almost identical writing as the Taliban said that they would, "respect the rights of women" before adding the caveat "within the framework of Islamic law". (Philp et al 2021) This implication that Islam does not respect women's right is again loud and clear especially with no immediate explanation of what their interpretation of Islamic law is in regard to women or that Islamic law itself has many facets with many different scholarly interpretations. The blanket statement of 'Islamic law' is misleading as it does not acknowledge its nuances as a concept and the debates that are constantly happening within it. Therefore, these articles indicate that nothing has changed with regards to how the British press view Islam and Muslims as detrimental to Muslim women's rights.

Yet these rights were not a priority for the invading Western forces in 2001 after all the media coverage insisting that the 'Muslim woman' had none of her rights Stabile and Kumar (2005) found that this was not a primary concern in US policy regarding Afghanistan. The media still tried to keep to the script of the Western saviours and so released articles and programmes relating the success of the Afghanistan occupation and how free the 'Muslim woman' now is in coverage described as "cynical and opportunistic." (p. 776)

## Muslim women are controlled

Along with having no rights, the ‘Muslim woman’ seems to have no power over her life and is constantly being controlled by Muslim men and Islam. The West is therefore portrayed as a welcome liberator for these women who are under the command of Islam. Nasimi (2021) uses the headline ‘The West has betrayed the women of Afghanistan’ which serves to conjure up the West’s responsibility for the lives of Muslim women. Going into the article, it mentions the astonishment of the journalist that “the West has made” in Afghanistan when fathers “proudly” told them of their daughter’s successes when under the Taliban rule they were not allowed to leave the house without a man. This comment can be taken in two different ways; men in Afghanistan are themselves oppressive of women and Western ideologies changed this or with the help of Western allies Afghans were finally free from Taliban rule and could live their lives how they wish; with the general Orientalist ideologies underpinning the news I would pick the former.

However, one reporter (Spillius 2001) attempted to paint a picture of a more Westernised Afghanistan before the Taliban and Soviet occupation by mentioning that women would wear “mini-skirts”, an icon of Western female fashion, listen to Jimi Hendrix, a popular American guitarist, and would “hold hands with their boyfriends” like any other dating couple. This casts an image of the normal peaceful life of a 1970’s woman that many in the West would remember fondly when they’re reading this story in *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper. This was then all stripped away by rules which were, “proclaimed in the name of Islam,” leaving any reader with the notion that this imagined Western inspired life that all Afghans – especially women - seemed to be living was destroyed by Islam. Even though Islam has been present in Afghanistan for centuries (Barfield 2010) and it was people responsible for distorting its messages, Islam still takes the blame as the controlling force against Muslim women.

One would think that allies would be found in the feminist studies field however mainstream Western feminism disparages at the thought of Muslim feminists as an interview with Phyllis Chesler in *The Guardian* reveals her Western elitism as she believes the best way to combat Muslim women’s oppression is to simply, “[tell] the truth about Islam and demanding that the Muslim world observes certain standards.” (Sutherland 2006) These standards are the West’s even though all around the world, even within the same street, different women are facing different struggles due to differences in culture, religion, skin colour, class, or sexual

orientation allowing for a variety of feminisms to exist. One feminism should not exist as a stick with which to beat the others. Moreover, Chesler feels comfortable expressing her views as she feels that an accepted statement of truth is that the 'Muslim world' is less than the 'Western world' and her own brief experience with Islam in Afghanistan gives her a credible insight into the lives of Muslim women as she feels that they are controlled by Islam. It seems that the West has felt itself be the defenders of women against the manipulations and commands of Islam as they have changed the attitudes of oppressive Muslim men towards women and are responsible for a feminism to liberate them all. However Muslim feminists would strongly disagree with the view that Western feminism holds of Muslim women, both Bullock (2002) and Barazangi (2004) comment on Western liberal and secular feminists not understanding fully the experience of Muslims and Afshar and Maynard (2004) writing about 'Western feminism' being written by and for the white, middle-class woman. The article above and these scholars' analysis of Western feminism tells of a view of feminism that doesn't take into account the different ways of being a woman, Afshar and Maynard claim different women (including Muslim women) make contributions, but they aren't part of the mainstream voice as it doesn't fit with a Western, anglophone idea of feminism. The 'Muslim woman' is still then represented as controlled and limited within certain boundaries that are placed there by others including the media and Western feminists.

### **Muslim women's clothing is oppressive**

Another sign of oppression by Islam is Muslim female clothing which has been the subject of many political, social, feminist, and religious debates over the years with very little of them involving Muslim women as is indicated in the following articles. Boris Johnson once again comments on the oppression of Muslim women by insulting them and their clothing which has culturally Islamic links, "women who wear burqas and niqabs look like 'bank robbers' and 'letterboxes'." (Ferguson 2018a) Interestingly most of the article is dedicated to showing a clear picture of what Boris Johnson said with a small segment towards the end for critiques. This was followed up days later with another article focusing on Imam Taj Hargey supporting Johnson's comments with no other source to critique his comments therefore he is treated as if he speaks for Islam and all Muslims (Ferguson 2018b). At no point were any burqa-wearing women asked to comment on this story and there is little to no voice of any Muslim woman present across both articles therefore establishing both men as experts on Muslim female clothing and the message of its oppression of Muslim women is loud and clear. *The Guardian* does a much better job at balancing the article they wrote by using multiple

sources, some from organisations and some personal accounts (Saner 2018), but it is one in a sea of overwhelming voices clamoring to tell the UK public of women's oppression by their choice of clothing. Another such story from 2008 (*Daily Mail*) titled 'The Burqa is a prison for women' is very clear in its attitude towards the burqa arguing that it is a "straitjacket" evoking the image of Muslim women being mentally disturbed if they wear the burqa. The article also claims that a Moroccan woman was denied citizenship to France because of her wearing a burqa as it is a fanatical type of dress and a sign of 'radical Islam' which is imposed on women even though the burqa is a choice in Morocco and only a small minority of women wear it (Ennaji 2017, para. 4). However, the writer made no comment on this fact and instead quoted her saying that the burqa, "is not a religious insignia but the insignia of a totalitarian political project that advocates inequality between the sexes," which groups all Muslim majority countries together because despite her insistence that it is not a matter of religion, the only link between Morocco and countries where the burqa is enforced is Islam. Furthermore, though the writer has the woman's name, Faiza, there is no mention of her opinion or a statement on the matter meaning her words are not important on this story and with no critique of what this French minister has said, her words are the only viewpoint shared in the article.

An article by *The Telegraph* preaches to readers about the oppressiveness of all hair, face, and body coverings as any hijab is oppressive (Brown 2021) and any woman who chooses to cover up are slaves to male domination, "How can you choose to don garments which symbolise male domination and ownership in Iran, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia?" This completely takes away from a woman's autonomy to choose what she wears and how she expresses herself whilst trying to hide behind extreme religious fanatics who also do not respect a women's choices. Here is again another assumption of women wanting to be free from their oppressive 'Islamic' dress rather than understanding what hijabs and coverings mean to different women. The concept of veiling in the West is seen as specific Muslim problem and another signifier of 'us' and 'them' and when it comes to how the 'Muslim woman' is represented then she needs to be emancipated from the oppressive misogynistic tradition (Siddique and Mehmod 2021). There is a fundamental misunderstanding or a wilful ignorance in Western media's portrayal of 'veiling' in Islam as is demonstrated in one article by *The Times* clearly depicts. The participatory feature (Reeves and Keeble 2015, p. 34) released in November 2001 called 'Invisible Woman' (Treneman) centred around a non-Muslim female British journalist who wore a makeshift burqa for the day and detailed her

experiences. The concept itself was ill planned as she did not know how to wear the burqa, but additionally the journalist's goal was to encapsulate the experience of how an Afghan woman must dress under Taliban rule. The execution did not capture any of the experiences of a woman in Afghanistan at the time as she was in London and Tunbridge Wells, a white American wearing the incorrect clothing, and under no threat as according to her, in Afghanistan "if women fail to cover up, the Taleban beat them." Treneman also remarks on feeling protected by the burqa in an area where her colleagues have been attacked as it is, "full of immigrants and refugees... many people here are Muslims," indicating that because she 'looks like one of them' they will not harm her. The entire concept of the article shows a gross disrespect and misunderstanding of why some women choose to wear a burqa and she insulted the sweeping assumptions about residents of a particular area near her work. This article perfectly demonstrates the Occident's arrogant attitude towards the Orient where a Western woman can experience wearing the burqa or any kind of culturally Islamic dress without *really* experiencing it as they receive no Islamophobic abuse, do not partake in the culture surrounding the garment, and think that the clothing itself is all that matters.

Interestingly some Muslim female scholars would agree with the oppressive symbolism of 'veiling' as Ahmed, a prominent writer in Muslim feminism, writes that the hijab or 'covering up' is what identifies women as Muslim and in imperialist ideology this is what obstructed the civilisation and progression of Muslim societies (1992). However other Muslim feminists would disagree with Ahmed's perspective such as Bullock (2002), a Muslim convert, who critiqued Ahmed and other 'liberal feminists' like her who claim the veil is oppressive and instead suggests that the hijab represents the various opinions of the women who wear them. Whilst Bewley (2004), a translator of the Qur'an into English, mentions the obsession with the hijab in many discourses about women both within and outside the Muslim community. Bewley challenges the field to move beyond this discourse to larger discussions about the role and rights of modern Muslim women.

There is a clear pattern of the 'Muslim woman' being oppressed by her religion or Muslim men who restrict her rights, her control and her choices especially when it comes to clothing but in other areas too. Participants in Cheruvallil-Contractor's research expressed the media reflects these oppressions mentioned above as well as the 'Muslim woman's' lack of education, her inability to think for herself and the forcible nature of those around her including Muslim men and family (p. 113). The British press has then waved its Western



superiority in the face of Islam and Muslims whilst showcasing their persecution and repression of women to emphasise them as 'other' and the West as defenders of women.

## **The 'Muslim woman' is dangerous**

Whilst the framing of the 'Muslim woman' in British press suggests she is weak and oppressed there is also an underlying tension that springs from her 'Muslimness' as Muslims and Islam have been so clearly portrayed as dangerous (Baker et al 2013; Poole 2002; Poole and Richardson 2006). The West has found a way to marry these two versions of the 'Muslim woman' together by indicating that Muslim women restrict Western women with the concept of 'creeping Islam' and their conservative ideas of being a woman. The British press also report on the banning of burqas and other hair, face and body coverings for security reasons across Europe implying that Muslim women are a security threat. This threat is made very real with the implications that Muslim women are extremist's themselves, support their extremist husbands, and will recruit other women to join them.

## **Muslim women are converting the West**

The 'Muslim woman' is the antithesis to Western women being able to show their bodies and Western women are in danger of being restricted more and more because of Muslim women and creeping Islam. Mooney (2005), writing for the *Mail on Sunday*, attempts to corroborate Muslim women's opinion of Western female imagery, but with 'terror' in the headline and the first paragraph mentioning two Muslim women who are "completely covered" she only conveys a perpetuating image of Muslim women being associated with extremism and their views encroaching on Western ideals of women. There is a preconceived idea that Muslim women do not like the West and judge it constantly, "I ask myself if the two women felt offended by the wholly unnecessary sexiness of the advert... would those Muslim women be correct to conclude that we have lost our moral compass?" and the underlying Orientalist concept of the article assumes Islam is constantly challenging the West and these two women who were simply on a bus have become symbolic of this argument. This article also exemplifies the feeling that Islam and Muslims wish to change the 'Western way of life' which includes how women present themselves. Mooney writes, "Muslims, moderate and otherwise, don't integrate," and that, "they see our popular culture not as liberating but as an assault," and whilst Britain opened their arms to allow 'others' the chance to experience the freedoms of a Western lifestyle, "those who have come here to benefit now wish to destroy

them.” This creates an ominous image of Muslims wanting to demolish the West and with Muslim women being a focal point in this article there is a strong implication that they want to subdue Western women. However, this is just not the case as Muslim women are more concerned with their own ‘veiling’ and struggles over this than trying to convince non-Muslim to do so. Many Muslim women choose to cover themselves for a variety of reasons; including to form friendships, to express their commitment to their religion, or to have a stronger connection to their ethnic identities (Read and Bartkowski 2000). Therefore, their discussions around and choice of clothing has very little to do with launching an attack against bikini-clad women on billboards and more to do with their expression of themselves.

Another article (Thornhill 2013) about the Miss Italia beauty contest being taken off air highlights the repressive nature of Muslim women towards Western women with a quote from a former Italian senator (Gian Marco Centinaio) who invokes images of Muslim women to argue about that lack of freedom this decision has created. Mr. Centinaio states, “Women have a right to show their beauty. There is nothing scandalous in silent women dressed in bikinis. What would she prefer? Miss Burqa? Does she now know that Muslim women are also not allowed to speak to men unless to members of their own family?” These remarks were not commented on or examined by Thornhill leaving them uncontested and displaying the fear of ‘creeping Islam’ in the West that has the potential to undermine a woman’s “right to show her beauty.” This statement once again puts Islam and Muslim women against the West and Western women and spreads fearful lies about the restriction of speech for Muslim women with the frightening implication that ‘these women could become our women’.

Mansson McGinty (2006) conducted a study where she spoke to female Western (American and Swedish) converts of Islam and found that they had a “emotional and intellectual development” in their lives which led them to Islam. She speaks about the Orientalist ideas that the West have and uses it as an explanation as to why Westerner’s struggle with the concept of people converting to Islam – especially women. Mansson McGinty emphasises the philosophical and spiritual draws that Islam had for these women rather than any vain considerations for “beauty”. Furthermore, it is Muslim women living in Western society who must adapt to Western fashions for the sake of social cohesion, and they have been successful in their efforts (Shafee 2020). Only a minority of Muslim women wear the burqa around the world so using it as a sign of Western conversion to Islam makes little sense as Muslim women themselves would have to adopt it more frequently for it to be any sort of tool of ‘creeping Islam’.

## Muslim women are a security threat

The biggest threat to the West posed by the ‘Muslim woman’ is her choice of dress. The burqa was featured heavily in the news and the biggest stories are those surrounding the ban of burqas and niqabs in various countries as they are considered a security threat. Although there never has been and are no current talks of the so called ‘burqa ban’ in Britain there are currently bans in France, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, parts of Germany, Austria and Sri Lanka with proposed bans or partial bans in Norway and Australia. Two *Guardian* articles published in 2010, around the time of the French and Belgian burqa bans, demonstrate a lack of debate and discussion within the text and a limited source selection (Brussels 2010; Davies 2010) with arguments denouncing the bans given one or two sentences within the article. This seems to be the case for articles reporting on later burqa ban related issues including Norway, Germany and Australia (AFP 2016; Robinson 2016; Australian Associated Press 2017). The intentions of burqa wearers are often ignored by politicians and the media (Akou 2021) as is apparent here as not a single one of these articles included the thoughts or opinions of women who wear the burqa or Muslim women who are being seen as a threat to state security in multiple countries across Europe. The British press has shaped the debate without having much of one and have not included those affected by these bans in the majority of reporting. The reporting on the ban in Sri Lanka goes a step further by linking the burqa to the terrorist attack of 2019 as one headline states, “Full-face veils are deemed a security risk two years after ISIS bomb attack,” (Bunyan 2021) and the first line of another article maintains, “Muslim women are to be banned from wearing a burqa or niqab for reasons of national security, Colombo's government said after suicide bomb attacks in 2019.” Thereby indicating a direct link between the burqa and acts of violence clearly marking it as a dangerous extremist tool. Khiabany and Williamson (2011) mention a development in the presentation of the ‘Muslim woman’ as the burqa or niqab is no longer an oppressive tool (although it still is in certain contexts) but an “internal sign of fundamentalism and a visible threat at home.” (p. 183)

Not only is the burqa apparently a danger to state security but to social cohesion as well as Robinson (2016) mentions burqas are a “barrier” to integration, he states this point twice, and in a later article (2018) affirms that Denmark’s vote to ban the burqa was made, “in favour of the legislation in a bid to uphold 'secular and democratic values'.” Whilst the European Court of Human Rights ruled in favour of France’s face covering ban in 2014 to help with social cohesion or ‘living together’, Lægaard (2015) found that there was very little basis for this

claim and even less for the Court to consider it a worthwhile claim therefore any banning of the burqa on these grounds is ground-less. The so-called ‘values’ of a nation are not in danger because of a small minority within a minority population, but the countries imposing these bans simply do not want the ‘Muslim woman’ to wear the burqa because they are suspicious of Muslims and feel uncomfortable around visible signs of Muslimness, therefore the ‘Muslim woman’ and her burqa is now a threat to state and societal security.

### **Muslim women are extremist fighters, support their terrorist husbands and recruit others**

There is an established link between terrorism and Islam which was founded firmly after 9/11 (Baker et al 2013; Poole and Richardson 2006) leading to the British press depicting Muslim women as terrorists or supporters of terrorism. In 2015 Shamima Begum and her two friends were radicalised and ran away to join Isil where they were treated as the children they were in the British press and referred to as “runaway schoolgirls”, “missing schoolgirls”, and schoolgirls that were lured by a corrupting force (Ellicott and Linning 2015; *The Telegraph* 2015; Evans and Turner 2015). When Ms. Begum returned to national news years later she received a very different spotlight as is shown by two articles using the same interview from Shamima Begum that took two different approaches, the article by *The Guardian* (Busby and Dodd 2019) emphasised Ms Begum’s plight as a scared 19-year-old pregnant woman who just wants to go “home to Britain”, whilst *The Times* (Lloyd 2019) dedicated some of its column space to implying that she is now a dangerous ‘professional’ terrorist who is a danger to Britain. Their headlines summarise the stances perfectly with *The Guardian*’s stating, “London schoolgirl who fled to join Isis wants to return to UK; Shamima Begum, 19, in refugee camp in Syria after fleeing last territory held by Islamic State,” and *The Times*’s, “Isis bride Shamima Begum: ‘When I saw my first severed head it didn't faze me at all,’” clearly the journalist’s took two very different messages from Ms Begum’s interview. The next day *The Times* released another article which was a scathing, hate filled piece about Ms. Begum where she is referred to as a “heartless little jihadi bride” and the concepts of ‘radicalisation’ and ‘de-radicalisation’ are mocked (Pearson 2019). Although she was still a “schoolgirl” when she was radicalised and has since been living in a warzone surrounded by other radicalised individuals, Ms Begum receives no understanding and is instead denied help and access to her own country. During the Afghanistan withdrawal an article relating to her lawyer’s actions has reflected negatively on her and comments he made about her have likened her situation to “World War One veterans suffering from PTSD” and saying that even

the “Nazis had the Nuremberg Trials” (Sales 2021). All this is attempting to use Western imagery to get the public to empathise with her case but the tone of the article changes his comments to find Ms Begum sinister and sadistic in her attempts to manipulate the public even though she is not the one saying these things. Clearly there was a tension between the British public and Ms Begum as a result of the media’s framing of her situation which led to an increase in Islamophobic and hate speech discourses that were supported or constructed by UK politicians (Murphy 2021). This level of aggression towards the British Muslim population indicates that the blame of her actions rested with them, maintaining the ‘us’ and ‘them’ Orientalist ideologies and the development in the nature of the ‘Muslim woman’ as a dangerous extremist radical.

Muslim women are also a danger of the ‘Muslim woman’ as a detailed segment from a *MailOnline* article focuses on the recruitment of Ms Begum and her friends by clever and powerful women who were “prolific” and a “leading light” in the Islamic State cause (Reid 2019). By building the recruiter up as a powerful individual the writer is suggesting that others can easily be recruited and with a previous article suggesting that, “ISIS women and children 'pose a security threat' to Britain after returning home.” (O’Brien 2018). Therefore, there is potential danger to the West from ordinary British Muslim women as well as ‘foreign’ Muslim women. This is supported with the titles of ‘jihadi bride’ and ‘ISIS bride’ being forgone as the British press has now given these women responsibility of their own actions as “ISIS women”.

Muslim women are perceived as real threat to the West in terms of state security and societal cohesion. The ‘Muslim woman’ is plotting from within Western countries to slowly convert the West and Western women to Islamic ways whilst also plotting to radicalise other Muslim women and planning attacks on Westerners.

## **The ‘Muslim man’ is violent and an extreme radical**

With the overwhelming amount of content depicting the ‘Muslim woman’ as a helpless, oppressed victim it begs the question of how the ‘Muslim man’ is being presented in this scenario. The ‘Muslim man’ is portrayed as a terrorist, as violent and abusive, and as an ‘Islamist’ fundamentalist with very little coverage focusing on those who are not. The general portrayal of the ‘Muslim man’ in the UK involves a “masculinity that is inherently misogynistic, controlling and dangerous and, more recently, associated with radicalization

and Islamic terrorism,” (Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert 2012) and this is the case for reporting on Muslim men whether they be British or a part of the Taliban. It is expected for news reports to focus on the members of the Taliban during the 9/11 and Afghanistan withdrawal coverage as the majority of the members are men but there is little attention being paid to the male victims of their crimes and their experience of change within the country when the Taliban was defeated and then took over again. The main victims of the Taliban seem to be women and children, specifically girls, with very little mention of men or boys inferring that the male population of Afghanistan will either be unaffected by the Taliban, or they are the Taliban.

### **Muslim men are terrorists**

One aspect of the ‘Muslim man’ in the British press is that he is an individual who is likely to be radicalised and become a terrorist. It seems only the boys who are referred to the British Prevent programme (to help prevent radicalisation) have made it into the headlines as one nursery aged boy was referred because teachers thought he drew a picture of his father with a ‘cooker bomb’ as the four-year-old cannot say ‘cucumber’ properly (Quinn 2016). Another incident reported in the same newspaper saw an eleven-year-old boy being referred to Prevent when a teacher mistakenly thought he said give “arms to the oppressed” rather than “alms” (Taylor 2021). These reports support the fear of Islam in the West and the fear of Muslim men – or future Muslim men – in Britain. A *Times* report from 2016 makes a direct link between the Prevent programme and “Islamist extremism” confirming in the media what scholars and critics have said for years; the Prevent programme targets Muslims (Miah 2017; O’Toole et al. 2016; Rashid 2016) and the media is targeting Muslim males through this.

Young men are often presented as chaotic and a danger to the public in everyday life, so when that is mixed with the practices of Islam and sex segregation then Muslim men will be drawn to terror cells and find comfort with ‘likeminded’ individuals according to one article (Tiger 2001) while another article headlines with, “Disaffected. Raging against decadent Britain. And hungry for the harshness of Sharia law. A chilling insight into the minds of many of our young Muslims,” then continues to have majority male voices as sources who speak in defence of sharia law implying these “young Muslims” are Muslim men (Clarke 2007). Hussain’s (2012) own experiences with dealing with the news media and his research with young Muslims meant he had many frustrations with the news and how they present on Islam. He deals with an onslaught of questions about the various aspects of Islam that would

encourage a person to become a terrorist as the news is full of imagery of the ‘Muslim man’ being violent, a terrorist and a cultural threat. The young people he spoke to told him they felt “the news was deeply inaccurate, Islamophobic, disempowering and leading to a feeling of alienation.” (p. 130) The Muslims they see representing all Muslims in the media are “deeply offensive” to most British Muslims as they are often members of violent extremist groups who do not embody what the majority of British Muslims think or feel, yet they are the ones in the news perpetuating a narrative of ‘all Muslims are terrorists’ which is unfairly felt more by Muslim men.

Even when a man and a woman are convicted of the same crime, the British press blame the men and purposefully portray them as worse than their female counterparts as is shown in this *MailOnline* article; Mohammed Rehman (a man) is described as a “Low life” whilst his wife, Sana Ahmed Khan, is defined by her education, “Khan, an English graduate.” (Cockroft and Gardham 2015) The headline also blames Mr Rehman for this crime by quoting Ms Khan’s excuse of being “in an abusive and controlling relationship” in a “begging letter to judge” which the article shows in full. This clearly stirs up sympathy for Ms Khan even though the judge found her guilty, which is only briefly mentioned, therefore making Mr Rehman an abusive terrorist.

### **Muslim men are abusive**

The stereotype of Muslim men being abusive and oppressive have been maintained in the British press for years since the 9/11 coverage of Muslim women framing them as persecuted. Since then, multiple news events have supported the view that Muslim men are violent including the reporting on grooming gangs. Muslim men have been accused of not “integrating” into British society therefore their own ‘culture’ is showing in the form of grooming and assaulting young “white women with drink and drugs before raping and sexually abusing them.” (Bird 2017) Many other reports echo the sentiment of Bird’s article which sees grooming gangs as a Muslim problem therefore Muslim’s must deal with it even though these are isolated cases around the country and the only reason it became a news event was due to the colour of their victims’ skin (Evans and Swinford 2017; Ferguson 2017; Martin 2018; Swinford 2017). The linking factor between all these men was decided by the British press as being their religion rather than the crimes they committed indicating that Islam is abusive and violent. Furthermore, assumptions were made about how these men see women due to the long-standing concept that people from the ‘Orient’ hate people from the

West, this was seen in reports on terror attacks also, therefore their attacks are personal and purposeful rather than opportunistic and the result of depraved criminals. To further exemplify this, the British press uses terms relating to religion and race interchangeably as is seen in the articles mentioned above and in *The Times*'s article where "Muslim", "Pakistani", and "African" are all implied to mean the same thing (Norfolk 2015). However, they seem to disagree with themselves on this as the headline for Phillip's articles states, "We must say the unsayable about Rotherham; The refusal to acknowledge that grooming gangs are Muslim has had a catastrophic effect," and further on in her article, "to acknowledge that the cultural factor behind the Rotherham grooming gangs is not that they are Pakistani but Muslim." (Phillips 2015) This is a clear warning that 'Muslimness' is to blame, but with Islam being so closely tied with a country's culture and nation, who can say for sure what makes them abusive criminals?

Muslim men are apparently so volatile that they live in "ghettos", yet another accusation of the British Muslim population segregating themselves from British society, which oversee the oppression of women including, "forced female circumcision, forced marriage and so-called honour killings." (*The Times* 2013) As is the case for most areas of a country that have a high population of people from a certain cultural background, past migration patterns to Britain are to blame for these 'Muslim ghettos' where families have grown, and communities created (Gilliat-Ray 2010). This fear the media is portraying of Islam and Muslims trying to create separate parts of the country for themselves is in line with Orientalist ideologies that accuse Islam of not being able to coexist with Western values and peoples. We also see again the idea of abuse towards women being an inherent trait of Islam and therefore the 'Muslim man' with the sensationalism of outdated abusive practices towards women that the majority of the 'Muslim world' condemn and do not practice. This is another way to 'other' Muslims and to portray the 'Muslim man' as an enemy everyone in the West can unanimously attack as a violent misogynist.

The growing accusations against British Muslims meant members from the British Muslim population sensed they needed to respond to media and government accusations and so they felt they had to "disown grooming gangs" insinuating that they owned them in the first place (Kenber 2014). Cockbain and Tufail's (2020) research into grooming gangs and how they are depicted in the media found that the British press help to create and sustain damaging Orientalist narratives of Muslims which put pressure on British Muslim communities to make statements about these groups even when they were not the ones at fault. This distinctly



indicates that the British press maintain the narrative of Muslim men appearing abusive and holding Islam responsible for the actions of a few individuals.

### **Muslim men are extreme ‘Islamist’ fundamentalists**

“Our religion comes before everything, then family, then Britain,” (Johnson 2001) is the quote used in a *Mail on Sunday* article which is supported by the sentiments of the only sources used in the article which were three men and “every Muslim I met in Bradford” which is to say: not very many. Muslim men being defined by their faith and extremist Islamist views is another common stereotype used in the British news press as is shown by all Muslims seeming to put their faith before Britain, which is presented as a problem with Islam, and Muslim men being content to die for their religion. Philps’ (2001) article showcases this perfectly as two days after 9/11 *The Daily Telegraph* released her article about Muslim assassins who “queue eagerly for martyrdom” with incentives from Islam encouraging young men to become suicide bombers. Not only did this increase the number of Muslim men the readers should be scared, but also increased the role those extreme radical religious beliefs held in their lives. Philps insinuates most Muslim men want to ‘martyr’ themselves in this supposed “jihad, or holy struggle” because this is what mainstream Islam wants as he makes no effort to differentiate between extremist beliefs held by radicals and those held by Muslims; they are one and the same. Another report by *The Times* (Philp 2001) also accuses Muslim men of participating in a “holy war” however this reporter assumes “Afghan men” are joining the “growing Taleban Army” and so the two terms are used interchangeably throughout the article thereby presuming they have common goals and ideologies. As seen before by Clarke 2007 and *The Times* 2013, Johnson (2001) falls in line with the main media narrative of Muslims starting a “self-inflicted apartheid” because they have jobs and provide services where they live that other businesses do not, but this is seen as sinister rather than entrepreneurial.

This idea that ‘Islamist’ fundamentalism thrives within Muslim men is inaccurate as Kashyap and Lewis (2013) found that though religiosity within young British Muslims was high they do not general put it into practice, however they do identify strongly with Islam and encourage discussions of religion in the public sphere more. They were also found to hold more liberal views than those of their elders thus showing a clear engagement with society and non-Muslims. The notion that the ‘Muslim man’ is a fundamentalist today holds little

substance unless the 'Muslim man' can only be represented by male Taliban members in Afghanistan.

Whilst the British media have framed the 'Muslim man' as violent Islamist extremists, Dwyer et al (2008) found that there are many different masculinities within just young British Pakistani men who identify on varying levels with Islam and in varying ways. Their gender is largely explored in relation to other people and concepts, "Pakistani Muslim masculinities are defined in relational terms, to other ways of being Pakistani men and to being men in general, as well as to Pakistani femininities," (p. 130) therefore demonstrating complex relationships to their own self-image. Hopkins (2007) also found that the relationships and activities that Muslim men partake in contribute to their religious and masculine identities but after terror attacks that the media frame as Muslim attacks or other news events these men "feel threatened and marginalised in their attempts to negotiate their local networks." (p. 199) The British news' framing of the 'Muslim man' therefore negatively impacts real Muslim men as they cannot live their lives without feeling vulnerable to attack, both physical, societal and from the news they read. Muslim men cannot all be defined as the same or put into certain boxes as there are too many differences and contexts to take into account however this has not stopped the British press from stigmatising them as terrorists, abusive and extreme 'Islamist' fundamentalists.

## Conclusion

In summary this research has looked at how unconscious or conscious Orientalist biases in Western societies have permeated supposedly unbiased news media institutions to produce content that perpetuates Orientalist ideologies that feeds into public discourse and policy. The concept of the 'Muslim woman' and the 'Muslim man' encapsulates Orientalist thinking into functional and productive stereotypes used by the media to maintain narratives which are harmful to the perception of Islam, Muslims and the British Muslim population. The 'Muslim woman' is portrayed as a weak victim of oppression that still poses a threat to Western society through her 'Muslimness' whilst the 'Muslim man' is presented as an abusive 'Islamist' fundamentalist who is prone towards radicalisation and becoming a terrorist. The British press uses different techniques and types of news to continue their narratives of Muslim men and women, such as using Muslim voices as a source of authority, participating in Islamic cultural practices, interviews with Orientalist-minded individuals, and scaremongering of the encroaching Islamic threat. These practices have been used throughout

a twenty-year period of journalism and has become rooted within public discussion and governmental policies creating an erroneous system of validation that will not cease until one of these actors breaks the cycle or contributes different ideas.

My findings also presented an unbalanced view of the 'Muslim woman' and 'Muslim man' as her character was broken down into three distinct themes whilst the 'Muslim man' had only one. This imbalance in itself reflects the British news media's lack of range when it came to reporting on Muslim men and the obsession with the 'Muslim woman' as a person the West can save. As Johnson (2001) told us earlier, the most distinct difference between Islam and the West is gender equality and the treatment of women therefore the sensationalism of the 'Muslim woman' only deepens the divide.

These gendered characters of Muslims that I argued for have created an insight into how the British press imagines Muslim men and women with the narratives and themes framing them being maintained throughout twenty-years of news coverage. I am hoping my contribution to the field showcases how different aspects of reporting on Islam and Muslims can affect public discourse and that portrayals of gender as typecast characters does not further any significant debate on religion but rather stunts it as these media tropes do not reflect real Muslim men and women. The findings also indicate that Orientalism is still very much a part of the news making process which has gone unchallenged from within the industry as many of the studies produced before mine have critiqued the media's use of Orientalist ideologies which has produced a seemingly non-existent outcome as many of the articles, I analysed from 2021 still portray Orientalist concepts.

My research was qualitative based but there is a need for quantitative research on the 'Muslim woman' and the 'Muslim man' so numerical data could reflect how stereotyped these two characters are. Conducting research that is similar to Poole's (2002), Richardson's (2004), and Baker et al's (2013) would use a mixed methods approach to incorporate both aspects of the social field and to make the findings more generalisable. The findings themselves need to be built upon as constructing the 'Muslim man' proved harder to do than the 'Muslim woman' which begs us to ask; why? Future research in this area should focus more on Muslim men in the media and their lack of distinct voice in news narratives. Further research should also be conducted into the development of these religious gender characters as the 'Muslim woman' grew from an oppressed victim into a societal and state security threat which was exemplified alongside these original characteristics. Therefore, research

with a focus on particular news events, for instance the burqa ban, can create new insight into how the coverage of Islam and Muslims has grown and developed. My project only used a small number of newspapers and news sites and excluded other popular newspapers, such as *The Independent*, *The Evening Standard*, *The Sun*, and news sites only available online and through social media, such as *Buzzfeed*, *The Huffington Post*, *NowThis* which are increasingly used by news consumers as a quick and entertaining alternative to physical newspapers or news apps on phones. Most news agencies are present on most social medias as this is a more efficient and effective way to get news to the reader but as this is a somewhat recent occurrence not a lot of research has been conducted on how news sites create content for specific social media posts. My previous research from 2020 looked more closely at how news agencies used social media and I found this field of enquiry surprisingly sparse, so I would recommend further study into this area.

In general, there must be a demand for more accurate representation of Islam and Muslims in the British press. Petley and Richardson (2011) make a call for more responsible journalism as their research concludes that newspapers do exercise constraint when it comes to publishing stories that would intentionally cause fear, harm, or offence to those vulnerable from discrimination, such as British Muslims. Underpinning all of this is their feeling of responsibility for sustaining standards of courtesy and respect that promote thoughtful debate within British society. In regard to reporting on Islam and Muslims, maintaining these values would require journalists to become more religiously literate so they understand that religions are to be understood in their individual contexts and that religions can inform different aspects of a person's values, opinions, and experiences. This understanding of religion would help journalists when it came to writing stories on religion, gathering quotes from religious leadership, and demonstrating the wide range of diverging religious opinions. However, this may be a fruitless endeavour as the rise of social media and other new platforms means that framings and narratives of different stories goes unchecked by professionals (Hussain 2012) giving unqualified 'journalists' free reign of popular social media sites so that they can dispense 'news' that is more harmful than informative. Nonetheless, journalists should welcome religious literacy in order to give their readers the full depth of religious debate in their articles as well as maintain their standards on social media platforms in the hope others would do the same. Journalists must also show awareness of their ethnocentric and polarising frameworks that try to give simple answers to complex questions and uphold underlying Orientalist discourses (Karim 2003). Though this may be harder to do as ethnocentric

attitudes are an unconscious bias, journalists can use more Muslim voices in their articles to show a diverse range of opinions and focus on stories that benefit from positive discrimination to combat the overarching negative framing of Islam and Muslims.

Although scholars have been producing research in this field for over twenty years, it seems the dominant negative image of Islam and Muslims has only now started to be questioned and combated by some journalists, but we cannot wait another twenty years for the wider picture to clear and reveal the real Muslim woman and Muslim man. Journalism, journalists, and the public must seek out and demand change to produce news content that represents our shared lived realities and does not purposefully maintain outdated stereotypes.

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