

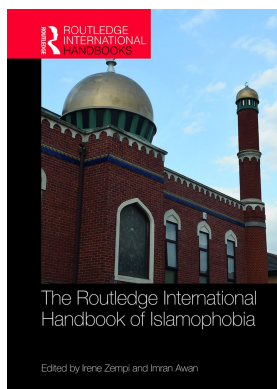
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## **The Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia**

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### **Race, racism, Islamophobia in the media**

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# Race, racism, Islamophobia in the media

## Journalists' perceptions and Muslim responses

*Amir Saeed*

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### Introduction

It is suggested that the representation of Muslims echoes previous research on how minority groups are portrayed in the Western media. In many respects, the media representation of minority groups is a 'double-edged sword'. First, it marginalises minority voices, thus, they are virtually ignored or invisible (Saeed 2007). Simultaneously actual representation of minority groups is often construed in negative discourses such as problems like terrorism (Ewart et al. 2017). The problematic nature of news media reportage of Islam and Muslims has been a significant focus of research especially in what can be termed Western media. Internationally, there is a growing and miscellaneous mass of research about the news frames, discourses used to report on Islam and Muslims by various Western news media (Ahmed and Matthes 2016; Anderson 2015; Bleich et al. 2015; Moore et al. 2008; Poole and Richardson 2006; Poorebrahim and Reza Zarei 2012; Rane et al. 2014; Richardson 2001).

When these frameworks are applied to audiences who have little social contact with minority groups, the role of the media as sole provider (or primary definer; Hall et al. 1978) becomes crucial (van Dijk 1987, 1993). Cottle argues that the media hold a powerful position in conveying, explaining and articulating specific discourses that help represent (and misrepresent) minority groups (Cottle 2000, 2002, 2006).

A significant conclusion in previous media research is that much of the mainstream news media reportage of Islam and Muslims comprises stereotypical approaches and generally negative representations of Islam and of Muslims per se as different, strange, and threatening (Saeed 2007). Research from Europe (Law 2015) and the USA (Aked 2015) indicates supports the assertion that Muslims living in the West are increasingly living under a climate of fear and suspicion (Saeed 2015a, 2015b). Thus the news media is a vital source of information for many Westerners about Islam and Muslims, and studies have shown that it shapes and influences how various publics perceive Islam and Muslims. Ewart et al. (2017) researched that this lack of knowledge of Islam and Muslims translates to news media practitioners.

The chapter provides empirical evidence from journalism, educators and regulators. Here open-ended interviews were conducted with members of the Association of Journalism Education in the UK (AJE), Society of Editors (SoE). The AJE represents journalism educators at higher education institutions in the United Kingdom and Ireland (<http://ajeuk.org>). The SOE represents members in national, regional and local newspapers, magazines, broadcasting, digital media, media law and journalism education ([www.societyofeditors.org](http://www.societyofeditors.org)). In addition interviews were conducted with ‘Muslim advocates’. That is individuals, who could be termed ‘gatekeepers’ with significant knowledge and understanding of the concerns of the British Muslim community. These included a member of the The Muslim Association of Britain ([www.mabonline.net](http://www.mabonline.net)) and also member of MEND. MEND is a not for profit company working towards enhancing the active engagement of British Muslim communities in our national life, particularly in the fields of politics and the media (<http://mend.org.uk>).

The interviews were open-ended but the respondents were specifically asked about media representations of Muslims and if this was accurate and how/it can be improved. The participants asked to remain anonymous as they noted that their personal views did not reflect the positions of their various organisations. It should be noted that the right to remain anonymous has not compromised previous research into media representations (O’Neill and Savigny 2014). Concluding, it will be suggested that the suspicion of mainstream media representations of Islam and British Muslims drives many Muslim communities living in the West to employ new media to challenge ‘old’ media representations and assumptions about Islam/Muslims. Therefore to further investigate this aspect. Muslim students from four different Muslim students associations were interviewed in focus groups. All of the students were studying journalism, media or Public Relations. A total 9 students (5 female and 4 male) all British Muslims from a variety of ethnic backgrounds were asked about their views on the mainstream media’s representation of Islam and Muslims.

### **Context: national and international concerns**

It has been argued that new forms of racism have emerged within contemporary society (Barker 1981; Gilroy 1993; Mason 2000). Goldberg (1990, p. xiii) argues that ‘the presumption of a single monolithic racism is being displaced by a mapping of the multifarious historical formulations of racisms’. Thus, traditional forms of racism linked to biological difference have perhaps become out-dated as racism has now attached itself to cultural differences between racial or ethnic groups. Elizabeth Poole (2002) describes how this contemporary manifestation of racism has its roots in Orientalist discourse and constructions of the ‘other’. Following the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, one of the UK’s leading newspapers the Daily Mail published a photo which featured caricatures of bearded Muslim men with exaggerated noses and veiled women crossing ‘Europe’s open borders’, along with scurrying rats. The implication being, they are one and the same. McKernan (2015) notes that the cartoon was widely denounced as racist and the image reminded many observers of Nazi propaganda. Allegretti (2015) explains that despite the plea of the President of the European Commission not to equate terrorists with refugees, the Daily Mail was unrepentant in its equation .

Likewise the UK’s most popular tabloid (*The Sun*) newspaper suggested a fifth of Muslims in Britain had sympathy for ISIS fighters. Despite the methodology of this poll being questioned and the newspapers interpretation of findings by the pollsters themselves (Melley 2015), *The Sun* was adamant of its claim (BBC Trending 2015). The Newspaper’s former editor even suggesting that ISIS was the beating heart of Islam (Burnett 2015). These finding that assert that the media

overwhelmingly associate Muslims/Islam with negative connotations have been reproduced in research throughout Western media. Karim (2003) notes that negative and distorted images of Islam dominated US media since the Iranian revolution of 1979. Assertions by then US presidential candidate Donald Trump to ban all Muslims following the shootings California followed a well-worn pattern of US–Muslim relations (Jones 2015). According to the US figures since 2012 there have been 1052 mass shootings in the USA (Guardian Team 2018). Insightful research by Clark (2018) notes that out of 207 shootings since 2015, only one was committed by a Muslim. He conceded:

the other 206? It's hard to tell because many suspects have not been identified. But, and here's the point, they are not identifiably Muslim and Islamic terrorism was not identifiably the motive . . . Beginning with the links provided by Shooting Tracker, my analysis of the media coverage related to each mass shooting revealed a pattern. For every non-Muslim shooting suspect, the media never mentioned their religion.

*(Clark 2018)*

Hence the connection is made between Islam and terrorism or Muslims and crime. The subsequent shootings in 2017 in Las Vegas and at the Baptist Church shooting in Texas by White (for want of a better word) non-Muslims have followed the narrative of 'individual responsibility' rather than a characteristic of the collective community—namely White Christians. This follows a well-known pattern that for many is exemplified by marking 9/11 as a 'terrorist' attack, associated with Islamic extremists, had unfortunate consequences for minority Muslim communities in the West. We see a similar pattern in Europe where, Europol reports, from 2007–2009 Islamic terror constitutes a tiny fraction of the terrorist attacks in European countries. During that period, more than 99 per cent of terrorist attacks in Europe were by non-Muslims (Europol 2007, 2008, 2009). The most recent report notes a decrease in Jihadist/Islamic inspired terrorist attacks from 2015 (Europol 2017).

It could be argued that the new 'floating signifier' is not 'colour' but religion and specifically Islam or Muslims. Although it should be noted that contemporary racisms combine assumptions about religion, class, nation. A UK YouGov poll suggests that sympathy for Syrian refugees in the wake of the attacks in Paris has plummeted. 49 per cent of those surveyed said that the UK should not accept any refugees from Syria, or accept fewer numbers. This is a 22 per cent increase from September 2015 (Dahlgreen 2015). One could suggest that if 'race' discourse is upheld in everyday language, the problematic ideology of racial difference will continue to live on. What we must remember is that 'racial' differences are social inventions, not natural. As Meer and Nayak (2013, p. 13) eloquently note, 'race is very much installed in the here and now. It remains ever present in late-modernity and strangely solid in liquid times.'

Thus, despite the ambiguous nature and problematic history of 'race' in contemporary modern and global society, essentialised 'race' thinking still appeals to significant sections of humanity. This leads to racism. Miles urges us to think of 'race' and 'racism' not as concepts that are rigid and fixed but rather as ones that constantly change and evolve according to different social, political and historical contexts. Race and racism thus go 'hand in hand.' Goldberg (1990, p. xiii) argues that 'the presumption of a single monolithic racism is being displaced by a mapping of the multifarious historical formulations of racisms'. It is more appropriate, then, to speak of 'racisms'—as Miles puts it (1993, p. 26), 'different modalities of racism within the historical matrix mapped by the evolution of the capitalist mode of production and by the associated rise of the nation state'. Or to use Balibar and Wallerstein words,

racisms are 'ever active formations' which materialise in any number of 'historical trajectories' (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, p. 40). This historical trajectory has resulted in the development of anti-Muslim racism commonly associated with the term 'Islamophobia'.

### ***Islamophobia***

The word 'Islamophobia' has been coined because there is a new reality which needs naming: anti-Muslim prejudice has grown so considerably and so rapidly in recent years that a new item in the vocabulary is needed (Runnymede Trust 1997, p. 4). It could be argued that Islamophobia came about because of a desire, by Western powers, to prolong the ideology of white or Western supremacy. Much literature has debated the term, its definition and the extent of Islamophobia in society in recent years (Allen 2016; Esposito and Kalin 2011; Sayyid and Vakil 2011). For Halliday, the term 'Islamophobia' is inaccurate because it is too uniform. Halliday (1999) points out that usage of this term implies that there is only one Islam and that all Muslims are homogeneous. In short, Halliday (1999, p. 898) is proposing that Islamophobia as a term suggests fear of Islam as a religion not fear of the people who follow Islam. However, Halliday does acknowledge that such academic debates might not prove fruitful for victims of such prejudice.

Significantly, the Runnymede Trust also appeals to the media to acknowledge their role in the reproduction of Islamophobia. Various authors have noted that often Islam and Muslims are treated homogeneously in Western media and depicted as the opposite of the West (Saeed 2007; Halliday 1999; Poole 2002; Runnymede Trust 1997; Sardar and Davis 2002). The apparent willingness of these Muslim 'enemies within' to support terrorism abroad (Saeed 2004) and develop an ideology that appears to challenge 'Western democracy' has seen Muslim minority groups placed under greater scrutiny by governments, public bodies and judicial organisations across the West (Abbas 2012). Kundnani (2007) has described the way in which Muslims have been singled out as the culturally distinct minority whose difference is constructed as a threat to national cohesion and security. Indeed much policy research in relation to Muslim communities is focused on the 'Preventing Violent Extremism' agenda (Khan 2009). At the same time, evidence from the Home Office and independent research suggests that violence and discrimination towards Muslims, already significant pre 9/11, has indeed evidently increased. The growth of the Far Right across Europe and the return of street violence and racism directed towards Muslims (or even victims perceived to be Muslims (Meleagrou-Hitchens and Brun 2013; Saeed 2011; Kundnani 2007) has seen Muslims across Europe feeling that they are in a midst of a cultural, social and political siege.

## **Journalistic responses**

### ***Interview material***

In summary then post 9/11 has seen a dramatic increase in newspaper coverage about Islam and Muslims. Karim (2003) suggests that Western media homogenises the Muslim population and fails to look at the varying traits/differences of the global Islamic 'ummah'. This misrepresentation is compounded by the attention focused on Muslim extremists/fundamentalists and therefore, it could be argued that the 'preferred reading' of these discourses highlights the 'otherness' of Muslims/Islam from mainstream society (Saeed 2007). It was these thoughts that were put to

the participants in this study. The initial question introduced the area and allowed respondents room to clarify positions:

Academic evidence suggests a biased negative representation of Islam and Muslim communities in the West. What are your thoughts on this?

The AJE member responded:

Islam and Muslims are seen as not belonging and for many people Muslims and Islam are concepts that they are unfamiliar with. Unfortunately this also applies to journalists who have little idea about the religion or the communities. Then when they are told to 'find' stories they follow the well-worn pattern of problems that minorities do. Usually the reporting on Islam, or when the media calls somebody a Muslim, everything is bracketed in that one word, and they fail to take into account that it encompasses a huge range of people who are politically different, who are geographically different, who belong to different countries, who are ethnically different, racially they are different.

*(AJE member, interview, 13 February 2017)*

A SOE interviewee further elaborated this mis-understanding of Islam and Muslims:

For me, I think the biggest issue is often a lack of context among the audience in terms of understanding many of the nuances, both in terms of some of the issues around Islam and the Muslim community, different parts of that community, different sects within Islam. . . . And so we're sometimes not doing anything to improve the audience's understanding of those issues, and at worst sometimes simplifying to a point where many people in the audience would have a very hard time understanding.

*(SOE member, interview, 24 April 2017)*

The participant here suggests that journalists are following established discourses of problematising and misunderstanding minority cultures. Thus they continue to replicate stories that follow the same pattern. They define the situation and determine how it should be debated.

Hall et al. (1978, p. 95) says the media constitute a 'machinery of representation' determining 'what and who gets represented and what and who routinely gets left out [and] how things, people, events, relationships get represented . . . the structure of access to the media is systematically skewed towards certain social categories'. They are thus able to 'command the field' in all 'subsequent treatment' (Miller 1994).

It is important to note that media effects are never simple or direct (Hall et al. 1978). Van Dijk (1987, 1993) links the idea of 'primary definers' to the notion that media constitute an 'elite' in society. While accepting that the media have conflicts with other social actors he argues that in terms of race and ethnicity an ethnic consensus is prevalent. The debate about 'otherness' and 'cultural clash' has been re-awakened by the focus of media on non-white immigrants in Europe. Saeed argues:

Too often, these debates ignore the reality of the existence of marginalised groups and concentrate on the 'fear of the outsider' rather than on the contribution immigrants can make. This homogenisation of 'otherness' and stereotyping, however, generates fear, contempt and hatred of the groups deemed 'other': non-whites, Muslims, asylum seekers, etc.

*(Saeed 2015a)*

One other aspect of this is a lack or diminution of Muslim sources or voices in new stories. The AJE participant also highlighted the sources where journalists went to ‘get’ or comment on events:

When something happens it is easier and quicker for journalists to ‘tap’ into existing contacts or people that have been cited before. Hence it becomes difficult to allow other voices to be heard. We also rely on stories elsewhere and just follow their leads due to lack of time. It’s not right but that the nature of the game now.

*(AJE member, interview, 13 February 2016)*

This implies a series of pressures that are faced by journalists. These pressures then appear to help ‘frame’ how the story is represented and possibly understood. It is not suggesting that journalists are Islamophobic consciously but that industry constraints and procedures play an important influence in media representations. When the agenda is consistent among media sources (Mills et al. 2011) the media has the power to create associations for people, relating to ‘race’, culture, and religion. For example, when representing Muslims, the ‘diversity of Muslim identities, practices, and forms of belonging are reduced into a few reactionary cultural practices’ (Semati 2010, p. 267). Moreover, some voices in the media are in fact quite closely connected to the authorities stemming from concerns within the intelligence and security industry (Mills et al. 2011). Mills et al. (ibid.) highlight the importance of powerful right-wing think tanks that have successfully managed to influence the mainstream media with a succession of ‘Muslim scare stories’ that suggest Muslims in the UK are attempting to undermine secular democratic institutions ranging from local governments to higher education. Abbas notes:

In the current period, there is a degree of Islamophobia found in think-tanks that have an important role in influencing the current Conservative–Liberal coalition in England. The London-based Centre for Social Cohesion, Policy Exchange and the Quilliam Foundation have all determined that Islamism is wide-ranging and that it is *the* problem of our time.

*(Abbas 2012, p. 353)*

The influence of ‘think tanks’ employing PR tactics to embed news stories within media organisations has been much researched and demonstrated (Mills et al. 2011; Miller 1994). Reese found that journalistic ‘objectivity’, often a professional and institutional ‘ideal’ often means that a narrow network of sources are accessed the most frequently, bringing a consensus view from institutional spokespeople, ‘experts’ and other journalists (Reese cited in McQuail 2010, p. 322). Source/media relationships are symbiotic by nature that means that some sources have unequal access because they hold more power, resources, status and are better organised, more authoritative and gain habitual access. Mutual interest between media and sources can result in assimilation of media material and comes into conflict with critical independence and journalistic professional norms (McQuail 2010). Practises of strategic communications, the existence of ‘spin doctors’ and the emergence of two relatively new industries, advertising and public relations all demonstrate how a ‘third force’ of sources are now operating through lobbyists, social organisations, and interest groups (Manheim cited in McQuail 2010, p. 325). The challenge here then seems to be how to get Muslim voices be heard that debate ‘non-Islamist issues.’ In recent years Muslim organisation have attempted to show the diversity of Islam/Muslims and challenge industry representations.

Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) is a not-for-profit company that helps to empower and encourage British Muslims within local communities to be more actively



involved in British media and politics. This issue, of challenging power within the media system and the challenges that itself means, was highlighted by the MEND participant:

The coverage of Muslims can be limited to looking at Muslims and Islam in general from the lens of like terrorism and extremism so a lot of stories are often about that. There are of course many stories that are out there but they're not getting as much coverage, maybe they're not getting as much attention, for example when there has been terror attacks a lot of people have asked me where is the Muslim condemnation a lot, there has been condemnation from basically every single Muslim organisation that I know and its just the we don't seem to get covered . . . it is interesting for the example the Not in my Name campaign which was a group of young British Muslims who did a video campaign so those kind of things will get attraction but not just press releases from the organisations so that's where it is quite difficult  
(MEND member, interview, 18 February 2017)

The participant notes the challenges to be heard and get access to the media to counter the mainstream representation. The Not in My Name (see <http://isisnotinmyname.com>) employed social media and managed to get some access in the mainstream media. The Muslim Association of Britain member also noted the importance of access to media by employing PR campaigns (see [www.inspiredbymuhammad.com](http://www.inspiredbymuhammad.com)):

you have to be pretty clever in your PR and everyone knows that . . . so that's why one of the projects I did was a PR campaign and it was called inspired by Mohammed, as well as a journalist I'm also a director of communications for a foundation called exploring Islam foundation and we specialise in PR campaigns and media resources based upon Islam so one of the campaigns we did was back in 2010 and it was all based around the people being inspired to contribute.

(Muslim Association of Britain member, interview)

Richardson (2006) looked at the sources quoted in newspaper coverage of Islam and Muslims in the British press and found that in a sample of news articles between October 1997 and January 1998, illegitimate ('terrorist') organisations were the most frequently quoted Muslim primary source and that 'Muslim criminals' were also frequently quoted. Significantly, the study identified that Muslims were only included in news stories that criticised their actions and faith. It could be suggested that negative representations of Muslims/Islam are not indicative of racist/Islamophobic personnel but rather how the media/journalism industries are structured. Van Dijk (2005) classified four issues that stimulate white news production: an over reliance on white elites as sources (see the reliance on powerful lobbying groups), a disregard of ethnic groups and organisations (hence the absence of Muslim voices, media representations that problematise the existence of minority groups and a dismissal of stories about racism/Islamophobia). In relation to this last point consider the defence of current US president Donald Trump's attacks on Muslims/Islam.

Indeed the SoE participant was quick to highlight how the journalism profession has criteria to combat racism and prejudicial reporting:

Journalists have to stick by strict legal considerations and their training means that they are or should be aware of stating libelous or prejudicial comments. They receive considerable able training either in their studies or 'on the job' to make them conscious of such issues.  
(SoE member, interview, 3 March 2016)



Journalists in many countries may aspire to certain values, such as objectivity, but their ability or willingness to actually abide by them is determined by the practicalities of their unique socio-political situation. Dolan (2006) equates the journalistic posture of objectivity with a white identity: purporting invisibility and neutrality when reporting events is tantamount to the unmarked yet privileged vantage that whiteness occupies in society. In the UK, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) (now defunct) sets out guidelines for the reporting of 'race' in its code of practice. There are three key aspects of this for journalists to have in mind. First, reference to someone's 'race' must only be made if it is deemed 'genuinely relevant' to the story. Second, if such reference is made, it must not be 'prejudicial or pejorative'. Third, the regulation only applies to the reporting of an individual and therefore does not cover, for example, references to groups or nations of people. This third aspect of the guideline is contentious and has provoked criticism of the PCC. As Frost commented:

The PCC's insistence that only discrimination against individuals breaches the code and that complaints about racism affecting groups of people are really a matter of taste and decency, and therefore not something on which it can adjudicate, begins to look perverse at a time when there is considerable public concern about perceived racism in some reporting of asylum seekers, the Iraq war and terrorism.

*(Frost 2004, p. 114)*

In 2010, just over 3 per cent of the 7000 plus complaints made to the PCC were on the grounds of discrimination. Yet, despite receiving dozens of such complaints each year, the PCC has never upheld a complaint made about discrimination in terms of 'race'. Hence it can be assumed that religious or Islamophobic reporting would also be treated in much the same way. It is too early to tell if the newly created IPSO will be exempt from such criticism in the UK. When this was put to the SoE member namely the lack of political will to challenge racism/Islamophobia:

We do take racism seriously, we take any prejudice seriously. So much that we have invested in trying to encourage journalism to reflect the multicultural society we live in.

*(SoE member, interview, 3 March 2016)*

There is no doubt that the perpetuation of particular stereotypes around 'race' and minority groups that can find articulation in the discourses produced by journalism is, in part, enhanced by a relative lack of diversity among the journalism industry. An absence of newsroom diversity has often been cited as an instrumental factor to the marginalisation and misrepresentation of racialised minority groups across the mainstream media (Ainley 1998; Cottle 2000; Kretzschmar 2007; van Dijk 2005).

In his international overview of research into media coverage, van Dijk argues that the composition of the journalism profession is a recurring factor in the production of racist discourses:

Many forms of ethnic bias . . . are crucially influenced by the fact that in all white-dominated societies, ethnic journalists are discriminated against in hiring, so that most newsrooms are predominantly white. And those (few) minorities being hired will tend to be recruited not only for their outstanding professionalism, but also because their ethnic ideologies (and especially their moderate antiracism) do not clash with those of the editors.

*(Van Dijk 2005, p. 199)*

Figures suggest that journalism is a ‘white’-dominated profession, particularly in the case of print journalism. Taking membership of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) as a barometer, just 2.2 per cent of the NUJ’s members from regional newspapers are black or minority ethnic (BME) journalists. This figure rises slightly to 3.7 per cent in terms of national newspapers. Broadcast journalism presents a slightly different picture, with 13.7 per cent of the NUJ’s membership classed as BME (Farrington et al. 2012).

We have invested in and tried to challenge this. In 2005 we set up the Journalism Diversity Fund to support more and train more journalists from minority backgrounds.

*(SoE member, interview, 3 March 2016)*

But while there is clearly an issue with the number of BME students pursuing journalism as a potential career, this does not supply a complete explanation of the problem. For example, the Society of Editors’ report does not account for the fact that diversity reduces towards the higher end of the journalism profession. Barriers exist not only in gaining entry to journalism, but also within the profession once entry has been gained. There are two schools of thought in relation to this. First, more BME writers simply equals a much needed diversity in reporting which would help to benefit how minorities are represented. But one could note that due to ‘racisms’, BME writers would become socialised or institutionalised within the existing norms of media production. To use Fanon’s (1996) argument, the adoption of the ‘white mask’ is crucial for non-whites to succeed in white worlds. Hence, BME journalists may not feel comfortable challenging ‘racisms’, especially covert and institutional racism, which is seen to be almost invisible and difficult to prove, when, after all, they are working in a white-dominated space.

### British Muslim voices

The nine students provide a valuable voice to this debate. As well as giving access to ‘mainstream’ Muslims, the opinion of these ‘apprentice media workers’ about media misrepresentation and how to challenge this can provide an insightful commentary on the issues. The students were interviewed together and on University premises. The students were not surprisingly angry about media representations of Islam and Muslims. This was evident in passionate and at times emotional outbursts that questioned mainstream media and society’s perceptions of Islam/Muslims. Previous research has indicated that Muslims are angry with media representations of Islam. Studies have focused on the reactions of and responses to such news media portrayals by Muslims, have revealed that there is little or no trust in their views of the news media (Awan 2008; Saeed 2004). An associated issue is that the news media representations contribute to the social exclusion of Muslims (Abbas 2012). For the purposes of this essay though their thoughts on what could be done and what Muslims are doing will be developed.

When asked specifically what can journalists do to ensure a more accurate representation of Islam/Muslims, the following extract revealed a number of issues:

*Female student, 19 (Level 2 BA, broadcast journalism):*

The obvious answer is be more fairer . . . and that means don’t be racist and allow all Muslims to be heard not just the nutters.

*Female student, 20 (Level 2 BA, journalism):*

Yes but . . . that’s what sells . . . ‘Muslims are terrorists, Muslims are backward’ . . . blah blah blah . . .

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*Male student, 20 (Level 2 BA, journalism):*

If they knew more about Islam and would challenge the editors but they don't . . . how do you explain the difference between Hezbollah and ISIS? . . . you need context but . . . its easier to say all Muslims [group nods in agreement].

*Moderator:*

So do we need more training given to journalists about history etc.?

*Female student, 19 (BA, media and popular culture):*

Yes, but how do you explain that? . . . when we do modules little is given about issues, history or society . . . most of it about law and ethics . . . and how to write . . . it seems you have to fill in the context yourself and then write the story . . . too much pressure !

*Male student, 22 (BA, sports journalism):*

I do think if people could learn that Muslims and . . . white people . . . have loads in common that would help . . . it would help people get on . . . maybe journalists need to learn about Islam . . . it would be good if Muslim organisation would open doors . . . the student society here did a series of talks called 'Know Islam' . . . maybe that's what is required.

The students above seem to allude to the current debate that appears to be continually developing in Higher education (at least in the UK) on that whether Journalism as a profession should be more practical/vocational based or allow for more reflective/critical training (Keeble and Reeves 2005). Inquiries into journalism have drawn from a wide range of disciplines, predominantly political science, sociology, history, language and cultural studies. The result, according to Zelizer (2009, p. 34), 'has been a terrain of journalism study at war with itself, with . . . a slew of independent academic efforts taking place in a variety of disciplines without the shared knowledge crucial to academic inquiry'.

Research on college-training affirms that incoming reporters lack the aptitude to write with anything other than a "White bias" and "insensitivity to minorities" (Dickson 1995, p. 41). The above extract notes the importance of training. Recently a number of studies have emerged that have looked at the relationship between journalism and academia (Richards and Brown 2017). Others have examined the need to develop or modify Journalism practice (Pintak and Franklin 2013; Rupar and Pesic 2012; Allen 2007). Together these resources emphasised the importance of, and need for, better media coverage of the issue along with the necessity for training and resources tailored to the particular cultural context in which the news media and Muslim people interacted in different parts of the world. Ewart et al. (2017), in an innovative piece of research developed training materials directed at contributing to more inclusive media coverage of Islam and Muslims. They concluded:

We find that as a result of the training, there are statistically significant shifts in levels of general knowledge of Islam and Muslims as well as knowledge levels in relation to best-practice approaches to reporting stories involving Islam and Muslims . . . The significance of this article is in that it has highlighted that positive change is possible in news media workers' knowledge of Islam and Muslims and that provides optimism for interventions.

(Ewart et al. 2017, p. 532)

This study also highlighted the need for such training to have strong historical context in understanding the diverse range of Muslim communities both locally and globally. This was accompanied by the need to develop a practical training approach that addressed the diverse

technological nature of modern journalism that included understanding of the digital and social media world. This latter point about new media was also developed by the British Muslim journalist students:

*Female student, 21 (Level 3 BA, public relations):*

I agree with the training and all that . . . but we as Muslims can do things as well. We can challenge the media and racists . . . if we don't like a story we can do something. It's easier now . . . we can blog, tweet and even just do emails. In PR we are taught to use websites and stuff.

*Male student, 19 (Level 1 BA, journalism):*

Yes it's quicker to run online campaigns and get the community and also other people involved . . . think of the all the stuff after the Paris attacks . . . when Muslims were killed as well.

*Female student, 19 (BA, media and popular culture):*

Yes you can use that to help but the problem is racist groups also use social media . . . it's like a double battle . . . old and new media needs to be . . . well challenged.

Muslims are identifying new reflexive spaces in various aspects of the public and social sphere (Meer and Modood 2009), for example, the rise of the Muslim 'blogo-sphere' and employment of new/social media to challenge anti-Muslim perceptions (Awan 2014; Saeed 2017). At the forefront of this this are what Gary Blunt calls 'i-Muslims' – meaning media savvy Muslims. In September 2014 a new Twitter hashtag #MuslimApologies appeared and quickly gathered pace it was used almost 30,000 times within 48 hours. The hashtag was originally a response to President Obama's speech to the UN General Assembly in which he noted, 'it is time for the world – especially Muslim communities – to explicitly, forcefully, and consistently reject the ideology of al Qaeda and ISIL' (Washington Post 2018).

Many of the tweets express almost anger and weariness about having to apologise for the actions of extremists who claim to represent Islam. However what was also evident was the employment of humour to tackle this assumption that ordinary Muslims must prove their 'anti fundamentalist' credentials. The 'conversation' was followed throughout the Muslim minority diaspora. The following give a flavour of the tweets sent (Rahman 2014):

Sorry for Algebra, cameras, universities, hospitals, oh and coffee too

I'm so sorry for coffee, cheques, parachutes, chemistry, inoculations, soap, shampoo, cameras

I'm sorry it was a Muslim woman, Fatima Muhammad Al-Fihri, that established the world's first university

(See <https://twitter.com/servusclementis/status/514772214277619712>)

The employment of social media demonstrates a sense of ownership of Islam, particularly by Islamic youth. This activism is further evident in the Hedbo incident that is alluded to in the previous focus group extract Grimm notes:

the campaign of solidarity with the heroized victims on the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial staff was a tightrope walk for many Muslims, who did not want to identify with the magazine's contents. The spread of #JeSuisCharlie hashtags on social media confirms this. The 25 countries with the most contributions include only three majority-Muslim countries:

Lebanon, Turkey and Indonesia. A much more prominent hashtag in the Muslim world was #WhoIsMuhammad, which allowed hundreds of thousands to emphasize the peaceful nature of their faith. However, most tweets by European Muslims came under the alternative hashtag #JeSuisAhmed (retweeted over 290,000 times), drawing attention to the French Muslim Ahmed Merabet, one of the two policemen murdered by the *Charlie Hebdo* attackers.

(Grimm 2015, p. 4)

What should also be stressed is that once again the Muslim online presence is again viewed by suspicion. With mainstream authorities worrying that young Muslims will become radicalised and that the Internet is a haven for 'anti-Western sentiment'. Indeed even 'liberal' influential organisations such as Pew Research Center, Anti-Defamation League and RAND Europe have all published reports noting the use of the Internet to promote terrorism and extremism in the Muslim communities. It is evident that social media surveillance on online Muslim spheres is apparent (Awan 2014). Despite this young Muslims are continually employing the internet to express the modern and fluid nature of Muslim identity in the world.

## Conclusion

While the mainstream media suggest that disenfranchised Muslims are inclined to turn to fundamentalist interpretations of Islam, in many respects this has not been the case. Despite the negative connotations attributed to Muslims' 'radicalism', a survey of British Muslims undertaken by the 1990 Trust in 2006 found that while 82 per cent of its respondents thought that Muslims were becoming more radicalised, a majority (65.2%) crucially did not associate radicalism with violence. Instead, radicalism was primarily associated more with activities such as letter writing, demonstrations, becoming involved in organisations or disengaging with mainstream politics. Since 2006 it seems apparent that British Muslims are increasingly turning towards new media as a mobilisation tool to challenge stereotypical representations. Furthermore the media industries are acknowledging the need to have a broader spectrum of Muslim voices to challenge Orientalist discourse. Interestingly the 'media students' now appear to have a more rounded view of the media. The focus groups indicated the 'values' in the production process and the need to challenge them through more directed and clever lobbying. The rise of groups like MEND and MAB seem to suggest a more multi-faceted manner that representations/statements and opinions that are perceived as racist/Islamophobic are being challenged.

Identity is a fluid concept that is subject to change dependent upon situation and influence. What this article shows is that my identity has been greatly influenced by external factors and that this has had a major impact on my academic research as well as my personal identity. Identity should be thought of as a process; it is a *matter of becoming not just being* (Hall 1992). In contemporary multicultural societies, academic research should acknowledge this *process*. In short, identity is an experience that is ongoing and research is required that highlights the importance of this. Fanon (1996, p. 170) once called for

passionate research . . . directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others.

(Fanon 1996, p. 170)

This study shows that it may be the case that journalism education for professionals in the media industry needs to be researched and utilised. By influencing the media production process it may be possible to have more balanced media representations of all minority groups.

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