

Investigating islamophobia in the daily mail



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Islamophobia is defined in the dictionary as being: 'hatred or fear of Muslims or of their politics or culture'. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11th and the London 7/7 bombings amongst others, some say islamophobia within the media has increased significantly. This work intends to discuss the coverage of Muslims and the religion of Islam as a whole within the 'middle market' newspaper The Daily Mail and explore whether publications such as the Mail are representing the Muslim race in a negative light.

One's interest in the subject matter involved is one that has derived from what is seen, amongst others, as bad journalism; middle market and tabloid newspapers inaccurately reporting issues concerning races such as Muslims. On a daily basis one can pick up a newspaper these days and spot numerous flaws, incorrect language or overall representation of a religion such as Islam. Also, a personal affliction or view in the area is the way in which Muslim communities within the UK are slowly being isolated and are being criticised collectively for the actions of a small population of the religion.

When exploring the relationship between the modern West and the East, one should look upon the concept of Orientalism. Said's (1978) work draws on the concept of 'us' and 'them': " Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying " us" Europeans as against all " those" non-Europeans" (Said, 1978: 7). This notion refers to the historical manufacturing of Eastern beings as alien, the 'Other', by the West. It is the negative portrayal of extremist Islamic images within frameworks such as the Mail that progresses, as Halliday (1996)(remember reference for this!, see notebook [2]) suggests, this 'myth of confrontation'

that pardons 'the West' of any need to excuse its enmity towards the East and religions such as Islam.

Before this paper looks at effects of the theory of islamophobia, it is worth evaluating the polarity of the term itself. Whilst some could say the branding of the term can draw attention to the issue for positive means, further comprehensive literature on the subject and enquiries commissioned (e. g. 1997 Runnymede Trust, Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All), there is a flipside. Academics have inferred that this is just another, more refined form of 'new racism' according to many sociologists. Sociologist Professor Gerard Delanty describes the use of the term islamophobia: " It is rooted in mainstream hostility to migrant workers and asylum-seekers, and is based to a considerable degree on ethnocentrism and xenophobia ... on ignorance and fear of 'the other'" (Delanty: Conference, see notebook for full reference[1]). Delanty is saying here that the categorisation of the idiom of islamophobia could be creating a new form of 'acceptable' racism.

The UK media industry is said by some to be institutionally racist:

" This racism is rooted in the country's imperial past, with feelings of racial superiority and crude nationalism now deeply embedded in the dominant culture". (Keeble, 2009: 175)

2 per cent of the NUJ membership was black, Asian and Arab in the first media-industry wide survey in 1995 by Anthony Delano and John Henningham. Comparing this alongside the national ethnic minority population percentage of 5. 26 percent at the time, and it does speak volumes. My research will include a plan to address this view and explore <https://assignbuster.com/investigating-islamophobia-in-the-daily-mail/>

how far or to what extent this reflects an islamophobic nature within newspapers such as The Daily Mail. However, to discuss how 'deep rooted' this patriotism, or national feeling of superiority over other races goes would be discursive from the intended discussion of the title's topic.

The role of a national newspaper such as the Mail needs to be highlighted to display the 'contextualising' link between islamophobia and the public.

" The fact that a familiar newspaper offers a sense of identity and possible security to its regular readers is an important contextualising factor when considering questions of 'race' and ideology." (Ferguson, 1998: 175)

Considering middle market newspapers such as The Daily Mail and Express along with the tabloids represent more than two thirds of the national daily readership figures (1997 survey: do footnote for this), this is a first base argument for explaining the negative (potential) effect of the press on the masses.

A matter to take in to consideration is the recent resignation of Daily Star journalist Richard Peppiatt, on the grounds of the papers islamophobic content. Albeit a personal letter to the Daily Star's proprietor Richard Desmond, the letter highlights a wide range of anti-Islamic features in the everyday characteristics of national newspapers such as the Star and Mail and labels the former as 'anti-Muslim propaganda'. The letter does refer to how closely the content of the Star is to the Mail's through criticism of how the newspapers editors 'build a newspaper from cut-and-paste-jobs off the Daily Mail website'. Where he admits to 'stirring up a bit of light-hearted Islamophobia' himself on the basis that this was in his professional duties at <https://assignbuster.com/investigating-islamophobia-in-the-daily-mail/>

the Star, his disapproval of this demonization is prevalent throughout. He refers to a story the paper published concerning the condemnation of taxpayer-funded Muslim-only public toilets:

" I was personally tasked with writing a gloating follow-up declaring our postmodern victory in " blocking" the non-existent Islamic cisterns of evil" (Peppiatt, 2011).

This could just be seen as one individual's personal attack on a proprietor and therefore not have much worth but it does relate to, and support the theory of institutional racism within the British media.

For the proposed intentions of this paper, it is worth noting the presence of Muslims within Britain. In the 2001 UK Census the population of Muslims from all ethnic groups within Britain was just short of 1.6 million (insert reference to table of figures in appendices here). The age old argument from many anti-immigration supporters is that the Muslims within Britain do not attempt to immerse themselves within British culture or 'our' way of life, owing to increased tensions between the two cultures. Figures show that nearly half (46.4%) of all British Muslims now living in England were born in the country. It could be said that those Muslims who came to the country as adults (first generation) are grateful for the chance to live in a more open society and therefore more willing to integrate themselves within 'our' culture. The sooner Western societies such as Britain aid this process of integration with the likes of first generation Muslims, the better. As the younger (3rd and 4th) generation of Muslims born in England grows, we could see Muslim communities become increasingly ostracised due to young

Muslims anger towards the role of 'the West' in Muslim lands and issues such as islamophobia within the media becoming more customary.

It is also worth presenting the PCC editorial guidelines with regards to discrimination:

The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.

The second part of the guideline refers to the details of those minority groups and how one should avoid inclusion (of those details) unless necessary to the story. The way in which newspapers such as the Daily Mail steer their content around these guidelines, in order to include xenophobic 'views' will be explored later in the literature review.

As this paper explores the surrounding themes of discrimination and false representation within the media and directs them towards the influence of a certain publication, it is important to draw from relevant history of the Daily Mail. Some would say the newspapers prejudice against religions such as Islam is a product of its deep-set DNA shown via the papers sympathetic views of Nazi Germany during the war period. The first joint proprietor and owner Lord Rothermere was known to be a friend and supporter of both Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler and praised the Nazi regime's accomplishments, which directed the Mail's political stance and was consequently used as propaganda by them. Lord Rothermere published quotes such as: " the minor misdeeds of individual Nazis would be submerged by the immense benefits the new regimes already bestowing on

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Germany" (Rothermere, 1933), as well as printing headlines such as " Hurrah for the Blackshirts" (Mail, Jan 1934). The Mail was also sympathetic to Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists. The support for this group was withdrawn after violence at a BUF rally in Kensington Olympia in 1934, which displays the potential harmful influence of newspapers on the masses.

Muslims within Britain have struggled with issues of integration and racism ever since there was an increased focus of attention from the media on the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Asad 1990, see references in 'muslim britain' book). Television screens across the world showed three million people celebrating on the streets of Tehran when Ayatollah Khomeini, known for his support of hostage takers and his calling for the death of British citizen Salman Rushdie, came out of exile; a disconcerting image for most Westerners. The Salman Rushdie affair in 1989 demonstrated the degree to which the media and British Muslims who protested against the book's (The Satanic Verses) publication became 'emotionally unhinged' (Parekh 1992, see same book + ref) over the issue. The book deeply offended Muslims and ignited debate on blasphemy laws and freedom of speech. Other historical events have all played a part in what Huntington's (1996) thesis describes as a 'clash of civilisations', these being: The Gulf War (1990-1), the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1993-6), the Oklahoma bombing (1995), the Taliban in Afghanistan (1997-2002), Grozny and Kosovo (1999), the recent Palestinian Intifada (since September 2000) and the War on Iraq (2003) (Abbas 2005: 14).

These events have and the media , some say (Huntington 1996) widened the gulf between East and West, Islam and Christianity and amplified the theory of Orientalism.

(maybe do a little on September 11 attacks here)

This paper intends to explore and discuss the different factors owing to the islamophobic content displayed in the Mail and how far it is damaging the representation of Muslim communities within Britain. It would be pointless to explain how islamophobic reporting increased or decreased over the past decade or so as it would be plain to see the increases in islamophobic content around the times of terrorist activities. One will analyse contributing factors such as the origins of islamophobia, the identification of islamophobic content, how closely does that content abide by editorial guidelines and the effect on Muslim communities through critical discussion of the topic and data analysis.

The reason as to why one thinks this subject is important and would be of interest to others is the increasing multi-cultured population of Britain. As more ethnic minorities such as Muslims continue to live in Britain, increasing tensions towards people of a particular race can only put more strain on an already weak relationship with Muslim communities.

The purpose of the paper is to critically evaluate and characterize publications, specifically The Daily Mail and its role in reinforcing or articulating racism, and in damaging ethnic cultural identities. The ways in which these issues are to be addressed and analysed will be explained through my research and its content analysis.

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Literature review

The aim of this chapter is to identify themes relating to the title topic from previous published literature and critically analyse those premises. The intention here is not just to identify those relating themes, but to analyse, criticise, interpret and evaluate those themes in connection with supporting or opposing the underpinning arguments of this paper. Over the past decade or so there has been an increase in the amount of writing, due to rising concerns from Muslims worldwide, explaining how discourses such as newspapers in Western media are misrepresenting ethnic minorities such as Muslims through presenting a negative image of Islam. My research will however focus on the Daily Mail in particular, portraying negative stereotypes, and the effects those portrayals have, on Muslim communities within Britain. In summary, this chapter will draw from prior literature and examine the complex structures and strategies of news reports and how they affect the interpretations of readers. How much does the role of publications such as the Mail play in the reproduction of 'racial' and ethnic inequality in British society.

Some of the earliest writing relating to British newspapers such as the Mail portraying Islam as a threat to Western interests comes from Teun van Dijk's: *Racism and the Press*. The issue of immigration within British newspapers is one that allows anti-Muslim voices to be heard, subjectively criticising the rise in the multiculturalism of Britain:

" The Mail specifically focuses on alleged abuses of British 'hospitality', and calls for stricter immigration rules. It does not hesitate to publish, with apparent approval, overtly racist statements by right-wing politicians who

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claim that without further curbs on immigration Britain may become the world's "dustbin".

(Van Dijk, 1991: 96)

What Van Dijk is inferring is that through government policies concerning issues such as immigration, any right-wing anti-immigration views from politicians or people within the public eye will be published by the Mail with the noticeable support of the paper. Whilst highlighting the political stance and nationalistic nature of the publication, a defence for the paper would revert to free press every time.

The earliest and most relevant research in this topic area has also been carried out by Teun Van Dijk. His work in the collection of empirical data surrounding the press and issues of 'race' is a starting point for anybody analysing institutional islamophobic content's effect on British Muslims. Van Dijk started this foundational research in plain content analysis of British newspapers, analysing content such as the repetition of certain words used in headlines in attempt to rouse certain meanings from them. He describes the repetitive use of certain topics of discourse such as 'black' and 'race' and how they are dealt with by the press as 'semantic macro structures'.

" These global, overall meaning structures of a text consist of a hierarchically arranged set of macro-propositions, which are derived from the meanings (propositions) of the sentences by way of macro-rules. These rules reduce the complex information of the text to its essential gist." (Van Dijk, 1991: 72)

Van Dijk is correct in some ways in saying that the prevalence of such vocabulary would suggest that the discursive agenda of newspapers is entrenched in concerns with 'race'. In his book *Representing Race*, Robert Ferguson agrees there are some uses of Van Dijk's research:

" It would seem from this as though the media are engaged in an endless process of reproducing already existing prejudices and stereotypes. The extensive content analysis which was undertaken by Van Dijk also demonstrated that ethnic minorities and anti-racists are 'systematically associated with conflict, crime, intolerance and unreliability.'" (Ferguson, 1998: 130)

The flaws in Van Dijk's research are that using empirical data, or strictly content analysis, to develop an understanding of representation can somewhat distort the power of ideology in newspapers text or framing. However, without being blatantly racist, newspapers such as the Mail through concepts of 'normality' can still give strength to negative representations. (Maybe use this paragraph in methods)

The detrimental representations of Muslim asylum seekers to Britain, in publications such as the Mail, are highlighted in Arun Kundnani's *The End of Tolerance*. Phrases such as 'we have to look after our own people first', a regular idiom in the Mail, gives strength to the inherent belief within Britain that we cannot satisfactorily provide for ourselves, never mind foreigners or 'them' as well.

" Thanks to the opportunism of media and politicians, asylum seekers and migrants had been made in to potent symbols for the loss of a nation-state

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that once 'belonged' to its people and afforded them certain privileges as citizens." (Kundnani, 2007: 65)

This argument is stating that through newspapers persistence in covering issues of economy and well being, the Mail amongst others, tend to shift the blame of these national problems on to asylum seekers, from communities such as Muslims, for increasing the population and adding to pre-existing problems such as rises in unemployment. The only critique of this concept adding to the misrepresentation and islamophobic nature of the Mail, is that this problem spans over a huge area and is historically embedded within a nation's way of thinking. My research aims to uncover the day to day anti-Islamic features of the Mail and expose the problems of intentional or institutional racism that could potentially be fixed.

In some ways, previous literature has explained that events such as 9/11 and other Islam related terrorist activities give acceptance to emerging islamophobic voices or views within the media. Chris Allen's chapter in Muslim Britain: Communities under pressure, highlights the enabling of publishing extreme right views on terrorist's religions without backlash. In the wake of Baroness Thatcher's condemnation of Muslim leaders in the Times, insisting that all Muslims - as a homogeneous group - should share responsibility for the attacks (4 October 2001). The Telegraph days later published an article entitled 'This War Is not about Terror, It's about Islam' (7 October 2001).

" This article sought not only to praise Baroness Thatcher's stance, but also confirm that 'Western' fears were justified because 'some three-quarters of

the world's migrants in the last decade are said to have been Muslims... (these) escapees, victims, scapegoats, malefactors and " sleepers" are awaiting their moment." (Allen, 2005: 61)

Jonathan Birt's chapter in 'Muslims in Britain' also agrees with this post 9/11 islamophobic reaction from the press without simply analysing the textual content of a newspaper:

" After 9/11, the more prejudicial media comment portrayed British Muslim communities, and especially their young men, as a dangerous and unpatriotic fifth column, which were sympathetic to anti-West resistance and, indeed, the use of violent terror. Mass communications today shape and order these Islamophobic moral panics and the reactive defence to them." (Birt, 2009: 217)

Here, we can see Birt is agreeing that post terrorist activities, the media is allowed to give a free press voice to 'racist' views and opinions without fear of backlash from media regulators. The defect in analysing the islamophobic nature of publications such as the Mail surrounding terrorist actions is that it is to be expected. There is bound to be a bad press reaction to national identities and religious viewpoints, how far the negative portrayal of those identities goes without trepidation of media regulators punishment, is an issue that needs to be addressed.

The British Journalism Review (March 2006) argues that the same harmful representation of Muslims within the media is the same for other terrorist groups such as the IRA. One can see similarities between views of Catholics

from Ulster in the 1980's and Muslims today, that "religious affiliations" trumped all other affiliations:

"In Britain and the United States the popular line was that if you were a Catholic, you probably supported the IRA. Today, if you are a Muslim, the popular line is that you are probably anti-western or fundamentalist. This is not to say that journalism was and is responsible for these views, but rather that de-contextualised coverage did and does little to throw cold water on old stereotypes."

The closest literature relating to the topic title comes from Elizabeth Poole's *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*. The book analyses the current situation regarding the image of Muslims by tracking the development of this form of 'new racism' from earlier works. Poole says that the theme of immigration as a problem has now transferred to Muslims (van Dijk 1991), due to, as Lueg (1995) says a population 'explosion' in the Middle East. British Muslims and their homogeneity to other Muslims become the feared 'fifth column' within (Runnymede Trust 1997). This combined with the discussion of numbers of people 'invading' the country depicts aspirations of taking over the world, not seeking asylum.

"The combination of the hostile threat and movement of Islam promotes the idea that it needs to be managed in a way that allows varied prejudicial practices to continue" (Poole, 2002: 47).

What Poole is saying is that a plain dislike of the notion of Islam cannot be seen as the central feature of hostility towards Muslims. Attitudes to Muslims derive from 'a mixture of xenophobia and racism' whereby newspapers such <https://assignbuster.com/investigating-islamophobia-in-the-daily-mail/>

as the Mail can discuss or mainly criticise some of the practices of Islam without being seen to be unashamedly prejudice towards Muslims.

Another adjoining piece of literature that many academics have drawn from when discussing this topic, is Edward Said's *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world* (1981). Said argues that the siege of the American embassy in Iran in 1981 and its media coverage initiated an increased attention and portrayal of Islam with danger, militancy and anti-Western sentiment. The text examines the genesis and ramifications of the media's monolithic images of Islam and reveals the twisting of fact that underlies 'objective' coverage of the Islamic world. Said says the application of a Western ideological framework or an 'ethnocentric way of seeing' (Dahlgren and Chakrapani 1982: 45) has meant we see a 'domesticated Islamic world or those aspects considered to be newsworthy' (Said 1981: 27). This has created a dichotomy between the West and Islam whereby the West is seen as judicious, civilized, developed and superior, and Islam as abnormal, undeveloped and inferior.

There are a small number of published journals that closely share the intentions of this paper. Diane Frost's *Islamophobia: examining casual links between the media and 'race hate' from 'below'* (2007) analyses the media reporting on recent and ongoing terrorist attacks in Britain and the effect on Muslim communities. The paper discusses islamophobic tendencies within British tabloids and their connections with government policies and violence that concerns religion. Whilst it highlights the media's promotion of 'moral panics' such as problems of asylum and 'race', it is saying British tabloids

breed on these moral panics, going further than the 'threat' that is actually presented.

" Thus, the media have represented Muslims as a 'collective problem' who threaten the very fabric of British society as supporters of al-Qaida and potential suicide bombers. They are the 'folk devils' of the twenty first century" (Diane Frost 2008 find out how to reference journal).

It is worth noting that there are strong links between increased anti-terror legislation and other government measures and the way in which publications such as the Mail criminalise Muslim communities when reporting on such measures and legislation. This type of research will be considered in the methods section of the paper.

Ian Hargreaves writes a piece in the New Statesman that demonstrates the negative coverage of immigration from the Mail in relation to fuelling racist attitudes. He says: " It is not that I view with cynicism the Daily Mail's efforts to achieve balance in its reporting of racial issues. Rather, I think the paper is misguided in discounting the encouragement its asylum coverage gives to racist sentiments" (Hargreaves 2000). Reverting back to the theory that newspapers such as the Daily Mail have colonial instincts and an anti-foreigner viewpoint established within its DNA, Hargreaves is trying to say that these publications are not intending to be racist; they simply believe the types of stories concerning Islam being published are due to the public-interest factor.

Christopher Allen's journal discusses the dangerousness of the concept of Islamophobia in analytical relation with the findings of the Runnymede Trust
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Report (1997). The report's findings concluded that Islam is inherently seen as 'other' to the West, reinforcing the 'them' and 'us' dualism. Taking this in to consideration, Allen says we should not be surprised 'to see such headlines as The Daily Mail's offering, " Fanatics with a death wish: I was born in Britain but I am a Muslim first". Here the Mail is merely reiterating those beliefs that are lodged at the heart of Islamophobia' (Allen 2008: 4).

The intention of this chapter was to identify underpinning theories, themes and issues published in previous literature in order for readers to understand the intentions of the research and findings that will be developed in the methods and data analysis.

Methods and methodology

This chapter will discuss the research that this paper will be carrying out, the reasons for using those methods and what results are to be expected. The most appropriate methods will be discussed along with their advantages and limitations, with ethical considerations ensured so that the data is collected in an ethical way.

Previous research philosophy approaches to the media's role in the reproduction of racism are mainly content analytical; quantitative studies picking out the use of stereotypical words, phrases or images used when representing ethnic minorities (see, for example, Van Dijk 1991, 1997). This discourse analytical method systematically describes different structures and tactics of text in relation to a social or political framework. The method enables for the identification of focus on certain topics in a 'semantic' analysis form as well as allowing examination of the overall 'organisation' of

news reports. Essentially this means 'discourse may thus be studied as the crucial interface between the social and cognitive dimensions of racism' (Cottle 2000). So, publications such as the Mail as a discourse in the social practice of racism can be seen as a main source for people's racist views/beliefs. According to Berger (1998: 23) content analysts 'assume that behavioural patterns, values and attitudes found in this material reflect and affect the behaviour, attitudes and values of the people who create the material'. The advantages and reason as to why this paper will be adopting a similar style of research is there is no technology or major funds necessary and it has been known to lead to fundamental changes in the practices of an institution, profession and society as a whole.

Another method of research that will be employed is that of conducting surveys to gauge the attitudes and opinions of Daily Mail readers on the subject of Islamic and Muslim issues. This will be cross referenced with readers of other newspapers to see if there is differing attitudes toward issues concerning Muslims, and of the role of The Daily Mail in these perceptions from people who read different newspapers. This intends to highlight the negative effect a newspaper has on reader's views of a religion such as Islam and the race of Muslim. One could condemn this research method data saying the views of readers are only the views of the reader and not the publication, how far those views are affected by the discourse would be research that is virtually impossible, or not possible within the means of this author.

(Explain the inductive approach to research with reference here)

For the content analysis of the Daily Mail's inciting of racial hatred, the content that will be analysed will be the amount of articles within a time period of 6 months the issue of Islam and Muslims is reported on in a negative manner. Albeit a personal opinion, a list of examples of this negative portrayal type of article is provided in the appendices. These are articles presenting Muslims and the religion of Islam as a 'problem' and their difficulties with conflicting issues within British society.

The research will compare the amount of times within a 6 month period these types of articles concerning Islam are presented in the Mail against how many times an article concerning the neo-Nazi anti-Muslim group The English Defence League (EDL) is shown. This will hope to demonstrate a correlation between increased amounts of Islamic coverage at a certain time with articles on/activities of the EDL.

With regards to the questionnaires that will be collected, the scope and design need to be established. The scope or amount of participants that the research intends to gather are as follows; 150 readers of The Daily Mail and double that amount, 300 of readers of all other newspapers. As the research method employed to gather this amount of data means standing outside a busy newsagents (W H Smith's in Lime Street Station, Liverpool) and asking people who have bought newspapers to answer a short survey, to attempt to gather any more than that provided would be take a considerable amount of time and effort. As people are normally quite reluctant to take part in surveys due to time constraints the survey will not ask for some of the standard demographic information such as age; gender; nationality; ethnicity; religion etc. The questionnaire will ask what newspaper the

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participant reads, usually a quick and easy question to answer when the people who I will be asking have just recently bought a newspaper from the newsagents and will realise this is what my questionnaire is concerning. The questions will then be presented by me reading the statement and asking their opinion on that statement from a spectrum of answers, these being: strongly agree; agree; neutral; disagree and strongly disagree. This method does not force a yes or no answer that some participants may be reluctant to give considering the invasive nature of the questions. At the same time it could be considered to be avoiding leading questions. Where the participant may realise the questions are intended to produce certain types of generalisations so they would answer accordingly for the purposes of the research, they have some form of choice in which to express their opinions.

These two forms of quantitative and qualitative research are used in order to arrive at a degree of triangulation when forming the findings and conclusions of the data collected.

The two types of research methods that this paper will be employing will be that of content analysis within a theoretical framework and surveys conducted. The aim is to achieve a form of triangulation in which to infer meanings from when analysing and evaluating the collected data.

Data, analysis and discussion

Conclusion