

Islam in the media

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



Why islam is negatively portrayed in western media Islam is one of three abrahamic religions, alongside christianity, and judaism. Christianity and judaism are arguably the most similar religions to islam, and have similarly spread into western culture from their middle eastern and european origins. Throughout the ages, each have had their drops in reputation, sectarian wars, and misunderstandings, which still carry on strongly today. With today's media however, being more widespread, easily accessible, sporadically based and cheaper than ever to use, any media target will get hit much harder than a target hit even just a decade ago. Since September 11, the muslim population has been in the spotlight by media outlets, and where reporting is, under a journalists code of conduct, supposed to be fair and balanced, it is questionable why the vast majority of reports about islam and any muslim activities have been negative. In contemporary reporting, there are facets that determine news coverage and what makes something news worthy; prominence, obscurity, timeliness, proximity and disaster. while islam is no new occurrence to the west, it's major impacts culturally and socially have only recently emerged. When the biggest, and arguably the most covered event in history is the World Trade Centre bombings, one of the obstacles for islam is that it has entered western awareness through a very problematic avenue. When an event such as the trade centre bombings occurs so suddenly, and massive amounts of people are killed, a potent mix of a need for timeliness, proximity, and most of all disaster, will command news authorities to very quickly narrow down to a culprit- with full media force. " bad news is good news. as is often observed, there is little mileage in reporting the safe arrival of air craft, the continued health of a film star, or the

smooth untrouled negotiations of a wage settlement. " An us Vs them mentality had immediately been forged by press agencies around the world following the bombings, and despite a lack of information regarding the suspects and evidence regarding the method of attack, it was very quickly so read that a muslim extremist group was behind the attacks. it is difficult to say of course that one authoritative figure, or even group may have behind the initial broadcast, but much easier to observe that in this case, many news corporations fell desperately weak at the hands of a very hungry market of consumers demanding " new" outbreaks, in an atmosphere of slow progressions; " news is a product to be marketed". while all news is more or less driven by market, it was incredibly evident after the september 11 bombings how this was so. it was almost routine, that for a media agency to be on top of the rest, it must have a threatening tone, and introduce new terminology. regardless of whether this new terminology is peaceful, threatening or even neutral, and atmosphere of spite created in the last few weeks will almost certainly mean that interpretation will be engulfed by a rework of fear. it was thus the case that words such as " jihad", " weapons of mass destruction", " islamism", " islamaphobia", and " shariah law" were introduced. naturally, in the hateful atmosphere these words were brought into, it necessarily entailed, and was intended, that they be interpreted negatively; " Islamic law to most foreigners, means Islamic punishment" in april 1980, the economist stated. While the semantics of many news reports obviously claim the status of fair and balanced, the coining of terms such as " islamism" must be questioned. introduces his theory of " the substitution test", where a doubtful reporter can substitute the word islam for either

Judaism or Christianity, and then judge whether the resulting news report will be fair and balanced. One must question whether these articles would still have been published if the word Muslim was substituted with Christian or Jew. Using this method, it is difficult to see how "Christianism" can be seen negatively. And "Judaism" has in fact already been "ism"ed. It is thus easy to see, that Islam as a religion has become known as an intrinsically evil phenomenon. "The cultural milieu in which it [the word Islamism] had appeared, had for a long time been teeming with overt anti-Islamic and anti-Arab slurs, with insulting and racist caricatures of Muslims, represented as generic, where one Muslim would be seen as typical of all, and of Islam in general. Edwards says. This raises the question- if the "cultural milieu" was not "teeming with overt anti-Islamic and anti-Arab slurs", would the coining of such a powerful term as Islamophobia be needed? Islamophobia, "a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam- and therefore to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims" (a commission headed by Gordon Conway, then vice-chancellor of the University of Sussex. While using the September 11 attacks is the most obvious example to the portrayal of Islam negatively in the media, it is in fact the case that this has been happening long before 2001. Two decades ago, there was a drama-documentary called "Death of a Princess. This documentary created massive diplomatic rows between Saudi Arabia, the United States and Britain. The documentary revolved around the story of a princess named Mishal, who wanted to leave the country with her lover, against Sharia (Islamic) law. Death of a Princess contained a potent mixture of two orientalist themes, medieval barbarism and cruelty, and the sexual allure of the mysterious East. It is this convergence of themes so

typical of movie and documentary productions that perpetuates the negative paradigm of islam, and particularly toward specific terms like 'shariah". The show demonstrated the massive imbalance of a cultural power between even wealthy sauudi Arabia...and the west. Edward said To this day, it is lear that the theme of punishment and ruthless law is one that is intimatley linked with islam. Where n many eastern countries the concept of shariah law is dominantly interpreted as a boundry by which non-muslim impurities cannot enter, often with the news to thank for, the dominant weestern fraework is that shariah is a brutal practice carried out against any one who performs " normal' western tasks. in the east it is a noun, in the west it is a verb. images of medievil barrbarism continue to domintate the struggle over representations of islam in an increasingly globalised media in which muslims are the consumers as well as generators of news here is an excerpt from a news article regarding the carying out of shariah law: next at the scene will be a judge reading from the koran. it is a ritual whch adds extra torture to th prisoner, who may not have known the day is to be is last, until the gaurds burst into his cell (daily mail 28th of september, 1998) If we were to look at this piece through's framework of the substitution test it would quite horribly fail; commenting that the quran adds " torture" to the execution(as distinct from offering comfort to the victim, or more neutrally, contextualising the execution within a culturally accepted relio-judicial framework). would the mail have described a final prayer or bible reading by the prison chaplain who normally attends an american execution as an addition of torture? It is evident that the degraded picture of islam in the eyes of any, now around the world, can be attributed to the market, the

journalist, and the preceding existing slander and stereotypes; when an atrocity occurs in Ulster, the journalist will regularly cut to a picture of a church leader denouncing the crime, but when Muslims carry out sectarian violence, the British media never interview a Muslim leader who denounces the act, although as any reader of the Arabic press must realise, such denunciations are frequently made. (Runnymede Trust 1997: 21)