

The Seven Deadly Sins in Covering the Muslim World

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Introduction

In 1993, the UN General Assembly declared May 3rd as World Press Freedom Day. This occasion commemorates the role of the media as the fourth estate, the watchdog of the social interest. However, this occasion has often been [used](#) by Western governments to engage in politicking. Both authors, being closely connected to the media community, believe in the role of the media as defenders of the public interest, and thus seize this opportunity to also reflect on the other side of the coin, namely on certain media biases that affect the journalistic standards of balance, truthfulness, and fairness. Numerous Western mainstream media outlets have been lacking [quality for a while](#), and many instances of bias, breach of ethics and opinions disguised as facts.

This is particularly true in relation to the coverage of the Middle East.

To this end, this policy outlook aims to examine some of the strategic deficiencies produced by the Western media when reporting the region as well as some of its accompanying dominant narratives and imagery. Subsequently, this publication highlighted seven critical flaws. Many of these overlap and intersect at times. There are also other shortcomings that were not mentioned given time constraints. These will need more comprehensive studies that examine larger samples and combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies to offer a more in-depth diagnosis.



People gather to celebrate the eighth anniversary of Libyans' 17 February Revolution, which put an end to dictatorship regime of Muammar Gaddafi, at The Martyrs' Square in Tripoli, Libya on February 17, 2019. (Hazem Turkia - Anadolu Agency)

1- Orientalist-tainted coverage

Negative coverage tends to characterise the reporting of the Middle East. Western news media regularly use the rhetoric of "otherness" when reporting about the region and thus Orientalist clichés find their way to a worldwide audience.

In his seminal works, Edward Said identified corporate Orientalism as the primary tool by which Europe has ruled the Orient; a powerful tool that defines what the Orient is about, describing it, teaching it, ruling over it and deciding how it should be institutionally conveyed and reported. This tool, as Said argues, constitutes a significant part of the 'Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (Said, 1979: 3). Consequently, as Michael Dalby notes, 'Orientalism gave the West the power to say what was significant about [the Other], classify him among others of his breed, put him in his place' (Rotter, 2000).

In the past decades, Islam and Muslims have been fashioned as a single cultural entity without internal complexities, and Middle Eastern peoples and cultures were stigmatised as violent whilst audiences were constantly reminded of their backwardness and irrationality (Karim, 2000). In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks (9/11 hereafter) in the US, this process was accelerated even further. Western media circulated the aforementioned fallacies at a much greater pace and frequency to promote an agenda primarily grounded in the clash of civilisations paradigm (Said, 2001). Amongst the most regurgitated clichés was the purported incompatibility of Islam with modernity, democracy, and the West.

An example of the myths that permeate the coverage of Western mainstream media is the "strongman" narrative. Warlord Khalifa Haftar in Libya exemplifies this. According to a piece put forward by the Diplomatic Editor of the [Guardian](#), the United Nations (UN) mediator Ghassan Salame recently said about Haftar: "He is no Abraham Lincoln, he is no big democrat ... Seeing him act, we can be worried about his methods because where he is governing, he doesn't govern softly, but with an iron fist" (Wintour, 2019). Haftar's rivals have accepted the UN peace process and pledged to establish democracy in the country, while he has not. However, it was Haftar who obtained the support of the United States, France, and a cohort of other nations more interested in gaining access to Libya's oil reserves than standing in defence of democratic ideals.

Subsequently, concerns about Haftar's democratic credentials do not feature highly in the news agenda, nor do the countless civilian casualties caused by his quest for power. [The Financial Times](#), for example, produced the following headline on April 4th, 2019: "Libyan military strongman orders his forces to march on Tripoli." Even the [BBC](#), which prides itself for its rigorous editorial guidelines, put forward the following headline on April 8th, 2019: "Khalifa Haftar: Libya's military strongman."

These are merely examples of the frictions underpinning some of the narratives conveyed by Western news media. On the one hand, the latter readily lectures non-Western audiences on human rights and democracy. On the other hand, whenever there is a serious push for democracy in the Middle East, Western governments are often the ones that – overtly or covertly – undermine and confront the same forces that champion these values (Libya is a case in point). Nonetheless, news outlets seldom question such contradictions.

The reason for this inadvertence is that Orientalist clichés have long shaped the perceptions of Middle Eastern societies, to the extent that one author, a former war correspondent, argues: 'there is no acceptable definition of a modern Muslim' (Pryce-Jones, 1989: xi); 'an Arab democrat is not even an idealization, but a contradiction in terms' (ibid: 406); and 'Islam and representative democracy are two [...] incompatible ideals' (ibid: xi). Such alleged incompatibility means in the eyes of Western decision-makers that Middle Eastern societies cannot ascribe to operate under democratic systems but can only function under the yoke of a "strongman" particularly if he is pro-Western.

This approach is deep-seated. In "All the Shah's Men", Stephen Kinzer relates the story of the 1953 CIA-sponsored coup against the democratically elected Mohammad Mossadegh in Iran. Kinzer depicts Mossadegh as a nationalist leader whose entire political career was shaped by two ideas: bringing Iran onto the path of democracy and establishing Iranian control over Iranian resources. However, even in the name of democracy, Mossadegh's national dream was swiftly repressed, and the U.S. sent a clear message to the Middle East that it was not interested in democracy but in a "strongman rule".

At that time, the New York Times employed Orientalist-tainted colonial style rhetoric in its editorial (6/8/1954) in explaining the CIA coup: "Underdeveloped countries with rich resources now have an object lesson in the heavy cost that must be paid by one of their members which goes berserk with fanatical nationalism. It is perhaps too much to hope that Iran's experience will prevent the rise of

Mossadeghs in other countries, but that experience may at least strengthen the hands of more reasonable and more far-seeing leaders" (Chomsky, 1992: 50).



Refugees arrive by a rubber boat on the Greek island of Lesbos after crossing the Aegean sea on October 12, 2015. Refugees who begin a journey with a hope to have high living standards away from conflicts, use Greece's Lesbos Island as a transit point on their way to Europe. (Ayhan Mehmet - Anadolu Agency)

2- Casting collective blame on Muslims for the scourge of terrorism

Historical evidence points to the utilisation of terrorist tactics in ancient Israel¹. Some encyclopaedias, such as the Oxford English Dictionary, trace the use of the words “terrorism” and “terrorists” to 1795 to characterise the use of state violence in post-revolutionary France. In the nineteenth century, the term “terrorist” was extended to European groups or individuals that carried out violent actions and assassinations against ruling elites.

In spite of this, there is a tendency to associate terrorist actions as originating from the religion of Islam irrespective of evidence (Wilkins and Downing 2002: 419). For example, the analysis of a database of every suicide bombing that occurred from 1980 to 2003 shows that “there is little connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, or any one of the world’s religions. ... Rather, what nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland” (Pape, 2005: 4). It is also interesting to note that the term “terrorism” only started to occupy a prominent place in media and academic discourse after 1967, the year of the Six-Day War, in which the Jewish state defeated three Arab armies; a defeat which led the Palestinians to step up their armed resistance against the colonial appropriation of their land² (Guelke, 1995: 2).

Since then, and especially after 9/11, the rhetoric on “terrorism” has been weaponised to attach a stigma to Islam and Muslims. The recent terror attack against Muslim worshippers in Christchurch, New Zealand (March 15th, 2019) resulted in at least 50 casualties and many more injured. Even as the New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern identified this episode as an act of terror, Western mainstream media refrained from following her example. Thus, it was virtually impossible to find any Western mainstream media calling the attacker a “terrorist” or even suggesting that this act might be

terrorism, preferring instead to frame the suspect as a white supremacist inspired loner.

For instance, the Washington Post published an [article](#) with the following headline: “Main suspect in New Zealand shootings that killed 50 charged with murder, believed to be lone gunman” (Stoakes, Mahtani, & Hendrix, 2019). Meanwhile, the British tabloid Daily Mirror framed the attacker as an “angelic kid”, describing him as “a likeable and dedicated personal trainer running free athletic programmes for kids”.

Orientalist rhetoricians – or “scholar combatants” in Edward Said’s words – who swiftly transformed into counter-terrorism experts in the aftermath of 9/11 bear a large share of the responsibility in this state of affairs. They often offer reductionist explanations, which conveniently choose to omit any reference to the serious political, economic, and social problems plaguing the region, preferring to interpret any violent acts perpetrated by Muslim culprits from the Orientalist prism as Islam versus Christendom. Hence, no matter how frequently Muslims affirm that terror acts are not Islamic because they have no relation whatsoever with the essential metaphysical, religious or spiritual dimension of the Islamic faith, these acts are still considered in the media as “Islamic terrorism.”

In the aftermath of the Sri Lanka terrorist attacks (April 21st, 2019), it is staggering to note that prestigious Western news outlets like the [New York Times](#) (which carried Reuters copy on its homepage) produced the following headline: “Sri Lanka Bomb Attacks Were Revenge for New Zealand Mosque Killings: Minister.” This title is mindboggling because it means the message of the terrorists was accepted at face value and also maintains the connection of Muslims to terrorism despite them being victims in Christchurch. Such a blunder prompted media commentator and former editor of the New Zealand Herald, Gavin Ellis, to [declare](#) that context was lost or

¹ It is believed that during the Roman occupation of Palestine (around 67-73 C.E.), a Judean movement known as the sicarii began an indiscriminate war against its enemies. In this massive revolt against Rome, the sicarii and zealots, both known as terrorist elements to each other and their followers would assassinate their less zealous co-religionists with short swords (sicarii) during the religious holidays. Violence included the burning of the palaces of the Herodian dynasty, and the torching of public archives and granaries, as well as the poisoning of wells. See: Weinberger, J. (2003). Defining Terror. Seton Hall Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations, (Winter/Spring), p.64.

² Such a move took place within a general context whereby leftist movements became attracted to the concept of “armed struggle” as part of their fight against capitalist states and institutions. This ideological shift pervaded the lexicon of socialist liberation ideology that attracted numerous educated urban youth in Western Europe. However, the resulting terrorism from European movements is rarely examined in depth by Western mainstream media.

relegated in international media coverage of the claim. Ellis said he expected more of these major international publications, especially when it came to reporting on such a volatile issue (Walters, 2019).

In a similar vein, the [Washington Post](#) put forward the following headline on April 22nd, 2019: "Christianity under attack? Sri Lanka church bombings stoke far-right anger in the West." So, instead of manifestly describing Daesh/ISIS for what it is, namely a terrorist group that has killed more Muslims than non-Muslims, has blown up more mosques than non-Muslim places of worship, and has no religious or political legitimacy whatsoever, reporters Adam Taylor and Rick Noack chose to throw more fuel on the fire.

Quoting the likes of Marine Le Pen, the head of the right-wing populist National Rally Party in France, Katie Hopkins, a British media personality and provocateur, and Gerard Batten, the leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), the Washington Post piece can best be described as incendiary. Thus, this article gives space to some of the most extremist European voices to express their opinions on a highly provocative situation. In this particular case, the damage is two-fold: it puts extremist right-wing parties as spokespeople for Christianity while placing collective blame on Muslims for the acts of terror groups, and it reinforces by the same token the "clash of civilisations" frame. Such a move is revealing, as it exhibits that some mainstream media are becoming detached and unconcerned even when their words fuel more hatred and misunderstanding.



People take part in a rally called 'I Am A Muslim Too' in a show of solidarity with American Muslims at Times Square on February 19, 2017 in New York City. A new version of a Trump administration travel ban will not stop green card holders or travelers already on planes from entering the United States, U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly said. (Volkan Furuncu - Anadolu Agency)

3- A simplistic reduction of situations

News is “not a reflection of an objective reality,” it is a “socially created product” (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996: 121). Therefore, there is a selectivity bias permanently associated with the process of news production. Since the media play the role of public interpreters of events and are often the symbolic space for the ideological struggle between antagonists (Wolsfeld, 1997: 54), this battle also affects the way that events are portrayed.

In this context, the meaning of events lets journalists adopt certain frames of reference, which include specific facts and representations while excluding others. More often than not, events are framed within ideological, political and cultural contexts to produce a representation of images, from which individuals picture the world in their heads and construct their conception of “us” and “them” (Kellner, 1995).

The narratives conveyed by Western news media often resort to simplistic reductionism, especially in their approach of the Middle East. Academic Jay Black, who studied how media bias operates, highlighted several specific characteristics that undermine the objectivity of media reporting, including the simplistic reduction of situations (Black, 2001: 133-134).

A good example of such an approach is the coverage surrounding the recent wave of protests in Algeria and Sudan. Experts with a good grip on Middle Eastern affairs (e.g. H. A. [Hellyer](#), [Marc Lynch](#)) have warned against drawing simplistic parallels with the 2011 uprisings. Algeria, for example, was one of the precursors of democratic change in the region and held the first free and competitive legislative elections in the Arab World in 1991.

In fact, Algerian political dynamics preceded the Arab Spring by two decades. The demands for democracy started in October 1988, and by January 1992, the Algerian army fomented a coup and stopped the electoral process after it became clear that the opposition was on its way to power. The country went then through a tumultuous trajectory, which consisted of heavy-handed repression, a civil war, (mostly failed) promises for a long-lasting reconciliation, and the emergence of an oligarchy at the helm of the country's affairs.



A woman holds a banner reading “Muslim Lives Matter” during a protest against racism and hate in Chicago, United States. People from different ethnicities and groups, gathered and marched from Federal Plaza Square to Trump Towers in order to defend and demand peace against the hate crimes and racist acts ending up in violent consequences. (Bilgin S. Şaşmaz - Anadolu Agency)

Nearly three decades later, the recent protests were triggered by the refusal of the masses to be humiliated by an elite disconnected with the grassroots and to see an increasingly weakened presidency beholden to special interest groups. Moreover, forces aligned with political Islam are not in the driving seat of these protests. There are many more factors at play, such as the deterioration in purchasing power and living conditions, which have more bearing in these protests than any other pan-regional political considerations.

Hence, instead of delving into the complex developments and the root causes behind them, the Western mainstream media often prefers to treat these events superficially. They have lazily adopted a frame of understanding, which indicates their lack of understanding of the country's unique socio-political framework, and choose to adopt references that have been critiqued as being too general. Such attitudes, wittingly or unwittingly, reinforce the Orientalist view that the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is a homogenous entity, depriving the “Orient” of any individuality.

Hence, more frequently than not, erroneous parallels will be established with the Arab Spring without nuances. [Bloomberg](#), for example, adopted this frame and put forward the following headline on April 11th, 2019: “A New Arab Spring Blows More Despots Away.” According to the author of this piece, “a second North African autocrat is on the verge of being felled this month by massive popular protests: Call it Arab Spring 2.0”.

4 - A fixed view of protagonists

As professor Jay Black argued, one of the insidious ways media bias pervades coverage is via what he calls the fixed portrayal of antagonists (Black, 2001: 133-134). This framework has been particularly virulent in media coverage of politics in Turkey. Due to the prevalence of regurgitated clichés about the supposed incompatibility between Islam and democracy, Turkey's governing AK Party along with the country's political leadership, have been consistently covered in a negative light by Western media outlets. This is in spite of the fact that the AK Party is considered among the most successful democratic parties in the region, having made significant progress in terms of a number of key indicators including promotion of individual freedoms, women's rights, political participation and a successful bid to weaken the direct political influence of the military.

Among the negative frames that are deployed to represent the political field in Turkey is the dictatorship frame, which ignores the fact that Turkey has witnessed the organisation of free and competitive elections regularly since 1950, and the AK Party has had to fight for every vote in the country since 2002. Politics around the world is a cut-throat business, and elections in Turkey are no different. They are usually closely contested. During the March 2019 local elections, the stakes were again very high, especially amidst an economic slowdown, and also because these were the first local elections after the 2016 coup attempt.

The latter represented a potent challenge to Turkey because the subversive organisation responsible had managed to infiltrate key nodes of the state, including the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches as well as other political, economic, and social domains. In the meantime, the country is also facing other terrorist threats such as Daesh and the PKK.

Even in such highly volatile environment, Turkey witnessed a very high turnout, as 84.7%, over 48 million of 57 million eligible voters exercised their democratic rights. One of the most critical measures of a functioning democracy is political participation. The level of engagement of citizens in politics directly determines the quality of democracy, and the voter turnout and contestation are considered as the fundamental indicators for a healthy democracy.

In contrast, low voter turnout is a nearly universal phenomenon in established democracies. Many of the major democracies (e.g. France) reached their lowest voter turnout rates ever in their most recent elections.



(Mehmet Çalık - Anadolu Agency)

However, all these considerations are often omitted, and the picture is readily turned upside down by Western mainstream media. They cover the electoral process in Turkey as if citizens live under some totalitarian regime, whereby only one dominant ideological perspective is allowed and no other political parties or alternative voices exist. These accusations persist even when knowing that the standards of Turkey's election system have routinely been audited by international agencies, including the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The latter has regularly issued a clean bill of health to Turkish elections in the past and up until mid-2018.

A [study](#) of media coverage of the 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey revealed that accusations of dictatorship permeated most of the Western mainstream media coverage. Such criticism did not stand-up to scrutiny then and does not now, especially as the opposition managed to win the mayorships of major cities in Turkey like Ankara, Izmir, and Istanbul³ in the 2019 local elections. Even so, post-election coverage has been dominated by allegations of dictatorship and autocracy. The New York Times published an opinion on April 2nd, 2019 written by its editorial board entitled "A Wake-Up Call for President Erdogan," while the sub-title read as follows: "In local Turkish elections, the opposition, united and organised, took on an autocrat." The piece repeatedly referred to Turkey's president as authoritarian.

³ At the time of writing, the Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey has decided, after looking at the myriad of irregularities and potential foul play, to redo the Istanbul municipal elections. This is not the first time local elections in Istanbul witnessed such a rigorous review process. For example, Former Mayor Kadir Topbaş ["https://www.yenisafak.com/en/columns/yasinaktay/the-election-results-they-have-a-lot-to-learn-from-turkey-2047003"](https://www.yenisafak.com/en/columns/yasinaktay/the-election-results-they-have-a-lot-to-learn-from-turkey-2047003) was elected after going through a review process, in which the AK Party's vote increased from 47.9 per cent to 48.6 per cent. At that time, Topbaş had to wait for more than a week until the YSK examined the complaints filed and gave its final decision.

5. Dehumanisation

"Wars begin in the minds of men." Those words are written in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) constitution preamble. Humans have in place strong moral prohibitions and psychological restraints against harming others, which means dehumanisation is an effective Machiavellian tactic to change a society's perception. Dehumanisation is a phenomenon by which people see others as somehow "less than human." Psychologists have linked this perception with everything from perceiving others as primitive and backward, to seeing the dehumanised as savage and aggressive.

When a 14-year-old student brought a digital clock that he made to his class, he probably expected to be encouraged and cheered, not arrested. However, the school headmaster called the police to arrest the teenager after the homemade clock was mistakenly perceived to be a bomb. After his arrest, this student poignantly said: ["It made me feel like I was not human."](#) According to Nour Kteily, an assistant professor at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, by framing innocent actions as dangerous - and responding accordingly - we create a perception among those we treat this way that they are perceived as animals (Kteily et al., 2015).

Creating fear and suspicion towards a group or nation is not a new phenomenon; dehumanising some nations is rather common in world history. During World War II, the Germans were portrayed as barbaric Huns and the Japanese as conniving, kamikaze fighters. While American troops were involved in the war abroad, Japanese-Americans were considered as a fifth column and were detained in detention camps in the United States.

During the Cold War, Western audiences constantly received a deluge of negative imagery on the Soviet enemy. In that juncture, especially in the United States, labelling someone a "communist" was to deprive him or her of his fundamental rights, as reflected in the slogan "better dead than red" (Porras, 1995: 301). At the end of Cold War, dehumanisation patterns shifted from communism to Islam as allegedly the trigger for terrorism and radicalism. Today, the face of the enemy is most frequently portrayed as Middle Eastern people wielding a bomb in one hand and holding a Quran in the other.

Following 9/11, a full-fledged dehumanisation pattern of Muslim populations in Africa, Asia and particularly the Middle East started. In *Media Control: The spectacular achievements of propaganda*, Chomsky says, "the public sees no reason to get involved in foreign adventures, killing or torture. So you have to whip them up. And to whip them up you have to frighten them" (Chomsky, 2002: 30). In that context, to create a hatred for one group, perpetrators use the media to dehumanise their victims.

Dr. Jack G. Shaheen, an internationally acclaimed author, media critic, and the writer of [Reel Bad Arabs](#), analysed more than 900 films produced by Hollywood. He concludes that 95 per cent of the movies project negative imagery of the Middle East, portraying its people as heartless, brutal, and uncivilised. Shaheen noted "research verifies that lurid and insidious depictions of Arabs as alien, violent strangers, intent upon battling non-believers throughout the world, are staple fare. Such erroneous characterizations more accurately reflect bias of Western reporters and image-makers than they do the realities of Muslim people in the modern world" (Shaheen, 2000).

Among the striking examples of dehumanisation in recent times is the treatment of migrants. Given the large numbers of them that originate from Muslim countries, they face a double disadvantage. In addition to being stereotyped because of their religion, migrants are negatively depicted and dehumanised on a regular basis on the presumption that they are freeloaders seeking to take advantage of Europe's "generous" welfare system, without any attempt to put their plight in the context of wars, often waged via Western weaponry and supported by Western officialdom, or at the very least with its tacit agreement.

As Dr. Myriam Francois contends, "the dehumanising language of pest control and vermin was echoed in some quarters of the mainstream press, as columnists nurtured fears of a tidal wave of foreigners hell-bent on overtaking European culture, and of terrorists in their midst. Such fears were exacerbated by incidents appearing to show that terrorists were exploiting the confusion over migrant arrivals in Europe; and reports of sexual assaults and acts of violence by refugees were upheld as indicative of the implied threat "refugees" as a whole posed" (Francois, 2019: 145).

6 - Reporting fake news without fact-checking

Western representation of Muslims and Arabs are not a recent phenomenon, — it has been operational and deep-rooted ever since the first contacts with Muslims. Edward Said observed that stereotypes about Islam were transmitted from one generation to another, and were able to survive revolutions, world wars, and the literal dismemberment of Empires (Said 1979: 222). Today, this state of affairs persists in what can best be termed neo-orientalism

Since the Gulf War of 1991, and even as far back as the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Islam and Muslim people have attracted considerable media attention (Ridouani, 2011). Research, specifically content analysis, has continued to demonstrate that Islam and Muslims have overwhelmingly been portrayed pejoratively by the mass media (Rane, 2000). Since 9/11, further research has continued to show not only a massive increase in the volume of media coverage of Islam and Muslims but also an increase in the pejorative nature of this coverage (Manning, 2004).

In *Knowing one Another: An Antidote for Mass Media Islam*, Australian academic Halim Rane, who specializes in Islamic Studies, says: "To consider the Western media's representation of Islam and Muslims as a mirror or a reflection of reality is inaccurate unless one recognises that, depending on their shape, mirrors are able to distort reality. Perhaps a better metaphor is to consider the media as a window; it does not so much distort reality as it limits the scope and range of view depending on the size, location, and direction of the window."

Thus, a [roundtable](#) organised by the University of Cambridge noted that the viewpoint absolving the mainstream national media in various countries from their share of responsibility in the growth of Islamophobia and increased hatred towards Muslims is no longer acceptable, given the wealth of academic evidence on the issue, and the lack of any evidence to the contrary. It concluded that mainstream media reporting about Muslims is contributing to an atmosphere of rising hostility toward Muslims in Britain.

The term "fake news" is used to describe outlets that intentionally disseminate false information with a specific goal. As an example, in 2016, The Mail on Sunday claimed that "isolated British Muslims are so cut off from the rest of society that they see the UK as 75 per cent Islamic, shock report reveals", when in reality the report they quoted did not make such a claim and instead referred to the views

of students of one school about the population of Asians in the UK. Subsequently, the Mail on Sunday belatedly [admitted](#) that the claim is a fabrication and published corrections and clarification.

The aforementioned story was also reported in the Sunday Times and The Sun. They also completely changed their claim when Miqdaad Versi, the assistant secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain, told them to correct the story. When the Mail Online and the Sun used the phrase "Islamic honour killing" in their headline in May, 2016, Versi again [complained](#) to IPSO (Independent press standards organization) that Islam does not condone honour killings and that the phrase incorrectly suggested it was motivated by religion.

Additionally, the press regulator has ruled that the Times "distorted" its coverage of a five-year-old Christian girl who was placed with Muslim foster parents. The council said a front-page headline, "Judge rules child must leave Muslim foster home", was misleading because the judge's decision had sought to move the child to live with her grandmother - who herself had a Muslim background. On the other hand, to prevent these kinds of humiliating stories in UK and to take action and improve the way Islam is covered, IPSO announced that they would publish guidance at the end of 2019 on the reporting of Islam and Muslims in UK.

Linking acts of terrorism with Muslims that happen anywhere in the world (e.g., Oklahoma City Bombing, Paris metro) — even though later many of those attacks are found out to be committed by Christian fundamentalists and other groups — has led many Muslims to perceive the media as an enemy, and non-Muslims to consider Muslims as an existential threat.

On the "fabrication" issue, instead of simply lamenting and condemning the spread of false information, research might try to explore and understand how and why such information gains traction. It should be clarified that various reasons potentially exist for the rise of fake news, including the echo chamber factor, which echoes and reproduces already existing fears and doubts.

7. The feeble reporting of Muslims as victims

The right to freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental human right recognised in all the major human rights treaties. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations in 1948, Article 18(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 (ICCPR), and Article 9(1) of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 1950 (ECHR) all guarantee freedom of thought, conscience and “religion.”

Correspondingly, the media is a platform to cover the news of people who belong to every different faith and give them a chance to explain themselves in terms of human rights. According to Pinto (2007), the media has been entrusted with the responsibility of guarding the rights of the people in a democratic political system. Moreover, terrorism is unfortunately presented within the framework of Western ideology that preconceives Muslim Arabs as “absolutist”, “patriarchal”, “unreasoning”, and “punitive” (Said, 1979). While the media is covering terrorism acts, the aforementioned fundamental human rights standard should be remembered and it must be taken into account that everyone is affected, no matter what religion they are.

Just after 9/11, David Osborne asked a striking question to his audience, “Why have we not heard more about the Muslim victims of the horror in America?” He mentioned the story of Dr. Mansoor Khan, who is a family doctor and opened a centre for the victims of twin tower tragedy. According to Osborne, who talked with a real witness of this tragic attack, this doctor theorises that the media are at fault. His reasoning is that media outlets did not sufficiently cover the Muslims victimized in that terrible terrorist attack and how the Muslim victims of the terror of 11 September are forgotten.

In 2014, a report released by the United Nations carefully documented known instances of Daesh’ barbarity against Muslims, noting in the first eight months of 2014 Daesh was the “primary actor” responsible for the deaths of 9,347 civilians in Iraq. Moreover, they documented events in 2015 when a terrorist group launched a coordinated suicide attack in the capital of Lebanon, killing 43.

It is noticeable that the media attempt to back their claims up with “evidence”, “arguments” and “facts” in order to

demonstrate that the Arabs’ “actions”, “thoughts” and “intentions” are evil and to deny the suffering of Muslims. The Western media, therefore, is inherently responsible for infusing and inculcating the Western public with biased and fabricated preconceptions about Muslims. If the media change their minds towards the Muslim community, they will get a reciprocally mutual response from their viewers.

In that respect, non-Muslims should be educated about Islam, and Muslims about other faiths, to establish mutual understanding and tolerance. To achieve this end, they can be invited and encouraged to share their various perspectives, and support partnerships with other religious and cultural organizations to organize educational activities such as seminars, lectures and discussion panels, all of which can inspire and illuminate the public at large. It is crucial to not let the media continue to proliferate the negative perception of Muslims, and the discernible reality is that terrorism cannot be born of religion. Terrorism is the product of corrupt minds, hardened hearts, and arrogant egos— and corruption, destruction, and arrogance are unknown to the heart attached to the divine.



People leave flowers and notes by the fence of the Christchurch botanic garden, in Christchurch, New Zealand on March 16, 2019. At least 49 people were reportedly killed in twin terror attacks targeting mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, an official said on Friday. Witnesses claim the Al Noor Mosque was targeted by armed assailants and there were up to 200 people inside for Friday Prayers. (Peter Adones - Anadolu Agency)

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