

## **Media ethics and the coverage of Islam: Some preliminary observations on the British media**

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**Abstract:** The way Muslims are portrayed in the media is now a very contentious issue. This article makes a preliminary investigation of how the Western media views and responds to Islamic issues with special emphasis being placed upon those Muslims who live as minority groups in predominantly white societies. Much of the contention appears to be based upon cultural norms rather than specific religious doctrinal differences. Thus the historical background as to how the western society has derived its ethical value system through scholars such as Aristotle, Kant and Mill, rather than a combination of ethical and moral values as is the case with Islam is examined. A brief consideration of how ethical and moral values are presented within the Holy Bible and the Holy Qur’ān illustrates this point. In conjunction with this preliminary analysis a number of pertinent articles by modern scholars such as Said, Foreman, Kabir and Cohen have been considered to examine Muslim behavior, particularly within British society and determine if the complaints made by Muslims of media victimization are justified. In conclusion, this article suggests that the media are actually operating within their own concept of ethical boundaries and if Muslims wish to be viewed in a more positive light they must then ‘walk the talk’ they eulogize by actually following more closely the moral and ethical values outlined within the Holy Qur’ān.

**Keywords:** British media; Ethics and morals; Media ethics; Orientalism; Worldview.

**Abstrak:** Cara orang Islam digambarkan dalam media sekarang merupakan satu isu yang mengundang perbalahan. Artikel ini telah membuat satu kajian

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tentang bagaimana pandangan media Barat dan repon mereka terhadap isu-isu berkenaan Islam dengan penekanan khusus terhadap orang-orang Islam yang tinggal sebagai kumpulan minoriti di dalam masyarakat yang rata-ratanya berbangsa putih. Banyak perdebatan yang diliputi media berdasarkan norma-norma budaya berbanding dengan perbezaan doktorin agama tertentu. Kertas kerja ini menyingkap dengan berlatarbelakangkan sejarah bagaimana masyarakat Barat memperolehi sistem nilai etika mereka melalui pemikir-pemikir seperti Aristotle, Kant dan Mill. Pada sepatutnya, gabungan etika dan nilai-nilai moral dalam Islam patut diperiksa terlebih dahulu. Satu pertimbangan yang ringkas mengenai etika dan nilai-nilai moral turut terkandung dalam Kitab Injil dan Al-Qur'an dapat menggambarkan hal tersebut. Sempena dengan analisis awal terhadap beberapa artikel yang berkaitan ditulis oleh pemikir-pemikir moden seperti Said, Foreman, Kabir dan Cohen dianggap dapat menilai perlakuan orang Islam, terutamanya dalam masyarakat British. Turut dibincangkan adalah kewajaran aduan-aduan yang dibuat oleh orang Islam terhadap penganiayaan media terhadap mereka. Kesimpulannya, artikel ini mengcadangkan bahawa media sebenarnya beroperasi dalam konsep sempadan etika mereka tersendiri. Sekiranya, orang Islam ingin dilihat lebih positif, mereka mesti memperkatakannya secara terus terang bahawa mereka sebenarnya mengikut etika dan nilai-nilai moral yang digariskan di dalam Al-Qur'an dengan teliti sekali.

**Kata Kunci:** Media British; Etika dan moral; Etika media Orientalisme; Pandangan dunia.

## Introduction

There are a number of dimensions to consider when a news reporter takes up his laptop and addresses coverage of any event for the consumption of the general public. He is the 'eye in the sky' and the relater of events to those who often have no personal experiences comparable with the news being covered. In addition to this, his knowledge of his target audience to whom he is bringing these insights may also be limited. The audiences are, to all intents and purposes victims, 'sitting ducks' for the media to feed or shoot at as they, their editors or the powers who sit above them see fit to dictate.

According to the Office of National Statistics, UK (2013), there were 12 million graduates as compared to 19.3 million (60%) of the adult population whose qualifications are the equivalent of an 'A level' or less. A total of approximately 40% of this figure accounts for those with GCSE's or lower. This in no way demeans the mental capacity

of members of the UK adult population, but it does suggest that a high proportion of the general public may not be equipped with the tools engendered during higher education to assist in the art of critical thinking required to weed through what the press editorials write or leave out of their articles.

Edward W. Said (1935-2003), a scholar of Orientalism and political activist, has criticized the ethical values of the American press in his book *Covering Islam* for what he believed to be blatant bias reporting against Orientals in general and the Islamic World in particular (Said, 1997). Nahid Afrose Kabir (2010), in her article, "Is the media biased against Muslims?" also expressed a similar sentiment, although her focus of study was the UK media rather than the media in USA.

This article proposes to examine the requirements of the media with regard to their professional ethics as envisaged by a number of leading scholars on the topic, and to compare the findings to observations by these experts as cited in the later parts of the article.

### **The press guidelines for making ethical decisions**

Patterson and Wilkins (2014) mention that contemporary professional ethics within the field of media revolves around two questions: a) "what duties do I have, and to whom do I owe them," and b) "what values are reflected by the duties I have assumed." They say,

Ethics takes us out of the world of "This is the way I do it" or "This is the way it's always been done" into the realm of "This is what I should do" or "This is the action that can be rationally justified". Ethics in this sense is the 'ought' talk.  
(p. 3)

Here it is necessary to understand that within the media industry there is an important distinction between ethics and morals. Many professionals believe that the truth within any 'story' is directly related to whatever profession one follows. This is due to different ethical values within each of the professions, due to which responding ethically within those guidelines in each case has its own parameters for 'oughtness'. This accounts for the distinctive differences in behavior between, say, politicians and doctors.

The present day guidelines of ethical decision making for the press stems from three philosophers: Aristotle, Kant and Mill. Briefly,

Aristotle believed that ‘flourishing’ would bring about the ultimate human wellbeing. He wanted to elevate activities by using practical reasoning and setting high standards. Practical reasoning implied the person was ‘*phrenemos*’ or someone of practical wisdom and this was considered a virtue. Kant believed one must act in a manner such that the personal choices could become a universal law. He maintained that one should treat every individual as an end and not simply as a means. He designated these two instances of reasoning as categorical imperatives which meant they should be considered as universal and not be subjected to situational factors. John Stewart Mill introduced Mill’s law in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He upheld that the consequence of any action determined whether it should be considered ethical. This is known as utilitarianism. This utilitarian rationale also meant that it might be ethical to hurt a given individual if the benefit for the community or a larger group could be established. This particular code is practiced by investigative journalists to justify their reporting methods.

As has been mentioned above, each profession has its own ideals and standards with regard to ethics. The standard for journalism is to tell the truth, but what is considered to be the truth can have problems associated with it. Throughout history, the concept of what successive generations have considered to be the truth of a matter has changed, implying that truth is not static. An example of this concept may be found in the recording of history. History by definition should be a narration of true facts, but the whole truth is never the prerogative of one party alone. As with the narration of wars, the veracity of a given set of historical facts is dependent upon who the narrator is and his personal motivations. Truth in this context is never complete.

With regard to journalism, this problem is further complicated in two ways. First, the media body’s relationship with their media audience, and second, their relationship with the powers above, who regulate to a certain degree how and which elements of the news they wish to be disseminated. The art of sincere professional journalism then becomes a gymnastic exercise of learning how to recognize the truth and then being able to convey that truth in the least distorted manner. This in itself is also problematic as it necessitates pleasing many masters. John Milton wrote in his *Areopagitica* polemic of 1644 that in a free and open encounter, truth would prevail (Blasi, 1997). Milton’s words, as quoted by Blasi (1997), were in true poetic style:

And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting, to misdoubt her strength. Let her and falsehood grapple; who ever knew truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?

This statement, even for the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, was simplistic. Its objective was to break the crown granted monopoly on the printing trade. The crown was at the time using its licensing authority in a singularly partisan manner. This regulated means of seeking out the truth left great room for the autonomy of manipulative individuals and the subverted use of centralized power. Yet it is from this forerunner that the ‘*Correspondence theory*’ emerged and is used by the press of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as their notion of the truth. It is based upon the understanding that truth may be divorced from the teachings of the Church, and is a product of a secular society. The Theory of Correspondence states that truth must correspond to the observations made and external facts encountered. This is contrary to the Enlightenment Theory that regards Truth as being linked to the use of the intellect in harness with what human beings perceive with their senses (Pera, 2012). It is compatible with the understanding of what constitutes democracy, but it is also solely reliant on rational and fair governance (Patterson & Wilkins, 2014).

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the German enlightenment philosopher is considered to be a ‘prophet’ of secularism but during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the meaning of secularism as he envisioned it shifted. Kant viewed liberal secularism through his metaphor of “*The apple of God’s eye*” and it corresponded to what he considered as, “The innate and inalienable rights belonging necessarily to humanity”. Kant believed it was the duty of all rulers to preserve these fundamental human rights, thus ensuring the leaders were humble in their souls. They would use their intellect to reflect that the sacred office bestowed upon them by God was too great for a human being to carry alone. He was thus the trustee for the right of human beings. The leader must therefore always take great care not to offend against this “*apple of God’s eye*” and construct laws for the citizens accordingly (Pera, 2012).

The implication of such a view is that a ruler must consider religion as a source of inspiration, preserve it in order to safe guard the human rights and promote the religion he or she considers endowed by God. Yet

Kant's writings at first glance appear to contradict his "*apple of God's eye*" statement because he also believed a ruler must not meddle with the citizen's religious faith systems or show favoritism to one particular view. Respect must be present for the pluralism of the various religious systems within the society. When his outlook is considered collectively, it appears to demonstrate that in Kant's opinion religion was a necessary premise for morality, politics and the proper functionality of a society.

The contemporary definition of Western secularism has since been modified by writers such as George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906), who is credited with inventing the term '*Secularism*' to describe a social order separate from religion. In *English Secularism*, Holyoake (1896) wrote,

Secularism is a code of duty pertaining to this life, founded on considerations purely human, and intended mainly for those who find theology indefinite or inadequate, unreliable or unbelievable.

Religion within a modern secular society is a private matter and therefore should not enter the sphere of politics or the professional arena. The secular liberal state must be considered an abode for all citizens regardless of their moral or religious commitments. A reference to any particular religious faith system would necessarily create discrimination and provide a blockage to social co-existence.

Thus the modern '*Theory of Correspondence*' and its definition of the Truth must necessarily be linked to this premise and hence objectivity. This quality of impartiality, or lack of bias, requires that one is aware of the human perception of facts and collects data with the understanding that all facts and peoples should be regarded as equals and so are equally deserving of coverage. The modern '*Theory of Correspondence*' fits well with this contemporary definition of secularism as defined by Holyoake but unlike Kant's version dissociates itself from a religious underpinning. Any cognition as to the "*apple of God's eye*" is excluded.

Following the emergence of the modern '*Theory of Correspondence*' a group of pragmatists led by individuals such as John Dewey, an American philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer, and George Herbert Mead, an American Philosopher psychologist and sociologist from the University of Chicago also voiced their version of what should constitute the truth in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They believed

firmly that the truth would always be dependent on who undertook the investigation and data collection. Mead and Dewey both considered that truth was relative. This definition of truth corresponds well to the values set out for individualism within the American concept of democracy. This acceptance within the journalist movement of a pragmatic theory led to a forward shift to the 21<sup>st</sup> century media values. Not only did the pragmatic approach find acceptance within journalistic circles, it was also embraced by a number of other fields such as law, literature and science (Blasi, 1997, p. 24).

The evolution of the internet during the last 30–40 years has brought changes within the distribution of information by the media. With much of the strain of financial pressure removed, a re-establishment of a more partisan and prejudiced system of operations was allowed. The huge success rating of media organizations such as CNN and Fox News is proving that a partisan media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be popular. Blogs and other similar electronic information promulgation systems now mean there are many conceptions of the truth emerging and converging together. This has led to an enfeebling superabundance of information that requires a great deal of time and energy to sift through. In 1987, Sissela Bok advises with regard to this,

Telling the truth therefore is not solely a matter of moral character; it is also a matter of correct appreciation of real situations and of serious reflection upon them ..... Telling the truth therefore, is something that must be learnt. This will sound very shocking to anyone who thinks that it must all depend upon moral character and that if this is blameless the rest is child's play. But the simple fact is that ethics cannot be detached from reality, and consequently continual progress in learning to appreciate reality is a necessary ingredient in ethical action. (Blasi, 1997, p. 25)

### **The Constructed reality of the Truth**

Gaye Tuchman (1980), a Professor of Sociology at Queens College, City University of New York describes the news as a window of the world. Truth must have a frame very much as a window is framed. The window may be large or small, have few or many panes, be opaque, tinted or clear, and face countless vistas. The view will also depend on where the viewer is standing in reference to the window. This can make the news frame problematic.

Sociologists consider people to be social beings and that the society of others creates social consciousness. This society will then provide the norms the individual members use as resources and constraints upon their behavior. Therefore, the individuals shape the social world and the institutions within it in a shared constructed experience. This implies that what society considers being news is dependent on its social structure and this social structure then provides what is considered to be the norms of attitudes. Journalists cover stories for print that are appraised as interesting or important to that society and so the news workers are fulfilling the function of reflecting the population. The news has thus given the society a mirror for what concerns and interests it. If that society were to change what it defines as news, then the structure of that society and the institutions within it must change. Hence, if a significant number of individuals begin to adopt deviant behavior, the social structure will become modified, leading to a modification of what is considered news (Tuchman, 1980, p. 183).

In 1972, George Gerber stated that, “today’s mass media is the cultural arm of the industrial arm from which they spring,” and Hans Magnus Enzensberger believed, “the media to be the consciousness industry whose main business is to sell the existing social hierarchy.” They both agree that the media as a whole is able to limit the *‘frames’* within which public issues may be debated and so provide a narrowing of political alternatives. This means that the media is also able to foster conformity, as a means of ensuring dissent does not spread. They do this by presenting dissenting views as merely curious or irrelevant eccentricities that will be dismissed by the vast majority as inconsequential (Tuchman, 1980, p. 156). This methodology assures that the media has identified their right to freedom of speech. For UK the freedom of speech stretches back to the Licensing Act of 1695. In USA, it is covered by the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. The United Nation Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that,

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression: this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.

The Enlightenment model mentioned earlier determines that for the public to be able to make well informed opinions of the veracity of any



truth they must be exposed to competing ideas so that truth can prevail. To protect these rights governments must therefore protect the freedom of speech. Yet this freedom of speech can at times interfere with the governments' activities. Regardless of this, newspapers are still private property and those who own them are therefore entitled to publish whatever they wish, provided they do not step beyond the boundaries of national security. The newspapers being privately owned are not obliged to publish anything they feel is not newsworthy. A. J. Liebling stated with regard to this that as Tuchman (1980) says, "Freedom of the Press is guaranteed only to those who own one" (p. 169).

Aside from government legislation there are a number of organizations that have been set up to protect the levels of press freedom. These include Reporters Without Borders, The Committee to Protect Journalists and Freedom House.

### **Who are the Journalists?**

The vast majority of the Western media is owned by a very small number of corporations. As of 2011, that figure stands at six, G.E. (N.B.C. and Universal pictures), News Corp (Wall Street Journal and New York Post), Disney (ABC, ESPN), Viacom (MTV, Paramount Pictures), Time Warner (CNN, Time), and CBS (Smithsonian). This concentration of media outlets within a limited number of corporations in turn suggests that the world view as portrayed by the media is limited to the perspectives of a few (Lutz, 2012).

Within these major corporations, critiques of the journalism industry have drawn attention to the fact that most of the journalists fall into a single category - predominantly white, male, well educated, and middle to upper class. Many of the settings these journalists are asked to cover include situations for which they have no past experiences to draw upon to give them any form of assistance in their assignments. Patterson and Wilkins (2014) believe that these 'single category' journalists, coming as they do from the upper strata of society, have much more in common with the many famous or powerful people who preside over the communities deemed news worthy rather than either those of the lower levels whom they gather news about, or the vast majority of the audience they gather the news to present to. This returns to the consideration that the majority of the reading public is not highly educated and so the

form of reporting style could and does have a distinct impact on how minorities are covered in the press (p. 27).

### **Morals vs. Ethics**

Clarity needs to be introduced here so that the difference in understanding between Ethical and Moral values may be understood. Ethics are considered as a rational process based upon an agreed set of principles within the framework. Morals, on the other hand are considered to be related to religion. The Ten Commandments is the Judo-Christian system of moral values and the eight-fold path of Buddhism is a similar framework within the Buddhist worldview.

The word moral comes from the Latin word '*mos*', which according to the dictionary means habit, custom or manner. Morality employs deeper aspects of one's behavior and encompasses standards, conduct and character. From this, a moral judgment will be made about another individual. Ethics is more closely associated with the study of the standards and judgments that those people make. Morals requires understanding what people value and why and do morals reflect a person's values. Philosophers believe they come in three types-preferential, instrumental and intrinsic. Preference value expresses some value we hold to, where the term 'hold' is used as opposed to 'adherence'. Instrumental value means we value something as a means to achieve another end. Intrinsic value means that something is valued for itself without the loading of expectation of a reward for its usage.

According to the Oxford dictionary, the term '*Ethics*' stems from '*Ethos*' which means the characteristic spirit of a culture or community as manifested in its attitudes and aspirations. So ethics may then be considered as the study of what is good for oneself and for one's society. Ethics implies a code of conduct that one chooses to govern one's life by allowing one to undertake a path that is not necessarily based upon religion such as that God will sit in judgment over any particular decision.

A good understanding of this difference would apply to, say, a defense lawyer who acts within his professional ethics and defends a murderer as innocent despite knowing of his client's guilt and that morally, the act was wrong. So for two thousand years, ethics as was understood by the Greeks has been adopted in the West to mean making

rational decisions amongst a multitude of choices where some are more morally justifiable than others.

### **Morals vs. Ethics in the religious context**

Ethics in Christianity encompasses one branch of Christian theology. The Christian perspective of behavior is defined through the concept of what is virtuous, and hence right, or what is sinful, and hence wrong. The modern academic study of theology draws upon a number of sources to establish its criteria. These are the Bible, Christian traditions, philosophical principles and methodologies, and other sources of world knowledge such as the sciences and human experience. The Holy Bible is the starting point for the consideration of the remaining sources. Upon investigation within a number of translations of the Holy Bible, it becomes clear that the use of the terms ‘moral’ and ‘ethic’ or ‘ethical’ are absent in most cases. The understanding of the terms is delineated within the text but the terms themselves are not mentioned within the majority of the translations. Determination of whether these terms were to be found in the original scriptures is now difficult since the English versions of the Holy Bible as found in the West have evolved through a series of translations from language to language, inclusive of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German and English.

Unlike the English definitions of ‘Morals’ and ‘Ethics’, the Muslim interpretation of these values have their roots firmly within the religion as within the Islamic worldview every aspect of one’s everyday existence may not be dissociated from one’s faith system. Coupled with this, the English version of the Holy Qur’ān is translated directly from the source language of transmission. There are a number of Arabic words that can cover the Western understanding of these definitions.

1. Moral or Ethical could be *Akhlāqī*. The root kh-l-q means to create, make, or originate, to shape, to form or to mould (Hans, 1960). From this root, it may be determined that the implication of one’s moral and ethical values is that they shape one’s life and hence mould one’s future. From the root, ten forms appear in the Holy Qur’ān 239 times but none are in the form above (Badawi & Haleem, 2008, p. 282).
2. Moral could be *Ādābī*. The root a-d-b means to be well bred, cultured, have refined tastes. This root does not appear in the Holy Qur’ān.

3. Moral or incorporeal could be *Maghzā* and may be translated as sense, meaning, importance, significance, moment, consequence. The root is (gh-z-a, gh-z-w) means to strive (for), aspire, to mean, to intend. This root does appear inside the Holy Qur'ān once but not in the form seen here.

As with the Holy Bible, the Holy Qur'ān does not distinctly mention the words for moral or ethical but the theme of the Revelation none the less reverberates with many references to general patterns for behavior and rules of conduct which may be designated as the moral code. Taken in its entirety this establishes a way of life for Muslims that impacts every area of their existence and so sits firmly above the concept of professional ethics. The ethical perspective of the Holy Qur'ān is that there is an ultimate meaningfulness in every human act. Therefore, the emphasis must be on the responsibility of the individual and also of the collective unit of people to respond to all others in a moral and an ethical manner. This code of behavior does not stem from the 7<sup>th</sup> Century and the advent of Prophet Muḥammad (saw), but transcends human existence. This primordial understanding is to be found in *Sūrah Al- A' rāf*. God asks, "...Am I not your Lord...," and the Children of Adam respond, "...Yes, we do testify....." And so both moral and ethical behavior become obligatory, not a choice (Qur'ān, 7:172; McAuliffe, 2002).

To extend this requirement still further so that a direct relationship may be drawn between what is spoken or written as compared to a general code of behavior, in *Sūrah Al-Isrā'* it teaches, "Say to my servants that they should (only) say those things that are best: for Satan doth sow dissensions amongst them....." (Qur'ān, 17:53).

'Say' in this *āya* comes from the Arabic word with the root q-w-l which also has the understanding of propagate, to hold a view or to allege, and this must incorporate the written word.

There are a number of *āyāt* in the Holy Qur'ān which may be used to explain the dilemma facing the Muslim community, but before one may consider those, one must appraise the reality of the four types of Muslim and their comparability with the non-Muslims.

- Indigenous Muslims who have embraced Islamic teachings and understand the coverage of the *Shahāda*,

- Indigenous Muslims who have yet to understand Islamic teachings and so do not yet comprehend the complexity of the *Shahāda*,
- Reverts who have embraced Islamic teachings and understand the coverage of the *Shahāda*,
- Reverts who embrace Islam for worldly reasons.

The Holy Qur'ān and the Holy Bible are both very clear as to the origination of humans from a single pair. In *Sūrah Al-Ḥujurāt* it says:

We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into Nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted. (Qur'ān, 49:13)

This is indeed an important premise as it clarifies that all men are 'born equal' and so birth right and background have no bearing on character and personality. From this premise, one may make use of the *āya* in *Sūrah Al-Baqara* which states, "Allah does not burden any human with more than he can bear..." (Qur'ān, 2:286).

It may be understood from the above two verses that for comparative purposes, God is always fair regardless of the origins of human being, and as such each will come into the world with his quota of life tests. Therefore, it can be considered that the challenges of the human being, whether he falls within the four groups of Muslims, or is as yet a non-Muslim, is the same. Muslims may have the advantage of being born with the only revealed text that is still unblemished by the human being's hand but they must expect challenges in relation to its teachings. *Sūrah Al-Ra'd* teaches Muslims that:

"...Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts. But when Allah willeth a people's punishment, there can be no turning it back, nor will they find, besides Him, any to protect." (Qur'ān, 13:11)

### **Views of the Media relationship with Islam**

Said was very critical of the American media's ability to deliver a neutral informative picture of world events to the general public. Much of Said's work viewed the field of Orientalism in three ways, as an

academic discipline; as a style of thinking; and as an institute annexed to the corporate world. He believed very strongly that the Western press works in collusion with the orientalists and the governing bodies to treat newsworthy materials in relation to the Islamic world in a manner that is filled with gross misunderstanding of their history, culture and diversity. Hence they produce articles littered with distortions that lead the Western population to dislike Muslims and Islam. Said (1994) wrote in *'Orientalism'* with regards to how he believes many predominantly white people view the Oriental such that, "An oriental human being was first and oriental and only seconds a human being" (p. 231).

Aside from Said's views, many other academics have also considered the impact of media on the Muslim communities. By reviewing a number of these it may be possible to determine if Muslims are correct in blaming the media for the Western negative perception of Islam or if fault must also be apportioned to the Muslim community.

Jonathan Foreman, in his paper "*Britain's Heart of Darkness*" has addressed some of the major problems within Muslim adolescent groups within the UK. His paper discusses the media spotlight placed upon the wrong doings by young '*Muslim men*' who have confused their own misconceptions of their culture with Islam. This has led to a hatred of Muslims by a significant part of the predominantly white British public. A group of Pakistani and Bangladeshi men, known as the Rotherham gang, were convicted of the grooming of vulnerable, mostly white teenage and preteen girls for use as prostitutes. This included gang rape and violence, but the men justified their actions on religious grounds (Foreman, 2015).

Another example of the misconceptions of culture's inter-relation with Islam is highlighted by "Baptism of Fire for Believers" in *'The Age'* on 4/02/2003. This article narrated the inflexibility of a group of Muslims who insisted that Christians, Tamils, Sabians and Mandaeans must conform to their dress codes and dietary requirements in order to make use of certain communal facilities (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005).

Nahid Afrose Kabir in "*Is the media biased against Muslims?*" considered the suggestion that Muslim youths believe that the media is biased against them. According to Kabir's research, this is the case but not overwhelmingly so. Kabir found this bias is more strongly felt amongst female teenagers. She demonstrated that there were a sizeable

number of individuals who consider the Muslims themselves to be at fault and of this section, the majority were male. Kabir also noticed that the most vulnerable amongst the youth who are swayed by extremism are not the underprivileged as might be expected but those who came from a comfortable middle class background (Kabir, 2010).

Erik Bleich, Hannah Stonebraker, Hasher Nisar and Rana Abdelhamid in “*Media Portrayals of Minorities: Muslims in British Newspaper Headlines*” sought to answer the question as to the biasness of the press by analyzing news headlines in a quantitative rather than a qualitative analysis by extracting the headlines from January 1, 2001 to December 31, 2012.<sup>1</sup> They found that Muslims definitely were the most covered group in the UK newspapers as compared to any other ethnic or religious group but that the coverage tone was not consistently negative towards them. They found that in three of the years within the range they chose showed a positive tone, but in respect of this their choice of headline words was very limited. Their evidence did not support the theory that major terrorist attacks inevitably led to the media tone towards Muslims being negative. Their data suggests that the years that showed the most significant negative tone were years when the terrorist acts were committed within the UK itself, namely the London Underground bombing in July 2005 and the Glasgow airport bombing in June 2007 (Bleich, Stonebraker, Hasher, & Abdelhamid, 2013).

“*The Perception of Islam and Muslims in the Media and the Responsibility of European Muslims towards the Media*” by Mirza Mešić (2011), Imam and Professor of Islamic History at Zagreb also provided some interesting observations:

- The era of communication now means that wars begin and end with media wars.
- Muslims have done little to respond to the emergence of Islamophobia.
- The Muslims most resent sexual and cultural promiscuity, ethical and moral corruption as has been documented by the media has led to hatred of Muslims.
- Terrorism spread is related to the modern global communication system.
- Representation of Muslims in the media is directly related to lack of acceptance of differences.

- Accepting others must go beyond tolerance.
- Respect for others requires certain knowledge of others' history, culture, way of life and other factors.

Kabir's other paper "*The Identity Debate*" examines how identity has played a part in the way young British Muslims view themselves. She believes that British Muslims do connect themselves with their own community but that they also connect themselves with the wider British population. Thus when the press portrays them as the 'other', this strikes a chord. They feel they are perceived as 'disloyal' and this sharpens their Muslim identity, causing great tension. A number of Kabir's interviewees revealed that even though they may wear attire in keeping with their religion and culture such as a *niqab*, they still feel very British and felt that Britain is a multicultural society willing to accept all cultures (Kabir, 2010).

Nick Cohen in "*Muslim is not a Dirty Word*" makes some valid points with regard to giving time to immigrant communities to establish themselves. He believes comedy through TV shows such as "*Goodness Gracious Me*", so popular in the late 1990's, may now be deemed as patronizing and dated but the good humored banter helped the Indian community establish itself. He says that unfortunately the Muslim face to the wider British public today is that of individuals such as Abu Hamza, of the Finsbury Mosque, and the Shoe Bomber. He also believes some glaring mistakes were made by academics with articles such as the "*1997 Runnymede Trust report on Islamophobia: A challenge to us all*". This article stated that British Muslims must be seen firstly as Muslims and not say British Pakistanis or British Bangladeshis and this was discrimination that cut to the core hurting people because of their religion (Cohen, 2004).

## Conclusions

It is certainly the case that the media is shaping opinion and covers reality with a degree of censorship, but Muslim groups are also taking the opportunity to convey their message via the media (Said, 1997). In the vast majority of cases it would appear that the journalists do work within the framework as is stated in their own guidelines. They do appear to follow the principles that they have been provided with, and the media ethics today is a result of their history. Their decision making in this regard, like so many other aspects of secular society,



stretches back to the Greeks and a clear distinction has been drawn in professional terms between the Church and State, partly thanks to the efforts of individuals such as Holyoake. The guidelines are strictly ethical and this is distinctly separated from any religious connotation of the moral. This does not imply however that the predominantly white journalists and media professionals do not have their own moral codes, but simply that these codes are classified as 'outside' of the office.

It does appear to be the case as Said asserts that the journalists walk a technical tight rope with regard to their articles. Perhaps the most important aspect of this type of work is recognizing one's own weakness in terms of one's background and seeking out ways to overcome the shortfalls. This would require that the media corporations also acknowledge their responsibilities to the general public in this regard.

Sociologists paint a frightening scenario for the Muslim populations who live in non-Muslim countries. They are residing on the 'border' of the Muslim Ummah and they do provide the first face-to-face contact most non-Muslims will have with Islam. Their role in upholding the moral and ethical values so dear to Islam is therefore vital.

In this regard the relationship between the media and societal behavior is important in that the cycle of social norms and individual behavior is not driven into a downward spiral as the media mirrors the society in a news dependency manner, encouraging more unsuitable behavior. Impartiality is very difficult to achieve at the best of times and this becomes much more arduous when acts of violence are committed by an ethnic group on one's own home turf and against one's own ethnic countrymen as was done by the Rotherham gang. This is especially so when the case involves the under aged and vulnerable as described in Foreman's paper, "*Britain's Heart of darkness*", as this could be one's daughter or sister.

Undoubtedly the media needs to encourage a wider range of journalists into the field so that the stigma of a profession dominated by Predominantly whites may be broken. John Milton, the Latin Secretary to the Puritan Interregnum and author of *Paradise Lost* wrote with regard to the Media in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Britain that 'truth will out' but this is not a strong enough precedent in the modern era. Perhaps the use of watchdog organizations such as Reporters without Borders to police the media industry should be bolstered more firmly by strong litigation

when reporters have been found to step over the ethical bounds of their profession. The frames of window reference as described by Tuchman do indeed appear to be limited based upon the cited articles and the data they have gathered. The adage of 'to walk in the shoes of the other' needs to be taken to heart and the blinds drawn back to prevent impeding of the view.

Truth does become distorted and society norms do tend to move in a manner not only dictated by individual behavior but also through how the media represents those norms. Media presents the news of interest, which includes most frequently incorporating the negative aspects of a small proportion of individuals from any demographic group. The overall group then reacts to this reporting in a manner that demonstrates news dependency, and in the long term this then changes the society norms leading to an increasing risk of more members within that demographic group conforming to the expectations of the general public as portrayed by the media. Most Muslims have not dissociated their moral creed from their behavior code unlike their sectarian counterparts but correct behavior is necessary to demonstrate this. The accountability so dear to Kant can be re-implemented in sectarian society as a good example to follow. Muslims who follow the correct Islamic worldview rather than their own cultural practices that they then wrongly attribute to the religion could provide this example if they can dissociate that culture from the religion.

The word ethics in itself is problematic in the media because of the use of language. If a human being commits a rape it should not matter if he is Muslim or colored or otherwise, the act is morally and ethically wrong. Religion does not enter the equation and unfortunately this loose use of language by the media perpetrates a great deal of hate. Examples can also be brought as to predominantly white persons running grooming operations as in the case in 2015 of Marie Black and two male accomplices who ran a sex party ring using under aged children but their religious denomination was not of interest (Crossley, 2015).

If media is to be independent, then the stranglehold by six news corporations over the Western press needs to be loosened and A. J. Liebling's assertion that the press is only free for those who own it is undoubtedly a truism. In this sense the theories of Correspondence and

Governance that the media is said to adhere to are very likely being bypassed on occasion.

Said, despite the many critics who believe otherwise, does appear to have nailed a connection between the press and the academics, whose funding often requires that they collaborate with the media and the Governing bodies from above who seek to mould the populous. Perhaps the greatest difference between the USA and UK is the continuous outward focus on Muslims from overseas where as the British appear more internally inclined. As Said rightly points out in "*Covering Islam*" this strategy has allowed the US Government to contain a population comprising of a great many ethnicities. The inward focus can lead to home based hate.

Bleich, Stonebraker, Nisar and Abdelhamid's results suggest that the UK has a mostly more positive tone in the newspaper headlines aside from the years associated with the London Underground bombing of July 2005 and the Glasgow airport bombing. This may well be because the UK population has, in general, been channeled to be more inward looking.

The predominantly Western sectarian worldview is undoubtedly different to that of the Islamic Worldview. Yet as one compares the guidance found within the Holy Bible towards moral and ethical values and the format provided in the Holy Qur'an it may be seen that both veer towards reverberation of the necessity of these qualities. Both emphasize the responsibility of the individual and of the collective, even though only one of the texts may be ascribed the status of being untouched by human intervention. This distinct difference in worldviews with regard to media ethics in a sectarian society appears to garner more influence in some respects from writers such Holyoake, and Kant with his metaphor of "*The apple of God's eye*" has been overlooked.

Muslims do often portray themselves as Muslim first followed by their nationality and this is distinctly different from many of a Western background. They do feel a personal security that when they read the Holy Qur'an for their guidance it comes from God alone without the intermediary of the human being. This brings a tremendous feeling of assurance in one's belief system. The difficulties facing the Muslim communities is great but they do carry the responsibility of being the face to face example of Islam for those of the West and the best example

will always be the one closest to home. Therefore, this responsibility is part of the quota of load that these Muslims carry. When they act in a manner befitting followers of the Prophet (peace be on him), it will have a much greater impact than media stories, as this is experiential rather than read knowledge. For these reasons surely it is imperative Muslims educate themselves and their children as to the differences between culture and Islam so that the religion does not gain a bad reputation as has been with the case of the Rotherham Groomers.

Kabir's interesting observation that most young extremists come from middle class comfortably of well-educated backgrounds is also somewhat telling. Perhaps these well meaning over protective parents may find allowing their children a little more room for personal experience at a young age, with the parents behind to guide, may be a better form of insurance against extremism than trying to over protect their offspring with the hope of insulating them from sectarian harm.

Muslims should expect that if they have been blessed with the Holy Qur'ān as a guide from birth then they will face their tests in relation to the correct following of its texts. The instruction of, "Read in the Name of your Lord." is a command not a suggestion and using one's mind requires self-reflection. Muslims know of personal accountability for their actions and are not shackled by erroneous teachings so in this manner they have no excuses for misunderstanding their faith system.

Much of the manner in which the British Asian society is behaving and is viewed by the predominantly white populations is a micro scale of the overall way Oriental societies are still viewed by the orientalist Western governments and media. The British Asians feed off the press and adjust as the press mirrors them, just as Orientalists in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries painted a face for Orientals. This has then influenced them to behave accordingly in line with the straight jacket pre-Newtonian mould as defined by Kissinger (Said, 1994, p. 47).

Better education can help to break the stereotyping and bring individual critical thinking for both the Non Muslim and the Muslim UK populations and on the macro level for the Oriental populations as a whole. Translations of exceptional works by Orientals not found in English should be stepped up to provide resource materials and open

the doors to Oriental wisdom. Book translating proved to be influential during the golden age of the Muslim scholarship, it was a tool during the Napoleonic conquest of Egypt and it may be implemented again to spearhead emancipation from the Orientalist stereotypes that handicap western minds from recognizing the equality in all aspects of those who come from the East.

Muslims desire that non-Muslims understand and accept their faith system but when a non-Muslim enters the door of Islam he will usually face great hardships when going against his own community and his family. This is part of his quota and for this he requires a suitable Muslim example to follow. The Muslim uphill struggle comprises of providing that suitable example. As Professor Mirza Mešić (2011) so eloquently put it, the representation of Muslims in the media is directly related to the lack of acceptance of differences, and respect for others requires certain knowledge of others' history, culture, way of life and other factors, but, this is a two way door and both sides must take responsibility for their own actions. Based on the model of society change and the lack of supporting structure it would be naïve to expect the media or Western society to change themselves since as yet the vast majority see no error in their behavior. This leaves the onus on Muslims to make the changes that will influence the society norms. The Qur'ān teaches, "...Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts (*Sūrah Al-Ra'd*, 13:11).

## Endnotes

1. Lexis-Nexis is a service for researching news, business and legal topics which contains more than 6,000 sources from all over the world drawn from print, broadcast and on-line media. The deep back file assists in finding contemporary accounts of events that took place decades ago and incorporates topical indexing and search features.

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