

Chapter 7

Free Speech: Creating the 'Us and Them' Debate

Nahid Afrose Kabir

Introduction

Developed countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and America take pride in their democratic institutions, personal freedoms and secular ethos. However, these conditions and their effects can become highly contested issues when it comes to the exercise of the freedom of speech. In this chapter I contend that free speech is practised in a prejudiced and distorting way by some news media when it comes to reporting on Muslim minorities. Reporting on Muslim issues by insinuating Islamophobic tendencies falsely engenders and facilitates a division of society into 'us' (the dominant society; or in a global sense the West) and 'them' (the Muslim minority; or in a wider sense the Muslim world).¹ Diasporic Muslims often seem disproportionately represented as violent, disrespectful of mainstream culture and a threat to the dominant society – a heavy criticism that is expressed by some media and media commentators under the aegis of free speech.² Not unusually by association Islam is included in this suspicion. This subjectivised media discourse is not only 'othering' Muslims and their religion in the perception of the dominant Western society; it is also alienating young diasporic Muslims, who become emotionally distanced from what they perceive as a hostile dominant society. Their take on the situation, I

¹ On Islamophobia in general and in the media see, for instance, the series *Jahrbuch für Islamophobieforschung* issued by Farid Hafez and the University of Vienna (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2010 etc.); also *Global Islamophobia*, ed. George Morgan and Scott Poynting (Farnham: Ashgate 2012); *Islamophobia: the Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, by John Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011) and many other publications.

² Not being a jurist, I will not go into the intricacies of legal provisions of freedom of the press and media, individual rights of free speech and expression, and restrictions on this freedom imposed by various laws.

found, largely coincides with my findings on the media discourse. I have widely discussed the impact of some Western media's representation of Islam and Muslims on young Muslims' identity in several of my publications, and will give an abbreviated and condensed version here.³

From 2006 to 2011 I conducted research among young Muslims (aged 15 years and over) in Australia, Britain and America and observed the impact media representation had on their identity construction. My reasons for choosing these countries were as follows. Living in Australia, my initial focus was on the identity of young Australian Muslims. In 2008 I had the opportunity to conduct research on young British Muslims' identity. From 2009 to 2011, as a visiting fellow at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University, USA, I undertook a similar study of young American Muslims. On the basis of my research experience I question the uses of freedom of speech by the media in Australia, Britain and America to present what I see as a biased image of Muslims and Islam. On the other hand, I observe that, when Muslims make use of the provisions of free speech – be it to defend themselves, to criticise the dominant society or to protest – it only earns them condemnation. Protesting against injustice is another right of free speech, but when exercised by Muslims it is often labelled unacceptable, radical and even violent. When the (former) Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, spoke up in favour of Muslims and Islamic law he was virtually put on trial by the British press. All this does not demonstrate a fair and balanced exercise of free speech in search of truth, but rather seems to perform the function of propaganda. Above all, it has the effect of isolating a section of Western society – the Muslim minority.

The 'Us and Them' Debate

Stuart Hall argues that when he uses the term 'the West and the rest', by the term 'the West' he means a *historical*, not a geographic, construct.⁴ Although

³ Nahid Kabir, 'What does it mean to be un-Australian?: Views of Australian Muslim students in 2006', *People and Place*, 15/1 (2007): 62–79; Nahid Kabir, 'Media is one-sided in Australia: The Muslim youth perspective', *Journal of Children and Media*, 2/3 (2008): 267–81; Nahid Kabir, 'A study of Australian Muslim youth identity: The Melbourne case', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 31/2 (2011): 243–58; Nahid Afrose Kabir, *Young British Muslims: Identity, Culture, Politics and the Media* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Nahid Afrose Kabir, *Young American Muslims: Dynamics of Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

⁴ Stuart Hall, 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power', in Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis (eds), *Development: A Cultural Studies Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002),

Hall does not specifically mention the placement of Muslims in his classification of the 'West and the rest', he points to the West as a unified entity in spite of the cultural differences among the Western nations. 'The West' is presented as enlightened, modern, developed, moral and desirable, while the 'non-West' is construed as underdeveloped, flawed and undesirable. This is the global image Edward Said has strongly argued against. His views on Orientalism are especially well known.⁵ Said believes the West has developed an Orientalist discourse in order to position itself as civilised and superior, and with this to empower itself and to justify its colonisation of the Orient ('the rest'). In other words, the Orientalist discourse, which is used to define the other, is an ideological exercise of power. Thus classifying Muslims and Islam as 'Oriental', in Said's mind, amounts to the exercise of that kind of power by which the subjugation of the defective other is rationalised. Demeaning Oriental otherness is an integral part of the 'us and them' style of debate and represents a kind of intellectual assault.

In contemporary times, the dichotomy between the West and the rest, or between the enlightened West and the Oriental other, has focused strongly on Muslims and Islam – in particular those Muslims existing in close proximity and increasingly closely interacting with the West. This has thrown the differences into even sharper relief. In *Covering Islam*, Edward Said observes that there are many troubling incidents involving the Muslim world, such as the killing of 240 American marines by a Muslim group in Lebanon in 1983, the Lockerbie bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 in 1988, Khomeini's *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie in 1989 and many others.⁶ When the Western mass media report on these events it is under the generalising rubric of 'Islam' or 'Muslims', used either as explanation or outright condemnation, and is part of the ideological attack on the Islamic world.⁷ Such generalisations shore up the notion of a profound opposition – almost of a Huntingtonian kind – of the Islamic world towards the West.

In the Australian context, Poynting, Noble, Tabar and Collins note that the Australian newspaper reportage on anything even remotely involving Muslims (from gang rapes, to refugees arriving as boat people and therefore being 'queue jumpers', to the 9/11 attacks in America) naturalises 'the dangerous Otherness

pp. 57–8.

⁵ Edward Said, 'Orientalism', in Schech and Haggis, *Development: A Cultural Studies Reader*, pp. 51–2; see also Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1995).

⁶ Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (rev. edn, New York: Penguin, 1997).

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. ix–xvi.

Figure 7.1 Letterbox bombing
Source: *Voice News*, 314, 19–26 June 2004, p. 1. Used with permission.

The headline ‘Letterbox Bombing...’ side by side with the Muslim image suggests a connection between the two completely unrelated reports.

of those of Arabic-speaking, Middle Eastern or Muslim background'.⁸ This in particular can be observed by the way some print media have been othering Muslims through published images and blaring headlines, as I have explained elsewhere.⁹ For example, when news and images relating to Muslims are accompanied by a sensationalist and completely unrelated headline, it can only be considered to be prejudicial (see Figure 7.1).¹⁰

In the context of the United Kingdom, Elizabeth Poole pointed out that during the Salman Rushdie affair in 1989, when Ayatollah Khomeini declared a *fatwa* against Rushdie calling for his assassination, the outraged liberal establishment in Britain and beyond defended Rushdie's right to freedom of speech.¹¹ However, this freedom did not seem to be extended to Muslims to voice their opposition to Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*, which blasphemously insulted the Prophet Muhammad and his family. The wider community condemned British Muslims for their violent protests against the Indian-born British author in which they burned copies of *The Satanic Verses*. Subsequently, there was a flood of accounts of the allegedly irrational, fanatical, intolerant Muslim persona, and calls for enforcing Muslims' assimilation emerged in British academic, media and political discourse.¹² Arguably, the burning of books was highly illiberal and in itself a denial of free speech. A peaceful Muslim rally against Salman Rushdie's book would have appeared more democratic and respectful of the right to free speech. In any case it was evident that the British media failed to show any sympathy for the Muslims' sentiment that the author had gravely offended their culture and religion.

In the United States context, Jack Shaheen observed that the media, in reporting on Timothy McVeigh's terrorist attack, did not mention that his ethnic and religious background was Irish Catholic.¹³ On 19 April 1995 Timothy McVeigh bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people. Characteristically, at first the attack was blamed on

⁸ Scott Poynting, Greg Noble, Paul Tabar and Jock Collins, *Bin Laden in the Suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other* (Sydney: Sydney Institute of Criminology, 2004), p. 52.

⁹ Nahid Kabir, 'Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Media, 2001–2005', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 26/3 (2006): 313–28.

¹⁰ See also *ibid.*, p. 319.

¹¹ Elizabeth Poole, *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims* (London: Tauris, 2002), p. 136.

¹² Tariq Modood, 'Muslims and the Politics of Difference', in Peter Hopkins and Richard Gale (eds), *Muslims in Britain: Race, Place and Identities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 193–209; see p. 204.

¹³ Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (DVD, Northampton MA: Media Education Foundation, 2006).

Middle Eastern suspects in news broadcasts, such as those on the ABC and CBS channels. Smith noted that, since the 9/11 Twin Towers attacks, American newspaper images 'from fools and knaves to oil-rich sheikhs with beards and huge bellies (and harem girls in the background) ... [have now] evolved into machine-gun-toting terrorists and suicide bombers'.¹⁴ However, in Major Nidal Malik Hasan's case, for instance, much play was made of his being Muslim.

In the following I will select some examples of news reporting from Australia, Britain and America which in my mind clearly show Islamophobic tendencies, as well as some reactions from young Muslims. As I analyse my observations of some selected news media, I am aware that sensationalist news copy sells well. For commercial reasons, some news media may endorse certain strategies to capture readers' attention.¹⁵ But free speech also brings responsibility. Since the September 11, 2001 Twin Towers attacks and the 7 July 2005 London bombings, some people (including Muslims) have become anxious about news relating to Muslims. This should put a duty on the media to be truthful and balanced. Media provide a mirror to reality; but sometimes, due to lack of cultural sensitivity or for commercial reasons, they do provide incorrect or distorted information feeding this anxiety and bias. For example, on earlier occasions, media sources have characterised honour killings and female genital cutting (circumcision) as routine Islamic practices.¹⁶ When such negative news involving Muslims and Islam emerge in the mass media the 'us' and 'them' rhetoric is further reinforced and a clear dichotomy established. The 'West' is shown as morally and culturally superior to the 'rest'. For example, after the 9/11 attacks in New York and the subsequent 'war on terror' campaign, some media organisations continually used terms such as 'the civilised world', 'the democratic world', 'the free world', 'global terrorism' and 'fighting back',¹⁷ and thereby portrayed the 'West' as the best and the 'rest' (the Muslim world) as unfree and uncivilised.¹⁸ All this is keenly felt by the young Muslims I interviewed in three countries.

However, it is fair to say that not all newspapers take the same approach. For example, on certain events (such as the Cronulla riots in Sydney in December 2005) the Fairfax newspaper group in papers such as *Sydney Morning Herald* has

¹⁴ Jane I. Smith, *Islam in America* (2nd edn, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 189.

¹⁵ Eoin Devereux, *Understanding the Media* (London: Sage, 2003), pp. 62–5.

¹⁶ Kabir, 'Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Media, 2001–2005', pp. 314–5; Kabir, *Young British Muslims*, pp. 137 and 176.

¹⁷ Devereux, *Understanding the Media*, p. 97.

¹⁸ Kabir, 'Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Media 2001–2005', pp. 315–17.

taken a more conciliatory approach (see Figure 7.2), unlike Rupert Murdoch's newspapers (News Corporation, *The Australian*). Similarly, in the UK the Murdoch newspapers *The Times* and *The Sun*, although the former is a broadsheet and the latter a tabloid, maintained an Islamophobic stance on the question of *sharia* law in their headlines and rhetoric.¹⁹ In the USA the Murdoch press tabloid *New York Post* maintained a similar stance to the non-Murdoch press such as the *New York Times* and the tabloid *Daily Post* (New York) on the Nidal Hasan shooting incident. In these cases it is reasonable to infer that since certain news sells well, newspapers attempt to capture readers through sensationalist content, headlines and images, but in the process arguably tend to misuse their press freedom to sell copy.

Dilemmas of Free Speech in Australia

In 2011 the Australian Muslim population numbered 476,300, which is about 2.2 per cent of the total national population.²⁰ By and large, Muslims believe they have been unfairly targeted by some media and politicians under the aegis of free speech, despite the fact that they constitute a very small minority. The attention Muslims receive in the media is disproportional to their number or influence – and usually negative. In this context I will discuss one incident which rather typically shows the selective use of free speech by the media and some politicians and how this contributes to the poor image Muslims and Islam have in Australia.

On 4 December 2005 a fight between three surf lifesavers and a group of four young men of Lebanese descent occurred at Cronulla Beach in Sydney. The lifesavers had allegedly insulted the Lebanese Australians by saying that 'Lebs can't swim.'²¹ Conversely, some Lebanese Australians who had come to the beach previously had verbally abused young females with insults like 'you're a slut', 'you Aussie slut', 'you should be raped.'²² Following the fight, the popular

¹⁹ *The Guardian* had maintained a relatively balanced stance during the Archbishop of Canterbury and *sharia* debate in February 2008. See Kabir, *Young British Muslims*, pp. 176–7.

²⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2071.0–Reflecting a Nation: Stories from the 2011 Census, 2012–2013* (2011), <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features902012–2013> (accessed 11 March 2013).

²¹ Scott Poynting, 'What caused the Cronulla riot?', *Race and Class*, 48/1 (2006), p. 86.

²² Ryan Barclay and Peter West, 'Racism or patriotism? An eyewitness account of the Cronulla demonstration of 11 December 2005', *People and Place*, 14/1 (2006), p. 77.

commercial media, notably the tabloids and talkback radio, commenting on the incident fanned the flames. On 11 December 2005 about 5,000 young Australians, many draped in Australian flags, converged on Sydney's Cronulla Beach, singing 'Waltzing Matilda' and 'Advance Australia Fair' and chanting insulting and crude slogans such as 'kill the Lebs', 'get the wogs off the beach' and much worse.²³ Subsequently, a group of Lebanese Australians armed with guns, machetes, baseball bats, knives, chains and iron bars arrived at a popular park and launched a reprisal attack by smashing shops and cars and threatening people who got in their way.²⁴ Finally, one of the youths took a flag from a local Returned and Services League of Australia Club and publicly burnt it.

Some academics believe that a media 'beat-up' was largely to blame for escalating the affair. Poynting mentions the tabloid *The Daily Telegraph* and the talkback radio programmes, Steve Price's 2UE and Alan Jones' 2GB, for provoking anti-Arab and anti-Islamic sentiments.²⁵ In 2006 a comprehensive New South Wales Police report, *Strike Force Neil*, confirmed that the 2GB talkback radio programme between 5 and 9 December 2005 had incited the 'Cronulla riots' that occurred from 11 to 13 December 2005 through its sensationalist comments against Lebanese Australians.²⁶ ABC's Media Watch reported that 2GB talkback host Alan Jones on 7 December had put this on air:

It seems the police and the council are impotent here. All rhetoric, no action. My suggestion is to invite one of the biker gangs to be present in numbers at Cronulla railway station when these Lebanese thugs arrive ... It'd be worth the price of admission to watch these cowards scurry back onto the train for the return trip to their lairs ... Australians old and new shouldn't have to put up with this scum.²⁷

I have previously argued that in the aftermath of the Cronulla riots the reputable broadsheet paper *The Australian* in its reporting from 12 to 18 December

²³ Caroline Overington and Drew Warne-Smith, 'Countdown to conflict', *The Weekend Australian*, 17–18 December 2005, p. 20.

²⁴ Poynting, 'What caused the Cronulla riot?', p. 90; Erich Kolig and Nahid Kabir, 'Not friend, not foe: The rocky road of enfranchisement of Muslims into multicultural nationhood in Australia and New Zealand', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 26/3 (2008), p. 279.

²⁵ Poynting, 'What caused the Cronulla riot?', p. 90.

²⁶ New South Wales Police, *Strike Force Neil, Cronulla Riots, Review of the Police Response: Media Component* (2006), <http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/ep38cronulla3.pdf> (accessed 24 April 2013).

²⁷ Media Watch, 'Front page – Jones and Cronulla', *ABC*, 20 February 2006, <http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s1574155.htm> (accessed 24 April 2013).

2005 also took the side of the Anglo-Australians.²⁸ Its headlines, images, news reports and opinion pieces referred to the Lebanese-descended youths not as Australians or Lebanese Australians but as Muslims or Lebanese Muslims – in other words, radically othering them as well as adding to the poor reputation of the label 'Muslim'. In addition to that, the then Prime Minister, John Howard, declared 'We're not a bunch of racists',²⁹ thereby reinforcing the divide between 'we' the West (i.e. Anglo-Australians) as 'civilised' people and Muslim barbarians regardless of the fact that they also are Australians. As some Australian media exercised their right to speak freely, thus inciting the riots and taking the side of the Anglo-Australian rioters, some participants in my study saw quite clearly the one-sidedness of the media and their use of 'free speech'. Sara (female, Australian-Lebanese) commented on the biased reporting practices of the media:

They're [Anglo-Australians and the media] always blaming us on [sic] everything and if someone, like if any Muslim does anything, they straight away put it in on the news, like in the newspaper, but if any Australian does it they don't put it, they straight away forget about it.³⁰

This represents a widespread perception among the young Muslims I interviewed.

However, some newspapers were more balanced. For example, the cartoon published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* was critical of the dominant Anglo-Australian perspective (Figure 7.2). At the Liberal Party launch on 28 October 2001, Prime Minister John Howard stated: 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.' It was a federal election pledge, but some critics in the media considered it a racist slogan that was intended to deter the asylum seekers, who were mostly Muslims.³¹ Such rare cases as the cartoon show that sometimes the boundary between 'us' (the West) and 'them' can be blurred by being critical of the West. But in my study I found

²⁸ Nahid Kabir, 'The Cronulla Riot: How One Newspaper Represented the Event', in B. Curtis, S. Matthewman and T. McIntosh (eds), *Public Sociologies: Lessons and Trans-Tasman Comparisons*. TASA/SAANZ Conference (Auckland: Department of Sociology, University of Auckland, 2007), <http://www.tasa.org.au/conferences/conferencepapers07/papers/268.pdf> (accessed 24 April 2013).

²⁹ Ibid. See also "'We're not a bunch of racists", PM says', *The Australian*, 13 December 2005, p. 4.

³⁰ Interview, Sydney, 2006.

³¹ Nahid Kabir, *Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 295–395; see also Poynting et al., *Bin Laden in the Suburbs*, p. 178.

such exceptions not only to be very rare but sometimes also to the disadvantage of the proposer.



Figure 7.2 We shall determine who comes to our suburb ...

Courtesy: Cartoon by Alan Moir, Sydney Morning Herald, 14 December 2005

The cartoon is critical of the aggressive posture of the Anglo-Australians. It is a reminder of former Prime Minister John Howard's election pledge in 2001 to repel asylum seekers from Australian shores.

Britain: Archbishop Dr Rowan Williams' Lecture

Between 2001 and 2011 the Muslim population in the United Kingdom rose from 1.5 million to 2.7 million, which was an increase from 3 per cent to 4.8 per cent of the total population.³² Yet, the rule of the 'West and the rest', separating out the Muslim minority, also applies. As the following case in my view clearly shows, if members of the dominant society exercise free speech in favour of the Muslim minority, they are subjected to disapproval and suffer a loss of standing.

³² Office for National Statistics, '2011 Census: Key Statistics for England and Wales, March 2011', <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/stb-2011-census-key-statistics-for-england-and-wales.html#tab---Religion> (accessed 6 March 2013).

On 7 February 2008 (former) Anglican Archbishop Dr Rowan Williams suggested that one way to accommodate Muslims in the United Kingdom and ameliorate their alienation would be to acknowledge (some version of) *sharia* law and give it a status equal to British law.³³ He seems to have placed emphasis primarily on the incorporation of so-called private law or Islamic family law into British law. Dr Williams did not directly refer to Islamic criminal law (*hudud*). Yet he was immediately subjected to what seems to me a trial by the media. The British press associated Islam with the controversial imam Abu Hamza al-Masri and with images of Muslim women wearing the *burqa*, both highly visible and negative symbols. Also the Quran was brought into the debate in a negative way. Abu Hamza al-Masri, (former) imam of the Finsbury Park Mosque, was known as the 'hook imam' because the media liked to show images of the one-eyed man with his metallic hooked hand prominently exposed – in an obvious attempt to imply his sinister character. In 2005 Abu Hamza was convicted of 16 offences relating to terrorism.³⁴ It is clear that associating his image with *sharia* has had a very damaging effect. (Then) Prime Minister Gordon Brown's office, refuting the archbishop's call, commented: 'We think British law should be based on British values and determined by the British Parliament.'³⁵ Strictly speaking this was not quite a full description of British law. One of my interviewees, Sarfaraz (male, Bangladeshi British), thought that some elements of *sharia* law already existed in British finance:

When the current Prime Minister [Gordon Brown] was a Chancellor of [the] Exchequer, he himself brought in legislation which facilitated Islamic financial transactions to be enacted, but this is because the country felt that there is an interest here, there is a tremendous amount of money floating around in the world investment market which is Islamic orientated and Britain can potentially become a major centre for some of those investments to be processed. Fair enough, so here is a way in which we are taking values of the *Sharia* and using them to benefit everybody. It's a win-win situation.³⁶

³³ Rowan Williams, 'Archbishop's lecture – civil and religious law in England: A religious perspective' (2008), <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1137> (accessed 24 April 2013).

³⁴ This is discussed in detail in Kabir, *Young British Muslims*, pp. 112–42.

³⁵ 'Muslims in Britain should be able to live under sharia, says top judge', *Daily Express*, 4 July 2008, p. 19.

³⁶ Interview, Leicester, 2008.

Some academics have addressed the feasibility of incorporating *sharia* family law within the multicultural framework of Western democratic countries. Modood noted that multicultural citizens' relation to the state is broad enough to accommodate Dr Williams' view because the archbishop made it 'quite clear that this was not a matter of separate or parallel legal systems, for the *sharia* tribunals would not be able to go against UK laws, both on specific areas or cases and on individual and human rights in general'.³⁷ The archbishop knew that the decision to go to the *sharia* tribunal was voluntary for Muslims. Kolig observed that in some liberal democracies *sharia* jurisdiction may be involved to settle family matters such as inheritance, divorce settlements, financial matters and family disputes.³⁸ Both Modood and Kolig recognise that Muslim women may remain disadvantaged when it comes to gender equality. Modood emphasises that to promote multicultural integration and citizenship some parts of Islamic family law should be accommodated within British law, just as the Jewish family law, *Beth Din*, has been incorporated within British law.³⁹ Kolig anticipates, however, that if certain elements of *sharia* are incorporated in liberal democratic countries Muslims may be entitled to demand greater restraint in journalistic freedom.⁴⁰

John Milbank pointed out that 'the [British] popular press suggested that the Archbishop was clearly mad' and 'accused him of extreme political naivety, obscurity, and misplaced academicism'.⁴¹ I found, by and large, that the British press's (*The Times* and *The Sun*, 8 February 2008) representation of Dr Williams' views evoked echoes of anti-Muslim bias. *The Times* headlined its front page 'Archbishop argues for Islamic law in Britain'. It reported that there were nearly 1.6 million Muslims in Britain, representing 2.7 per cent of the total population; it noted that so-called *sharia* courts did exist (in fact they are tribunals with limited legal standing) and that some *sharia* elements had been incorporated into financial dealings. However, the main thrust was that 'the Archbishop of Canterbury came under fierce attack from the government, his own Church and other religions'⁴² for proposing the adoption of parts of *sharia*; and it reported

³⁷ Tariq Modood, 'Multicultural Citizenship and the Shari'a Controversy in Britain', in Rex Ahdar and Nicholas Aroney (eds), *Shari'a in the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 36.

³⁸ Erich Kolig, 'To Shari'atize or Not to Shari'atize: Islamic and Secular Law in Liberal Democratic Society', in Ahdar and Aroney, *Shari'a in the West*, pp. 271–2.

³⁹ Modood, 'Multicultural Citizenship', p. 38.

⁴⁰ Kolig, 'To Shari'atize or Not to Shari'atize', pp. 274–5.

⁴¹ John Milbank, 'The Archbishop of Canterbury: The Man and the Theology behind the Shari'a Lecture', in Ahdar and Aroney, *Shari'a in the West*, pp. 43–5.

⁴² 'Archbishop argues for Islamic law in Britain', *The Times*, 8 February 2008, pp. 1 and 4.

criticisms of the archbishop made by both Muslims and non-Muslims. For example, it quoted the controversial Pakistani-born Bishop of Rochester, Dr Michael Nazir-Ali, who a few weeks earlier had claimed that parts of Britain were no-go areas for non-Muslims: 'English law is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition and our notions of human freedoms derive from that tradition. It would be impossible to introduce a tradition like *sharia* into the corpus without fundamentally affecting its integrity.'⁴³

Furthermore, *The Times*, under its headline 'From Leyton to Dewsbury – Sharia courts are already settling disputes', informed its readers of the definition of *sharia* and of the vulnerability of women in times of divorce and adultery (*zina*), which in Pakistan carries the death penalty. It also reported that unofficial [*sharia*] courts run by the Sharia Council 'hear cases across the country from Leyton in East London to Dewsbury in Yorkshire'.⁴⁴ It then discussed an isolated criminal case of a Somali youth which was resolved by the Sharia Council. It reported that a group of Somali youth was arrested on suspicion of stabbing another Somali teenager. The victim's family told the police it would be settled out of court and the suspects were released on bail. A hearing was allegedly held, and Somali elders decided that the assailants should compensate the victim. *The Times* then warned: 'Sharia cannot trump the basic principles of English law. Muslims can decide to have disputes settled according to Sharia in private arbitration, but cannot ignore or abandon the human rights and responsibilities entrenched in the laws of this country.'⁴⁵ It implied that British Muslims were the 'other' and that *sharia* was not only inappropriate but also inferior. All this goes beyond mere reporting and takes the liberty of voicing opinion freely, while voices in favour of *sharia* were not given any space in the media.

Through images and discussions in the same issue, *The Times* further reinforced the category of the 'Muslim other'. For example, on page 4 there was a photograph of the Quran with the caption 'Sharia rulings cannot trump the basic fundamental principles of English law'; then there was a cartoon that stated, 'Shoplifters will have their hands cut off'; and, finally, there was the image and story of the radical imam Abu Hamza, described as serving a seven-year prison term for inciting his followers to kill non-Muslims. Implicating him in the debate on *sharia* appeared to suggest that Muslims and their law pose an inordinate threat to Britain. In its editorial, *The Times* stated:

⁴³ 'Archbishop advocates Islamic law for Britain', *The Times*, 8 February 2008, p. 4.

⁴⁴ 'From Leyton to Dewsbury – Sharia courts are already settling disputes', *The Times*, 8 February, p.4.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

People of many faiths – Jews, Hindus, Sikhs – have settled happily in Britain without demanding a new set of laws for themselves. It would be more useful to ask how to help more Muslims to integrate successfully into what is a tolerant culture, than to urge a change in that culture to suit a notion that some parts of the Muslim community feel more comfortable with ... this is an act of appeasement. It threatens to undermine the practice of all faiths in Britain and the strength of our parliamentary democracy.⁴⁶

The editorial recommends that Muslims should adopt a ‘tolerant culture’ and integrate into ‘our parliamentary democracy’, thus upholding the propagandist rhetoric of the ‘superior civilisation’.

The tabloid newspaper *The Sun* of 8 January 2008 went even further in sensationalising the news. Its front page was headed ‘What a burkha [sic]’, with photographs showing Archbishop Williams and a woman wearing the *burqa* making the victory sign. Next to her, visually establishing a connection, was a photograph of the radical Muslim cleric Abu Hamza al-Masri with the caption ‘Hamza sent to America.’⁴⁷ On the next page, under the headline ‘Hook slung: hate preacher faces 99 years in US prison’, *The Sun* printed the full story of Sheikh Abu Hamza, including a photograph showing him with his hooked prosthesis. Next to this page was a large picture of a topless 20-year-old woman. It is difficult to imagine that this was not meant as a calculated insult to Muslims and their well-known and doctrinally prescribed sense of modesty.

Tabloid newspapers such as *The Sun* regularly publish images of half-naked women to attract more advertising. But, at a glance, I found the Muslim image of Abu Hamza had been juxtaposed in a calculated way to contrast with the model’s nudity. It is difficult not to understand the two contrasting photos facing each other as pointing out that ‘we’, the Westerners, are liberated people and ‘they’, the Muslims, are backward and criminals.

In its editorial, entitled ‘Dangerous rant’, *The Sun* suggested that the archbishop was unfit for his office, and asked, ‘Why doesn’t he condemn “honour” killings and forced marriages?’ Other comments included ‘Gordon Brown rightly lost no time in slapping down Williams.’ Then the provocative question was posed: ‘Why is our Archbishop promoting a law under which women are stoned to death and shoplifters barbarically dismembered?’⁴⁸ Pages 8–9, pursuing this story, showed some loaded images – such as the picture of a bus destroyed in

⁴⁶ ‘Church in a state: The Archbishop of Canterbury has made a grave mistake’, Editorial, *The Times*, 8 February 2008, p. 16.

⁴⁷ ‘What a burkha’, *The Sun*, 8 February 2008, p. 1.

⁴⁸ ‘Dangerous rant’, Editorial, *The Sun*, 8 February 2008, p. 8.

the 7/7 London bombings, the flogging of a Muslim man (who allegedly was later hanged) and a man with an amputated hand following a *sharia* verdict. Finally, on the same pages *The Sun* printed the headline: 'Archbishop says UK must accept Islamic Sharia law. He claims it's "unavoidable". His outburst is a ... victory for terrorism'. *The Sun* was quick in its fear-mongering campaign, saying that the archbishop's statement on the acceptance of *sharia* law will definitely lead to terrorism. It selectively failed to remind its readers that this recognition of *sharia* presumably was meant only to involve family law.

The Muslim–Christian Dichotomy in the American Press

The Pew Research Center suggests that in 2011 there were 2.75 million Muslims living in the United States, which amounts to 0.88 per cent of the total US population.⁴⁹ In some American media the dichotomous theme of 'the West' and 'the rest' is constantly reproduced and reinforced by emphatically connecting Islam with violence – even more so after 9/11.

On 5 November 2009 Major Nidal Malik Hasan, a US Army psychiatrist, American-born of Palestinian-Muslim background, who had counselled soldiers involved in foreign wars, opened fire with two handguns on fellow soldiers at Fort Hood in Texas. In this attack the Iraq War veteran killed 13 soldiers and wounded 30 others. The next day another shooting took place in Orlando, Florida. An engineer, Jason Rodriguez, an unemployed former office worker, opened fire in his old office, killing one person and injuring five others. When asked 'Why did you do it?' Rodriguez replied, 'Because they left me to rot'.⁵⁰ In *The New York Times* report, Rodriguez was portrayed as an angry man, but his ethnicity and religion were not mentioned – in contrast to Major Hasan, whose Muslimness was emphatically underlined in virtually all reports and in fact portrayed as his motivation. That the triggering cause may have been his traumatic war experience did not enter the picture. Also, the media reporting (both in print and electronic media) on Rodriguez lasted only a day, unlike Hasan's story which remained a front-page item for almost a week.

On 28 March 2010 nine members of a 'doomsday' Christian militia group in Michigan named Hutaree were charged with conspiring to kill a police officer and then attack the funeral with bombs in the hope of starting an uprising against

⁴⁹ Pew Research Center, *Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism* (Washington DC: Pew Research Center, 2011), p. 20.

⁵⁰ 'Gunman kills 1 and wounds 5 at Florida office', *The New York Times*, 7 November 2009, p. 9.

the government. Hutaree's belief system prophesies the end of the world: 'When the time comes for those without enough faith, they will fall to the Anti-Christ's doctrine. And it will make perfect sense to the whole world; even the elect.'⁵¹ An online video showed men armed with rifles, dressed in camouflage and wearing armbands with the Hutaree insignia (a red and brown cross flanked by diagonal brown stripes). It also showed gunmen practising shooting from behind a car, and conducting military manoeuvres in a wooded area. The Hutaree incident was selectively ignored by the American media. This shows clearly how the print media shaped the Fort Hood shooting incident into an 'us' and 'them' rhetoric and preferred to overlook the Hutaree Christianity-inspired doomsday conspiracy.

As mentioned earlier, sensational news sells well. News Corporation (Murdoch) news media tend to sensationalize coverage on Muslim issues in Britain and the USA.⁵² On 1 May 2010 Pakistani-American Faisal Shahzad attempted to explode a bomb in New York's Times Square. Apparently, the person who alerted the police of the failed Times Square bomb plot was Alioune Niass, a Muslim immigrant from Senegal. But Niass did not receive mainstream media attention.⁵³ The overall Islamophobic media culture⁵⁴ seems to have encouraged the cartoon published in a Muslim newspaper (Figure 7.3).⁵⁵ It depicts the Muslim perspective that any Muslim-related bad news will receive extensive mainstream US media coverage while good news involving Muslims does not get any attention.

⁵¹ '9 alleged militia members indicted for plotting to kill police', *The Blade* (Toledo, OH), 29 March 2010.

⁵² Devereux, *Understanding the Media*, pp. 62–6.

⁵³ 'Muslim vendor gets no credit in helping to foil Times Square Bomb plot', 6 May 2010, *Democracy Now*, http://www.democracynow.org/2010/5/6/muslim_vendor_gets_no_credit_in (accessed 1 April 2014).

⁵⁴ See, for example, Ahmadullah Siddiqi, 'Islam, Muslims and the American Media', in Amber Haque (ed.), *Muslims and Islamization in North America: Problems and Prospects* (Beltsville MD: Amana, 1999), pp. 203–29, see p. 210; Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*; Smith, *Islam in America*, p. 190; and Saud Joseph, Benjamin D'Harlingue and Alvin Ka Hin Wong, 'Arab Americans and Muslim Americans in the *New York Times*, Before and After 9/11', in Amaney Jamal and Nadine Baber (eds), *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008), pp. 229–75; see pp. 234–5.

⁵⁵ See Kabir, *Young American Muslims*, p. 134.

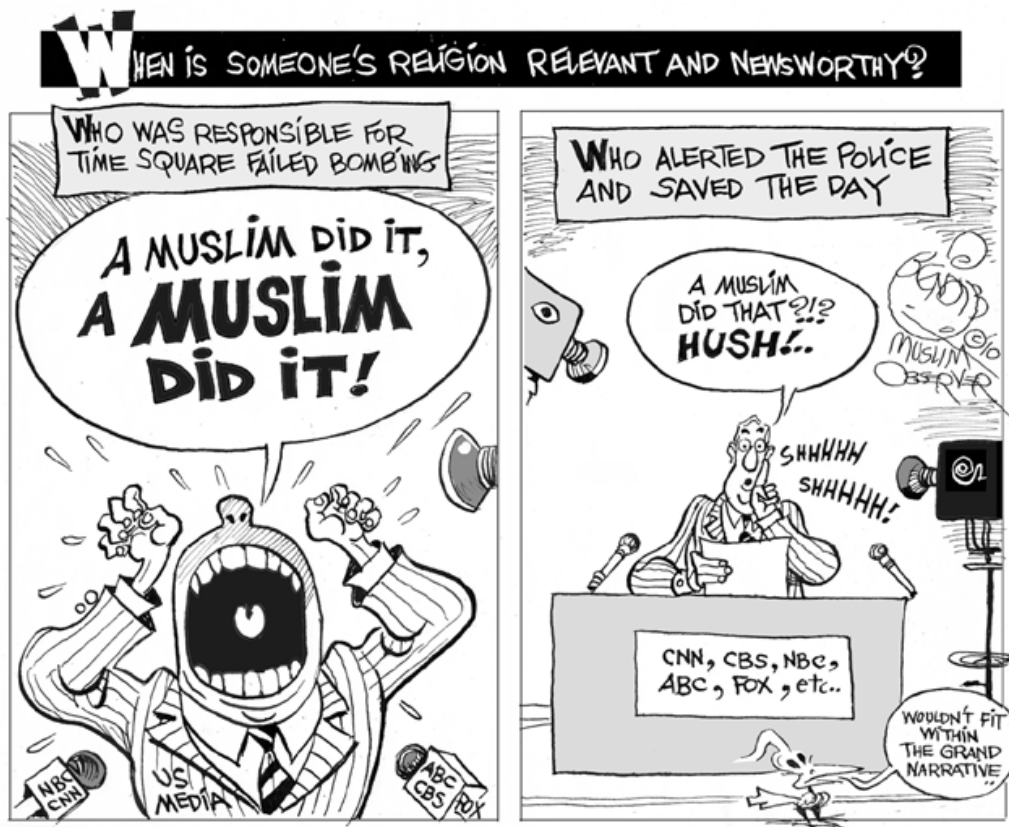


Figure 7.3 When is someone's religion relevant and newsworthy?

Source: *The Muslim Observer*, 16 May 2010. Copyright Khalil Bendib,
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Fort Hood Incident

The interviewees in my subsequent study did not comment on whether Major Nidal Hasan was a good or bad person, but they noted the agenda of the media when an incident that is related to Muslims is mentioned. For example, Ali (male, Egyptian-American) said: 'Yeah, Fort Hood, once the guy did it they blamed Islam automatically but if a Christian guy does it they blame him but not the religion, so that just gets me pissed off.'⁵⁶ Nadira (female, Bangladeshi-American) said:

A few days ago the guy, he shot down 13 people at Fort Hood. What he did was very bad, I don't think it's right to kill people, but one of the news anchors said that it was the worst terrorist attack since 9/11 and I didn't agree with that. Cos a few years back in Virginia Tech ... this Asian man he shot down all those people,

⁵⁶ Interview, New York, 2010.

that was a terrorist attack too, but nobody labelled it as a terrorist attack because it wasn't done by a Muslim. They think only Muslims do terrorist attacks and I don't believe that – everybody from different cultures does that.⁵⁷

The two respondents made further observations on the media reports. Ali spoke of how Islam was emphasised in a negative manner after the Fort Hood incident, while Nadira recalled the Virginia Tech massacre on 16 April 2007 when a non-Muslim student, Seung-Hui Cho, killed 32 people and injured many others on the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg before committing suicide. In this case the media did not emphasise either the shooter's ethnicity or his religion.

It is characteristic how the broadsheet paper *The New York Times* and the tabloid newspapers *The Daily News* and *The New York Post* made the Fort Hood tragedy a Muslim issue.⁵⁸ On its first day of reporting, *The New York Times* did not include the word 'Muslim' in its headline, but its content created the reasonable suspicion that Major Hasan was a 'Muslim'. It reported:

In one posting on the Web site Scribd [sic], a man named Nidal Hasan compared the heroism of a soldier who throws himself on a grenade to protect fellow soldiers to suicide bombers who sacrifice themselves to protect Muslims ... It could not be confirmed [by the FBI], however, that the writer was Major Hasan.⁵⁹

The next day, *The New York Times* confirmed that the Fort Hood incident was an act perpetrated by a Muslim. It reported that Nidal Hasan was 'An American-born Muslim of Palestinian descent, he was deeply dismayed by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but proud of his Army job. He wore Middle Eastern clothes to the convenience store and his battle fatigues to the mosque.'⁶⁰ Furthermore, 'He [Hasan] was trained to counsel troubled soldiers, but bottled up his own distress about deploying.'⁶¹ The article also reported that the Army Chief of Staff, General George Casey, had expressed concerns about a possible backlash against Muslims.

⁵⁷ Interview, New York, 2010.

⁵⁸ This is discussed in further detail in Kabir, *Young American Muslims*, pp. 114–47.

⁵⁹ 'Told of war horror, gunman feared deployment', *The New York Times*, 6 November 2009, pp. 1, 16.

⁶⁰ 'Details trickle out as army tests sole-killer theory', *The New York Times*, 7 November 2009, p. 1.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Over the next few days *The New York Times* continued reporting on Major Hasan, and in one instance he was pictured wearing Middle Eastern garments and a *topi* (Muslim cap) at a convenience store during the morning of his shooting rampage. On 10 November 2009 *The New York Times* published five letters, one of which specifically labelled Islam as oppressive and murderous:

...It is true that personal demons (delusion, rage and so on) are responsible for many of these incidents. It is also true that there are ideologies, including Communism, fascism, and yes, strains of Islam, that intellectually justify and even promote oppression and murder to achieve prescribed [sic] ends....⁶²

The last item in this issue was an opinion by David Brooks, who was critical of the army's 'political correctness'. Brooks pointed out that on the fringes of the Muslim world some Muslims see 'a war between Islam on the one side and Christianity and Judaism on the other ... They are the ones who go into the crowded rooms, shout "Allahu Akbar", or "God is great", and then start murdering.'⁶³ Brooks realised that for the moment political correctness in the army was acceptable because otherwise Muslims might be singled out, but if this attitude continued then it would encourage self-radicalisation by 'individual[s] in the U.S. as much as by groups in Tehran, Gaza or Kandahar'.⁶⁴ The opinion piece obviously made the Fort Hood incident an Islamic issue, and suggested that both Israel and the USA were victims of 'Islamic terrorism'.

The first page of *The Daily News* carried a big headline, 'Face to face with evil'.⁶⁵ It was accompanied by a photograph of Nidal Malik Hasan. Another headline at the bottom of pages 6–7 read 'Hasan went to same mosque as 9/11 thugs', followed by a similar story reported in other newspapers, suggesting that Hasan may have been connected to the 9/11 terrorists. The next day the editorial in *The Daily News*, entitled 'Fanaticism hits home', commented:

It was increasingly apparent that the mass murder at Fort Hood by Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan is the latest in a line of attacks or attempted attacks by Americans radicalized by fanatical Muslim ideology ... That Hasan began his rampage ... by saying 'Allahu Akbar' or 'God is Great' is relevant to his crime ... Hasan is the latest dot to connect in a picture of home grown radicalization. Another dot is

⁶² Thomas M. Doran, 'As the nation grieves over Fort Hood', Letters to the Editor, *The New York Times*, 10 November 2009, p. 30.

⁶³ David Brooks, 'The rush to therapy', *The New York Times*, 10 November 2009, p. 31.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ 'Face to face with evil', *The Daily News*, 9 November 2009, p. 1.

Najibullah Zazi, the Denver man indicted here in an alleged bomb plot. Another dot is Tarek Mehanna, the Boston area man charged in a plot to kill, kidnap or maim people, including shoppers in U.S. malls. Another dot is Michael Finton, the 29-year-old convert to Islam arrested in an alleged plot to blow up a federal building in Illinois. Another dot is Hosam Maher Husein Smadi, the 19-year-old Jordanian arrested for hatching a similar plot against a Dallas skyscraper. Of late, there have been many such dots, and the U.S. ignores them at its peril. Perhaps the government did so in Hasan's case.⁶⁶

The editorial was critical of the intelligence authorities for not detecting that Hasan was inclined to Islamically motivated violence, even though Hasan had exchanged emails with Anwar al-Awlaki, an imam with terrorist connections. The editorial reiterated that Hasan was 'swept along by the perversion of Islam – repeat, perversion – that has justified violence'.⁶⁷

The front page headline of *The New York Post* on 9 November was: 'Fort Hood massacre, mosque of evil, killer's 9/11 terror link'. Although there was another headline relating to sports on top of the page, the words 'MOSQUE OF EVIL' were printed in a big, bold font so as to dominate the news of the day. It reported: 'Fort Hood fiend Dr. Nidal Malik Hasan (above) attended a Virginia mosque at the same time as the 9/11 hijackers – and authorities are now probing a possible link between the men, a source confirmed yesterday.' Another headline on page 5 read: 'Killer prayed at mosque with hijackers'. The overall presentation of the newspaper (with the headlines and photos) clearly and deliberately connected Islam with terrorism.

The next day, *The New York Post* printed a large image (covering almost half the page) of Major Hasan wearing an Islamic *topi* coming out of a convenience store.⁶⁸ The caption read 'TICKING TIME BOMB: Maj. Nidal Hasan in security-camera footage taken at a 7-Eleven just hours before his rampage'. Below the photograph was the headline 'Officials admit shrugging off gunman's e-mails to al-Qaeda'. It reported:

The FBI last night said Hasan – who faces a court martial – first turned up on its radar in December 2008. That's when 10 and 20 e-mails were sent by Hasan to several terror-related Islamic figures, including Anwar Aulaqi [sic], a radical imam

⁶⁶ 'Fanaticism hits home', Editorial, *The Daily News*, 10 November 2009, p. 22.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ 'Officials admit shrugging off gunman's e-mails to al-Qaeda', *The New York Post*, 10 November 2009, p. 5.

from Virginia who has been openly propagandizing for al Qaeda in Yemen and who had ties to several of the 9/11 hijackers.⁶⁹

In the same issue, through the discourse on the editorial and the letters page, the extremely judgmental reportage on Hasan continued. The editorial was critical of the FBI and army investigators who had earlier ignored Hasan's case. It was appreciative of Senator Joe Lieberman who publicly speculated about Hasan's link to terrorism. It remarked on Hasan's comments that he was a Muslim first and an American second, and pointed out that 'One doctor who studied with Hasan said that he "would frequently say he was a Muslim first and an American second"'.⁷⁰ This doctor and others reportedly complained to higher authorities, but no action was taken against Hasan.⁷¹ The editorial quoted one of Hasan's classmates: 'We questioned how somebody could take an oath of office and be an officer in the military and swear ... to defend America against all enemies, foreign and domestic,' with that attitude.⁷² In the letters to the editor column, out of 13 letters there was only one that defended Muslims: 'To blame the whole Islamic world for a terrorist attack by one individual is wrong.'⁷³ All the other letters were critical of Muslims and Islam in general.

One can argue that when Major Nidal shouted *Allahu Akbar* as he shot people, he revealed his identity as a Muslim. On that basis it is understandable that the media, deliberately or accidentally, provoked fear of the Muslim other. On the other hand, one can also argue that this horrendous incident was unduly presented in some US media as a problem intrinsic to Islam. The media generally did not engage in the debate that Major Nidal Hasan as a veteran of the Iraq war may have had psychological issues. Instead the media chose heavily to reflect on his religion. On 16 September 2013 the convert American Buddhist Aaron Alexis was involved in a shooting rampage at the Washington Navy Yard, killing 12 people. Some news media did mention his religion, but this aspect was not reported as prominently as in Nidal Hasan's case.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ 'Eyes wide shut', Editorial, *The New York Post*, 10 November 2009, p. 28.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Peter Manasse, 'When terror hits home, America's PC suicide', *The New York Post*, 10 November 2009, p. 28.

⁷⁴ Manny Fernandez, 'Distant violence shatters a Texas Buddhist group's quiet', *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/21/us/navy-yard-gunman-shatters-a-texas-buddhist-groups-quiet.html?_r=0 (accessed 27 September 2013).

Hutaree Group

It is interesting to compare this material with media reportage on the shadowy Hutaree group. Zahed (Muslim, male, African American) mentioned in an interview that members of this radical Christian militia group had been charged with plotting to kill police in Michigan and wage war on the federal government. Although ideologically Christian extremist in orientation, in the media they were not identified as Christians:

We have from, not just right wing TV like FOX National News, but even sometimes from local stations through ignorance misrepresent issues relating to the Muslim community or they use inaccurate nomenclature to describe us or news stories. Like for example, they'll call a Muslim like this guy, 'the Christmas day bomber'⁷⁵, and 'Islamic radical' or a 'Muslim terrorist', but then with the Christian militia group they won't even mention Christianity ... Hutaree, um, this is just one example.⁷⁶

Prior to Zahed's comments, I had not heard about the Hutaree. On 12 February 2011 I looked into the Factiva database (which has a wide-ranging collection of newspapers) and typed 'Hutaree' to see if it was associated with Christianity.⁷⁷ There were 753 news items from 28 March 2010 to 27 January 2011. I found that only 2 per cent of the American media included 'Christianity' in the headlines in their reporting. For example, *USA Today* reported:

Charges that nine members of a Michigan militia group were cooking up a crackpot plot to kill police officers and wage war on the United States should come as a surprise to no one. We've seen this kind of lunacy before, most tragically with the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City.

But the scheme is a reminder that well-armed people simmering with hatred are ever present and easily stoked to violence, that they're not easily typed by race or ethnicity, and that terrorism is sometimes homegrown.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ On 25 December 2009, the 23-year-old Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdul Mutallab attempted to blow up a Detroit-bound Northwest Airlines Flight 253 with explosives tucked in his underwear. Some media call him 'Christmas day bomber'. See 'Christmas Day bomber sentenced to life in prison', *CNN*, 17 February 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/02/16/justice/michigan-underwear-bomber-sentencing/> (accessed 1 April 2014).

⁷⁶ Interview, Michigan, 2010.

⁷⁷ See Kabir, *Young American Muslims*, pp. 136–40.

⁷⁸ 'Militia arrests show there's no stereotyping terrorism', *USA Today*, 31 March 2010, p. 10.

The New York Post compared the Hutaree militia with the 9/11 plotters and Fort Hood gunman, but declared that Hutaree was a lesser threat:

Alas, the Hutaree case is likely to boost the bogus narrative that such antigovernment militias represent fundamentally the same threat as Islamist terrorists ... But one need only contrast the wild fantasies indulged by the Hutaree kooks with the lethal calculation of killers like the 9/11 plotters or the Fort Hood gunman (not to mention their respective body counts) to understand the radical difference between the two threats. One consists of the dedicated agents of a ruthless, religion-driven ideology. The other: a few guys in the woods with guns. The Obama administration – Attorney General Eric Holder and Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, in particular – needs to keep its eyes on the ball.⁷⁹

In the 753 Factiva American news items, I found three columnists – Omar Sacirbey of *Houston Chronicle*, Leonard Pitts Jr of *The Virginian-Pilot* and *Ledger-Star*, and an anonymous writer in the *Christian Century* (Chicago) – who were critical of the media or mainstream Americans' selective use of the word 'terrorism' when describing any Muslim's act of violence. It shows that the demarcation between the 'West' and the 'rest' is somewhat flexible, and that some commentators are prepared to point out the failings of the media.

Conclusion

I have tried to demonstrate how free speech, or more specifically media freedom, operates in Australia, Britain and America when looked at from a Muslim point of view. My research among young Muslims has made that fairly clear. Even when looked at from an academic, Saidian-influenced position, this perspective loses nothing of its actuality. The specificity of angle does not alter substantially the character of the take. In addition, I have tried to elucidate the different dimensions of representation the mass media embrace in reporting about Muslims. But clearly the culture of news media reporting in relation to Muslims and Islamic issues is not universal. In times of crisis such as the Cronulla riots, some media adopted a position less unsympathetic to Muslims and their concerns (for example, the *Sydney Morning Herald*). But some media's

⁷⁹ 'Gunmen in the woods', *The New York Post*, 31 March 2010, p. 28, <http://nypost.com/2010/03/31/gunmen-in-the-woods/> (accessed 1 April 2014)

rhetoric can be seen to have been directly responsible for inflaming the situation and inciting the riots between Lebanese-descended Australians and Anglo-Australians at Cronulla Beach. (As I have pointed out, this has been confirmed by several independent commentators.) In Britain, (former) Archbishop Dr Rowan Williams was heavily criticised by the press and politicians because he spoke in favour of Muslim family law being incorporated into the British judicial system in recognition of the fact that devout Muslims were also part of the fabric of British society. Finally, in the United States, the representation of news on the Fort Hood massacre and the Christian Hutaree plot showed the selective spotlight thrown on Islam and Muslims by some media. Overall, in times of simmering conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims the dominant society's rhetoric tends to divide society into 'us' versus 'them', generating an unproductive and unfair intellectual stalemate. Under the aegis of freedom of the press and opinion, it draws heavily on a typification of Muslims and Islam as dangerous. By and large, from the point of view of the Muslim interviewees in this study, it seems that the rhetoric protected under freedom of speech is undermining Islam's and Muslims' reputation. The Islamophobic media stereotype remains effectively unchallenged. In contrast, when protests are voiced by Muslims they usually only add to the media's negative portrayal of Islam.



**Prophet
Muhammad^(s)**

**father of
Good Manners**

**Freedom of Speech
and Islam**

Edited by Erich Kolig

FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND ISLAM

Freedom of speech and expression is considered in the West a high public good and an important social value, underpinned by legislative and ethical norms. Its importance is not shared to the same extent by conservative and devout Muslims, who read Islamic doctrines in ways seemingly incompatible with Western notions of freedom of speech. Since the Salman Rushdie affair in the 1980s there has been growing recognition in the West that its cherished value of free speech and associated freedoms relating to arts, the press and media, literature, academia, critical satire etc. episodically clash with conservative Islamic values that limit this freedom for the sake of holding religious issues sacrosanct. Recent controversies – such as the Danish cartoons, the Charlie Hebdo affair, Quran burnings, and the internet film ‘Innocence of Muslims’ which have stirred violent reactions in the Muslim world – have made the West aware of the fact that Muslims’ religious sensitivities have to be taken into account in exercising traditional Western freedoms of speech.

Featuring contributions from experts across a spectrum of fields within Islamic studies, *Freedom of Speech and Islam* considers Islamic concepts of blasphemy, apostasy and heresy and their applicability in the modern world.

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Freedom of Speech and Islam

Edited by

ERICH KOLIG

University of Otago, New Zealand

ASHGATE

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III

Contents

	<i>Prefatory Remarks and Acknowledgements</i>	<i>vii</i>
	<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>ix</i>
	<i>Foreword by Rex Abdar</i>	<i>xi</i>
1	Introduction: This Book, Its Mission and Its Essays <i>Erich Kolig</i>	1
2	Why Is Freedom of Speech a Problem for So Many Muslims? <i>Christopher J. van der Krogt</i>	21
3	Balancing Freedom of Speech and the Rights of Muslim Minority Groups in the Australian Context <i>Ghena Krayem</i>	45
4	Muslim Sensitivities and the West <i>Erich Kolig</i>	63
5	The Rushdie Affair: Cultures at Cross Purposes <i>William Shepard</i>	125
6	Being an Unbeliever and the Power of <i>Fatwa</i> in Iran <i>Negar Partow</i>	143
7	Free Speech: Creating the 'Us and Them' Debate <i>Nahid Afrose Kabir</i>	163
8	The Instrumental Accusation of Islamophobia and Heresy as a Strategy of Curtailing the Freedom of Speech <i>Bassam Tibi and Thorsten Hasche</i>	187

9	Parameters of Teaching Islam ‘Freely’ <i>Katharina Völker</i>	209
	<i>Bibliography</i>	225
	<i>Index</i>	249

Prefatory Remarks and Acknowledgements

As the collection editor I have standardised spellings of non-English terms – except in direct quotations. This may not conform with chapter authors' usage and preferences, but for the sake of uniformity and simplicity a particular standard had to be imposed. Arabic, Persian and Turkic terms by and large have been Latinised and are rendered without ayn and hamza and other diacritical marks. Thus, for instance, it is simply *Quran* and *sharia* and not *Qur'an* and *Shari'a*. However, where such marks are part of names proper or in cases where their absence may be confusing – as for instance in *Shi'i* and *Isma'ili* – they have been retained in simplified form.

Quran quotes have been taken from various sources and using various translations which may produce verbal and substantive differences. It goes without saying that translations of one and the same verse can differ noticeably, allowing for different exegesis and considerable divergence in understanding.

The list of acknowledgements can be short. The chapter authors have not benefitted materially from their effort in this publication project. They have simply responded to my invitation to produce an essay on the topic of free speech in relation to Islam and lay their thoughts on the matter open honestly and without prospects of tangible rewards. It goes without saying that authors were free to exercise their right to free speech, allowing them to express any opinion, not necessarily shared by the editor. Some scholars I invited to contribute may have declined for the reason that they did not wish to be published together with the views of others' they do not share. This is very regrettable as it is exactly the purpose of this volume to assist in initiating a dialogue between seemingly irreconcilable viewpoints.

It would be churlish of me not to acknowledge a debt to some of my colleagues, research assistants, associates and graduate students (mainly at the universities of Otago and Vienna, where I taught) who over the years have helped me in gaining an understanding of Islam and Muslim issues, as have many non-academic Muslims through patient explanation and their lived example. In particular, my friend Rex Ahdar, Professor of Law at Otago University, has stimulated my interest in legal issues and their reference to Islam. Thanks to Owen Baxter of

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ERICH KOLIG

Dunedin, New Zealand, May 2013