Linking Islam with Terrorism:
A Review of the Media Framing since 9/11

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Abstract

Considerable literature is available to believe in the idea that media construct reality by presenting a mass mediated view through framing, shaping and portrayal. Such obsession seemingly is tinged with negative signifiers when it comes to Islam/Muslims presentation in the media. Based on the contemporary literature, this review article examines the theoretical foundations of the media framing of Islam/Muslim, terrorism and the West discourse and presents an overview of the main causes and effects. In analyzing the contributions from the existing research, this paper addresses the following four areas: (1) Manipulative role of the mass media (2) Covering terrorism—Media use of frames (3) Anti-Muslim sentiments in the West—the media signification of Islamophobia (4) Media and terrorism: A dangerous symbiosis against Islam.

Introduction

Mass media role in transmitting the dominant ideologies, beliefs, culture and values is widely accepted by media researchers and scholars (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, &Sasson, 1992; Hall, 1981; Kellner, 2005). Media framing (as a major theoretical model for the construction of media messages) impose limits to serve the dominant class. It molds debates in ways that eventually serve the interests of corporations (McChesney, 2004; McCombs, 2004; Shuffled& Tewksbury, 2007). By doing so media fulfills dual functions, reflecting and shaping issues occurring in the cultural, social and politics (Garrett & Bell, 1998). There is a current obsession in mainstream media and academic discourse pertaining to Islam/Muslim, terrorism and the West. This current obsession is tinged with negative signifiers with the global media's predominantly negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims. The portrayal overwhelmingly cast Muslims as violent, irrational terrorist (Manning, 2003). Muslims are considered as fodder for the front-page news in US and at the same time one can find rare presentation of individuals follow Islam in a positive portrayal(Karim, 2006). The tone of allegation also varies dramatically from one news story to another article ranging from a mere suspicion to an overt accusation (Alghamdi, 2015). To describe thecriminals activities of terrorists, the adjective 'Islamic' is being heavily used by journalists. Such labelling would be inconceivable for the activities of those belonging particularly to Jewism and Christianity (Karim, 2003). One particular example to this effect is the slaughter of nine African Americans in a Charleston churchfor which Brit Bennett writes "Media outlets have been reluctant to call it an act of terrorism" (Dabashi, 2015). The dominant factor that explains this virulence are; 1) seemingly the Anglo-American nature of international news media and its coverage(Manning, 2003) and 2) the conjecture about Islam that violence is inherent to Muslim societies, as the term 'Islamic Terrorism' itself signify a unified nexus between acts of terror and practice of Islam(Holmes, 2016). Moreover, there exists a fundamental disconnect in communications between the Muslim world and USA(Pintak, 2003). Last but not the least; major religions of the world have had violent periods, or periods in which the religion has coexisted with violence (Robert, 2015). The level of the media groveling after a tragic and deadly saga of 9/11 in US has been astounding. Is it the period when Islam is co-related wit violence?

Islamophobia (fear of Islam and Mulsims), like any other phobia, is an irrational fear without foundation in reality (Sudan, 2015). It has intensified with the 9/11 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. It is fear that makes terrorism distinct from war (Hawthorne, 2012). Terrorism, in its advanced form, has its origins in the mid to late 19th century. It is the same era that saw the spread of both the mass media and democracy. Without the media information, a small number of people would know that an attack has taken place, and without democracy, those manipulating power would have little reason to heed the sentiments that such violence provokes (Burke, 2016). Extremism in the past have molded the mass media to link Islam/Muslim with terrorism – largely after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Global media is depicting a mediated image of Islam to the world (Kenes, 2015). Philip Bump's writes in the Washington Post that the term "terrorism" has become so central with Muslim (criminals or otherwise) that associating it to a white person dismantles the entire lexicography of America (and Israeli) political culture (Dabashi, 2015). In such a situation the media not only carries the message of ongoing terrorism as an alarming situation around the world, but it also linked Islam– which BülentKenescalled 'international injustice' (Kenes, 2015).On the other side, actual evidence shows more than one percent of terrorist attacks from 2009 to 2013 were religiously motivated in E.U. In 2012, less than three percent of the total 219 terrorist attacks were inspired by religion. In 2013, out of 152 terrorist attacks just one percent was religious in nature (Norton, 2015). The prescribed causal relationship between Islam and violence is not only debatable but also, in fact, terrifyingly reductionist, associating what is a contingent collection of heterogeneous followers with action of a political minority. The term 'Islamic Terrorism' can be better understood as an emotional depoliticizing term intended to make publics think less and fear more (Holmes, 2016). Misunderstanding and myths of cultural history of Muslims societies is a reason for the failure in understanding contemporary trends. For example in 2002, journalists covering the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan were too quick to predict that the country's women would all throw off the veil (burqa) (Karim, 2006). Furthermore articles on terrorism claiming to act for the cause of Islam tend to be shown with photographs depicting worshipers bowing in prayer (Karim, 2003). Similarly the most dangerous myth is that Islam condones terrorism. Another myth is that Muslims are mostly Arabians. A third myth is that in Islamic teachings, men are allowed to terrorize women. A fourth myth is that Islamic teachings allow a government to force everyone to be Muslims. The view of a strong association between Islam/Muslim and terrorism no doubt has been fueled by the media outlets (Kenes, 2015).

Literature Review

Certain incidents capture immense mainstream news media attention and become "media events" (Faye et al., 2012). According to Fiske(1996), media events take on symbolic significance in setting frames regarding the interpretation of social issues and, as such, exemplifybroadersocietal dynamics (Fiske, 1996) as "real events…are not intrinsically newsworthy, but only become 'news' when selected for inclusion in news report. The vast majority of events are not mentioned, and so selection immediately gives us a partial view of the world" (Fowler, 1991).Another modus operandi for giving prominence to such news reports adheres to continuous flow highlighting or stressing/intensifying (by rising intonation), capitalized keywords in the text and placing the news story in box(Alghamdi, 2015). Following the same trend an intentional efforts has been made by the international media to associate terrorism with Islam(Yusof, Fauziah, Hassan, & Osman, 2013). Dr. Natasha Hamilton-Hart, once said that presently the definition of terrorism is too narrow as it

only depicts Islam and Muslims in irrelevant manner (BeritaHarian, 2008). Words like 'deadly terror attack', 'killings', ripping apart buildings' are the main crux of the news story (Alghamdi, 2015). Every year there are hundreds of terrorist attacks in Europe. The ones that immediately receive the media attention through headlines of every news outlet, are ironically the ones carried out by Muslims (Norton, 2015).In his content analysis study Kumar (2008) found five negative discursive frames that have been employed by the Western media to represent Islam; 1) Islam is a monolithic religion; 2) Islam is uniquely sexist religion; 3) The "Muslim mind" is incapable of rationality and science; 4) Islam is inherently violent and 5) The West spreads democracy, Islam spawns terrorism (Yusof et al. 2013).Associating Islam/Muslims with these discursive formulationsis a core narrative of the discourse 'Islamic Terrorism'—thereby forming an intrinsic and seamless association between Islam and terrorism. Additionally texts contain Islamic doctrines of *Jihad* and the like—all within context of discussing the origin of 'Islamic Terrorism'.

On the other hand, since 1980, US has occupied or invaded more than 14 Muslim countries that caused hundreds of thousands of deaths but the same have never been designated as an act of terrorism despite some overwhelming evidences (Dabashi, 2015). On April 7, 2010 US President Barak Obama urged his consultants to omit terms like "Islamic terrorism", "Islamic extremism" and "*Jihad*" from the vital document drawing the US national security strategy an action which best describes American's government understanding of irrationality as these prejudicial terms have been used in the West to refer to all Muslims (Alghamdi, 2015). Similarly the initial coverage of the 9/11 attacks put the broadcast journalist disoriented as they found themselves scrambling to deliver a coherent commentary. A research by Karim, (2006) put it in the following way in quotes;

> *"Following the 11 September attacks, there was only one story and generally one perspective on the multiple TV networks of the USA. Most experts interviewed responded to security matters did not seem interested in the larger political, social and economic causes of the attacks. The focus was primarily on the immediate reaction rather than on the larger issues. After some initial fumbling, the government was son able to establish the frames and the agendas according to which the unfolding story was generally reported. Indeed, most media, stunned by the events of the day, seemed all too willing to accept the government's lead. As the hunt began for the 'Islamic terrorists', journalists' narratives failed to provide a nuanced and contextual understanding of Islam, Muslims or the nature of the 'Islamic peril'*
> *(Karim, 2006).*

In retaliation to attacks, President Bush's historic reference "crusade" and "either you are with us or you are with terrorists" divided the world into two camps, meaning, either you are with the crusade or you are with Islam. This approach raised many eye brows in the world. It increased fears that the terrorist attacks could spark a 'clash of civilizations' between Islam and Christianity, sowing new winds of hatred and mistrust (Ford, 2001; Norton, 2015).

On "*The O'Reilly Factor*", news show hosted by Bill O'Reilly on FOX News Channel, a guest host Laura Ingrahamshort report on the terrorist attack[1] in Norway in which she said:

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[1] The two attacks were massive and horrific and have been described by many as the deadliest attack on Norwegian soil since World War II.

"In the 'Back of the Book' segment tonight, two deadly terror attacks in Norway, in what Appears to be the work, once Again, of Muslim extremists. (Alghamdi, 2015).

According to a study Australian Imagining Islam (Manning, 2013) of international news articles, the proportion of overwhelming image associated with the word Muslim/Islam is violence. The percent of derogatory words is calculated as violent/violence (28 percent), dead/death/die (40 percent), kill, killed/kills (39 percent), bomb/bomber/bombing/bombed/etc. (42 percent), gun/gunmen/gunfire/gunned/etc. (17 percent), terror (56 percent) and suicide (18 percent). Number of articles citing 'Muslims' was 1,175 and the number of articles that mention 'Muslim' and 'terror' over this period was 625. Therefore, over this two-year period, 53 percent of articles carried both the words together in one article (Manning, 2003). The dramatic change of narrative could be judge from the fact that prior to September 11, only 11 percent of all articles mentioning 'Muslims' and 'terror' together, whereas after September 11 event, 89 percent of them did (Manning, 2003). The analyses of the research work "The representation of Islam in Western Media: The Coverage of Norway Terrorist Attacks" revealed that Western media used word choices, modal expression and implication to put the responsibility of attacks on Muslims (Alghamdi, 2015). The factual position revealed a different story as from the period between 2004 and 2013 60 percent of the fatalities and, about half of all terrorist attacks,took place in the Islamic countries i.e. Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan (Alexander & Moore, 2015).

Manipulative Role of the Mass Media

The dominant paradigm upholders view mass media as an instrument in the hand and service of the dominant elite class or power-holding group (Cohen, 1963; Herman &Chomsky, 1988). This paradigm advocates that the content of the press actively distorts the marketplace of ideas in favor of the view of the powerful. In case of a conflict with another country or ideology, the press will articulate the views of the state and the economic elite. The "media's purpose in a free market is to manufacture the consent among the governed, rallying the population to endorse elite decision" (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Anderson (1988) characterizes the media as one of the central mean by which a dominant ideology is disseminated to and accepted by subordinate groups. Studies by Sigel (1973), Hess (1981) and Koch (1990) support the view of official controls on news stories when it dealing with issue of international importance. They also gave evidence of media's reliance on official source for foreign affairs reporting. Moreover, there is enough evidence to indicate the US media shift of direction of their coverage of foreign affairs in accordance with shifts in US foreign policy (Lynch & Effendi, (1964); and Harwood, (1974).

Covering Terrorism—Media Use of Frames

Framing is the term used by the researchers to refer to how an event in a particular news story is portrayed. The manner of depicting events and news reporting, in words, tone, visuals, similes and presentation constituted different frames. It involves selection and salience by identifying problems, diagnoses causes, make ethical judgement and suggest solution (Entman, 1993; McQuail, 2012). Hacket (1984) pointed out that "framing is not necessarily a conscious process on the part of media men; it may well be the outcome of the unconscious absorption of assumptions about the social world in which the news must be embedded to make it intelligible to its intended audience. The most common frames used by the media from center are associating Islam/Muslim with terrorism e.g. "Islam caused Violence" and "Muslim are terrorists" (Yusof, 2013). Even such frames become the titles of a

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news story e.g. "France's Charlie Hebdo blames ordinary Muslims for terrorism" (McAuley, 2016), "More than 15 Armed Muslims Opened Fire in California!" (Kosar, 2016),"Muslim student at Texas school called terrorist by teacher" (Bolt, 2016) and "Muslim migration in France opens door to terror" (Bult, 2016). Following extract from The Economist on its issue (May 7th-13th, 2011) mirror such frame. It stated;

> "Al Qaeda is still active, even without Laden. The alarming problems
> of Pakistan, Yemen and so many other places threaten to feed more
> violence"(Yusof 2013).

Frames for "killing" do vary. For instance, Moore (2003) said "When we kill civilians we shouldn't call it "collateral damage" as the same act has been "terrorism" for others. Bombing, attacking and slaughtering Iraqi's in thousands received just an apology. In comparison the attacks on World Trade Center and Pentagon is framed as terrorism (Moore, 2003).

Anti-Muslim Sentiments in the West—the Media Signification of Islamophobia

From the mainstream Western media, have one ever heard Buddhist terrorists and Jewish terrorist. Or even Hindu terrorists? Big NO! When is the last time we heard about "Christian terrorists"?The "War on Terror" is primarily directed towards the Muslimsstates like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria and Iran safeguarding Wests' dark impulses (Moore, 2003). Extremist Buddhists have killed many civilians in Burma, Sri Lanka. Some even went on a violent rampage burning to ashes Muslims homes and businesses.Or What about Jewish terrorists attacks on Palestinians causing deaths and injuries dismantling Masjids and Churches. The State Department's report of 2013 on terrorism revealed that there were close to 400 acts of terror committed by Israelis' in what are known as "price tag" attacks(Obeidallah, 2015).

Anti-Muslim prejudice is extensive in the West. Religion in general and Islam particularly, has been the main focal points of policy, decision-making and constitutional politics in liberal West (Kille & Wihbey, 2015). Inaccurate self-reported knowledge about Islam/Muslims seems to affect the Western's feelings of prejudice towards the religion and its followers. Several Western countries share this sentiment, saying that the West does not respect Muslim societies. Specifically more than 50 percent of the Americans and close to 50 percent of Canadians say the West does not respect Muslim societies (GALLUP, 2016). An FBI study looking at terrorism committed on US soil in the period from 1980 and 2005 revealed that 94 percent terror attacks were committed by non-Muslims(Obeidallah, 2015). However, an exaggerated hatred, hostility and fear towards Islam and its followers perpetuated by negative images in discrimination, bias and the marginalizationand exclusion of Muslims from social, civic and political live (Ali, et al., 2011). Such anti-Muslim sentiments and heavy media depiction proclaiming Islam and Muslims as elements of terrorism gripped Western societies to Islamophobia—the concept existed in premise before the terrorist attacks 9/11 (GALLUP, 2016). Study conducted in 2014 by University of North Carolina found, since the 9/11 terrorists attacks, Muslim-linked terrorism has claimed the lives of 37 Americans nationals. In the same period, close to 200,000 Americans were murdered (Obeidallah, 2015). On the other hand, Muslims suffered 82 to 97 percent of terrorist-related fatalities over the past five years(Alexander & Moore, 2015).Without distinguishing between mainstream Muslims and Terrorists, Trump's newest proposal of suspending immigration from regions linked with terrorism until a proven vetting method is in place is a recent example to this effect. He was alluding towards Muslims. The

Presidential candidate appears to be "intimidating" to Republican leaders who have charged him of going too far on the Muslim ban, said conservative pundit S. E. Cupp (Richter, 2016).

Right from George W. Bush up to the Tony Blair, David Cameron and all those at the helms of affairs in the Western part of the world spoke their mind on the 9/11 aftermath with remarkable frankness. Bush termed it "Islamic fascists" Blair called it "a war not just against terrorism but a struggle between reactionary Islam and Moderate, Mainstream Islam" Cameron labelled it "the driving force behind the terrorists threat is Islamic fundamentalism" (Danial, 2013). To US Senator, Joseph Lieberman they are "violent Islamist extremism" (Lieberman, 2010). Another US Senator from Pennsylvania put it in the following way.

> *In the World War II we fought Naziism and Japanese imperialism. Today, we are fighting against Islamic fascists. They attacked us on September 11th because we are the greatest obstacle to their openly declared mission of subjecting the entire world to their fanatical rule. I believe that the threat of Islamic fascism is just as menacing as the threat from Nazism and Soviet Communism. Now, as then, we face fanatics who will stop at nothing to dominate us. Now, as then, there is no way out; we will either win or lose[2].*

Similarly, Hallin (1986) observed that the Times and The American Television Network regularly accepted the US government's view on the Vietnam war. According to him the US news media on foreign affairs fluctuated between three views; a Cold War view between East and West; 'human rights" and "decentered set of nations, each with its own particular problem". The fortress US perspective of the world as a "hostile sea" is forcing America's struggles for survival against waves of irrational hatred.

Putting the emphasis on "Islamist" instead on "violent extremist" undercuts efforts as it is wrongly associate the core problem in the faith of over one billion Muslim who abhor violence (Benjamin, 2010). The wave of terrorism and the present onslaught by the Western dominated media with the connivance of the Western capitalist class is seemingly a repetition of mistakes committed in the past by considering Communism as a potential threat to their interest.Toeing the same line, now Islam has become a potential threat to their interest. Allied forces attack under the command of US on Iraq and Afghanistanin the recent past reminds the similar attacks on Vietnam decades ago. Soon you will hear someone from the US establishment that "we were wrong, terribly wrong" as has been said by McNamara, the architect of US policies regarding defense in the past.

Media and Terrorism: A Dangerous Symbiosis against Islam

Terrorism and the media relationship have long been clear. Terrorists aim to incite irrational fear among public in order to influence legislators and thus advance their goals (Burke, 2016). The advent of the digital media in the mid-2000s completely altered the way terrorists operate. Just like media organizations, terrorists too need an audience—both have adapted their strategies to keep your attention (Burke, 2016). Terrorism is an attractive boom for media coverage as it makes viewers ratings surge and increase profits. It covers terrorism by writing sensation-seeking news, enlarging anecdotic stories especially on who is to blame (Vasterman et. al, 2005).As a social construct, terrorism (Jenkins, 2003) is motivated by religion a tendency to target Islamic groups more often due to the culprits of 9/11 being Islamic (Nagar, 2010). Because of the 9/11, Islam has been in the spotlight resultingnegative perceptions about Muslims depicting massive fears and dangers that these people can

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[2] "The Great Test of This Generation," Speech to the National Press Club, Washington D.C., National Review Online, July 20, 2006.

supposedly cause (Bail, 2012). A London-based writer, Richard Sudan (whose writing has been published in many prominent publicationsthe Guardian, the Independent, Huffington Post and Washington Spectator) article's titled "Increasing attacks on Muslims caused by media-hyped Islamophobia" (Sudan, 2015) is an indicator suggesting the media-terrorism nexus against Islam.Media in US has often been far from objective, calm, and prudent as it oozed hatred and panic, calling for an action mainly against Arabs and Muslims(Bilgen, 2012).

Two groups primarily benefits from media-terrorists relations on Muslims: Firstly, Islamic extremist groups themselves that have appropriated Islamic texts and concepts and tailored them into a mantle of religious legitimacy for bloodshed and second, West's growing far-right. Though standing pole apart, both groups share a congruence of interest. The former, use the clampdown as "evidence" that there is seemingly no room for Muslims in the secular West that has declared war on Islam and the later cashes these attacks as "evidence" that there is actually no room for Muslims in the secular West that should declare war on Islam (Norton, 2015). Terrorists need publicity through media whereas media need greater audience and profits thus form symbiotic relationship between terrorism and media(Bilgen, 2012).

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on US, a significant increase in media attention has been noticed. Prior to 9/11 terrorism was not as important as today and the media was focused on various types of groups. The post-9/11 scenario has witnessed a shift to more focus and concentration on Islam and some western media organizations made news coverage reports and published news articles in which Islam and Muslims were targeted. The media contents most of the time were depicting the mass mediated view away from reality that has influenced all of the media consumers by shaping their views of terrorism to mimic what is portrayed in todays' media. On the other hand terrorists have hijacked the religion of Islam through impersonation supported by the media in their selfish and evil goals.Spoken and written words, audio and video presentation matters in such situation because one of the ways to win a struggle is through the battle of hearts and minds. Putting the emphasis on "Islamist" instead on "violent extremist" undercuts efforts as it is wrongly associate the core problem in the faith of over one billion Muslim who abhor violence. The concept of Islam is also vividly distorted by calling it as "moderate" or sometimes "liberal" Islam.

Putting the emphasis on "Islamist" by not destroying weapons of mass destruction by smashing it into depleted uranium ploughshares, the center has no right to tell those at periphery to do so. From breeding the terrorists to the wave of terrorism and ongoing onslaught by the Western dominated media with the connivance of the Western capitalist class that owned almost everything in the world is a continuation of wrong policies and repetition of mistakes that Vietnamese communists were on the run, defeated, or destroyed. It is a time to shun this insane Pandora's Box and stop supporting oppressive governments that the West have helping to keep them in power since long. Like communism Islam too been not a potential threat to the Western interest. Refrain from viewing Islam as violent religion both as a policy and media depiction.

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