

# Islamophobia

## American and Canadian News Media Coverage of Muslims, Arabs, and Middle-Easterners



“Arabs, for example, are thought of as camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose undeserved wealth is an affront to real civilization.”  
-Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*.

**How are Muslims/Islam portrayed in North American news outlets? How do depictions/portrayals of Muslims/Islam compare between American news and Canadian news?**

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Orientalism is a “Western style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority or power over the Orient or ‘Other’”<sup>[1]</sup>. As a result of this power imbalance, the Orient is not a free subject of thought or action. Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in the mainstream media has often been defended under the principles of freedom of speech and the press. After 9/11, there has been a new revival of historical Oriental depictions of the ‘other’ in the case of Islam and Muslims in order to re-create the binary between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The negative portrayal of Muslims in the media has in effect constructed this community as the new racialized ‘other’ in Canada and the U.S. and even worse, the ‘enemy from within’<sup>[1]</sup>.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

- Sources of influence on the Western media and its connection to media's portrayal of Islam.
- Western geopolitical and economic interests in the Middle East.
- Ideological violence by Muslim versus non-Muslim perpetrators.
- Western media portrayals of Muslim women.

### CASE STUDY

- The case study includes the analysis of 20 articles: 10 from Canadian print media and 10 from American print media on the Quebec mosque shooting which took place on January 29, 2017.
- The newspapers selected are the Montreal Gazette and The Star for the Canadian media, and USA Today and The New York Times for American media.

### FINDINGS

A number of key components of Critical Discourse Analysis were used, including framing, foregrounding, backgrounding, and omission<sup>[2]</sup>. There is backgrounding in terms that revolve around “terrorism”, as it is rarely or almost unused when describing the incident, and it is mostly referred to as the “Quebec mosque attack” or “mosque shooting”. Most of the headlines and news focused on the victims rather than the killer. There is an overall framing to the killer as an “introvert” and a “mysterious” man, and that there is difficulty finding out his “motivations” behind the attack. There was omission/backgrounding on his political and religious affiliations, and he was framed as a public figure rather than a killer when mentioned in headlines. Topics related to humanizing the killer are foregrounded in various ways by emphasizing the activities the killer engaged in before the shooting, such as visiting the grocery store, dining with his parents, and mentioning the pages he liked on Facebook that included pages of musicians and celebrities. There was no significant difference between the American and Canadian coverages, but the American coverage still had fewer racist implications; the least was The New York Times, and the most was the Montreal Gazette.

### CONCLUSION

The findings may indicate that negative news of Muslims/Islam may affect the Muslim community's status, and Muslim individuals may continue to feel “othered”. The Western media is largely to blame for this “othering process”<sup>[4]</sup>. The data analyzed in the case study acts as a framework of a new Orientalism that targets and demonizes Muslims and Islam, and proves what Said stated, “The Oriental is seen as being irrational, deprived, childlike, and ‘different’, whereas the European is seen as rational, virtuous, mature, and ‘normal’”<sup>[1]</sup>.

#### REFERENCES

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