ISLAM, MUSLIMS AND JOURNALISM

GUIDELINES FOR MEDIA

Islam, Muslims and journalism

Summary

By way of introduction

Language, the tool the journalist uses to describe the world around us, is also a factor when it comes to defining and constructing our imaginaries, the frameworks and settings within which we encase our immediate universe. This guide seeks to provide data and recommendations so that journalists take into account the conceptual frameworks -which are loaded with negative stereotypes- within which we unconsciously constrict Islam and Muslims. George Lakkof, a pioneering figure as regards the theory of conceptual frameworks, argues that "to think differently you have to speak differently".[1] This author doesn't hesitate about giving journalists a crucial responsibility when it comes to seeking to obscure the frameworks of the settings within which we tell our stories. In fact, Lakkof is speaking about the foundations of journalism: challenging the status quo, not accepting established messages, being critical of power and those who want to impose the hegemonic discourse. Words are linked to these frameworks, and so we must advocate a rigorous journalism which uses inclusive language that is committed to going beyond those limits, to taking a step back and striving for a global, contextualised and critical view of the dominant thinking that rehumanises the discourse concerning Muslim people.

But what is this universe in regard to Islam and especially Muslims in Europe? What is the image that we Europeans have of the Muslims who live amongst us? In fact, it is increasingly negative: 42% of Europeans believe that Islam is incompatible with the values and cultures of their countries,[2] while 55% feel that immigration from countries with a Muslim majority should be totally prohibited.[3]

However, inevitably, we are talking about the construction of an imaginary over the

> " *The letters are distributed in the raw material and are the origin of all things* "
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> Sahl al Tustari

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1. Lakoff, G., (2017), *No pienses en un elefante*, Madrid, España: Ediciones Península.
2. Pew Research Center, (May, 29th 2018). *Being Christian in Western Europe.*
3. Goodwin, M., Raines. T. y Cutts.D., (February, 7th 2017). *What Do Europeans Think About Muslim Immigration?* Chatman House.

centuries since the expulsion of Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula, the Crusades in the Middle East, the clash with the Ottoman Empire, the colonisation of the previous century that have created what Edward Said calls "the shackles forged by the mind".[4] This is the framework where the imposed discourse concerning Islam as a violent ideology which is incompatible with European values fits perfectly. Films, television series, pop culture, the political class, social networks and the media constantly refer to this legacy. Alongside the social awareness that is changing the language used to speak about gender or to avoid racist discourses, work must also be done to deconstruct Islamophobia in all areas, including the media.

This inertia as regards the image of Muslims serves to socially justify security legislation which is discriminatory and stigmatising vis-a-vis the Muslim community in Europe.[5] This is how Islamophobia goes unnoticed and has been normalised in all arenas of society. However, each country in Europe is unique when it comes to managing the insertion of the Muslim community, from governments that have refused entry to Muslim immigrants to states that make assimilationism based on secularism their hobbyhorse in order to harass and target Muslims. More respectful models based on multiculturalism also run the risk of lapsing into the exoticisation of minorities, with the environments that have committed to interculturality as a basis for inclusion the places where better results are being achieved as regards social cohesion.

The increasing prominence of the Muslim religion in their communities in recent

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4. Said. E.W., (1978), *Orientalismo*, New York, EEUU: Pantheon Books.
5. Azfar Shafi and Dr Asim Qureshi, TNI., (2020). *Stanger than fiction. How 'pre-crime' approaches to "Countering Violent Extremism" institutionalise islamophobia. A European Comparative Study.*
Amnesty International, (2012). Choice and prejuidice. Discrimination aganist muslims in Europe. London, United Kingdom: Amnesty International.

decades contrasts with the decline in interest in faith that is spreading throughout the old continent. The view of religion in general as regressive and as a mindset from another era is especially aggressive, with Islam today submerged in a battery ofnegative stereotypes. This is the context within which the breeding ground for the increase of Islamophobic crimes, particularly intense against women, has been created.[6] The result of this is that Muslims feel more excluded than before in European society.[7]

Given this environment, it is inevitable that media coverage regarding Islam in Europe is a reflection of this dynamic[8] and vice versa. However, it is also true - and this is corroborated by different projects run by the associates involved in the development of this guide - that direct outreach work and training with journalists has a positive impact that leads to change. In order to report more accurately on Islam, as this guide proposes, one needs to be aware of the situation and to seek solutions since, in most cases, the shortcomings are more linked to specific concepts and instruments when addressing the issue than to insurmountable stigmas. Thorough and complex work is necessary in order to reverse the current reductionist and dehumanising trend in which Muslims are treated as mere *homos islamicus*, depriving them of the individual identity specific to each citizen. In this regard, a recent PEW study confirms that familiarity with Muslims is linked to a positive perception thereof. However, the same report shows the enormous outreach work that remains to be done since only 36% of those surveyed say they have even minimal knowledge of Islam.[9]

6. Bayrakli. E. y Hafez. F. (Eds), (2019). *European Islamophobia Report 2018*. Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA).
7. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), (2017). *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey. Muslims: Selected findings.* Luxemburg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019.
8. Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los Medios
9. Pew Research Center, (May, 29th 2018) idem.

We are definitely talking about changing the cognitive frameworks from which Islam is discussed in the public debate, that is, the prisms through which we filter information, the scenarios where news is drawn, a closed space where everything that is left out does not exists.

More diversity in the newsrooms to connect with all communities

The citizen expects the journalist to reflect the world as it really is. And not as it is shaped by mainstream opinion. When it comes to Islam and Muslim communities, it must be acknowledged that the media do not play their role as truthful scouts.

Too often citizens of Muslim faith or culture are portrayed in the press as exclusively religious, to the exclusion of other dimensions of their personality. Too often, the media refrain from giving them a voice. Too often, media coverage takes a discriminatory turn, sometimes unintentionally.

Recent research by Amir Saeed, Senior Lecturer at the University of Huddersfield (UK), on Islamophobia in the media[1] has shown that Muslim citizens are generally portrayed in the press as foreigners, entities not integrated into the community, although journalists are careful not to convey deliberately racist discourse. Saeed challenges a media culture of representation of non-white minorities in the Western press. Minority voices are marginalized, ignored, made invisible. The representation of minority groups is often associated with negative elements, such as terrorism. Amir Saeed rightly calls on journalists to be aware of this "hidden agenda" that influences the media narrative about Islam and Muslims.

The lines are moving. The experience of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), the main representative organisation of media professionals in Europe, tends to show that more and more professional organisations (journalists' unions and associations, journalistic ethics councils...) are concerned about more ethical, more inclusive, less discriminatory coverage.

The rise of counter-narrative

Among the good practices is the rise of counter-discourse. The   Counter-

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1. Saeed, A. (2019). Race, racism, Islamophobia in the media: Journalists' perceptions and Muslim responses. In I. Zempi, & I. Awan (Eds.), The Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia (1st ed., pp. 325-339). (Routledge International Handbooks).

Islamophobia Kit project documented and critically analysed dominant Islamophobic narratives in operation, and also counter-Islamophobia narratives and related best practices employed in eight EU member states (Belgium, the UK, France, Germany, Hungary, Greece, Portugal, and the Czech Republic) in order to produce the Counter-Islamophobia Kit. This Toolkit[2] identifies and postulates narratives, arguments, strategies and actions that will be able to directly counter Islamophobia and set guidelines on best practice.

In 2019, the Ethical Journalism Network (EJN), a partner organisation of the European Federation of Journalists, published its report 'Muslims in the Media: Towards More Tolerance and Diversity'.[3] The report investigates the ways in which Muslims are portrayed in the media across 11 countries: Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

The report makes a number of recommendations for journalists, media and policymakers. "Perhaps the most important of which is for media leaders to recognise and embrace the reality of diversity by making inclusion a conscious choice in the way that stories are framed and the way that they organise newsgathering," says the report. "When they do this, media will help people confront hatred and discrimination and build confidence and trust in the values of dialogue, co-operation and respect for others".

Diversity in the newsrooms

"In support of actions recognizing the value of inclusion and pluralism at all levels of the news gathering process, media organisations should:

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2. Law, L., Easat-Daas, A., Sayyid, S. (2018). Counter-Islamophobia Kit.
3. Ethical Journalism Network, (2019). *Muslims in the Media: Towards More Tolerance and Diversity. London United Kingdom.*

- *Support diversity training for journalists and media managers that includes raising awareness of the origins, history and customs of different religious traditions.*
- *Ensure there is a newsroom understanding of Islam and the different branches of the Muslim faith. This is vital to informed reporting of Muslim affairs. Of particular importance is raising awareness of the role of women and the tenets of the Muslim faith in practice.*
- *Create newsrooms and media staffing profiles that are diverse and reflect the media audience including the employment of qualified staff from a Muslim background.*
- *Listen and give voice to the Muslim community by developing contacts at all levels. Officials sources of information are important, but so too are voices on the ground. Media should develop contact with religious leaders, Imams, for example, and not just those designated as press officers. But also consider alternative and diverse voices like Muslim scientists, activists and advocates both men and women, but also youth.*
- *Develop specific editorial projects aimed at creating new narratives, exploring diversity within the Muslim community itself and promoting inter-faith dialogues.*
- *Prepare and make available editorial guidelines that give precise and appropriate definitions of terms and language on reporting of migration and terrorism and, in particular, terms used to describe aspects of Islamic scripture and Muslim practice including, for example, Sharia Law, jihad, Ramadan, fatwa, etc. Agree neutral and accurate terms for reporting migration and terrorism.*
- *Support inter-faith dialogues and organize discussions with media and journalists who specialise in representing faith groups as well as discussions with secular media."*

The EJN report also calls on the media to develop a strategy to combat hate speech and to proactively engage in ethical self-regulation mechanisms (press councils, codes of conduct on discrimination and religious freedoms, etc.).

Earlier research, produced by MDI in partnership with Article 19 and the European Federation of Journalists in 2012, "Getting the Facts Right: Reporting Ethnicity and Religion",[4] found that most journalists covering ethnicity and religion were not aware of discrimination laws. This implies a need for training efforts in editorial offices. The EFJ report again made very specific recommendations for good practice for journalists that are included in this guide.

These are all basic recommendations that are not systematically applied when media coverage focuses on Islam or Muslim communities. It is as if these subjects were not worthy of professional, responsible and ethical coverage.

In addition to journalists, media companies have their share of responsibility: they must train their journalists, promote diversity within their newsrooms and develop a culture of tolerance. More and more journalists and newsrooms have become aware of the issues at stake. But much remains to be done to provide Muslim communities with the coverage they deserve.

Ricardo Gutiérrez, General Secretary of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ).

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4. Rupar, V., Media Diversity Institute/Cardiff University, (2012). *Getting the facts right: Reporting ethnicity and religion.* Brussels, Belgium: International Federation of Journalists.

On the afternoon of Monday, February the 3rd, 2020, between 5,000 and 6,000 people gathered near a large mosque in Brussels, where the funeral prayer was being held following the death of a Muslim preacher. This societal event was not covered by the Belgian media or press, despite the fact that Brussels is not only the third most cosmopolitan city in the world, but it also has a significant Muslim population. It would appear that the media are not aware who the leaders of Muslim communities are. Very often they choose "their leaders" and this situation is rather common in Europe.

Although there are highly diverse and dynamic Muslim communities present in all sectors, economic, cultural, sports, education, charitable, religious, well-being, etc.,[1] this is often ignored by the media and press except for a few specialist journalists. These communities are often only seen through the prism of religion, which greatly distorts the understanding and necessary knowledge of these communities.

While it is true that there are "Muslim" journalists working in the newsrooms, they do not necessarily deal with these issues or they prefer not to do so for various reasons.

The fact that there is no specialist in Islam and Muslims in the newsrooms means the media and the press participate in a clumsy manner in the rise of Islamophobia by creating a negative public opinion. For example, for the feast of the sacrifice of Abraham, they illustrate articles with photographs of slaughtered animals or issues regarding slaughter but never the meaning of the feast or the importance of animal welfare in Islam.

As another example, state constitutions allow for the opening of "Muslim" schools or places of worship. However, the media never points out that it is a constitutional

1. Felice Dassetto, (2012). *L'Iris et le croissant. Bruxelles et l'Islam au défi de la co-inclusion.* Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium: Presses universitaires de Louvain (UCL).

right but only talks about the urban pollution it generates. These articles are often catalysts for petitions orchestrated by the far right.

A final example concerns articles relating to COVID19. In a large majority of the photographs used as illustrations, we see "Muslims" praying, backpacks on their backs, health checks. These photos inevitably generate fear that they are the ones carrying this virus.

In Belgium back in 2015, in the report "Muslims and non-Muslims in Belgium: encouraging practices enhance living together"[2] from the King Baudouin Foundation, it stated that *"for many Muslims, and even some non-Muslims, the media represent 'the chief culprits' with regard to the negative image of Islam and Muslims in public opinion… This regularly gives rise to manifestations of the frustrations of Muslims quietly living their faith, sometimes called "moderate" in the media (which can also be a cause for annoyance), tired of what they consider to be persistent coverage which speaks 'only of the negative' and overlooks their positive actions. To which journalists respond that they are subject to constraints that do not allow them to cover every news item on a daily basis, that they do not deliberately choose not to relay the positive actions of this or that group but that the overabundance of information forces them to make choices. They also add that attention has been given to diversity in general within newsrooms for years, and that with regard to their coverage of beliefs, they also leave room for the 'phenomenon of Islamophobia'"*, which reflect the widespread feeling in Europe.

Journalist associations are conscious of this situation. For example, the Association of

2. Bocquet, C., Maréchal, B., Van Den Abbeele, S., (2015). *Musulmans et non-musulmans en Belgique: des pratiques prometteuses favorisent le vivre ensemble.*

Professional Journalists (AJP Belgium) has created an EXPARTALIA[3] database and provides information on Muslim leaders whom journalists can contact as a resource for their investigations, reports, interviews or debates.

Mustapha Chairi, President of Collectif contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique (CCIB).

3. Expertalia. *Un répertoire d'experts issus de la diversité.*

> *"The journalist participates actively in social transformation towards democratic betterment of society and contributes through dialogue to a climate of confidence in international relations conducive to peace and justice everywhere"*
>
> *International Principles of Professional Ethics in Journalism* [1]

In the same way that in order to write properly about ethnic minorities, the phenomenon of racism must be kept in mind, or to write correctly about gender one needs to be aware of the sexism inherent in society and in language itself, when a journalist tackles a report on Islam they need to be aware of the Islamophobia which is present in our imaginary and our society.

Journalists have the potential and, therefore, the responsibility to create alternative narratives so that the public is informed about current affairs from a human point of view, free from prejudice and generalisations. It is crucial that current frameworks through which people are told about Islam and the Muslim people of Europe be reversed and redrawn. Coverage must be professional, truthful and sensitive to the topics that are being dealt with, promoting values such as freedom and respect for the decisions of each individual, thus encouraging intercultural dialogue and coexistence. The growing tension regarding the Muslim community in Europe, the result of the negative generalisations made about Islam based on the predominant discourse, makes this awareness more urgent, if possible, because in addition to the psychological damage that hate speech causes, this message travels to street level, as rising figures concerning hate crimes against Muslims show. Journalism cannot be a weapon at the service of the hegemonic discourse but must instead challenge it, its objective being to inform and not inflame.[2]

Most European media or regulatory entities have created specific guidelines to address issues related to minorities in order to ensure coverage which is more suited to current European cultural diversity. However, newsrooms today find themselves in an increasingly precarious situation, which makes specialisation[3] and internal training difficult. It also means that the time and resources needed be thorough in the writing of news reports is not available, and these are just some of the circumstances journalists have to manage on a daily basis.

1. Nordenstreng, K. and Heinonen, A., (2018). *International Principles of Professional Ethics in Journalism.*
2. Pintak, L., (2017). *Islam for Journalists (and Everyone Else): A primer for reporting - and understanding - news about Muslims in America* [Kindle version].
3. "Most of the journalists (64%) cover other topics as well as reporting on ethnic or religious minorities, on Rupar, V., Media Diversity Institute/Cardiff University, (2012). *Getting the facts right: Reporting ethnicity and religion.* Brussels, Belgium: International Federation of Journalists.

General Considerations

Despite all these obstacles, it is up to each journalist to continue with his or her training and to keep striving to get the best from themselves. To do so, they can use reflections and instruments generated by different currents of journalism, such as transformative journalism, peace journalism, solutions journalism, humane journalism, constructive journalism and ethical journalism.[4]

As Evelyn Alsultany shows in her research,[5] the representation of Muslims in the media is basically reduced to their relationship with terrorism and a basic binary typology: in its negative version they are the terrorist, the millionaire sheik or the submissive woman; and in the version of the "good Muslim", the victim, the model citizen who fights against extremism and the woman freed from Islamic patriarchal bondage thanks to Western values.

Changing this tendency, where about 90%[6] of the news that is written about Muslims in Europe[7] is negative, is essential if we are to advance towards a multifaceted and closer understanding of European Muslim communities.

Beyond inviting them to condemn terrorist attacks and to defend themselves against fanatics to whom all the media focus is given, a voice must be given to the individuals themselves. More diverse voices within European Islam are gradually beginning to appear in the media, but not without lapsing, in some cases, into the creation of binary models involving the successful Muslim in the face of the extremist male or subjugated female model. Although the first step is the inclusion of Muslim citizens when they are the subject of the debate, the ultimate objective should be that their presence in the media ceases to be limited to their religious dimension and they are involved like any other citizen spoken to about everything that concerns their society.

4. Ewart, J. (2018): Reporting Islam: International best practice for journalists. [Kindle version]
5. Evsultany, E. Arabs and Muslims in the Media, (2012). *Race and Representation after 9/11*. New York, USA: New York University Press.
6. Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los medios (España, 2017-2019).
7. Three hundred academic publications on the construction of Muslim identities in the news assert that the recurring tone in stories about Muslims tends to be negatively framed and loaded with stereotypes, in Pennington, R. (2018): *On Islam. Muslim in the media*. Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press.

Since the 9/11 attacks, the terrorism-Islam binomial has dominated reporting on the 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide. The violence and extremism of a few terrorists in an appropriation of Islam has been the parameter around which the cognitive frameworks and narratives of everything perceived as Muslim have been built. The statistics are compelling: even in 2019, a year in which there was no serious terrorist attack in Europe, it was still the most regular topic in news concerning Islam on the old continent.[1] This increasing construction of the "Muslim enemy", which was reinforced following 9/11 by the bellicose dialectic of the "war on terror", would appear to justify the generalised idea that there are certain determining factors inherent to Muslims that make them especially susceptible to engaging in violence, as can be seen in much of the criticism of programmes to combat radicalisation and violent extremism.[2]

These implicit assumptions frame the information which is generated at breakneck speed, especially following a terrorist attack. In addition to the limitations and obstacles already mentioned that the profession faces, there is the pressure to report on events at speed and competition not only for traditional audiences but also for likes and retweets on social networks. In this stressful environment, more care needs to be taken to use the appropriate language, cite the correct sources, use data with accuracy and precision, and take a critical approach to sources, even official ones, to dominant discourses and simplistic theories. It is precisely in those moments when one needs to be more careful not to reproduce clichés and generalised stereotypes, because making a mistake when publishing a news item on these topics can be highly damaging for the people affected.[3]

The term terrorist must be used with utmost responsibility, realising that this

1. Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los Medios, (2019). *Estadísticas 2019*.
2. InI, (Blakeley, R. and others), (2019). *Leaving the War on Terror A Progressive Alternative to Counter-Terrorism Policy*.
3. Marthoz, J.P., (2017). *Terrorism and the media: a handbook for journalists*. París, France: UNESCO.

description can go against the presumption of innocence. Possible alternatives include 'person with explosives' or 'aggressor'.[4] If - as we have been saying - language is crucial in seeking to eradicate the current dominant narrative concerning Islam, it is most important when it comes to the issue of terrorism, where its connotations are radiated across other topics under discussion. Progress has been made in recent years, since there is a general consensus as regards avoiding using the term Islamic to refer to terrorist acts, just as the actions of the Ku Klux Klan are not described as white terrorist acts, since we would be implying that being white, which is its identifying aspect, has an intrinsic terrorist component. There has also been an agreement, increasingly backed by European governments, not to use the name "Islamic State" when referring to the Daesh terrorist group. If one wishes to use this expression, it should be in quotation marks or, at least the first time it is mentioned, it should be clarified that it is the self-proclaimed Islamic State.

Without a doubt, the most significant challenge in journalism today regarding the coverage of terrorism by these groups involves the terms "jihad" and "jihadism". Possible alternatives would be "Daesh terrorism" or "Al Qaeda terrorism" or "ta*kfirist*", similar to how ETA terrorism was not described as Basque, nor that of the IRA as Irish terrorism. The urgency and need to name things in a concise and rapid manner have led to the media sharing and promulgating the terrorists' appropriation of the term "jihad", usurping its original meaning, which put succinctly is the spiritual and material effort of the Muslim to improve as a person. Even the meaning of offensive jihad ("jihadism") upon which these terrorist groups are based is a notion open to different interpretations and which has been under constant discussion on the part of the ulema for fifteen centuries. The balance between the need to label,

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4. British Broadcasting Corporation., (2019). *Guidelines: the BBC's Editorial Standards.*

in a journalism of fewer and fewer words and more and more immediacy, and the connotations that the use of a certain term has for a section of the population, is one of the challenges that contemporary journalism must face with sensitivity, responsibility and rigour.

The gender labyrinth

Patriarchal control of societies for thousands of years has marked and continues to determine all aspects of our lives. The major religions have been no exception and Islam is especially vilified by the media with regard to gender issues. In fact, when this topic comes up, the control that social patriarchy has exercised since Antiquity seems to vanish amidst the assumption that Islam is inherently sexist by nature, regardless of the historical context. Adopting this essentialist understanding of Islam paves the way for generalisation and stigmatisation of Muslim women, viewed as one monolithic bloc, regardless of their individual characteristics and where they are located. For journalists, criticising the treatment of women in repressive and institutionally chauvinistic societies which exploit a certain interpretation of religion to justify this oppression is not only legitimate but necessary. However, it is essential that we examine the events we are relating in terms of their particular context and that we have in depth knowledge of the contexts in which the stories that we tell take place. The situation regarding freedoms and options for personal fulfilment that a woman encounters in Saudi Arabia cannot be compared to that of Muslim women who were born or raised in Europe. The confusion between religious affiliation, culture, social class, education and acceptance of patriarchal hegemony as a social base or the greater or lesser degree of sexism as deriving solely from religion and in this specific case connected with the central tenets of the Muslim religion, is a serious fundamental error which must be treated with utmost care.

The generalised perception concerning the sexist component of Islam as a religion also translates into the way in which various discourses on the subject are received. When a reputed academic such as Karen Armstrong discusses the advances that the emergence of the Koran in the 7th century entailed for women, arguing that "it grants women legal rights regarding inheritance and divorce that Western

women would not enjoy until the 19th century",[1] she is listened to with respect. However, when it is a Muslim woman discussing gender or Islamic feminism as a means of emancipation, she is often the target of furious attacks. Also significant is the extensive media coverage given to Muslim women who describe the discrimination they have endured in the name of religion, which leads to a discourse in which individual experience becomes the general norm due to the sexism integral to Islam. Although it is essential that we report on situations of discrimination and sexism, this should not translate into erasing at a stroke the complexity of the social, political and cultural factors that define the environment of each woman.

In the introduction to this guide, the need to reflect diversity and to humanise the narrative concerning Muslim people was alluded to. In the case of women, this need is even more pressing. When planning an article on this topic, one must ask oneself in advance what approach one wants to take, whether to use a specific angle because it contributes something or because it is especially striking and whether the story is being placed in its correct context. Articles featuring diverse views regarding Islamic feminism and other topics centring on Muslim women apart from the still controversial and much-covered issue of the hijab have recently begun to appear in the media. However, there is still a long way to go if we are to free our societies from the prejudices, orientalist paternalism and western ethnocentrism which bear heavily on European Muslim women and to recognise them in their diversity and individuality, with equal capacities to face all the difficulties that living in a society whose matrix is still predominantly patriarchal entails.

1. De Querol. R., (April, 8th 2020). Karen Armstrong: "Cuando arrinconamos a la religión, surge el fundamentalismo". *El País*.

Migration and the other

The securitisation of migration in Europe would appear to have definitively buried the migrant character of European citizens themselves. The dominant discourse on the subject has focused on the issue of security and the view of migration as a threat. The criminalisation of what is known as the "refugee crisis" in 2015 led to xenophobic and racist messages from political leaders, which, together with the reinforcement of the policy of the militarization of borders, damaged the largely positive perception European people had of this phenomenon. Within this diffuse amalgam of migrants and refugees fleeing wars, it is Muslim migrants who experience a double stigmatisation: as migrants but also because of their religious status.

The creation of a discourse of non-acceptance regarding this group is distinguished by the dialectic of "us" and "them", the "I" against the "other". Extensively analysed, this dichotomy, which is also fuelled by certain media and politicians, positions an homogeneous, cultured, educated, egalitarian and non-violent European citizen against a reactionary, violent, sexist Muslim who has values which are incompatible with European ones, and who is accompanied by a woman without her own will, who is illiterate and reduced to her role as mother and submissive wife. This process of estrangement seeks to immerse itself in the contention that Islam is incompatible with European values. This is an age-old discourse that was conceived in the European Renaissance, fuelled by the orientalism and colonialism of the previous century, accentuated by the economic and social conditions of migrants and which explains the aporophobia of our society.

These ideas reinforce the discourse of those who uphold the theory of a silent invasion of Islam in Europe, an idea that has led to the creation of a debate known as "the Muslim problem". These constantly repeated messages not only fossilise the negative imaginary that exists in Europe with regard to Muslims, but also facilitate a

more dangerous discourse which is that of the "foreignization" of European Muslims. The latter are distanced from the rest of the society in which they live, thereby preventing the normalisation of diversity, and the acknowledgment of a culture and customs which have been part of Europe for centuries and which are clearly enriching.

Writing about Muslim migrants arriving in Europe in a manner which is inclusive and respectful of human rights is a necessary and urgent endeavour. Avoiding mentioning their religion if it is not necessary for the understanding of the news item would be a first step towards breaking with the rapid stigmatisation. It can, of course, be a positive to provide information that refutes xenophobic discourses, but neither should these arguments decide the tone or the content. After all, the narrative regarding migrants should not be based on the rationale of European economic or demographic needs, but rather on the values of humanity and solidarity with regard to the situation these people are experiencing. Narration concerning migrations must go back to the human factor, to the stories of people beyond the dialectic of numbers, security and conflict.

Image: representation and meaning

News of terrorist attacks illustrated with a photograph of men praying in a mosque. A story about child prostitution in a Muslim country illustrated with an image of randomly chosen girls with headscarves. An investigation into Muslim extremism in Europe accompanied by a photo of a veiled woman or a bearded man... We have all witnessed this association between violent news items and photographs of ordinary Muslim people, a practice that creates a direct and unconscious connection between those contents and our imaginary concerning Islam, and that reinforces the mental frameworks which underpin Islamophobia. In a world where image prevails over text, it is even more essential to be aware of the responsibility choosing the appropriate visual coverage entails, as demonstrated by the photographers from the NOOR Foundation who participated in the European Stop-Islamophobia project.

Tackling abstract and complex subjects requires careful preparation both in the documentation phase and in the relationship with the community one wishes to portray. Knowledge of the subject to be addressed is key to connecting with the relevant interlocutors, building trust and finding common ground from which to be able to carry out the work. Constructing a visual narrative that suits the content may require focusing on specific items, which will allow professional intuition to recognise if good documentation work has been done in advance.

Muslim communities in Europe tend to be wary of the audio-visual world as a consequence of bad previous experiences, of the image the media portrays of them and the manipulation of their rituals and symbols. Aware that in the newsrooms of today time is a scarce commodity, it is essential to maintain a minimum of contact, of collusion with the interlocutors. One cannot think of them as mere objects in an interesting image or resort to easy symbolic identifications without considering what this means in the collective imaginary.

> *Images are cultural practices the significance of which reveals the values of those who created, manipulated and consumed them*
>
> Keith Moxey

It is as important to be aware of the stereotypes (positive and negative) and prejudices that exist with regard to Islam in society as it is to recognise our own conditioning, in order to resist the temptation to reproduce photos of a markedly exoticising nature or tired clichés and thus break the vicious circle of photograph/stereotype.

As important as the image can be the text that describes it. An isolated photograph with the appropriate caption can become a powerful message. The same image with a poorly contextualised caption, for example, can add up to dangerous content.

The photographer "takes" from those who share their lives with him/her, and so transparency is crucial, both with regard to the ideas behind the story and the media via which it will be disseminated. Complying with what is agreed is essential in order to establish a relationship of trust with the people who have collaborated. This honesty starts with being clear about why the topic is interesting, what angle one wishes to take and what type of discourse one wishes to communicate. And, of course, one must always keep in mind a basic rule of photography, especially when it comes to vulnerable communities: never take a photo that could harm or endanger the interlocutor.

Knowledge and social networks

The particular nature of social networks means that the values that apply to the journalist's profession must be taken into account more than ever. The same rigour and care with language must be used on these networks, paying heed to the correct use of terms and figures and showing the same respect for the audience.

In order to have an impact on Twitter, the social network *par excellence* for journalists, you need to have a clear idea of the profile and content you want to share, to remain consistent and be transparent as regards objectives, aware that you have to deal with prejudices and dynamics that express themselves in a more virulent manner hidden behind the anonymity of virtual profiles. We hear a lot about Twitter trolls[1] and hate messages circulating on this social network, but although their danger should not be minimised, it must be noted that they are still a small minority of the more than 500 million daily tweets.

There is a certain consensus regarding how to take action against promoters of hate: report all those messages that violate the regulations that both Twitter and the European Union have created to combat this phenomenon.[2] Regarding messages that, although offensive, are not liable to being reported, the best strategy is to avoid direct dialogue with their creators and not to participate in conversations with Islamophobic *hashtags*, as this will simply lead to greater dissemination of their offensive message. If the objective is to respond to particular hate messages, the recommendation is to create alternative content, based on facts and data, that generates a positive dialectic that supports and gives voice to constructive accounts and messages. To counter hoaxes and *fake news*, the best strategy is still to refer them to specialist organisations with the information needed to repudiate them.

These organisations have the experience and the necessary criteria to be able to decide when it is worth refuting a false news item or whether it is preferable to

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1. Iganski. P, Sweiry. A., Media Diversity Institute. *Stopping hate. How to counter hate speech on Twitter.*
2. European Union (2016). *The EU Code of conduct on countering ilegal hate speech online.*

ignore it, for example if it is not having an impact and its denial could give it more publicity.

Used with respect, caution and transparency, social networks are a valuable source of knowledge for journalists. However, in no case must they constitute a substitute for the personal relationship of trust that needs to be created with the population being reported on, but rather as an extension thereof. The Muslim collective – organisations, imams, religious authorities and private individuals – are highly active on social networks. The freedom they provide and the fact they allow you to engage in conversations and share experiences and recommendations mean they are a great way to share concerns and counteract our preconceived clichés concerning Islam. Becoming aware of the diversity that exists, and the internal debate generated by all aspects of their lives, provides a more intimate and more accurate version. As long as respect and transparency are maintained, social networks provide an excellent opportunity to come into contact with different and authentic kinds of people whom we would not be able to contact physically due to issues of time, geographical distance or simply because we had been unaware of their existence. This diversity will help lead to a wider variety of Muslim voices appearing in news reporting. In this framework of trust, data or comments should not be used without first checking with their author. Interacting on these networks, contributing ideas and accurate and verified data, and participating in discussions of the issues regarding which certain relevant information can be provided, is highly rewarding. Transforming the general public's perception of Muslims - as well as Muslims' perception of the media - is a task that requires perseverance and determination, but one where the Internet can represent a real window of opportunity.

Recommendations for writing about islam

1 Document. The complexity of Islam means you will need to document in depth, to be familiar with related legislation and to search for diverse sources, both from academic experts and from Muslim people with varied profiles.

2 Relationship with the Muslim population. Transparency, respect, complicity, knowing how to listen and following current events apart from crises are some of the things to consider when looking to create a relationship of mutual trust.

3 Be careful with the language used. The journalist must be responsible with his/her working tool and look for the right words, the correct tone, verified statistics and the correct terminology.

4 Avoid stereotypes and generalisations. It is essential that you keep in mind the negative mental frameworks in which the image of Islam has historically been confined in order not to repeat them and thus not perpetuate them.

5 Portray diversity. The variety of topics and interlocutors will contribute to a more accurate depiction of Muslim people. There is no typical Islam person or country, there is no Muslim prototype.

6 Images. Look to use images that avoid clichés, fostering empathy and complicity with the interlocutors.

7 Context. Explain the events that will be narrated within the socio-political environment where they occur, treating Muslim people as subjects and not objects.

8 Be critical. Challenge official discourse, reductionist approaches, question institutional sources and those of Muslim people. Ensure political correctness does not prevent you from raising controversial issues.

9 Gender. The continual controversy regarding the body and independence of Muslim women must make us be especially careful and vigilant, with our own prejudices too.

10 Credibility. Looking to amass a stable and long-term track record based on rigour and transparency will reinforce the reliability and trust of the journalist as a source of specialised information.

Islam or Islamism?

Islam is a religious system that is based on the Qur'an, the word of God transmitted by Muhammad, and on the latter's model. Devotion to Islam manifests itself in what is known as 'the five pillars': recognising that there is only one God and that Muhammad is his prophet; carrying out daily mandatory prayers; giving alms (zakat); observing the fast during Ramadan and making a pilgrimage to Mecca. In Islam, along with theology, ethics and metaphysics, politics also has a place, hence the term 'Islamism' designates the set of ideological schemas whose legitimation paradigm is built around Islamic doctrine.

Muslim, Islamic, Islamist?

'Muslim' should be applied only to people who believe in Islam, although its use as a common adjective is increasingly widespread. 'Islamic' should be used for things or abstract realities, and never for people, and 'Islamist' for activists of a political Islam: not all Muslims are Islamists (only a minority are), and nor is everything that is Islamic exclusive to believers in Islam.

Jihad vs. jihadism

Jihad is, on the one hand, the Muslim's spiritual and material effort to improve his or herself (known as 'greater jihad', which ranges from faith to rituals), and on the other hand, the effort to improve his or her surroundings ('lesser jihad', from oral persuasion and the exemplary striving of every Muslim to 'offensive jihad'). Based on the exclusively militaristic interpretation of jihad, an ideological current exists that maintains that it is an individual obligation and, therefore, must be undertaken by each Muslim for the final liberation of the ummah. This is what is known as 'jihadism'.

'Takfirist' terrorism better than 'jihadist', but never 'Islamist'

Muslims are appalled when jihadism is confused with Islam, an error which the expression 'Islamist terrorism' leads to. Nor, logically, do they accept the normalisation of the usurpation of the terms jihad/jihadist by terrorist groups, reducing them to an extremist interpretation, which excludes from Islam those who do not follow them (*takfir* doctrine). Possible alternatives would be 'Daesh terrorism', 'Al Qaeda terrorism' or 't*akfirist* terrorism'.

Feminism and Islam

Contrary to what happened in the contemporary European context, in the feminist movement of the majority Muslim societies, religion was generally seen as an essential driving force for transformation. Three currents emerged: a Muslim feminism, an Islamic feminism, and a secular feminism. The dividing line between secular and religious feminists is marked by the role that religion is given as a tool for emancipation on the part of the latter. For its part, Muslim feminism is distinct from Islamic feminism in its acceptance of the difference between men and women, while Islamic feminists insist on full equality between the two based on a new Koranic hermeneutic, which they call the 'gender jihad'.

Hijab, *niqab*, *burqa*, chador... dealing with clothing

The issue of Islamic attire and clothing is one of the most controversial. Although the Qur'an did not stipulate specific outfits, it did provide certain guidelines concerning the clothing and grooming of men and women. Despite the fact that the concealment of the female face has nothing to do with Qur'anic requirements, with the wave of social re-Islamisation and the strength of the Islamist movements, clothing has been recreated that ranges from garments that just cover women's hair (such as the hijab) to others that cover their entire body (such as the chador or *abaya*) or that conceal them completely, except for the slit that allows them to see out, poorly (*burqa*, *niqab*). One should not generalise without distinction when it comes to the cultural, political, economic or personal meanings of wearing clothing that is labelled as Islamic, and that can be both an identifying hallmark and simply a matter of custom.

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