

10. MEDIA

Media consumption, where the purpose is to understand and seek information about issues and events beyond an individual's immediate circle of family and friends, may be viewed as an act of citizenship, because it suggests concern about the local area, the city, the state and internationally. The media therefore both reflect and influence societal attitudes towards Muslims and shape the space in which policies and initiatives to support social, economic and political inclusion take place. A group will feel excluded if its members are invisible in the public space or where public discourse, including representation by the media, is stereotyped and distorted in a way that is demeaning.⁴⁰⁷ The media are not, of course, a monolithic entity but consist of a broad range of producers and consumers, reflecting diverse views and understanding of Muslim communities.

This section focuses on respondents' views of the representation of Muslims in the media and their impact on social cohesion and inclusion. It explores how Muslims have responded to increased media focus on them, and highlights initiatives aimed at supporting Muslims' engagement with the media and increasing their involvement in media production. It also draws on discussions of the media in focus groups and stakeholder interviews and refers to the broader research literature on minorities and the media.

10.1 Representation of Muslims in the Media

Professor Stuart Hall argues that “the mass media”, in particular national print and television news, “play a crucial role in defining the problems and issues of public concern. They are the main channels of public discourse in our segregated society. They transmit stereotypes of one group to other groups. They attach feelings and emotions to problems. They set the terms in which problems are defined as ‘central’ or ‘marginal’”.⁴⁰⁸ Groups can be stereotyped through under-representation, over-representation or misrepresentation. Thus, “a group of people can be marginalised by their portrayal as an unrepresentative minority or denigrated by being presented as abnormal and peculiar, or excluded by only appearing in the media when they present a problem”.⁴⁰⁹

Research on media portrayals of Muslims finds that coverage is generally negative. A study of news press coverage of Islam in the UK revealed that even before 2001 there

⁴⁰⁷ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*.

⁴⁰⁸ S. Hall, “Black men, white media”, *Journal of the Caribbean Artists Movement* Vols. 9–10, 1974, pp. 18–21, cited in D. Frost, “Islamophobia: examining causal links between the media and ‘race hate’ from ‘below’”, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* Vol. 28, No. 11/12, 2008, pp. 564–578 at p. 570.

⁴⁰⁹ K. Williams, *Understanding Media Theory*, Arnold, London, 2003, p.132.

was an underlying discourse in which Islam was presented as a threat to British society and its values, and Muslims were seen as deviant, irrational, different and unable to fit into life in the UK.⁴¹⁰ Research in Sweden also found that the majority of television news reports between 1991 and 1995, in which Islam was mentioned, related to violent events.⁴¹¹ Since September 2001, the coverage of Muslims has been dominated by security and terrorism.⁴¹² There is particular criticism of the gap between the scale of coverage given by newspapers to arrests connected to terrorism and the lack of coverage when arrested individuals are subsequently released without charge.⁴¹³ Analysis of Danish news media found that Muslims also face stereotyping through culturalist interpretations of crimes where the perpetrator is Muslim, that is, a tendency to explain crimes committed by Muslims by reference to their religion.⁴¹⁴ A review of British media coverage of Muslims since 2000 found that “the bulk of coverage of British Muslims – around two thirds – focuses on Muslims as a threat (in relation to terrorism), a problem (in terms of differences in values) or both (Muslim extremism in general)”.⁴¹⁵ It noted that 2008 was the first year in which “the volume of stories about religious and cultural differences (32 per cent of stories by 2008) overtook terrorism related stories (27 per cent by 2008)”.⁴¹⁶

There are, however, indications that media coverage of Muslims and Islam is improving. Analysis of Dutch media reporting after the murder of Theo van Gogh suggests that in the weeks following the assassination the focus was more nuanced than the initial reaction, stressing socio-economic issues rather than questions of religious

⁴¹⁰ E. Poole, *Reporting Islam*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2002.

⁴¹¹ Hvitfelt, Håkan, “Den muslimska faran. Om mediebilden av islam” (“The Muslim danger: On media images of Islam”), Ylva Brune (ed.), *Mörk magi i vita medier* (Black magic in the white media). Carlsson, Stockholm, 1998, pp. 72–84, cited in G. Larsson, *Muslims in EU Cities: Preliminary Research Report and Literature Review – Sweden*, Open Society Institute, Budapest, 2007, p. 37.

⁴¹² Hafez, Kai and Carola Richter, “Das Islambild von ARD und ZDF” (ARD and ZDF’s picture of Islam), in Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Hrsg.) (26–27/2007): *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*. (Beilage zur Wochenzeitung Das Parlament). Frankfurt/Main, Frankfurter Societäts-Druckerei GmbH, pp. 40–46.

⁴¹³ A. Kundnani, *Analysis: the war on terror leads to racial profiling*, Institute of Race Relations, London, 2004.

⁴¹⁴ R. Andreassen, “The Mass Media’s Construction of Gender, Race, Sexuality and Nationality. An Analysis of the Danish News Media’s Communication about Visible Minorities from 1971–2004”, PhD dissertation, Dept. of History, University of Toronto, 2005, available at <http://www.rikkeandreassen.dk/phd-afhandling.pdf> (accessed November 2009).

⁴¹⁵ Kerry Moore, Paul Mason and Justin Lewis, *Images of Islam in the UK: The Representation of British Muslims in the National Print News Media 2000–2008*, Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff, 2008, p. 21 (hereafter, Moore *et al.*, *Images of Islam in the UK*).

⁴¹⁶ Moore *et al.*, *Images of Islam in the UK*, p. 3.

and cultural compatibility.⁴¹⁷ A poll taken a year after the van Gogh assassination found that negative views of Muslims had not increased, but that among those with a negative view their negative evaluation was more intense.⁴¹⁸ Analysis of German coverage also reveals increased sophistication and subtlety in the coverage of Muslim communities.⁴¹⁹

From the focus groups and stakeholder interviews it is clear that Muslim respondents were very concerned about the representation of Muslims in the media. In focus groups, participants reported feeling overwhelmed by what is perceived to be relentless negative media coverage of Islam and Muslims. The view of one female participant in a focus group in Antwerp is typical of the feelings expressed by many: “Really, I get all worked up over it. The problem is just ... the media, you know. Every newspaper you open: Islam, Islam, Islam. It’s always about Islam.” Another young female participant in the Berlin focus group expressed her anger at stereotypes used in media reports on integration, noting that discussions of integration were often accompanied by pictures of elderly women wearing headscarves and shopping in Turkish markets. She argued that these women represent Muslims and at the same time become symbols of their lack of integration.

The highly selective voices chosen by the media to represent Muslim communities also attracted resentment. In London, members of focus groups felt that the media afforded disproportionate coverage to extremists:

The extremist Muslims are the ones who are in the media limelight, and we need to make sure that they’re the ones who are moved away, and the average Muslim needs to be in the limelight, to basically understand, and it can’t happen if you’re segregating yourself into Asian communities; it can’t happen.⁴²⁰

10.2 Local and National Media

The research found that distinctions were made by stakeholders and focus group participants between the media coverage at the national and at the local level. Respondents felt that the agenda of the local media tended to differ, concentrating on smaller communities of Muslims, rather than approaching them as a homogenous, transnational collective. In Copenhagen, for example, local neighbourhood media are

⁴¹⁷ H.G. Boomgaarden and Claes H. de Vreese, “Dramatic Real-World Events and Public Opinion Dynamics: Media coverage and its impact on public reactions to the assassination”, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 1–13, 2007, p. 9 (hereafter Boomgaarden *et al.*, “Dramatic Real-World Events and Public Opinion Dynamics”).

⁴¹⁸ Boomgaarden *et al.*, “Dramatic Real-World Events and Public Opinion Dynamics”, p. 4.

⁴¹⁹ Sabine Schiffer, “Medien als Spiegel und Konstrukteur gesellschaftlicher Vorstellungen. Der Islam in deutschen Medien“, available at http://www.migration-boell.de/web/diversity/48_1231.asp (accessed November 2009).

⁴²⁰ OSI Focus Group, London.

seen more positively than national media. Local media stations, like Norrebro TV and Kanal Koeknhamn, are seen as objective and providing access to the voices of minority communities in their programmes. Interviews in Leicester found that the local news media were viewed as responsible and fair. There was recognition in the focus groups that this was mainly due to differences in local dynamics:

Local media are somewhat different, and the reason for that is because local media need a clientele, they need the existing people within the vicinity to sell [...] for example, in Leicester we can have the *Leicester Mercury*, so it will be the local paper people buy and hence they need to be that bit more careful as to how they approach the subject.⁴²¹

As further evidence of the sensitivity of local media to the impact of their coverage of local communities, interviewees in Leicester referred to a situation when a Somali man was arrested in Leicester under antiterrorism legislation. According to the interviews, a group of approximately 150 people of largely Somali Muslim backgrounds met senior police officers and city council representatives. At the meeting it was agreed that in light of the risks of exacerbating existing tensions in the city, the ethnicity of the individual arrested would not be mentioned. In subsequent reporting of the incident by the *Leicester Mercury* and BBC Radio Leicester neither the individual's name nor his ethnicity was mentioned.

The focus group participants in London also felt that there was “a big difference” between the national and the local media:

With the local media we do not have any problems and we have a very good relationship with them. They perform their duties very responsibly and ethically. The national media, you know the score.⁴²²

The national media always are portraying us the Muslims as fundamentalists, terrorists and extremists [...] The local media is engaging with us in a very good way and portraying us as it should be, but the national media is the problem.⁴²³

The approach of local papers is also shaped by the profile of their readership. In Berlin, the Commissioner on Integration, Günter Piening, pointed to differences in the representation of Muslims across different sections of the local Berlin media. In his view the Berlin-based tabloid *BZ* often provides a positive coverage of Muslim issues compared with the more upmarket and middle-class Berlin daily, *Der Tagesspiegel*. He suggested this reflects the differences in the nature of the audiences: the readership of the former consists mainly of workers and those in the lower socio-economic classes, and includes large numbers of Muslims, while the latter's readership is found among the middle classes. Piening suggests that *Der Tagesspiegel's* coverage therefore satisfies –

⁴²¹ OSI Focus Group, Leicester.

⁴²² OSI Focus Group, London.

⁴²³ OSI Focus Group, London.

and reproduces – certain reservations towards Muslims and Muslim organisations that seem to be growing.⁴²⁴

10.3 The Impact of the Media’s Portrayal of Muslims

In general, participants in focus groups felt sad, hurt, angry and in some cases alienated by the coverage of Islam and Muslims in the media. One example of the way in which negative stereotyping can foster a sense of alienation emerged during the focus group discussion in Antwerp about the coverage of an incident a few years earlier when a Belgian boy was stabbed at a train station in Brussels. The reporting of this incident (based on eye-witness accounts and video surveillance) suggested that the perpetrators were Moroccan. A journalist in one Flanders newspaper demanded that the migrant community, understood as referring to the Moroccan Muslim community, hand the perpetrators over to the police as a gesture of goodwill to Belgian society:

The murder of Joe van Holsbeeck really was an enormous blow for our community because for those five first days [...] the story was that two Moroccans had stolen an mp3-player and [...] it felt really ridiculous to be Moroccan. It was constantly repeated in the media. Yet one week later they [the attackers] appeared to be Polish [...] But we had all of Belgium against us for a whole week. And when that happens, you don’t really feel like a citizen in Belgium any more. I was born and raised here, but at that moment I really felt foreign in Belgium because of something I didn’t actually do. I kept myself informed of current events a lot and that feeling of guilt was directly due to the media.⁴²⁵

In interviews, officials in the municipal authorities in Amsterdam and Antwerp were critical of the role they felt the media played in increasing or exacerbating tension and for failing to report examples of the good work and initiatives being developed in their cities.

The research also reveals examples of the negative impact of news coverage on local events. In Amsterdam there was particular criticism in stakeholder interviews of the media coverage surrounding the release of Geert Wilder’s film *Fitna*. Some interviewees felt that the focus of the media coverage on the possible reaction of Dutch Muslims to the film’s release created the very tensions journalists were looking for. In Berlin negative media coverage relating to an anti-Semitic comment made on the open forum of the website of the organisation German Muslim Youth (MJD) led to the withdrawal of public funding from the Ministry of Family and Youth for a project that challenged misconceptions about Islam (held by Muslims) and the abuse of Islamic arguments for the justification of hostile behaviour. Although the organisation distanced itself from the comment made on its website and had a track record of

⁴²⁴ Interview with Günter Piening.

⁴²⁵ OSI Focus Group, Antwerp.

working with other religious groups, some press coverage suggested the comment was evidence of anti-Semitism in the organisation and hinted at strong links between the organisation and the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴²⁶

10.4 Responses to Media Coverage of Muslims

The OSI research finds that the negative media coverage has provided a spur for some Muslims to actively engage with the media. The need to respond has led to initiatives from individuals, community organisations and public bodies aiming to increase Muslim participation in media debates and discussion. In Berlin, a female OSI focus group participant said that in response to negative media coverage, “you have to take matters into your own hand and the only way is to publicise articles, to try and keep open the debate in the media and to organise debates.” In London, the campaign group Islam is Peace, which was formed after the 7 July 2005 bombings, ran a publicity campaign in 2007 with posters on London’s buses and in tube stations that featured a range of Muslims, including a policewoman and a scout group leader, accompanied by the slogan, “Proud to be a British Muslim”.⁴²⁷ In London, the council responded to the concerns expressed by young people about the negative portrayal of Muslims in television drama by supporting them in making a series of short films exploring this issue.⁴²⁸ The young Muslims participating in the project were able to put their concerns to prominent journalists and the scriptwriters of the popular TV police drama *The Bill*.

In Leicester, the *Leicester Mercury*, the city’s local paper, created a Multicultural Advisory Group (composed of community leaders, faith community representative, academics and other stakeholders such as police and council officials) which provides a sounding board for the local media in helping them create an understanding between different communities in Leicester. Stakeholder interviews suggested that the relationships built up through this advisory group ensured that the paper was in a good position to handle news coverage after the 2005 bombings. This meant, for example,

⁴²⁶ The Berlin daily *Der Tagesspiegel* stated the following: Für den Verfassungsschutz steht fest, dass es enge Verbindungen gibt. So sei der Verein im „Haus des Islam“ gegründet worden, einer Organisation, die Mitglied im Zentralrat der Muslime ist. Der Zentralrat wiederum sei eine Dachorganisation, zu der auch die Islamische Gemeinschaft gehöre und die werde von Anhängern der fundamentalistischen Muslimbruderschaft beeinflusst. (The Verfassungsschutz sees it as proven, that there are close connections. The association was founded in the ‘House of Islam’, which is a member of the Central Council of Muslims. The Central Council again is a head organisation, a member of which is the Islamic Community (IGD), which again is influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood.); Susanne Vieth-Entus, “Antisemitismus inbegriffen”, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 7 November 2003, available at <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/art270,1973689> (in German, accessed November 2009).

⁴²⁷ BBC News, “Muslim ‘peace’ adverts launched”, 1 October 2007, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7021323.stm> (accessed November 2009).

⁴²⁸ See the Waltham Forest Council website at <http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/index/social/community-cohesion/cohesion-with-young-people/imuslim.htm> (accessed November 2009).

that the paper was aware of the peace rally held by Muslims a few days after the London bombings.

The benefits of increased contacts between Muslim organisations and the media are also highlighted by research in Berlin. Here, an initiative which began as a research project that brought Muslim community representatives and journalists together for meetings through a media roundtable was found to be sufficiently useful for the meetings to be continued after the project was completed. In fact, the media roundtable was replicated by public officials in other districts.

10.5 Media Production

Muslims and other minorities are active in developing media output that meets the needs of minority groups by, for example, giving voice and narrative to their experiences. In Belgium, public broadcasting time is available for Catholic and Jewish services, but there was a negative response to proposals to give time to Muslims. In Denmark the national state library, the Danish Refugee Council and the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) have recently collaborated to introduce online news in the six major languages of migrant communities. In Germany the radio station Radio Multikulti (part of the local radio and TV station RRB) was founded in 1994 in reaction to racist attacks that had taken place in Molln and other German cities that year. It broadcasts in 21 different languages, the length of airtime given reflecting the size of different language communities in Berlin. As well as the broadcasts themselves, the station has played an important role in training and development of journalists from minority groups. In 1998, Makaria radio station was launched in Berlin. This was the first station in the city to broadcast in Turkish. Since 1999, the Turkish radio station Metropol FM has been broadcasting to Berlin and other areas of Germany.

In France, there have been programmes about Islam primarily aimed at Muslim audiences since the early 1980s. The earliest of these was “Connaître l’Islam” (To know Islam), which was broadcast on Sunday mornings alongside programmes about Christianity and Buddhism. The early 1980s saw the launch in Paris of Radio Orient, initially broadcasting only in Arabic; since 2002 it has included programmes in French. Radio Beur, now Beur FM, was also launched in this period and played a crucial role in 1983 of “les marches des beurs”.⁴²⁹

In the Netherlands, channel AT5 is important at the local level, as is MTNL (Netherlands Multicultural Television) which broadcasts in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague. The programmes, broadcast to a multicultural urban audience, aim to promote inclusion and positive attitudes towards diversity as well as

⁴²⁹ See N. Echchaibi, “Republican Diasporas: Beur FM and the Suburban Riots in France”, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, TBA, San Francisco, 23 May 2007, available at http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/7/0/8/0/p170801_index.html#get_document (accessed November 2009).

providing local news. Young Moroccans have their own Dutch-language websites, such as *maroc.nl*. In addition to programmes on mainstream channels, there are two Muslim broadcasting corporations in the Netherlands. The first, NIO (the Netherlands Islamic Broadcasting Organisation), is the voice of the Netherlands consultative organisation, Muslims and Government (Overlegorgaan Moslims en Overheid). The second, NMO (the Netherlands Muslim Broadcasting Organisation), is an independent broadcasting organisation which aims to represent the diversity in the Muslim community and to support debate and dialogue in the Netherlands, both among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims.

In the UK, the BBC has among its range of radio stations the BBC Asian Network. At the local level, licences are given for community radio stations, including a series of local community broadcasts during Ramadan, often collectively referred to as Radio Ramadan.

10.6 Increasing Ethnic-minority Diversity in the Media

The OSI reports also highlight initiatives aimed at increasing the diversity of those working in the media, in order to include more ethnic minorities. In Germany, adding to the number of people from minorities working in the media is part of the diversity mainstreaming project in the Federal Government's integration plan.⁴³⁰ In Belgium, the public television network, VRT, has signed a diversity charter which states that as a public mass medium it should reflect the diversity of the population. Efforts in increasing the visibility on television of young people from ethnic minorities in Flanders include the programme "Rwina", broadcast on VRT. In the focus groups there was, however, criticism that this show reproduced stereotypes.

10.7 Key Findings

There has undoubtedly been enormous media scrutiny of Muslims in different European countries. Much of this has involved the negative reinforcement of stereotypes and prejudices. However, the research also suggests that the coverage is not undifferentiated. There are signs of complexity in much of the coverage; with Muslims aware of differences between the approach and agenda of different media organisations. The adverse media coverage has also provided the impetus for individuals, and civil-society and public bodies to respond with greater engagement in the media debates and discussions and has focused the need for encouraging and supporting more Muslims to work in the media.

⁴³⁰ German Federal Government, *Der nationale Integrationsplan. Neue Wege – neue Chancen* (National Plan for Integration. New ways – new chances), Berlin, 2007.