

## **The Portrayal of Islam and Muslims in Western Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis**

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**Abstract:** With the realization of the promised global village, media, particularly online newspapers, play a significant role in delivering news to the world. However, such means of news circulation can propagate different ideologies in line with the dominant power. This, coupled with the emergence of so-called Islamic terrorist groups, has turned the focus largely on Islam and Muslims. This study attempts to shed light on the image of Islam being portrayed in Western societies through a Critical Discourse Analysis approach. To this end, a number of headlines about Islam or Muslims have been randomly culled from three leading newspapers in Western print media namely *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The New York Times* (2015). This study utilizes “ideological square” notion of Van Dijk characterized by “positive presentation” of selves and “negative presentation” of others alongside his socio-cognitive approach. Moreover, this study will take the linguistic discourses introduced by Van Leeuwen regarding “representing social actors and social practices” into consideration. The findings can be employed to unravel the mystery behind the concept of “Islamophobia” in Western societies. Besides, it can reveal how specific lexical items, as well as grammatical structures are being employed by Western media to distort the notion of impartiality.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); Ideological Square; Socio-cognitive; Representation of Social Actors; Islam and Muslims

### INTRODUCTION

In the world today where multicultural and multiethnic societies are prevalent, the role of media in disseminating news according to varied social, political and religious events, regardless of geographical constraint, is

indeed crystal clear to everyone. All types of media sources, online or in print, can exercise drastic impact on the public's mentality by either the correctness or the misrepresentation (manipulation) of what they choose to report (George and Waldfogel, 2006) particularly when the objectivity, which should be theoretically the first priority of media, is to a great extent ambiguous. Public's consensus management, distortion of data, manipulation of the news, brainwashing individuals are all the created features of the modern media. As Bloor and Bloor (2007) put it, most social practices are institutionalized in line with power and dominance. Therefore, an approach considering text as a part of specific social practices within the political presuppositions regarding diverse issues of status and distribution of social power is of vitality (Gee, 2004). "CDA examines how texts represent and construct reality within a specific ideological system through implicit messages based on what is said and left unsaid" (Heros, 2009: 173). In Van Dijk's (1993) words, "One crucial presupposition of adequate critical discourse analysis is understanding the nature of social power and dominance. Once we have such an insight, we may begin to formulate ideas about how discourse contributes to their reproduction." (Van Dijk, 1993: 254). It is also worthwhile to note that power and dominance involve control in any aspect by those imposing their influence on others. This control can manifest itself in either action, cognition or both in order not only to restrict freedom but also to exercise a huge impact on public opinion. Today, this control is indeed largely in the form of cognitive control being enacted by persuasion, dissimulation or manipulation as strategic means to manipulate and alternate public opinion for the sake of own interest and according to CDA, this mind control is commonly achieved through text and speech (Van Dijk, 1993).

Machin and Van Leeuwen (2003; 2004) also hold this perspective that mass media allows the shared information to be dissimilar and localized, but at the same time, let formats be homogenized to a great degree. Throughout the world, one can find fewer yet more powerful procedures and formats and at the same time, more but less powerful discourses (Van Leeuwen, 2008).

For another, Islam has always been a bone of contention amongst different religions and elite officials from the Ottoman period up to very recently. Considering this long-term stereotypical belief, perhaps mainly because of the presence of Muslims in different societies, it has drawn great attention to itself and has been in the media spotlight for the past

few years, especially after the tragic 9/11 incident, far more than ever. This attention has been fueled by the emergence of numerous terrorist groups calling themselves Islamic. The media have therefore covered Islam in the way they have desired. This misconception of Islam has led Western media to address Muslims as “extremist”, “terrorist” and “violent”, as a replacement of “slave traders”, “primitive” and “ignorant” which were formerly fixated on them (Esposito, 1992: 203-180). Although many Muslims throughout the world have attempted to clarify their worldview by distinguishing themselves from the extremist groups who in reality do not even remotely represent the 1.4 billion Muslims in the world, the majority of Muslims are bearing the brunt of these isolated terrorist acts. The stereotype of radical Islam is being more and more prevalent in Western societies to a great extent owing to the Western mass media coverage of different events depicting a distorted image of Muslims and Islam and reducing their true identity to terrorists. The original concept of Islam as a peace-seeker notion has turned into the recognition of a nation as savage individuals and violence-supporters.

Considering the above-mentioned points, this study attempts to investigate the strategies used by Western media to subjectively depict Muslims and Islam. This is done through analyzing a number of headlines published in three widely articulated Western newspapers comprising *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The New York Times* (2015) in order to shed some light on the perception of “Radical Islam” and the interpretation of “Islamophobia” in Western societies.

Given the impact of media, the notion of Islamophobia and the possible counter action, this study attempts to investigate the perception of “Radical Islam” and the interpretation of “Islamophobia” in western societies by identifying the linguistic tools being used in western media for propagating specific ideologies against Islam and Muslims. It would be worthwhile knowing if there are any common linguistic strategies to achieve the goal of discrimination in western media. Moreover, since language is the main element of social practices, this study, through a practical analysis (CDA), tries to highlight those subtle and hidden ideologies being fed to the public through the media as the main source of knowledge for individuals. It also tries to make clear if there is any relationship between the portrayed image of Islam in Western societies and the concept of Islamophobia. Additionally, the explicit or implicit common strategies used to avoid impartiality in Western media are sought. It

should be noted that numerous researches have been conducted and several papers have been published in this regard. However, two points can make this research quite unique in its attempt. First, most of the previously published papers have focused on a limited number of printed subjects. This study, however, analyses a wider scope of topics related to Islam and Muslims. Second, as the pace of improvement in media is relatively high, recognizing new strategies of ideological propagation is a must in order to have a say in the modern warfare of words. By employing multiple suggested frameworks, this study tries to unravel what common methods of presentation exist in the world of Western print media to stabilize the intended ideologies.

***Representation of Social Actors.*** Halliday (1985) believes that grammar in the English language is a meaningful potential representing (“what can be said”) rather than a set of rules representing (“what must be said”). Yet, unlike many other linguistically-oriented forms of Critical Discourse Analysis, Van Leeuwen (2008) does not merely focus on linguistic operations, such as nominalization and passive agent deletion, or from linguistic categories, such as the categories of transitivity. Instead, he also considers a socio-semantic inventory of the ways in which social actors can be represented and establish the sociological and critical relevance of different categories (Van Leeuwen, 2008).

The main reason is that in Van Leeuwen’s opinion, “Agencies” should be considered a sociological concept in the sense that it is the context which defines whether a social actor is “agent” or “patient”. However, this recognition is not only based on the linguistic agency or the grammatical role. Many other ways which will be dealt with later should be taken into account and since in Van Leeuwen’s words “There is no neat fit between sociological and linguistic categories”, if a critical discourse analyst merely focuses on specific linguistic operations, many subtleties of agency representation can be left unnoticed (Van Leeuwen, 2008).

***Exclusion.*** Representations whether in the political context, religious or other ones, include or exclude social actors purposefully to suit their interests and purposes in relation to the readers for whom they are intended (Van Leeuwen, 2008). Some exclusions can be “innocent” (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 28) since they are either already known to the readers or irrelevant. Others, however, can have a drastic impact on the interpreta-

tion of the representation of the actors serving the strategic propaganda of the dominant power. Two types of exclusions can be considered (Van Leeuwen, 2008):

- **Suppression:** leaving no trace of the social actor by completely eliminating it
- **Back grounding:** a less radical exclusion by mentioning the actor elsewhere

***Role Allocation.*** To consider which social actor is represented as agent (actor/ the dominant participant of the action) and which one as patient (goal/ the receiving end of the action) with respect to a given action is called Role Allocation which is of quite importance for there need not be congruence between the roles that social actors actually play in social practices and the grammatical roles they are given in texts in order to serve specific purposes. Such representations can reallocate roles in a social action or rearrange the social relations between the participants (Van Leeuwen 2008).

- **Activation:** the active, dynamic and dominant force of the social action
- **Passivation:** the participant undergoing the action or being the receiving end of it

***Assimilation and Individualization.*** In the sphere of CDA, it is of significance to know which social actors are being treated individually as the elite participants or all as members of a group sharing similar interests or features (assimilated). While the former can be recognized by singularity, the latter is signified by plurality. However, Van Leeuwen (2008) believes that two types of assimilation should be considered: “Aggregation” and “Collectivization” (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 37). When participants are dealt with as statistics (40%) or quantifiers (a number of), aggregation is being used to assimilate the participants. Using plural nouns or mass nouns (this nation) are the indicators of collectivization.

***Association and Dissociation.*** Association (commonly indicated by parataxis) occurs when a group of social actors even those which are not specifically labeled represent the same group or in some cases the same interest and benefits: “They believed that the immigration program ex-

isted for the benefit of politicians, bureaucrats, and the ethnic minorities, not for Australians as a whole” (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 38).

***Indetermination and Differentiation.*** In Van Leeuwen’s words: “Differentiation explicitly differentiates an individual social actor or a group of social actors from a similar actor or group, creating the difference between the “self” and the “other,” or between “us” and “them” (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 40). It is noteworthy to remark that there is a seemingly close similarity between the notion of Ideological Square introduced by Van Dijk (Van Dijk, 1998) in which us and they are separated from one another and the Van Leeuwen’s notion of “Differentiation” (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 40)

## DATA SELECTION

The data for this paper is comprised of news stories from three leading online newspapers: The Independent, The New York Times, and The Guardian in 2015. The headlines were chosen based on their content including Islam or Muslims or both. After gathering many of these headlines, a number of them were randomly selected for the purpose of data analysis.

## PROCEDURE

To methodically and meticulously analyze the obtained headlines, this study employs the ideological Square of Van Dijk (1998) which provides a theoretical notion of “positive in group” and “negative out group” being manifested in discourse by lexical and other linguistic means. Besides Van Dijk’s ideological Square and his notion of socio-cognitive approach, Van Leeuwen’s (2008) model of social actor presentation is utilized in this study which provides a more detailed critical discourse analysis towards partiality and impartiality of the headlines.

## DISCUSSION

### ***The New York Times***

*Muslim Parents on How They Talk to Their Children about Hatred and Extremism* (Hanna Ingber Dec. 15, 2015)

*Analysis through Representation of Social Actors.* According to Van Leeuwen's representation of social actors (Van Leeuwen, 2008), "Muslim Parents" acts as the main activated role in the headline which carries the stress and the emphasis of the sentence. On the contrary, both "Children" and "Hatred and Extremism" are the passivated roles. This allocated role of passivation can be detected by the circumstantialization of the mentioned passivated roles accompanied by "To" and "about". The noteworthy point here is the domination of "Muslim Parents" in a headline in which words as "Hatred and Extremism" are playing the inferior roles.

Besides the given activated role to "Muslim Parents", the headline also contains an assimilation (the collectivization type) which considers all Muslim Parents the same in facing the dilemmatic situation of explaining "Hatred and Extremism" to "Their Children". This assimilation assumes that all Muslims throughout the world are struggling with such an issue which clearly represents the difficulty of distinguishing Islam and extremism for their youngsters.

Another point to consider according to Van Leeuwen's representation of social actors (Van Leeuwen, 2008) is the association of "Hatred and Extremism". In this headline, since "Muslim Parents" are foregrounded, the association of these words alongside Islam and Muslims would inevitably create a link of ideologies between Islam and extremism which in turn would undeniably leave a damaging image of Muslims on the readers.

The final point to contemplate in the headline is Van Leeuwen's term of "differentiation" (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 40). The employment of such pronouns as "they" and "their" in the headline can and will make a dissimilarity between "us" and "them" for those reading the headline.

*Analysis through Lexical Perspective.* In terms of the used vocabulary and lexical items, due to the use of "how", it is much plainly understood that "Muslim Parents" are presupposed to be facing a difficulty in elaborating on the problem of "Hatred and Extremism" to their children and young ones. Considering this subtle presupposition, the following questions come to mind:

Why it is the case and what exactly is this difficulty related to ?

Is the mentioned struggle because of the fact that others commonly (yet falsely) assume all Muslims to be extremist or is it because of the fact that they essentially are ?

- Are Muslims being falsely victimized by several premature suppositions or are they actually training their children with the ideologies of extremism ?
- Does the foregrounded struggle in the headline in fact refer to the stabilization of such extremist ideologies on their juveniles' minds ?

The answers of all these questions are left to the reader and his self-interpretation.

It is also noteworthy that the bipolarization in the headline indicates that dealing with “Hatred and Extremism” is an issue of only Muslims labeled as others not us.

### *Condemning Radical Islam / Confronting Islamic Extremism*

*Analysis through Representation of Social Actors.* In both headlines, the gerund forms of “condemn” and “confront” (forming process actions) will deprive the reader of knowing who the actual social actors are. In other words, in Van Leeuwen’s representation of social actors’ words (Van Leeuwen, 2008); the main social actors are excluded from both headlines, since the doers of the previously mentioned process actions are anonymously unknown.

In terms of role allocation as another vital element in Van Leeuwen’s representation of social actors (Van Leeuwen, 2008), “Radical Islam” and “Islamic Extremism” are both the passivated roles in these headlines. For these passivated roles, the association of “Radical” and “Islam” in the former, and the association of “Extremism” and “Islam” in the latter are of no question. Therefore, it can be certainly said that such associations will inevitably deteriorate the image of Muslims and Islam by demonstrating them as radical and extremist entities.

*Analysis through Lexical Perspective.* The definitions of “Condemn” and “Confront” according to *Oxford Online Dictionary*:

Confront:

- (Of a problem or difficulty) present itself to (someone) so that action must be taken.

Condemn:

- Express complete disapproval of; censure.
- Prove or show to be guilty or unsatisfactory.

Since Islam, Radical and Extremism were deceitfully collocated in these two headlines, the above-mentioned definitions convey a total negative

and abhorrent impression regarding Islam and Muslims. Plus, in both headlines, by considering the fact that “Radical” and “Extremism” were misleadingly fixated to Islam and Muslims, the superiority “us” over Islam has been indicated which in Van Dijk’s definition of Ideological Square (Van Dijk, 1998) is an obvious bipolarization.

*Italy Accuses Muslim Migrants of Killing Christians at Sea* (Jim Yardley and Gala Pianigiani April 16, 2015)

*Analysis through Representation of Social Actors.* The main social actor of this headline is “Italy” which is dominantly responsible for the act of accusing Muslims. By considering this domination, and according to the Van Leeuwen’s representation of social actors (Van Leeuwen, 2008), it can be said that the activated role in the headline belongs to “Italy” as the ample and main dynamic force. On the contrary, “Muslim migrants”, who were accused of murdering Christians by Italy, carries the opposite allocated role which has undergone the process of passivation in the headline and thus appeared inferior compared to the superior role of Italy.

In terms of assimilation as another term in representing social actors introduced by Van Leeuwen (2008), “Muslim migrants” were all collectivized in the headline which indeed means that all are blamable in the process of murdering Christians at sea. Furthermore, since Christians were also collectivized and the exact number of Christian victims was excluded from the headline, the dramatic effect has been hugely intensified.

Another point of consideration in the headline is that although it is quite common to write a country’s name as the subject of a social action, we cannot afford to neglect the fact that the main social actor of this headline, stating the foregrounded accusation, has been excluded and instead, Italians or perhaps better to say Italians’ officials were collectivized as the unanimous actor. This way of presentation can deeply segregate the two religions of Islam and Christianity by depicting a ferocious hatred running between them which had led to a group murdering another.

*Analysis through Lexical Perspective.* The fact that “Muslim migrants”, “killing”, “accusation” and “Christians” were all collocated in the headline will unavoidably stoke a sense of hatred towards Muslims and conversely, a sense of sympathy and innocence towards Christians. One reading this headline can easily presuppose that there is a religious war between Muslims and Christians which leads to murdering one another.

Having that in mind, there is no need to say that this headline directly supports the commonly propagated notion of violence running among Muslims who are zealous to annihilate those who stand against them.

It is also worthwhile to mention that the headline deepens the polarized idea that Muslims and Christians are from two entirely diverse spheres having quarrels with one another on regular basis. And since the shown violence in the headline is merely related to Muslims, this opposition would mainly damage the image of Islam and Muslims.

### ***The Guardian***

*Anti-terrorism summit reinforces “fear and hate” towards Muslims, critics warn*  
(Spencer Ackerman, Feb. 13, 2015)

*Analysis through Representation of Social Actors.* According to Van Leeuwen’s representation of social actors (Van Leeuwen, 2008), in this headline, the word “Muslims” has undergone the process of assimilation as the recipient of “fear and hate”. In other words, through collectivizing all the Muslims around the globe, one reading this article will get an impression that all the Muslims, even those terrorists who falsely call themselves so, are essentially the same and much feared and hated by others.

Another key element in representing social actors regarding this headline is Role Allocation. “Anti-terrorism summit” has been activated through subjection which makes it the dominant force of this headline. “Muslims” on the other hand, by experiencing circumstantialization (the existence of towards as the preposition) has been passivated being at the receiving end of this headline. Also, “fear and hate” can be deemed as another passivated role in the headline since they are the direct object of the reinforcement.

Finally, the words “fear” and “hate” seem quite ambiguous since one fails to understand who fears and hates Muslims. It is not obvious that this fear and hate is a global phenomenon, a national issue or a regional one. In other words, through excluding the actors of the mentioned actions, the assumption has been left to the readers and this assumption would certainly be extremely deleterious to the image of Muslims and Islam.

*Analysis through Lexical Perspective.* In terms of lexical items and collocations, it is quite clear that collocating words as “anti-terrorism, fear, hate

and Muslims” in this headline would inevitably leave a negative impression on the readers. The effect of the “anti-terrorism summit” on the “Muslims” is foregrounded in this headline and according to this headline, Muslims are presupposed to be terrorists, otherwise why would they be affected by this summit ?

Also, according to the Oxford Online Dictionary, the word “reinforce” means: Strengthen (an existing feeling, idea, or habit). It is, then, presupposed in this headline that beforehand, Muslims were feared and hated and this summit would only intensify such existing feelings.

*The role of Islam in radicalization is grossly overestimated* (Anne Aly Jan. 14, 2015)

*Analysis through Representation of Social Actors.* By wearing the lens of social actors representation (Van Leeuwen, 2008), it can be understood that the actor of “overestimating the role of Islam in radicalization” has not been mentioned or implied in this headline which means that it has been wholly excluded from the headline. This exclusion was most likely meant to be employed in order not to distract the reader from the association of Islam and radicalization which is detrimental to Islam and Muslims’ global image. Beside this, according to the online Oxford dictionary, “grossly” means: In a very obvious and unacceptable manner or: Extremely; excessively. In any case, by bearing these definitions in mind, it can be said that the act of gross overestimation seems to indicate the negligence, ignorance and short-sightedness of its social actor. This, perhaps, would be another reasonable reason why this headline preferred to not nominalize or specify the social actors and through the usage of exclusion, the actor(s) was entirely excluded from this headline without leaving any trace for the reader.

Moreover, in terms of role allocation presented by (Van Leeuwen, 2008), both “the role of Islam” and “radicalization” were passivated; however, with different indicators. While the former has undergone the process of changing an active sentence into a passive form through subject deletion and object replacement, the passivation of the latter is based on circumstantialization indicated by the use of a preposition namely “in”.

*Analysis through Lexical Perspective.* In terms of diction, “Islam” and “radicalization” were collocated in this headline which indeed bears a negative impression towards Islam and Muslims for whomever reads this head-

line. More importantly, according to the Oxford Online Dictionary, the word “overestimation” means: A judgment or a rough calculation that is too favorable or too high. When the role of Islam is overestimated, the presupposition here is the fact that Islam actually does have a role in radicalization; however, due to some unknown reasons, it has been overestimated.

*Tony Blair\_ force is necessary in struggle against radical Islam* (Dan Roberts, Jan. 15, 2015)

*Analysis through Representation of Social Actors.* Tony Blair, as an authority in the government, has been nominalized and individualized here (Van Leeuwen, 2008), since it can directly represent the dominance and power of this social actor compared to the other allocated roles in the headline.

Also, one can ask a number of questions hovering above the word “force”:

- What kind of force?
- Who is to impose this force?
- Who is the recipient of this force?

The answers to all these questions were excluded from the headline which means through the usage of exclusion (Van Leeuwen, 2008), the social actors regarding the word “force” were not mentioned in this headline and the reader cannot have a clear understanding of the true nature of this word.

And in terms of role allocation, “force” as the most important entity in this headline has been activated and this employed role allocation in the headline alongside the passivated role of Islam, can bear a destructive outcome for Islam and Muslims. Conversely, as mentioned previously, through circumstantialization, “radical Islam” has been passivated. The word “against” as a preposition in the headline, is an indicator of this passivation.

*Analysis through Lexical Perspective*

“Struggle” according to the Oxford Online Dictionary means:

1. Make forceful or violent efforts to get free of restraint or constriction
2. Engage in conflict
3. Strive to achieve or attain something in the face of difficulty or resistance

#### 4. Have difficulty handling or coping with

By taking a close look at different definitions of struggle according to the online Oxford dictionary as listed above, it can be easily deduced that there is a problem called “Islam” and it has to be immediately taken care of. Beside this, the way “force”, “struggle”, “radical” and “Islam” collocated in this headline will bring about nothing but a negative representation of Islam.

#### ***The Independent***

*A third of Americans “favour” Trump's Muslim ban* (Massoud Hayoun, Dec. 11, 2015)

*Analysis through Representation of Social Actors.* Clearly, the two main components of this headline are “A third of Americans” and “Trump’s Muslim ban” which need to be deeply analyzed through the representation of social actors. The former, as the activated role of the headline, plays the dominant role compared to the one of the latter which is passivated and inferior (Van Leeuwen, 2008). In this headline, “Americans”, which has also undergone the process of assimilation (“A third of” is an indicator of aggregation), carries the main stress of the headline and since “Muslim” is a part of the opposite role in the headline, a feeling of inferiority can be transferred to the readers.

Also, since “Muslim ban” is stated quite generally in the headline with no further explanation, it can serve as a general representation of all Muslims. Therefore, it can be said that in this headline, for the passivated role of “Muslim Ban”, there is no fine line between the employed representations of “Exclusion” and “Collectivization”:

- Which Muslims are foregrounded in the headline ? All or a group ?
- What is the scope of this ban ?

Either of these methods of representation, alongside the association of “Muslim” and “Ban” can eventually leave a negative impression on the reader intensifying the separation between Muslims and Americans.

*Analysis through Lexical Perspective.* According to online *Oxford dictionary*, “Favour” means “Feel or show approval or preference for”.

The assumption here is that “Americans” prefer the “Muslim ban” which will intensify the polarization of “Us” and “Them”. Furthermore, the collocation of “Muslim” and “Ban” in the headline, as well as the

presupposition that Muslims have done something wrong to deserve the ban, represents a destructive image of Muslims to the readers of the headline.

*Islam in Italy\_ Muslim with traditional clothes and Koran insulted and shouted at in Milan* (Lamiat Sabin, Feb. 19, 2015)

*Analysis through Representation of Social Actors.* According to Van Leeuwen's term of exclusion (Van Leeuwen, 2008), the social actors responsible for "insulting" and "shouting" were not mentioned in the headline and the interpretation was left to the reader. By having a close examination, it can be deduced that this exclusion has most likely taken place in order not to steal the attention from "Muslim" as the activated allocated role in the headline which solely represents the repulsive feeling of others towards itself. In contrast to "Muslim" as the activated role, "Milan" plays the passivated role in the headline which can be detected through the process of circumstantialization ("in" is the indicator of this circumstantialization).

Another important point in the headline is the association of "Muslim", "traditional clothes" and "Koran" which were all together targeted by the insult and disrespect of an unknown social actor. This association can bear this impression that not only merely Muslims, but also the traditions and their holy Book are not acceptable in the Western world, and considering Milan as a pole of global fashion, the subtle inference of "traditional clothes" can be indeed of importance.

*Analysis through Lexical Perspective.* In this headline, words including "Muslim", "traditional clothes", "Koran", "insult" and "shout" were collocated. The presence of these words in the headline can lead to the following assumptions:

- The main reason why "Muslim" was insulted and shouted in Milan is the fact that he was wearing traditional clothes and holding Koran which was unacceptable for the society.
- In Milan as one of the leading cities in fashion industry, there is no room for "Islamic traditional clothes" which probably refers to hijab.
- In a city where Christianity is the main religion, Islam cannot be tolerated.

All these assumptions would intensify the polarization between "Us" and "Them" by looking at Muslims as foreigners, strangers and outcasts.

*Are peaceful Muslims in denial about their religion* (Adam Walker Mar.4)

*Analysis through Representation of Social Actors.* As the activated role (Van Leeuwen, 2008) in the headline, “Peaceful Muslims” have undergone the process of assimilation and all of the meant ones share the same quality of being “peaceful”. On the contrary, by acknowledging “about” as an indicator of a prepositional phrase, it is true to say that “their religion” has been allocated the passivated role (Van Leeuwen, 2008) in the headline. However, since “their religion” itself represents a possessivation (Van Leeuwen, 2008), it is true to note that “religion” is also a passivated role in the mentioned headline. In either case, the bottom line is that whether considering the former passivation or the latter, in both, “religion” has been allocated the passivated role as opposed to “peaceful Muslims”. These role allocations are tied to one another by “in denial” in the headline which presents a sheer contrast between “Peace” and “Islam”. Furthermore, the accompaniment of “peaceful”, “Muslim” and “denial” in this headline would make a damaging association about the true nature of “Islam” and “Muslims”. Having mentioned this, another point to consider in the headline is that Muslims and Islam are being explicitly differentiated from others as the possessive pronoun “their” has been employed in this headline.

*Analysis through Lexical Perspective.* According to Van Dijk’s ideological square (Van Dijk, 1998; 2000), since the negative perception of others (in this headline “their religion”) has been used, a polarization in ideologies and a binary opposition between “Islam” and other religions have occurred. Also, the presuppositions in the headline are manifold. To clarify, it can be said that the collocation of “Peaceful Muslim”, “in denial” and “their religion” would raise many questions as following:

- What is the true nature of Islam ?
- Does Islam oppose peace ?
- Are peaceful Muslims heretic in the eye of Islam ?

One reading this headline would most likely answer the mentioned questions by making an unjust association between aggression, barbarism, savageness and Islam.

## FINDINGS

According to Van Leeuwen's representation of social actors, any social actor, by serving any specific purpose, can be resolutely included or excluded. Considering this method of presentation, this study concluded that in order to deliver the most desired message, Western print media tend to exclude those social actors which might appear even remotely damaging to the face of those against Islam and Muslims, while in many cases, Islam and Muslims were unfairly included in several headlines in order to draw the whole attention and carry the weight of foregrounded news. This was to a great extent more evident when the headline was trying to report a terrorist attack, clash of ideologies or Islamophobic news pieces.

According to the analyzed headlines in this study, it is true to say that in several instances social actors in favor of Western media were frequently given the activated role of the headline, while Islam and Muslims were allocated the passivated roles. However, in such pieces of news where a damaging image of Islam was intended, Muslims were commonly the dominant actors of the studied headlines. In addition, this study came to this conclusion that in many cases, Western media purposefully tend to collectivize Muslims to depict that terrorism and Islam are two inseparable notions which go hand in hand in the world of Muslims.

According to the examined headlines and their intended subtleties regarding the representation of Islam and Muslims in the Western media, it was deduced that in Western media, Muslims and Islam frequently tend to be alienated and differentiated by representing them as different individuals (commonly negatively and detrimentally) from others and rest of the world.

Therefore, this study lends support to Van Dijk's ideological square (Van Dijk, 1998), and the fact that the positive perception of selves and negative perception of others can engender a polarization in ideologies and a binary opposition between different groups (in this case, Muslims and others). Therefore, such groups (Western media) will indeed attempt to represent "we" as a favorable interpretation and "they" (Islam and Muslims) as an absolute unfavorable one through the application of ideological square and inculcating their intended ideologies (Kuo and Nakamura 2005).

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