



# The Stereotype of Arabs and Muslims in British Press. A Critical Discourse Analysis Study

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## ABSTRACT

The topic of stereotyping Arabs and Muslims is an under-debate topic in the field of critical discourse and the field of sectarian discrimination. This research tries to shed some light on the way and reason of stereotyping Arabs and Muslims as terrorists in the British press. The main problem of the paper is to figure out the way of stereotyping by British journalists. The researchers have tackled five articles from two newspapers as the data of Analysis. The model of Fairclough has been adopted in the analysis of the data. The prominent results of the study are that the journalist tries to enclose all Arabs and Muslims in the stereotypical image of terrorists and extremists by adopting special schemas, scripts, and micro-linguistic terms to convey this stereotypical image.

**KEYWORDS:** Stereotype, extremist, terrorist, radical, Arabs, Muslim, Critical discourse.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with an ongoing problem in the western press in general, and in the British press in particular, that is the stereotype of Arabs and Muslims. For a very long time, the British press has tried to depict the Arabs and Muslims with the picture of robbers, terrorists, hostile, and other negative aspects of social interaction. The paper tries to shed light on the critical side of this stereotype of Arabs and Muslims by investigating and analyzing the articles in selected British newspapers.

The paper tries to answer the following questions

- 1- How does the British press stereotype Arabs and Muslims?
- 2- What is the social ideology behind this stereotype?
- 3- How do the journalists manipulate the sociolinguistic discourse to convey the stereotypical image of Arabs and Muslims?

To answer the above questions, the research is set out to achieve the following aims:

- 1- Identifying the way of stereotyping the Arabs by the British press.
- 2- Specifying the social ideology behind this kind of stereotype.
- 3- Diagnosing the way, the journalists follow to manipulate the sociolinguistic discourse to convey the stereotypical image of Arabs and Muslims.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the next section of this paper, a theoretical background will be given about the meaning of critical discourse analysis with an emphasis on the model of Fairclough which is more suitable to this research than Van Dike's and Wodak's models. Then a general brief account of stereotypes and their origins have been explained. The data of the research will consist of four newspaper articles in two British printed newspapers: Church Times and Evangelical Times. The reason behind choosing those two newspapers is that they are so popular in attaching Muslims in their articles. Those four articles will be analyzed according to Fairclough Model to see how they depict the stereotypical image of Muslims and Arabs.

### 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Approaches

Critical discourse analysis is a branch of linguistics that lies in critical linguistics. Critical linguistics is a developing branch of linguistics that uncovers the hidden ideological processes and power relations at work or any situation in a written or spoken context. This branch of linguistics involves such topics as the social context of a text, grammar production, and language political issues. More specifically, critical discourse analysis studies the relation between the discourse and the socio-political and cultural factors, especially how discourse is ideologically influenced or may influence power relations in society. (Crystal, 2008)



CDA is derived from the critical theory of language which investigates the use of language as a form of social practice. All the social practices are related to specific contexts and they are the devices by which social relations are reconstructed to produce different interests. It raises the questions about interest

- How is the text positioned?
- Whose interests are served by this positioning?
- Whose interests are negated?
- What are the consequences of this positioning? (Fairclough, 1995)

Critical discourse analysis assumes a variety of approaches to deal with the social analysis of discourse which differs in theory, methodology, and the type of research issues to which they tend to make prominence (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Pêcheux, 1982; Wodak & Meyer, 2001)

Fairclough (1989, 1995) proposed a model for CDA that consists of three inter-related processes of analysis tied to three inter-related dimensions of discourse. Those dimensions are:

- 1 The object of analysis (including verbal, visual, or verbal and visual texts).
- 2 The processes using which the object is produced and received (writing/ speaking/ designing and reading/ listening/ viewing) by human subjects.
- 3 The socio-historical conditions which govern these processes.

According to Fairclough each of these dimensions requires a different kind of analysis

- 1 Text analysis (description),
- 2 Processing analysis (interpretation),
- 3 Social analysis (explanation).

According to Van Dijk's theory of CDA, the term critical refers to the use of language and reproduction to show power and dominance in society. The criticality is designated specifically to the problem of hegemony, power, and resistance in various fields of language. Van Dijk (2003) stated that CDA emphasizes the mental representation of a social group and is influenced by the social structure. In this regard, the theme of discussion might influence the way people emphasize the important information in a text or talk. CDA is regarded as an interdisciplinary multi-methodical approach rather than an isolated field of study. Van Dijk (2009) emphasized that CDA is the fusion of critical theory and application rather than a critical analysis.

Let's quote Van Dijk (2009) and Wodak and Meyer (2009) sketched aims and tenets of CDA which are employed in reviewing recent CDA studies:

a) CDA is more problem-oriented than in a particular theory or discipline because its implications are explicitly presented in layman's terms to the public.

b) CDA is interdisciplinary because it involves various theories, methods, and practical applications in serious non-binding issues and problems in society.

c) CDA is considered social research because its critical research is concerned with social issues and understanding of human rights, social inequality, abuse of power, such as racism, classism, sexism, and so on.

d) CDA is interested in unethical issues that investigate the dominance of groups of people who experience discursive injustice.

e) CDA underlines spontaneous assessment as a need to enlighten the phenomenon under investigation and justifies why a certain interpretation is more effective than others. The purpose of this review is to find out how CDA as a critical discourse analysis method plays a central role in uncovering hidden ideologies and examining the power of media discourse studies. The specific objective is to explore the application of the CDA approach in the study.

## 2.2 Origins of Stereotype

In surveying the literature about stereotypes, it can be found that there are several epistemological stances of stereotypes. With the emergence of globalization of media coverage, it seems that the media (movies, television and advertisements, and newspapers) has contributed to overflow the stereotypes and those media tools are regarded as the main source of transferring stereotypes to individuals (Plous, 2003; Whitley & Kite, 2006). Even though media has not created stereotypes directly but it has a great influence on people to convey stereotypes (Cooke-Jackson & Hansen, 2008). Stereotypical figures and images are portrayed in the media every day, those pictures can cause prejudice towards other groups making people have negative and emotional feelings towards members of these groups (Ramasubramanian, 2005).

Away from the media, the stereotype can be found in the childhood of some people when the parents intentionally teach their children the concept



of stereotype against special social groups. In the workplace also there may be a kind of stereotype that might be indirectly originated from parents, peer groups, colleagues, or teachers. (Timberlake & Estes, 2007). Sometimes parents or family members directly provide and support stereotypical ideas and beliefs to their children, those beliefs will be deeply rooted in the children's minds and they grow up with these beliefs (Bar-Tal, 1996; Whitley & Kite, 2006).

Bar-Tal (1996) made an investigation about the Jewish children in Israel who show a stereotypical belief about Arabic children, the study found that the Jewish children have negative stereotypical beliefs about Arabs such as being aggressive and violent. Those negative stereotypes are taught to children by their parents and family members. The ways of providing them were like ordering their children not to contact Arab children and they should stay away from them. Those negative ideas in the mind of Jewish children may stick in their minds even after maturation and become a fact about Arabs (Whitley & Kite, 2006).

The term Stereotype was firstly coined by Lippmann in 1922 to describe the characteristics perceived about a certain social group (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick & Esses, 2010). In addition to that, the stereotype is an exaggerated belief related to a category. (Allport 1954, p. 191). The purpose of stereotypes is to rationalize or justify our beliefs about that category. This preliminary definition was regarded as a benchmark for the next works on stereotypes (Pickering, 2001). According to the definition, it can be seen that stereotypes overgeneralize traits that are found to be features of specific categories. (Pickering, 2001).

The notion stereotype will be analyzed according to the model of Van Dijk. the model consists of three levels: the macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. The first one will show how stereotypes are expressed by the use of power and dominance, this will be achieved through in-group and out-group devices, this means that the writers of the newspapers article use these devices to classify social groups as those who are victimized as in-groups, and those who perform the terroristic actions as out-groups. (Van Dijk 2009).

The second level of analysis according to Van Dijk is the superstructure level which includes the schema and script of the event in the article, this level of the model will show how the stereotype is expressed by the use of these tools. According to the schema, the journalist depends on the conventional

mental shared knowledge of the readers about the terrorist groups to shape the stereotypical image of Muslims and the script is the dynamic schema through which the journalist tries to depict the act performed by the terroristic attacks and make those attack related only to Muslims.

The third level of analysis is the microstructure level, this level includes the linguistic structure of the text or article, the researchers will analyze the article semantically and pragmatically to see how the journalists use certain words or idioms to perform the stereotypical image about Muslims, pragmatically, the articles will be investigated to see the intended meaning of the journalist behind their article to convey the phenomena of stereotypes about Muslims.

### 2.2.3 Model of analysis

The data in this research will be analyzed according to the Van Dijk model of CDA. It consists of three levels: macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure.

The macrostructure shows the dominance and power in the mass media. These elements will add a thematic value to the text that quenches the readers' thirst for information to be conveyed, this is the way how journalists drag their readers and the public opinion to believe in something according to their opinion. This level represents the social cognitive side of the text that the writer tries to convey (Van Dijk 2009).

The superstructure represents the schematic structure of the article or news that the journalists intended to convey, according to Van Dijk, the superstructure is the strategy in arranging the composition of the news to achieve the purpose that he is after, for example prioritizing something and postponing something else according to what he wants to convey, it has been mentioned above that the journalist will depend on the conventional shared knowledge and the dynamic script in the mind of the reader to depict the stereotypical image about Muslims (Van Dijk 2009).

The third level of analysis is the microstructure level which reveals the linguistic level that is used by the writer or the journalist to express his ideas. This level can be sub-categorized into: semantic and pragmatic. As stated above, the semantic level will show the use of certain words or expressions to express the idea of stereotypes about Muslims and the intended meaning of the writer behind his article (Van Dijk 2009).

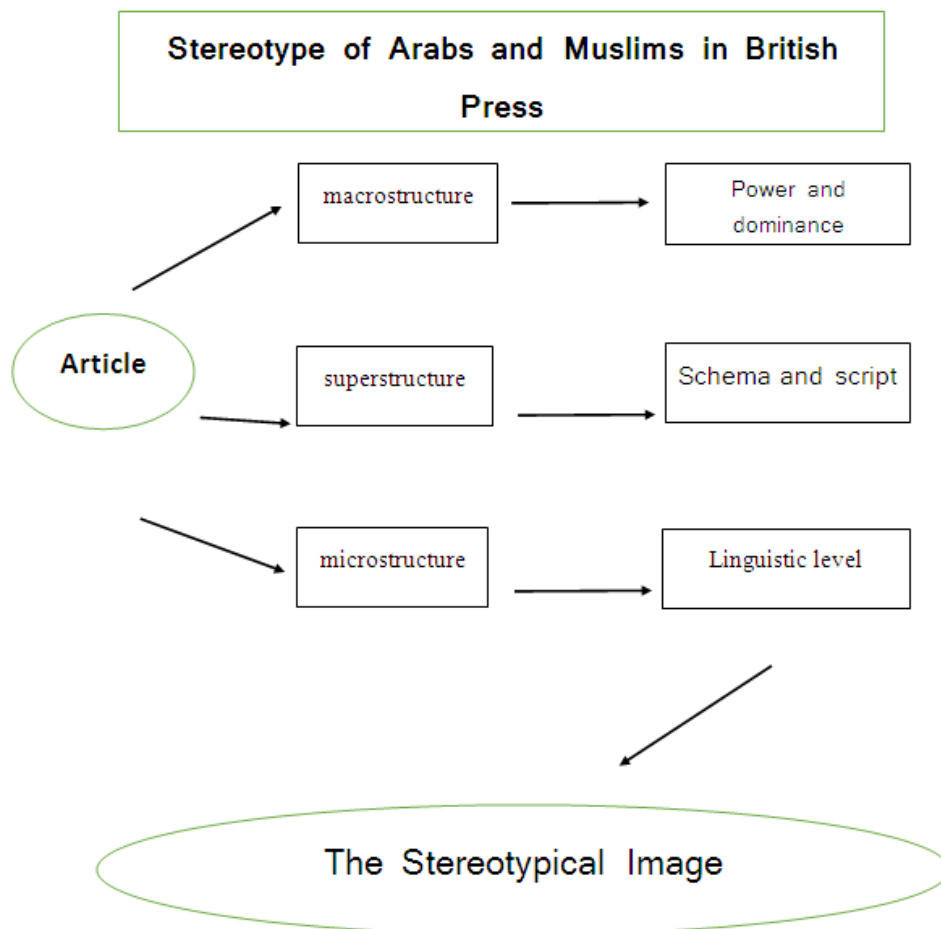


Figure (1) The Model of Analysis

### III. DATA AND ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 Data description and collection

The data of this paper consists of five articles from two newspapers: Church Times and Evangelical Times. Those articles depict the stereotypical phenomena about Muslims. The links to all the articles will be listed in the bibliography.

#### 3.2 Data length

As mentioned earlier, the data of this research consists of five articles, nearly each one of them consists of nearly five hundred words, they are not so long, so it will be easy to track the three levels of the model to analyze those articles.

#### 3.3 Data theme

The main theme of the research is the stereotype image of Muslims in the British newspapers. The researchers will analyze the data according to the model of Van Dijk in Critical discourse analysis.

#### 3.4 Method of analysis

The data will be analyzed according to the model stated earlier. The examples that represent the three levels of analysis will be extracted from the five

articles. And then the result is collected and compared to see the dominant feature of the analysis.

#### Article 1 Targeting Muslims 24 JULY 2015

According to the Macrostructure level, this article has explained the problem of the extremist Muslims who suicide themselves to kill others, "When the Prime Minister spoke on Monday about extremists who clearly detest British society and everything we stand for"

"It cannot be right, for example," Mr. Cameron said, that people can grow up and go to school and hardly ever come into meaningful contact with people from other backgrounds and faiths."

British prime minister David Cameron superficially acknowledged that the extremists are not actual moderate Muslims, but the stereotypical image here is that why always the bomber or





suicides are categorized as Muslims or Arabs even though there are some similar occasions in which Christians or other religious believers made massacres against Muslims in Austria, but that crime was dealt with as an exceptional case of psychotic criminal, even the Muslims in Australia believe that all Christians are peaceful not like that criminal. So the journalist classified the terrorist as an out-group and overgeneralized this group for all Muslims. David Cameron classifies himself and other society members as in-group members to be under the terror of extremists, see these words: *Mr. Cameron's speech on Monday, however, was unusually pointed. He said little about Muslims that could be applied to any other religious group, a sign that the days when undifferentiated "faith groups" were praised or castigated might be over.*

According to the superstructure level, the journalist makes use of the schema and script of terroristic groups to depict all Muslims as terrorists, this schema and script indirectly figure the stereotype of terror in the Character of Muslims and Islam.

Finally, the microstructure of the article will be analyzed semantically, the writer of the article uses certain words to denote the stereotypical image of Muslims, the most recurrent word was "extremists" which was stated four times along with the word "Muslims". The article is tightly coherent and cohesive to convey the stereotypes of Muslims and Arabs as Terrorists. Pragmatically speaking, the way of Cameron's speech is intended to convey the idea that all Muslims are extremists and terrorists even though he didn't state it directly, this idea was conveyed by the political power of his speech as the prime minister of the UK.

## Article 2

### An Effective Response to The Terrorists

27 SEPTEMBER 2013

The second article has tackled the bombing attack on Christians in Pakistan by so-called radical Muslims. *"THE attacks on All Saints', Peshawar, and the Westgate Shopping Centre in Nairobi tell us nothing new about terrorism. The murderous targeting of non-Muslims in Nairobi, and Christians, in particular, in Peshawar are depressingly similar in type, if not in scale, to a series of attacks in other parts of the world, such as Egypt, Syria, and northern Nigeria."*

If we consider the existence of Muslims and Christians in Pakistan, it can be seen clearly that the journalist wants to classify Muslims as an out-group people to show the dominance of radical Muslims over the Christians, this is against the fact

that both believers of both faiths grow together peacefully without any kind of envy, aggression or hostility, the writer of the article tries to judge the Christians as an in-group member under the dominance of out-group radical Muslims.

*"This was an attack on a congregation of Christians, whose presence in Pakistan is being challenged by radical Islamists, although the two communities have rubbed along together successfully for so long in the past"*

According to the above extract, it is so clear that the attack was performed to make a challenge between the two religious' believers, but no rational person can call the attackers Muslim despite the claim to be Muslim, the real Muslims go in queues to donate blood for the injured people, those are the real Muslims.

As the superstructure level is concerned again the media has described the criminal and the authority behind that attack in the schema of Muslims without differentiating them as criminals, the conventional script neglects hundreds of crimes that are committed every day by Christians and other religious believers, why it is only for Muslims to be overgeneralized by the crimes of some radicals, this is the stereotypical idea behind the article, this is the real role of schema and script to idealize the stereotype image of Muslims as terrorists.

According to the third level that is the microstructure level, semantically the journalist uses the dichotomy of *Muslim/ Christian* to show a kind of claimed struggle between the two religious groups, also the journalist states very influential words like "radical, al Qaeda, Islamist, and terrorists" to depict the stereotypical image about Muslims. Pragmatically speaking, the journalist intended to relate the terroristic attack by so-called radical Islamists to Muslims, in general, to stereotype the image of terror to All Islamic Believers.

## Article 3

### Nigeria: Aid workers killed as a 'warning' against converting Muslims to Christianity

September 2020

The third article has described the horrible crime of killing aid workers in Nigeria by the 'Islamic State in West Africa Province' (ISWAP), "Boko Haram", a faction of Boko Haram.

*In a video, the fighters said that the executions were a warning to 'all those being used by infidels to convert Muslims to Christianity'*

The writer of the article tries to classify the Muslim as out-group to be represented by the terroristic Islamic State in West Africa



Province' (ISWAP) and all other Christian as in-group members, but the writer did not mention that this crime was committed as a reaction to the call of converting Muslims to Christians, check this extract also from the article:

*'The militant Islamic group shows no remorse as it continues to target civilians based on their faith, such as Leah Sharibu who was abducted by Boko Haram over two years ago.'*

According to the superstructure level of analysis, the writer emphasizes the schema of picturing Muslims inside the terroristic group "Boko Haram and Al Qaeda", the script of this schema is the way of kidnapping those poor aid workers and killing them and got them recorded in the table, this script figures the stereotypical image about political Islam and Al Qaeda. Everyone in the world knows that those terroristic groups do not represent anyone or belief but themselves.

The microstructure level is highly emphasized in this article by using highly expressive words like **Boko Haram**, **Islamist**, and **militants** in addition to the negative use of **Muslim's** positive use of **Christianity**. Pragmatically speaking, the journalist is after focusing on the envy and debate between the **Muslims** and **Christians** in Nigeria but this is expressed indirectly. What is expressed semantically is to shed some light on the crime of the Boko Haram group but the stereotypical image that is intended behind the text is to symbolize Muslims as terrorists. Although the notion of Islam is used negatively to refer to the terroristic group that claims to belong to Islam, no real Muslim can acknowledge killing innocent people, this crime is denounced by all Muslims around the world, but if we look at the article from a different point of view, it can be seen that there is no reference to the fact that a group of Christians in Nigeria try to convince Muslims to turn to Christianity and this is against the principle The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and this is the stereotypical fact in the article, just to focus on the crime of what is so-called Islamic radicals.

#### Article 4

Norway: Muslims beat and attempt to force the conversion of the street preacher

March 2020

**Four Muslim men abducted, beat, and robbed a Christian Street preacher in Trondheim, Norway, demanding at knifepoint he converts to Islam or be killed.**

The above extract is from an article about an incident of abduction of a Christian man by four "Muslims". The writer of the article tries to isolate

the Muslims in Norway as an out-group away from all other people Christians and other believers, the incident is definitely a crime but is it a reaction to trying to convert Muslim refugees to Christians.

The same month, the head of Stop Islamisation of Norway set a copy of the Koran on fire in the city of Kristiansand, sparking outrage from many Muslim nations

Concerning the superstructure level, the writer of the article structures the details of his article schematically to show that Muslims are kidnapers, the script of the action starts from the action of kidnapping with all the details ending with the incident of Burning a copy of the Holy Quran, the writer did not focus on this crime of contempt Islam. This is the stereotypical image of the writer that he intended to convey, the writer neglected to burn a holy Sacred book by Christian and focused on the reaction to that crime.

According to the microstructure level, linguistically, the journalist stated words like Christians, Muslim, and Quran, but surprisingly he related the words **Stop Islamisation**, **Muslims** with the meaning of **abduction**, **robbery**, and **Christians** with preaching, but the writer did not focus on the **burning** of the **Holy Quran**. This is the meaning of the stereotypical image to enclose the Muslims with the horrible thing which is the reaction of initial actions which is more horrible like burning the holy Quran.

#### Article Five: Mission – Christian outreach to Muslims

November 2016

*'While terrorist groups such as Islamic State, Taliban, Al Qaeda, and Boko Haram are killing Christians in different countries, God is leading us to reach out to the Muslims for his own glory and help them to know that Jesus Christ is the only living God and Saviour.'*

This article is about a mission to Muslims to convert them to Christians, following the macrostructure level, the writer of the article classified Muslims as the frame of terroristic groups like Taliban, Al Qaeda, and Boko Haram and put the Christians as God angels who pray to God for poor Muslim people. The writer followed the same principle of in-group and out-group, Muslims as in-group and Christians as out-group.

Secondly, on the superstructure level, the journalist schematizes the All Muslims inside the terroristic groups only despite his knowledge that all Muslims condemn the actions and crimes committed by those terroristic groups. The script of the actions has been arranged to sympathize with the Muslims who suffer



from those terroristic groups to rescue them by joining Christianity. This is the way how the writer tried to stereotype Muslims as terrorists.

Linguistically according to the microstructure level, the journalist stated a word like *Christians* on one hand and words like *Muslim*, *Al Qaeda*, *Taliban*, *Boko Haram* to show the stereotypical image about Muslims to depict them as terrorists, unlike reality.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the data analysis above, the following can be concluded. Firstly, the British journalists try to classify Arabs and Muslims as out-group people

by categorizing them as extremists, terrorists, suiciders, and robbers.

Secondly, the journalists use special schemas and scripts to depict the Christians as very innocent people who have done nothing to Muslims, and they depict Muslims as terrorists, extremists' people who want to kill Christians.

Thirdly, the journalists used specific terms and notions to refer to Muslims to enclose them in a stereotypical image, those notions are extremist, terrorist, Islamist, radical, and the like. The details of the analysis can be shown in the following table.

Table (1) the details of the article according to Van Dijk model of Analysis.

	Superstructure	Microstructure	Macrostructure
Article 1	In-group: British people Out-group: extremists	Schematic picture of Muslims to be terrorists	Linguistic notions: extremists Muslims
Article 2	In-group: Christians in Pakistan Out-group: radical Muslims	Schema: Muslims as criminals not like other criminals	Linguistic notion: Muslim/Christian radical, al Qaeda, Islamist, and terrorists
Article 3	In-group: aid workers in Nigeria Out-group: Boko Haram members	Schema: picturing Muslims inside the terroristic group "Boko Haram and Al Qaeda"	Linguistic notion: Boko Haram, Islamist militants Muslims Christianity Muslims Christians
Article 4	In group: Christian preacher Out-group: Muslims	Schema: Muslims are kidnapers	Linguistic notion: Stop Islamisation, Muslims abduction, robbery Christians burning holy Quran
Article 5	In-group: Christians Out-group: Muslims	Schema: All Muslims inside the terroristic groups	Linguistic Notions: Christians Muslim, Al Qaeda, Taliban, Boko Haram

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

According to the above analysis and results, the following points can be concluded.

1- The British press always tries to depict the Arabs and Muslims in the image of terrorists and extremists without focusing on the terrible actions that Christians exert against Muslims.

2- The journalists in the British press reveal indirectly the ideology of terroristic Islam by focusing on the terroristic groups such as Al Qaeda and Boko Haram as Islamic groups.

3- The British journalist uses special schemas and scripts to picture the image of the Muslims as terrorists. They also use specific linguistic notions



such as extremist, terrorist, radical in order to convey the stereotypical image of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists.

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### Article Links

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