

A Content Analysis of UK Newspapers Portrayal of Muslims following Woolwich and Mohammed Saleem

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Abstract

In 2013 Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale, murdered a British soldier, named Lee Rigby in Woolwich, south-east London. In the aftermath of the incident, evidence showed Muslims had become targets for a rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes.¹ Most notably, mosques had been reported to have been burnt down and graffiti with messages of hate scrawled against the walls. In such times, the role of the media is crucial in projecting a balanced approach. This study analysed newspaper coverage three weeks from the Woolwich attacks and examined the language and headlines used to describe Muslims. Over 1022 articles from UK newspapers were reviewed using the Nexis database utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the media narrative regarding Muslims and also make a comparative analysis of how the media reported on the case of Mohammed Saleem who was murdered by the far right extremist, Pavlo Lapshyn. The newspaper articles were analysed by using the computer software NVivo to search for and identify patterns across the articles in order to give an idea of the most frequent ways that Muslims were being portrayed. This paper found that news coverage had generalised about Muslims which was made in an overtly prejudicial way.

Key Words:

Islamophobia; Counter-terrorism; Extremism; Media; Woolwich; Muslims

Introduction

In the summer of May 2013, British Army Drummer, Lee Rigby was murdered on the streets of Woolwich by two men, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale. Both men openly expressed their anger and views, through a passer-by who had recorded everything on his mobile phone. Carrying meat cleavers and with their hands covered in blood, both men are seen walking the streets of Woolwich in a disturbingly calm, calculated and collective manner. Both, Adebolajo and Adebowale have since been convicted of the murder of Lee Rigby². The incident provoked strong public anger and outrage by politicians, policy makers and the British press who were quick to describe the attack as an act of ‘terrorism.’ This forms the basis of this article, as we examine the meaning of terrorism and media reporting of this incident and the one of Mohammed Saleem, a British Muslim, aged 82 who was murdered by a far-right extremist named Pavlo Lapshyn.

Indeed, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron made a statement, following the Woolwich incident outside Downing Street in London, indicating the attack was a form of terrorism. He stated that: “First, this country will be absolutely resolute in its stand against violent extremism and terror. We will never give in to terror – or terrorism – in any of its forms”.³ The Terrorism Act 2000 states that an act of terrorism must be politically, religiously and ideologically motivated and includes ‘serious violence against a person, damage to property, endangers a person’s life, creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public, or is designed seriously to interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system’⁴.

The ideological, political and religious justification used for the Woolwich attack was given by Adebolajo in a series of statements following the attack including at his trial at the Old Bailey in London. At the time of the incident, in a video that was posted across YouTube and also broadcast by a number of media outlets such as ITV, Adebolajo stated that: “The only reason we have killed this man today is because Muslims are dying daily by British soldiers and this British soldier is one - It is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”⁵. That statement led to a number of criticisms about how the media had effectively allowed Michael Adebolajo a voice and platform to broadcast his opinion. In particular, the news channel, ITV were criticised, as they decided to broadcast those comments live on its 6.30pm bulletin causing a huge level of anger and criticism from the public. ITV received 500 complaints, whilst the BBC received 200 complaints which were made to the British media regulator Ofcom⁶.

The broadcast was initially justified by editors at ITV who felt it was an integral part of the news story and therefore was in the ‘public interest’. However ITV would later edit the video in an attempt to ‘obscure’ the actual body and face of Michael Adebolajo, who was the other suspect involved and also minimise at the same time the damage they had caused. As the events of the day began to unfold, the BBC’s political correspondent, Nick Robinson was also criticised for describing the attackers as of a ‘Muslim appearance’ in the 6.00pm BBC news bulletin⁷. As a result, the BBC received 43 complaints. Sian et al. (2012: 232) study⁸ into the impact of the media and Muslims in the UK found that the BBC had often illustrated a bias, distortion and negativity in the way they reported stories concerning Muslims. Indeed, serious questions were raised as to what was someone of a ‘Muslim appearance’? Is it someone with a beard? Or is it someone with a darker skin complexion? Robinson’s assertion had caused a lot of damage and revealed a deeper concern which was: How were the media portraying Muslims following Woolwich? Was this a simple error in judgement on Robinson’s part? Or were the British media using Woolwich to make ‘lazy assumptions’ with terrorism and Muslims?

We note that editors were under immense pressure following Woolwich to make sure they were reporting the actual facts but also maintaining a fair balance between the news story and what we found from our study which was in practice making a number of over-generalising statements about Islam, Muslims and terrorism. Interestingly, the press complaints commission (the print media regulator) also received over 83 complaints about the print media and their coverage of the Woolwich incident⁹. Much of that criticism, was based on the images, pictures and headlines used of Adebolajo, with his hands covered in blood. For example, the Guardian

had been criticised for its front cover, which had a picture of Adebolajo carrying a meat cleaver and his hands covered in blood accompanied by the headline: 'You people will never be safe'.

Indeed, the Sun, the Daily Telegraph, the Independent, the Times and the Mirror all used the same image and words. The Guardian also went a step further; in view of some the dangers attached to the case by deciding to prevent people making comments in its 'commentisfree' section with stories around Woolwich, because they felt there was a legal risk attached to some statements¹⁰. Clearly, the print media, played an important role in the dissemination of news and also setting the news agenda of the day¹¹. Moreover, it provided a platform by which social, political, world affairs and other policy related issues are interwoven into a wider public debate about society¹². This type of news story therefore can play an important role in the construction of behaviour and opinions which are shaped by the way stories are reported¹³.

Terminology and Words Used in the Print Media

Indeed, we know from previous studies looking at media coverage in particular post 9/11, that the media news stories have often stereotyped Muslims in a negative light. Moore et al. (2008)¹⁴ study from (2001-2008) examined over 974 newspaper articles and found that the majority of news coverage post 9/11 about Muslims was negative. Their research into media coverage of British Muslims involved a content analysis of 974 newspaper articles about British Muslims in the British press and an analysis of visual images. Using statistical analysis of stories and language they found that at least two thirds of newspaper articles were focused around stories on terrorism. These stories had used the words such as 'militancy' and 'radicalism' to depict Muslims in an overtly negative fashion and were a product of a wider anti-Muslim prejudice which they found across British newspapers.

They also found that the language, news coverage, headlines and stories used regarding British Muslims were overall negative and often coupled British Muslims with a narrative that they were a 'problem group', a 'threat' or indeed Islam was deemed to be 'dangerous' and an 'irrational religion'. They also found that the common nouns used in relation to British Muslims were the words, 'extremist', 'Islamist', 'suicide bomber', 'militant' and the common adjectives used included the words 'radical', 'fanatical' and 'fundamentalist'.

The research by Moore et al. (2008)¹⁵ also found that 36% of stories about British Muslims between those periods were exclusively about terrorism. They also found that news coverage of stories in more recent times, had been focused around religious and cultural barriers between Islam, Muslims and British culture and around the implementation of Shariah law. Indeed, their study found that the print media stories were often based around societal and political experiences of Muslims in the UK.

Furthermore, in a study conducted by Baker et al. (2013)¹⁶ which provided an analysis of stories regarding Islam and Muslims in British newspapers found that overall stories concerning Islam were negative. Using a critical discourse analysis which sought to address some key questions from over 200,000 media articles on Islam they examined the use of language which they found represented Muslims and Islam in a prejudicial manner. Similarly, Poole's (2002: 2006)

research found a clear link between Muslims being associated with terms such as ‘terrorists’, ‘politics’ and ‘reactions to the war in Iraq’.¹⁷

We argue that such reporting and representation of British Muslims also helps create the framework for the ‘othering’ of communities and in particular may influence people’s perceptions of Muslims because of the dominate type of headlines and stories they read. Our research findings also show that from the three week period when the Woolwich attack took place, similar notions of terrorism were being linked to Islam and Muslims. This was evidenced by negative stories that were portrayed by a number of British newspapers. Furthermore, our findings seem to mirror with the work of Allen (2012: 8) who found that 91% of British newspapers coverage of British Muslims was deemed negative.¹⁸

Media, Terrorism and Publicity

In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher, the former British Prime Minister, famously coined the phrase that media publicity is like oxygen for terrorists. By this she meant that terrorists seek change through the use of fear and intimidation and in particular specific terrorist attacks can often be employed in a manner that allows them to maximize the impact of their activities. This can be amplified by the use of the media in how they display and send their message. Bozarth (2005) argues that the impact of terrorist attacks can therefore be measured by how terrorist specifically use the media to propagate their cause.¹⁹ For Bozarth (2005) this type of impact could be measured with the prevalence of media coverage, the number of media sources who report the incident, the duration of coverage of an attack and the details of the coverage.²⁰

Clearly, there is a fine line between reporting a news story and portraying a negative version of the story or simply acting as a sound piece for a terrorist. For example, The New York Times and Washington Post both published the political manifesto of Ted Kaczynski the Unabomber in 1995. At the time he made a declaration that he would cease the bombings if newspapers would publish his manifesto and as a result both The New York Times and The Washington Post published his manifesto called “Industrial Society and Its Future” (The Washington Post: The Unabomber Trial: The Manifesto 1995)²¹. Indeed, more recently Al-Jazeera, the Qatari based media news channel has received criticism for its close links with the Al-Qaeda leadership. For example, a number of videos of Osama bin Laden and Ayman Az-Zawarhi have been broadcast directly through Al-Jazeera.

Similarly, as noted above, a number of British media news channels were also heavily criticised for their reporting of the Woolwich attack. ITV News and Sky News were amongst the groups that were criticised for effectively broadcasting the Adebolajo statement. Terrorists, do look to the media to amplify their actions and be able to spread their message to a wider audience. Ultimately this forms a ‘signal’ by which they disseminate their cause for violence and terrorism to a wider audience. This in turn can help provide an impetus for terrorists to use the media as a means to broadcast their message and thereby create a theatre of fear. Nacos (2002) for example argues that this forms a triangle of political communication which is used by terrorists to identify the news media and the public as a means to disseminate their ideological reasons for their crime.²²

In each section of the triangle the media allows the flow of messages to the general public. This is particularly important in Woolwich because the individuals had the urge and impetus to communicate their causes and grievances to a wider audience. For example, both the print and news media, therefore in effect allowed the Woolwich attackers the platform to magnify and maximise publicity by broadcasting Adebolajo's reasons for committing this murder. Critics would argue that British newspapers therefore may also have been complicit in this act as they used the pictures and his words to create news headlines that caused controversy. More specifically, the media therefore can act as gatekeepers in communicating wider messages of counter-terrorism issues. We argue that they therefore have to take a socially responsible decision in how they report such events because as we have found out this can have implications for the communities and faith groups they target.

The Leveson Inquiry

The dilemma, therefore between what to report and how to report a big news story is a key consideration when examining what is in the 'public interest'. Indeed, the high profile Leveson inquiry in the UK revealed serious concerns about media corruption following the British Newspaper, News of the World's, closure after it had admitted it had hacked into Milly Dowler's¹ mobile phone and voicemail after her death. The Leveson inquiry was set up by the British government to try and create better government oversight and press regulation. As part of his evidence before Leveson, Inayat Bunglawala, who was the media secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain, made the case that the British press had created an atmosphere which 'demonized' Islam and fuelled an anti-Muslim narrative. For Bunglawala this meant the media needed to portray a more 'responsible' and 'proportionate' attitude towards stories which meant a fairer portrayal of Islam.

His evidence concluded that a more balanced and nuanced way of reporting stories by the media concerning Islam could be achieved if a system of self-regulation was introduced, because it would allow a process that challenges inaccuracies in reporting stories. Moreover, the Leveson inquiry did make a number of recommendations that included tighter monitoring of internet sites and blogs where there was evidence of anti-Muslim prejudice emerging. However, at the time of writing these recommendations have not yet been implemented. Inayat Bunglawla (2012) stated that:

“British Muslims as a social group collectively suffer from poor media practices, whether this is the excessive attention granted to fringe Muslim groups, like Muslims Against Crusades, by the media or poor fact-checking prior to publication. Improving media practices and media responsibility on portraying and reporting fairly on Islam and British Muslims, without bias or discrimination or intent to incite anti-Muslim prejudice, is an urgent concern.”²³

Below the paper will now examine our research project in more detail with regards Woolwich and the representation of Muslims in UK Newspapers.

¹ Milly Dowler, was a 13-year-old-girl who was abducted on her way to school and subsequently murdered.

The Research Project

Utilising the principle of grounded theory, we were able to examine the role of the print media and its use of news headlines and news coverage of the Woolwich incident by observing a three week data set²⁴. Using grounded theory and content analysis is important because it allows for a more useful method for examining wider trends, patterns and helped provide a robust empirical basis for understanding the language within the print newspapers. Our main question which we wanted to explore was: How did UK newspapers depict Muslims three weeks from the Woolwich incident? We first examined newspaper coverage more generally regarding the Woolwich incident and were able to identify emerging themes and patterns from our data set.

The sample for the content analysis was then gathered from the Nexis database examining British broadsheet and regional newspapers within the first three weeks' of the Woolwich incident between the 22nd May 2013 the date of the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby and the 12th of June 2013. The three week period was used because we wanted to capture only the initial reporting of the incident as we felt it would provide us with a starting point for further research in this area and also shed light on how the print media reacted to the Woolwich incident in its immediate aftermath.

Clearly, there are drawbacks to such a narrow time frame and also a small sample size like this cannot truly be representative of all news coverage, however we do believe this does provide a platform for further research which we hope to conduct in this area. Using Nexis, we identified the subsets of 'Terrorism', 'Islam', 'Muslim' and 'Woolwich' which were carried out in order to establish our sample. Nexis is an electronic database which holds an archive of British newspaper articles, reports, comments, features and case studies. Nexis does have limitations in its use of searchable words and therefore cannot be an indicative source for all news stories.

We then used NVivo, an electronic software system, which allowed us to analyse and collect themes that emerged from the newspaper articles. This also meant we were able to create coded themes and use the word frequency generator within the program which generated the 75 most frequent words that emerged from both regional and broadsheet newspapers. We found the most common words within the top 75 most frequent terms that appeared were 'Muslim', 'terrorist', 'terror', and 'Islamic'. This was not surprising since previous studies have shown links between the words Islam and terrorism. For example, Akbarzadeh and Smith (2005: 23) state that the identification of Islam with acts of terrorism, or terrorism in the name of Islam is commonly known as 'Islamic terrorism' and therefore is likely to appear simultaneously.²⁵

Through both Nexis and NVivo we are confident that we have captured some of the key stories and headlines which yielded over 1022 articles. Out of the total results, only a selected volume of broadsheet (four) and regional (five) newspapers were used for the research, as we found that these daily newspapers provided extensive coverage of the Woolwich attack during the three week period and more importantly they were the key themes emerging from NVivo (see Table 1 and 2). The data set of three weeks post Woolwich was utilised, because we felt it would capture the scene at the time and therefore provide important data with regards the way

in which the print media were reporting this incident from the beginning. Below we will examine those key themes that emerged by starting with the word ‘Muslim’ and its depiction in both the broadsheet and regional newspapers.

Table 1 – Reference made to Woolwich

Broadsheet Newspapers	Articles in relation to Woolwich attack
The Telegraph	244
The Times	150
The Independent	137
The Guardian	66

Table 2 - Reference made to Woolwich

Regional Newspapers	Articles in relation to Woolwich attack
Scotsman	38
Scotland Sunday	25
Yorkshire Post	23
Belfast Telegraph	22
Evening Standard	21

Findings

The Term ‘Muslim’ in the British Newspapers following Woolwich

We found that a number of British broadsheet newspapers initially reported the Woolwich incident based around comments from within the Muslim community. For example, The Times²⁶ and The Telegraph²⁷ reported how the Muslim Council of Britain within hours of the attack were quick to distance Islam from the incident. The Muslim Council of Britain is a national organisation which represents news and stories about the Muslim community in Britain.

Indeed, the British Prime Minister David Cameron also had acknowledged how: “the strength and unity of response from Muslim community leaders” was evident shortly after chairing an emergency Cobra meeting following the murder of Lee Rigby²⁸. However it is acknowledged that when acts of terrorism do occur such as Woolwich, 9/11 and 7/7 than it does appear that public outrage has led to a sense that community leaders are encouraged or need to come out and distance themselves from such acts of terrorism. Following the Woolwich attack, it was visible that many Muslim organisations and Muslim community leaders were interviewed across British Television screens and via print media condemning the attack in a manner we argue is an attempt to alleviate any fears communities may be experiencing about reprisal attacks.

This was noted by the London Evening Standard²⁹ which a day after the Woolwich attack used the headline: “The threat from lone wolf terrorism.” Interestingly, their coverage revealed, how they felt Muslim groups were perhaps too quick to come out and condemn the incident without obtaining all the facts. They stated that: “Mainstream Muslim groups have been quick to condemn the killing, more so after than 7/7. But we do not know enough about their [attackers] background and influences.”³⁰

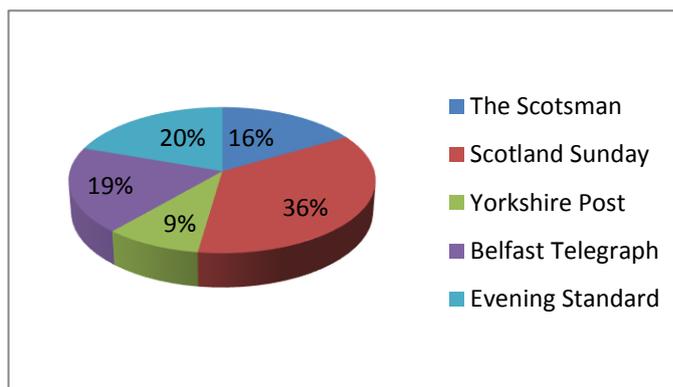
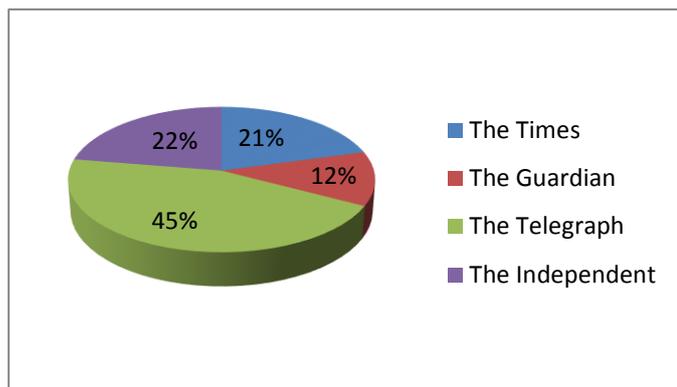
We argue that terrorism incidents can obscure and conflate arguments that sometime lead to counter-productive assertions embedded within the narrative that some people are sympathetic to terrorism causes, if they try to rationalise terrorist behaviour and do not condemn certain actions. Following Woolwich, we are of the opinion that the vocal condemnation by the Muslim communities of this attack was also perhaps influenced by the statement issued by the BBC’s political editor Nick Robinson. On the day of the attack he claimed on the 6.00pm BBC news bulletin that “the attackers were of Muslim appearance”³¹. That statement led to a number of complaints to Ofcom (the media regulator) and also led to Nick Robinson having to apologise for those comments.

The use of such language does seem to relate to a wider international problem of how Islam and Muslims are viewed. For example, Akbarzadeh and Smith (2005: 21)³² outline in their analysis of newspaper articles the use of common adjectives such as; ‘Muslim fanatics’, ‘radical Islamic group’, and ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ as being frequently used by Australian newspapers to ‘describe Muslims and Islam in connection to terrorism in both international and domestic cases.’ Robinson’s comments did also portray an undertone of naivety which was steeped in the generalisation that people of a ‘Muslim appearance’ maybe connected to terrorism. We also argue that this can be seen as problematic in particular when the public may not be aware of what Islam stands for. Indeed, Allen (2012) found that 64% of the British public claim that they do know about Muslims and what they do know is ‘acquired through the media’.³³ The paper below will now examine the news coverage of the term ‘Muslim’ via British regional newspapers.

The Term ‘Muslim’ in Regional Newspapers following Woolwich

Similar to British broadsheet newspapers, the British regional newspapers also adopted a position of stories that were heavily focused initially around Muslim community leaders expressing their anger at what had happened and crystallising the view that Islam and Muslims were not to blame. This amounted to for example, 36% of stories in the Scotland Sunday in comparison with Broadsheets such as The Telegraph which was 45%. Please see figure 1.1 below for a full breakdown of the word ‘Muslim’ in both Broadsheet and Regional Newspapers.

Figure 1:1 Coverage of the term ‘Muslim’ used by Broadsheet and Regional newspapers during the aftermath of the Woolwich attack by percentage



This was also personified by responsible reporting from many local regional newspapers which made a strong case for using references from Muslim councillors and Muslim Members of Parliament to show the visible outrage etched across Muslim communities after Woolwich. The Burton Mail, for example, used the headline ‘The British people will not accept this - Burton MP speaks out on Woolwich attack’³⁴.

We feel that this type of narrative was used in particular across smaller local regional newspapers as a means to stop the potential of problems escalating within tight knit communities. Clearly, the role of all communities is vital when confronting issues of this nature and the British print media did make an attempt to highlight how Muslim community leaders were expressing their outrage and anger over Woolwich. We can only speculate that this might affect their readership who would view this either in a positive or negative manner. However, within the first three weeks after Woolwich the impact seemed to show a polarised viewpoint about Muslim communities in Britain. For example, a YouGov survey of over 1,839 adults conducted following Woolwich showed there was clear evidence people felt Muslims were a threat to democracy. Furthermore, two-thirds of those people believed that Britain was facing a clash of civilization between British Muslims and White Britons³⁵.

Indeed, in a survey conducted later in September 2013, by BBC Radio 1 Newsbeat, of 18-24 year-olds they found that from the 1,000 people questioned, 28% of young people believed Britain would be a safer place with fewer Muslims and 44% of people felt Muslims did not share the same values as the rest of Britain. Interestingly, the people questioned did state that Islamophobia existed in mainstream politics and within the media. They also blamed terrorist groups abroad for this image (26%), and the media was second place at (23%) for depicting Muslims in a negative light and finally, UK Muslims who had committed acts of terrorism were ranked at (21%)³⁶.

We find those results worrying because it does tend to point towards a wider endemic problem of anti-Muslim reporting and prejudice. Moreover, in a Unitas Report, which was submitted to the Leveson inquiry, it did suggest that the British press had continued to report negative stories about Muslim communities since 9/11. They found that there was a serious problem of racism within the British press and anti-Muslim reporting of stories continued to shape news items³⁷. Below the paper will now provide a comparative analysis of the media portrayal of the

Woolwich attack and the case of Mohammed Saleem who was murdered in April 2013 and why one incident was an act of terrorism and why another was categorised as a racial hate crime.

British Newspapers: The Print Media portrayal of the word ‘Terrorist’ in Woolwich and in the case of Mohammed Saleem

We found that almost all articles we reviewed regarding Woolwich the term ‘terrorism’ was used to describe the attack. The British Prime Minister David Cameron argued that Muslim leaders should help: “challenge the poisonous narrative of extremism on which this violence feeds”. However this is in stark difference to what happened three weeks prior on the 29th April 2013 when Mohammed Saleem, an 82 year-old grandfather was stabbed to death while on his way home from evening prayers at a mosque in Birmingham³⁸. The attack was immediately labelled as ‘racially motivated’ by the police but it was later revealed that the person who murdered Mohammed Saleem was in actual fact a Ukrainian man named Pavlo Lapshyn, who would be characterised not as a ‘terrorist’ but as a ‘white supremacist’ by a number of newspapers.³⁹ Lapshyn was also involved in planting a number of bombs outside mosques in Birmingham. The most serious was at the Aisha mosque in Walsall but no one was injured.

In a statement after the Cobra meeting, following Woolwich, the Prime Minister said: “the nation should come together to stand against those who sought to divide us.”⁴⁰ Comments of such were supported by the Muslim community; however further headlines by The Telegraph, which stated that: “Woolwich shows that Muslim leaders have learned how to respond to terrorism”⁴¹ were headlines that associated the general Muslim community with acts of terrorism and potentially fuelled far right groups like the British National Party to stage demonstrations under the banner “United Against Muslim Terror”⁴². Allen (2012:10) argues that such tactics can increase feelings of insecurity, suspicion and anxiety amongst non-Muslims.⁴³

We also believe that such statements made in newspapers like the Telegraph which stated that: ‘Muslims have had to embark on this learning curve without any help from the media’⁴⁴, showed a clear sense of negativity which implied that all Muslims must condemn acts of terrorism. The Telegraph news coverage also provided another powerful attack on Muslim communities by arguing that: “Muslim leaders finally sound like they are on side. Our side.”

The term ‘terrorist’ was therefore used by a number of different media outlets. For instance, The Independent - partially headlined one of its articles on the night of the attack as a ‘suspected Islamic terrorist attack’⁴⁵. The following morning, The Telegraph headline⁴⁶ was: ‘Woolwich attack: terrorist proclaimed ‘an eye for an eye’ after attack; A British soldier has been butchered on a busy London street by two Islamist terrorists, one of whom proclaimed afterwards: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ Both newspapers went onto use the term ‘terrorist’ to headline additional articles relating to the attack as days went by. However, in the case of Mohammed Saleem, our findings from the database revealed how The Telegraph did not use the term ‘terrorist’ to describe the attack or attackers. Moreover, the term ‘terrorist’ was not

used as a headline even when Pavlo Lapshyn was found guilty of the murder of Mohammed Saleem and the three mosque bombings under the Terrorism Act 2006. Instead the Telegraph chose the headline: ‘Ukrainian white supremacist avoids life sentence over murder and mosque bombings’⁴⁷. On the other hand The Guardian headline after the conviction did use the words: ‘Mosque bombing suspect arrested over ‘terrorist’ murder of pensioner.’⁴⁸

Furthermore, The Guardian⁴⁹ did make the case for a responsible manner for reporting the term terrorist for the second time with the headline: ‘Ukrainian man charged with ‘terrorist-related murder’ of Mohammed Saleem.’ It seems odd that even after Lapshyn was charged under the Terrorism Act 2006 for the murder of Mohammed Saleem and three mosque explosions, The Times also appeared as one of the few newspapers who used the word terrorist in their headlines, after Lapshyn was found guilty. On the 26th October 2013, The Times stated; ‘Lone wolf’ terrorist jailed for minimum 40 years for killing Muslim man.’⁵⁰

British Regional Newspapers: Use of the word ‘Terrorist’

In the case of regional articles, the term terrorist was primarily used in headlines as well as within articles to condemn the Woolwich murder. Nonetheless its usage was loaded with over-generalising statements. We believe that the way in which the news was reported in this story was crucial in creating a ‘them versus us’ mentality. This was depicted by many of the images of the news showing the victim wearing a Help for Heroes t-shirt. This also helped create a coup for far right groups such as the English Defence League who were quick to take note of ‘Britishness’ and argue the them versus us narrative (see figure 2.1 for overall coverage of the term ‘Terrorist’ used after Woolwich and figure 2.2 for the same term used after Pavlo Lapshyn was convicted).

Figure 2.1 Coverage of the term ‘Terrorist’ used by Broadsheet and Regional newspapers during the aftermath of the Woolwich attack by percentage.

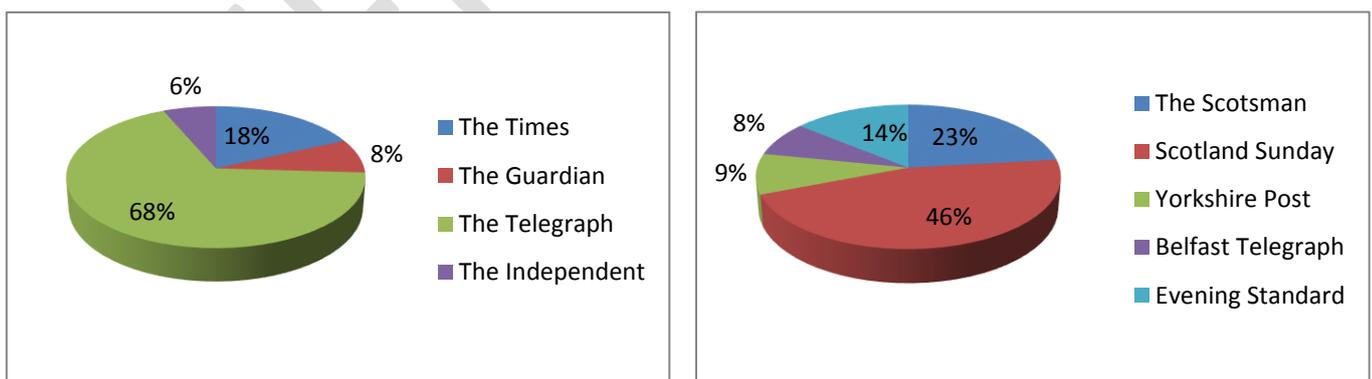
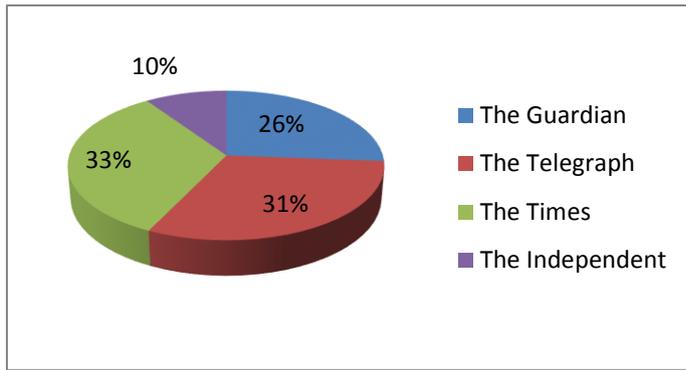


Figure 2.2 Coverage of the term ‘Terrorist’ used by Broadsheet newspapers after the formal police charge on Pavlo Lapshyn by percentage.

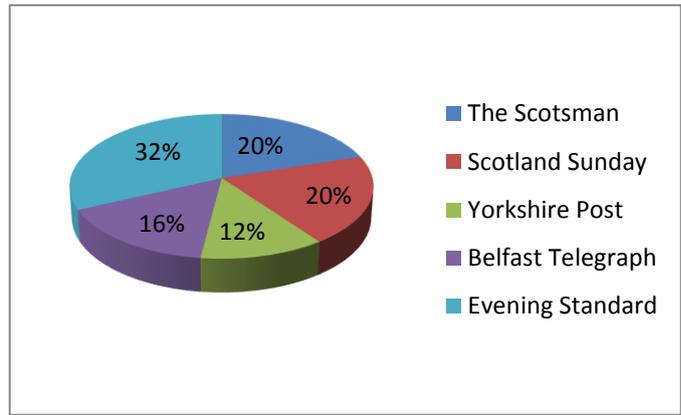
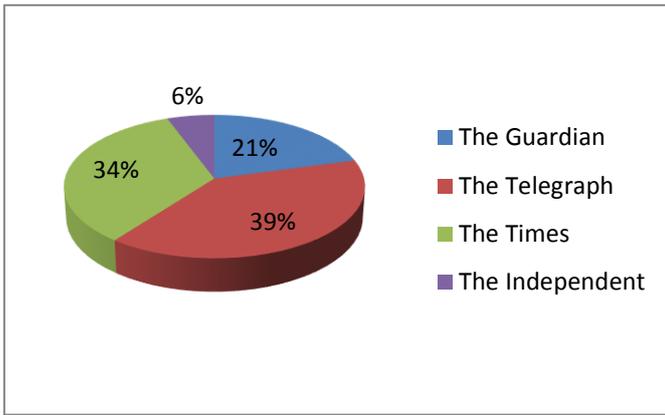


As we will see, clearly the term ‘terrorist’ was widely used by both formats of newspapers after Woolwich. However in relation to Mohammed Saleem the term was limited in use by the regional newspapers. This does leave the question of whether Pavlo Lapshyn, who was convicted of a terrorism offence under the Terrorism Act 2006, is in actual fact a terrorist. In the view of some parts of the British print media it can be argued that he is not. It should be noted, that Lapshyn’s label as a terrorist in the print media was relatively low in comparison to the perpetrators in the Woolwich attack, as the average usage of the term terrorist was 11 in broadsheet newspapers in comparison to 155 for the Woolwich attack.

British Newspapers: Use of the word ‘Terror’ in Woolwich, and the Mohammed Saleem case

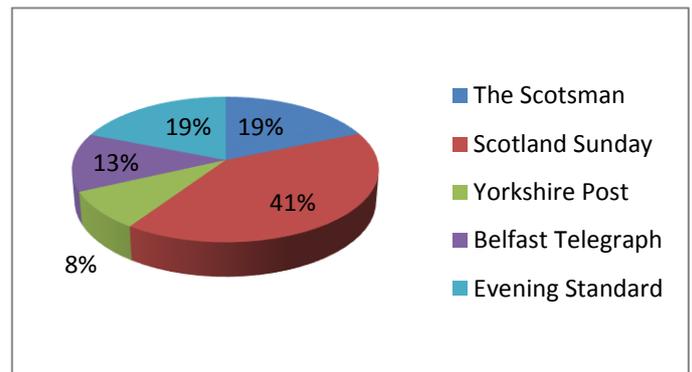
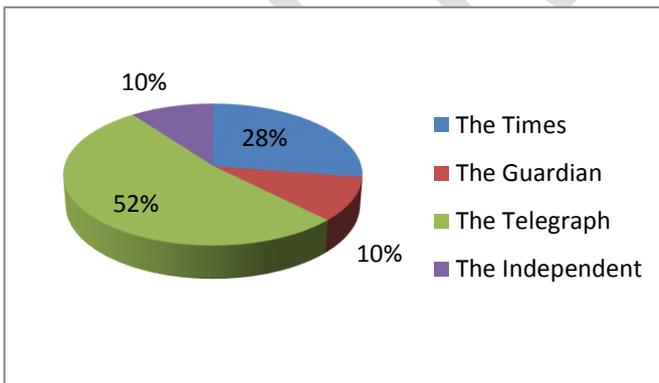
As has been highlighted the word terrorist was consistently used in newspaper headlines and within articles after Woolwich by both formats; its sub-branch of the word ‘terror’ was also consistently used in article headlines by both regional and broadsheet newspapers. Through the content analysis of article headlines, it is noticeable that the word ‘terror’, which also means; fear, horror, shock, panic, and fright, was used repetitively along with the word ‘attack’. Immediately after the murder; regional articles used headlines such as a “terror attack”⁵¹ yet again without proper clarity and transparency of the overall incident. On the day of the murder, articles from The Guardian and The Independent⁵² also declared the attack as a “terror attack”⁵³. However like the word terrorism the word terror was also used in a limited capacity by both broadsheets and regional newspapers after Lapshyn was charged (see figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Coverage of the term ‘Terror’ used by Broadsheet and Regional newspapers after the formal police charge of Pavlo Lapshyn



Attention should also be paid as to why the expression “terror attack” was used repeatedly by both newspaper formats, and in a sense why it became a reoccurring theme when addressing the story. This article headline in fact was to some extent misleading, as it was immediately clarified through media and the recording of the shocking footage by ITV that there was no ‘Terror attack’, and the attack actually occurred on a London street, outside the ‘barracks’ as opposed to the inner parts of the barracks, which is what The Independent seemed to depict. The headline could also illustrate the problems around misrepresentation of stories as in this case which assumed that there was more than one victim. Nevertheless, this was then rectified by the newspaper, as they used the headline: ‘Sickening deluded and unforgivable: Horrific attack brings terror to London streets’⁵⁴ the following day.

Figure 3.2: Coverage of the term ‘Terror’ used by Broadsheet and Regional newspapers during the aftermath of the Woolwich attack by percentage.

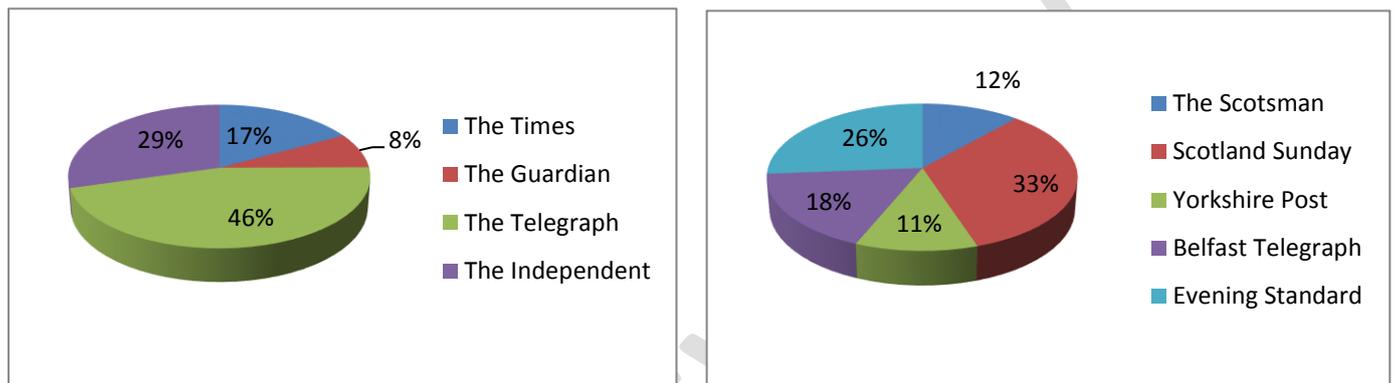


Whilst the term ‘terror attack’ was used for Woolwich it is surprising that both broadsheet and regional newspapers did not use the same headline for the killing of Mohammed Saleem or even the three mosque explosions. For instance, in relation to Mohammed Saleem, the term ‘terror’ was first used by The Guardian 3 months after the murder, when Pavlo Lapshyn was charged with the murder and further offences related to mosque explosions.

British Newspapers: Use of the terms ‘Islam’ and ‘Islamic’ to address Woolwich attack

As noted above, following the Woolwich attack the British media made some imbalanced assumptions with Islam and terrorism. For example, the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair argued that “there is a problem within Islam” and the attack on the soldier was “profound and dangerous”.⁵⁵

Figure 4.1 Coverage of the term ‘Islam’ used by Broadsheet and Regional newspapers during the aftermath of the Woolwich attack by percentage.



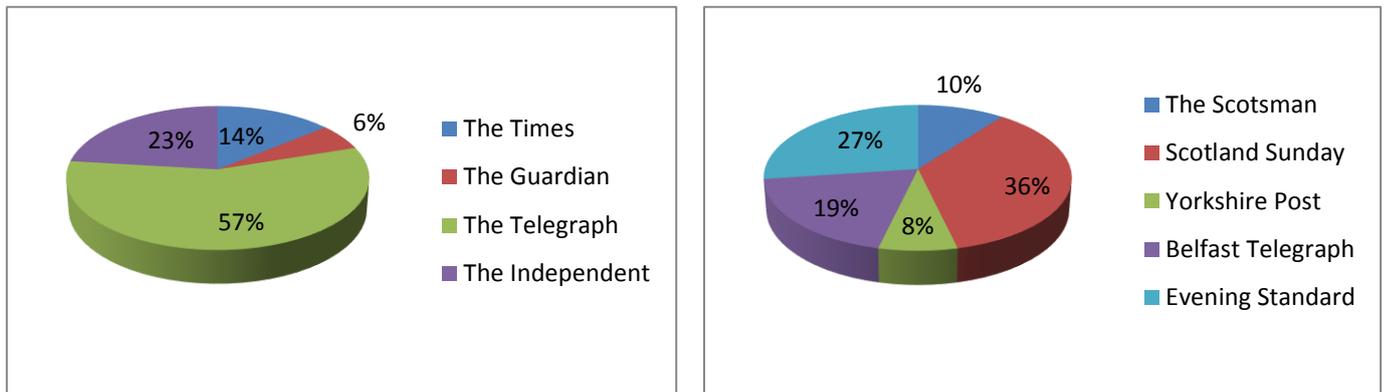
The Telegraph stated that the English Defence League were within their own rights to condemn the attack of the soldier by holding Islam accountable. The former EDL leader Tommy Robinson stated the issue is “political Islam; its political Islam that’s spreading across this country.” It was further revealed in a separate article by The Telegraph that Robinson went onto say: “They’re [Muslims] chopping our heads off. This is Islam. That’s what we’ve seen today. They’ve cut one of our Army’s heads off on the streets of London. Our next generation are being taught through schools that Islam is a religion of peace. It’s not. It never has been. What you saw today is Islam.”⁵⁶

Moreover generalisations were made by the Independent⁵⁷ which partially labelled one of its articles in relation to the Woolwich murder as an “Islamic terrorist attack.” Similar headlines⁵⁸ were also printed on regional newspapers such as the Daily Mail which stated: “‘You and your children will be next’: Islamic fanatics wielding meat cleavers butcher and try to behead a British soldier, taking their war on the West to a new level of horror”.⁵⁹

The evidence does suggest the term was used without due diligence in headlines, which was coupled with ‘extreme’ words such as ‘terror’ and ‘terrorists’, which provided the adequate influence to discriminate against wider Muslim communities. Moreover, newspaper articles by The Telegraph used the term ‘Islamic’ over 46% of times within many of their articles. For example, stating that: ‘A soldier was hacked to death in a south London street on Wednesday by two men shouting Islamic slogans’⁶⁰. Yet it was not stated that the attackers in fact cited various political dogmas for their actions in a video recording which was released by the ITV. As Mehdi Hasan, the editor of the Huffington Post UK, who was quoted by The Scotsman

stated that: “the inconvenient truth is that Muslim extremists usually cite political, not theological, justifications for their horrendous crimes”⁶¹.

Figure 4.2 Coverage of the term ‘Islamic’ used by Broadsheet and Regional newspapers during the aftermath of the Woolwich attack by percentage



The term Islamic (see figure 4.2) was also displayed in the top hits of news coverage. The terms presented as a main theme in this research, as it depicts a certain religion and its followers, and links them directly with the attack on Lee Rigby. Thus the use of ‘Islamic’ or ‘Muslim’ as adjectives implies that Islam sanctions terrorism⁶². This is also informed through the work of Said (1981: 56)⁶³ who in his book ‘Covering Islam’, and states that the definitions of Islam today are predominately negative. Our findings show that the term Islamic was used over 57% by The Telegraph and 36% by Scotland Sunday which shows the divide in comparison and the coverage of those stories was overtly negative.

Conclusion

The Woolwich attack in the summer of 2013 caused public outrage and continues to make the news headlines as the two men Adebolajo and Adebowale face a criminal trial for the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby. Our research suggests that following Woolwich, the print newspaper coverage of Muslim communities in the immediate aftermath provided a lens by which the terms Islam and Muslims were used alongside terrorism in an overtly negative manner. Sadly, we believe this is a trend within the British press that has often negatively termed Muslims as ‘fanatics’, ‘extremists’ and indeed ‘terrorists.’ We argue by using the comparison of Mohammed Saleem who was also a victim of a terrorist attack, that a more balanced viewpoint of reporting terrorism is required otherwise we risk as a society stoking up further anti-Muslim prejudice and also exacerbating the potential for unfair treatment of Muslim communities.

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