Muslims in the Media

Round Table discussion part of the Media against Hate Campaign
Institute of Journalism and Social Communication
University of Warmia and Mazury, Olsztyn, Poland

June 8th, 17:00 – 19:00

A video message from young British Muslims to the editors of The Sun and The Daily Mail courageously explains how misconceptions originating in the newspapers’ coverage of Islam are affecting their day-to-day lives. The video producers invite the editors to become aware of their power and responsibilities and to commit to fair reporting – instead of instigating divisiveness.

From Edward Said’s Covering Islam. How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world1 to later works such as Tell me lies - Propaganda and media distortion in the attack on Iraq2, in the past 35 years several studies have pointed out that the future of international relations and multicultural societies is very likely to be influenced by the media presentation of the West, the Middle East, and Islam3. The Gulf wars, the aftermath of September 11th 2001 and more recent events have revealed to what extent this is true. Unbalanced media reporting undermines intercultural relations and poses serious threats to the European and Euro-Mediterranean integration process, as well as to peaceful cohabitation in contexts where different ethnic and religious groups coexist.

This is particularly relevant for second and third generation European Muslim citizens, faced with waves of anti-Muslim headlines and expected to justify their multiple identities – as illustrated by Afroze Zaidi-Jivraj in her article “What it’s like being Muslim in 2016”

Even if media play along with certain political manipulations of the issue of the “stranger”, building the image of the “Other” in a reductive, stereotyped way, media coverage related to migration or minorities is not only confined to distorted and biased reporting.

Mainstream media do provide their audiences with important and significant information - but because disinformation and selective reporting exist, citizens should be aware of it. And media professionals need to be conscious of their role as intercultural mediators, as privileged actors who bear responsibility and power.

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1 SAID Edward W., Covering Islam. How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world, London and Henley, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.
3 See also HAFEZ Kai, Islam and the West in the mass media, Cresskill NJ, Hampton Press, 2000; and BODAS BAREA José, DRAGOEVICH Adriana (eds), El mundo árabe y su imagen en los medios, Madrid, Editorial Comunica, 1994.
Migrants and minorities are also active in producing content that fosters interreligious and intercultural dialogue through community media, artistic and multimedia initiatives. For example, Asha Siad, an award-winning Somali-Canadian journalist and documentary filmmaker, shares stories of solidarity rather than division through her work, when approaching topics pertaining to faith and religion. However, until a stronger involvement of all minorities (ethnic, religious, cultural or other) in the media is achieved – as media professionals and as established sources of information – representation of “diversity” is bound to remain partial.

**The round table on Muslims in the media would like to discuss:**

- Media portrayal of Muslims in Polish and European media – main issues and recommendations for improvement
- How Muslim communities are dealing with anti-Muslim stereotypes and xenophobic public discourse
- Good practices of community and mainstream media in promoting intercultural dialogue

**Panelists:**

- Sabika Shah Povia, freelance journalist, The Post Internazionale, Italy
- Adam Puchejda, co-author of media analysis on representations of Muslims in Poland, Kultura Liberalna, Poland
- Emina Ragipovic, President of the Foundation “Culture without Frontiers” (“Fundacja Kultura bez Granic”), Poland
- Mary Dowson, Director, and Shamim Akhtar, radio presenter, Bradford Community Broadcasting, UK

**Moderator:**

Dermana Seta, OSCE/ODIHR, Adviser on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims

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