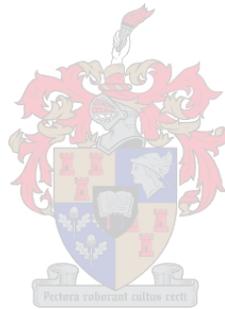


**Islamophobia and the media:  
The portrayal of Islam since 9/11  
and an analysis of the Danish cartoon controversy in South Africa**



Supervisor: Prof. L. Rabe

**DECLARATION:**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, cursive letters, is written over a horizontal line.

Date: 12 February 2008

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If it were not for a few very important people, the completion of this project would never have been possible. Thank you to Professor Lizette Rabe, my most supportive and encouraging supervisor, who would not let me give up. Thank you to my life partner, Yaqub Peerbhai, for your tolerance, patience, and understanding support, and for the many sacrifices you have had to make these past two years (not forgetting the tolerance of my many mood swings in pregnancy). Thank you for not allowing me to quit. And finally, thanks to my work colleagues, especially Deseni Soobben and Mikhail Peppas for believing in me, and giving me sanity in my moments of madness.

**Abstract:**

The media plays a fundamental role in shaping societies' opinions about topical issues. Most human beings depend upon either the print media (newspapers/magazines), television or radio as their sources of news. The advent of the internet since the 1990s revolutionised the media world and created an immediacy on the impact of news like no other previous medium could provide, as it had a combination of audio and visual material. The most effective demonstration of such immediacy would be that of the impact of the September 11 attacks in the USA in 2001. The aftermath of the media's impact still resonates throughout the world today, especially its impact on those who follow the Islamic faith. This paper aims to explore the impact of the media on this newly derived concept of Islamophobia, especially post 9/11. It includes a case study of the Islamophobic Danish cartoon controversy that occurred in February 2006. This paper discusses the concept of Islamophobia and anti-Islamism, as well as how the events of 9/11 and its media coverage contributed towards the worsening of this sentiment across the globe. The conclusion reached is that instead of the media acting as a mediator between Western society and the global Muslim community and creating an atmosphere of each understanding the other, it acted negatively against Islam, the world's fastest growing religion.

**Abstrak:**

Die media speel 'n fundamentele rol in die vorming van mense se opinies. Die meeste mense is van die drukmedia (koerante / tydskrifte), televisie of radio as nuusbron afhanklik. Die aanvang van die internet het sedert die 1990's 'n revolusie in die mediawêreld, en 'n onmiddellikheid in die nuusomgewing soos geen ander medium voorheen kon verskaf nie, tot gevolg gehad, aangesien dit oudio- en visuele materiaal kombineer.

Die effektiëste voorbeeld hiervan is die impak wat die aanvalle van 11 September 2001 op Amerika op die wêreld gehad het. Die nadraai van die media-impak resoneer steeds regdeur die wêreld, veral die impak wat dit op die Islamitiese geloof gehad het.

Dié navorsingwerkstuk probeer om die invloed van die media op die neologisme "Islamofobie" te bepaal, veral ná 9/11. Dit sluit 'n gevallestudie van die Islamofobiese Deense spotprentkontroversie in wat tydens Februarie 2006 begin het.

Die werkstuk bespreek ook die konsep van Islamofobie en anti-Islamisme, asook hoe die gebeure van 9/11 en die mediadekking daarvan bygedra het tot die uitbrei van hierdie sentiment

regoor die wêreld. Die gevolgtrekking wat gemaak word, is dat die media as 'n bemiddelaar optree tussen die Westerse samelewing en die globale Moslem-gemeenskap. Hierdeur word 'n verstandhouding tussen dié twee gevorm wat negatief is teenoor Islam, die geloof in die wêreld wat die vinnigste groei

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## **Chapter One**

### **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

The term Islamophobia originated in the early to mid-1990s in the United Kingdom (Richardson, 2004). A simple meaning of the word would be a fear (phobia) of Islam. However, in-depth definitions will be discussed later on in this chapter.

The study of this topic was necessitated by many reasons; a primary reason being the fact that this researcher is a practising Muslim, and that she has experienced several anti-Islamic incidents, including being victimised shortly after the September 11 incident because of her faith.

Secondly, Islam is one of the world's largest religions, with more than one billion Muslims spread across the globe (Amjad-Ali, 2006). According to Amjad-Ali (2006: 25), a scholar in Christianity and Christian-Muslim relations,

“[t]here are now some 1.2 billion Muslims spread over many countries and cultures, to the extent that there is a Muslim presence evident in almost all countries in the world...Muslims constitute the second largest religious community in Europe, a fact that is not always easily understood or remembered. It is also perhaps the second largest religious community in the United States. About 20% of the global Islamic population reside in the Arab-speaking world.”

This implies that Islam is a widely recognised, expanding world religion, and certainly a recognisable global religious force.

Thirdly, since 11 September 2001 (hereafter referred to as 9/11) Muslims across the world have had to endure increasing animosity from the West, including violent attacks and verbal insults (Amjad-Ali, 2006:131). This Islamophobic trend is especially prevalent in Western countries. Examples of such incidents will be discussed later on.

### **1.2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Initially, the idea for this paper focused on 9/11 and the international media coverage of the event. This, it seemed, was the birth of Islamophobia. However, on surveying the material

available, this researcher realised that the topic was far too vast for a paper of this nature. This excluded the information available on the internet at this point.

The focus was then narrowed down to 9/11 and the South African coverage of the event. Even this seemed too overwhelming a challenge. However, the central underlying theme was indisputable: that the coverage of these events led to a fear of Islam and Muslims (Islamophobia), and that 9/11 created a certain image of Muslims as terrorists. This researcher then decided to investigate Islamophobia in South Africa, as she thought it would be a relevant and suitable topic, given that she is Muslim and lives in this country. On submission of the research proposal the working title for this paper was “Islamophobia and the media: a South African perspective.” However, on reviewing available literature on Islam in South Africa, by prominent researchers and authors such as Baderoon (2004) , Dangor (2003) and Jeenah (2002), she soon discovered that incidents of Islamophobia in South Africa were very few, and it was therefore not worth pursuing research on the topic in this country. Most South African literature on the religion of Islam generally covered areas focusing on, for example, the history of Muslims in South Africa, the status of Muslim females in Islam, Cape Malay Muslims and religious practices of Muslims in South Africa; nothing pertaining to Islamophobia. Her search on South African databases such as that of the National Research Foundation, SABINET, the South African Data Archive and South African search engines including Aardvark, Ananzi and Zebra, as well as higher education sites, proved futile.

It was then that this researcher opted to search beyond this country’s borders to investigate whether Islamophobia existed internationally and to what extent. This researcher then began searching for incidents of Islamophobia on a global scale. Her interest was piqued by the worldwide outrage which broke out over the publishing of certain satirical cartoons depicting Islam’s holiest figure, the Prophet Muhammad, in a Danish newspaper in September 2005. The fact that these images were re-published in February 2006 caused an uproar amongst Muslims globally, and once again, issues of Islamophobia made headlines as the Muslim communities of the world protested both violently, as well as non-violently.

It was only in May 2006, that this researcher truly gained focus and direction for the chosen topic at a presentation at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, by Professor Charles Amjad-Ali, a Pakistani born Christian scholar in Islamic studies and Christian-Muslim Relations (Amjad-Ali, 2006b). She was taken aback by his views on Islam, considering the fact that he was an orthodox Christian (Amjad-Ali, 2006b). Given his religious background, his views were surprisingly outspoken; that Muslims were being ostracised and that the West was intimidated

by Islam (Amjad-Ali, 2006b). Amjad-Ali's book, *Islamophobia or Restorative Justice: Tearing the Veils of Ignorance* was launched at this lecture. This researcher eagerly purchased this piece of literature, which was the starting point of the revised topic. In his book, Amjad-Ali makes reference to several key Islamic scholars, such as Edward Said and Samuel Huntington. Upon reading Said's *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam*, this researcher contacted Amjad-Ali via email for further guidance. He advised her to search websites from the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA), as in his opinion, these were places where Islamophobia was rife, especially post-September 11.

Upon conducting intensive internet searches, this researcher came across the website for the UK-based Runnymede Trust, which had specifically conducted research into Islamophobia in Britain. This organisation had published a report on Islamophobia entitled *Islamophobia: Issues, challenges and action. A report by the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia* (Richardson, 2004). The report included detailed information regarding the events of September 11 and the British public's response to the event, as well as the impact of these responses on Muslims living in Britain. The website also included the organisation's quarterly publication, which generated some interesting thoughts for the researcher to ponder upon and possibly include in her study, such as the fact that contrary to popular belief, Islamophobia is not a new concept. It in fact emerged centuries ago, during the time of the Crusades (Richardson, 2004: 7). Said (1997) and Amjad-Ali (2006) also hold similar opinions; that Islamophobia emerged prior to the 1990s.

Since literature on this fairly recent topic only really emerged in the 1990s, this researcher struggled to find content to be researched for the chosen topic. For this reason, she then opted to also search websites such as <http://www.kalahari.net> and <http://www.amazon.com>, for more literature on Islamophobia. After purchasing literature by the likes of Lewis (2004), Hachten (2005) and Pilger (2005) she managed to narrow her field of focus.

It must be stated at this point that due to the fact that Islamophobia is a fairly new concept with not very much literature on the subject, this researcher had to rely quite heavily on the internet as a source. Papers presented at various conferences and seminars were also analysed. These include Allen (2001), Isal (2001) and Mamdani (2006), all of whom were very vocal on the events of 9/11 and the cartoon controversy. Although there were many events which occurred globally, which could be deemed as being Islamophobic, this researcher chose 9/11 as the birth of Islamophobia (as it was the first such incident to raise large-scale international awareness of

the religion), and the Danish cartoon controversy as proof that Islamophobia is still prevalent, especially in the Western media.

The controversy of the cartoons surrounds twelve depictions of Islam's holiest figure, the Prophet Muhammad, which, according to Islam, were considered to be blasphemous as well as hate speech. The Danish cartoon controversy in South Africa was selected as the case study for this paper, due to the nature of events surrounding the issue in this country. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, only one newspaper in South Africa, the *Mail & Guardian*, managed to publish one of the twelve cartoons, and it managed to create an outrage amongst South African Muslims. Other newspapers such as the *Sunday Times* and the Independent Newspaper Group were legally prohibited from publishing the offensive cartoons. This raised questions of censorship and freedom of expression, issues which will be raised later on.

All of the above finally led to this researcher's focus on the media's relationship with Islam and the concept of Islamophobia itself.

### **1.3. HYPOTHESIS**

It is this researcher's hypothesis that the media is mainly responsible for propagating Islamophobia. If one were to view this according to the theories of the press, no one, single theory would apply. Instead one could describe it as an application of a matrix of theories. A brief discussion of some of these theories follows:

#### **1.3.1. Marxist Theory:**

Before proceeding further, one needs to define the meaning of political economy. According to Fourie (2001: 121) the political economy is an umbrella term for all those theories and analytical approaches which have the purpose of understanding how economic and political relationships, interests and affiliations determine the functioning of social institutions (including the media as a social institution), and the impact or lack of impact of these relationships on social transformation and development. In terms of Marxist theory, it is believed that all means of production, including media production, determines the nature of a society and that the economy is the base of all social structures, including institutions and ideas (Fourie, 2001: 122).

According to this theory, the working class is oppressed by those individuals and groups in society who own the means of production and whose sole purpose is to make a profit. In addition, Fourie writes that the economic and political control of the media determines the content and thus the ideological power of the media.

“By ideological power we mean the power (and means) to form, direct and influence the thinking of people. This power is mainly vested in those who own the media and who have the financial means to own and manage the media” (Fourie, 2001: 122).

The global media trend seems to be one that is dominated by political agendas as well as profit-making. This follows in the footsteps of trends set by First World Western countries where profit motives direct the business, where the media is controlled by a small group of entrepreneurs whose primary focus lies in generating capital. It seems that internationally, the media is mainly controlled by a small, elite capitalist group, who can exercise the right to control issues relating to content, propaganda, agenda-setting, etc. This was precisely what happened when the events of 9/11 occurred (Lewis, 2005).

The small, elite capitalist groups worldwide exercised their power in carefully selecting the footage and information they wanted the masses to consume (Lewis, 2005). According to Fourie (2001: 123), the concept of power is central to the critical political economy. Thompson (as cited in Fourie, 2001: 123) distinguishes between four types of power: economic, political, coercive and symbolic. The latter, i.e. symbolic power, is the real and potential power vested in all cultural institutions such as the church, educational institutions and the media. These institutions possess the power to influence people's thinking and behaviour. They produce symbolic forms of expressions that guide people to understand and think about the world in certain ways. According to Fourie (2001: 136) the underlying assumption that is made in terms of Marxist capitalist theory, is that economic ownership leads to the control of content that promotes the interest of the ruling class at the expense of the masses. However, Functionalist theorists tend to disagree.

### 1.3.2. Functionalist Theory:

Functionalism views society as an integrated, harmonious, cohesive whole in which all parts (for example, institutions such as the school, the church, economic, political and cultural institutions) function to maintain equilibrium, consensus and social order (Fourie, 2001: 240). Furthermore, society can be viewed and analysed similar to a human body consisting of different organs all functioning together. Should one of these organs become sick/dysfunctional, it affects the whole body. Functionalism sees the media as one of the instruments in society that should contribute to the harmonious and cohesive functioning of society (Fourie, 2001: 240).

The media can generally be held responsible for social attitudes. According to Fourie (2001: 265), the media can be viewed as a powerful instrument of socialisation whether it is through education, information or entertainment. The media holds society together in all spheres, whether social, economic, political or technological. In Fourie's view, the media's responsibility to society is in providing information that the public has a right to know (2001: 265). As part of functionalist theories, the media has a role in contributing towards the development of society, as an agent of social change. Functionalists also believe that the public have a role to participate in the media in the form of opinion. In terms of functionalism, the media plays a somewhat authoritarian role in propagating the State's interests to the public. Also, functionalists believe that the public is capable of formulating its own opinion about issues. Overall, the media is the glue that allows society to function in a systematic manner, creating a social order of sorts.

In terms of the Western media's coverage of Islam or issues/events relating to Islam, especially in terms of 9/11 and the cartoon controversy, it seems that the American media perpetuated its government's stance. Even though the public was allowed to participate in responding to the events, the media still shaped societies' opinions on Islam. This will be explored in Chapter Three.

### 1.3.3. Critical Media Theory

In terms of critical theory, the media are seen to be the most pervasive ideological agent in late twentieth and early twenty-first century society. This is according to Fourie (2001: 241) who adds that there is hardly a person who does not come into contact with media of one kind or another and the ideas and values they convey, be it newspapers, radio, television,

advertisements, popular music or the internet. Fourie writes that the possible ideological implications of that media is what gave rise to critical media theory.

“Mass society theories were formulated at the turn of the twentieth century as a critical reaction to the rise of technology that in turn gave rise to industrialisation, urbanisation and what is referred to as the ‘mass man’ and ‘mass society’. Radio, film and the press of the day, and after the Second World War, television, were seen by critics on both sides of the political spectrum as products of technology used by a minority to manipulate the majority” (Fourie, 2001: 242)

This theory is brought forth in Chapters Two and Three, where it is described how society relies on some form of media, whether it is print, broadcast or the internet, as a source of information and formulation of opinion on a particular subject.

Underlying assumptions of this theory include:

- Seeing the media as forms of symbolic expression, i.e. the communicator expresses his/her values, beliefs and attitudes on a particular topic/subject, thereby assigning a meaning to reality.
- The recipient understands and interprets the message in his/her own manner, the meaning that he/she attaches to it being a result of the confrontation between the viewer and what he/she views on screen, hears on the radio or sees in the newspaper.
- Critical theory stresses the circumstances of the communicator. It is also concerned with how the ideologies of media owners influence content that is produced in the media.
- The theory also argues that the media mainly support the interests (political, economic and social) of one group at the cost of another group. (Fourie, 2001: 246)

#### 1.3.4. Pluralist Theory:

Pluralism refers to the variety of media in a democracy.

“The underlying premise in pluralist media theory is that in view of the variety of media (various newspapers, television station, radio stations, films, videos, publishers, advertising agencies, all looking at reality from different perspectives) it is impossible to make one-sided and limited claims about the way the media function” (Fourie, 2001: 248).

According to Fourie (2001) pluralists argue that if one newspaper or television station adopts a particular ideological perspective, another newspaper or television station is free to propagate an opposing ideology. He adds that media users are free to be selective about their exposure to the media and the ideologies propagated.

In terms of coverage of 9/11 and the cartoon controversy, although media users were free to choose the type of media they were exposed to, they were limited in the sense that the news that was disseminated originated from one country, i.e. the USA, a hegemonic force in the international news arena. This will be discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

In order to understand how the various theories apply to the topic of this paper, one needs some historical background on key concepts which will be discussed after the methodology.

#### **1.4. METHODOLOGY:**

This paper is a combination of both empirical and non-empirical studies. It commences with a textual analysis of academic and literary works by authors such as Edward Said (1997), Bernard Lewis (2004), Jeff Lewis (2005), Charles Amjad-Ali (2006), William Hachten (2005) and Mahmood Mamdani (2004). Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Covering Islam* (1997) provide much needed historical background on the religion of Islam and its constant conflicts with Christianity, and more especially the West. Amjad-Ali (2006) and Hachten (2005) bridges the gap between the past and present historical relationships of Islam and the West.

An in-depth search of the internet proved fruitful, whereby recent writing on Islamophobia was uncovered for discussion in this paper. This included papers (conference papers and speeches)

by Isal (2001) at the World Racism Conference, Allen (2001), Henzell-Thomas (2004) and Sajid (2005). Some of these papers provided most recent material on issues of Islamophobia after 9/11, as well as the Danish cartoon controversy.

Key research questions include:

- What is Islamophobia?
- Is Islamophobia a new concept, or did it exist prior to the 1990s?
- What kind of relationship has Islam shared with the West, both historically and at present?
- What type of relationship has Islam had with the media?
- Can the media be held responsible for shaping public opinion?
- How has the media treated Islam since the events of September 11, 2001?
- What impact has Western media had on the rest of the world?
- Can the Western media be held responsible for propagating Islamophobia?

The case study consisted of an analysis of content, commencing with the twelve offensive cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. It also includes an analysis of newspaper articles, press statements and the case of the *Jamiat-UI-Ulama of Transvaal v Johncom Media Investment Ltd* and others. The case study raises issues of censorship and press freedom, as well as issues of human rights and respect for religion and culture.

This researcher initially chose to include in her case study semi-structured interviews with two newspaper editors: the *Mail & Guardian* and *The Sunday Times*. The reasons for these choices were:

1. The *Mail & Guardian* opted to publish one of the cartoons, for “educational purposes”, despite the fact that the editor, Ferial Haffajee, is Muslim. A single, restrained reproduction was run next to a straight news report about the row. There is merit in the argument that readers needed to see what all the fuss was about, and that M&G readers are generally a tolerant and sophisticated lot. This is not a newspaper that can be

accused of having an Islamophobic agenda. Nevertheless, the religious feelings around images of the prophet run particularly deep, and should have weighed more heavily than the explanatory value of showing cartoons that could have been described in words. I did not agree with the decision to run the cartoon, but the paper has now apologised, and that has put the matter to rest (Kruger, 2006a).

2. *The Sunday Times* was prohibited from publishing on the eve of going to print, even though its editor, Mondli Makhanya later stated that he probably would not have published the cartoons (Cartoon row: Sunday, 2006). This raised controversial issues of press freedom and censorship in South Africa.

However, after several attempts to contact both editors via telephone and email, this researcher was told by both editors to make reference to the internet, where their views on the matter have been exhausted in the public domain. The views of both Mondli Makhanya (editor of the *Sunday Times*) and Ferial Haffajee, were obtained after refined searches on the internet, and are included in Chapter Four.

The case study also includes a structured email interview with David Canning, editor of *The Mercury*, a Durban-based newspaper, which is part of the Independent Newspaper Group, which was prohibited from publishing the cartoons. This particular newspaper was selected as its physical location is based in the same city as the researcher, and the fact that it has a multi-religious readership. The following questions were included in the interview:

- Had there been no court interdict, what would your decision have been?
- “With freedom comes responsibility.” As an editor, what is your opinion on freedom of speech versus religious tolerance, especially living in such a multi-cultural society?
- Journalism aside, what is your opinion on the issue of the cartoon controversy?
- Do you believe that the court interdict compromised freedom of expression and freedom of the press, which are entrenched in the South African Constitution? Does the court order not interfere with issues of censorship of the media?
- If the cartoon controversy centred around another religion, would you have taken the same stance?

- Many journalists argue that the public's right to know overpowers religious tolerance. This seemed to be the case with the *Mail & Guardian* which published at least one of the offensive cartoons. What are your thoughts on this?
- What role do you think the media has played in Islamophobia, especially post-9/11?

In terms of non-empirical studies, a detailed analysis of the concept of Islamophobia is included at the very beginning of this paper, and this analysis continues with discussions throughout the various chapters. This paper begins with a definition of the term Islamophobia in this chapter.

Chapter Two explores the historical relationship between Islam and the West, as well as how the Western media covers Islam. It also covers the definitions of fundamentalism and terrorism, and the media's misuse of the terms. This chapter lays the foundation for Chapter Three, which explores the media's coverage of the September 11 attacks, and its impact on Western, as well as global societies.

Chapter Four is a case study of the Danish cartoon controversy in South Africa. It includes the Islamophobic sentiments propagated by the publishing of these offensive cartoons, and the meaning of these cartoons for Muslims across the world.

The final chapter of this paper concludes with recommendations for the media to promote multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. It also includes suggestions on how to report sensitive religious issues, without causing offence.

The remainder of this particular chapter explores the concept and definition of Islamophobia, thus laying the foundation for the rest of this paper.

## **1.5. SPELLING ISLAMOPHOBIA**

Prior to defining and exploring the meaning of the concept, it is imperative to mention at the outset, that there are two spellings of the word Islamophobia.

Islamophobia – with an o – has been the preferred choice as most literature utilises this particular way of spelling. In addition, the term Islamophobia originated in Great Britain. It was coined by the Commission on British Muslims in the 1990s (Islamophobia: a definition: 2004) and it has therefore been adopted as the preferred term.

Islam<sup>a</sup>phobia – with an a – is the alternative spelling. When the term Islamophobia was initially conceptualised, scholars and academics in the field used both spellings. However, when the Runnymede Trust began discussions on incidents Islamophobia in Britain, it seemed that the spelling of the term Islamophobia – with an o – was adopted.

Although there is no correct or incorrect spelling, this is a debatable issue, since the word has only been recently introduced and adopted by the English language. Thus, both spellings are acceptable and are often used interchangeably by scholars and the media.

## **1.6. DEFINING ISLAMOPHOBIA**

Simplistically, Islamophobia can be defined as the fear of the religion of Islam, or a fear of Islam's followers who are referred to as Muslims (Islamophobia: a definition: 2004). However, one needs to delve beyond this definition in order to understand the term better.

According to a publication by the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia entitled *Islamophobia: issues, challenges and action* (Richardson, 2004: 7) manifestations of anti-Muslim hostility include:

- Verbal and physical attacks on Muslims in public places
- Attacks on mosques and desecration of Muslim cemeteries
- Widespread and routine negative stereotypes in the media, including the broadsheets, and in the conversations and “common sense” of non-Muslims – people talk and write about Muslims in ways that would not be acceptable if the reference were to Jewish people, for example, or to black people
- Negative stereotypes and remarks in speeches by political leaders, implying that Muslims in Britain are less committed than others to democracy and the rule of law – for example the claim that Muslims more than others must choose between “the British way” and the “terrorist way”
- Discrimination in recruitment and employment practices, and in workplace cultures and customs
- Bureaucratic delay and inertia in responding to Muslim requests for cultural sensitivity in education and healthcare and in planning applications for mosques

- Lack of attention to the fact that Muslims in Britain are disproportionately affected by poverty and social exclusion
- Non-recognition of Muslims in particular, and of religion in general, by the law of the land, since discrimination in employment on grounds of religion has until recently been lawful and discrimination in the provision of services is still lawful
- Anomalies in public order legislation, such that Muslims are less protected against incitement to hatred than members of certain other religions
- Laws curtailing civil liberties that disproportionately affect Muslims (Richardson, 2004: 7)

Islamophobia also means that (Islamophobia: a definition: 2004):

- Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change
- Islam is seen as separate and “other”. It does not have values in common with other cultures, it is not affected by them, and it does not influence them
- Islam is seen as inferior to the West. It is seen as barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist
- Islam is seen as violent, aggressive and threatening supportive of terrorism and engaged in a “clash of civilisations”
- Islam is seen as a political ideology and is used for political or military advantage
- Criticisms made of the West by Islam are rejected out of hand
- Hostility towards Muslims is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society
- Anti-Muslim hostility is seen as natural or normal (Islamophobia: a definition: 2004).

The report, *Islamophobia: issues, challenges and action* (Richardson, 2004: 7) states that Islamophobia is a new word for an old fear, which has been recorded and can historically be traced back to eighth century European societies.

This antagonistic historical relationship between Islam and Western societies will be briefly analysed in the next section of this paper.

Since the last century, more specifically after 1960, Islam posed a threat to the world in other ways, including the economic leverage it held on the world stage of oil-rich countries, many of which were Muslim in their culture and traditions (Richardson, 2004). The West also became afraid of the emergence of political movements claiming to be motivated by Islam and that used terrorist tactics to achieve their aims (Richardson, 2004). The abuse of human rights by repressive regimes that claimed to be motivated and justified by Muslim beliefs was an additional reason to the animosity that existed between Islam and the West (Richardson, 2004: 7).

Henzell-Thomas (2004) identified the following problems which were created by Islamophobia:

- Prejudice, fuelled by unbalanced media representation in the following areas: the association of Islam and Muslims in general, explicitly or implicitly, with fundamentalism, terrorism and intolerance
- The use of biased language to stigmatise Islam and Muslims
- The reduction of the richness of Islamic tradition to a few simplistic clichés around controversial issues which tend to stigmatise Islam as “backward” or oppressive – e.g. hijab, jihad, ritual slaughter, etc
- The misleading association of Islam with specific cultural identities and practices, especially Asian and African, e.g. female circumcision, forced marriage, honour killings
- Blatant and unchecked dehumanisation of Muslims, including abuse and incitement.

Sajid (2005: 9) further defines Islamophobia as follows:

“Islamophobia is the fear and/or hatred of Islam, Muslims or Islamic culture.

Islamophobia can be characterised by the belief that all or most Muslims are religious fanatics, have violent tendencies towards non-Muslims, and reject as directly opposed to Islam such concepts as equality, tolerance and democracy. Islamophobia is a new

form of racism whereby Muslims, an ethno-religious group, not a race, are nevertheless, constructed as a race. A set of negative assumptions are made of the entire group to the detriment of members of that group. During the 1990s many sociologists and cultural analysts observed a shift in racist ideas from one based on skin colour to one based on notions of cultural superiority and otherness.”

According to Sajid (2005: 9), Islamophobia derives from Xenophobia and is concerned with culturalism and identity politics. It initially referred to inhumane conditions suffered by Muslim immigrants to the West, but has recently broadened in reference to ostracism suffered by Muslims globally.

Before progressing further, it is important that this historical relationship between Islam and the West be examined in detail.

## **1.7. SUMMARY**

In this chapter, it has been established that the term Islamophobia refers to the fear of Muslims or the fear of the religion of Islam. The consequences resulting from this fear have also been outlined. Islamophobia has been likened to racism or Xenophobia where followers of the Islamic faith have fallen victim to threats, attacks and insults simply because of their religious affiliation. Chapter Two discusses greater details on the relationship that Islam has with the West, initially focusing on the historical relationship, and then on present-day relations.

## Chapter Two

### 2.1. ISLAM (EAST) VERSUS WEST

In the West, Islam has often been referred to as “a religion of the East” (Said, 1978: 40) and it is therefore associated with the Orient.

Edward Said, an Israeli born American author and expert on the Middle East, writes in his book *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient* (1978: 41), that as far as the West was concerned during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West.

The West held a superior attitude that everything Oriental/Eastern was inferior and that the West should be a role model. Said highlights (1978: 27) that Western society (including scholars, academics and the media) held a racist attitude towards Eastern countries and they held notions of cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, and dehumanising ideologies especially over Arabs and Muslims.

This researcher wants to stress that this was written at a time in which the term Islamophobia had not yet been thought of, although it was being practiced.

According to Said (1978), the media at the time reinforced these stereotypical views, which ultimately shaped Western societies’ perception of Islam and the East.

“One aspect of the electronic, post-modern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media’s resources have forced information into more and more standardized moulds. As far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of ‘the mysterious Orient’. This is nowhere more true than in the ways by which the Near East is grasped” (Said, 1978: 27).

In the next section on the relationship between the media and Islam and the media’s coverage of Islam, examples illustrating the portrayal of Muslims by the Western media, will be discussed.

Said identifies three aspects which contribute to these perceptions. He writes (1978: 27):

“Three things have contributed to making even the simplest perception of the Arabs and Islam into a highly politicized, almost raucous matter: one, the history of the popular anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the West, which is immediately reflected in the history of Orientalism; two, the struggle between the Arabs and Israeli Zionism, and its effects upon American Jews as well as upon both the liberal culture and the population at large; three, the almost total absence of any cultural position making it possible either to identify with or dispassionately to discuss the Arabs or Islam.”

He adds that the complexities of oil-economics, Judeo-Islam relations and other aspects further muddied perceptions (1978: 27) of Arabs, Muslims and the East/Orient. Said (1978: 45) explains that the word Orientalism expresses the strength of the West as opposed to the weakness of the East and that it divides the world into oppositions, i.e. West (us) versus the East (them). Islam became a symbol of terror, devastation, and demonic barbarianism (Said, 1978: 60).

In his writing, Said (1978) emphasises that this rivalry between the East and West is not a recent occurrence. Instead, it has existed since centuries ago, possibly even prior to the Crusades. Said notes in his writing, however, that this adversarial relationship was intrinsically inherent since the era of the Crusades where there was a battle for, amongst other things, religious superiority between Islam and Christianity.

“Not for nothing did Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma. Until the end of the seventeenth century the ‘Ottoman peril’ lurked alongside Europe to represent for the whole of Christian civilisation a constant danger, and in time European civilisation incorporated that peril and its lore, its great events, figures, virtues, and vices as something woven into the fabric of life” (Said, 1978: 60).

He adds that from the end of the seventh century until the battle of Lepanto in 1571, Islam in either its Arab, Ottoman or North African and Spanish form dominated or effectively

threatened European Christianity (1978: 74). This naturally implied that followers of orthodox Christian Europe would view its conquerors in a negative light.

This was particularly because Islam provoked Christianity in many ways at that time (Said, 1978). Not only did it lie closely to the religion geographically and culturally, but it also boasted unrivalled military and political successes.

“The Islamic land sits adjacent to and even on top of the Biblical lands; moreover, the heart of the Islamic domain has always been the region closest to Europe, what has been called the Near Orient or Near East. Arabic and Hebrew are Semitic languages, and together they dispose and redispense of material that is urgently important to Christianity” (Said, 1978: 74).

Islam’s geographic position, the fact that it had so much in common with Christianity and Judaism in terms of language and beliefs, and the fact that Islam could provide these religions with a formidable, if not equal and worthy opponent, contributed towards an intense dislike and hatred towards Islam and Muslims, since the seventh century.

Sajid, in his writing, also refers to the Crusades and the negative perceptions of Islam that exist since that period (2005: 12):

“The negative image of Muslims and Islam began as early as the Crusades when Christian and mercenary soldiers marched to Palestine in order to ‘free’ Jerusalem and the Holy Land from Islamic influence and authority. Songs were sung by the marching Crusaders characterising Islam and Muslims not only negatively but Muslims as infidels and idolaters. Ever since the early Crusades, Islam and Muslims have been portrayed in a derogatory fashion.”

One can argue that this intense loathing of Muslims has carried through many centuries, and is now being practiced in a different disguise.

Amjad-Ali, agrees with Said’s viewpoint about the East-West antagonistic relationship (2006: 1):

“Islam has been the West’s oldest, nearest and largest neighbour since its emergence in the seventh century. Christendom and Islam have lived side by side for some 14 centuries, and with the exception of Judaism, Islam is the only religion to coexist for so long with Christianity. For almost a millennium, the other world religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, etc. – were thousands of miles away, but Islam was as near as Spain, the Pyrenees, Sicily, or the Balkans. This proximity, however, has not always resulted in the most congenial of interactions on either side. Instead, this relationship has been replete with hostility and suspicion, because Islam was not merely a neighbour; it was also the only real competitor for spiritual loyalty in the Mediterranean world. Today, these tensions have resurfaced and are manifesting in what some would call ‘Islamophobia’ – the fear, dread and even hatred of all things Muslim” (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 1).

One can therefore state that Islamophobia, although a newly coined word, is not a new occurrence. It existed centuries ago, but under another guise.

In Amjad-Ali’s writing, it emerges that phobias and prejudices are fed by a diabolical combination of disinformation, lies and simple, often wilful ignorance (2006: 2).

“For without tearing away this veil of ignorance and misinformation, true dialogue cannot hope to emerge, and without such a dialogue the discord between Islam and the West will continue its escalation into a never ending cycle of anger, recriminations, attacks and counter attacks, resulting in an ever increasing toll of violence, death and destruction.”

This constant clash (physical or non-physical) between the West and Islam could be a possible reason as to why Islam is all too often viewed as a barbaric, violent, and destructive religion.

Amjad-Ali sees Islam’s emergence, and the fact that it quickly became a major religious and political player, first in its region, and then shortly thereafter on the world stage, as a serious challenge to the existing religions in the area (2006: 11).

This was particularly so for Judaism and Christianity, since Islam not only claimed to be in total continuity with them, but to be their culmination or completion. For Islam saw itself as the abrogation of these religions, especially of Christianity, which Islam argued had already played a similar, if not identical, role vis-à-vis Judaism (Amjad-Ali, 2006). This was a huge challenge for Christianity because Islam is the only major world religion that claims to be its successor (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 11).

Islam's strength in the face of Christianity as a major religion means that it has emerged as a political force challenging Western hegemony and has immediately been allocated the place of archenemy, which was formerly held by communism, which disintegrated with the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989 (Amjad-Ali, 2006:3) .

In Amjad-Ali's view, Islam came to be viewed as a single, homogeneous, coherent ideological movement and therefore a serious threat and challenge to the universal acceptance of the West's liberal political construct (2006: 3.). Islam thus emerged as the new binary, the new "other" (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 3). The West replaced its original enemy, communism, with Islam (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 3). . Islam has positioned itself as a challenge to capitalism and this has served to reinforce its negative prominence in the eyes' of the West (Amjad-Ali, 2006).

According to Lewis (2004),

“The key question that occupies Western policy makers at the present time may be stated simply: Is Islam, whether fundamentalist or other, a threat to the West? To this simple question, various simple answers have been given, and as is the way of simple answers, they are mostly misleading” (Lewis, 2004: 23)

In Lewis' view, according to one school of thought, Islam and Islamic fundamentalism have replaced the West's old enemy of the Soviet Union and Communist movement (Lewis, 2004: 23). Lewis (2004) adds that another school of thought sees all Muslims including radicals as decent and peace loving even though they had to endure many dreadful things from the West (i.e. Muslims suffered oppression at the hands of the West). Lewis writes nevertheless that, “the West still views them as an enemy as they have a psychological need to replace their old enemy, the Soviet Union” (Lewis, 2004: 24). According to Lewis (2004: 24), a significant number of Muslims – notably but not exclusively those whom the West calls fundamentalists –

are hostile and dangerous, not because the West needs an enemy, but because those Muslims do. (A clear distinction between fundamentalism and Islam will be discussed later on.)

## **2.2. THE WESTERN MEDIA AND ISLAM**

Islamophobia has existed in the media since 1979 (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 19).

According to Amjad-Ali (2006: 19), when American hostages were taken in Iran in 1979, after the overthrow of the country's Shah, US News commentator, Ted Koppel, became a household name because of his daily reporting on this event.

On what became the famous late night news programme, *Nightline*, he brought the American public's concern to a fever pitch because it was an election year (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 20). It seemed that instead of a number of individual Americans, it was the whole nation that was being kept captive by Iran, as reflected by Koppel's by-line, "America Held Hostage."

Thus, the media hype that surrounded this crisis served both to heighten latent Islamophobia within the West generally, and in America particularly (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 20). Since this time, Western media, more especially American media, have taken the cue from Koppel in building a sort of patriotism amongst readers/listeners/viewers when covering stories relating to East-West issues (Amjad-Ali: 20).

In his introduction to the revised edition of *Covering Islam* (1997), Said writes that since the first appearance of the book fifteen years earlier, there has been an intense focus on Muslims and Islam in the American and Western media, characterised by exaggerated stereotyping and belligerent hostility.

"Indeed, Islam's role in hijackings and terrorism, descriptions of the way in which overtly Muslim countries like Iran threatens 'us' and our way of life, and speculations about the latest conspiracy to blow up buildings, sabotage commercial airliners, and poison water supplies to play increasingly on Western consciousness. A corps of 'experts' on the Islamic world has grown to prominence, and during a crisis they are brought out to pontificate on formulaic ideas about Islam on news programs or talk shows" (Said, 1997: xi)

In Said's view (1997), this worsens the situation by blowing incidents totally out of all proportion and creating a public fear of a supposedly peace-loving religion. There has also been a revival of Orientalist ideas about Muslims – generally “non-white” people – ideas, which have achieved a startling prominence at a time when racial or religious misrepresentations of every other cultural group are no longer circulated with such impunity (Said, 1997: xii).

Malicious generalisations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West (Said, 1997: xi). What is said about the Muslim mind, or character, or religion or culture as a whole cannot now be said in mainstream discussion about Africans, Jews, other Orientals or Asians (Said, 1997: xi).

According to Said (1997) the levels of anti-Islamism in the mainstream media have reached unacceptable heights, whereby Muslims/Arabs are portrayed even in Hollywood style movies, as villains, terrorists, and violent barbarians, obsessed with women, sex, and money.

In his paper “Covering Islam and Terrorism”, Edward Said (1997/2002) remarks that there is now a new wave of feature films which portray the classic villains as Arab terrorists, complete with glinty eyes and a passionate desire to kill Americans whose main purpose is first to demonise and dehumanise Muslims in order, second, to show intrepid Western, usually American, hero killing them off.

He cites examples of the movie *Delta Force* (1985) which began this trend (Said, 1997/2002: 589). This was followed by the Indiana Jones series and numerous television serials in which Muslims are uniformly represented as evil, violent, and above all, eminently “killable” (Said, 1997/2002: 589).

Karim (2003: 110.) cites Jack Shaheen on television stereotypes about Arabs:

“Jack Shaheen writes that television tends to perpetuate four primary stereotypes about Arabs: ‘they are all fabulously wealthy; they are barbaric and uncultured; they are sex maniacs with a penchant for white slavery; and they revel in acts of terrorism (Shaheen, as cited in Karim, 2003: 110).

Karim also cites Kassis (2003: 110): Such core images have been the basis for the dominant Western perceptions of Arabs/Muslims since the Middle Ages when they were viewed as being

“war-mongers”, “luxury lovers,” and sex maniacs, and they have remained the most resilient images about Muslims by the West (Karim, 2003).

These images are not only pertinent to television, but also include popular culture, art, music, literature, school textbooks, public discourse, and computer-based media (i.e. the internet) (Karim, 2003: 110).

Ultimately, Muslims are stereotyped as violent, lustful, and barbaric (Karim, 2003: 110). Another scholar, Sajid (2005: 13) says that the film industry is even more effective in the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in a manner that creates hate and prejudice in the hearts and minds of international viewers.

Arab and Muslim groups living within the United States have struggled to combat these negative images, but do not have the power, the means nor possess as effective a voice as the billions of dollars that back the entertainment industry (Sajid, 2005: 13).

Sajid (2005: 13) makes reference to a United Nations special investigation on religion carried out by a Tunisian lawyer, Abdul Fattah Amor, who in 1999, reported that a pervasive Islamophobia existed in the United States and that it was fed by a “hate-filled” image of Muslims presented in the media.

This Islamophobia reflected both racial and religious intolerance. He makes reference to Fattah’s findings (2005: 13)

“This is not the fault of the authorities, but of a very harmful activity by the media in general and the popular press in particular, which insists in putting out a distorted and indeed hate-filled message treating Muslims as extremists and terrorists.”

The medium of television has also played a significant role. Lewis (2005: 7.) writes

“...television remains the most widespread and significant medium in the global communication of terror and political violence.”

No doubt, television is a powerful visual medium, one that can have an impressionable impact on the mind of the average person.

Hachten (2005: 24) writes:

“Global television, which is capable of bringing the world together to share a common grief, such as the death of a president, or a global celebration, as during Neil Armstrong’s walk on the moon, can also be manipulated to shock and terrify the world.”

This was exactly the nature of the coverage of the events of 9/11. The world was brought together by Western (mainly American) media, to share in America’s grief.

Hachten adds:

“Terrorism is still very much with us although the forms keep changing: plane bombings, hijackings, political kidnappings, assassinations, civilian bombings, and more recently, suicide bombings of prominent buildings or groups of people. Such acts are perpetrated, some feel, to capture time and space on the world’s media. Terrorism has been called ‘propaganda of the deed’ – violent criminal acts, usually against innocent people, performed by desperate people seeking a worldwide forum for their grievances” (Hachten, 2005: 24)

As was the case with 9/11 and other so-called “terrorist” acts around the world, much of the media was preoccupied with the minute-by-minute coverage of the event. Hachten (2005) writes that terrorists have learned to use the media’s preoccupation with coverage of their acts as attention-seeking devices to their plights.

“Terrorists have learned a lesson of this media age: Television news can be manipulated into becoming the final link between terrorist groups and their audiences, and as with sensational crimes, the more outrageous and heinous the act, the greater attention the media will give it” (Hachten, 2005: 24).

Hence, the media is responsible for the creation of an avenue through which terrorism and terrorist acts gain maximum exposure, for such heinous crimes (Hachten, 2005: 24).

By promoting this perception of Muslims in Western society, the media have managed to create anti-Islamic sentiments amongst mainstream Western society, which ultimately influences their attitudes towards Muslims and their religion.

### **2.3. DEFINING FUNDAMENTALISM AND TERRORISM**

It seems that the Western media have managed to create a great misunderstanding and misperception of Islam, by constantly incorrectly associating two terms with the religion, i.e. fundamentalism and terrorism, to such an extent, that most non-Muslim societies see Islam, fundamentalism and terrorism as synonymous. The fear of Islam that has been created by the media is blatant, as Said (1997) describes:

“So inflamed against Islam has the media environment in the United States and the West generally become that when the Oklahoma City bomb attack took place in April 1995 the alarm was sounded that the Muslims had struck once again...” (Said, 1997: xiv)

In this researcher’s view, this has become a common practice in the media, where terrorist accusations are made prior to proof being presented. It has become a frequent occurrence that when anything remotely suspicious takes place, journalists are all too quick to place blame almost immediately on terrorists or Muslim fundamentalists. It is therefore vital that a distinction be made between the terms “terrorist” and “fundamentalist” at this stage. With reference to journalists, Said writes (1997: xvii),

“Looming over their work is the slippery concept, to which they constantly allude, of ‘*fundamentalism*’, a word that has come to be associated almost automatically with Islam, although it has a flourishing, usually elided, relationship with Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism.”

One can state that the word “fundamentalist” should refer to one who upholds the fundamental beliefs of his/her religion. Therefore, this researcher is of the opinion that since every religion has its own fundamentals, every follower of a particular religion should be referred to as a fundamentalist if he/she upholds these fundamentals. The basic fundamentals of Islam (which an Islamic fundamentalist should adhere to) are its five tenets (The Five Pillars, 2006):

1. Declaration of belief in the oneness of God and his Prophet Muhammad
2. Prayer: there are five daily prayers, which every practicing Muslim should perform
3. Fasting: every mature Muslim is expected to fast for thirty days during the Muslim month of Ramadaan
4. Zakaat (charity)
5. Hajj: the pilgrimage to the holy land which every adult Muslim is expected to make at least once in her/his life, should s/he be able to afford it.

Yet, the Western media fails to understand the meaning of the word “fundamentalist” (Said, 1997/2002: 586). They create a false impression by deliberately creating associations between Islam and fundamentalism (Said, 1997/2002: 586), using the terms interchangeably, thus ensuring that the average reader confuses the two terms and comes to see Islam and fundamentalism as essentially the same thing.

It hardly seems fair that Islam be falsely equated with fundamentalism because fundamentalism and Islam cannot be described as one and the same. There has been a tendency to reduce Islam to a handful of rules, stereotypes, and generalisations about the faith, its founder, and all of its people. Added to this is the perpetual reinforcement of every negative fact associated with Islam – its violence, primitiveness, threatening qualities (Said, 1997/2002: 586).

Therefore, the term “fundamentalism,” needs to be clearly defined and placed in context. Westerners have come to see Islam as a negative force, even a threat to their way of life (Said, 1997).

“For the general public in America and Europe today, Islam is ‘news’ of a particularly unpleasant sort. The media, the government, the geopolitical strategists, and – although

they are marginal to the culture at large – the academic experts on Islam are all in concert: Islam is a threat to Western civilization” (Said, 1997: 144).

This threat is mainly economic and political. Bobby Said (as cited in Lewis, 2005: 67) states that a powerful resistance to US global capitalism has evolved through Islam and Islamic nationalism. With the collapse of Soviet communism, Islam appears to be the only genuine source of resistance, a site in which a powerful and powerfully united community has been able to say no to American domination. It is thus the opinion of this researcher that this resistance is a thorn in America’s side.

“Most Muslims are not fundamentalists, and most fundamentalists are not terrorists, but most present-day terrorists are Muslims and proudly identify themselves as such” (Lewis, 2004: 117).

According to Lewis (2004: 117), Muslims complain when the media refer to terrorist movements as “Islamic” and question why the media do not similarly identify Irish and Basque terrorists/terrorism as “Christian.”

Lewis (2004: 117) says that the answer is simple and obvious: it is because they do not identify themselves as Christian. He argues that although the Muslim complaint is valid and understandable, it needs to be addressed to those who make the news, not those who report the news. Usama bin Ladin and his Al-Qa’ida followers may not represent Islam, and many of their statements and their actions directly contradict basic Islamic principles and teachings, but they do arise from within Muslim civilisation, just as Hitler and the Nazis arose from within Christendom, and they too must be seen in their own cultural, religious and historical context. Al-Qa’ida is a radical extremist group (Lewis, 2004: 118)

A terrorist is one who carries out an act of terror, and by carrying out that act, instils fear in its victims (Lewis, 2005: 53). According to Lewis (2005: 53), “the label of ‘terrorist’ is used by adversaries in a violent conflict to demonise their enemies.”

The Western media is responsible for creating an “us” versus “them” situation whereby Muslims and Arabs are portrayed as aggressive terrorists (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 5).

It is essential that one understands the point that was made in the introductory lines of this paper; i.e. that the media play a crucial role in informing society and creating public opinion.

The public domain is one that is dominated by the mass media. The critical media theory (Fourie, 2001) states that society is dependent on the media as a source of information. This dependency can be said to be abused by the Western media in its portrayal of Islam. Said (1997) writes:

“The misrepresentations and distortions committed in the portrayal of Islam today argue neither a genuine desire to understand nor a willingness to listen and see what there is to see and listen to. Far from being naïve or pragmatic accounts of Islam, the images and processes by which the media has delivered Islam for consideration to the Western consumer of news perpetuate hostility and ignorance...” (Said, 1997: xlviii).

Hoffman (as cited in Amjad-Ali, 2006: 135) states

“Terrorism, in the most widely accepted contemporary usage of the term, is fundamentally and inherently political. It is also ineluctable about power: the pursuit of power, the acquisition of power, and the use of power to achieve political change. Terrorism is thus violence – or, equally important, the threat of violence – used and directed in pursuit of, or in service of, a political aim...the other fundamental characteristic of terrorism: that it is a planned, calculated and indeed systematic act.”

According to Switzer (2004), the conservative Christian response to events since 9/11 mirrors the official governmental response by endorsing a crusade ethic that uses the same language and imagery. Conservative Christians base their actions on religious and secular authority: America is pursuing absolute and unlimited goals in the pursuit of democracy, and the American way of life is the way of righteousness for the rest of the world. Switzer argues that the mass media must bear a major share of the responsibility for marketing the war on terrorism. He says that the mainstream media as a whole constituted a willing propaganda arm of the government long before and after September 11, and that they may have played a significant role in the diffusion of international terrorism. (Switzer, 2004: 164).

Thus, one can conclude that the Western media demonises and vilifies all Muslims and Islam as fundamentalists and terrorists. At the same time, the US is defined as being synonymous with goodness, and being justly engaged in the democratisation of these uncivilised barbarians. Amjad-Ali (2006: 18) says that Islam is the only other civilization that can match the West today in terms of economic and political power, and this has instilled a fear in Americans, such that the only way to deal with its rival is by demonising it in the eyes of its citizens.

Said (1997: xxix) says that the tendency to consider the whole world as one country's imperium is very much in the ascendancy in today's United States, the last remaining superpower. However, whereas most other great cultural groupings appear to have accepted the United States' role (Said, 1997: xxix), it is only from within the Islamic world that signs of determined resistance are still strong. Therefore, societies across the world have an efflorescence of cultural and religious attacks on Islam from individuals and groups whose interests are informed with the idea of the West (and the United States, as its leader) as the standard for enlightened modernity (Said, 1997: xxix).

Yet far from being an accurate description of "the West," such an idea of rightful Western dominance is in reality an uncritical idolisation of Western power (Said, 1997: xxix). Said (1997) implies therefore, that ideally, the USA would like to maintain its position of hegemonic superiority and dominance over the rest of the world, both East and West

It is hardly surprising then, that when an event of the scale of 9/11 occurs, that American media rush to rescue their country's superpower status (Amjad-Ali, 2006).

#### **2.4. SUMMARY:**

This chapter examines the historically volatile and adversarial relationship between Islam (the East) and the West. It traces this relationship back to the time of the Crusades, up to the present. The Western media's coverage of Islam and events relating to the religion is crucial in contributing towards this volatile relationship. In fact, it may have contributed to the deeply-etched divide between the East and West. Also, the Western media seem to have failed Islam, most especially when attempting to define crucial terms such as fundamentalism and terrorism, which section 2.4. covers quite aptly. Chapter Three further analyses this relationship in terms of the Western media's coverage of the events of 9/11 and its aftermath.

## Chapter Three

### 3.1. THE MEDIA AND 9/11

The coverage of the events of 11 September 2001 needs to be placed in context of the subject of Islamophobia. There is no need to explain the chronological sequence of the attacks on the USA. However, the coverage of those events need to be dealt with in order to understand how it relates to and contributes towards Islamophobia.

What one needs to understand is that the 9/11 attacks were an attack not only on American citizens, but also on the superpowers' hegemonic ego (Amjad-Ali, 2006).

“This was the logic that lay behind what happened on 11 September 2001, which was an attack on the central symbols of western power, namely the World Trade Center (representing US and Western corporate capital and economic power), the Pentagon (representing the military might of the US), and the White House or the Congress building (representing the political might of the US)” (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 21).

However, the sheer scale of the destruction of the World Trade Center, the symbolic importance of the targets, and the fact that the attack took place on American soil, drastically changed the West's perception of terrorism (Amjad-Ali, 2006).

Suddenly, terrorism and terrorists became a homogenous reality rather than a disparate phenomenon carried out by various terrorist groups, operating in different countries/regions, for different political purposes (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 125). Now all terrorists were assumed to be Muslim, and conversely, most Muslims were assumed to be terrorists (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 125)

Muslim men and women travelling abroad, or even within their own countries, were victimised as they were viewed as potential terrorists (Amjad-Ali, 2006). As a result of the 9/11 attacks, Muslims were treated differently from normal passengers at airports and other public places (Racialising Terror And, 2001: 1) They were subjected to intensive body searches and interrogation simply because they had an Islamic name (Racialising Terror And, 2001: 1).

Amjad-Ali writes that now all terrorists are seen almost exclusively as being Muslim (2006: 125). People from Muslim countries and with Muslim identities have begun to be profiled and targeted, and many are still incarcerated. “A dark bearded man, walking down the street, was a potential suicide bomber, a fact tragically proven in the death of Jean Charles de Menezes” (the

Brazilian man who was shot in the United Kingdom shortly after the London bombings in July 2005) (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 125).

Of course, Western leaders have been quick to disassociate themselves from this absolute essentialisation of the terrorists, saying that it is not Islam, but Muslim fundamentalists, who are the enemy of freedom and democracy (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 125).

Nevertheless, the “war on terrorism” seems, in essence, to be a war on Muslims, or at least those Muslims that the West does not like (Amjad-Ali, 2006).

Amjad-Ali (2006) thus raises questions as to which Muslims exactly does the West like. The answer would naturally be those countries that serve the economic and political interests of the West, especially the oil-producing Muslim countries (Amjad-Ali, 2006).

It seems that in the coverage of the events of 9/11, historical events leading to its occurrence were simply ignored (Sajid, 2005: 4). Western media found it easier and preferable that blame be placed on Islam’s “lack of progress” and “barbaric mentality” (Sajid, 2005).

In a draft report entitled “Final Report: Consultation of UK NGOs in preparation for the World Conference Against Racism” (Isal, 2001) Islamophobia was equated to racism and even apartheid. However, instead of stereotyping a particular race, a specific religion was the target. The report highlights the negative role of the media as one of the main factors perpetuating racism and Islamophobia.

Furthermore, the report states that religious discrimination was identified as one of the major forms of racism today, and one that needs to be addressed in a more comprehensive way in legislation, as well as policies (Isal, 2001: 8). It called on governments to acknowledge the existence of marginalised groups that are clearly victims of racism but are not often recognised as such. As Isal (2001: 8) writes:

“All forms of racisms, including religious discrimination and Islamophobia, should be recognised as a violation of human rights.”

This is particularly crucial in order to tackle Islamophobia effectively (Isal, 2001: 8).

Although the World Conference Against Racism took place just a week prior to the 9/11 attacks, it had already recognised that the media was one of the major sources of racist opinion

and the perpetuation of racial tension (Isal, 2001). Isal's report says that the debate on race relations in the media is often biased and describes minorities in either a negative way or by stressing some aspects more than others, such as "black on black racism", thus perpetuating negative stereotypes (2001: 11).

A week later, after the 9/11 attacks, the report's comments reflected the truth of the matter: that the Western media's portrayal of events was highly opinionated, propagandist and perpetuated Islamophobic stereotypes (Isal, 2001).

In a chapter entitled "Making sense of the 'Islamic Peril': Journalism as cultural practice", Karim writes about the media's coverage on 9/11 (2003: 105):

"Indeed, most media – stunned by the events of the day – seemed all too willing to accept the government's lead. As the hunt began for the 'Islamic terrorists', journalists' narratives failed to provide a nuanced and contextual understanding of Islam, Muslims, or the nature of the 'Islamic peril'."

From Karim's writing, one may be led to believe that by failing to place the event in the context of religion and background, the media in a sense failed the public. The media were all too quick to assign blame to Muslims being responsible for the death of thousands of Americans who died on 9/11, but failed to mention America's role as a superpower and its involvement in and attacks on other countries (Karim, 2003: 106).

"Instead, the righteous and moral stance of the US became a key component of the dominant journalistic script for reporting 'the War against Terrorism' – a label produced by the administration and accepted uncritically as the rubric for the coverage of the US' military actions in Afghanistan" (Karim, 2003: 106).

Although Karim is a Muslim scholar, he also places a large amount of blame for the failure of the Western media's informed coverage of Muslim societies on Muslims themselves. He says that Muslims have not explained sufficiently the ethical and humanistic content of Islam and that by default, they also allow militant Islamists to become the spokespersons for all Muslims

(Karim, 2003: 106). In this way, Muslims themselves have done both their religion and the media a great disfavoured (Karim, 2003).

The West's failure to understand Islam is reciprocated by Islam's failure to understand the West. Karim (2003) cites the example that Muslim governments have been exposed to liberalism since the late nineteenth century, but an appreciation of related concepts such as freedom of expression seems to be frequently absent amongst Muslim governments.

Karim believes that whereas journalists need necessarily to continue reporting on corruption and human rights abuses wherever they exist, they need to be more aware of historical and socio-cultural backgrounds in the societies they cover, as well as the nature of their relationships with those particular societies (2003: 107).

An example of this would be that the media have the tendency to declare manifestations of Muslim beliefs such as wearing the veil and performing the five communal prayers as certain signs of "Islamic fundamentalism," whereas the wearing of Christian religious apparel or even attending church are not usually considered as signs of fundamentalism or fanaticism (Karim, 2003: 107). The generalisation by the media of all Muslims as fundamentalists serve to distort communication and the messages disseminated by the media (Karim, 2003, 107).

The mainstream Western media's coverage of 9/11, adopted the Bush administration's "us versus them" frame (Karim, 2003: 113). The media failed to be objective and reported a one-sided story, creating a "culture of fear," populated by a vast array of threats (Waisbord, 2003: 202).

This did not help contain a crisis situation. Instead, the Western media's coverage of the event worsened matters. According to Sreberny (2003: 220), while the media in ordinary times help to structure and order the everyday, in times of crisis their role in allaying anxiety is even more crucial. In catastrophic times, information plays a "therapeutic" service, a ritual akin to prayer or chanting. In their introduction to *Journalism After September 11* (2003: 2), Zelizer and Allan quote Herman about journalism's role in society after a crisis:

"Invested in the best of cases with a social mission to clarify the undecipherable to distant publics, journalism plays a key role in moving whole populations from trauma to recovery precisely through questions related to identity. The three stages of such a process – establishing safety, engaging remembrance and mourning, and reconnecting with ordinary life."

However, Zelizer and Allan write that instead of playing this responsible role, much of the coverage of 9/11 focused on trauma and its aftermath (2003: 3).

This therefore raises questions regarding journalism's broader role as interpreter and provider of context. An additional question that may be asked is whether journalists can provide informed reportage if they lack knowledge about Islam or any other religion, in a Western context where religion is decreasingly important.

Lewis (2005: 7) quotes former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as saying that the media and publicity are the "oxygen" of terrorism.

Whilst this may be true, and terrorists do rely on the media for exposure and measuring the levels of their success, the media needs to take greater responsibility in ensuring that terrorism has not succeeded (Lewis, 2004: 117). Lewis (2004: 133) writes that terrorism has succeeded because of the media and the impact of its immediacy.

"Thanks to the rapid development of the media, and especially of television, the more recent forms of terrorism are aimed not at specific and limited enemy objectives but at world opinion. Their primary purpose is not to defeat or even to weaken the enemy militarily but to gain publicity and to inspire fear – a psychological victory."

Therefore media exposure to so-called terrorist acts simply mean great exposure for the perpetrators of these acts, by being the subject of the news and thus instilling fear in the global public (Lewis: 2004).

Lewis (2005: 19) introduces the concept of the "mediasphere," which evolves out of the democratic public sphere and represents the convergence of public and private interests.

It is the site where media organisations, governments, texts and audiences converge in a cultural politics, which he describes as a broadcast democracy. In terms of functionalist theories, the public plays a key role in interacting with the media, through call-in programmes, letters to the editor, etc. This ties in to Lewis' (2005) concept of the mediasphere.

The televisual mediasphere raises many questions over the meaning of global terror and the so-called war on terror. In this mediasphere, the idea that the world radically changed after 9/11

has become something of a mantra for social and political commentary, especially as the US continues to assert its global primacy over those whom it regards as enemies (Lewis, 2005: 17).

According to this, our understanding and experience of terrorism is created by the way the media represents it and the manner in which our culture and society creates its meaning.

The Western media, especially that in the USA and the UK, fail to realise how their coverage of events affects the world's news, and that the global media rely heavily on these countries' media as a source of their news (Hachten, 2005: 14).

“Most Americans who keep up with the news are unaware of the influence and reach of American journalism beyond the borders of their nation. During the past 50 years, the US news media, in doing their basic job of reporting the news for local audiences, have participated in and helped shape a world that is economically more interdependent while becoming, since the end of the Cold War, more politically fractured and threatening. In addition to American-generated news in print and broadcasting, our movies, pop music, television programs, and lifestyles have penetrated the minds and cultures of European and non-Western people with tremendous impact” (Hachten, 2005: 14)

Such is the dependency of the rest of the world's media on the UK and USA as a source of news that even a “First World” country like Canada relies on them (Lewis, 2005: 63).

“...Canada's mass media is entirely bound to the perspective of the United States. As a global and regional minnow, Canada is dependent on the US, not merely because of America's economic-military primacy, but because of its capacity to generate information and 'cultural knowledge'. In particular, the Canadian print media and its perceptions of 'Islam' remain heavily dependent on the global information networks dominated by the UK and the United States” (Lewis, 2005: 63).

In Hachten's view (2005: 15), the enhanced ability of Western journalism to report quickly and fully on global crises and trends enables leaders of nation states, the United Nations, and business and non-governmental organisations to respond to such challenges. News media can

and do alert nations to a kaleidoscope of such dangers as environmental disasters, changing facets of terrorism, human rights clashes, economic trends and crises, and political crises, wherever they may be occurring in the world. Ultimately, however, it is the media's gatekeepers that decide what makes news.

“It has been said with some but not much exaggeration that an American's right to know is the world's right to know. For any news story that gets into the American news, media can and often does flow rapidly around the world and can appear in local media anywhere if it gets by the various gatekeepers that select and reject the news of the day” (Hachten, 2005: 16).

Furthermore, through globalisation and the information revolution whereby communication technologies have merged, the media has become like a nervous system to the world (Hachten, 2005: 15). Just as the human body cannot operate without the central nervous system, neither can societies across the globe function without the media (Hachten, 2005).

With the combination of computers, satellites and digitalisation, the global network encompasses the earth, almost similar to the atmosphere (Hachten, 2005). Such is the impact of the global network that when an incident such as 9/11 occurred, the world could view the unfolding events live on either the internet or television (Hachten, 2005).

This is precisely what happened when the second plane hit the twin towers in September 2001. While the world watched the first of the twin towers, they could view the destruction and collapse of the second tower live (Zelizer, 2003: 49). The emotions that the television coverage elicited in viewers will possibly be indelibly imprinted in their minds (Zelizer, 2003: 50). The media hardly helped the situation by repeatedly screening that particular footage for months to come, and this constantly stirred emotional responses amongst viewers (Zelizer, 2003: 50).

What one needs to bear in mind is that all media is a business, and all media houses aim to make a profit (Said, 1997).

“It ought to go without saying that the media are profit-seeking corporations and therefore, quite understandably, have an interest in promoting some images of reality than others. They do so within a *political* context made active and effective by an

unconscious ideology, which the media disseminate without serious reservations or opposition” (Said 1997: 49).

The Bush administration wanted to make it blatantly clear to the world that the US were the victims, the “good guys” (Said, 1997).

In addition, they expected the mainstream US media to portray this image to the global audience, knowing that most of the world’s media depended on the Western media as their sole source of news.

“The American media differ from the French and British media because the societies differ so much, the audiences differ, the organizations and the interests differ. Every American reporter has to be aware that his or her country is the only superpower with interests and ways of pursuing those interests that other countries do not have. Independence of the press is an admirable thing, whether in practice or in theory; but nearly every American journalist reports the world with a subliminal consciousness that his or her corporation is a participator in American power which, when it is threatened by foreign countries, makes press independence subordinate to what are often only implicit expressions of loyalty and patriotism” (Said, 1997: 51).

This was precisely the case with the coverage of the 9/11 attacks.

Lewis (2005: 24) writes that at the simplest level, the September 11 attacks on America generated a dramatic increase in media coverage of Islamicism and issues pertaining to the Middle East. Most of this media coverage however, was extremely negative and did nothing but ostracise followers of the Islamic faith across the world.

What journalists often fail to realise is that the communication of the event is as important as the event itself. Lewis adds (2005: 73) that the representations of Islam by the First World media and political commentaries frequently reduce the complexity of Muslim histories and cultures to a typically far-near formation where a terrorist event like 9/11 comes to epitomise all that is distant to our understanding within a core of immediate threat. It seems the modern, global networked media contributes to the East-West divide (Lewis, 2005: 73).

One of the most striking features of the 9/11 attacks is the level of global sympathy expressed which could mainly be attributed to media coverage of the event. According to Chomsky (2001:11.), the shock of 9/11 is stimulated by false sensibilities including a belief in the inviolability of American power and the justness of its actions.

For the first time since 1812, the United States had received “return fire” on its homeland from those it had exploited, assaulted and coerced (Chomsky, 2001: 11). Colonialism, which was the form of globalism initiated by Europe and adapted by the US, had created a radical division of social, economic and political difference (Chomsky, 2001: 11).

The exceptional nature of 9/11, however, was that the victims of these foreign adventures had actually conducted their reprisals on the imperialist’s soil: rarely had Europe been attacked by their foreign victims (Chomsky, 2001: 12).

It seems that the 9/11 attacks were a response to America’s own alliances and actions in foreign territories (Lewis, 2005: 95). As mentioned earlier, that America is responsible for the death of thousands of lives in other countries numbering far more than 9/11, is conveniently overshadowed by the country’s emphasis on it being victim to 9/11 (Lewis, 2005: 95). Lewis (2005: 98) writes

“It is not, however, that an attack on US interests was exceptional in itself. Since the 1980s US citizens and soldiers had been targeted by terrorists both domestically and internationally; the Trade Centre itself had been bombed in 1993, killing six people and injuring around a thousand more. Against this context, moreover, various other forms of political violence over recent years have produced many more casualties than September 11 – in Rwanda, for example, around 800,000 people were killed in a campaign of ethnic cleansing, while in Serbia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and most recently the Sudan tens of thousands of people lost their lives in politically charged ethnic and territorial disputes. The distinguishing feature of the 9/11 attacks, in fact, centres on the sudden exposure of America’s vulnerability, not merely as a material and social space, but as a semiotic system.”

It is so conveniently then, that the Western media failed to report on American oppression on foreign countries, where so many lives were lost (Lewis, 2005: 98). It is even more ironic because loss of life is a key news value; a basic fundamental (Harriss, Leiter & Johnson, 1992).

It may be then, in Lewis' view (2005: 128) that individual governments seek to assert their interests through the control of the mediasphere. It could also very well be that in situations such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph, that the media of a particular country fears its government, in the case of 9/11, the Bush administration (Lewis, 2005:128). Therefore "the major corporate media tended to support the patriotic discourse, contributing to an image of George W. Bush as a 'regular folksy guy' who was leading the nation against the forces of political and cosmological evil" (Lewis, 2005: 128). This could also explain the lack of critical voices, especially in the months following the 9/11 attacks (Lewis, 2005). The Bush administration mounted the war on terror in order to mobilise the forces of good against evil (Lewis, 2005: 128).

The Bush administration left the American public with no choice, but to be patriotic. This was exactly the message that the mainstream American media conveyed to its audience.

Mamdani (2004: 15) writes

"Listening to the public discussion in America after 9/11, I had the impression of a great power struck by amnesia. Acknowledging the epochal significance of the event should not necessarily mean taking it out of a historical and political context. Unfortunately, official America has encouraged precisely this."

It seems as though the public were not allowed to exercise their minds freely. Instead, they were told how to think, act and respond to the events of 9/11. Mamdani (2004: 15) writes that after an unguarded reference to pursuing a "crusade", President Bush moved to distinguish between "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims". From Bush's perspective, "bad Muslims" were clearly responsible for terrorism. At the same time, the Bush seemed to assure Americans that "good Muslims" were anxious to clear their names and consciences of this horrible crime and would undoubtedly support "us" in a war against "them". But this could not hide the central message of such discourse: unless proved to be "good", every Muslim was presumed to be "bad". All Muslims were now under obligation to prove their credentials by joining in a war against "bad Muslims" (Mamdani: 2004: 15). Bush persisted with this "campaign" to such an extent that he was trying to turn even American Muslims against followers of their own faith, who he considered to be bad.

It seems that judgements of “good” and “bad” refer to Muslim political identities, not to cultural or religious ones. Bush also made it clear that “you are either with us, or against us” (Mamdani, 2004). Mamdani (2004) adds that this must surely have placed the media in an uncompromising position, pressurising them with almost no choice but to voice the opinion of the government.

Bush’s words, “you are either with us, or against us” were repeatedly used in the media for months after 9/11. The constant repetition of this particular phrase must have created an impact on global audiences, also convincing them of Bush’s ideology. Once again the power of the media as a crucial source of deriving information, was demonstrated when Bush won over the support of many societies around the world.

There should be no doubt left in one’s mind, that the media’s coverage of 9/11 certainly created an impact (mainly negative), on Muslims globally. This will be discussed in the next section.

### **3.2. THE IMPACT OF THE COVERAGE OF 9/11 ON ISLAM**

As a result of the Western media’s propagation of its government’s view, Muslims across the world suffered, especially those living in Western countries. This is according to the Runnymede Trust based in the United Kingdom, which is one of the pioneer non-government organisations in the world to investigate Islamophobia and its consequences. An article in the Trust’s quarterly publication, *The Runnymede Bulletin*, states

“It could be argued that the media portrayal of the alleged perpetrators of these acts of terrorism is racist and Islamophobic. A cursory glance of the media’s coverage of the last two weeks is sufficient to establish that reporting of the event is unbalanced and likely to stir up feelings of Islamophobia. Repeated images of Osama bin Laden with weapons, children of Asian origins with weapons, crowds (adults and children) in Palestinian communities ‘celebrating’, when contrasted with images of the ‘New Yorkers’ who perished in the attacks do, while not overtly stating the message, make a link between terrorism and Islam, and terrorist and Muslim” (Racialising Terror And, 2001: 1).

There seems to be a widespread perception that the war on terror is in fact a war on Islam (Richardson, 2004). The 9/11 attacks and the days that followed wreaked emotional havoc across the world, where strong feelings of powerlessness and frustrations were echoed by both non-Muslims and Muslims (Richardson, 2004: 9). It was these strong feelings that led to violent language being used when ordinary citizens were venting their feelings in the mediasphere, through letters to editors, talk shows, etc. (Richardson, 2004: 10). This language portrayed Islamophobic sentiments, which was understandable at a time when emotions were running high (Richardson, 2004: 10).

According Richardson (2004: 10)

“American writers such as Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington have developed the thesis that there is an irreconcilable clash between Islam and ‘the West’.”

The underlying problem for “the West”, writes Huntington (in Richardson, 2004: 10),

“is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilisation whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power.”

The irony of these two scholars’ theses however, is the fact that the West, especially the US, is obsessed with its superpower status and portrays itself as the world’s hegemonic leader (Richardson, 2004: 10).

Richardson’s report (2004: 11) also highlights that the media creates an “us” versus “them” situation where “they” are totally different from “us” with no sense of a shared humanity, or of shared values and aspirations, or of “us” and “them” being interdependent or mutually influencing. Richardson (2004: 11) writes:

“Indeed, they are so different that they are evil, wicked, cruel, irrational, disloyal, devious and uncivilised. In short, they do not belong here and should be removed.”

According to Richardson (2004: 11) these strongly negative views of the “other” are accompanied by totally positive views of the “self”. It seems “we” are everything that “they” are not – good, wise, kind, reasonable, loyal, honest and civilised (Richardson, 2004: 11).

The media propagated the sentiments of Western governments and societies, who, after 9/11, and due to the negative Muslim images created by the media, felt that all people of Eastern descent, especially Muslims should return to their homelands (Richardson, 2004). Islam was portrayed as a race, rather than a religion, and all those belonging to this “race” were ostracised.

Post-9/11 the media seemed to dehumanise and demonise followers of Islam, who were at the time deemed as the enemy (Richardson: 2004). The world was divided into two camps by the media: the good guys (us) and the bad guys (them) (Richardson, 2004: 15).

To summarise the above, Islam and Muslims have been portrayed almost as aliens from another world, and therefore do not belong in Western society, due to this alien nature. This extremely negative sentiment of the religion was forcefully propagated by the media, leading the public to believe it, and thus treat Muslims as foreigners in their countries. Amjad-Ali (2006: 126) writes

“An act of terrorism can be likened to a deadly theatrical performance, enacted in a particular way to convey a particular message to a particular audience. Just as in a play, one must consider the text (i.e., the particular act that is carried out), the staging (i.e., the context), the different actors (i.e. the terrorists), the audience(s) and the critics (i.e., interpreters).”

He refers to the critics as those who interpret the actual event, in this particular case: the media and possibly government. He asks two questions: Who is interpreting the subject of the act? Who gets to decide whether the act is “terrorism” or “freedom-fighting”? (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 126). He comments that interestingly, these are perhaps the most active participants in a terrorist scenario, for it is not the act of violence itself, but the conversation about the act, which provides the act with its force and meaning, and that the control of this remains largely with the real, system-wide power, i.e. the interpreters. In addition, the terrorists have no control over the interpreters’ response to the act (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 126). The interpreters, i.e. the media and the government, have the power over the kind of message/impact that is communicated to the public.

Regarding the impact of 9/11 and the war on terror, Richardson states (2004: 15) that

“The enemy was portrayed as implacably opposed to us and to all we stand for; as evil and barbaric; and as deserving of punishment, suppression and even death. Also, the enemy is less intelligent and rational than we are, has a poorer sense of proportion and cannot be argued with. The only language the enemy understands is force. Casualties inflicted on the enemy are less serious ethically or legally than casualties suffered by one’s own side” (Richardson, 2004: 15).

By creating the impression that Islam and Muslims are the enemy of the West, the media manage to portray the image of Muslims as uncivilised, unreasonable and barbaric (Richardson, 2004).

In addition, by demonising the “enemy”, the media always manage to lay great stress on characteristics that mark out the difference between the enemy and one’s own side (Richardson, 2004: 15). Examples include the differences in language, food, dress, clothing, physical features, and especially religion.

Richardson writes (2004: 15) that the more obviously different “they” are from “us,” the easier it is to justify hostility towards “them” and to mobilise support for military action against “them”.

This was what occurred after 9/11 in the US, UK and other Western countries.

The greatest emphasis in the case of 9/11, was always placed on religious differences Richardson, 2004: 15).

“If they have a different religion from us it’s as if they inhabit a different planet – a different earth, a different heaven, a different hell. And it’s all easier to believe that the gods are on our side, and not at all on theirs. It has been said that truth is the first casualty in times of war: yes, and God is the first conscript. A divine seal of approval is invaluable for mobilising support and obedience, quietening uneasy consciences and maintaining morale” (Richardson, 2004: 15)

The media toyed with confused minds in society, to justify the plight of the Bush administrations attack on Afghanistan, and its declaration of the war on terror (Richardson, 2004).

A national commission formed in Britain to investigate Muslims' experience after 9/11, found that life was more difficult for them (Casciani, 2004). The commission "criticised public bodies for failing to address institutional Islamophobia".

It adds that there is also renewed talk of a clash of civilisations and mounting concern that the already fragile foothold gained by Muslim communities in Britain is threatened by ignorance and intolerance (Casciani, 2004).

Switzer (2004: 165) found that

"Islam went on trial in the American media. The Christian Conservative stance on war would help to establish a religious agenda on wars."

One can conclude that those that possibly did not believe in the Bush administration's plight were being convinced through the avenues of religion that the war on terror was a justifiable war.

At a conference organised by the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism one scholar (Allen, 2001: 2) argued that the media must be held responsible as a source of Islamophobia.

With reference to the UK, Allan found that (2001: 2)

"[f]or some time now, the Muslim community and some interested others have believed that the media's portrayal and representation of Islam has been one of the most prevalent, virulent and socially significant sources of Islamophobia in this country. This is not to say that the media are the cause of Islamophobia. However, it is fair to state that it is the most accessible and indiscriminate disseminator of such ideas in our global environment."

He adds that most often the media inappropriately couple the words "Islam" and "Muslim" with such terms as "extremist", "fundamentalist", "fanatic" and "terrorist" (2001: 3.).

He therefore questions just how much truth lies at the foundation of the media's reporting. He quotes French sociologist Jean Baudrillard as stating that media news is a hyper-realistic construct, where "the real and imaginary continually collapse into each other", and this raises concerns (2001: 6).

Allen consequently asks (2001: 7)

"So when we ask what is real and what is imaginary, we must question how accurate, and indeed responsible a decision was it for news agencies to show Palestinian children dancing in the streets as the first response from the Muslim world to the terrorist tragedy. And when rumours circulate that these might have been CNN library pictures dating back to 1991 the distinction between fact and fiction becomes increasingly distorted."

Allan points out (2001: 7) that the "experts" that the media choose to comment on incidents such as 9/11 are highly questionable, and that they are usually chosen to fit a particular agenda. He cites the example that articles demonising Islam were written by Tom Clancy and Frederick Forsyth, both of whom are internationally renowned fiction writers. One must therefore ask whether as authors of espionage thrillers, they can present Islam accurately, or in any way that is distinguishable from the enemies they create in their respective fictions.

Allan concludes (2001: 9) that Islamophobia's main distinctions amount to the fact that Islam is commonly interpreted as being retrogressively backward and unidimensional; inherently separate to the West; the perpetual and inferior enemy to modernisation and Western values; and manipulative as an ideology to solely oppress and control. Coverage of 9/11 portrayed much of these closed derogatory views. Islamophobia is "dangerous" because it does not respect the individual. Allan writes it is an indiscriminate prejudice that tarnishes every Muslim, irrespective of social, ethnic or cultural orientation. It is equally true that it has its effects on the motives and attitudes of millions of individuals that in turn determine their behaviour and beliefs about Muslims (2001: 9).

One can make a statement that journalism will never be the same since 9/11. The coverage of that event has changed the coverage of Islam as a religion and Muslims as a subject.

### **3.3. SUMMARY:**

The media, including popular media such as books and movies, prior to 9/11 have certainly played a definitive role in assisting the public in creating a negative perception of Islam, whereby Muslims have been demonised and viewed as terrorists. The events of 9/11 seemed to have worsened the situation for Muslims, especially on the world stage.

These states of affairs have played themselves out in a global controversy for the first half of 2006 after the publication of cartoons in a Danish newspaper in 2005. This will be examined as a case study in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four

### 4.1. THE DANISH CARTOON CONTROVERSY: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

#### 4.1.1. Background

The cartoon controversy dates back to September 2005, when a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, published a series of twelve cartoons satirising Islam's last Prophet, Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) (Pillay, 2006: 6).

These cartoons were published after an invitation to forty local cartoonists to illustrate the Prophet Muhammad as they saw him (Pillay, 2006: 6).

The starting point of this controversy was when a Danish author of children's books with religious themes, Kare Bluitgen, wrote about the life of the Islamic Prophet. Being a children's book, he wanted to illustrate the book with pictures of the prophet. However, he was unable to find a willing illustrator. *Jyllands-Posten* heard of this and followed with an invitation to local cartoonists to illustrate the Prophet as they saw him (Pillay, 2006).

Bluitgen eventually found an anonymous illustrator for his book in Denmark. *Jyllands-Posten* opted to publish the series in September 2005 (Jyllands-Posten Muhammad, 2006). However, it was not until the international media published the cartoons in February 2006, that an upheaval arose; creating what came to be known as the "cartoon wars" or "cartoon controversy" (Pillay, 2006).

#### 4.1.2. The Media and the Controversy

The Muslim population in South Africa and across the world were outraged by the insulting and Islamophobic nature of the cartoons, which will be discussed shortly (Baig, 2006).

The ensuing reaction was quite catastrophic as Muslims across the world expressed their anger through protest marches, burning of Danish flags and embassies, boycotting Danish products, as well as boycotting all media that opted to expose the offensive cartoons. This resulted in a loss of lives, as well as great damage to property (Jyllands-Posten Muhammad, 2006).

The turmoil in South Africa was exacerbated by the *Mail & Guardian* publishing one of the offensive cartoons (Pillay, 2006: 8).

This resulted in the voluntary Muslims association, the Jamiat-ul-Ulama (Council of Theologians) of Transvaal, on the evening of 3 February, to apply for an urgent interdict against various newspapers in the Johncom Media Investments Ltd., Newspaper Printers and Independent Newspapers to stop the *Sunday Times* and all other newspapers in these groups from publishing and disseminating any of the cartoons depicting the Prophet (Pillay, 2006: 8).

The applicants argued that the cartoons were an infringement to one's constitutional right to freedom of religion, and that they were blasphemous and insulting, and they were aimed at mocking and ridiculing Islam and its founder (Pillay, 2006: 9).

The application was defended on the basis that the press had a right to decide whether or not to publish the controversial cartoons, it had not as yet exercised its decision-making power in this regard, and it was strongly opposed to the attempts of any outside group to edit or censor the newspaper (Pillay, 2006: 9).

If this was the result of twelve cartoons in a Danish newspaper, one needs to ask what was so offensive about these twelve cartoons, apart from the fact that they depicted the Prophet's physical image.

Only two of the most offensive messages will be discussed here, although all twelve images have been attached (Addenda A – L) (No title, 2006). It seems that all twelve images portrayed blasphemous messages, and depictions of the Prophet, but Muslims generally seemed to perceive Addenda A and B as the worst because they were a direct attack on Prophet Muhammad.

The first image to be analysed (Addendum A) is that of the Prophet looking extremely angry with a turban on his head, inscribed with the first tenet of Islam, the declaration of faith (No title, 2006). The turban in actual fact is a bomb, with a lit fuse. Although the image is in full colour, it portrays a bearded Prophet Muhammad in an almost dark, angered state, with his eyebrows furrowed together and a frown on his face. The only other spot of colour on the image is that of the lit fuse. It seems as though there are two meanings (one literal and the other figurative) that one may decipher at first glance, i.e. that literally, the bomb is going to explode, and figuratively, that due to his furious, angered state, the Prophet is going to explode.

The second image (Addendum B) is one of the Prophet, standing at heaven's entrance. He is shouting to a line of suicide bombers: "Stop, stop. We ran out of virgins!"

One can interpret these two cartoons as portraying Islam's holiest figure as both a terrorist and an encourager of suicide bombers amongst other things. It also starkly conveys the message that Islam is a terrorist and sexist religion.

#### **4.2. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND RELIGION**

One scholar's analysis of the impact of the cartoons on perceptions pertaining to Muslims is that

“[t]he initial publication and the subsequent Europe-based defence of these cartoons – in the face of Muslim pain and outrage – was grounded on the right to freedom of speech, which was repeatedly stated to be one of the cornerstones of civilization. The implication was that if Muslims could not accept this provocation with grace, they were not civilised” (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 159).

Amjad-Ali emphasises that this is Islamophobic as the cartoons are an expression of unmitigated hate speech, and not, as some would claim, a matter of freedom of speech and expression (2006: 160).

He says that the actual intention behind the publication of such images needs to be used as a yardstick. Amjad-Ali describes the attempts to hide behind freedom of speech while generating xenophobia, racism, and, more critically in the recent years, Islamophobia, “a rather cynical and convenient camouflage used in the West” (2006: 160).

Because Muslims across the world have chosen not to accept this “camouflage” any longer, they are condemned as being incapable of either understanding or having the ability to live in “civilised” societies of the West (Amjad-Ali, 2006)..

Amjad-Ali (2006: 160) points out that

“[s]uch arguments would carry no substance if those making them were not controlling the current status quo. These arguments should be seen for what they are – incontrovertible nonsense – and shown for what they are – a hypocritical and cynical use of high ideals for perpetuating hatred for and negation of the other.”

He further adds that the West's self-righteous argument for freedom of speech is galling and needs to be challenged because the rights of free speech and expression are always limited by a rightful acknowledgement of necessary corresponding responsibilities, including the need to take cognisance of, and safeguard the rights of others, especially those who are the most vulnerable in society (2006: 161).

Amjad-Ali highlights key human rights documents that are acknowledged by the global community, and the West uses to support and ground its arguments. One such document is the The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted by the United Nations' General Assembly in 1948), which declares (as cited in Amjad-Ali, 2006: 161):

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights...and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject to such limitations as are determined by law for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.”

Another such document is the European Charter of 1950 (as cited in Amjad-Ali, 2006: 162).

The applicable clause reads as follows:

“The exercise of these freedoms [of expression], since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such restrictions and penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others.”

However, Amjad-Ali highlights the irony which lies in the Danish Penal Code under Section 140, which prohibits blasphemy and any person from publicly ridiculing or insulting the dogmas of worship of any lawfully existing religious community (2006: 162).

Even more ironic is Section 266b which authorises criminal prosecution and conviction of any person (as cited in Amjad-Ali, 2006: 162)

“who publicly or with the intention of dissemination to a wide circle of people makes a statement or imparts other information threatening, insulting or degrading a group of persons on account of their race, colour, national or ethnic origin, belief or sexual orientation.”

Amjad-Ali argues that it therefore lay in the hands of the Danish government to seriously reconsider its extremely wrong and inadequate response to the cartoons (2006: 163). The government should have enforced the national law stated in the Penal Code, as well as international treaty commitments to defend the human dignity of all members of their populations, including the Muslim population. Amjad-Ali argues the Danish government needs to re-examine its foreign policies to make them more compatible with promoting global conditions of justice and peace (2006: 163).

The cartoon controversy can be used to explore the boundaries of South Africans’ right to freedom of expression as entrenched in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution (Pillay, 2006: 14).

The South African Bill of Rights in the Constitution (2006) states the following, regarding freedom of expression under section 16

“Freedom of expression

16. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes –

- (a) freedom of the press and other media;
- (b) freedom to receive or impart information or ideas;
- (c) freedom of artistic creativity; and
- (d) academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.”

The right to freedom of expression is central and essential to any democracy and this is recognised internationally as a fundamental human right. In the case of the cartoon controversy, the South African courts prevented the publication of the cartoons by certain newspapers, and

this means that this right to freedom of expression was infringed upon. The media had no room to exercise its right to freedom and this could be viewed as a contradiction of the constitution.

The cartoon controversy can also be used to scrutinise the scope of press freedom in South Africa. According to the *Sunday Times*' code of ethics (Code of Conduct: 2006) in dealing with issues of race, religions and cultural difference, its staff:

- Will act independently when reporting issues of race but will take note of sensitivities regarding race, or other issues, in their work;
- Will report on these issues where there is a demonstrable public interest; when race is the central issue of a story, racial identifications should be used only when they are important to readers' understanding of what has happened and why it has happened;
- Will not unjustifiably offend others in reporting on sensitive issues relating to race, religion or cultural difference;
- Will not use language or pictures that are offensive, reinforce stereotypes or fuel prejudice or xenophobia.

Despite these inclusions in its code of ethics, the newspaper's editor, Mondli Makhanya, was not impressed by the court's decision to prohibit his paper from publishing the cartoons. His response will be discussed shortly.

In its code of ethics, *The Star* (part of the Independent Newspaper Group) includes:

- *The Star* should encourage racial co-operation and pursue a policy aimed at enhancing the welfare and progress of all sections of the population.
- The public's right to know about matters of importance is paramount. *The Star* should therefore fight vigorously any measure to conceal facts of public interest, any attempt to prevent public access to the news and any effort further to curtail freedom of speech.

This newspaper was also prohibited from publishing the cartoons by the court interdict. The presiding judge, Mohamed Jajhbhai, concluded that the cartoons were unconstitutional and a violation of one's right to dignity, and thus issued a pre-publication ban on the cartoons (Pillay, 2006: 17).

Firstly he found the cartoons offensive on the grounds of blasphemy, in that they depicted the Islam's revered Prophet (Pillay, 2006: 18).

Secondly, the messages that they portrayed were highly insulting to members of the Islamic faith (Pillay, 2006: 18). Judge Jajhbhai said that human dignity outweighed the right to freedom of expression in this particular case, and the publication of the cartoons would violate it. He highlighted the important role that the media have to play in our developing democracy. He said that South Africa's constitution seeks to promote and to protect the legitimate interests of individuals and groups to have their reputation intact. He added that in balancing the right to freedom of expression against the interests of human dignity, the limitation on the right to freedom of expression is justifiable in the interests of human dignity and it is necessary to foster national unity. This, he said, is imperative in a country like South Africa with a history of hatred and fear which divided its people. It is necessary to promote and protect human dignity, equality and freedom in a community that is so diverse (Pillay, 2006).

Apart from the depiction of the Prophet, which is forbidden in Islam, the cartoons also depicted him as a terrorist. This amounts to stereotyping Muslims and perpetuating Islamophobic sentiments (Amjad-Ali, 2006).

The *Mail & Guardian* claimed to have published the cartoons for the purpose of illustration and education (Pillay, 2006: 19). It argued that its motive was completely different to that of the Danish newspaper (Pillay, 2006: 19), yet readers could not make that distinction. This was followed by an apology to its Muslim readers in the next issue (Pillay, 2006: 20). It seems that instead of serving its educational purpose and explaining the issues of the conflict, it chose to expose the existing international conflate, which did little except provoke emotions amongst readers (Pillay, 2006: 21).

The key issue at stake in this controversy is the protection of freedom of speech and expression which was used by the West over the vulnerable, weaker and smaller minority (Amjad-Ali, 2006). Amjad-Ali writes (2006: 163):

“One only equates the two issues (i.e. hate speech and freedom of speech) if one is morally bankrupt, ethically deficient, or lacking in basic common sense.”

He puts forth the argument that if the attacks in these cartoons were honest, it should have at worst, targeted al-Qaeda or bin Laden or the Muslim fundamentalists who are seen as the threat to the current order of things by the West.

“By instead using foul depictions of the Prophet Mohammed to represent these acts, the cartoonist did not attack the people responsible, but instead hit Islam’s foundations of faith and its ontology. It is like saying that since Israel and the US are overtly and unashamedly perpetuating state-terrorism, they should be depicted by making a mockery of Moses and Jesus as either being terrorists or encouraging if not directly perpetuating terrorism. Such an act will be clearly intended as hate speech and no claim of freedom of speech will provide it the hiding place it seeks” (Amjad-Ali: 164)

What is clear is that *Jyllands-Posten* published these images in order to inflame Islamophobia in its readers and to incite the sensibilities of Muslims (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 164). According to Amjad-Ali, just three years prior to these cartoons, the very same publication refused to publish blasphemous cartoons of Jesus on the grounds that it would offend readers and create an outcry (2006: 165).

The fact that the newspaper was aware that such cartoons are highly offensive means the cartoons of Prophet Muhammad was clearly meant as hate speech to offend Muslims through consciously denigrating and maligning them (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 164). The cartoon controversy must be seen as a violation of free expression and not as a protection of it (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 164). The cartoons were meant to be inflammatory, showing total disrespect, as well as a lack of moral or aesthetic maturity (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 166).

Amjad-Ali (2006: 167.) states that if any civilisation is showing immaturity in the current debate – immaturity of reason, common sense, political knowledge, humanity itself – it is the West, for not being able to see its bigotry, prejudice, and open Islamophobia, instead of doing nothing and quickly hiding behind the “higher principle” of freedom of speech.

One can conclude that this type of controversy serves to assert that Muslims are incapable of learning, grasping and living within the so-called Western and European cultures.

Naturally, such offensive images would cause emotional responses from Muslims internationally. The instances where Muslims have reacted violently are now being taken as yet another example of what is wrong with the Islamic world; without any notice of the causalities that produced such a reaction (Amjad-Ali, 2006: 169).

Again Amjad-Ali blames the West (2006, 169):

“...globally the media outlets are beyond the reach of Muslims and as such their freedom of speech is effectively denied, so they must turn to the streets as their only form of expression. This is a classical political tactic: to define your enemy as the aggressor and thereby cover your own initial act of aggression.”

South African Muslims reacted in the same manner, with protest marches to Danish embassies, as well as calls for boycotts on Danish products and boycotts on purchasing those South African newspapers which intended to publish the cartoons.

However, South African Muslims, in their angered state, failed to acknowledge that the cartoons raise issues regarding the right to freedom of expression and dignity as both a value and a right in the South African Constitution. It also raises issues of press freedom, hate speech, unfair discrimination and censorship.

In a podcast on a journalism resource website (McBride, Steele, Woods, Clark and Colon, 2006: 1) it is argued by McBride that the cartoon controversy could be

- an issue of free speech,
- an issue of intolerance, or
- of ethnocentrism.

Bob Steele (McBride, Steele, Woods, Clark and Colon, 2006: 1), a scholar on journalism values said,

“Political cartoons are the visual equivalent of a strong editorial or column. They should express strong opinion. They should evoke and provoke. They should evoke some sort of emotional reaction from those that see the political cartoon.”

One can state that this was precisely the response to the Danish cartoons – an angry, highly emotional Muslim community. It evoked feelings of disdain and certainly provoked the Islamic world to respond to the West.

Another scholar, Keith Woods, Dean of the Faculty of Journalistic Ethics at the Poynter Institute, said that many journalists are ignorant of religious issues and need to understand the issue of depicting the prophet at its core, and then to make an informed choice. He asked why it is necessary to reproduce the cartoons: “What do we know about the issue of depicting Muhammad at all that might make this an issue for us today?” (McBride, Steele, Woods, Clark and Colon, 2006: 2)

Roy Peter Clark, a senior scholar at the Institute (McBride, Steele, Woods, Clark and Colon, 2006: 2) said that in issues such as the cartoon controversy, journalists need to make an informed choice.

“On one hand, we want to be able to portray the source of this great discontent and unrest so that we can be truly informed, and on the other hand, the reproduction of these images may make the problem worse. And so we want to tell the truth, we want to minimise harm, and those things are very difficult to do at the same time.”

This was the exact predicament created by the *Mail & Guardian*, who probably anticipated the ramifications of publishing (Pillay, 2006: 20). However, this newspaper failed to add context and knowledge as to why exactly the cartoons were offensive (Pillay, 2006: 20). Context needed to be given not only to the choice of publishing the cartoons, but the context of the decision behind the choice to publish. In addition, Woods (McBride, Steele, Woods, Clark and Colon, 2006: 1) adds that for most Muslims the first offence was not the actual cartoons, but the fact that any media organisation would choose to publish the offensive material in the first place.

Mamdani writes (2006: 1) that everyone agrees that the cartoons are offensive, and not particularly because they portray the prophet in human form. At the heart of the offence is their message. This message goes beyond the demonisation of Muslims to a direct assault on Muslims in Europe. It is abundantly clear that the cartoon controversy is a manifestation of Islamophobia (Mamdani, 2006: 2).

### **4.3. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION VERSUS RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE**

Trying to balance the scale between freedom of expression on the one hand and respect for the feelings and beliefs of other people on the other hand is becoming an increasingly complex issue. It also raises questions of what tolerance means in our democracy.

A joint press statement by the Muslim Judicial Council and the Media Review Network (Press Statement From, 2006) states that they were deeply shocked by the publication of the cartoons. It said that publications that chose to print the cartoons showed blatant disregard for the beliefs of the Muslim community in South Africa and that these publications had taken the concept of “freedom of speech” to a very dangerous, irresponsible and unacceptable level by showing complete disregard for the sensitivities and fundamental laws of Islam, and yet claims to uphold the highest ethical standards based upon respect. With freedom comes responsibility and these papers failed in their responsibility to the Muslim community at large.

### **4.4. RESPONSE FROM THE MEDIA**

Mondli Makhanya, the editor of the *Sunday Times*, one of the South African newspapers that were gagged from publishing the cartoons, said (Cartoon row: Sunday, 2006) that his newspaper would have done the responsible thing:

“We are obliged to reflect the world that we live in – not just a part of it – for the benefit of all our readers. We must uphold the right to publish without fear or favour.”

He added that no credible newspaper can be held ransom by the beliefs of a section of the population. The South African National Editors’ Forum (Sanef) chairperson Joe Thloloe said (Cartoon row: Sunday, 2006) that the interdict amounts to pre-publication censorship and that it

limits freedom of expression in that the decision on whether to publish or not has been taken away from the editors and placed on the shoulders of the court.

“Journalism and the law are fundamentally different fields. Legal processes can drag on for years, while editorial decisions have to be taken on the turn” (Kruger, 2006)

Kruger adds that journalists have to be ready for judicial scrutiny and a possibility that they may have to defend their story. For most South African newspapers, the opportunity to possibly publish was snatched away. As a result there was no opportunity to defend their story.

According to the SABC news website, in a press statement by Sanef (Sanef issues statement, 2006), the organisation said that it has for a long time represented a tradition of respect for the beliefs of all religions, including that of the South African Muslim community. It adds that it has always stood ready to defend the rights of Muslim citizens when these have been threatened. It expressed its disappointment at the fact that the South African court did not allow the press, which is well aware of the sensitivities surrounding religion, to exercise its freedom.

David Canning (2007), editor of *The Mercury* (part of the Independent Newspaper group) based in Durban, said:

“I am personally religious and sensitive to the religious feelings of other people and in all probability would not have used the cartoons.”

Canning’s religious awareness means that he is aware of the consequences of the publication of such material on his readers. He would have taken into account the negative impact that the publication of such offensive illustrations would have on readers.

He added that the press has various responsibilities, one of which is to allow people to freely express their beliefs for or against any issue or cause, providing the debate is respectful and rational. It is also most important to respect the sensitivities and religious beliefs of readers.

At the same time, nobody can legitimately expect never to have their ideas challenged in a constructive fashion, or to expect to reconstruct the news only to their own liking (Canning, 2007).

The public's right to know is very important, but there are certain limits which are difficult to define. In each case, one needs to weigh one factor up against another (Canning, 2007).

On the issue of 9/11 and Islamophobia, he said (Canning, 2007):

“I have the sense that 9/11 created a virtual paranoia in the American media. I am not aware of this having happened in South Africa. On *The Mercury* we are as careful as we can be (in view of a constant rapid flow of copy on tight deadlines), on the one hand, not to create stereotypes but, on the other, not to censor the actual news.”

Canning (2007) concluded by saying that he would have exercised the same editorial criteria, had the cartoons been about any other religion.

*Mail & Guardian* editor, Ferial Haffajee created a row amongst South African Muslims when she opted to publish one of the Danish cartoons. Perhaps more so because she herself is a practising Muslim, yet in a sense failed the public due to her decision (Kruger, 2006a). Haffajee said she had received abusive texts and messages (SA editor threatened, 2006).

“People have been phoning my mother and exercising pressure through her” (SA editor threatened, 2006).

She said that the Muslim community displayed a lack of tolerance which was nerve-wracking (SA editor threatened, 2006). She adds that she felt that she was being targeted more especially because she was Muslim.

“Being female and Muslim to boot, I may have seemed the perfect sound bite for a foreign correspondent, but I wasn't making the same point as the European editors” (Haffajee, 2006).

Haffajee writes that the cartoons were not meant to offend people.

“We used the cartoon as an illustration to show our readers what was causing the global furor. In no way was our action in concert or in solidarity with that of the editors of the European newspapers, which used the cartoons to make a stand on freedom of speech” (Haffajee, 2006).

She says that even though Islamophobia is a threat, her publication does not shy away from controversy (Haffajee, 2006)

A statement published by the *Sunday Times* says

“We are aware of the sensitivities regarding the cartoons, and the editorial team was discussing whether these sensitivities should be given more weight than the right of non-Muslim readers to see the depictions that had caused huge offence in other parts of the world. We declined to give an undertaking not to publish the cartoons, not because we were intent on publishing them, but because we strongly oppose the attempt by any group to edit or censor the newspaper. We regard this as a serious blow to the freedom of the press and have every intention of challenging the ruling when the matter returns to court” (SA editor threatened, 2006).

Editor Mondli Makhanya said that had his publication been given the chance, he probably would not have published the cartoons.

#### **4.5. SUMMARY**

The Danish cartoons most definitely raised some serious issues for the South African media regulatory bodies to consider. Freedom of expression and freedom of the press which are

entrenched in the constitution need to be questioned as the court's decision on the prohibition of the publication of the cartoons raises questions about censorship and editorial integrity. The concluding chapter of this paper suggests how issues such as the cartoon controversy and other Islamophobic incidents could be treated by the media in future.

## Chapter Five

### 5.1. CONCLUSION

Dr Chandra Muzaffar, president of the International Movement for a Just World wrote in her article “What is the Cartoon Controversy?” (2006) that there is an important reason for the demonisation of Islam.

“It is the baneful impact of 9/11 and the war on terror upon Muslims and their subtle stereotyping in the media as a people prone to violence.”

She adds that television images and media commentaries have often reinforced the erroneous equation of the religion with terror. Muzaffar blames the West which equates the oil sources of the East with money, and money equates power. It is therefore not a coincidence that when some Muslim countries began to exercise control over their oil since the early 1970s, Arabs and Muslims were vilified in the mainstream Western media (Muzaffar, 2006: 1).

Similarly, as Zionist influence over the media and political sectors of American society increased (Muzaffar, 2006: 1) and the Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation intensified, the American media accelerated its imaging of “Muslim terror” (Muzaffar, 2006: 1).

The politics of Israel and oil has been at the root of much of the stereotyping of Islam and Muslims in recent times, and it is highly unlikely that the mainstream Western media will stop equating Islam with violence in the near future (Muzaffar, 2006: 2).

The unfortunate consequence however, says Muzaffar (2006: 2) is that Islam has become synonymous not only with violence and terrorism, but also as an opponent of free speech as with the cartoon issue. She says that the Western media perpetuates Western hegemonic ideas and since the West has an obsession with the East’s oil sources, it has become a natural enemy of the West. She adds that the only way in which a balanced perspective of Islam may possibly be presented to the world, is through alternative media.

By implying that Islam and its adherents are intolerant of the West, America in particular has been able to sell its lies in order to advance its occupation of Muslim lands (Muzaffar, 2006: 2). The publication of the cartoons of Islam’s prophet has very little to do with freedom of expression, but is more as a result of centuries of hatred and resentment towards Islam (Muzaffar, 2006: 3). Freedom of expression it seems, was merely the scapegoat used for the

publication of the hateful cartoons (Muzaffar, 2006: 3). The concept of free speech is being used as a licence for hate speech (Muzaffar, 2006: 3). The media needs to be held more accountable for the decisions it takes, more especially in sensitive or controversial issues (Muzaffar, 2006). .

## **5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Isal (2001) writes that the media needs to be made more accountable for the messages it disseminates. She raises a concern that the media are not always made accountable for what they publish and that there are not enough means to restrain them from inciting prejudice and racial stereotyping. Isal's report (2001: 11) makes the following recommendations:

- The government should make sure that the media in general is made more accountable when discussing race issues. This means imposing sanctions and making sure that there is a "code of conduct" respected by journalists when it comes to discussing race issues, in particular regarding asylum seekers.
- Independent monitoring projects and bodies should be set up to ensure that black and minority ethnic groups or individuals have a place where they can report any offensive coverage.
- There should be adequate programmes on TV and radio highlighting diversity and race issues. However, these shows should not be used as tokens.
- There should be more black and minority ethnic people to commissioning editor and management posts.
- Newspaper should have a clear policy of increasing employment of black minority ethnic staff through setting recruitment targets. The ethnic composition of staff should then be closely and regularly monitored (Isal, 2001: 11).

From the above, one can conclude that the media needs to take some lessons from the cartoon controversy.

Richardson (2004) writes that race equality organisations and activists failed to include Islamophobia in their programmes and campaigns appear to be an example of institutional racism. There needs to be a professional code of ethics. He cites an example from the Association of Professional Journalists in Indianapolis (USA) (Richardson, 2004: 69) which includes in its code of ethics, regarding stories representing Muslims and Arabs:

- Make an extra effort to include olive-complexioned and darker men and women, Sikhs, Muslims and devout religious people of all types in arts, business, society columns and all other news and feature coverage, not just stories about the crisis.
- When writing about terrorism, remember to include white supremacist, radical anti-abortionists and other groups with a history of such activity.
- Distinguish between various Muslim states; do not lump them together as in constructions such as “the fury of the Muslim world”.
- Avoid using word combinations such as “Islamic terrorist” or “Muslim extremist” that are misleading because they link whole religions to criminal activity.

In a 2002 lecture by Brian Whitaker on Islam and the British Press (in Richardson, 2004: 71), he suggested that in order to improve media coverage on Islam, the public should make the media more responsible and accountable by doing the following:

Complaining:

- Stereotypes are self-perpetuating unless people challenge them. Once they are challenged, writers tend to back off, or at least start to qualify them a bit.
- Demand correction of factual errors, especially regarding the misuse of terminology.
- Do not try to censor opinions, but engage in debate, for example through letters to the editor or directly to the writers concerned.
- If you do not get satisfaction, write to the Press Complaints Commission (the South African equivalent would be the Press Ombudsman or the Broadcasting Complaints

Commission of South Africa). Constant complaints may cause them to moderate their views.

- Send copies of your complaint to friends/contacts, or post them on a website. This may help to build a climate of opinion and help to persuade others to complain as well.

#### Employment:

- Media organisations should take positive action measures, which could include bursary schemes for journalists in training, to ensure the recruitment of more employees from Muslim backgrounds. It is important that such people be part of the mainstream, not ghettoised into writing only or mainly about Muslim issues.

#### Education:

- There are several excellent websites providing reliable information about Islam. They should be widely publicised amongst all journalists.
- Issues about Islamophobia and Muslim identity should be on the syllabus of professional training and part of induction programmes.

#### Professional ethics:

- Individual newspapers and media organisations should draw up codes of practice about how they will cover and report Islam and should publish these on their websites (Whitaker as cited in Richardson, 2004: 71).

### **5.3. SUMMARY**

In an attempt to understand Islamophobia, one needs to understand the fundamental role that the media play in society as a disseminator of information.

The media play a key role in shaping peoples' opinions as discussed in the chapter on 9/11 and the media. Most often, the media, especially those in Third World and developing countries like South Africa, rely on the Western media as a source of international news. This is due to the fact that media houses in these countries have limited budgets, and therefore cannot send journalists abroad to gather a first-hand account of the story. Hence, the Western media must act more responsibly in their role as news sources. At present, it is beyond a doubt that Western media play a key role in Islamophobia, and the world's perception of Islam.

Even though incidents of Islamophobia are very sparse in South Africa, the media still has a responsibility to report on the religion both nationally and internationally, as with 9/11 and the cartoon controversy. It relies quite heavily on Western media as a source, and as a result, needs to be careful not to propagate its Islamophobic sentiments. South African media need to be responsible when reporting on Islam and Muslims, as a significant number of South Africans belong to the religion and their religious sensitivities need to be taken into account.

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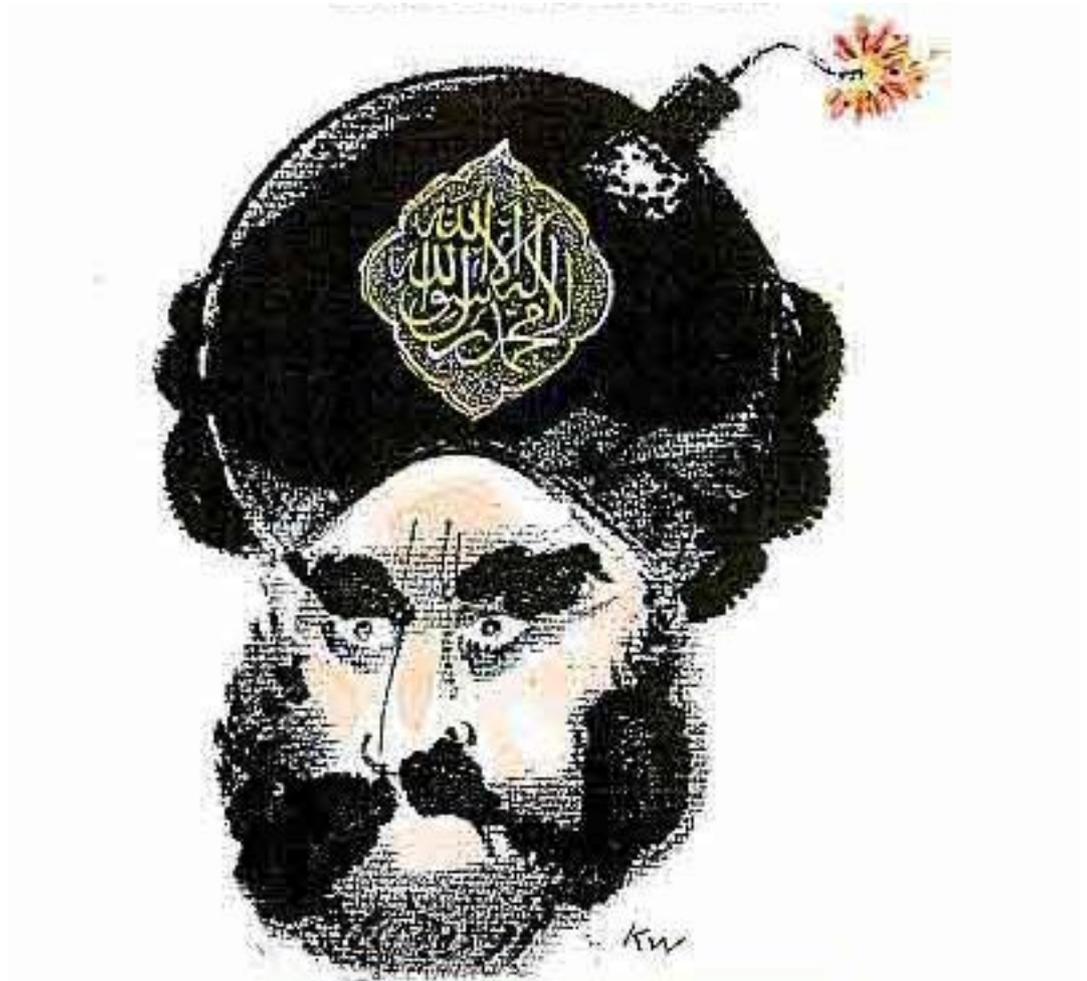
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Addendum A

Source: <http://www.aina.org>



**Addendum B**

Source: <http://www.aina.org>



**Addendum C**

**Source: <http://www.aina.org>**



**Addendum D**

**Source: <http://www.aina.org>**



Addendum E

Source: <http://www.aina.org>



**Addendum F**

Source: <http://www.aina.org>



Addendum G

Source: <http://www.aina.org>



On the blackboard it says in Persian with Arabic letters that 'Jyllands-Posten's journalists are a bunch of reactionary provocateurs'

**Addendum H**

**Source: <http://www.aina.org>**



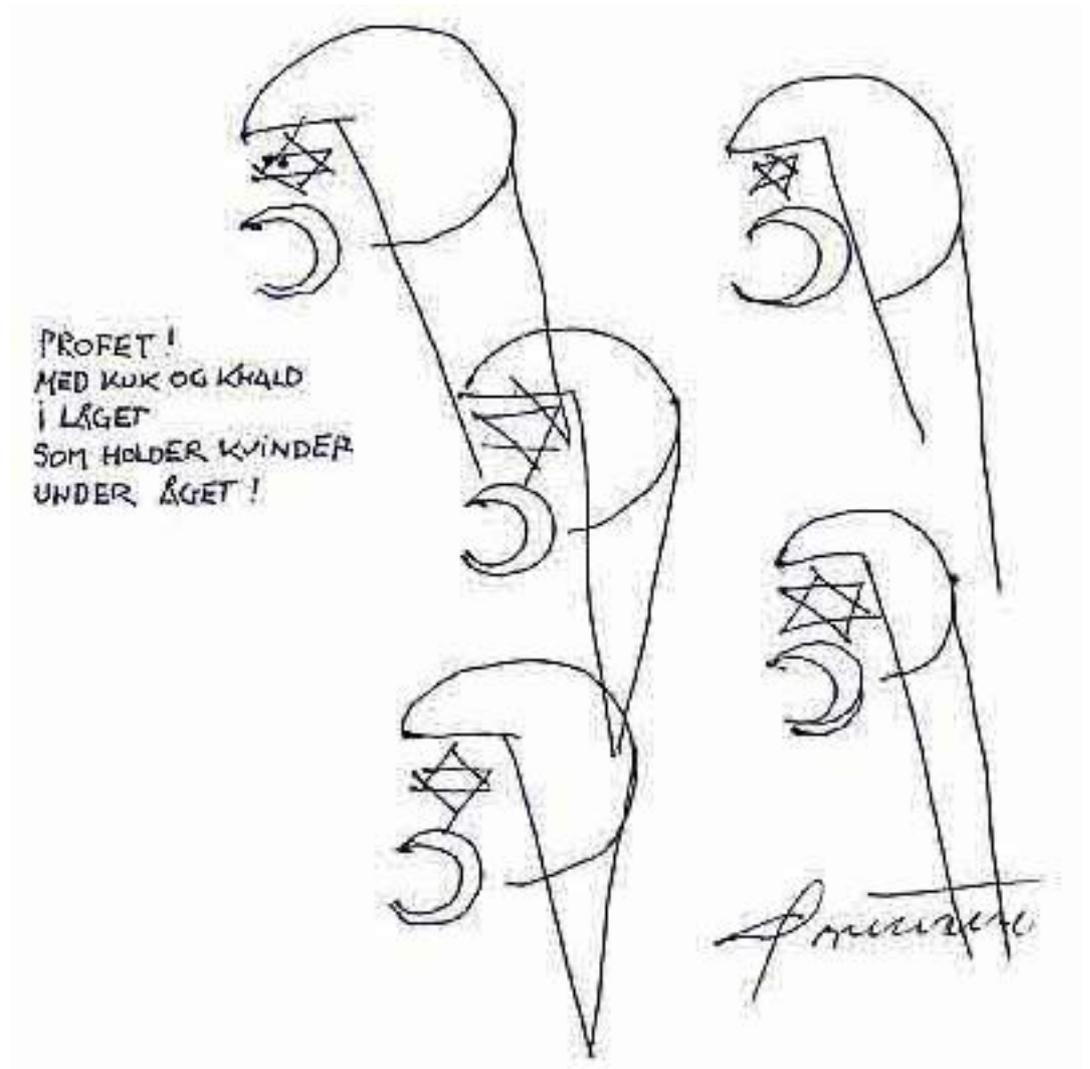
Addendum I

Source: <http://www.aina.org>



**Addendum J**

Source: <http://www.aina.org>



Addendum K

Source: <http://www.aina.org>



• ROLIG, VENNER, NÅR ALT KOMMER TIL ALT ER DET JO BARE EN  
TEGNING LAVET AF EN YANTRØ SØNDERJYDE...

Relax folks it is just a sketch made by a Dane  
from the south-west Denmark.

**Addendum L**

Source: <http://www.aina.org>

