

Submission of Evidence to the Lords Select Committee on the Future of Journalism

27th April 2020

Call for Evidence

1. Introduction to Centre for Media Monitoring

- 1.1. The Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM) was set up in 2018 by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) with the aim to:
 - Create an evidence base on how Islam and Muslims are reported in national print and broadcast media.
 - Develop insights on potential areas of improvement through evidence-based analyses, reports and guidelines.
 - Advocate change through constructive engagement with key stakeholders.
 - Empower Muslim communities to proactively engage with the media and help change the narrative.
- 1.2. CfMM monitors and analyses thousands of articles and broadcast clips daily. Our monitoring methodology has been developed and approved by leading academics and experts in the field of corpus linguistics. CfMM is recognised as an authority in this field and a valuable resource by all stakeholders, including the media, regulators, politicians and community organisations.
- 1.3. CfMM works closely with editors and journalists from the national print and broadcast media to highlight inaccuracies, generalisations and misrepresentations of Muslims & Islam in the media as well as promote good practice and increase Religious Literacy. We hold roundtables, publish reports, release data, sit on advisory boards, make submissions to inquiries and feed into consultations.
- 1.4. To date we have submitted responses to: OFCOM's Thematic Review of Representation and Portrayal on the BBC, the BBC's Editorial Guidelines Consultation, the Editor's Code Review and the APPG Religion in the Media Enquiry into Religious Literacy. CfMM was also part of IPSO's working committee which developed guidelines for journalists on the reporting of Muslims and Islam.
- 1.5. CfMM welcomes the opportunity to respond to this important inquiry.
- 1.6. This submission will respond to the questions relating to trust and why the profession is not representative of the society we live in.

2. Summary

2.1. This submission will respond to the following two questions:

- **Why has trust in journalists declined? How could it be improved?**
- **Why is the journalism profession not more representative of the population?**

2.2. The first section on trust will address why there is mistrust of the profession specifically by Muslims:

- **Journalism & Muslims**
- **Consequences of Irresponsible Journalism**
- **Accuracy**
- **Language & Terminology**
- **Consistency**
- **Opinion & Comment Journalism**

2.3. The second section on why the profession is not representative, we will address the following issues:

- **Unconscious selection bias**
- **Quotas**
- **Recruitment**
- **Training**
- **Perspectives**
- **Correcting Misunderstandings**
- **Normalisation**

3. Why has trust in journalists declined? How could it be improved?

- 3.1. Freedom of the press is an important cornerstone of our democracy. Journalists play an integral role, not only informing the public and reporting news, but also speaking truth to power and holding institutions and governments to account. For this to be effective, journalists need to report the news accurately, responsibly, fairly and with integrity. News organisations need to represent a wide range of issues from a variety of perspectives and with a diversity of voices that are representative and reflect the make-up of the society we live in.
- 3.2. Despite the claims of journalism to be an institution that supports democracy and strengthens communities, too often some forms of journalism prey on the vulnerable and are discriminatory.
- 3.3. The inability by some forms of journalism to strike the balance between the freedom of expression with the rights of the public, has led to a decline of trust in journalism, its authority and legitimacy – making it one of the biggest challenges facing journalism today.
- 3.4. In 2018, the Edelman Trust Barometer asked over 33,000 people in 28 countries which institution they trusted to do what is right, ‘the media in general’ came out as the least trusted institution in 22 of the 28 countries.¹ In 2018, in the wake of ‘fake news’, the UK media was quick to point out that trust in traditional media had risen and that traditional journalism was more trusted than social media platforms. But a closer look at this data shows that while the likes of the BBC are indeed more trusted, the red-top journalism of the UK tabloid press still languishes at the bottom. Just 27 per cent of Britons said they trusted journalists to tell them the truth.²

¹ https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2018-10/2018_Edelman_Trust_Barometer_Global_Report_FEB.pdf

² <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2017-11/trust-in-professions-veracity-index-2017-slides.pdf>

3. Journalism and Muslims

- 3.1. Since 9/11, Muslims have arguably been the most consistently demonised group in the media and have come under excessive scrutiny. Terrorism has become synonymous with Muslims and is the most recurring theme in the media relating to Muslims & Islam along with other conflict paradigms and the othering of Muslims. This form of journalism has led to a trust deficit between Muslims and the media
- 3.2. In December 2019, the outgoing chair of IPSO, Sir Alan Moses, admitted that: “The portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the British press has been “the most difficult issue” facing the press watchdog in the past five years. He said: “I speak for myself, but I have a suspicion that [Muslims] are from time to time written about in a way that [newspapers] would simply not write about Jews or Roman Catholics.”³
- 3.3. The majority of Britons say that “the media” is to blame for the prejudice Muslims face in daily life in Britain.⁴ A survey conducted by the Muslim Council of Britain in October 2019 confirmed this when 74% of respondents identified the media portrayal of Muslims as the most important factor driving Islamophobia. The media, like politics and business, is a repository of power that needs to be monitored and held to account.
- 3.4. Whilst some of the most reprehensible anti-Muslim bigotry documented by the Centre for Media Monitoring has been in print, especially in tabloids, the right leaning press and religious publications, broadcast media has also fallen short in its representations of Muslims and Islam.
- 3.5. Centre for Media Monitoring’s “State of Media Reporting on Islam & Muslims” quarterly report (Oct-Dec 2018) found that:
 - 59% of all articles analysed associated Muslims with negative behaviours
 - Over 1/3rd of all articles misrepresented or generalised about Muslims
 - 37% of articles in right leaning and religious publications were “Very Biased”
 - Terrorism was the most recurring theme in the media relating to Muslims & Islam
 - Television drama proportionately misrepresented Muslims & Islam the most⁵
- 3.6. Claiming that journalism and the media has played no role in the growth of Islamophobia and increased hatred towards Muslims is no longer a tenable position, given the wealth of academic evidence on the issue, and the lack of any evidence to the contrary:
 - Research by the University of Cambridge concluded that mainstream media reporting about Muslims is contributing to an atmosphere of rising hostility towards Muslims in Britain.⁶
 - Research by the University of Leicester suggested that “Politicians and media fuel hate crime in Britain.”⁷
 - Findings of an Islamophobia Roundtable in Stockholm showed that the regular association of Islam and Muslims with crime and terror in the media and on the internet is vital to the spread of Islamophobic rhetoric.⁸
- 3.7. Home Office figures show almost half of religiously-motivated hate attacks in 2017-18 were directed at Muslims. In the week after the current Prime Minister’s controversial Telegraph

³ <https://www.ft.com/content/60d5bea6-1ff9-11ea-b8a1-584213ee7b2b>

⁴ Islamophobia Poll, Comres, MEND, 27 October 2018 <https://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/MEND-Islamophobia-Poll-October-2018-1.pdf>

⁵ <https://cfmm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/CfMM-Quarterly-Report.pdf>

⁶ University of Cambridge and Economic and Social Research Council Roundtable held at the House of Lords

⁷ Politicians and media fuel hate crime in Britain, say University of Leicester experts, University of Leicester, June 2016

⁸ Report, Roundtable on Islamophobia in Europe, 2014 – by Department for Discrimination Issues, Ministry of Employment, Sweden

column in August 2018, which compared veiled Muslim women to “letterboxes” and “bank robbers”,⁹ hate crime incidents rose by 375 per cent”.¹⁰ In the following weeks, 42% of street attacks referenced Boris Johnson or his words.

⁹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/05/denmark-has-got-wrong-yes-burka-oppressive-ridiculous-still/>

¹⁰ <https://www.tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Tell%20MAMA%20Annual%20Report%202018%20-%20Normalising%20Hate.pdf>

4. Consequences of Irresponsible Journalism

4.1. The overall impact of inaccurate, misrepresentative and generalised reporting of Muslims and Islam in the media has been that far right tropes and conspiracy theories have embedded themselves in the psyche of a substantial proportion of Britons:

- 52% believe Islam (not fundamentalist groups) poses a threat to Western liberal democracy¹¹
- 32% believe there are “no-go areas in Britain where Sharia law dominates and non-Muslims cannot enter”¹²
- The average Briton believes 15% of the population are Muslim (when in fact according to the Office of National Statistics it is 5.6%), and that Muslims will make up 22% of the population by 2020 (forecast at c.6%)¹³
- 18% believe “Muslim immigration to this country is part of a bigger plan to make Muslims a majority of this country’s population”¹⁴
- 35% of children agreed or partly agreed that “Muslims are taking over our country”.¹⁵

4.2. Representatives of the British media attending roundtable discussions organised by the Centre for Media Monitoring have admitted themselves that the public discourse on Islam and Muslims needs to change. However, in order for this to happen and trust to be established, our submission will highlight some of the issues that need to be addressed by practitioners of journalism.

¹¹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1527192/Islam-poses-a-threat-to-the-West-say-53pc-in-poll.html>

¹² <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-no-go-zones-muslim-sharia-law-third-poll-hope-not-hate-far-right-economic-inequality-a8588226.html>

¹³ <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/2016-12/Perils-of-perception-2016.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2018/12/14/brexit-and-trump-voters-are-more-likely-believe-co>

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/may/19/most-children-think-immigrants-are-stealing-jobs-schools-study-shows>

5. Accuracy

- 5.1. Accuracy is the most important aspect of good journalism: a value shared unanimously by leading media platforms and facilitated by several established mechanisms. These include systems of factchecking as well as rigorous efforts to determine the reliability of sources. However, there is an abundance of academic research that illustrates how the production and standards of journalism have changed in the digital age. With the loss of advertising to online platforms, news publishers find themselves having to produce more content across several platforms at greater speed with ever fewer journalists. In order to maintain healthy profit margins, accuracy can sometimes be compromised in the race to chase eyeballs through click bait. One of the reasons that public service broadcast journalism such as the BBC generally fairs better than newspaper journalism is that it is not subject to the same commercial pressures.
- 5.2. CfMM’s own analysis and data illustrates numerous inaccuracies and a dependency on unreliable sources causing serious harm both to British Muslims as well as the general public’s understanding of Islam. CfMM has submitted over 500 complaints and secured over 250 corrections from both print and broadcast, whilst our Executive Director, Miqdaad Versi, has had newspaper complaints upheld by IPSO more than ten times.
- 5.3. Below are some examples of misleading articles that newspapers and broadcasters themselves have corrected or have been forced to correct, given the significance of the inaccuracies involved:
- The Times front page story “Christian child forced into Muslim foster care”.¹⁶ IPSO upheld a complaint and ruled the Times “distorted” its coverage of a five-year-old Christian girl who was placed with Muslim foster carers and breached clause 1 of the editors’ code of practice.¹⁷
 - Daily Mail’s double page “Powder Keg Paris” article which claimed that 300,000 ‘illegal migrants’ were living in a crime-ridden suburb of Saint-Denis. It was removed online following a [lengthy Twitter thread](#) that raised more than a dozen issues with the piece.¹⁸
 - Mail on Sunday’s story on “Scandal of the mini cab predators” falsely accused a minicab licencing officer of acting as a “fixer” for paedophile taxi drivers in Rochdale. The newspaper had to pay £180,000 in damages to Wajed Iqbal.¹⁹
 - Daily Telegraph online had to publish an apology and correction after wrongly reporting that the police were investigating Ahammed Hussain, the Leader of the Scout Group at the Lewisham Islamic Centre. The Telegraph claimed he had segregated the Scout group by gender, in breach of the Scouts Association rules, and had promoted Muslim values and extremist views to scout members in ways that contradicted the Scouts commitment to British values and gave rise to safeguarding concerns. The newspaper had to pay him damages and costs.²⁰

¹⁶ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/christian-child-forced-into-muslim-foster-care-by-tower-hamlets-council-3gcp6l8cs>

¹⁷ <https://www.ipso.co.uk/rulings-and-resolution-statements/ruling/?id=20480-17>

¹⁸

https://twitter.com/MarwanMuhammad/status/1025786653040889856?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwtcamp%5Etfweembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1025786653040889856&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theguardian.com%2Fmedia%2F2018%2FAug%2F06%2Fdaily-mail-removes-powder-keg-paris-report-after-complaints

¹⁹ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/article-7956699/Clarifications-corrections.html>

²⁰ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/01/28/apology-mr-ahammed-hussain/>

- The Times had to apologise and pay damages to an imam who questioned the Conservative leadership candidates about Islamophobia during a televised BBC debate in June 2019. The Times falsely accused him of having anti-Semitic and extremist views.²¹
- The Mail Online and The Sun both claimed an Afghan migrant murdered his girlfriend “because she refused to convert to Islam” when in fact Ahmed S had killed her in a fit of jealousy after she had broken up with him and begun a new relationship. The Sun removed the story after a complaint from the CfMM²² and the Mail Online made a clarification in an updated version of the article and apologised for any confusion.²³
- The Spectator claimed that “there are an estimated 32,000 Muslims eager to commit the next terror atrocity” in September 2017. Following a complaint by Miqdaad Versi, IPSO ruled that The Spectator’s claim was “significantly inaccurate”²⁴
- While covering the shooting of 12 people in Thousand Oaks, California, both Sky News and the Daily Express chose to report that the shooter was a “Middle Eastern man”, even though this was not the case. This misreporting was shared millions of times on social media and gave ammunition to the anti-Muslim agitators and Islamophobes to use this description of the assailant to incite hate towards Muslims. Centre for Media Monitoring submitted complaints and elicited corrections from both the Express²⁵ and Sky News²⁶.

5.4. Headlines: Even when journalists write stories accurately and fairly, media outlets often attract readers to specific stories through powerful but sometimes sensationalist or misleading headlines, particularly within tabloid newspapers. Headlines cannot always incorporate the whole story and often have to be abridged. However, headlines shape a story and often change the way the reader thinks.²⁷ When seen in passing, as they often are in supermarkets, on forecourts, on the internet etc by people who will not go on to read the whole article, but will remember the headline, they can mislead the reader. With social media, misleading headlines are often shared without the rest of the article and used by far-right individuals and organisations to further their own narrative about Islam and Muslims. The following is a small selection of highly misleading headlines CfMM has in its database:

- “Janbaz Tarin appears in court charged with killing Sharia Law wife and her mum while they ‘screamed like animals’” (The Sun).²⁸ The fact that the couple had a religious wedding ceremony and highlighting it in the headline gave it more importance than its actual relevance to the story. The Sun removed references to Sharia Law in its headline following a complaint by CfMM.
- “The BRITISH hotels propped-up by Islamic torture – Celebs call for mass boycott” (Express)²⁹ The newspaper changed the headline and removed “Islamic torture” once CfMM pointed out that there is no such thing as “Islamic torture” and that what they

²¹ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/corrections-and-clarifications-5phnn0xh2>

²² <https://cfmm.org.uk/corrections/sun-removes-false-reporting-on-murder-in-germany/>

²³ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6673297/Failed-Afghan-asylum-seeker-stabbed-girlfriend-death-jailed-life-Germany.html>

²⁴ <https://www.mend.org.uk/spectators-claim-32000-muslims-eager-commit-next-terror-atrocity-deemed-significantly-inaccurate-ipsos/>

²⁵ Jordan, F, (2018), Officers were advised that the suspect was a Middle Eastern man in his early 20s wearing all black clothing and with a beard, 08-Nov-2018 (Before and After), Article is No longer accessible, but can be accessed at <https://web.archive.org/web/20181108161040/https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1042521/california-shooting-thousandoaks-bar-video-live-police-latest-news-update-terror> (Accessed 08-Nov-2018)

²⁶ Sky News (2019), Multiple people shot as gunman opens fire in California bar, Nov 08 2018, Sky News, accessible at <https://news.sky.com/story/multiple-people-shot-as-gunman-opens-fire-in-california-bar-11547848> (Accessed on 09-Nov-2018)

²⁷ How headlines change the way we think, The New Yorker, December 2014

²⁸ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/7140509/solihull-murder-janbaz-tarin-sharia-law-killing-wife-mum/>

²⁹

were referring to were new penal codes introduced by the Kingdom of Brunei aimed at ‘persevering traditional values and family lineage.’

- “‘Duchess’ mosque’ linked with 19 terrorists” (Mail Online).³⁰ The headline inaccurately refers to terror suspects awaiting trial as “terrorists”.
- “Swapping the Queen’s birthday for Ramadan” (Daily Mail Australia). This headline wrongly attributed a change in Pepsi’s employee leave policy as exclusively for Muslims. After CfMM’s complaint they removed references to the Queen’s Birthday being swapped for Ramadan, and removed references to Muslims and Islam.³¹
- “Muslim-only swimming pools and university ‘safe spaces’ all BANNED:” (Daily Mail Australia).³² In a story about a local MP’s policy manifesto to overhaul anti-discriminatory laws, Daily Mail Australia published an incorrect headline and misleading image. Nowhere in the article is evidence provided of “Muslim only” pools. Even though the council says that the privacy curtain was installed “following significant ‘community’ demand, and not just from Muslim women”, the article claims that it was installed “to shield Muslim women”. Following a complaint by CfMM, the headline and article were amended but the accompanying image was not removed.

³⁰ Abul Taher, ‘Duchess’s mosque’ linked with 19 terrorists, 25-Nov-2018, Mail on Sunday at www.dailymail.co.uk (Accessed on 25-Nov-2018)

³¹ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5790025/Pepsi-letting-Muslim-staff-swap-public-holidays-Ramadan-days-culturally-relevant.html>

³² Stephen Johnson, Muslim-only swimming pools and university ‘safe spaces’ all BANNED: The radical changes that could be coming to Sydney VERY soon, 22-Nov-2018, Daily Mail Australia at www.dailymail.co.uk (Accessed on 22-Nov-2018)

6. Language and Terminology

- 6.1. Language is important as the BBC acknowledges in its own guidelines stating “different words cause different degrees of offence in different communities as well as in different parts of the world. A person's age, sex, education, employment, faith, nationality and where they live, may all have an impact on whether or not they might be offended.”³³ Given the narrative and misinformation that has been pushed by certain groups and individuals it is vital that utmost care is taken by all practitioners of journalism with the language around Muslims and Islam so as not to misinform or reinforce prejudices or stereotypes.
- 6.2. Editorial decisions are made to determine the right words and terminology to use for specific recurring issues. These should follow the principles of academic veracity, understandable by the wider audience and consistency. Centre for Media Monitoring has observed a number of problematic terms relating to Islam and Muslims which are widespread amongst the media. While there is not enough space in this submission to go through all the problematic terms in detail, below is a small selection in summary:
- “Islamic terrorism” – The term creates an unreasonable link between Islam and terrorism insinuating there is religious legitimacy when in fact terrorism is not sanctioned by Islam.
 - “Islamist” – Technically an “advocate of running the government in accordance with their understanding of Islamic law”, its usage has moved to a specifically more derogatory meaning “advocate of militancy or fundamentalism linked to Islam”, blurring the line between non—violent political groups, and violent groups
 - “Islamic State” – The term creates an unreasonable link between Islam and the terror group despite leading Muslim jurists and scholars outrightly rejecting Daesh as an Islamic organisation. Furthermore, the use of this term is inconsistent as the English translation of other organisations such as Al Qaeda (The Base), Taliban (The Students), Hizbullah (Party of god) are never used.
 - “Jihadi” - The words ‘*jihadi*’ and ‘*jihadist*’ are used without much consistency and have become shorthand for ‘terrorist’ when the suspect is Muslim. Jihad(ist), which is a classical Arabic term literally meaning ‘to struggle to one’s utmost’ has no bearing to the meaning of terrorism or terrorist.
 - “Allahu Akbar” – A phrase used by billions of Muslims worldwide at least five times a day in prayer which is also a core part of their daily vernacular. The constant reference by the media to Allahu Akbar in the context of terrorism has conflated the phrase with acts of terrorism and assigned an ordinary Islamic phrase a negative connotation.
 - “Sharia Law” – This phrase is used in a narrative of encroachment in line with far-right tropes which suggest that the British legal system and its values are under threat from a parallel legal system when in fact Sharia Law is normally utilised in domestic family matters only by consent, is subservient to the civil as well as criminal law of the U.K.
 - Muslim “Grooming Gangs” – Despite “grooming gang” not being a legal category, there is widespread usage of it in the media when linked to Muslim men suggesting that there is a link between the actions of a few criminals with the religion of Islam when in fact their actions are anti-religious.

³³ BBC Draft Editorial Guidelines, Section 5, Harm and Offence, *Language* 5.3.20

7. Consistency

- 7.1. Journalism at its best should not be biased or inconsistent. It has a duty to be fair and balanced. However, at CfMM, we have found that generally Muslim communities have been singled out and treated with antagonism in certain forms of journalism. One of the areas where we have observed the most inconsistencies in journalism is relating to the coverage of terrorism. Of particular significance are the pre-conceived correlations between the identity and background of the perpetrator and the way in which their crime is reported on. Many Muslims who see the coverage of terror attacks, believe reporting is discriminatory with attacks perpetrated by “Islamists” treated differently to “far-right extremists”.
- 7.2. This is evident when comparing attacks of a very similar nature. Plotters and attackers inspired by white supremacist ideology are all too often given a terrorism free pass in comparison with those inspired by Daesh. This inconsistency is reinforced by the disproportionate application of the term “lone wolf” to non-Muslim terror suspects despite being involved in wider networks and having links to far right or Nazi organisations, as well as the near exclusive description of non-Muslims as mentally unwell. This lends credence to the argument that Muslim suspects function in networks while non-Muslims assailants are mavericks and therefore a lesser threat to wider society.
- 7.3. Below are a few examples which show these inconsistencies:
- The Sun’s coverage of two separate knife attacks which were both carried out on London Underground. Despite their similarity and both suspects having a history of mental illness, the Muslim attacker, Muhaydin Mire was labelled a terrorist,³⁴ while the other, Adrian Brown, was characterised as schizophrenic.³⁵
 - The BBC’s coverage of the Westminster Bridge attack by Khalid Masood and the Finsbury Park attack on a mosque by Darren Osbourne. “Four dead in Westminster Terror Attack” is how the attack by Khalid Masood was described,³⁶ while Darren Osbourne was referred to as “Finsbury Park attacker”,³⁷ and “Mosque attack suspect”.³⁸
 - The Melbourne Australia attack in which a young man, identified as originating from Somalia, set fire to his car and stabbed three people. It was called terrorism immediately by all national media outlets, whereas an attack on a Jewish Synagogue in Pittsburgh, USA did not get called terrorism by the vast majority of media outlets. The Melbourne perpetrator had complained of being ‘chased by people with spears’ in the lead up to the attack yet unlike many far-right cases, mental health was not mentioned, leading to understandable concerns about inconsistency.

³⁴ thesun.co.uk (2016). Watch the Leytonstone ‘you ain’t no muslim bruv’ terrorist stab heroic commuters and gets tasered by police in new CPS footage.. [online] The Sun. Available at: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/video/news/watch-theleytonstone-you-aint-no-muslim-bruv-terrorist-stab-heroic-commuters-and-gets-tasered-by-police-in-new-cps-footage/>

³⁵ Shammass.J, (2016) Knifed on Tube: Schizophrenic knifeman who shouted ‘I want to kill all the Muslims’ before stabbing passenger on packed commuter train claimed ‘ISIS are the problem’ [Online] The Sun. Available at <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/4289408/schizophrenic-knifeman-who-shouted-i-want-to-kill-all-the-muslims-before-stabbingpassengerson-packed-commuter-train-claimed-isis-are-the-problem/>

³⁶ 23 March 2017, London attack: Four dead in Westminster terror attack, *BBC News*

³⁷ 02 February 2018, Finsbury Park attacker Darren Osborne jailed for minimum of 43 years, *BBC News*

³⁸ 30 January 2018, Finsbury Park mosque attack suspect hoped to kill Jeremy Corbyn, *BBC News*

8. Opinion and Comment Journalism

- 8.1. Opinion and comment pieces in certain publications have far too often given journalists and writers the liberty to propagate inaccurate, misleading and blatantly racist views while hiding behind the cloak of opinion, humour and satire. The racism is sometimes articulated in subtle and restrained ways, but often it is more explicit. Establishment figures like Rod Liddle have referred to Muslims as “savages”³⁹ and to ‘Islamic’ countries as “hellholes”⁴⁰. Melanie Phillips promotes a fear of an ideological takeover writing that “The Islamists, or jihadis, are intent upon snuffing out individual freedom and imposing a totalitarian regime of submission to religious dogma which erodes and then replaces British and Western Values”.⁴¹ She claims that churches are being replaced by mosques without providing any evidence, that people can’t find a local butcher selling pork and are being intimidated by ‘local youths declaring ‘this is a Muslim area’. Conspiratorial theories share the characteristic that a minority is threatening the majority status quo, without providing any evidence. The likes of James Delingpole and Douglas Murray have also echoed the sentiments of far-right white supremacists and their theories of white populations gradually being replaced by non-white migrants and Muslims.
- 8.2. The transition of racist and xenophobic beliefs like these from the unregulated corners of the web to mainstream political discourse is of serious concern. It is contributing to rehabilitating the reputations of such far right figures both domestically, in Europe as well as in the States. Commentators have been given license to dehumanise Muslims and promote conspiracies of Islam on the grounds of promoting unfashionable views or uncovering a great underlying threat which is ignored by those in power. Views expressed in opinion pieces by establishment figures and publications gives them credence and legitimacy which is often then used by the far right to legitimise their own views by sharing views from opinion pieces with millions of people on the internet.

³⁹ R. Liddle (2009), “Somali Savage Update”, (The Spectator) available online at: <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2009/11/somali-savages-update/>

⁴⁰ R. Liddle (2010), “After all the fuss, will anything actually change” (The Spectator) available online at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2010/05/after-all-the-fuss-will-anything-actually-change/>

⁴¹ M. Phillips (2009), “Clash of uncivilisations” (The Spectator) available online at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2009/10/the-clash-of-uncivilisations/>

9. Why is the journalism profession not more representative of the population?

9.1. Journalism is a typically white, middle class, privileged profession, which needs to change.

- A recent survey by the National Council for Training of Journalists (NCTJ) revealed that more than 94% of journalists in the UK are white while BAME communities represent 40% of the population in the UK's largest cities.⁴²
- British Muslims constitute 5% of the population but only 0.4% of the journalist population.
- Whilst most journalists who enter the profession are graduates, "individual journalism students from minority groups are not being attracted to becoming journalists."⁴³
- Ofcom has criticised British broadcasters for a "woeful" lack of diversity among their staff and accused the BBC of failing to lead the way.⁴⁴

9.2. One of the reasons for this lack of diversity could be a result of unconscious selection bias, overt prejudice as well as a lack of trust in the profession by BAME communities due to the nature in which they are represented and misrepresented in the media. The result is that the world of journalism is less diverse than the population as a whole and is therefore more likely to fall into the trap of perpetuating common misconceptions and stereotypes without understanding where they come from and how to avoid them.

9.3. Hitherto, news organisations have attempted to combat the problem of underrepresented communities by focusing their efforts on recruitment. Yet despite quotas, diversity funds and apprenticeship schemes targets have yet to be met. At a recent CfMM event, we were told by senior news executives that the problem is that there are a shrinking minority of BAME and Muslim applicants in the pool. Our hypothesis is that this is because these minority voices do not believe their perspectives are important and that they think they will be expected to conform to a kind of mass-media orthodoxy.

9.4. While quotas are important, numbers are irrelevant if the culture of newsrooms, the content and perspectives of journalism and stories remain the same. Minority communities are still portrayed as the other and are often vilified and scapegoated. However, a handful of BAME journalists will not be able to change that culture. Many have spoken of their experience of feeling intimidated, frustrated or marginalised within newsrooms. They are often pigeon holed and not given the freedom and flexibility to cover stories (whether BAME related or not) from a different sensibility. Diversity requires everyone at the table to recognise that diverse people bring diverse views and experiences which if allowed to influence content would enrich output and build trust in people and communities who have been under-served, under-reported and misrepresented for far too long.

9.5. Newsrooms need to:

- Acknowledge there is a problem.
- Be transparent about the make-up of the workforce
- Publish rigorously collected equality monitoring data at the programme and production level for producers of content whether in-house or external
- Meet staffing quotas.
- Decrease barriers to entry for BAME and Muslim journalists.

⁴² <https://www.nctj.com/downloadlibrary/DIVERSITY%20JOURNALISM%204WEB.pdf>

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/sep/14/ofcom-criticises-uk-broadcasters-for-woeful-lack-of-diversity>

- Appoint people to senior positions with decision making powers.
- Invest in training and apprenticeship schemes.
- Increase the diversity of programming and print content with stories that minorities would want to read and watch.
- Use BAME and Muslim journalists for the access they have to communities without pigeonholing them.
- Allow them to tell and generate stories from a different angle.
- Increase access to trusted voices, sources and experts from the Muslim community.
- Work towards the normalization of Muslims in the media, so that Muslims are given the opportunity to talk about issues beyond their faith.
- Bridge the mistrust between the media and Muslims and encourage participation of the latter in the former.
- Correct the misunderstandings of Islam and Muslims.

10. Conclusion

The Future of Journalism lies in the profession and industry building and maintaining trust as the purveyor of truth. It must not only defend free speech but balance that with the rights of individuals and communities. If it is to maintain its position as the fourth estate it must adhere to its standards of accuracy, responsibility and accountability. Poor journalism not only tarnishes the profession but society as a whole. Problems within the industry and mistrust in the profession will only improve when the practitioners are respectful of all communities, media outlets have is a diverse workforce on all levels of seniority who are literate, conversant, sensitive and respectful, producing content that reflects this reality. Only then will it be able to maintain its position as a trusted, reliable source of information and set itself apart from the growing noise on the internet and social media.