Anthology Project

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Unveiling the Misrepresented Narratives of Muslims in American Media

The portrayal of the minority groups in the American media matters because it is able to set a tone for public opinion and discussion. In the wider scenario of most of these groups, the Muslims seem to stand out in the focus of intense and split media stories. This paper looks to understand the effect of portrayal of Muslims in the media on the public view in the United States and emphasizes on the need for a more nuanced and understanding approach. At the heart of this debate lies the realization that Muslims are not of one whole cloth. They are from diverse backgrounds and points of view, where their life experience forms their outlook. Yet media stories tend to simplify those facts, sometimes reinforcing stereotypes that can create confusion and prejudice. This fact becomes very palpable in issues related to topics such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where media coverage seems to accord great favor toward one side while glossing over some of the core issues and struggles of the Palestinians, many of whom are

Muslim. This would escalate the possible fueling of fear and hatred in crimes involving Muslims through associating Islam with criminal activities, which is not the case. The paper describes such representations, inspects their source and impacts, and offers measures through which these stereotypes can be remedied. By giving an insight into media and promoting a balanced view of news, we aim at making the public debate more educated and more humane. We will, in that case, further zero in on media bias and its impact on public opinion an issue that calls upon all and sundry to question and change these narratives as informed media consumers. We call for collective movement toward a media environment in which all humanity is represented in its diversity and dignity.

American media has greatly rendered news coverage in a very shallow manner, and this can be quite evident with the Palestinian conflict. This has created a wide knowledge gap in the public, and in fact, biased reporting only makes it worse. I was a victim of this when I posted a sequence of videos in social media showing the harrowing happenings of the conflict, which are usually omitted in the mainstream news. I began posting these videos on Instagram and TikTok, and my accounts were placed on suspension. I was told that I was "promoting gory pictures." With this kind of response, it seemed that there was an intention to filter the reality of the matter and bring in only one point that supports a certain view, ignoring the others. Selective reporting does not only hide the truth; it actually creates a certain notion of what the public is to see or not see. It was an eye-opener and very provoking; it brought out, after all, a much larger issue. Many times, the social media and news reports are partial representations of important issues that exclude details on purpose, which would give a more complete and balanced picture. Such selective

representation makes it difficult for the public to grasp the full complexity of situations like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. My guess is that my frustration results from realizing that these are not only practices of censorship but also of altering public opinion in, most probably, highly subtle but very important ways. This incident has really brought home the importance of looking for diverse sourcing and viewpoint in trying to understand global conflicts. We, whose aim lies in bringing out the neglected perspective of such issues, have no other choice but to seek a way of bypassing such blockades and bring the unfiltered truth out.

When I was 15, a few years back, I underwent a clear example of how society has stereotyped Muslims. This happened right after I left a session of prayers. One of my friends was wearing a Thobe, traditional clothing for Muslims. We were walking through a store and came to a TV where the news report was about a crime carried out by someone identified as "a Muslim." That tag by the newsman just drew my attention because in Islam, theft and deception are bluntly condemned. Someone doing such things, in my eyes, does not practice the true teaching of our faith. But then, the next worst thing happened. As we started to leave, I overheard some adult say in a suppressed voice, "Those kids are Muslims; I've seen some Muslims wear such clothes. We better keep away from them, they are all are troublemakers." This surprised me. It is a great example of how some people generalize and stereotype all Muslims as a result of the actions of a few that are reported in the media. The adults assumed that we were troublemakers just because of our religion and the doings of another person out of our related person, who was termed by the media as "Muslim." This one just showed how very pervasive and destructive stereotypes could be. That was not only a matter of carefulness; it was a correct reflection of a larger social

problem where Muslims are often seen through the reflection of the worst acts of people supposedly belonging to their community. On the contrary, this encounter has only revealed how large is the impact of media stereotypes on the perception of Muslims in American society.

The ongoing negative framing of Muslims through media ideologies predisposes the psychological health of the Muslim youth, who are always in this kind of exposure. I have a large number of young Muslims in my community who have been hiding their religious identity and feeling comfort in practicing their religious traits due to the judgment and bullying. One young boy talked to me about his experiences. He had joined the older kids for prayer, and when he returned to class, his teacher asked where he had been. He was so afraid to tell them about his religious practice that, in fact, he lied to them, saying he was going to the bathroom, sadly not for the first time under such pressure to hide his faith. I asked him after school why he did not say he was praying. He told me he feared being laughed at; his classmates sometimes had the habit to make very nasty comments, calling him a bomber, and the same used to be on social media like TikTok. "I just don't want them to make fun of me," he said, so he chose to keep it to himself. I told him he is not doing anything to be ashamed and should not hesitate to follow his religion openly. This therefore evidently indicates how much negative impact media images are bound to have on the minds of young Muslims, thus making them scared and exposing something that might otherwise have been the "real" person in them. Many children think they need to hide their faith in order to be accepted or to stay out of trouble. It is important for us to turn the focus to show further positive stories about Muslims; empower youth like him to be proud of belonging

and show that being a believer should not be causing him to feel ashamed and less accepted in society. Changes like this will bring a more embracing and understanding environment where young Muslims will be less scared of being themselves.

It can be well thought that events organized by the community, in which people from all religious walks come together, which may help in changing the misunderstood, created by media, and imposed by society on the Muslim community. Most significant among them include food drives conducted during the Ramadan month, which were, however, participated in by all faiths but mostly Muslims and Christians. This was a congregation that exposed everybody to work very closely, and in the process, be in the company of each other, hence mutual respect for our varied beliefs. I think that was really an eye-opening experience for a lot of people with whom I was, and really does dispel many myths out there about Muslims, most of which are being propagated in the media. This event demonstrated that the negative stereotypes frequently broadcast about Muslims are not accurate. That clearly proved side by side that the people from the religious community could work, and within that, they could have a vision of each other's real nature. It surprises one how mutual respect and teamwork can turn this perception into an exercise that builds faith. All these experiences truly affirm that knowing people as persons can be more powerful than any mediational stereotypes of judgment. Such personal engagement has a powerful counter to the divisive narratives so often witnessed in the media.

The stereotypes created by media influence life in America for Muslims and particularly the young Muslims to a significant level. From this essay, we can observe how bad imagery can create a change in people's perspectives toward Muslims, leading to real problems such as a young boy feeling he has to hide his religion. But we have also seen that coming together as a community can challenge these stereotypes. The stories that I shared or such events during Ramadan, where people come together from various different backgrounds, tell us that understanding and cooperation can only defeat the wrong notion. In such moments, there is oneness, and one can view people in a real sense, not as portrayed by the media. Going forward, it is absolutely important to continue working in changing the stories. That means more learning, more talking, and more investment in the kind of activities that allow people to come together. We all must work together towards making our media and society one that reflects and honors the true diversity of every community. It is possible to ensure that no one ever gets seen only as a stereotype, and everyone will receive value for who they really are. This needs to be an all-inclusive effort if we are going to achieve a difference.