

The Devil is *Not* in the Detail: Representational Absence and Stereotyping in the ‘Trojan Horse’ News Story

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Abstract

Using Content Analysis, this study investigated the coverage of the Trojan Horse news story aiming to ascertain whether its representation by the British press emphasised ‘Islamist extremism’ over ‘poor school governance’. The sample coverage was extracted from five national newspapers and ranged from 9 June (the date of release of the *Ofsted Advice Note*) to 26 June 2014. Our analysis shows that the coverage reported evidence of Islamist ideology much more frequently (61.5%) than evidence of poor governance (38.5%). This suggests that the Trojan Horse news story was predominantly represented as a case of Islamist extremism and therefore covered in an unbalanced manner. Such a partial coverage relied on ideological dualisms and negative stereotypes to represent Islam and Muslims, and on the textual strategy of selecting some features (extremism) whilst omitting others (governors’ professional misconduct). This bias has arguably diverted attention away from systemic problems within the national school system whilst reinforcing Islamophobic discourses.

Keywords

Trojan Horse, news media, content analysis, representation, governance, islamophobia

Introduction

Media scholars have been concerned with the representation of Islam and Muslims in Western media since at least the 1980s (see for example Said 1981). As a research issue, the unfair coverage of Islam and Muslims by the British media has been ongoing, but has significantly evolved in connection with the unfolding of key events involving Muslims in the West itself, such as the 9/11 or the 7/7 London bombings. More recently, non-violent ‘Islamist issues’ have been central to the media coverage of the so-called Trojan Horse events, which saw the furious investigation by the British government of twenty one schools in Birmingham between 5 March 2014 and 1 May 2014, an investigation which was connected to a suspected threat of an ‘Islamist takeover’.

As a news story, ‘Trojan Horse’ effectively started on the 2 March 2014 when the Sunday Times published an article titled “‘Islamist plot to take over schools’: Leaked papers reveal an alleged plan to target failing schools, force out heads and convert classes to Islamic

principles". The article reported that the secret papers highlighted a strategy allegedly written by fundamentalist Muslims and named the Trojan Horse Operation to take over schools in Birmingham, Bradford and Manchester, and to turn them into academies to be run on Islamic principles. The journalists who wrote the article, Kerbaj and Griffiths (2014) outlined this strategy as follows:

...the first step is to identify poor-performing state schools in Muslim areas; then Salafist parents in each school are encouraged to complain that teachers are "corrupting children with sex education, teaching about homosexuals, making their children say Christian prayers and mixed swimming and sports".

... The next steps are to "parachute in" Muslim governors "to drip-feed our ideal for a Muslim school" and stir up staff to urge the council to investigate. The strategy stresses the importance of having an "English face among the staff group to make it more believable".

Finally, anonymous letters are to be circulated to MPs, press and ministers. "All these things will work towards wearing the head down, removing their resolve and weakening their mindset so they eventually give up (...)."

After the publication of this article, the Trojan Horse Operation became a public issue and the British government felt the pressure to publicly respond to it. As a result, on 5 and 6 March 2014 the Office For Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) conducted a no notice section 8 inspection¹ at Park View School. After that, on 17 and 18 March, a further full section 5 inspection² at the same school was to be carried out "prompted by concerns about what they saw on their section 8 inspection" (Clarke 2014, 114). Then, between 2 and 10 of April, Ofsted conducted inspections of fifteen schools (a mixture of section 8 and section 5 inspections depending on school circumstances). Finally, on the 14th of April, Birmingham City Council commissioned its own investigation led by Ian Kershaw, and on 15th of April the Secretary of State Michael Gove announced Peter Clarke as Education Commissioner to lead a further enquiry. This appointment made the news because Peter Clarke was the former head of Scotland Yard's counter-terrorism unit, thus virtually aligning the Trojan Horse Operation to violent Islamist extremism. The reports of these investigations were published a few months later: on 9 June 2014, Ofsted published the "Advice note provided on academies and maintained schools in Birmingham to the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, as commissioned by letter dated 27 March 2014"; and on the same day, the Education Funding Agency (EFA) published the 'Review of Oldknow Academy Trust'. These publications were followed in July by Clarke's "Report into allegations concerning Birmingham schools arising from the 'Trojan Horse' letter" (22 July); Kershaw's report "Independent Trojan Horse Investigation Prepared for Birmingham City

¹ This is an unannounced inspection carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. A section 8 inspection is reserved for schools judged as 'inadequate' by Ofsted inspectors on their last full inspection.

² This is an announced inspection which aims at judging on a school's quality from "outstanding" to "inadequate".

Council” (18 July); and finally, the Trojan Horse Review Group’ (THRG) review of Kershaw’s report (22 July).

In short, a total of five official reports were filed on the Trojan Horse operation, as a testament to the seriousness of the allegation, but perhaps also to the popularity of the Trojan Horse news story. In fact, at the time of drafting this article, less than a year after the publication of the first article on the alleged Trojan Horse plot, there appear to be 2343 news articles on the UK Newsstand database for the keyword ‘Trojan Horse Ofsted’ (dated between 2 March 2014 - 27 January 2015). It would not be unreasonable to surmise that the popularity of the Trojan Horse news story is largely due to the association of the events from the very beginning with Islamist extremism. We do not question this association simplistically here, since doing so would ignore the genre-based constraints within which the news as a media genre operate (i.e. that ‘bad news’ is ‘good news’, and that whatever features in national news will almost inevitably be represented in a negative light). Rather, we seek to investigate the extent to which such an association is partial, and how much other problematic issues such as governors’ work ethics, which clearly had a significant role to play in the events, or even the more systemic failure on the side of the British government to provide a healthy deregulated school system, have also featured (or not) in the media coverage.

Media stereotypes of Muslims in the press

Cultural studies has traditionally focussed on the coverage of minorities in news media (see for example Hall et al. 1978; Malik 2002). The news plays a vital role in framing local and international issues and affecting policy. It has been argued, for example, that the structures of news production allow the media to reproduce the definitions, opinions and views of those in powerful institutional positions – something which Hall et al. (1978: 57-59) call ‘primary institutional definers’. These views do not have to be inherently or overtly racist, but when they have minorities (whether ethnic, gender, age or ability-related) as their object of concern, the media’s take on the minority in question can become problematic. In such circumstances, the news media may feed upon, strengthen and even develops racist/discriminatory ideas. The Trojan Horse news story, for instance, may have helped to reinforce a ‘wider Islamophobic discourse’ (Sian et al. 2013, 85-86).

Journalists recurrently use prejudicial stereotypes to represent and characterise Britain’s minority communities in general (Richardson 2004, 49), and in recent years, Muslims in particular. According to Hall, a stereotype is

a one-side description which results from the collapsing of complex differences into a simple ‘cardboard cut-out’. Different characteristics are run together and condensed into one. This exaggerated simplification is then attached to a subject or place (Hall 1992: 308).

But a stereotype is not only a simplistic picture of a complex reality operating in isolation. Such a picture also rests on a broader system of signs usually organised and defined through sets of binary oppositions. Hulme (1986) calls this ‘stereotypical dualism’, a textual device

that is composed of two split and opposed halves – a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ side. Such dualisms, in which a variety of stereotypes are grounded, form a structure of rules that influences the meanings that can be attached to ethnic minorities in the media. Within the wider context of Western modernity and its historical imperialism, cultural ‘splitting’ is a regular feature which gives rise to the ‘West vs the Rest’ discourse. For example, in the aftermath of 9/11 in Detroit, non-Arabs began using terms like ‘you people’ when talking to Arab friends and relatives (Howell and Shryock 2003: 444), implying that there was a truly American ‘us’ and a non- (or not-properly-) American ‘them’. ‘The Rest’ (and today especially Islam) thus becomes defined as everything that ‘the West’ is not (Hall 1992, 308) – the West comes to stand for rational, humane, developed and superior, while Islam comes to stand for aberrant, underdeveloped and inferior’ (Poole 2002, 43).

Sian et. al (2013, 84) remind us that prior to 9/11 negative representations of Muslims were far from absent, and were informed by events in the Middle East and in the UK by the Rushdie affair and the 2001 riots. Since dualisms are not fixed, but as specific instantiations of cultural habits³ that change over time, the dualisms upon which the representation of Muslims are based have since changed. Broadly, before 9/11 British Muslims were portrayed in broadsheet coverage mainly as ‘Orientals’ notable for their difference from ‘Westerners’. Within this orientalist logic, Muslims were portrayed as backward, child-like and generally passive subjects who must be disciplined or ignored, a status which particularly strengthened America’s sense of self as a mature world power (Kassimeris and Jackson 2011, 25). More specifically in the British broadsheet press pre-2001, the coverage of Muslims was written from a perspective of fantasy presupposing white superiority; hence Muslims were either excluded, ignored or patronised (Richardson 2001, 239).

The West/East dualism is also found in the way in which the general concept of culture is deployed. Generally, in relation to the modern West culture denotes ideas of creativity and exuberance; whereas for the premodern/underdeveloped non-West, culture signifies unscientifically-conceived mechanical habits, instinctive activity and inflexibility (Lewis in Mamdani 2002, 766). This brings non-Western cultures closer to an animalesque state rather than an ‘enlightened’ one. The upshot is that the Middle-Eastern Muslim Other has little choice but to follow his culture blindly; and if that culture should dictate hatred and violence towards the West, then he will robotically carry out some sort of an attack against Western peoples and places.

This causal association has of course become exacerbated in the press after 9/11. Moore et al. (2008, 11) note how

the increase in coverage of British Muslims from 2000 to 2008 is clearly related to the terrorist attacks in 2001 and 2005... The ‘war on terror’ has become a long-running story in its own right, and this is [now] the main lens through which British Muslims are reported.

³ Habit is used here *sensu* Peirce (1992) as a flexible, probabilistic rule framing meaning, and is opposed to code, understood as a fixed, deterministic rule for information.

In other words, since a group of violent people identifying as Muslim had a role in the attacks, the general representation of Muslims as passive objects no longer made sense to the collective imaginary or the media; it thus changed to that of *active but 'bad'*. Such a role was much more appropriate to be readily associated with terrorism rather than with 'oriental innocence' (Kassimeris and Jackson 2011, 26). This is well-reflected in some sections of the British press. For instance, in *The Sun*, Britain's best-selling tabloid, the discourse surrounding the representation of Muslims has been reconfigured to fit the 'war-on-terror' era, shifting from inferiority and backwardness to outright defiance, a threatening presence, and so forth.

Unsurprisingly, the construction and depiction of the 'bad Muslim' relies on its binary opposite the 'good Muslim'. According to Mamdani (2002) the need to distinguish between 'good Muslims' and 'bad Muslims' stems from the 'culture talk' – reducing cultures to essential characteristics especially in relation to politics – which exploded in Western media following 9/11. In this narrative, Muslim religious experience becomes recast as a political category in an attempt to separate the wheat from the chaff, as it were. Howell and Shryock, for instance, note that many Arab-American spokespeople in Detroit, a city whose socio-economic situation drastically changed after 9/11, started to differentiate the 'Arab Americans proper' from the non-citizen, alien, temporary Arab (2013, 456-457). Also, in an article written for *The Atlantic Monthly* in 2002, Bernard Lewis asks: 'What went wrong in Muslim civilization?' (Lewis in Mamdani 2002, 766). In this way, when a person of a Muslim background commits a terrorist act, the political, social and economic dimensions of that act are rendered almost totally irrelevant in the Western press. Instead, attention is squarely drawn to their particular interpretation of Islam, making them a bad Muslim and implicating their violent extremism as an effect of their religious experience. However, this is not done on an individual but a collective basis: the distinction is not between a criminal or non-criminal person who happens to be Muslim, but between good and bad Muslims – *in plural*. The implication is that extreme Islamist ideology becomes an effect of 'Islamic civilization', which is then unproblematically linked to Wahhabism.⁴

The post-9/11 shift from Orientals to extremists is perhaps nowhere better exemplified than in debate surrounding the veil, especially in the *Sun's* representations of veiled Muslim women. Having traditionally been eroticized by the press or seen as an example of Muslim women's victimization at the hands of an oppressive patriarchy, Khiabani and Williamson (2008, 71) argue that coverage of veil use has been reorganised along four themes. Firstly, veiling is seen as a stubborn and explicit refusal of the 'British way of life' and as such contributes to its destruction. Secondly – particularly in relation to Jack Straw's comments in 2006 asking Muslim women to remove their niqab to aid community relations – the veil has come to signify that which can no longer be tolerated, implying that Britain's attitude towards other cultures has hitherto been tolerant to the point of becoming dangerous. Thirdly, veiling is represented as an expression of resistance, which equates to the imposition of an alien culture upon Britain. Finally, by means of a rather 'creative' symbolic association, the veiled Muslim female body itself comes to signify the very threat of terrorism – it is a powerful

⁴ A particular interpretation of Islam which developed in Saudi Arabia in the Eighteenth century.

visual marker of difference which in this narrative is lifted out of its gendered dimension and placed at the centre of negative imaginaries about Muslims and Islam in general.

Overall, then, within the British press there are systematic ways for presenting the supposedly imminent threat which ‘bad Muslims’ pose. In fact, news-reporting about immigrants and ethnic minorities tends to be restricted to a fixed repertoire of negative events and characteristics (Van Dijk 2000, 38). Each of these ways is a re-elaboration of the negative polarity in the bad Muslim/good Muslim dichotomy. Such strategies include recurring semantic features such as conflict, controversy and deviance (cf. Richardson 2004, 47) as well as militancy, danger and anti-Western sentiment (Poole 2002, 42). These semantic categories have come up repeatedly in the findings of several quantitative-oriented research projects typically involving content analysis (see for example, Cushion et al. 2001; Moore et al. 2008; Kumar 2008; Zhao and Postiglione 2010; Yusof et al. 2013). Moreover, the fact that most issues involving Muslims are readily linked with violent interpretations of the concept of jihad serves as a further mechanism for politicizing Muslim religious experience and for creating associations between Muslims and extremist activities (cf. Hassan in Poole 2002, 45).

Representation, between stereotypes and absence: a methodological note

In measuring the fairness of the coverage of the Trojan Horse events, there is another fundamental issue to consider – that of representational omission or absence. The importance of this issue becomes clear once we examine a potential problem latent in analysing representation by researching stereotypes. That is, one should not simply point with outrage at the fact that media representations of people, things and events simply misrepresent reality. The point here is neither to engage in debate about whether media representations faithfully reflect reality – of Islam or anything else. They certainly do not. Stuart Hall, among others, made that clear nearly twenty years ago when he demonstrated that representations neither reflect nor embody an intended object; they *create* the object and hence reality itself through the very act of representation (Hall 1997). In other words, ‘representations are never straightforward *presentations*, rather they are *representations* of the world and the relationship between people in it’ (Albertazzi and Cobley, 2009, 393, original emphasis). Or, taking cue from Derrida, the infinite ‘slippage’ between signifier means that there is never an original, complete meaning to present (see also Baudrillard 1994). Thus, media representation is an asymmetric and imprecise reproduction of reality at best.

But instead of just pointing at the ‘falseness’ of stereotypes, a more sensible investigation of stereotypes in media texts would be predicated on the question of what makes a representation *valuable* to people. The category of the ‘valuable’ lifts a representation out of a simplistically-conceived true/false dichotomy and projects it into a pragmatic dimension where value, affect and experience are as, and perhaps even more, important than what is simply true or false. After all, representations do not have to be true or faithful in order to make sense (and be valuable); echoing Eagleton in reference to ideology, all they need is not to sound absurd (Eagleton 1991, 26).

The key question, therefore, is: *what makes a specific representation feel plausible?* Here Cobley's view that 'representation allows some things to be depicted and not others' (2014, 7), in other words, that representation relies on some things *not to be* represented, provides a suitable entry point to the analysis of plausibility and persuasiveness. The absence of selected issues in representation might mean that the representation in question may be subject to different kinds of bias, which in turn then legitimise prejudice and stereotypes in a not so evident yet cumulative manner. In this respect, we hypothesised that the Trojan Horse news story had been affected by a bias in relation to the weight it gave to the representation of extremist Muslims as compared to other issues, most notably, as it turned out, governors' work ethics or 'poor governance'. We predicted that it would precisely be this difference in ratio, or representational absence, which would legitimize the association of the Trojan Horse events with Islamic extremism, hence allowing for further, or more evolved, modes of signification in the realm of Islamophobia to coalesce, gather momentum, and become reified, rationalized, authorized, powerful, operational, and so forth.

A content analysis of news articles

In order to map the ratio of extremism vs other issues represented in the news story, a content analysis was performed. As a quantitative method, it has alerted us to the sort of representational absence mentioned above, by enabling us to produce counts of categories belonging to key issues present in the sample (see Neuendorf 2002, 14). Apart from their intrinsic value, these data are also a good initial indication of wider social impact. Qualitatively, the method has drawn our attention to particular modalities of communication and systems of signification, that is, the textual strategies deployed in representation of Muslims and Islam. Our overall aim was to gain an overview of the extent to which issues of Islamist ideology and, as it was found, poor governance have been associated with the Trojan Horse Operation in the British press, and to be in a position to judge the fairness of the coverage of the Trojan Horse affair.

To determine the sample of analysis and gain an overview of the number of articles that were relevant to the Trojan Horse news, data were extracted from the newspaper database ProQuest UK Newsstand. First, a search on ProQuest using the keyword 'Trojan horse Ofsted' was performed. Using the keywords 'Trojan Horse' or 'Ofsted' alone did not produce any relevant results. However it appeared that articles containing the keyword 'Trojan horse Ofsted' did date to the early 1990s,⁵ so not all the results of this search were fully relevant either. Therefore only those articles that were published after the 2 March 2014 (the date in which the Trojan Horse news appeared in the media) were initially considered to be relevant. From this search, it appeared that between 2 March 2014 and 4 September 2014, 790 articles were published on the topic. Table 1 shows the newspapers which published the most number of relevant articles. [Table 1 near here]. The database search also showed that 41 newspapers in addition to those listed above have published on the topic, with their contributions varying from 16 articles (Express Online) to 1 (e.g. the Lancashire Evening Post). Given our primary interest in national coverage, regional newspapers were not considered as part of the sample.

⁵ This happened when 'Trojan Horse' was used in its traditional metaphoric sense of 'undercover carrier' in articles which happened to be related to Ofsted, for example: 'The articulated teacher scheme was introduced as Trojan horse for school-based training... Yet a report published in January by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) said that articulated teachers were broadly as competent as conventional PGCE students trained for half the time' (Berliner 1993).

Because the research aimed at focussing on those newspapers which have the highest potential to shape public opinion around the Trojan Horse affair, the selection considered only newspapers with the highest circulation figures as defined by the Audit Bureau of Circulation figures (both print and online) for June 2014. The UK National Newspapers were then considered according to the three key typologies, tabloid, mid-market and broadsheet, and given the highly politicized nature of the Trojan Horse news, their position along the political spectrum (Table 2 shows the final selection of UK national newspapers). [Table 2 near here].

The total number of articles brought back by the ‘Trojan Horse Ofsted’ keyword search in the five selected newspapers from 2 March 2014 until the end of August 2014 amounted to 243. In order to identify strictly relevant articles, a timeline of key events which were deemed likely to have triggered significant media coverage was outlined (see table. 3). The timeline includes, amongst other things, a selection of significant events extracted from ‘Annexe 3: Timeline’ of the Clarke Report (2014, 113-114). [Table 3 near here].

It was deemed that the periods of extraction of articles for the analysis should revolve around the dates of the publication of the four Trojan Horse reports, hence one or more of the periods broadly surrounding these dates: 9 June (release of Ofsted advice note and the EFA review), 18 July (release of Kershaw’s report), 22 July (release of the THRG and of the Clarke reports). All these dates yielded a high potential for media coverage. However, taking into account the criteria for newsworthiness cited by Romano (1986, 59), which include timeliness and a feel of consequence (impact), we felt that the *Ofsted Advice Note* would be the most newsworthy publication because it was the first report to be published and provided the long-awaited results of the investigations carried out on the schools earlier in March and April (timeliness). Since it was so anticipated, it would also be the one with the highest potential for emotional arousal and the further shaping of public opinion (impact). Therefore, we chose to focus on the period following the release to the media of the *Ofsted Advice Note* on the 9 June 2014.

After eliminating duplicates, non-relevant articles, and the Scot and Ulster edition, and after considering only the latest edition of articles (edition 2), the sample that was subjected to content analysis consisted of 49 strictly relevant articles pertaining to the five selected newspapers covering the period between the 9-26 June 2014 (there appeared to be no more articles on the topic after this date, until the beginning of July). ProQuest/UK Newsstand furnishes electronic versions of the print editions of articles, so these were the ones considered. Article genres such as news, features, articles and opinion/editorial pieces were all included in the selection.

Decreasing semantic ambiguity in coding

In order to pre-define categories for coding the facts in the articles, a sample of material was pre-scrutinised. In this sense, the coding categories were responsive, that is, emerging from the data themselves (Cohen et al 2011, 560). Since the aim of this research was to measure the extent to which problematic Islamist ideology has been made to feature in the articles as

compared to problematic governance, it was decided that the articles would be scrutinised under the general angle of ‘evidence reported in relation to Trojan Horse’, that is, the evidence listed as proof that misconduct had taken place at the schools in question. We wanted to avoid ‘a superficial content analysis of isolated words’ (Van Dijk 2000, 42), so it was decided that the units of analysis considered would consist of phrases rather than single words. The phrases expressed a specific instance of evidence, such as ‘Women to wear the veil whether they are Muslim or not’ and included at least one verb. After pre-scrutiny of the sample, the evidence category was divided in sub-categories. The code devised for the evidence (E) reported in relation to the Trojan Horse news story was:

E1 - Islamist ideology

E2 - Poor governance

Both semantic and syntactic rules were devised in order to sharply define these sub-categories against each other so as to eliminate ambiguity as much as possible at the point of data coding. The presence in phrases of keywords such as ‘Islam’, ‘Muslims’, or on the other hand, ‘governors’, allowed for the first general level of categorization. Then the categorization was refined using simple semantic links such as:

Veil, religion → Islam, Muslim [E1]

Teaching, staff, subject, pupil, student → Governors [E2]

Subsequently, semantic links were further specified: where a semantic binary opposition was present in a phrase, as for example, Muslim/Christian, us/them, Arabic language/French language, fair/unfair treatment of women, fanatical/non-fanatical or banning/allowing, the evidence was categorized as Islamist ideology (E1). For example, phrases such as ‘women cannot refuse sex and must obey their husband’ are based on the binary opposition fair/unfair treatment and were categorised under the label of ‘Islamist ideology’ (E1). Where there appeared to be a semantic link to misconduct in the workplace (e.g. corruption, fraud, money, faking, professional misconduct, bullying staff, intimidating staff etc.), the evidence was categorised as ‘poor governance’ (E2). For example, a phrase like ‘paying for services of a private solicitor with schools’ budget’ which relates to misconduct in the workplace, was categorised as ‘poor governance’ (E2).

There was a handful of phrases which appeared to fall into both the categories of poor governance and Islamist ideology since they either contained keywords from both categories (e.g. the phrase ‘Muslim governor’) or semantic links to both categories (e.g. “‘Pupils’ are not taught the dangers of ‘extremism’”). In the first case, ambiguity was reduced by comparing the quantity of words pertaining to (E2) or (E1) present in the same unit of analysis. For example, the sentence ‘Muslim governors impose Islamic agenda on the school’ contains two keywords, ‘Muslim’ and ‘Islamic’ which pertain to the Islamist ideology category (E1), but it contains only one word, ‘governor’, pertaining to the poor governance category (E2). Hence it was categorized as Islamist ideology (E1) only. In the second case, ambiguity was reduced by looking at the position of the keyword or semantic link in the sentence. For example, in ‘Pupils are not taught the dangers of extremism’ the word ‘pupil’

pertaining to the poor governance category (E2) appears before the phrase ‘dangers of extremism’, which pertains to the Islamist ideology category (E1). Because of this syntactic hierarchy the whole sentence was categorised as poor governance category (E2).

Findings

During the content analysis, the evidence reported by journalists was fully mapped under the categories ‘Islamist ideology’ (E1) and ‘poor governance’ (E2) as shown in table 4. [Table 4 near here]. The counts for each category were then gathered according to the newspaper’s title and were collected in table 5 [Table 5 near here]. Overall, the content analysis showed that the coverage of the Trojan Horse news story reported evidence of Islamist ideology more frequently (61.5%) than evidence of poor governance (38.5%).

From analysing the four articles from *The Sun*, it emerged that in its reporting of the Trojan Horse affair the newspaper referred 32 times to evidence connected to Islamist ideology (80% of the counts) and only eight times to evidence connected to poor governance (20% of the counts). Evidence of Islamist ideology in *The Sun* included references to anti-Christian chants. As *Sun* journalist Hopkins reported: ‘In these Muslim schools of malice, a teacher led football chants to the refrain, “Do we believe in Christmas?”, to the reply “No, we do not”’ (Hopkins 2014). This evidence is clearly built upon the binary opposition of ‘Christians/Muslims’, which in turns relies on the opposition ‘West/non-West’, where Christianity is taken as an unequivocal index of Western-ness and Islam of non-Western-ness. So the coverage of the anti-Christian football chant is consistent with the practice highlighted by Poole (2002, 42) of representing all Muslims in the media as bearing an anti-Western sentiment. Furthermore, the strong emphasis that *The Sun* placed on indicating Islamist ideology as the key agent in the Trojan Horse affair suggests that the right-wing tabloid, in line with its orientation, has hardly questioned the framework for the interpretation of ‘the facts’ provided by the initial Trojan Horse letter and by the governmental response to it through official investigations. Such a representational bias is structurally in line with the ‘institutional primary definers’ (Hall et al. 1978) of the Trojan Horse issue – i.e. Ofsted and DfE.

The ten articles from the *Daily Mail* showed a similarity, albeit not to the same extent, to *The Sun* in the higher coverage of evidence relating to Islamist ideology (37 counts or 64%) over that relating to poor governance (21 counts or 36%). The newspaper’s bias thus shows that it, too, prioritizes Islamist ideology as the main interpretational context in which the Trojan Horse issues ought to be understood. Again, this finding is consistent with the paper’s conservative political orientation and with the primary definers’ view. Evidence of problematic Islamist ideology includes the story of a teacher at Park View School who uses Facebook to spread his ideas of personal politics:

Anwar has... written on his Facebook page in support of Abu Bakr, a bookshop owner from Birmingham, who has frequently been described as ‘the terrorists’ favourite bookseller’ because his store sells extremist literature and its past customers have included the leaders of the July 7 bomb plot (Martin 2014).

In this way the *Daily Mail* reinforces media stereotypes that associate Muslims as a whole with militancy, danger and extremism (Richardson 2004; Poole 2002).

The twelve articles extracted from the *Daily Telegraph* made 21 references to poor governance (39.5% of cases) and 32 references to Islamist ideology (60.5% of cases). As per *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*'s coverage, this result is in keeping with the right-wing orientation of the newspaper. However, its slightly higher coverage of poor governance issues (as compared to *The Sun*) would suggest that the *Daily Telegraph*'s journalists have read the Ofsted Advice note with more care than journalists at *the Sun*, a claim that would be supported by the former's quality-broadsheet characterization. Evidence of problematic Islamist ideology reported by the *Daily Telegraph* include: 'Muslim pupils [are] not allowed to study Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* because it shows young people falling in love and marrying' (Pearson 2014). This instance of evidence relies on the antagonism embedded in the 'us/them' binary opposition (Howell and Shryock 2003; Hall 1992), where the 'us' stands for British and 'them' stands for Muslim and non-British. This dualism is based on the wishful 'patriotic' assumption that the non-British cannot appreciate the works of high English literature as the British can.

The three articles from *The Daily Mirror* provided eight references to poor governance and nine references to Islamist ideology. Evidence of the latter included the story that in Park View school pupils 'had been told in sex education "girls could not refuse sex to their husbands once married"' (Beattie 2014). This evidence is in keeping with the British press tradition of associating Muslim values with the subjugation and repression of women, and hence with Illiberal gendered social practice (see Richardson 2004, 89). It has to be considered that *The Daily Mirror*'s overall smaller coverage of the Trojan Horse news story (only 17 references in total) as compared to that of all other papers means that in terms of percentage, the gap between the references to Islamist ideology as compared to poor governance seems wider; but in effect there is only one count of difference. The *Daily Mirror*'s slightly higher coverage of Islamist ideology (53% of cases) over poor governance (47% of cases) might suggest that the left-wing populist paper, in line with its political orientation, has taken on board the general interpretational framework of the Trojan Horse facts as an Islamist plot set by the primary institutional definers as the other aforementioned newspapers did, yet it has done so with a fair degree of criticism, dedicating at the same time a good amount of space to the problems of governance that were reported in the Ofsted Advice Note.

Lastly, out of the 20 articles from the *Guardian* on the Trojan Horse affair, it emerged that the newspaper referred 22 times to evidence connected to poor governance (55%) as opposed to 18 times to evidence connected to Islamist ideology (45%). This result suggests that unlike the other four newspapers the *Guardian* tried to go against the primary definers' interpretational framework and strived to frame the Trojan Horse affair primarily as an issue of poor governance rather than a case of problematic Islamist ideology. The *Guardian* appeared to have consistently reported across its articles that in the Trojan Horse events, the key issue was the inappropriate influence of 'a small group of governors [who] is making significant changes to the ethos and culture of the academy without full consultation' (Adams

and Malik 2014). The *Guardian* is also the only newspaper to underline the fact that ‘Of the five schools placed in special measures by Ofsted after the “Trojan Horse” investigation, four are academies and exempt from having to teach the national curriculum’ (Watt 2014). This is important to underline because changes to the curriculum that were grossly bemoaned and problematized by other newspapers are in fact formally within the ‘unrestricted powers of any academy’ (John 2015). This point made by the *Guardian* shows that the responsibility for the problems found in the schools involved is attributable not only to inept governors and head teachers, but also to the fact that the deregulation of the school system effectively allows for alternative curricula to be taught – including some which may be deemed inappropriate. Some of the blame, therefore, according to the *Guardian*, must be shouldered by the government, in particular Michael Gove (Secretary of State for Education 2010-2014) who ‘wants us to trust in the assumed intrinsic capacity of the private sector to fix public services’ (John 2015).

The *Guardian* also wrote:

The arrival of academies and free schools has created an open session for lay people and professionals to pursue their own eccentric ideas: and when the governor vacancies occur, some perpetuate the very English tradition of inviting friends to join them (Brighouse 2014).

This statement underlines that the current deregulated school system also failed at protecting the schools from a tradition of nepotism and recruitment irregularities that are uncomfortably ‘close to home’, another issue that the other newspapers have largely ignored. The *Guardian*’s moderate questioning of the interpretive framework set by the primary definers is consistent with both the paper’s broadsheet characterization and its left-wing critical orientation.

On the whole, despite the fact that evidence of poor governance in general was reported by the newspapers only in the 38.5% of all cases, it is worth noting that this percentage included little (as in the case of the *Guardian*) or nothing (as per all the other newspapers) of the specific evidence relating to poor governance as present in the Ofsted Advice Note. This unrepresented evidence included (a) professional misconduct, (b) incompetence, (c) personal politics and (d) conflict of interests. Professional misconduct of governors was found, for example, as the report noted that according to staff ‘recruitment was neither fair nor transparent’ (Wilshaw 2014, 3). Incompetence was reported in the Advice note, among other instances, as follows: ‘in several schools, governors are not sufficiently trained in or knowledgeable about “safer recruitment” procedures’ (Wilshaw 2014, 3). Personal politics was also an issue strongly underlined in the report. For example: ‘leaders have struggled to resist attempts by governing bodies to use their powers to change the school in line with governors’ personal views’ (Wilshaw 2014, 4). Lastly, the report underlined the presence a conflict of interests for governors as it stated that ‘Some raised questions about the close links that exist between local authority officials and key governors in the city’ (Wilshaw 2014, 6). A crucial point to highlight, therefore, is that the representation of the Trojan Horse news story in the British press *also* heavily relied on these factors *not* being represented – a

representational absence. This textual device acting in synergy with the aforementioned textual device of stereotyping gave rise to a highly biased and unfair coverage of the Trojan Horse news story.

Discussion

Overall, these findings show that none of the newspapers ignored the highly problematic interpretational entry point to the facts furnished 1) by the original Trojan Horse letter, which is initially responsible for devising the whole issue as an Islamist plot, and 2) by the primary institutional definers such as Ofsted and the DfE, which with their investigations were responsible for crystallizing the associations of the events to extremism. As our findings show, the performative force of the original Trojan Horse letter as published by the *Sunday Times*, and the official investigations that followed, set the terms of reference within which all further coverage of the news story took place. As Hall et al. (1978) observed, the structured relationship between the media and the primary institutional definers permits the latter to establish the initial definition or primary interpretation of the topic in question. In this case, the initial response to the letter by Ofsted and the British government, and the retransmitting by all news media outlets of such a response in the form of an interpretation of the issue as a case of Islamist extremism meant that it was not possible anymore for the news story to acquire an identity detached from Islamist extremism, not even when the Ofsted Advice Note, published in June, clearly pointed at problems in school governance. Once the initial frame of reference for a news story has been established, it is difficult to get out of it. ‘Arguments against a primary interpretation are forced to insert themselves in its definition of “what is at issue” – they must begin from this framework of interpretation as their starting point’ (Hall et al. 1978, 58-59). This is why even the *Guardian*, the paper with the lowest number of references to Islamist ideology, was forced to represent the news story from *within* the ‘Islamist plot’ framework of interpretation. This happened for example when a few of its articles continuously stated that ‘no evidence of extremism’ was found in the schools, as for example in the title “Analysis: A toxic bundle of claims - but little evidence” (Adams 2014). Had the issue not been framed as a case of Islamist extremism from the start, such observations could have centred directly on the key questions at stake – for example, ‘evidence of professional misconduct found in schools’. However, in the current context, even the *Guardian* might have inadvertently contributed to solidifying the Trojan Horse news story as one of extremism at its core. Furthermore, the consistency of the mode of representation (albeit with different degrees of strength) is due to the fact that although not explicitly declared, *news values* are widely shared between the different news media (Hall 1978, 54); and in contemporary Britain, undoubtedly, a story of Islamist extremism has more news value, which is to say that it is more ‘out of the ordinary’ than a ‘trivial’ story of professional misconduct in the workplace. Thus, in disproportionately emphasising Islamist ideology (and thus extremism) over poor governance, the British press, and particularly the right wing news media, have grossly overshadowed the equally important – perhaps more important in this case – issue of problems in the governance of the schools involved.

However, paying attention to poor governance would directly implicate the deregulatory education policies of the Conservative-led coalition government, thus identifying central and

local politicians as at least partially responsible. This, indeed, is an important point, and voices from various quarters have called for shared responsibility (see Richardson 2015). We mentioned early on that the structures of news production combine to provide those in powerful and privileged institutional positions disproportionate access to news media. Following the findings discussed in this paper, one can deduce that this level of access and influence is the reason why the problems with governance linked in part to central and local government shortcomings were altogether missing in the construction of the Trojan Horse news story. As Bravenboer (forthcoming) argues, ‘the exclusion of these factors from the official discourse can be read as a strategy to flood the discursive space and marginalise consideration of any specific problems with academy school governance.’ So, it only makes sense that the privileged and powerful do not want their own flaws to be exposed to the public and would rather let an easy scapegoat take the blame. The Islamist extremist feeds the popular imagination enough to fit the (guilty) bill, hence attention is successfully diverted away from wider institutional issues, hiding systemic flaws that are not only fully British, but also overwhelmingly, if not totally, unrelated to religious extremism of any sort.

But such a choice also feeds racist ideas and ideals. It is no surprise then that in addition to the textual strategy of omission, the qualitative aspect of the content analysis also revealed a consistent use of traditional stereotypes surrounding Muslims. These continue to be consistent with those highlighted by a number of cultural theorists in the 9/11 aftermath, that is, stereotypes of Muslims are still fundamentally grounded in the ideas of anti-Western sentiments, extremism and gender inequality. According to these views, Muslims in the news are highly likely to be portrayed as extremist, oppressive, backwards, controversial and even life-threatening. These recurring themes possess an intrinsic universalizing quality which casts Islam and all Muslims as enemies, whether real or perceived (Shryock 2013, 161), thus consolidating and reinforcing Islamophobic discourses. In this vein, our research echoes previous findings which show that broadsheet newspapers can in the main be regarded as islamophobic (Richardson 2004) and that newspapers tend to portray Muslims as a threat (Moore et al. 2008). Unfortunately, these representational themes continue to be operational and effective as we approach the end of the second decade of the twenty-first Century.

Conclusion

The aim of the analysis was to ascertain the extent to which the representation of the Trojan horse events by the British press emphasised Islamist extremism over poor school governance. The analysis showed that on the whole, the coverage of the Trojan Horse news story contained more evidence of schools’ problems being attributable to Islamist ideology (61.5% of all cases) rather than to poor governance (38.5%), *despite the latter having been identified as a major issue by the original Ofsted report*. In particular, *The Sun* was the newspaper presenting the largest amount of evidence relating the Trojan Horse events to Islamist ideology (80%), whereas the *Guardian* was the newspaper which presented the smallest amount of such evidence (45%), while also being the only paper which kept its references to Islamist ideology below 50%. By contrast, *the Mirror* presented evidence of Islamist ideology in 53% of cases, the *Daily Telegraph* in 60.5% of cases and the *Daily Mail* in 64% of cases.

The content analysis revealed that the Trojan Horse news story has been constructed following the key textual strategy of selecting/emphasising some features (i.e. evidence of Islamist ideology) whilst omitting others – that is, the glaring representational absence of evidence of (a) governor misconduct, (b) incompetence, (c) personal politics and (d) conflict of interests, *categories of misconduct identified within the Ofsted report*. The content analysis has also underlined how a key strategy in the representation of the Trojan Horse news story as an Islamist plot was the reliance on long-standing ideological dualisms and stereotypes of Islam and Muslims in the media in general as well as in the press.

On the basis of these findings it can be argued that by downplaying the evidence of poor governance, the British press has found in ‘the Islamist plotters’ the plausible yet abstract culprit to blame for the irregularities of the schools involved in the investigations. This is also quite a convenient approach as the social and discursive ‘scene’ is readily set for it – or set to accept it. That is, since 2001, the vastly heterogeneous cultural and religious practices and experiences of Britain’s Muslims have become increasingly politicized in mainstream media and political discourse, whilst being made to look homogeneous. From this perspective, it ‘makes sense’ (is necessary, in fact) to superimpose a highly biased interpretation of a set of professional and educational issues at a handful of school onto the ‘Muslim community’ (which does not actually exist but still inspires fear – much like Bigfoot or the abominable snowman) and then link the whole thing to ‘global jihadist threat’. However, such an unbalanced representation of evidence in the Trojan Horse news story, as the content analysis reveals, ends up not only reinforcing existing stereotypes of Islam and Muslims in the British public sphere, but it also fails to direct attention to another issue of concern to the British public: the potential for serious systematic failings in the current school system, and the clear role which central and local government play in those processes. These issues surely cannot be attributed to notions of Islamist extremism alone.

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Table 1 shows the newspapers which published the most number of articles pertaining to the Trojan Horse news story.

Title	Distribution	Number of articles relevant to 'Trojan Horse Ofsted'
Telegraph.co.uk	national	93
The times	national	92
The Birmingham Mail	Regional	79
Daily Mail	national	68
The Guardian	national	65
The Daily Telegraph	national	64
the Sunday Times	national	41
Birmingham Post	Regional	32
the Sunday Telegraph	national	29
The Sun	national	28
The Independent	national	21
Daily Mirror	national	18

Table 2: UK national newspapers selected for content analysis

Title	Type	Orientation	Circulation
<i>The Sun</i>	Tabloid	Right-wing	2,033,606
<i>The Daily Mail</i>	Mid-market	Right-wing	1,673,579
<i>The Daily Mirror</i>	Tabloid	Left-wing	958,674
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	Broadsheet	Right-wing	514,592
<i>The Guardian</i>	Broadsheet	Left-wing	185, 313

Table 3: Timeline of key events likely to have triggered significant media coverage.

Timeline of key events of the Trojan Horse affair yielding coverage potential		
March	2	The Sunday Times publishes the first story on Park View Academy and ‘Trojan Horse’ allegations.
	5-6	Ofsted conducts a no notice section 8 inspection at Park View School
	7	The Birmingham Mail runs a five page story on ‘Trojan Horse’ letter. BBC runs story confirming that they have seen the ‘Trojan Horse’ letter.
	17-18	Ofsted conduct full section 5 inspection at Park View School, prompted by concerns about what they saw on their section 8 inspection.
April	2-10	Ofsted conduct batch inspections of 15 schools (a mixture of section 8 and section 5 inspections depending on school circumstances).
	14	Announcement by Birmingham City Council that Ian Kershaw will lead a widened investigation, with Stephen Rimmer providing oversight through a new Birmingham City Council Review Group.
	15	Appointment by Secretary of State of Peter Clarke as Education Commissioner announced.
June	9th	Ofsted publishes the <i>Advice note provided on academies and</i>

		<i>maintained schools in Birmingham to the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, as commissioned by letter dated 27 March 2014.</i> EFA publishes the <i>Review of Oldknow Academy Trust</i> .
July	22	Clarke's <i>Report into allegations concerning Birmingham schools arising from the 'Trojan Horse' letter</i> is printed.
	14 (released on 18)	The Signed executive summary of Kershaw's report <i>Independent Trojan Horse Investigation Prepared for Birmingham City Council</i> is released.
	18 (released on 22)	'Trojan Horse Review Group' (THRG) Birmingham City Council (review of Kershaw report.

Table 4 shows the evidence pertaining to the categories 'Islamist ideology' (E1) and 'poor governance' (E2).

E1 – Islamist ideology	E2 – Poor governance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-Muslim staff banned from Friday assembly. - "White women are prostitutes". - Women cannot refuse sex and must obey their husbands. - Women to wear the veil whether they are Muslim or not. - Boys forced to change for PE in store cupboard. - Children are well-behaved and respectful. - Kids go in detention for not following Islamist ideology. - Segregating children by gender. - Organising Muslim-only trip to Saudi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Governors acting in a network. - Governors intimidate staff with investigation of emails. - Tactics: constantly questioning decisions, school results and complaints. - Witch-hunt (removing head teachers). - Governor turning a school into a faith school, altering the school's ethos. - Paying for services of private solicitors with schools budget. - Paying for restaurant meals with school budget - Staff paid not to speak. - Family members appointed to unadvertised post. - Evasion of scrutiny in view of Ofsted investigation.

<p>Arabia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Performing anti-Christian chant. - Christian kids banned from school trip. - Neglecting Christian kids. - Banning of doll as baby Jesus. - Christmas assembly cancelled. - Hate preachers invited in school. - Warning against the dangers of hellfire - Banning of toys and games. - Banning of tombola and raffles. - Banning of music and art. - Presence of books on stoning and lashing. - Posting comments on FB about Islamic practices. - Religious education focuses primarily on Islam. - Pupils taught Arabic not French. - "Evolution is not what we believe". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schools faking good conduct. - Putting up shows of cultural inclusion. - Student achievement is inadequate. - Pupils are not taught about the dangers of extremism. - The citizenship subject has not been taught well enough. - Students are not prepared for life in multi-cultural Britain. - Children have limited understanding of arts, other cultures and religions. - Not presenting a balanced view of the world. - Staff being undermined, bullied, intimidated, forced out of their jobs, marginalised and treated unfairly because of gender and religious belief.
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Table 5: Counts of evidence for each category are grouped according to the newspaper's title.

	Islamist ideology (E1)	Poor governance (E2)	Total references to 'evidence' across all articles	Total number of articles strictly relevant to 'Trojan Horse' news.
The Sun	32 (80%)	8 (20%) ⁶	40 (100%)	4
The Daily Mail	37 (64%)	21 (36%)	58 (100%)	11
Daily Telegraph	32 (60.5%)	21 (39.5%)	53 (100%)	11
The Daily Mirror	9 (53%)	8 (47%)	17 (100%)	3
The Guardian	18(45%)	22(55%)	40(100%)	20
TOTAL BIAS	128 (61.5%)	80 (38.5%)	208 (100%)	49

⁶ Percentages are rounded up/down by 0.25.

