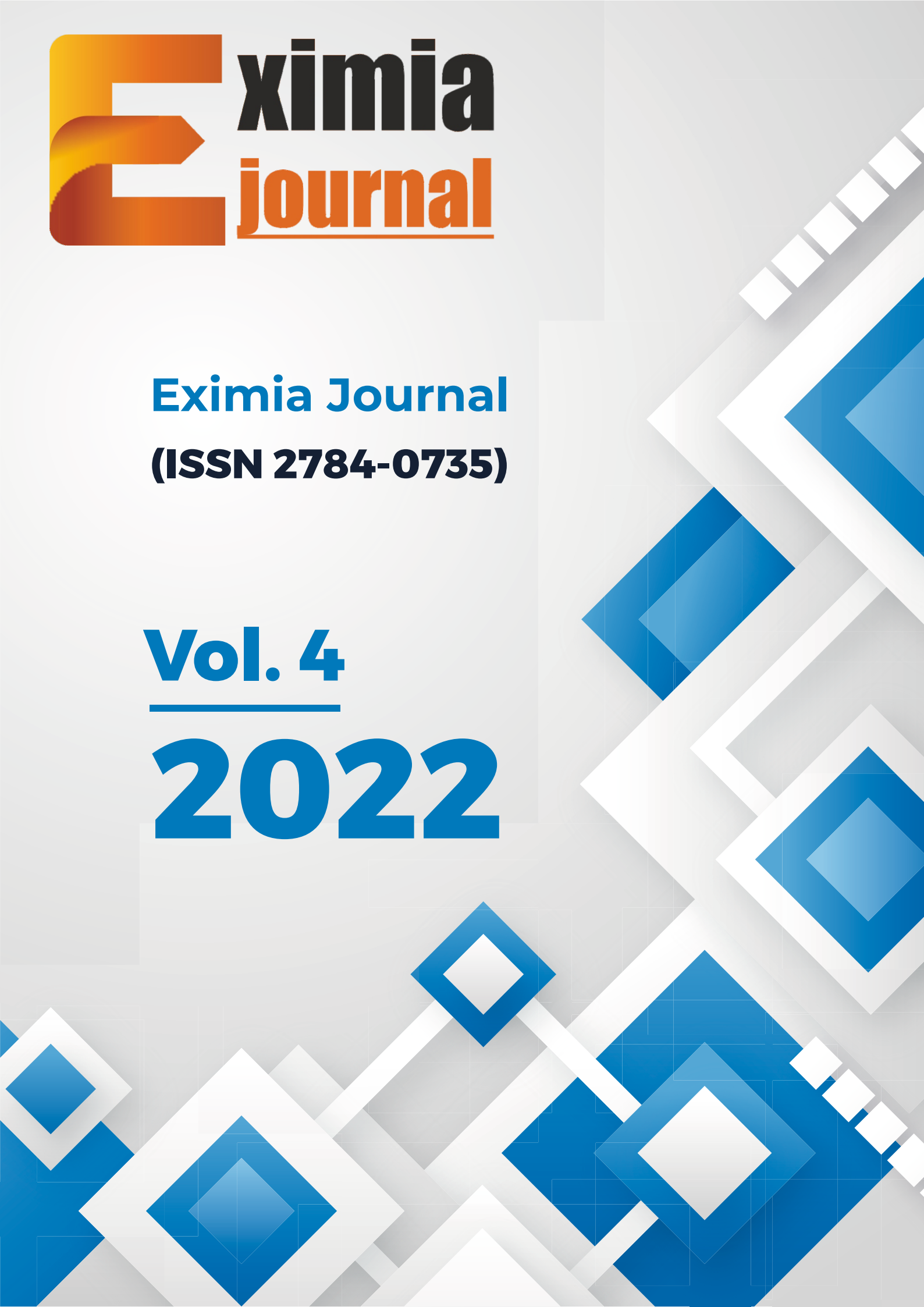




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The U.S. Media Coverage of Islam and Muslims in the Wake of the ISIS Emergence

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Abstract. This paper seeks to describe the history of The New York Times' coverage of Islam and Muslims in a specific period. The paper aims to look at how the newspaper represented Muslims in a time when the image of Muslims in the world was being distorted through the massacres committed by the group, ISIS, in Syria and Iraq in the name of Islam. Historical exploration focused on the coverage published in six months of 2014. The examination revealed a consistent approach with a high focus on the topics of terrorism and extremism. By far, in this period, the most prominent and widespread coverage of Muslims in the newspaper was Terrorism, ISIS, and Al Qaeda.

Keywords. Media, Muslims, Islam, ISIS, The New York Times

This paper mainly argues that the American media, particularly *The New York Times*, has contributed to stereotyping the image of Islam and Muslims in the world by linking the terms terrorism, extremism, and violence to Muslims. The newspaper used violence perpetrated by ISIS in the Middle East in the name of Islam to popularize an unrealistic image of Islam. The mass media works to form the opinions of the audiences about the issues being discussed and to be transmitted and retransmitted through these media. Audiences follow the information conveyed by the media and begin to think in the context of what the media means. The majority of Americans' opinions about the outside world are formed based on the messages they receive from the media, so the media contributes effectively to the formation of people's perceptions of events and other people.¹ It is widely known that what audiences know and think is shaped by the way the media report events. The media plays an important role in societies in making and directing public opinion. This role makes it an important tool for states to serve their internal and external policies.² In this context, the United States is working to bring the media into the position of public custodian. This position transformed the role of the media into a political one.³ Also, the messages the media convey to the masses integrate simulated reality into people's lives, and, thus, masses become dependent on the media to form perceptions about the real world.⁴ It can be said that media is nowadays the main source of knowledge about Islam and Muslims and, therefore, the media decides what kind of knowledge is related to these topics.⁵ The debates about the dialectic of Islam and terrorism are not a topic of the moment. Discussions about the relationship of Islam and terrorism have a long history. For example,

Scholar Edward Said discussed that more than forty years ago, saying, “Not for nothing did Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma . . . what remained current about Islam was some necessarily diminished version of those great dangerous forces that it symbolized for Europe.”⁶ However, at the same time, some American contexts defended Islam and refused to label Islam as terrorism. This was evident in President Obama’s speech about terrorism on December 5th, 2015, when he said, “We cannot turn against one another by letting this fight be defined as a war between America and Islam.”⁷ These quotes may be important in forming a theoretical basis that includes two views regarding the portrayal of Muslims in American media coverage.

This paper seeks to describe the history of *The New York Times* coverage of Islam and Muslims in a specific period. The paper aims to look at how the newspaper represented Muslims in a time when the image of Muslims in the world was being distorted through the massacres committed by the group, ISIS, in Syria and Iraq in the name of Islam. Historical exploration focused on the coverage published in six months of 2014 (June 1st, 2014, to November 30th, 2014). This time period was specifically chosen since this is the period in which ISIS emerged significantly in Syria and Iraq. Additionally, at this time, the ISIS group was considered a real threat by the United States. Also, an international military alliance was formed by the United States and a number of Arab countries to fight ISIS in Syria and Iraq.⁸

The researcher will explore the coverage of *The New York Times*, as it is one of the high-circulation newspapers in the US. According to the Coalition for Audited Media, the newspaper was among the first three newspapers in terms of circulation in the United States in 2014 (the period of this study). The circulation of *The New York Times*, in terms of average print circulation and digital subscriptions, was (2,134,150).⁹ Moreover, *The New York Times* is considered a representative of the American press as well as an essential reference for society and institutions locally and globally.¹⁰

Media owners may use their outlets to achieve political or economic goals. The independence of the media gives power that can cause damage to democracy or to culture and morals.¹¹ One of the main topics constantly raised in the media is religion, especially after the events of September 11th, 2001, in the United States. The incidents resulted in the deaths of thousands of people after civilian planes crashed into the World Trade Center in New York in conjunction with targeting other places in the country.¹² Scholar Ingrid Gomes argued that these attacks spawned political and ideological discourses that were produced by the media.¹³ Having observed this ideology that is constantly being produced by the media, scholars in the field of media have examined the form of this discourse targeting religion, especially Islam, before and after these events and explored how the media portrays Islam and Muslims.¹⁴

Numerous studies have confirmed that there is widespread prejudice against Muslims in Western countries. This argument is explained by the fact that these biases are the product of the extensive information that is being disseminated about Islam and Muslims.¹⁵ Nearly a decade after 9/11, research in the media field also emphasized the negative framing of media coverage towards Islam and Muslims issues in American newspapers.¹⁶ Moreover, studies revealed that Islam was portrayed as a source of violence.¹⁷ More specifically, the studies revealed that US newspapers’ coverage of Islam and Muslims was biased and negative and that the religion of Islam was not inclined to peace.¹⁸ After the events of September 11th, there was a link between Islam and terrorism. This link was of great concern in the media and opened the door to new discussions.¹⁹ After these attacks, there was widespread talk of a terrorist organization called Al-Qaeda.²⁰ The origin of Al-Qaeda dates to the fight of Islamic groups in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union in the 1980s under the leadership of Osama bin Laden.

The group carried out attacks on civilian and military targets in various countries, especially the West, most notably the attacks of September 11th, in the United States.²¹ ISIS is an acronym for the group that has given itself the name (The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). It has been identified as a terrorist group carrying out extremist, insurgent, and brutal activities in the Middle East. It is considered an ideological extension to Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.²²

The conditions of war and sectarian rule in Iraq helped the group's expansion and extremism to increase. In addition, the Syrian revolution and the chaos caused by the repression of the Syrian regime provided an environment for the expansion of ISIS.²³ ISIS can be considered the fourth stage of Al-Qaeda's plan in which Al-Qaeda seeks to overthrow the Islamic regimes it considers apostate, namely Jordan and the Gulf states. The plan was to implement this phase during 2010-2013. In the fifth stage, from 2013-2016, Al-Qaeda planned to recruit forces from all countries of the world.²⁴ In August 2014, the United States launched a series of airstrikes against ISIS militants in Iraq after the expansion of the organization's reach and the increase in the attacks it carried out. On September 5th, 2014, U.S. President Obama hardened the US position against ISIS by enlisting nine countries to form a military coalition to fight ISIS in Iraq and Syria.²⁵ On September 23rd, 2014, the United States and its Arab alliance launched the first military strikes against ISIS in Syria. The strikes killed 70 ISIS militants.²⁶

The researcher noted the absence of studies that dealt with the portrayal of Muslims in the coverage of the American media after the emergence of the ISIS group. There is also a dearth of studies that explore the impact of the emergence of ISIS on the image of Muslims in the media. This study builds on Islamophobia discussions within the media discipline and the link between Islam and images of terrorism, especially with the rise of new groups that practice violence in the name of Islam.

As the study's argument predicts, there were negative images within the coverage of *The New York Times* about Islam and Muslims issues. Using the keyword *Muslim* to search the newspaper's website during the study period, most results were attributed to news stories and articles about terrorism, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, violence, suicide bombings, and murder. Most of the coverage tended to link the violence and killing incidents perpetrated by ISIS in the name of Islam with Muslims - especially Sunnis - and with the religion as a whole.

On June 1st, 2014, *The New York Times* linked the extremist fighters who perpetrate violence in Syria to Islam. The newspaper reported on the arrest by French forces of a French man who had killed three people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels. The newspaper indicated that the man who was arrested had a long criminal history, and he had traveled to Syria a year before his arrest to join the "radical Islamic" fighters. The newspaper said that the killing committed by the arrested person is the "first" carried out by a citizen returning from Syria.²⁷ The newspaper pointed out often that most of the suicide bombers who joined ISIS had converted to Islam before joining the terrorist groups. For example, "Mr. Molins said Mr. Hauchard, a 22-year-old from Normandy who converted to Islam at 17, left France for Syria in August 2013 under the false pretext of humanitarian work."²⁸ Such coverage referred to the ethnic and religious stereotyping of the suspects.

The article also stated that there is a fear of the kind of violence that European citizens returning from the battlefields in Syria could bring. Moreover, the newspaper assumed that the arrested man had received money from "Islamist" groups in Syria in order to carry out an attack in Belgium. The newspaper linked the killing in Brussels to other killings that were carried out, according to the newspaper, by a French citizen linked to Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and trained among the Islamist fighters there, who then returned to France and killed seven people, including three children and three French soldiers.²⁹ Terrorist operations carried out in Europe

always have an Islamic background, according to the newspaper. There was no doubt in the coverage that converting to Islam is necessarily a cause for violence and terrorism.

The newspaper published an article in which it talked about the efforts made by President Obama to bridge the gap between America and the Islamic world. The first of these efforts was President Obama's speech to the Muslim world in Cairo as part of the road map entitled "Changing Course: A New Direction for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World," which aspired to mend the division between America and Muslims. The Egyptian revolution during the Arab Spring ended with the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak and the election of Muslim Brotherhood member Mohamed Morsi as president, who was overthrown by the army in July 2013. The newspaper said that the democratic principles referred to by President Obama were mocked by former President Morsi through dictatorial decisions and orders he had made during his presidency. The newspaper claimed that the Muslim Brotherhood was lying when it marketed itself as moderates and that political Islam failed to achieve the aspirations of the Arab peoples. Therefore, supporting "secular" parties against "Islamists and jihadists" is in the interest of America.³⁰

The newspaper showed that Islam was not the best solution for taking power, and that the rule based on Islam is a dictatorial rule, unfit for life, and contrary to the principles of humanity. On one hand, the coverage indicated the danger of exercising governance or politics based on religion, or what is known as political Islam. This portrayal showed Islam as a barbaric, primitive, discriminatory, and irrational religion. Also, it showed that those who believe that Islam is not only a religion; but rather a political, social, and economic system suitable for building state institutions are necessarily dictators and do not fulfill the peoples aspirations of freedom, justice, and development. They necessarily believe in using their faith primarily politically and militarily.

On the other hand, the coverage indicated the consolidation of a stereotyped image among the Americans and the world that the Muslims is by nature hostile to civilization, democracy, and progress, and that violence is an inherent characteristic of the Arab Muslim personality and that they are unable to manage their country's affairs. Accordingly, there was an inevitable necessity for the West to interfere in the affairs of the Arab Muslim countries, as it is the carrier of progressive, civilized, and democratic ideals.

The newspaper indicated that the rituals of Islam, such as prayer and reading the Qur'an, are some of the causes of extremism.

For example, on June 3rd, the newspaper published an article talking about a young teenager who died after a truck loaded with explosives he was driving exploded in Syria, killing 37 people. The newspaper mentions that this young man was passionate about praying in the mosque and reading the Qur'an. He used to publish Islamic hadiths on Facebook, and he was neglectful in his school and sneaked out to go to prayer. Between the lines of the article, the newspaper mentions that the principal of the school attended by the teenager remembered the latter's mother through her traditional Islamic clothing.³¹ Along with such images that reflected one side of the coverage against Islam, the newspaper supported freedom of religious belief and attacked right-wing parties that hold contempt for religions, especially Islam. Through an opinion article, the newspaper discussed freedom of religion and right-wing parties in Europe that attack freedom of religion, especially Islam. The article pointed out that the freedom of religion reflects the freedom of democracy that the secularists are obliged to accept. Therefore, the attack on Islam is a violation of freedom.³² Such images in support of religious freedom did not appear in the usual press coverage of terrorist events, but only appeared in some opinion articles.

A news story published on the same day stated that the German authorities had charged three people (two Lebanese and a German) with terrorism-related charges for their involvement with an extremist Islamic group in Syria. At the end of the news story, the newspaper mentioned that most of those who left Germany for Syria were Muslims who were born and lived in Germany.³³ The newspaper continued to use the term “Sunni” in most of its terrorism coverage when talking about ISIS militants and associated them with the terms “extremists” and “radicals.”³⁴ Sunnis are the largest denomination of Muslims; about 90% of Muslims belong to it.³⁵ The newspaper adopted the designation of ISIS as “Sunni fighters,” “Islamic State fighters,” and “Sunni extremists” in most of its coverage of the terrorist events related to ISIS. Such coverage portrays Sunni Muslims to the world as the source of terrorism and extremism in the world. However, in very few news stories, the newspaper attributed the naming to the terrorist group itself by saying, “ISIS, which calls itself an Islamic State, burst into global consciousness in June when its fighters seized Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city, after moving into Iraq from their base in Syria.”³⁶ The newspaper closely linked Islam as a religion to the practices of extremist movements that committed terrorist acts in the name of Islam. In many cases, the newspaper did not differentiate between a moderate Muslim in his religious practice and Muslims belonging to extremist groups that differ in their ideologies and agenda. The newspaper exploited incidents involving some radical Islamists to blame Islam and Muslims for terrorism. Continuing to use the name of the *Islamic State* in covering terrorist acts committed by ISIS in the world may increase the emphasis and link between Islam and terrorism, leading to an increase in Islamophobia in the West and the rise of anti-Islam voices. The use of such names indicates that Islam is a religion of war and is hostile to peace. The name also indicated that Islam is not only a religion; but a political ideology that seeks to extend its influence in the world through weapons, killing, and destruction.

The newspaper portrayed Islam as hostile to pluralism and rejects the other. In a news story from Indonesia talking about parents’ anger at schools who force female students to wear Islamic clothing, the newspaper mentioned the concern of parents in Indonesia because of what it described as a rise in Islamic practices in public schools, which stifles pluralism in the country. In this regard, the newspaper stated, “The rise of Islamic practices in public schools, mirroring a rise in fundamentalism across the country, makes parents like Ms. Lies and Mr. Tri Agus uneasy.”³⁷ The report also indicated a rise in Sunni radicalism and religious intolerance in Indonesia and the repression of minorities such as Christian students, Hindus, and Buddhists.³⁸ *The New York Times* at that time still reminded Americans and the world of the September 11th attacks. The newspaper continued to link the attacks with Muslims and to associate Muslims with the term terrorists who constitute the source of the threat and danger, even if the Islamic countries are a political ally of the US.³⁹ It constantly referred to Islam as “the danger coming from the east” or “the Sunni threat.”⁴⁰ In news stories that covered sectarian violence between Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq, for example, the newspaper frequently associated Shiites with the term “militias,” while it frequently associated Sunnis with “extremists.”⁴¹

In news reports regarding the conflicts between Uyghur Muslims and the ruling Han group in China, the newspaper conveyed a one-sided view, which is what the official Chinese version said and ignored the Muslim minority’s point of view. Such coverage reflects the bias toward violence against Muslims in favor of the Chinese government. In the context of the coverage, the newspaper judged the Muslim minority in China as a terrorist, savage, and criminal, while there is no focus on the violence practiced against the Muslim minority.⁴² The newspaper said the violence in China’s Xinjiang region. Six Han farmers were stabbed, according to Radio Free Asia. The newspaper added that “the attack comes amid a year-long

“strike hard” campaign that Beijing is waging against what it calls Islamic-inspired terrorism in Xinjiang.”⁴³ Such biased coverage distorts the reality of events and marginalizes the rights of religious minorities. In addition, it reinforces the image of hostility towards Muslims by portraying them as the cause of violence and terrorism.

In contrast, in more than one article, the newspaper referred to the hatred faced by Muslim minorities in East Asian countries such as China. The newspaper also showed pictures of the effects of contempt these minorities face due to their conversion to the Islamic religion. In China, for example, on July 11th, 2014, the newspaper published pictures of religious rituals practiced by Muslims in China during Ramadan, along with pictures of attacks on their places of worship, the mosque, and the destruction of graves.⁴⁴ There is little representative coverage of Muslims in *The New York Times* regarding the discussions of policies that affect Muslims directly.

However, the views of Muslim minorities were ignored, or their views were presented briefly and with few words compared to the sources of the other party’s point of view. For example, the official Chinese view has been presented in news coverage of the conflict between the Muslim minority and the Han people, the dominant ethnic group in China. The Muslim minority’s point of view was mentioned in a few words at the end of the story.⁴⁵

The newspaper published a news story about the ISIS threat to al-Qaeda as an active site of the insurgency. Within the article, the newspaper points out that parties from the Gulf countries financed ISIS in Syria to establish an Islamic state. The newspaper described one of those who financed ISIS as an “Islamist.” It is stated in the article that “As Syria’s civil war raged, a Kuwaiti Islamist, Ghanim Al-Mteiri, funneled cash from wealthy donors in the Persian Gulf to Syria’s affiliate of Al Qaeda in hopes that it would overthrow the government and lay the foundations of an Islamic state.”⁴⁶ For the newspaper, Islam is the primary driver of violence in Arab countries. A goal shared by most Americans is “to rein in violent Islamic extremism.” The regimes that derive their ruling philosophy from Islam are described as dictatorial regimes that seek to perpetuate oppression and reject pluralism.⁴⁷ The newspaper mostly portrayed Muslims as a homogeneous bloc of closed-mindedness and inhuman religious extremism, i.e., they are a closed group utterly different from the secular, open, liberal, and democratic West.

The newspaper presented the tragedy experienced by the Christians of Iraq under the control of ISIS over large parts of the country. The news story showed a state of solidarity between Muslims and Christians. There were catch phrases within the article such as “In the pews Muslims and Christians alike held signs that read, I’m Iraqi. I’m Christian.” and “A Muslim woman sitting next to her in the pew reached out and whispered, you are the true original people here, and we are sorry for what has been done to you in the name of Islam.” However, in the same news story, there is still a link between Sunnis and militants in the statement: “as Sunni militants with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria seized the land and persecuted anyone who did not adhere to their harsh version of Islamic law.”⁴⁸ With the sectarian conflict between Shiites and Sunnis intensifying in Iraq, such coverage may reinforce hatred towards Sunni Muslims in the world. In addition, the newspaper also failed to differentiate between Sunnis and ISIS militants who call themselves the Islamic State in the Levant and Iraq.

In July 2014, the newspaper’s coverage of Muslim issues tended to cover the war between Israel and the Islamic movement, Hamas, (the abbreviated of the Arabic name, the Islamic Resistance Movement in Palestine) at the expense of other issues. The number of news stories and articles related to the keyword *Muslim* in the month of July reached 196, and the number of articles related to the word *Islam* reached 194. The number of news articles related

to the keyword *Gaza* was 250, and the number of articles related to the keyword *Israel* was 396. This shift in coverage indicates that there has been a relative disregard for the issues of terrorism compared to coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian war. Also, this shift could indicate that the newspaper focused on the most hectic Muslim-related issues and trying to draw the readers' attention to them.

A part of its coverage of the war between Israel and Hamas, the newspaper maintained an objective balance in most news stories. The Islamist group that dominates the Gaza Strip in Palestine (Hamas), which fought against Israel, was mentioned abstractly without any partial description.⁴⁹ However, at the end of July, the newspaper published two articles regarding the war between Israel and Hamas arguing that the Islamic group fighting Israel “has proved a bad ruler. By [using] many of its military assets—tunnels to infiltrate Israel, bunkers for its fighters, [and] rocket launchers to terrorize Israeli civilians.” For the most part, news coverage sided with Israel in the war with Hamas. The newspaper said, “Israel has every right to intensify its campaign until Hamas’s leaders agree to a cease-fire.” On the contrary, the newspaper did not mention the effects of the attack launched by Israeli forces on civilians in the Gaza Strip. Nor did the newspaper mention to the readers the real reason that sparked the war between Hamas and Israel.⁵⁰ After using the word “militants” and linking it to the fighters of the ISIS group, the newspaper used the term to describe the Palestinians after the war between Hamas and Israel. The newspaper makes judgments about Hamas stating, “But Hamas, the militant Islamist faction [. . .] ruled Gaza for seven years and led the battle against Israel.”⁵¹ In contrast, the newspaper did not use any vocabulary when mentioning Israel. This is shown by the newspaper saying: “More than a week after an Egyptian-brokered cease-fire agreement halted 50 days of fighting between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza, little has changed on the ground.”⁵² The newspaper is in line with the official position of the U.S. and Israel regarding Hamas as an Islamic terrorist organization. One of the articles indicated this by saying, “Qatar openly provides a base for leaders of the Palestinian militant group Hamas—deemed a terrorist organization by the United States and Israel—as well as money to help prop up its government in Gaza.”⁵³ Despite the huge military capabilities that Israel possesses compared to Hamas, the newspaper failed to focus on terrorizing civilians in Gaza by Israel. Many articles referred to the suffering experienced by civilians in Gaza and the damage and destruction caused by the war. The newspaper attributed the devastation caused by the war to Hamas alone, without holding Israel responsible for the deaths.

On the contrary, in August 2014, *The New York Times* invited young Muslim women to share their hijab photos on its fashion platform and tag the photos with #nytfashion. The newspaper promotes the hijab, not only because it is a religious identity for Muslim women, but also as a part of fashion.⁵⁴

During the months of September, October and November, the newspaper continues to maintain the same style of news coverage of terrorism news, whether in the Middle East or the rest of the world. It was noted that during news coverage of events not related to violent acts, no judgments or descriptions were given to Muslims, such as Sunnis, Shiites, savage, extremist, terrorist, etc., while these language choices are issued in news covering acts of violence and terrorism.

During September 2014, the same pattern continued in the press coverage of terrorism news by using the word “Islamist” with acts of violence. In an article about the residents fleeing from the city of Maiduguri in Nigeria from a group of armed men, the newspaper said that “Amid fears that Islamic militants are approaching the main city in northeastern Nigeria, hundreds of residents are said to have fled from Maiduguri on Thursday in the face of doubts

that the army can repel an attack on a city of more than a million people.”⁵⁵ *The New York Times* condemned the financial support provided by some Arab countries to any Islamic militant organization. The newspaper describes that financial support is necessarily support for terrorism, because Islamic groups are terrorist groups. For example, the newspaper claimed that the “oil-rich” state of Qatar “has provided at least some form of assistance—whether sanctuary, media, money, or weapons—to the Taliban of Afghanistan, Hamas of Gaza, rebels from Syria, militias in Libya and allies of the Muslim Brotherhood across the region.”⁵⁶ The events of 9/11 may still affect *The New York Times* newspaper’s coverage, which reflects a general decline in journalistic standards regarding coverage of Islam and Muslims. The terms “Muslims” and “terrorism” were almost inseparable in the coverage of terrorist incidents. The newspaper portrayed Muslims as a race of people directly linked to violence and Islam as inspiring terrorist ideology, and Islamic countries as incubators of terrorism.

While describing President Obama’s speech regarding allowing the expansion of the military campaign against ISIS, the newspaper resorted to using the phrase “against rampaging Sunni militants in the Middle East.”⁵⁷ The newspaper commented on the president’s speech by saying, “For all of Mr. Obama’s efforts to reassure the public, his remarks were a stark acknowledgment of the threat posed by the militants, whose lightning advance through Iraq and Syria and videotaped beheading of two Americans have reignited fears of radical Islamic terrorism.”⁵⁸

At the beginning of October, the newspaper published videos for the annual Haj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia⁵⁹ and an article about gatherings of Muslims in Paris to express their rejection of ISIS practices and exonerate Islam from the criminal acts committed by ISIS in the name of Islam. The newspaper also published their calls to stop using the common use of the name Islamic State, which the ISIS group calls itself. In the words of the demonstrators, the newspaper said that this name leads to the stigmatization of Muslims and the extremism of Muslim youth.⁶⁰

There are indications in some articles that converting to Islam generates violence and murder. The newspaper pointed out that religious rituals practiced by Muslims are necessarily a cause for murder and violence. In a news story about an American who converted to Islam and was killed by the ISIS fighters, the newspaper stated, “After converting, he took Islam’s practices seriously, praying the five daily prayers and taking on the name Abdul-Rahman.”⁶¹

The newspaper published that “The four car bombs were detonated in Karbala on the periphery of a pedestrian-only area [...] killing 22 and wounding 51, officials said.” It added: “No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks in Karbala, but suspicion fell most heavily on the Sunni-led Islamic State.”⁶² The newspaper issued generalizations that the terrorist group ISIS is led or ruled by Sunnis. The newspaper’s descriptions portray the Sunnis, the largest religious group among Muslims, as practicing violence, murder, and terrorism in the world.

In a news story about the killing of gang members in Xinjiang, western China, the newspaper said, citing Chinese state media, that the Chinese police killed four people who threw explosives in the street and killed people. The newspaper added that the official report issued by the Chinese police did not comment on the motives of the dead and did not describe their race. Despite this, the newspaper said, these attacks were similar in the past by ethnic Uighur separatists and Islamist militants. The newspaper presented the background that the Muslim minority had a lead in carrying out terrorist attacks in the country, saying, “but almost invariably the Chinese government has ascribed similar attacks in the past to ethnic Uighur separatists and Islamic militants seeking to turn Xinjiang into an independent homeland.”⁶³

The newspaper presented a prejudgment that the attack perpetrators belonged to the Muslim minority and that the incident was a terrorist attack. The newspaper also indicated that most of the area residents in which the attack was carried out are Muslims. The newspaper said, “96 percent of Shache County’s 800,000 residents are Uighur, 3 percent are Han and 1 percent belong to other ethnicities.”⁶⁴

The newspaper failed to adhere to objectivity in presenting the news story, nor did it provide tangible evidence to justify inserting such backgrounds around Muslims and explain their relationship to the incident. In general, the content of news coverage and the language of media reports covered murder and terrorism in China have often tended to focus on matters that permeate negative perceptions of Islam without providing concrete evidence or presenting objective and balanced views.

In covering issues related to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Hamas movement in Palestine, the newspaper showed their failure in dealing with internal and external politics, either with peoples or countries. On the one hand, the coverage related to the Muslim Brotherhood showed that the group was unable to implement the principles of democracy after taking power in Egypt in 2012 after the revolution that toppled President Hosni Mubarak, and it will not be able to achieve the Egyptian people’s dreams of freedom and justice that they aspired to during their revolution against the previous regime.

On the other hand, the coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli war indicated Hamas was unable to take into account the interests of the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip, during the war. The newspaper directly attributed the poor conditions suffered by the people in Gaza during and after the war to the weak Islamic political performance of Hamas.

According to this coverage, the newspaper was biased against Islamic movements that seek to rule people according to the Islamic religion or the so-called political Islam and present it to the public as a reactionary and anti-democratic regime that is not capable of development.

It can be seen that *The New York Times* coverage revolves around two basic narratives: the first is indictment narratives which tended to create the “us” and the “other” by promoting the employment of Islam as a source of terrorism. This narrative portrayed Muslims as the outcast part that is not in line with the path of the global identity of civic peace and religious and sectarian tolerance. The second is objective narratives that dealt with Muslims as persons who should obtain religious freedom, and that any persecution of this freedom is a violation of the values of the tolerant world. By observing the political and ideological dimensions that directed the newspaper’s narratives in shaping the image of Muslims and Islam among readers, accusation narratives appear to dominate the newspaper’s coverage during the examination period, which may contribute to the reproduction of the phenomenon of Islamophobia more strongly than before.

In light of this context, it is noted that the newspaper’s discourse had political, ideological, and cultural dimensions in reinforcing the difference between “we” non-Muslims, as a positive identity that enjoys pluralism, tolerance, and cultural and civilization openness, and the “other” that includes Muslims, as a religiously and culturally fanatical social group, they always seek extremism and violence. Coverage of *The New York Times* represented a continuation of the cultural and ideological accumulation towards Islam, starting from the Crusades, passing through European colonialism, the first and second world wars, all the way to the aftermath of September 11th.

Conclusion

An examination of nearly 140 in *The New York Times* published on Muslims and Islam between June 1st, 2014, to November 30th, 2014, revealed a consistent approach with a high focus on the topics of terrorism and extremism. By far, in this period, the most prominent and widespread coverage of Muslims in the newspaper was Terrorism, ISIS, and Al Qaeda. Topics of terrorism and violence were the most Muslims-related topics compared to other topics in *The New York Times* coverage. The keywords “Muslim” and “Islam” used in the search mostly led to articles, news stories, videos, and photos related to terrorism. The newspaper ignored the massacres committed by ISIS against Muslims and focused on the massacres committed against American and European people.

The newspaper also ignored fact that the vast majority of Muslims do not support the extremist ideas of the organization. The coverage focused on the fact that ISIS poses a threat to America and Europe, and Islamic countries are considered incubators of the organization and not a direct enemy. Islam was mentioned in *The New York Times* in the same context as extremists, suicide attacks, bombings, and massacres. The newspaper failed to show the differences between ISIS and Islam. However, during the examination period in this study, there was no evidence of incitement against American Muslims. There were articles supporting the presence of Muslim minorities in America and Western countries.

Furthermore, an imbalance in the news coverage of Muslims by the newspaper was noted. Official views that are usually the views of a dominant power such as government or the official media are presented. The newspaper’s coverage of Muslims issues, the conflict between Hamas and Israel in particular, did not provide opportunities for differing opinions, and the coverage was one-sided. *The New York Times* blamed the Gaza war primarily on Hamas. Coverage indicates in most cases that Hamas is the one who ignited the conflict with Israel. The coverage indicated sympathy with Israel against Hamas, which the newspaper considers an “Islamic” extremist group. Such conclusions are relatively consistent with earlier conclusions that argued that *The New York Times* had explicit negative biases toward Islam and Muslims. The newspaper’s coverage contributed to the stereotyping of Islam’s image as a source of violence and tension.⁶⁵ Moreover, some studies of US media representations of Islam and Muslims indicated that the American media contributed to associating the image of Islam and Muslims with violence and religious extremism.⁶⁶ Through negative stereotypes that address the US citizens, this study argues that such coverage increases negative feelings about Islam and Muslims and may lead to increased civil rights violations of American Muslims. After 9/11, there were fundamental changes that limited the civil rights of Muslim immigrants and Muslim Americans. According to Scholar Maira Sunaina’s argument that Muslims “have been forced to respond to new and constantly shifting measures to limit their civil rights, some of which are not widely publicized, creating more uncertainty and terror” (228).⁶⁷ Such coverage may also support the images that see Muslims only in the context of hostility to the democratic world order. The era of terrorism committed by the ISIS group in the world may be a new era after the September 11 attacks. This era imposes new types of media portrayal of Muslims and Islam. It is crucial to study the dimensions of the ISIS group emergence and its impact on the image of Muslims in America and the West. Moreover, it is essential to know the roles played by the media in exploiting terrorism in the name of Islam in reshaping the image of Muslims or producing new images that did not exist in the past. Future research should examine as much as possible the American media and go beyond examining a single newspaper, which may be one of the limitations of this study.

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