RELIGION IN THE MEDIA:
A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

Salman Al-Azami

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To my beloved wife Shaheen—
without her support and sacrifice,
this book would have never come to light.

Preface

Religion plays an integral part in the lives of billions of people in the world. Although there are differences in beliefs and practices, a majority of the world's population has a spiritual element and finds comfort, peace, and tranquillity through that. Religions have existed for many centuries and there has been violence in the name of religion throughout history. However, in the contemporary world, religions are under intense scrutiny due to conflicts that kill innocent civilians in the name of religion. Religious riots between Hindus and Muslims in India, Buddhists slaughtering Rohingya Muslims in Burma, and Muslims and Christians killing each other in different parts of Africa are examples of violence in the name of religion. Although the Middle East conflict is more political than religious, it is between Palestinian Muslims and Israeli Jews, and religion often plays a divisive role in the tensions between the two conflicting groups. The worst religious conflict since the turn of this century has been the rise of extremism, fanaticism, and mass murder by people who call themselves Muslims. From the terrible multiple attacks on 9/11, to the mass murders in Madrid, London, Brussels and Paris in the West, and to the many more incidents around the world, Islam as a religion has been at the forefront of violent extremism in the twenty-first century.

History has taught us about past conflicts. Today, advances in media technology have brought current world conflicts straight into our living rooms. Many people around the world saw the horrific attacks on the

World Trade Center in New York live on their television screens. The 24-hour news channels, access to news online as it happens, and the sharing of news stories in social media enable us to be constantly updated as each terrorist incident unfolds. As Hoover (2006, p.1) argues, it is the media that has brought religion to the centre of our attention through its continuous coverage and by leading the audience to depend on media for information about religions, particularly Islam.

Immigration and terrorism have now become central political issues in Western countries where the increase in population diversity has made many members of the majority community worried, sceptical, and apprehensive of 'other' cultures. Many politicians have made inroads in these climates of fear and are dividing communities. The media could play the vital role of creating a better society by playing a constructive role in the immigration and terrorism debates. At present, research overwhelmingly shows that the role of the media is far from being constructive.

While politicians in the West have been struggling to grapple with the rise of terrorism and are finding themselves in the tangled web of one war after another without much thought about the consequences of exacerbating the crises, the Western media has failed to play the crucial role of making politicians accountable and helping communities that are scarred by divisions come together. The silent majority from communities find themselves in the crossfire between the rise of Islamophobic hate crimes on the one hand and the increase of radicalisation on the other hand. Provocative headlines against Islam and Muslims in the British media have become a regular feature, which is not helpful to reducing tensions between communities.

It is not only Muslims who find their faith to be attacked and stereotyped by the media. Jews and Christians also consider the British media to be generally anti-religion and not fairly representing their respective faiths. Whether it is media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the coverage of the role of Christian beliefs against homosexuality, or the child sex abuse scandals in the Catholic Church, religious groups are not happy with the way the secular British media has portrayed their religions. Followers of other religions in Britain, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, and so on, are also disappointed with a media that is

obsessed with Islam and a media that undermines the important roles religions play among the communities.

Religion in the media is a relatively new field in academia—dating back only a few decades—but a lot of work has been done in this area, particularly in the United States. It is not a widely studied subject in Britain compared to the USA, though it is growing as an emerging field. Unfortunately, even in the USA, linguists have shown little interest in religion in the media. Linguists have focused heavily on media discourse, and recently, they have started to take interest in religious discourse; but how language is used in the media to represent religions has not been considered an area in which linguists can contribute.

It is at the backdrop of this uncomfortable relationship between religion and media—and the lack of research in language, religion, and media—that this book has been written. The main purpose of this book is to linguistically analyse religion in the media and investigate how the audiences that belong to different faiths as well as those with no faith respond to media representations of religions. As a result of this analysis, it is hoped that a new interdisciplinary field of research will emerge so that religion in the media will be studied from a linguistic perspective.

The innovative aspects of this study include studying media representations of the three Abrahamic religions in British media together and incorporating both discourse analysis and audience response analysis of those media representations. Non-religious groups are also included in the study of religion in the media. Studying the religious and non-religious groups should bring new insights to the study of religion in the media. Success of this humble project will be the development of a new interdisciplinary study that has more linguists adding religion in the media to their research repertoire.

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Introduction—Language, Religion, and Media: A New Approach

Religion is important to most people in the UK, according to the most recent census data. The censuses of 2001 and 2011 included an optional religion question, which showed an overwhelming majority of people affiliating with a religion with over three quarters of the population saying that they had a religion in the 2011 census, making it an important aspect of the lives of the British people. Although 7.2% of the people who participated in the last census did not answer the question and although there has been more than a 10% increase of people reporting no religion since the 2001 census (ONS 2011), there can be no doubt that religion plays a crucial role in the lives of most Britons.

American sociologist Nelkin (2000, p. 14) defines religion as 'a belief system that includes the idea of the existence of an eternal principle ... that has created the world, that governs it, that controls its destinies, or that intervenes in the natural course of its history'. A functional definition of religion refers to it as 'a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of human life' (Yinger 1970, p. 7). Although Smith (1982) looks at religion as 'solely the creation of the scholar's study', Green and Searle-Chatterjee (2008, p. 1) observe that the discourse of religion has shaped major

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social changes in the world in the past two centuries. However, religion is increasingly becoming a subject of prejudice in recent times. Allport (1979, p. 446) suggests that the main reason of this prejudice is the 'cultural function' of religion.

In a democratic society, some take the view that the media plays a vital role in defending public interests by mediating between society and state. Such a role enables the media to have privileged access to the minds of the public. The end of the Cold War in the 1990s saw the media's attention towards religion significantly increased, particularly after the tragic events of 9/11 and 7/7. Samuel Huntington's (1996) theory of 'Clash of Civilisations' suggests that religion and culture are going to determine the global conflicts in the twenty-first century. Although political scientists debate how much the current global conflicts stem from a clash of civilisations, the media (particularly in the West) has taken a deep interest in religion and its influence on society. The separation of church and state ensures no role of religion in governance leading to secularism gaining momentum in most countries in Europe. Yet, religion continues to play an important part in the lives of European citizens. Although the number of people identifying with a religion decreased from the 2001 to the 2011 census, still 59.3% of the UK population call themselves Christians and Muslims are the second largest religious group with 4.8% adherents (ONS 2011). Therefore, religion remains a significant aspect of contemporary social, political, and cultural lives of many people and continues to be an object of media scrutiny. Religions are represented in news, documentaries, serial dramas, comedies, soap operas, and on reality television. Religions are depicted in films and portrayed in the broadcast and print media, on the Internet, and in multi-platform texts.

According to Hoover (2006), 'It is through the media that much of contemporary religion and spirituality is known' (p. 1). The reason behind the increased interaction between religion and media is that in this modern age, we are continuously exposed to and are largely dependent on the media for information. Hoover's later study (2012) suggests that it is 9/11 that led to the increase in media audience. The effects of the attacks would not have been the same without the media coverage, which has permanently shaped the way people see religions' contribution to politics, public discourse, social change, and political struggle. According

to Hoover (2012, pp. 76–87), media, religion, and religion and media together were important to the events of 9/11 and their aftermath in four ways. First, the media was the source of the national and global experience of the events; second, the media was the source of our knowledge of the events and their knowledge of us; third, the American media exports, such as films, are an important basis for the 'Islamist moral critiques of US and Western culture', creating a stereotypical negative impression about the West in the Muslim world; and fourth, 9/11 illustrated and confirmed the role of the media as central to a new 'civil religion' based on 'public rituals of commemoration and mourning'.

The growing media interests in religion resulted in increased awareness amongst academics of the complex interactions between religion and the media. However, Hoover (1998) argues that journalists lack the knowledge and expertise to report the religious dimension of news stories adequately. Buddenbaum (1990) suggests two reasons why the reporting of religious aspect of news stories is often woefully inadequate. First, the predominant ethos of the newsroom is secular, and many journalists have an antipathy towards religion. Second, news stories are primarily characterised by controversy and conflict, and this consequently misrepresents 'the reality of religion as most people experience it' (p. 259). Biernatzki (2002) finds poor representation and interpretation of religion in the media where 'it is either ignored or sensationalized—and either of those extremes distorts its reality' (pp. 1–2).

Morris (1994) argues that the news has the capacity to confront believers with 'perennial questions about meaning, destiny, and purpose' (p. 146). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theorists like Fairclough (1995a) and Van Dijk (2001) discuss how the media uses the power of language to influence its audience towards a particular direction. However, many commentators no longer accept the secularisation thesis (Berger 1999). Hoover (1998) points out that many news stories do have a religious dimension.

Research on religion and media has come from a range of disciplines including sociology, anthropology, religious studies, media studies, cultural studies, and so on. There have also been significant works on language and media. Although not as much as the other two, language and religion has also been a subject of scholarly works in recent times.

Audience response studies on religion and media have mainly focused on socio-political aspects with very little interest in language. Religion and media scholars' perspectives have mostly been on non-linguistic issues, such as sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and so on. On the other hand, if we look at studies on media and language, we will hardly find any work that involves representations of religions.

A detailed literature review will be dealt with later; for now, it is important to briefly outline the works that have been done so far, which highlight the importance of this book as a pioneering work in the area.

Religion and the Media

Religion and the media is an emerging field of study with a growing literature. Hoover and Lundby's pioneering work (1997) in the field set the trend by linking theories of media, religion, and culture, which they call an '… interrelated web within society' (p. 3). They conclude that the integration of media, religion, and culture leads to the understanding of mediated religion in culture (p. 298). Hoover later extends this by looking at media consumption from the perspectives of social theory and practice (2006). Papers in De Vries and Weber's edited book (2001) show manifestations of religions through mediatisation, contextualizing the contemporary world within the theories of media and religion, with particular emphasis on representations. Lynch and Mitchell's edited volume (2012) explores the relationship between religion, media, and cultures of everyday life, questioning how they implicate, contextualise, and shape contemporary society. Clark's (2007) edited collection intersects the secular media and the sacred texts to look at the negotiation between religious practice and the commercial marketplace in the present age of consumerism. Lynch's edited collection (2007) looks at religion in popular culture, whereas Stout (2012) examines the history, theory, cultural context, and professional aspects of media and religion looking at religion and media in terms of world conflicts. It is evident from literature in religion and the media that linguistic analysis is largely ignored, whereas people's manifestation of religious beliefs and the media's role in depicting religions involve language use in a large scale.

Language and the Media

Studies on language and the media are heavily focused on media discourse with some studies on news reporting. Van Dijk's edited volume (1985) is considered a key text in this area. In it, media discourse and the production process are discussed in social and cultural contexts. Fairclough (1995b) looks at media discourse in terms of social and cultural change with a view to highlighting '… the linguistic and discoursal nature of media power' (p. 3). Bednarek (2006) analyses some newspaper corpus, looking for an expression of opinion in news discourse, whereas Talbot (2007) brings together cultural studies and Critical Discourse Analysis in her attempt to analyse the representational aspect of media discourse. Fowler's (1991) work is concerned with the linguistic content in newspapers and it shows how language is used in the construction of ideas. Scannell's (1991) edited book is one of the pioneering studies on 'broadcast talk', which draws on discourse, conversational analysis, pragmatics, and critical linguistics to address the ways in which media constructs audiences and how the audiences respond to it. Tolson (2006) studies 'conversational media talk' with direct or indirect audience involvement.

It is evident that studies on media discourse generally do not focus on religion. In the current world order, a study of media discourse on religion will be a useful addition to the field.

Language and Religion

Most works on language and religion have been published in recent times, and therefore, the list of existing literature is relatively short. Omomiyi and Fishman's (2006) edited collection is a pioneering work in this area; in it, new methodologies and paradigms of analysis are explored to demonstrate how the shared interests of sociology, religion, and language impact social practices in various communities around the world. Porter's (1996) work is an edited volume about theological and literary issues related to the nature of religious language. Fatihi et al. (2003) looks at communicative aspects of translations of the Quran using 'componential analysis' of semantics—the study of meaning. Green and Searle-Chatterjee's

(2008) edited volume analyses the interplay of religion, language, and power. William Downes (2011) explores world religions and relates modern cognitive theories of language and communication to culture and its dissemination.

However, existing literature in this field does not take into account media as an important player in the relationship between language and religion.

Audience Response Studies

Hall (1980) talks about encoding and decoding of media texts where the decoded meaning of a message may be different from the intended meaning of the encoder, because the audience brings 'interpretive frameworks' to texts rather than agreeing to the 'preferred meaning' of the media text. Ruddock (2007) uses theories of cultural studies to look at people's perceptions of media representations. Stout and Buddenbaum (1996) look at audience responses to media representations of various Christian traditions in the context of institutional religious influences and expectations. Other research on media supports Hall's position that people actively engage with media texts rather than passively absorb meanings (Buckingham 1996; Morley 1992). Poole (2002) applies Hall's Encoding/Decoding model and finds that 'cultural and religious proximity is important for decoding culturally encoded texts'. Al-Azami (2008), in a study of negative media portrayals of some mosques in Britain, finds that many non-Muslims living near those mosques used their knowledge to construct media representations as 'prejudiced' and 'misconceptions'.

Despite the complexity of the engagement between media representations and audiences, there is lack of research about how people, particularly the various religious communities in the UK, make sense of media images of religions. This book attempts to compare the responses of three religious groups and the responses of those with no faith in an audience response study and it brings a new dimension to the existing literature in the area. The introduction of interactive news media through online versions of newspapers and news agencies means that the silent masses are no longer silent. The opportunity to react to a news item while maintaining

anonymity has empowered many members of the public to give their opinions freely. Religion is one issue that evokes a lot of controversies and debate in online media. This aspect is also covered in this book.

It is clearly evident that little in existing literature combines language, religion, media, and audience response studies together as an academic field of study. The only study that is partially similar to the present study is Baker et al.'s (2013) work that analyses media attitudes towards Islam using Corpus Linguistics and Discourse Analysis methods. This lack of interest by scholars prompted the necessity of linking all these forms theoretically in the present study. The study presents a comprehensive analysis of how language is used in the media while representing religions and what impact it has on people from different faith groups and none. The book aims to facilitate the opening of a new field of research that will extend the interdisciplinary area of 'religion and the media' to 'language, religion, and the media'.

Media Representation: The Three Abrahamic Religions

This book analyses media representations in the UK of the three Abrahamic religions—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. It is not possible to cover all religions in one book, so the representations of religions that share beliefs, concepts, and history to a significant degree are the subject matter of the study. These religions are mainly monotheistic (though Christianity believes in the 'trinity'), share the Abrahamic traditions, and believe more or less the same history of human creation and life after death. All three religions are widely practiced in Britain with Christians being the overwhelming majority, followed by Muslims, and then Jews. The role of all three religions is significant in contemporary British society. Although the importance of Judaism and Islam in Britain has increased because of large-scale immigration in the aftermath of the Second World War, it is the centrality of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East in current world politics and the rise of terror attacks in Western countries that have made these two religions much more significant than their actual number in terms of overall population.

The three Abrahamic faiths are represented in contemporary media from completely different perspectives. In recent times, the controversy of sex abuse in the Roman Catholic Church has created a lot of media interest; so has the issue of female bishops and gay marriage. Judaism in the media is more focused on Jews rather than its religious doctrines. Both these religions are covered in the media in terms of their roles in contemporary society without much controversy over what they stand for. In contrast, Islam is the centre of an overwhelming majority of media representations, particularly after the tragic events of 9/11 and 7/7. The so-called 'war on terror' has brought religion to the forefront of British media discourse at an unprecedented level. Although 'Islam' and 'terrorism' have been intrinsically linked in the past decade, it is Muslim women's clothing that has been of extensive media interest in recent times. The wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and most recently, the threat of ISIS, domestic issues such as male-female segregation, and the so-called 'Trojan Horse' problem in some Birmingham schools have also contributed to the British media's disproportionate coverage of Islam and Muslims.

Edward Said (1997) examines the role of media in determining how the rest of the world perceives Islam. Elizabeth Poole (2002) provides a detailed account of how the British national press represents Islam and Muslims through in-depth case studies of news reports as well as audience interviews, whereas Poole and Richardson's (2006) edited volume examines the role media representation of Islam plays in the climate of threat, fear, and misunderstanding. Eickelman and Anderson (2003) analyse the role of new media in reshaping different aspects of Muslim societies in modern times. Baker et al. (2013) use Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics methods to understand different terminologies used by journalists to report about Islam and Muslims.

Media representation of Christianity has been studied from various perspectives, but not much work can be found on how the media represents religion as a whole. Horsfield et al.'s (2004) edited book looks at the interaction between religion and media from a cultural perspective with particular focus on how Christian institutions perform while living culturally within their broader media context. Ryan and Switzer's work (2009) is a comprehensive study of how Christian conservative political power has been achieved in America by linking political, social, media, and religious interests. Schultze (2005) discusses the tension between

religion and civil society in America and the role of mass media in brokering an uneasy marriage between them.

Studies on Judaism in the media mostly look at media and the social life of Jews and the State of Israel. Shandler's (2009) work examines technological advances in the media and their impact on American Jews' religious life. Cohen (2012) offers a detailed analysis of the media in Israel and shows how Judaism influences media practices in the country. Antler's edited work is a collection of essays challenging the Jewish female identity portrayed in American popular culture, and Parfitt and Egorova (2013) examine the media representation of Jews and Muslims from the perspective of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

However, none of these studies include media representations of all three Abrahamic religions together under one study, even though the three religions have significant roles to play in contemporary world politics. A combined approach in academia is needed.

Terminologies in the Book

This book uses terminology that a reader without a background in Linguistics would not find difficult to understand. The term 'linguistic' has been used in the title of the book as an adjective of 'language'—not to refer to Theoretical Linguistics. Linguistic terminologies are mostly used in Chapter 2 where Critical Discourse Analysis has been done on newspaper articles, TV documentaries, and TV dramas. Analyses of the 'Register' comprising *field* (subject matter), *tenor* (participants) and *mode* (channel of communication) have been done on news articles/columns and documentaries in the same chapter. There are also a number of grammatical terminologies, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, active/passive voice, or tense and aspects. Terminology related to audience response studies are used in Chapter 3, including the frequently used terms encoding and decoding. These are explained in detail. Hall's terminology includes the terms 'dominant hegemonic code', 'negotiated code', and 'oppositional code', referring to fully conforming, neither fully conforming nor fully rejecting, and fully rejecting media representations, respectively. These terms are frequently used in Chapter 3 where they are explained. The media terms used throughout the book are not exclusive to media studies

and can be understood by anyone who has minimum understanding of the media. There are no religious terms in the book that a non-religious person or people from other faiths would find difficult to understand. This study does not include theological teaching of any religion; only familiar religious terms that are often found in the media are mentioned.

New Approaches in Methodology

The book takes several innovative approaches in the linguistic analysis and audience response study of religion in the media. Looking at the representations of the three Abrahamic religions together will enable readers to understand the contextual and perceptual differences that underpin the attitudes towards these religions by the mainstream British media. Applying Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2003) tools while analysing media texts will reveal the discursive power relationships behind these representations. An audience response study using Hall's Encoding/Decoding model (1980) will provide evidence of how the representations are received by followers of the three faiths and those with no religion. A comparative study between the findings of the audience response study and people's comments in online versions of the same media reports will determine whether people's views are more restricted while discussing them in a focus group versus giving opinions online where people can use pseudonyms and can be more candid. Another unique aspect of the audience response study is the analysis of people's views on the representations of their own religion and the other two religions along with the views of non-religious people.

Another distinct feature of this book is that some of the media texts analysed in the first two sections of Chapter 2—news reports/columns, television documentaries, and television dramas—are also used in the audience response study in the next chapter. Findings in Chapter 2 will be used as stimulators for discussions in focus groups and interviews in Chapter 3. Not only that, the representatives of all three religions and those with no religion will go through the same materials so that cohesive patterns of text production and reception can be identified and researched in greater detail. This will enable readers to observe the effectiveness of media discourse among

people who belong to the three religions as well as non-religious people who participated in this study.

It is important to make it clear that the focus of this study in its entirety is the representation of the three Abrahim religions in mainstream British media; therefore, the book will not cover any aspect of 'mediated religion', that is, the religious media such as televangelism.

Media Characteristics and Media Discourse

The media texts analysed in this book cover both print and broadcast media, though the mode through which people access them often includes electronic media. Each media—whether it is newspapers, radio, television, or the Internet—will have unique media characteristics, 'due to the unique nature of each medium and to the manner in which its audience consumes each medium' (Fang 1991, p. 2). Newspaper readers have the flexibility of scanning to find an article of interest, and they can assess the first paragraph to ascertain whether to continue or not. They even have the choice of coming back to the article at a later time. Broadcast media, such as radio and television, never had this liberty as there was no scope of scanning or skimming; however, these are now available in broadcast media and the audience can listen or watch programmes later by recording them or by 'catching up' via television services or radio services such as the BBC iPlayer.

Linguistic styles are significantly different among the various types of media. In broadcast media, radio and television will differ considerably with radio depending on language and television accompanying language with visual images. In print media, one needs to carefully choose their words in a limited space for optimum effectiveness, whereas time constraints are rife in broadcast journalism. Therefore, there is a relationship between media characteristics and media discourse where language used in a particular media genre conforms to its media characteristics. Writers in different media also take into account different 'registers' and 'styles' within the same media genre due to differences in their audiences. These include class differences among readership or viewership that can influence the style of a particular news media. For example, the headline of

a tabloid newspaper will often include puns, neologism, sarcasm and so on, whereas a broadsheet newspaper will tend to avoid such language use.

Although there are significant differences in terms of media characteristics between print and broadcast media, there is not much difference in the content because the flow of information has now gone beyond a person's choice to buy a newspaper or to turn on a television or radio. Due to the availability of the internet, access of devices like smart phones and tablets, and the popularity of social media, we now have information even when we are not searching for it by just scrolling down our Facebook or twitter pages. This type of overlapping between media is a form of, '…hybridisation within the print and broadcast media, whereby elements from what previously were different conventions are combined' (Corner 1998, p. 95).

One of the key communication differences between print and broadcast media, particularly television, is multimodality for which Semiotics plays a significant role along with language to convey the message. Scannell (1991, p. 1) says:

> Broadcast talk is a communicative interaction between those participating in discussion, interview, game show, or whatever and, at the same time, is designed to be heard by absent audiences.

Literature Review

Religion, Media, and Culture

Historically, studies on religion and media covered two broad categories —first, they looked at issues related to formal religious institutions; second, they looked at the antagonistic relationship between religion and the media (Hoover and Lundby 1997, p. 9). Approaches to the study of religion and media had not considered culture before. Hoover and Lundby's (1997) edited work brought religion, media, and culture together from cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary perspectives, because, 'the intersection of media and religion', they argue, 'must be studied through the

processes of patterns of culture' (p. 5). However, the studies in this volume centred on mediated religion, emphasising how religious messages are transported in the media with a cultural interpretation of religious symbolism. This is quite different from the premise of this book.

According to Lynch and Mitchell (2012, p. 1) '…it is increasingly difficult to think about religious phenomena in contemporary society without thinking about how these are implicated with various forms of media and cultural practice'. The edited collection addresses issues such as persistence and change in religions due to the influence of media and culture; people's involvement with religions being contextualised by media and culture; the role of media and culture in the religious and spiritual lives of people; how the study of religion, media, and culture challenge the nature of religious life; roles of media and cultural products in shaping religious lives and practices; and normative or ethical problems of the ways media and cultural structures frame contemporary religions. The book covers wide-ranging topics about the role of consumer culture in religions, how media has transformed the way religions are perceived in the contemporary world, the relationship between religions and material life, and so on.

Hoover's article in this edited volume, 'Religion, the Media and 9/11', (pp. 75–88) deserves special mention here. Discussing the significance of 9/11 for the interaction between religion and media, Hoover argues that the effects of the attacks would not be the same without its media coverage, which has permanently shaped the way we see religion's contribution to politics, public discourse, social change, and political struggle. Herbert's article (2012, pp. 89–97) observes that traditional institutions have lost the total control of religious symbols and discourses in public spheres, calling it 'de-differentiation', because the electronic communication system has spread religion across other social systems like commerce and entertainment. (p. 90). He concludes that the interaction between religious culture and new technologies is dialectical, that is, both the religion and the public sphere change rather than one completely dominating the other.

De Vries and Weber's edited collection (2001) takes an interdisciplinary approach to the relationship between religion and media by highlighting that no experience of religion is unmediated, uncoded, or unformed by cultural systems. Looking at the historical and systematic

background of the study of religion and media, essays in the book cover issues related to imagery in religions as well as religion and media in different parts of the world. Another multidisciplinary work that looks at religion and consumerism is Clark's (2007) edited book that combines disciplines like history, theology, media and communications studies, cultural studies, sociology, and so on. This work discusses how global consumerism and media technology influence modern religious practice. The essays in the volume try to unravel how religious individuals manage the tension between self and society in the consumption of media products. Articles in Deacy and Arweck's (2009) interdisciplinary collection explore issues of religion and the sacred in relation to cultures of everyday life drawing from disciplines such as theology, religious studies, media studies, cultural studies, film studies, sociology, and anthropology. One of the editors, Deacy (pp. 1–22), says that the authors in this book have, '…. sought to ensure that a more multi-faceted and creative engagement with religion' is done with an international audience in mind rather than, '…. the more dismissive treatments of religion that have been so much in vogue of late' (p. 20).

Hoover's study (1998) looks at the relationship between religion, media, and public discourse and it explores how media's representation of religion has changed at a time of increased public profiles of religions. He suggests that in order to improve the coverage of religion, the media should attempt to be more deeply connected with the religious impulses of the people. He argues that as religions have moved away from traditional institutions that journalists were used to addressing, a contemporary approach is needed to cater for the varied roles of religion in modern public life. 'Religion', Hoover concludes, 'is no longer thought to be trivial or "fluff". It is a serious, important beat that merits the same professionalism in coverage and in discourse about coverage that other beats receive' (p. 219). His seminal work, 'Religion in the Media Age', (2006) focuses on media 'consumption' or 'reception' in order to find how the media is integrated into contemporary lives of people. His study represents, 'an interaction between emerging paradigms in media studies, cultural studies, and religious studies' (p. 24), drawing from qualitative and ethnographic approaches to media reception. Hoover observes that media consumption in contemporary time is central to a person's construction of religious identity and practice.

With religion and media becoming a topic of increasing academic inquiry in the past two decades, Stout (2012) uses a text book format to provide academics a toolkit to teach major contemporary issues in the media-religion interface, examining its theoretical and cultural aspects and providing a roadmap to understand this complex area of study. Covering both traditional and non-traditional religions, the book tries to present religion as '…a useful analytic concept, one that aids our understanding of a full range of media-related experiences, not just those pertaining to denominations' (p. 2).

Marsden and Savigny's (2009) edited book covers a series of case studies on the media coverage of religions in conflict with particular focus on Islamist militancy and far Right Christian influence on American foreign policy. They argue that religion, media, and conflict are so 'ontologically interlinked' that '…to understand one, we must necessarily have the understanding of all three' (p. 159). The editors argue that Huntington's (1996) theory of conflict between Western and Islamic civilisation still influences the Western discourse on religion and conflict. Buddenbaum and Mason's (2000) edited collection is a comprehensive compilation of religious news stories in U.S. newspapers from the founding of the nation to the end of the twentieth century and covers key political, social, and religious controversies in the country, including the changes in reporting of religion over time.

This section of literature review reveals two things: First, an overwhelming majority of the studies in religion and media are based on American context, and second, whether it is from an interdisciplinary or a cultural perspective, language remains an elusive subject in the study of media and religion. This book takes up language as the main tool for analysing religion in the British media, thus bringing a new dimension in this field of research.

Religion in Films

Although not in the remit of this book, literature review on religion in the media without mentioning films will seem incomplete. Religion in films is not a new phenomenon, but scholarly works in the area are fairly recent. A lot of these recent works highlight the intrinsic relationship between

religion, films, and culture. Mitchell and Marriage's (2003) edited collection brings together leading scholars in the field covering different issues related to religion, media, and culture. Lyden (2009) looks at the religious function of popular films by emphasizing the role films play to cater for its audiences. He argues that there is no difference between religion and other parts of culture. 'Films', according to him, 'provide a set of symbols, both visual and narrative, which act to mediate world views as well as systems of values' (p. 44). Wright (2007) combines works of cultural studies, religious studies, and film studies to address all aspects of the interrelationship of religion and films. She argues that it is impossible '… to conceive of a narrative film devoid of any trace of the religious impulses that underpin the cultural construction of feelings, institutions, relationships, and so on'. (p. 7)

Torry and Flesher's work (2007) is a text book for students to help them understand religious imagery, characters, and symbolism in post-World War II American films from various religious traditions. The book examines the role of storytelling in covering religious themes while addressing contemporary cultural issues in films. Plate (2008) looks at the study of world religions from the perspective of visual subjects, such as painting, landscape gardens, calligraphy, architecture, mass media, and so on. The book covers issues related to art and perception, the iconicity of Jesus Christ, the relationship between words and images in Islam, and divine images in India. Gabig (2007) explores the interaction of religion and film to see how the concepts of identity and community among youth are influenced by films. The study explores how interaction with films can influence a youth's concepts of identity and community.

Several encyclopaedias/companions/readers have been published in the past few years on the subject. Mazur's (2011) encyclopaedia covers information on the intersection of religion and film, mostly in the English- speaking world but also including non-Western films and filmmakers giving a comprehensive intercultural account of the topic. Lyden's (2009) companion caters to both students and scholars; it encompasses the history of the subject and diverse issues about religions in films from various religious traditions to feminist approaches that analyse issues like redemption, the demonic,

heroes, and superheroes in films. Another companion by Blizek (2009) is useful for people interested in the intersection between religion and film covering some pressing issues in the field and featuring popular religious themes with an extensive bibliography and filmography. Mitchell and Plate's (2007) reader is an anthology of interviews, essays, and reviews from numerous directors, film critics, and scholars; it brings together extensive material from various sources and it is presented in a student-friendly format.

It is both interesting and surprising that linguists have taken little interest in analysing the language used in films where religion in some form is depicted. This book also does not cover this aspect as the only form of popular culture it covers is fictional drama in television. It is important that this angle of religion in films is looked at by researchers interested in the field.

Language and the Media

Works in language and the media mostly study media discourse from a communicative perspective, particularly focussing on the power of media discourse to influence the audience. Teun Van Dijk and Norman Fairclough have made extensive contributions in this field. Van Dijk's (1985) pioneering book looks at discourse from a socio-cultural perspective. It consists of essays on social, political, and economic issues in mass media discourse, and it highlights the '…social dimensions of the communicative process'. (p. 6)

In his own essay (pp. 69–93) Van Dijk proposes that news discourse should be analysed from a global perspective dealing with higher level structures, that extend beyond individual words or sentences. He suggests that news and schemata are related to each other in the news. He concludes:

> … to account for the actual structures of news, in which principles of relevance and recency also play an important role, a cognitive and strategic orientation should be given to the formulation of theme and schema uses in news discourse. (p. 92)

Van Dijk looks at the discursive power of media in a later article (2001) where he observes that it is the media, who by controlling the most influential discourses, has more chances to control the minds and actions of others. In order to simplify the intricate relationship of the discourse power circle, Van Dijk suggests splitting the issue of discursive power into three basic questions for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) research:

- How do (more) powerful groups control public discourse?
- How does such discourse control the mind and action of (less) powerful groups?
- What are the social consequences of such control, such as social inequality? (p. 355)

It was Fairclough who introduced the framework of CDA in the book *Language and Power* (1989)—a framework that views language as a form of social practice and studies discourse from interdisciplinary perspectives that look at how social and political domination are reproduced in text and talk. Later, a book with this title was published in 1995, comprising ten articles written over a ten-year period. The CDA framework has been extensively studied since then and has been used by scholars like Van Dijk (2001), Wodak and Meyer (2001), Talbot (2007), and so on. Critical Discourse Analysis theory is also the main analytical framework of this book and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter where CDA will be applied in analysing media discourses on religions. Fairclough's (1995b) book *Media Discourse* highlights the 'substantive linguistic and discoursal nature of the power of media' (p. 2) by linking media discourse with issues like intertextuality, genre mixing, and identity. He notices that contemporary media is both 'conversationalised' and 'marketised' and affects power relationships within a social system; from an ideological perspective, those relationships make the audience's involvement increasingly important in media discourse.

Questions of power are also central to Scannell's (1991) edited work where contributors look at how 'talk' on radio and television is used to investigate the way institutional authority and power are maintained, how media constructs audiences, and the way audiences respond to the programmes broadcast. The book draws on theories of Discourse Analysis, Conversational Analysis, Critical Linguistics, and Pragmatics. As Scannell explains in his introduction,

the book tries to move away from the Encoding/Decoding theory of Hall (1980) and the Semiotic model of Saussure, and it recognises, '…the liveness of radio and television, their embeddedness in the here and now (their particularity), and the cardinal importance of context and audiences'. (pp. 10–11)

Tolson (2006), on the other hand, looks at broadcast media and analyses how media discourses are created for an overhearing audience. The empirical study focuses on the 'conversational media talk' (p. 3) that is generally unscripted, such as talk shows, in order to explore the 'communicative dynamic' between participants in the media and the audience who watches or listens to the programme.

Bednarek (2006) uses a different form of Discourse Analysis where a set of values called 'Evaluative Parameters' (p. 3) has been used as the framework for investigating opinions in the language used by news writers. He used a 70,000-word corpus from hundred newspaper articles to examine these evaluative elements. An important aspect of this book is its emphasis on the context in which newspaper discourse is produced and the 'news values' that contribute to the creation of the news. Fowler (1991) finds language in the news media to be imprisoned by the culture of the time and commercial interests of the newspaper. "… because the institution of news reporting and presentation are socially, economically and politically situated, all news is always reported from some particular angle". (p. 10)

Fowler finds that the audience often falls into the ideological and institutional bias in the language of newspapers as "… people are not in general trained to see through the veils of media representation, and massive educational advances would be necessary in order to produce significant numbers of critical readers who could discount the bias". (p. 11)

It is evident that studies on language in the media takes into account issues of 'power' of the media that has the potential to significantly influence the 'audience' to behave in a particular way. Yet, religion being such a major topic in the media in the current political climate of 'war on terror' has not been looked into much by critical discourse analysts. This is why this book could be the initiation of this field of academic inquiry.

Language and Religion

Porter's (1996) edited volume is composed of 16 papers on theological and literary issues related to the nature of religious language and it looks at the use of language in different religious contexts. Ranging from ancient to early modern and modern texts, the papers cover historical, theological, and literary approaches to the study of language and religion, but as the editor explains in his introduction, the papers in the book focus on either theological or literary themes (p. 13). Fatihi et al. (2003) look at communicative aspects of some translations of the *Quran* applying the 'Componential Analysis' theory of Semantics. As an interdisciplinary study of Quranic translation and theoretical linguistics, the book makes linguistic analyses of the translations of the first chapter of the *Quran* in four languages: English, Bangla, Urdu, and Kashmiri. Jule's (2005) edited book applies the Discourse Analysis method to understand how language intersects with gender and religion. Fourteen papers of this book cover three major themes: gender and language patterns in religious thought, gender and language use in religious communities, and gender and language use in religious identity.

Sawyer and Simpson's *Concise Encyclopedia of Language and Religion* (2001), distilled from the 1994 ten-volume publication *Encyclopedia of Language* started the shift of focus from only language to the study of language and religion. Papers in this volume tend to keep language and religion as discreet subjects rather than combining the two as they focus mainly on linguistic matters. However, it may have paved the way for the interdisciplinary approach taken in the edited work by Omoniyi and Fishman (2006), which is widely acclaimed as the foundation for the study of 'Sociology of Language and Religion' as a discipline that looks at the overlap between the study of religion and the study of language. Papers in this volume tried to bring together shared interests of various disciplines to demonstrate how language of religion contributes towards the social lives of different communities in the world. In this book, languages interact '…in complex (but orderly) ways with religions' (p. 6) with the recognition that '…both language and religion are dynamic and ever-changing' (ibid).

More comprehensive studies on this new discipline are found in Omoniyi's (2010) edited collection of nine papers that combines studies from a variety of contexts and deals with the complex and multidimensional nature of change, conflict, and accommodation, and it establishes a close link between language and religion. As summarised by Omoniyi (pp. 9–12), the book covers a variety of issues, such as how social change accommodates linguistic change; how language plays a bridging function between distinct groups; how the Whorfian Hypothesis shows that a language can accommodate a religious culture into its language to change its worldview; what role linguists and theologians play in the development of a framework for the sociology of language and religion; how through 'lexical engineering' obsolete religious terms are secularised to fill the lexical void of a religious language in modern times; how sociology of language and religion explores the same terrain as linguistic anthropology; how language contributes in changing adolescents' religious practice; how using an ethnic minority language in both secular and religious contexts contribute to language maintenance; and how a specific genre of popular culture like hip-hop can create a link between the secular and the sacred.

In another edited volume by Green and Searle-Chatterjee's (2008), the interplay of religion, language, and power is analysed. The volume highlights the discursive power of religion in modern societies. The papers in the volume make comparative analyses of the role of language and power in the making of religion in different parts of the world in different periods. Languages like Arabic, Sanskrit, Chinese, Greek, and English are analysed by distinguishing between '...the power-within-language and the power-behind-language' (p. 8). Finding religious language far from being apolitical, the editors of the volume claim that '...the transcendental and universalist character of religious discourse needs to be understood as the rhetorical corollary of struggles for authority, whether conceived as obedience or truth' (pp. 11–12).

Taking a different perspective, Downes (2011) explores world religions and relates modern cognitive theories of language and communication to culture and its dissemination. Downes develops a cognitive theory of religion as a cultural ensemble of the supernatural, religious normativity, rationalised contents, and religious effect and motivation; shows

how the concept of a supernatural being works in human minds; uses epidemiology of representations to explain how religious mysteries are explained; highlights the importance to take a critical approach towards religious mysteries; questions whether religion can represent reality; and explores 'revelatory' or 'poetic' styles that stereotype religion (pp. 6–7).

However, as existing literature in this field demonstrates, the media has not been the focus of attention in scholarly studies in the Sociology of Language and Religion. Scholars of language and religion have hardly looked at how the media uses language to portray different religions. This is evidence of the importance of a book that looks at this aspect.

Language, Religion, and the Media

Baker et al.'s (2013) comprehensive analysis of language in British newspapers on Islam and Muslims between 2000 and 2009 is the only study that brings language, religion, and the media together. Using a combination of Corpus Linguistics and Discourse Analysis methods, the book uses a large corpus of 140 million words of newspaper articles looking particularly at media portrayals of issues like Muslim women's clothing, hate preachers, and more. It takes a multidisciplinary approach that combines journalistic practices, readership patterns, and attitudes surveys and finds overwhelming negativity in the British media against Islam and Muslims. The authors conclude that although the blame for this negative representation does not lie entirely on the British press, the reaction to terrorism-related activities by the media has played into the hands of the terrorists.

This is an encouraging beginning towards a new interdisciplinary study that this book attempts to extend. However, the present study makes important additions to this new field of research by including Christianity and Judaism and by analysing audience responses that should pave the way towards more research in the field. The methodology is also different as a qualitative study of actual people's responses adds a human dimension to this important new academic field.

Audience Response Study

Audience research in the past few decades has turned audiences from mere participants to an 'active audience' (Fiske 1989; Awan 2008). McQuail (1997, p. 1) calls the word 'audience' ambiguous because variables like time, place, people, type of medium or channel, content of messages, and so on are involved in the overall process of mass communication. Moores (1993, cited in Awan 2008, p. 29) highlights that audiences can include disparate groups categorised according to how they receive different media from the point of their cultural positioning. Ross and Nightingale (2003, p. 7) discuss five elements of media events necessary for audience research: 'the audience participants as individuals; the audience activities of the participants in the media event; the media time/space of the event; the media power relations that structure the event; and the mediatized information with which people engage'. Therefore, the relationship between the audience and the media texts has become ever more important in media research where through examining the social knowledge of the reader, we can know '…how people relate their knowledge of the world to the world of the media, how the interpretations they make of media texts fit or challenge their prior experiences, and the role of their knowledge in directing divergence in interpretations' (Livingstone 2007, p. 2).

Livingstone (2007, p. 12) highlights the 'dynamic of interaction between text and reception' with due emphasis on the 'context' in the audience response study. The textual factors include textual closure, preferred readings, generic conventions, naturalising discourses, dominant ideologies, or subject positioning; whereas the (psycho) social factors incorporate sociodemographic position, cultural capital, interpretative community, contextual discourses, sociocognitive resources, national identity, or psychodynamic forces. Livingstone concludes that 'both textual and social determinations must also be understood in relation to textual and social opportunities for openness, contradiction, agency, polysemy, ambiguity, and so forth, for these play a key role in the analysis of social change, resistance, and individuality in the production and reproduction of meanings in everyday life' (ibid).

Stout and Buddenbaum's (1996) edited collection is composed of papers that try to develop a 'creative synthesis of ideas between mass communication research and the sociology of religion' (p. 5). Looking at what the two disciplines can offer each other, the book mainly takes an audience-centred approach to the study of religion and media consisting of both quantitative and qualitative analyses of attitudes towards media representation of religions.

Ruddock (2007) looked at audience response studies from the perspective of cultural studies within the context of his own empirical studies. The book covers topics like the role of 'information' and 'meaning' as the central issues in audience research; the relationship between media use and perceptions of alcohol abuse in the UK; the complexity of having a theoretical basis of understanding audiences because of the fluid relationship between public and the media; and a 'decentred notion of media power' (p. 7) where life is seen as 'media-related rather than media-centred' (ibid).

While talking about the decoding process, Corner (1995) suggests three steps: the process of decoding the denotative level of textual meaning, the process of decoding the connotative level of textual meaning through the processes of implication and association; and the dependence of decoded meanings on the viewer's own contextual and personal circumstances.

Looking at television audiences, Lewis (1991) combines traditional queries on the influence of television with newer theoretical developments, such as semiology and cultural studies to understand the 'ideological role of television in contemporary culture' (p. 203). The first of his two empirical studies finds a significant gap between the producer and the consumer of news, whereas the other finding is that TV fiction brings more predictable audience response because of its 'use of more conventional narrative codes' (p. 205). Morley (1992) also looked at the television audience from the perspective of cultural studies questioning how social class and cultural differences affect people's interpretation of television programmes moving from '...the analysis of the ideological structure of factual television programmes, through a concern with the wider field of popular programming, towards the multifaceted processes of consumption and decoding in which media audiences are involved' (p. 1). He argues that the role of media in constructing cultural identities

is contextualised in how the media articulates public and private spheres in the social organisation of space, time, and community.

There have been separate audience response studies on different religions, but no study has brought all three Abrahamic religions together, which this book undertakes. Second, previous studies have not asked religious groups to respond to representations on other religions. This aspect is another new contribution of this study. Third, this book also includes perspectives of people with no religion, which previous studies did not incorporate. Finally, a comparison between people's comments in focus groups and interviews and in online versions of newspaper articles is another new dimension that this study contributes.

Representation of the Three Religions

Although Islam in the media has been widely studied by academics, media representations of Christianity and Judaism have also been researched to a considerable extent. A brief outline of works done on the representation of the three Abrahamic religions is given below:

Islam

Since 9/11, Islam has been the centre of intense media scrutiny and Islam and Muslims often form the front page news in Britain and in the Western world. Therefore, academics have also started taking interest in studying the representation of Islam in the media. One such widely read work is Edward Said's (1997) book on representation of Islam in which the author examines the origins and repercussions of the media's relentless coverage of Islam and argues that through partial media coverage due to misperceptions of Islam, the media mostly misrepresents Islam. Said finds some media representations racist for making ignorant generalizations about Islam and Muslims; observes that the columnists in major newspapers represent more opinions than facts; and says that the ignorance of the reporters stems from limited knowledge of Islam and its cultural practices. Although it is a landmark book on the subject and most issues are still relevant, it can be considered a bit outdated as the world changed significantly after 9/11 and 7/7, and the

emergence of the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and the aftermath of the Paris and Brussels massacre have again brought Islam and Muslims to the epicentre of media coverage.

Elizabeth Poole (2002) examined how the British media constantly demonises Islam and Muslims and portrays Islam as a threat to Western interests from an ideological standpoint that subjugate Muslims both internationally and domestically. She looked at the coverage of British Muslims initially in *The Guardian* and *The Times* over a three-year period; then she analysed media portrayals of Islam in two broadsheets and two tabloids during a single year; and finally, she conducted audience research to investigate how Muslim and non-Muslim readers respond to this coverage. Poole finds that the media representation of Islam is full of negative stereotypes and lacking common-sense objectivity. Although the present study has some similarities with Poole's work, it is also significantly different due to two factors: language as a key element and the incorporation of the three Abrahamic religions.

Set in both the British and international contexts, Poole and Richardson's (2006) edited volume looks at media representation of Islam in the climate of threat, fear, and misunderstanding; investigates how meaning is produced and reproduced in the news media; investigates the way both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences consume these representations; and examines critical links between the geographical and political contexts of the content and production of Muslim representations. The authors look at the social, cultural, institutional, and national frameworks that create and influence the news for a particular audience. Although Poole and Richardson's book takes a comprehensive approach towards media representation of Muslims in the context of Western Europe, the present study combines language, religion, and media in the British context, which includes media coverage of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

Eickelman and Anderson's (2003) edited book explores the relationship between new media and the public sphere in the Muslim world with a view to investigating the extent in which such media transforms the civic and public lives of Muslims around the globe. Papers in this book show how Muslims in different parts of the world use new media technologies to contextualise Islam in the modern world. Although the book provides a rich set of case studies demonstrating diversity of Muslim

'public media' around the world, it doesn't look into representation of Islam, which is one of the subject matters of the present study.

Christianity

Horsfield et al.'s (2004) edited book gives wider perspectives in the intersection between Christianity and media cultures through a number of papers that deal with international and intercultural case studies. The books include case studies from Pentecostal images in Ghana, Latin American telenovelas, visual culture in Ethiopian Protestantism, West African horror videos, and field research on Internet religion and the U.S. middle class. Also covered in this book are essays on media influences on religious education and current practices in cultural perspectives on media and religion. The book shows how Christian institutions are living culturally within their broader media context. Although the book covers a large number of issues, there is little on how the media represents Christianity.

A detailed analysis of Christian conservative political power in the United States is the main subject matter of Ryan and Switzer's (2009) book. The authors believe that the electoral successes of Christian conservatives that the Republican Party is dominated by comes from the conservative mindset in American politics in which political, social, media, and religious interests merge. Issues like women's reproductive rights, gay civil rights, or the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq due to the declared war on terror are featured in the book. Some of the major topics covered in this book include looking at how media is used by Christian conservatives to promote the gospel of Christian conservatism, examining the impact of the emergence of an independent conservative media establishment, exploring to understand the conservative mindsets in America, investigating the limits of religion in American political culture in recent times, examining how Christian conservatives use political power through elective and appointed positions, finding the role of patriarchy and religion on gender and sexuality issues, and investigating the responses to the attacks of 9/11 (pp. 25–26). These topics suggests that the remit of this book includes more political influence of religion rather than media representation of Christianity.

In the midst of tension between religion and civil society in America, Schultze's (2005) book looks at the role of the Christian media as critics of mainstream American media; the author addresses the tensions from a religious rather than a media-centric perspective and suggests that if the mainline religious leaders' voice is not heard, then the moral enrichment of American civil discourse will be severely affected. The book contains five case studies where Schultze documents the success of televangelism in drawing large audiences. This approach is an important contribution to the study of religion and media as it suggests inclusion of media in the debate rather than excluding its role in mainstream media. However, it confines itself to the context of America where the role of religion is much different than a more secularised British society.

Judaism

Studies on Judaism in the media mostly look at media and the social life of Jews and the State of Israel. Shandler's (2009) work is a pioneering study of how new communications technologies and media practices influence the religious life of American Jews. With history deeply rooted in the book, but the future also an important component, the analyses include the role of radio, television, museum displays, and tourism as a way of remembering the Holocaust, as well as the role of mass-produced material culture in Jewish responses to the way Americans celebrate Christmas. One of the key themes of the book is the significance of historical change in which communication is considered as important as policies and economy, and society and culture as a key aspect of historical research. Apart from being focused on America, this study covers little about media portrayal of Judaism, which is the focus of the current study.

Cohen (2012) makes a detailed analysis of how Israeli Jews are influenced by the media and how the media in Israel are influenced by the religion. The author finds that media coverage of 'religion' in Israel is more concerned with specific religious groups rather than theology per se. With special focus on the ultra-orthodox Haredi community in Israel that rejects mainstream secular media and has established powerful media outlets, Cohen suggests that even secular Israeli politicians try hard to get coverage in the Haredi media.

Along with distinctive clothing like black garb and their visibility in the political arena, the Haredim are considered as media stars and are given significant power in Israeli society. Although this study has great influence among mainstream politicians, it mainly focuses on mediated religion in Israel, which is much beyond the remit of the present study.

Antler's (1998) edited work is a collection of essays that challenges the traditional stereotyping of Jewish women in American popular culture to '...construct a dialogue about the ways in which popular images and stereotypes of American Jewish women complement and interact with each other to both distort and reflect reality' (p. 1). Covering important past events, such as immigration, depression, world wars, the Holocaust, and the feminist movement, the papers in this book provide a multiple of images of American Jewish women that include domineering as well as vulnerable, manipulative as well as quiescent, and alluring as well as unattractive (ibid). Like most other works, this volume also talks about the Jewish community in America and represents a section of the Jewish community rather than highlighting Judaism as a religion.

Representation of Judaism and the Jewish people are covered combined with representation of Islam in Egorova and Parfitt's edited collection (2013) in which various topics relating to the portrayal of these two religious groups in the West, Asia, and Africa are investigated along with the images of Israelis and the Arabs in broadcast and print media in different parts of the world. Drawing on discursive, semiotic, sociological, anthropological, and feminist concepts of representation, the papers in this book take different methodological approaches towards the study of ethnic and religious representations. The scope of this collection is so broad that it is difficult to find a coherent theme for the study of representations of either of the two religions.

The literature review in this section reveals the gap in literature in the backdrop of which this project was undertaken. It is an effort to develop a new interdisciplinary area where language, religion, and media come together with special focus on how the media uses language while representing religions or religious groups. The literature review demonstrates that religion in the media is a widely studied area; language in the media is also studied extensively mostly by Critical Discourse Analysts; and language in the religion is a relatively new, but growing area of research; but

there is little work that combines the three. In the current socio-political climate, it is important for linguists to take more interest in religion and the media. This book is a humble effort to initiate this new academic field.

Scope of the Study

The context of the present study is the situation in Britain in which both the society and the media are more secularised than in America. This study avoids mediated religion altogether and looks at the approaches towards religions by the mainstream secular British media. This book covers only the three Abrahamic religions covering news media, documentaries, fictional representations, and readers' comments on online versions of some newspapers. The study does not include the portrayals of religions in literature, films, or music as it will be difficult to make in-depth analyses of too many aspects in one book. In terms of content, the book makes linguistic analyses of the representations under study; conducts an audience response study to examine how followers of the three religions and those with no religion react to the same representations; and compares between face-to-face reactions and online comments.

Chapters in the Book

There are two main chapters in this book. Chapter 2 studies media representations using the Critical Discourse Analysis model. It first discusses six newspaper articles from the *Daily Mail* and the *Guardian*, two each on Christianity, Judaism, and Islam encompassing both news reporting and opinion columns. Two documentaries each on Islam and Christianity broadcast on Channel 4 and the BBC, and a documentary on the Jewish community in Manchester broadcast on ITV are analysed in the next section. Finally, one fictional drama representing each religion that include two episodes of a BBC drama on MI5 representing Christianity and Islam, respectively, and an episode of the adult American cartoon series *Family Guy* shown on the BBC were analysed.

Chapter 3 takes the news articles and documentaries analysed in Chapter 2 to the audience to get their reaction to the way the three religions are represented. Three focus groups each with Muslims and Christians in London, Birmingham, and Manchester, a mixed focus group between Christians and Muslims in London, two focus groups with non-religious people in Manchester and Liverpool, separate interviews with two members of the Liverpool Jewish community, and 15 responses to an online questionnaire by the Jewish community are investigated using Hall's (1980) Encoding/Decoding model. Linguistic analyses are also done, wherever possible, on the language used by the audience while reacting to the representations. Finally, comments on the online versions in five newspaper articles used in Chapter 2 are examined to find the difference in language between face-to-face conversations and online comments where anonymity can be maintained.

Chapter 4 summarises all the findings in Chapters 2 and 3 and it tries to build a coherent theme coming out of the research. The chapter also includes a summary of the results of the five hypotheses developed at the beginning of the project. It then discusses the main contributions of the study, the benefactors of this research, the contribution of this book in academic research, and some suggestions about how media and religions can work together to build a cohesive society. The chapter ends with recommendations for future study and some of its limitations.

2

Media Representation of Religions: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Apart from the news media, religions are represented in all genres ranging across documentaries, serial dramas, comedies, soap operas, and reality TV. Similarly, religious representations can be observed within film, broadcast media, print media, and the Internet and within multi-platform texts operating across media. This chapter looks into media representations of religions in the British media focusing on the three Abrahamic faiths: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Linguistic analyses of print, electronic, and broadcast media gives you a reasonable understanding of these representations that are intended to shape public opinions. The analyses of media discourse includes both positive and negative representations of each religion. Norman Fairclough's (2003) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory is applied to examine the interplay of language and power in the media to influence the audience and the concept of Register (Halliday and Hasan 1976) that analyses *field*, *tenor*, and *mode* will be used to set the context of each media text.

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Discourse Analysis

The study of morphology and syntax discusses the formation of words and sentences, and discourse takes language study to the next level by analysing sentences that are closely linked together to make a cohesive argument. However, there is no universal definition of *discourse* making it a contested term. McCarthy and Carter (1994) use it to refer to language beyond the sentence level. A similar definition is given by Stubbs (1983, p. 1) who defines discourse as: 'language above the sentence or above the clause,' whereas Fasold (1990, p. 65) calls it 'the study of any aspect of language use'. Gee (1990) calls it the way language is used in a social context to 'enact' activities and identities. Fairclough (1992, p. 28) also looks at discourse from a social perspective and defines it as '…language use, whether speech or writing, seen as a kind of social practise'. A similar approach is taken by (Bhatia et al. 2008, p. 1) who define the analysis of discourse as 'the analysis of linguistic behaviour, written and spoken, beyond the limits of individual sentences, focusing primarily on the meaning constructed and interpreted as language used in particular social contexts'. Jones (2012, p. 38), while talking about discourse as a social practise, looks at language as a system through which individuals construct their own social identities and social realities that help, '…to show who we are and also reflect our different ideas about the world, different beliefs, and different values'. Perhaps the most comprehensive definition of Discourse Analysis is given by Cook (1992, p. 1):

> [I]t is not concerned with language alone. It also examines the context of communication: who is communicating with whom and why; in what kind of society and situation, through what medium; how different types of communication evolved, and their relationship to each other.

As an analytical method, Discourse Analysis is an important and useful tool used by linguists to analyse the salient linguistic features of a written or oral text. Special attention is paid to the structures of the phrases, clauses, or sentences under study and the meanings attached to them. A discourse analyst examines a discourse in terms of coherence between the sentence structures and the narrative styles, the social strategies of participants, and the processes of production and comprehension of

discourse. The journal *Discourse in Society* summarises Discourse Analysis as a field of study by defining it as, "…an explicit, systematic account of structures, strategies or processes of text or talk in terms of theoretical notions developed in any branch of the field".

The power relationships in society also have a major role to play in understanding the context in which a particular written or spoken discourse is based, and understanding the individuals' positions in a social interaction is as important as understanding the words, phrases, and sentences used in a discourse. Norman Fairclough (1992) raises the importance of this aspect clearly when he says:

> If power relations are indeed increasingly coming to be exercised implicitly in language, and if language practices are indeed coming to be consciously controlled and inculcated, then a linguistics which contents itself with describing language practices without trying to explain them and relate them to social and power relations which underlie them, seems to be missing an important point. (p. 6)

Critical Discourse Analysis

One of the sub-fields of Discourse Analysis in which the power relationships are extensively studied is CDA, which is concerned with uncovering the covert mechanisms of social inequality and dominant ideologies. It has an anti-hegemonic approach by analysing the way dominant groups use language that appear to be common sense or inevitable. The primary purpose of CDA is to investigate how written and spoken discourse in a social and political context contribute to power abuse, dominance, and inequality. CDA draws on a range of multidisciplinary theories highlighting the inter-relationship between language and power.

Fairclough (1992) talks about CDA from five theoretical perspectives: (1) how language shapes and is shaped by society, (2) how discourse contributes to the understanding of social relations and social identity, (3) how discourse is shaped by relations of power, (4) the way discourse is a stake in power

struggles, and (5) how society and discourse shape each other. Fairclough and Wodak (1997, pp. 271–280) offered eight foundational principles for CDA:

- CDA addresses social problems.
- Power relations are discursive.
- Discourse constitutes society and culture and is constituted by them.
- Discourse does ideological work—representing, constructing society, and reproducing unequal relations of power.
- Discourse is historical—connected to previous, contemporary, and subsequent discourses.
- Relations between text and society are mediated and a socio-cognitive approach is needed to understand these links.
- Discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory and implies a systematic methodology and an investigation of context.
- Discourse is a form of social action.

Van Dijk (2001, p. 355) talks about 'power as control' in CDA and finds that, '…access to specific forms of discourse—for example, those of politics, the media, or science—is itself a power resource'. He suggests that people's actions can be indirectly controlled by influencing their minds. He concludes that those groups who control most influential discourse also have more chances to control the minds and actions of others. Van Dijk suggests splitting the issue of discursive power into some basic questions for CDA research:

- How do (more) powerful groups control public discourse?
- How does such discourse control the mind and action of (less) powerful groups?
- What are the social consequences of such control, such as social inequality?

Media Discourse

The media is part of the cultural and political environment. The media operates in and looks at the world through existing frameworks of understanding or discourse (Moore et al., p. 7). According to Hall et al.

(2000, p. 648), the media determines whether an event is significant and informs people how to understand these events. We are constantly bombarded with media messages in our everyday life as Talbot (2007, p. 4) observes, 'Media discourse circulates in and across institutions and it is deeply embedded in the daily life and daily interaction of almost everyone'. Media represents the society around it and shapes social practises to a large extent but has inherent ideologies and is a medium for the reproduction of ideologies and the operation of power relations in a particular social context. The disseminations are made through the lens of the media professionals who, '…are able to write or speak in authoritative ways about the world, making claims to know what other people feel or what is really happening which few others in society would get away with' (Matheson 2005, p. 2). Media discourse, therefore, is the spoken or written interactions that take place through a medium intended for a non-present reader, listener, or viewer (O'Keeffe 2011, p. 441). The purpose is to influence the audience so that it views the world as intended by the encoder of the media message. They are often successful as the power of the language used in the media often shapes, reinforces, and alters our opinions about the world around us (Macarro 2002, p. 13).

The growing influence of media in our everyday life has led to increased interest among scholars in Linguistics and Media Studies to analyse how media discourse shapes present day social practise. Duranti (1986, p. 243) suggests that speakers and audiences are equals because,' …every act of speaking is directed to and must be ratified by an audience'. Fairclough (1995a, p. 16) says that textual analysis alone is not enough to uncover media discourse, so it should be complemented by the analysis of text production and reception as well.

CDA is an appropriate conceptual and theoretical framework for the analysis of news reporting due to the kinds of questions it asks, such as, who has the power to control whom. It is often argued that in a democratic society, the press plays a vital role in defending public interest by mediating between society and state. Such a role enables the media privileged access to the minds of the public. It is the media, therefore, that has more chances to control the minds of others by controlling the most influential discourses (Van Dijk 2001, p. 355).

Analysing discourse in the media is no different than analysing any other discourse and sociocultural practises (Fairclough 1995a, p. 19).

Media institutions are integral parts of the social fabric they are surrounded by and represent the social events that happen in that social environment, albeit from their own ideological perspectives. However, the structural and stylistic features in the media are significantly different than other discursive practises. Even within the media, there are differences among the various media genres due to multiple media characteristics. Some of the distinctive linguistic features of media language, particularly that of news media include short sentences, increased use of passives, frequency of modality, and in news headlines, grammatical oddity. As society changes over time, the language in media also undergoes changes. Hundt and Mair (1999) notice (cited in Durant and Lambrou 2009, p. 195) linguistic changes in news reports between 1960 and 1990 when an increase in first and second person pronouns, contractions, sentence initial conjunctions, phrasal verbs, and progressive aspects could be found over the 30-year period.

Fairclough (1995, pp. 33–34) summarises works on analytical approaches to media Discourse Analysis into eight key elements:

- Wider changes in society and culture lead to changes in media discourse practises.
- Analysis should include language and 'texture' as well as visual images and sound effects.
- Text analysis should be complemented by analysis of text production and consumption.
- Analysing the institutional and wider social and cultural context of media practises includes relationships of power and ideologies.
- Text analysis should include both linguistic and intertextual analysis in terms of genres and discourses.
- Multi-functionality includes textual analysis in terms of representation and the constitution of relations and identities as simultaneous processes of texts.
- Textual analysis should be at all linguistic levels—phonological, grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and so on.
- The relationship between texts and society/culture should be seen dialectically.

Scholars have analysed media discourse from different analytical frameworks and approaches. Prominent among them include Conversation Analysis by Greatbatch; Critical Discourse Analysis (sociocognitive) by Van Dijk; Critical Discourse Analysis (discourse practise) by Fariclough; Cultural Studies by Allan; Structural Discourse Analysis by Bell; Reception Analysis by Richardson; and Grammar of Visual Design by Kress and van Leeuwen (Bell and Garrett 1998).

Discourse analysis of media representation of religions is not a common area of academic inquiry. The areas that have been extensively researched are media Discourse Analysis and religion and media, but few studies looked at religion and media from linguistic perspectives. Linguists so far have been mostly engaged in researching media discourse on politics and current affairs, but not as much on religion.

This chapter includes detailed analyses of media texts that represent the three Abrahamic religions in mainstream British media. These analyses will be divided into three major sections: (a) News Reporting, (b) Documentaries, and (c) Fictional Representations.

'News is the end-product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories' (Hall et al. 2000, p. 645). This section discusses how news reports and newspaper columns in print media and documentaries and fictional drama in broadcast media represent different religions. There will be detailed discussions on the characteristics of news reporting with special emphasis on the concept of *objectivity*, which implies that news stories tend not to contain the opinion of the writer, but instead contain the opinions of people whom the writer interviews.

The three religions under study—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—have significant political roles in the contemporary world. Although these religions have aspects of shared history, the geo-political climate in the past few decades have brought them head to head, and various conflicts in different parts of the world have some links to the religious doctrines of these Abrahamic religions; although the main reason for these conflicts tends to be political rather than theological. Another aspect that is crucial in creating media interest in this area is increased immigration in Western countries with a large number of Muslims from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East migrating to Western societies but still opting to practise

their faith openly. Islam, which had been of little significance in these societies until the recent past, has suddenly become a central element in political and media discourse, largely due to the terrorism-related problems in the new millennium. The Arab-Israeli conflict is central to the politics in Europe and the USA and often the tension between Muslims and Jews in the Middle East transcends geographical boundaries with intermittent wars in Gaza playing a divisive factor among politicians, communities, and the media. On the other hand, although Christianity as a faith does not create media headlines for the wrong reasons, and in many situations, it plays a positive role in inter-faith dialogues, the very fact that the largest religion in Western societies is Christianity, but Islam still grabs all the media headlines, affects how some Christians perceive Muslims. Another reason for enhanced media attention on religions in recent times is the challenge Western secular societies face due to increased religiosity among Muslims and Jews. Controversies related to halal and kosher ways of slaughtering and hijab and gender segregation issues among Muslims (and to some extent Jews) have brought religion at the forefront of media discourse.

The analyses of media texts include both positive and negative representations of the three religions under study so that a balance can be achieved; although a majority of the contemporary media representations portray religions negatively. The purpose of this study is not to portray media as anti-religious but to represent the reality of media representation of religions in contemporary Britain.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Religions in the Media

News Reporting

This section takes an in-depth analysis of some news stories on the three Abrahamic religions in mainstream British newspapers. Fairclough's (2003) CDA is the main analytical framework in analysing media representations of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Fairclough (2003,

pp. 23–28) categorises discourse structures into internal and external relations with the former comprising analysis of vocabulary and grammar within a text. He also looks at the meaning of the texts in terms of action, representation, and identification. His external factors consist of social effects and personal beliefs of the authors and are broken into social events, social practises, and social structures.

However, CDA is not the only framework of analysis in this study as some important aspects of Discourse Analysis will be used as the starting point for analysing each text. The concept of the Register comprising *field, tenor,* and *mode* (Halliday and Hasan 1976) contextualises the media text along with the CDA of the article. *Field* refers to the subject matter of the text and talks about the activities involved; *tenor* discusses the roles of the participants in an interaction and looks at its relative status or power; and *mode* is the channel of communication examining the language closer.

The analysis begins with Islam followed by Christianity and Judaism.

Islam

There is hardly any news media that is not affiliated with a particular political or influential group. Obvious differences exist in the way news is reported due to ideological differences between different media institutions. Fowler (1991, p. 10) suggests that all news is reported from a particular angle as news reporting and presentation are socially, economically, and politically situated. Therefore, it is not surprising that an overwhelming majority of the articles in British newspapers on Islam are negative. Recent studies suggest that Islam is positioned as a 'threat to security' by the British news media and that Islam is incompatible to the mainstream British way of life (Moore et al. 2008; Poole and Richardson 2006). A Cardiff university study on media representation of Islam in Britain (Moore et al. 2008) analysed 974 newspaper articles about British Muslims between 2000 and 2008 and found that 80% of the discourses about Muslims in the British press, particularly in the tabloids, associate Islam and Muslims with threats, problems, or in opposition to dominant British values (p. 3). The study observed that the subject of discussion, the British

Muslim community, was rarely used as sources in these reports (p. 20). An interesting aspect of this research was the comparison of coverage between Islam and other religions. Although the study could not find explicit value judgments in approximately one-half of the comparisons, where there were value judgments, negative assessments of Islam outnumbered positive ones by more than four to one, again prominently in the tabloids (p. 21). Another research commissioned by the Mayor of London (Greater London Authority 2007) found that 91% of stories about Muslims in any given week used abusive and inflammatory language about Muslims with terrorism being a major theme. Corpus analysis in a recent study by Baker et al. (2013) on the British media's attitude towards Islam found some '… explicitly Islamophobic representations, particularly in the right-leaning tabloids' (p. 254); however, the main finding was subtle and ambivalent language that '…indirectly contributes to negative stereotypes' (p. 255). Said (1978, cited in Richardson 2004, p. 5) calls this negative approach by the Western media towards Islam as orientalism in which Westerners consider non-Western cultures as the 'other'. *Orientalism* is defined as '… systems of representation framed by the hegemonic political forces of colonialism, post-colonialism, and neo-colonialism, which act towards bringing "the Orient" into "Western" consciousness, Western dispensation, and under Western dominion'. (ibid). Poole (2002), while discussing the 'Islam versus West' attitude in the British media, says:

> The creation of a dichotomy between Islam and the West is a consequence of this, presented in the press along a series of binary oppositions in which the West stands for rational, humane, developed and superior, and Islam for aberrant, underdeveloped and inferior. (p. 43)

Fairclough (2003, p. 23) calls newspaper reporting as a 'social practise' to create a product that can attract its readers based on their research on what the readers want. The headlines of these reports are such that would appeal to the readers' curious minds so that they are influenced to purchase the product. According to journalist and media critic Roy Greenslade (2004, cited in Johansson 2007, p. 7) the tabloids are, '…illiberal, reactionary, negative, pessimistic and infected with a sentimentality which appeals to readers' emotions rather than their intellect. They play to the gallery. They whip up the mob. (…) They appeal to the basest of human instincts'.

Both the newspaper articles about Islam have been taken from the tabloid the *Daily Mail*. The first article is clearly negative where male female segregation of Islam comes under the spotlight from a specific ideological perspective. The second article that talks about Muslim converts in the UK is relatively positive compared to the first one; although some subtle linguistic and semiotic aspects of negativity exist. This newspaper was chosen because of its inherent negative attitude towards Islam and Muslims because it is known to be of right-wing conservative alignment with its audience mainly from the lower-middle and working class backgrounds (Bell 1991, p. 109). The *Daily Mail* is powerful because of its vast audience rather than being intellectually superior (Van Dijk 1996, p. 18). This tabloid newspaper, according to Williams (1998, p. 56), introduced, '…a trend in the British press to the polarisation between down-market, mass circulation tabloids and up-market, elite broadsheets with small circulations'. The *Daily Mail*, like any other newspaper, would like to take into account the views of its readers and ensure that the articles published conform to the perspectives of its target audience, particularly on controversial issues such as immigration, religion and so on. The negativity of its readership is clearly evident through comments on online versions of the newspaper articles in which an overwhelming majority of the comments show strong anti-immigration as well as anti-Islamic sentiments.

Article 1—'Inside British university where Muslims were segregated by sex: Shocking picture shows how men were reserved front-row seats while women had to sit at the back'; The Daily Mail; 14 December 2013

The *field*, that is the subject matter or the theme of this article, is segregation between genders in Islam, laid out explicitly in the title of the article. The word *segregation* is a negative term that historically referred to the injustices during slave trade and apartheid and implies the dominance of one group over another. The use of the word *shocking*, which is a favourite tabloid word (Bagnall 1993, p. 24), denotes the attitude of the article towards gender segregation in Islam. Using this word in the title is likely to create anxiety among the readers that this type of 'gender discrimination' is happening in a British university. The title does not say that this

event was organised by the Islamic Society of the university held at the university campus rather than a regular lecture session of the university. The online comments indicate that many people perceived it to be a practise done by the university lecturers. For example, one person wrote in uppercase letters, SHAME ON THIS UNIVERSITY, and there were also calls for the 'lecturer' or the 'head' of the university to be sacked, whereas there is no proof that any lecturer or the vice chancellor of the university were involved with this event. The sensationalistic nature of this article conforms to what Johansson (2007, p. 99) describes as the 'melodramatic handling of news' by the tabloids in which the negative news is portrayed in a dramatic and threatening style emphasising the dangers this type of incident may possess. The title of the article thus clearly attracts the readers' attention in which the viewpoints of the author is represented in texts (Fairclough 2003, p. 27).

The *Tenor*, that is, the participants in this article include Prime Minister David Cameron and a student right campaign group personnel opposing gender segregation; a spokesperson from the university who tries to clarify the university's position on this matter; and the views of the guest speaker of the event who defended the decision to have separate arrangements for men and women. However, the views absent in the article are those of the main organisers, and most important, of the women who attended the event. The absence of women's perspective is noteworthy because they have been referred to as victims of segregation policies imposed by men. The guest speaker of the event says, 'They [women] are forthright, not meek and mild as those who do not understand Islam assume', implying that the claim that women are victimised and discriminated in British universities by males are unfounded. Kesvani (2014) argues that there has been, '…far less discussion, particularly from female viewpoints, on the values of choice, liberty, religious identity and legitimate boundaries of self-expression'. She observes that in a debate in which the terms such as *patriarchy, misogyny, medieval,* and so on are used to refer to gender segregation in Islam, it is unwise to 'shut out the people who have been portrayed as the victims in all of this'. Campbell (1995, p. 7) argues that media marginalises minority voices by making them 'invisible' and calls this attitude, '…dangerous ignorance about people of colour and a continuance of discrimination and injustice'.

University Islamic societies are not male exclusive and women are presidents of Islamic societies in many universities in the UK. Yet, without the voice of the women, the article seems to have taken a biased position implying that men are the perpetrators and women are the victims of gender segregation. Camilla Khan, a former head of communications of Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), an umbrella body of Islamic Societies in British universities, says:

> Much of this debate is centred on women, and how we are the ones who are disadvantaged by such an arrangement, a sort of pseudo-feminist calling. As a female Muslim leader I find this problematic and deeply worrying—allow us to have our own voice. (Khan 2013)

However, an average non-Muslim *Daily Mail* reader is not likely to question the absence of a female voice in this article but would rather express disgust at this apparent discrimination as evident in the comments on the online version of the article. This power of the media to control the minds of its audience about matters of minorities is summed up by Van Dijk (1996, pp. 20–21) when he says, 'It is not surprising that, as a result of such coverage, the white readers get a seriously biased version of ethnic affairs. Because the average readers lack access to alternative definitions of the ethnic situation, and because alternative interpretations are hardly consistent with their own best interest, they will generally accept such mainstream definitions as self-evident'.

The *mode* of this article is that it is written on a topic of contemporary value in which the writer makes value judgments on the issue and also conveys the views of some people opposed to the concept of segregation and a person involved with the event. The sentences are mostly declarative with a number of passive sentences as commonly found in news articles. Adjectives such as 'shocking' and 'disturbing' are generally used for something extremely serious. In situations of power and control, use of language like this can be a useful tool for manipulating concepts (Fowler 1985, p. 61) and as Van Dijk (2001, p. 355) observes, the media has more chances to control the minds of others by controlling the most influential discourses. This type of mind control may happen to many readers of this article. Here the author's use of these words is

likely to make many readers feel shocked and disturbed; although the actual act is nothing but separate seating arrangement in a gathering of Muslims in which male and female Muslims voluntarily sit separately as part of their religious culture. Similarly, passive verb forms have been used that imply that the female participants had been forced to agree to the segregation. The article begins with the author's judgment on segregation, *'With women obliged to sit yards behind chairs reserved exclusively for men…'* and in another place it quotes the member of the student rights group who says, *'…women pushed to the back of the hall…'*. In these two examples, the words 'obliged' or 'pushed' have been used in passive constructions to make women victims without any indication what they actually felt about this. The word 'exclusive' denotes that the front seats were reserved only for men, whereas no evidence has been given how it was a forced act. The perception that gender segregation is a patriarchal phenomenon is presumptive as it is a culture in Islam that is accepted by men and women alike, and there is no evidence that it was different in this case. The consequence of such perception and the subsequent media representation in a seemingly objective fashion will influence the audience to act in a particular way (Van Dijk 1996, p. 16). 'Persuasive text and talk', concludes Van Dijk, 'are no longer seen as ideological but as self-evidently true'.

Johansson (2007, p. 50) says, 'The sole importance of news may not lie in its ability to convey information, but also in its structures, ways of creating meaning, and in its links to social and cultural contexts' Fairclough's (2003, p. 27) concept of 'representation' talks about the relationship between the text and the rest of the world in which the writers describe the events the way they want the world to see it. Fairclough observes, 'What people commit themselves to in texts is an important part of how they identify themselves, the texturing of identities' (2003, p. 164). Cottle (2000) comments, '…certain forms of news reporting—particularly the narrative approaches that centre the journalist as interpreter and not simply as reporter—appear to militate against fair and impartial treatment' (p. 115). The author of this article seems to have an ideological stance on the issue of gender segregation that it is morally wrong and is oppressive to women. The religious practise that has significant cultural difference from secular Western societies has been questioned from the author's

own cultural perspective. Looking at other cultures from the viewpoint of one's own is usually known as *ethnocentrism*, which refers to passing negative moral judgment on other people's way of life (Gil-White 2005; Hoopes 1981). Gender segregation is a religious as well as cultural practise among Muslims and is common in many religious and social events. Although there are debates about the extent and nature of this separation among Islamic scholars, it is not unusual to find this phenomenon even within the Western context. What is common in the Western countries is the flexibility for men and women to choose between segregated and mixed-gender seating arrangements at Islamic events. Segregation is by no means the most common trend in university Islamic society events as the article suggests that 'over a quarter' of such events have segregated arrangements, which means that almost three-quarters are not. Yet, the manner in which it is presented indicate a problem of high intensity. The guest speaker of the event, who was interviewed in this article, claimed that there was no enforced segregation, but the title and the introductory lines of the article make no mention of that and portray the event as forced segregation in which women are 'obliged' and 'pushed back' to sit at the back and forced to be separated from men. As Bernstein (1999, cited in Kesvani 2014) observed 'Guarding the freedom of choice for men and women is more important than preventing such sex segregation since methods of prevention can often cause more harm than good for both sexes'.

The *tenor* of the article includes quotes from all the people mentioned in the article. This is a common feature in news reporting to show the authenticity of the reporting. Almost all comments made by the people interviewed in the report have been cited in the article as reported speech with little paraphrasing. However, as Caldas-Coulthard says, 'The reporter only reports those parts of the exchange that are significant for him/her according to his/her view of the world' (1994, p. 298). This article gives a fair share of quotes from both sides of the debate by first quoting the Prime Minister and the person from the student campaign group opposing segregation before quoting the guest speaker of the event. Although both sides got similar amount of space and the quote of the guest speaker also features as a bullet point at the top of the article, the overall presentation style does not seem to treat both sides equally. For example, the guest

speaker of the event, whose views seem to conform to liberal views for not enforcing segregation, was referred to at the beginning of the article to belong to a 'hardline Islamic group'. Van Dijk (2000, p. 39) says that journalists control who to quote and how much and concludes that minorities are quoted less in the media. In this article although the guest speaker has good coverage of his views, absence of more Muslim voices, particularly that of a female, demonstrates how the reporter uses the power to control whose voices are heard by the audience.

A sense of national identity is another factor commonly found in tabloids that Fairclough (2003) refers to as part of the 'external relations'. The use of 'British University' in the title as well as at the beginning of the article reminds the readers that this is happening inside Britain and something that goes against British values. Quoting the Prime Minister of the country, who also uses the expression 'universities in Britain', is another example of overt patriotism coming from the article as if it is a big blow to 'British values'.

Newspaper articles often include images to support their claims as multimodal discourse is a useful tool to influence the audience's perception of events (Fairclough and Chouliaraki 1999, p. 146). This article includes several photos. Two photos show men sitting at the front and only one woman sitting at the back. The caption with one of the photos uses the term 'inequality' and suggests that men are given the best seats. This is another cultural difference as Muslim women generally find it uncomfortable to sit in front of men. It was not clear from the article or from the photo whether women were forced to sit at the back or they chose to do so. Another photo shows separate entrances for men and women, and the caption says that the university authorities were investigating that. There is no mention whether the separate entrances were for those who preferred to sit in segregated areas or it was enforced.

There are theological debates in Islam about male-female segregation and the role of women in Islam, particularly what the Qur'an tells about women. Some scholars (Ashrof 2005, pp. 35–67; Murata 1992, pp. 43–44; Barlas 2004, pp. 3–6) argue that gender inequality among some Muslims is due to male interpretation of the Qur'an rather than the actual teachings of the scripture. Segregation between sexes in Islam is looked at from different perspectives by Muslims and non-Muslims and

discourses in the media about Islam are therefore received by Muslims and non-Muslim differently. Fairclough and Wodak (1997, p. 258) find ideological effects of these types of discourses in which unequal power relations can exist between the encoder and the decoder, particularly in the ways ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities are positioned. The *Daily Mail* article on gender segregation can be cited as an example of such unequal power relations in which an article written by a member of the majority group on issues of religious minorities can create negative attitudes towards the minorities. The student rights groups whose representative has been quoted in the article monitors campus extremism. Through this the article covertly creates a link between segregation and extremism, whereas there is no evidence to suggest that these two are related. As Van Dijk (1996, pp. 19–20) observes, Muslim traditionalism is often culturally linked to fundamentalism in the media.

Article 2: How 100,000 Britons have chosen to become Muslim...and average convert is 27-year-old white woman; The Daily Mail; 5 January 2011

This article is about the high number of Muslim conversion in Britain, particularly by white, young women. News about Muslim converts in the media mainly links them to terrorism, for example, the Lee Rigby murderers, the nail bomber Nicky Reilly, the shoe bomber Richard Reid, or one of the July 7 bombers Germaine Lindsay. The 'Faith Matters' report (Brice 2011) this *Daily Mail* article is based on find that 62% of the media articles on Muslim converts link them to terrorism, 14% link them to fundamentalism, and 2% link them to non-terrorism related offenses, which means 78% reports on converts were negative. Suleiman (2013, p. 85) in a report concludes that, 'Converts are often seen to be rejecting British values by the media because British people are not commonly Muslim' and the attitudes towards converted women was, 'She used to be British but now she is Muslim.'

The *field* of this article is that a large number of indigenous British people, mostly women, are converting to Islam and the rate of conversion is high. Referring to a report by 'Faith Matters' (Brice 2011), the article

talks about the increased rate of Muslim conversion and gives views of some of the converts who tell why they converted to Islam. Unlike article 1, this article does not have too many comments by the writer, and the overall approach is relatively less negative; though there is some covert negativity throughout. The main findings of Baker et al.'s (2013) study of British newspapers' representation of Islam between 1998 and 2009 also concluded that the media mostly stereotype Islam and Muslims in a subtle manner.

The *tenor*, that is the participants include the researcher and the director of the organisation that conducted the survey and some women converts who tell why they decided to convert to Islam—all quoted from the survey with none being actually interviewed by the writer of the article. The article contains no counter-argument against the findings of the survey and no quotes of anyone opposed to any aspect of Islam or Muslims are mentioned. This is not a common phenomenon among the British media, particularly by a right-wing newspaper such as the *Daily Mail.* For example, Richardson (2006) observes:

> …Muslim sources are overwhelmingly and only included and only quoted in reporting contexts critical of their actions and critical of their religion. When Muslim activities are not criticised—or when reported activities are not labelled as *Muslim* actions—Muslims sources are, almost without exception, absent from journalistic texts. (p. 115)

Baker et al. (2013, p. 254) conclude that attributing journalists having Islamophobic motives all the time is an over simplification, which appears to be true through the absence of overt negativity in this article. How an article concludes often indicates the overall tone of the article, and this article ends with a statement of the director of Faith Matters criticising the media for stigmatising Muslim converts. This is another example of an apparent less aggressive attitude towards Islam and Muslims in this article, which was not the case in Article 1.

The *mode* of this article is contemporary, similar to Article 1, as stories of Muslim converts disillusioned by the Western society with some of them becoming terrorists often appear as headlines in the media. However, the article seems to emphasise that the average age and gender

of Muslim converts are 27-year-old white women as, apart from mentioning that in the title, this information is repeated four times in a short article. The purpose may be to highlight the gender and ethnicity of the majority of the converts, which is a positive approach towards Muslim converts as the common media stereotype of a convert is a mentally disturbed man committing terrorism-related activities.

However, quite a few examples of subtle negativity are in the article where the language tends to be of typical right-wing media sensationalism. In the title, 'How 100,000 Britons have chosen to become Muslim... and average convert is 27-year-old white woman' the use of 'how' followed by the figure 100,000 could make the average readership of the newspaper, many of whom are already prejudiced against Islam and Muslims, to be worried that the country may be undergoing 'Islamification', which the writer does mention in the article. Said (1997) says that public consciousness about Islam in Europe and America comes only through the media. Using the often negatively used verb 'fuelled' in the first sentence followed by the word 'surge' to refer to white women's conversion to Islam is not likely to go down well with the audience already worried about the increase of Muslims in the country. As observed by Van Dijk (2000, p. 37) most members of the wider community in Britain have little exposure to minorities and don't have any other alternative sources for information about them other than the media. Therefore, they are unlikely to question media representations of Islam in the same way as members of different religious communities or non-Muslims exposed to Islam and Muslims who would use their own interpretive frameworks while decoding media messages, as found in the next chapter.

Although the overall tone of the article is not negative, the image of two women with *niqab*, or full veil, has a negative connotation and is likely to create a negative stereotype against Muslim convert women, whereas it has little to do with Muslim converts. Images of veiled women are often published in newspapers or shown during TV reporting on issues related to Muslims. *The Sun* famously used the headline 'What a Burqa' with an image of a veiled woman when the former Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Rowan Williams once created a media uproar by saying in a speech in 2007 that some aspects of Muslim Sharia Law about Muslims in Britain could be applied in the UK. Karim (2006, p. 118) discussed a distinct

set of visual signifiers relating to 'Islamic fundamentalism' and one of them is 'the hijab worn by some Muslim women and girls'. These images of 'medieval' dress are used in the media to reinforce how women are 'oppressed' in Islam (Poole 2002, p. 45), a type of demonization of Islam that is found in both patriarchal and feminist cultures in the West (Nazlee 1996 cited in Poole 2002, p. 45). Baker et al.'s (2013, p. 204) analysis of British newspapers' representation of the veil found overwhelming negativity with verbs like '…forced, compelled, obliged, or required, or modal verbs that imply that the veil is imposed on them'.

This article does not directly relate Muslim converts with terrorism, but some subtle correlations exist between Muslim converts and terrorism. The following lines give the best example of such correlation:

> In 2001, there were an estimated 60,000 Muslim converts in Britain. Since then, the country has seen the spread of violent Islamist extremism and terror plots, including the July 7 bombings.

No evidence has been given how the spread of violent extremism is linked to the rise in Muslim converts. This correlation sharply contradicts the sentences before and after this comment by the writer. The previous sentence says that two-thirds of the converts are women, and the sentence after this statement gives names of some converts who became terrorists —all being males. As found in a report, converts to Islam are often described in the media in radical terms, '…assessing their propensity to engage in terrorist-related activities' (Suleiman 2013, p. 87). Tamam and Uhlmann (2011, p. 29) found in a study on representation of Muslim converts in the German media that the converts were covered only when a violence occurred or was expected to occur. The Faith Matters Report (Brice 2011, p. 16) found many media stories suggesting that people convert to Islam to commit terrorism. Although the article is based on this report, it deviates from the findings significantly on two accounts: firstly, correlating Muslim converts to terrorism, though it does refer to the report's finding that the percentage of Muslim converts resorting to terrorism is low. Secondly, it suggests that the increase in Muslim converts is an indication of Islamification as the article says that this increase has *led to claims that the country is undergoing a process of Islamification*. The

Faith Matters Report (ibid, p. 36) says exactly the opposite as it claims that Muslim converts accounts to only 0.2% of the population and there is no evidence of mass conversion or Islamification in the UK. The use of the word 'claim' for Islamification is interesting as it does not say who claims it, but the positioning of this statement might lead one to misunderstand that this might have come from the report, whereas the report says completely the opposite.

Media is generally good in playing with numbers and statistics to make their arguments more authentic and evidence-based. As Best (2001, p. 160) argues, statistics is treated as 'powerful representations of truth'. This article also uses numbers and statistics based on the Faith Matters study on Muslim converts. However, the manner in which the numbers are presented can create a negative image among the readers about Muslim converts, whereas the actual figures tell a different story. Let's analyse how the numbers and statistics are portrayed in the article, all of which come in the same paragraph:

1. *More than one in four accepted there was a 'natural conflict' between being a devout Muslim and living in the UK.*
2. *Nine out of ten women converts said their change of religion had led to them dressing more conservatively.*
3. *More than one-half started wearing a head scarf.*
4. *Five percent had worn the burka.*

Examples 1, 3, and 4 actually tell a different story than the one presented here. In the first example, it means that almost two-thirds of the Muslim converts do not find any conflict living in the UK; the third example suggests that almost one-half of Muslim convert women do not wear a headscarf; and thirdly, 95% do not wear the *burka*. If one looks at these numbers closely, they would not find them problematic, but here the negative aspects are highlighted in such a way that the actual numbers are likely to remain unnoticed by an average reader. It is interesting to observe the use of the conjunction 'but' at the beginning of the sentence that refers to the article's findings that most converts found Islam to be 'perfectly compatible' with living in Britain. This conjunction is generally used to contradict or question a previous statement, and its use here suggests that

the writer is sceptical whether this finding is acceptable though he avoids questioning its authenticity directly. As for the second example, modest clothing for both men and women is one of the fundamental teachings of Islam, so it is natural for someone to wear clothes differently after converting to Islam. The word *conservatively* is interesting here as it is not clear what it means as the study found that almost one-half of the converted women do not even wear a headscarf, let alone a face veil. As Tamam and Uhlmann's (2011, p. 29) study on German Muslim converts observed, there is a tendency of journalists to mainly focus on the gaps and not the similarities between the Muslim converts and the majority population, which leads to playing with number in this manner. They suggest that the responsibility of journalists should be to also describe other aspects of the lives of these converts, such as religious, cultural, spiritual, and personal aspects so that the public can get a broader picture about them (p. 28).

Christianity

Christianity has been the religion of the majority population in this country for many centuries and still is the faith of 59.3% of the population; though, there has been a 12.4% decrease in the number of people who called themselves Christians in the last census (ONS 2011). Church attendance and Christian participation have also declined during this time (Knott et al. 2013; Guest et al. 2012). Even in the United States where Christianity is much more deeply rooted in society, it is subject to negative portrayal in secular media. Ryan and Switzer (2009, p. 18) observe criticisms in the American media against Evangelical Protestants and other Christian conservatives due to their conservative stance on issues such as abortion, the death penalty, prayer in schools, and using foetal stem cells in medical research. Wright and Zozula (2012, p. 6) find that critics of Christianity portray Christians as amoral and hypocritical in their effort to '…discredit the Christian faith and those who practice it'.

Despite Islam getting the highest coverage in the British media, Christianity continues to get importance due to being an integral part of the nation's heritage. Many tenets of the country are based on Christian traditions, and the British monarch is still known as the 'Defender of the Faith and the Supreme Governor of the Church of England'. Therefore,

one would expect the British media to treat Christianity sympathetically, but that has not been the case. Media headlines about Christianity in recent times have been quite negative with the secular press often portraying the religion as anti-egalitarian, homophobic, and out of date, and stories of child sex abuse in church settings far outnumber positive contributions of the faith in society. A report by the Christian Institute (2009, p. 22) says:

> In general, Christians and Christianity are negatively portrayed in the media. …In dramas Christians are often depicted as objects of ridicule, moral hypocrites or cultish brain-washers. In two extraordinary recent instances, TV dramas featured Christians as violent extremists.

The two articles on Christianity chosen for analysis include an article in *The Guardian* on an American Christian young man's 'gay experiment' and a *Daily Mail* report based on an interview with the former BBC Director General on Christianity in the media.

Article 1: 'Why a Bible belt conservative spent a year pretending to be gay'; The Guardian; 13 October 2012

The first article on Christianity is from *The Guardian* on the experience of a heterosexual man in America pretending to be gay for a year. The *field* of the article is that a Christian, who grew up hating gay people, spends a year pretending to be gay and reinvents the real essence of his religiosity through that process. The terms 'Bible belt', 'conservative', 'pretending', and 'gay' added by the interrogative word 'why' at the beginning of the title give the readers a clear idea of the subject matter of the article. It is published in *The Guardian*—an overtly secular and left-leaning British broadsheet newspaper (Baker et al. 2013, pp. 8–9), which does not hide its political or ideological standpoints in contrast with broadcast media that tend to portray a neutral position (ibid, p. 13). Therefore, *The Guardian's* opposition to religious conservatism is clear.

Homosexuality is a topic that is often considered a taboo subject among some religious groups who are generally unsupportive of this issue (Besen and Zicklin 2007, p. 250). The Christian man in the article represents a

generation growing up in an environment in the West that is increasingly becoming more and more secular and is supportive of gay rights; but, at the same time, those young people who are brought up in a religious environment are caught between the 'increasing support for and acceptance of gays from secular authorities and a strong counter-mobilization from the religious right' (ibid). The person whom the article is based on is an Evangelical Christian, a part of Protestantism, which many studies found to be least tolerant towards gays and lesbians compared to Jews and Catholic Christians (ibid, p. 252).

The *tenor*, that is, the participant in the article is primarily Timothy Kurek, whose story of pretending to be gay for a year is told in this article. The writer is clearly sympathetic to the story and the overall appeal of it fits in well with the secular ideology of the newspaper. Therefore, the article is unlikely to create much controversy among the secular mass. There are mentions of some other people who were involved in Kurek's one-year journey as a gay, and the person who is highlighted the most and whose written diary excerpt appears in the article is his mother. The statement *'I'd rather have found out from a doctor that I had terminal cancer than I have a gay son'* attributed to his mother fits in with the tendency of journalists to quote people's statements that conform to the intended message of the article (Caldas-Coulthard 1994, p. 298), which here is to prove how extreme the conservative view against homosexuality can be in which a mother could write something like this about her own son.

The *mode* is contemporary in which the article tells a story of a man pretending to be gay in a society that has negative attitude towards homosexuality. The conflict between religious attitude towards gay people and homosexuality in a secular Western society is reflected in the article. There is an element of storytelling in which the one-year journey of Timothy Kurek is told sometimes by Kurek himself and sometimes narrated by the writer. Therefore, the writer resorts to a narrative style, which Bruner (1990, p. 43) calls, 'a unique sequence of events, mental states, happenings involving human beings as characters or actors'. Bell (1991, p. 147) goes further to say, 'Journalists do not write articles. They write stories.' In this article, the writer narrates the beginning of Kurek's journey to gay life, the ups and downs of his time as a fake gay, and the ending of his gay life culminating in a book along with comments by the writer through-

out. The style seems to follow the pattern of a short story characterised by use of short sentences, dramatic description of events, and a mixture of direct and reported speech, as illustrated in the following paragraph:

> *But it was not a straightforward journey. Early on Kurek decided to try to acclimatise to Nashville's gay scene by visiting a gay nightclub. Entering alone, he soon found himself dragged on to the dance floor by a shirtless muscular man covered in baby oil and glitter. As the pair danced to Beyoncé, the man pretended to ride Kurek like a horse to the disco music and called him a 'bucking bronco'. It was all a bit too much, too soon. 'I want to vomit. I need a cigarette. I feel like beating the hell out of him', Kurek writes.*

While commenting, the writer uses some typical journalistic language; for example, passive sentences such as, *'He had been taught that being gay was an abomination before God',* to refer to how Kurek was forced to hate gay people by Evangelical Christians around him or *Kurek also experienced first-hand being called abusive names* to show how he was subjected to bullying by the same community. However, an active sentence is used to show how Kurek's friend's family members were the perpetrators of an objectionable action by 'kicking' her out for being a lesbian, an incident that drove him towards this experiment. The mention of this incident is immediately followed by the writer's comment that *'Kurek began to question profoundly his beliefs and religious teaching'*. Implying that the kicking out incident of his friend by her family was inherently linked to religious teachings provides evidence of the anti-religious attitude of the author writing for a left-oriented newspaper. It also shows the stereotyping of the Evangelical community by the writer.

The writer also refers Kurek as the perpetrator in the first sentence of the article, attributing him to be someone who hated the gay people, but the use of the phrasal verb 'grew up' with 'hating' exonerates him from the negative aspect of his mental condition by blaming his family and the society that brought him up in that way. The writer's positive attitude towards the experiment is also reflected by the use of the adjective 'remarkable' while referring to the book Kurek wrote about his experience. It is interesting to note the use of the adjective 'honest' by the writer while commenting on Kurek's account of his experience in the book as it is paradoxical to the basic

premise of the book, which is 'pretending' to be gay that fundamentally contradicts with honesty. There is also an element of paradox in Kurek's claims that 'Being gay for a year saved my faith' and 'I found gay Christians more devout than me' without providing any evidence of why that apparent contradiction could be correct. Using the term 'Gay Christian' is also quite interesting here as labelling Christians as 'Gay Christian' or 'Straight Christian' is not a common trend in the religious community.

Most religions consider homosexuality to be a sin. According to Gross (2008, p. 77), 'The Roman Catholic Church, as well as many Protestant churches, condemn homosexuality unambiguously'. Gross's study found that homosexual Christians negotiate the contradiction between their faith and sexual practise by different means of identity negotiation, for example, '….repressing or altering their sexual identity, compartmentalization, reinterpretation, and integration' (p. 92). However, how spending a year as a gay helped Kurek to save his faith is a unique self-evaluation that perhaps needs further investigation within the religious community.

The writer's attitude towards Christian conservatism is evident in the title when it uses the expression 'Bible belt conservative' to refer to the individual whose story is narrated in the article. 'Bible-belt' is a term given to a region in south-eastern United States where Evangelical Protestants have an influential role in society and politics and is considered to be, '…a religiously conservative or fundamentalist region' (Brunn et al. 2011, p. 513). By adding the word 'conservative', the writer apparently attempts to create a negative impression about the people of the region. Mason and Rosenholtz (2012) found that the media consistently used sources from Evangelical organizations speaking on LGBT issues, but the messages conveyed in this process were more negative than positive, and the media was found to 'clearly frame' stories as gay versus religion (p. 4). The first two sentences of the article create a correlation between the society Kurek grew up in and his initial hatred towards gay people. It presupposes that he developed this attitude because he lived in a conservative Christian area, whereas Kurek himself states at the end that only a few people in his community held strong views against gay people.

The Church Kurek attended was termed as 'right-wing' by the writer, but he never defines what was meant by the term. Religious right wing often applies to '…a largescale, well-organised, well-funded network of groups which has a clear and limited set of policy aims deemed as

"Christian", which it seeks to deliver through the vehicle of the Republican Party' (Walton et al. 2013, p. 27). Evangelical Christians are often associated with right-wing views. According to a survey by The Pew Forum on the changing attitude towards gay marriage in America, although the overall trend was overwhelmingly positive, Evangelicals were found to be least supportive of same sex marriage. However, it is not clear the extent of right-wing views Kurek's community held as no evidence was given about the nature of their right-wing attitudes apart from implying that his society made him hate gay people and that he attended an Evangelical university. Walton et al.'s report (2013, p. 28) links American religious right with the Republican Party, but the article makes no such links with the community with any political party. With Evangelicals often associated with a militant attitude, the correlation is created here as well through the writer referring to Kurek's previous ideological position as a 'soldier of Christ'.

Article 2: 'Christianity gets less sensitive treatment than other religions admits BBC chief'; The Daily Mail; 27 February 2012

This article is based on an interview of the former Director General of the BBC Mark Thompson's opinions about Christianity getting less sensitive treatment in the media. Although the interview was not taken by the writer of the article, the overall theme of the message of the former BBC boss is similar to the ideological standpoint of the *Daily Mail*, which is supporting the need to remove discrepancy in representing Islam and Christianity. The article was chosen as it fits well with the main theme of this book; that is, media representation of religions, particularly because it gives the perspectives of a person who had been the chief of the largest media institution of the country. The *field* of the article is that due to Christians being more tolerant about its criticisms and Muslims being aggressive when their religion is attacked in the media, the broadcast media in particular tend to be careful while representing Islam and less sensitive towards Christianity. A key distinctive feature of this article that separates it from the previous three articles is that it talks mainly about the broadcast media in the UK; though the article is published in a newspaper. Hence, the article consists of an interesting mix of media domains in which the language of the writer contains features of a news media, but

the subject matter mostly covers the broadcast media. Throughout the article words such as 'religion', 'faith', 'Christianity', 'Islam', 'Jesus', and 'Muhammad' are repeated clearly indicating what this article is about. As Chung (2009, p. 161) observes, '…particular words common in certain kinds of writing occur frequently in those texts, and therefore provide good coverage for those text types'. Due to ideological perspectives found in newspapers in the reporting (Conboy 2007, p. 10) this article has a sympathetic tone towards Christianity, which is expected from a right-aligned newspaper like the *Daily Mail.* This sympathy is also observed when the word 'broad-shouldered' used by Mark Thompson to refer to Christianity as a religion is repeated several times in the article. However, the term seems to have been used for the religion rather than the followers of the religion, whereas the interview refers to a tolerant reaction by the Christians about *swearing and its irreverent treatment of Christian themes.*

It is important to understand the context of an article to put things into perspective. Buja (2010, p. 260) defines context as, '…a term referring to the features of the non-linguistic world in relation to which linguistic units are systematically used', whereas Hymes (1964, cited in Buja 2010, p. 260) highlights the importance of understanding the addressor and addressee in a given context. At a time when media representation of religions is under intense scrutiny by academics, particularly the negative portrayal of Islam studied extensively in the broader field of religion and media, this article seems to provide a counter-argument that it is Christianity rather than Islam that receives less sympathy by the British broadcast media. There is an interesting contrast between the title and the content of the article in terms of which religions get more sensitivity in the media as opposed to Christianity. Although the title uses the term 'other religions', the comparisons in the article attributed to the former BBC boss are almost exclusively between Christianity and Islam.

The main participant (*tenor*) of this article is the former BBC Director General Mark Thompson. The only other person that is quoted is the historian Timothy Garton Ash who supports the strategy of more sensitivity towards ethnic minorities, but unlike the whole article, which tends to highlight the sensitivities shown towards Muslims, he talks about similar treatment to other religious communities such as Jews, Hindus, and

Sikhs as well. Although the main tenet of Mr Thompson's argument that the discrepancy in sensitive treatment between Islam and Christianity is not right, the historian Timothy Ash's comments justify the trends in the media. This is a slight contradiction to what Caldas-Coulthard (1994, p. 298) calls the 'conformity' journalists maintain to the theme of an article while quoting people.

The *mode* of this article revolves around direct and reported speech as it juggles between quotes from Mark Thompson and comments by the writer. As the article is an excerpt of an interview of the former BBC Chief, there is a high proportion of words and phrases used within inverted commas in addition to the direct speech references of what he said. In the title the writer uses the term 'admits' implying that the media do not generally accept that there is lack of sensitivity towards Christians in their representation. In two other places comments like 'revealed' and 'conceded' are used for similar affect. The first sentence of this article, *'BBC director-general Mark Thompson has claimed Christianity is treated with far less sensitivity than other religions because it is "pretty broad shouldered"'* can be termed as the discourse topic (Van Dijk 1977) in terms of Discourse Analysis, but in Media Discourse Analysis, perhaps calling it a 'lead' (Conboy 2007) is clearer as, according to Conboy, it is '…the opening burst of language which summarises the main story which follows' (p. 17).

By using coordinating conjunctions 'but' and 'however' several times in the article, there is an attempt to provide the readers with the writer's own perspectives on the issue. As many as seven sentences begin with 'but', whereas one sentence starts with 'however', and in each case, the writer brings together two apparently contradicting statements by Mark Thompson. For example, the former BBC head shows his own sensitivity towards depiction of Christianity in some films by saying that he did not watch them, and the writer links that statement by starting the following sentence with 'but' in which Mr. Thompson accepts the logic of showing those films. The next sentence begins with 'however' where he justifies the telecast of a controversial Jerry Springer satirical show in which Jesus Christ is shown to wear a nappy. The writer makes a typical tabloid style comment when he says, *'Many said that no one would have dreamed of making such a show about the Prophet Muhammad and Islam'*. It is not

clear who those 'many' represent, but the writer's attitude towards some Muslims' reaction to previous incidents of satirical images of Prophet Muhammad is evident here. This is followed by another comment by the writer in which his attitude towards Muslims is manifested when he says that Mark Thompson's acceptance of this aspect was 'belated'.

Showing Muslims and Christians' contrasting reactions to satirical depictions of their faiths is one of the key themes of Mark Thompson's interview that this article highlights. The sentence, *'He conceded that the broadcaster would never have aired a similar show about Muhammad because it could have had the same impact as a piece of "grotesque child pornography",* is the best example of this comparison. By using the term 'conceded' the writer implies that this was known to them before, which a senior broadcasting figure has now admitted. This aspect continues to be of high contemporary value as the debate between freedom of speech and showing sensitivity towards people's religious beliefs is a hot topic in modern media discourse, and incidents like the Charlie Hebdo killings have exacerbated this debate even further. There may be a correlation between contrasting reactions towards satirical depiction of religions in the media by Christians and Muslims. According to a report by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG 2011) there is a steady fall in the number of people calling themselves Christians, but a rise in the Muslim population (also ONS 2011), and among them Muslims largely outnumber Christians in terms of religious practise (p. 6). This increase in religiosity may have developed stronger sensitivity among the Muslims, particularly about issues related to Prophet Muhammad whom they revere in high esteem.

Although the BBC chief states that race and religion are not the same and sensitivity towards the former is acceptable, not the latter, people of different faiths tend to disagree to that position. Focus groups, interviews, and online questionnaires in the next chapter show that Christians, Jews, and Muslim participants overwhelmingly accuse the media as being too secular and less sensitive towards their religious sentiments. However, the two non-religious groups give contrasting views with the humanists showing less sensitivity towards religious groups than university students (Chapter 3). As found from the quote by the historian Timothy Ash in this article, race is often mixed with religion among the ethnic minorities,

whereas the white majority can keep their religious beliefs apart from their racial identity. The DCLG report also found that, 'Muslim people (48%) were more likely than Christian people (14%) to say that the harassment was incited by religion; and Black people (92%) were more likely than White people (61%) to cite their skin colour as a cause of the harassment they had experienced'. This shows that race and religion are intrinsically linked with the Muslim population and satirical representations of their religion is often received as racial discrimination by Muslims. Weaver (2010, p. 688) uses the term 'liquid racism' to refer to this type of racism, 'where the sign-systems that make it up are entwined with not just the ambivalence of racist subjectivity but also an assemblage of issues, perspectives and contexts of reading'.

Judaism

The Jewish population in the UK are the fifth largest Jewish population in the world, and second largest in Europe (Staetsky and Boyd 2014, p. 4). Its presence in this country is small but strong with the population remaining almost static between the two censuses of 2001 and 2011. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) the number of Jews in England and Wales in the 2011 Census was 263,346 with a slight increase of 1.3% since 2001. Before being readmitted into the UK in the mid-seventeenth century after King Edward 1 had expelled them in 1290, the number of European Jews was approximately 120,000 due to the Jewish migration between 1870 and 1914, and it rose to approximately 300,000 at the start of the First World War (Gartner 1973; Pollins 1982, cited in Meer and Noorani 2008, p. 201). The number, however, decreased significantly after reaching its peak in the 1950s with an estimated number of 420,000 mostly due to Jewish people migrating to Israel (Staetsky and Boyd 2014, pp. 4, 7). Since the Second World War, the Jewish community has largely settled in the UK with many of them assimilating into the British way of life. Staetsky and Boyd's report found that the British Jews increasingly became part of mainstream British society since the Second World War, and a vast majority of them feel at home

in Britain with 83% of the people surveyed reporting 'very strong' or 'fairly strong' feelings of belonging to Britain (p. 7).

As found in a parliamentary enquiry report (2006, p. 3), the European Jewish migrants were subject to anti-Semitic backlash from right-wing political groups who associated them with 'spies and enemy aliens', and there was widespread anti-Semitism during the Second World War. According to Staetsky and Boyd (2014, p. 6), the Jewish population in the UK was not directly affected by the Holocaust as much as their other European counterparts. Endelman (2002) observed that the anti-Semitism in the UK had historically been social and cultural rather than political. However, the current situation in the world, particularly the problems in the Middle East, has changed the complexion of the problem with Arab-Israeli conflict, strong support for the Palestinians by the rapidly growing British Muslims population, and the British Jews' loyalty towards Israel creating, according to Staetsky and Boyd (2014, p. 7), '…a "new anti-Semitism"…based on antagonism towards, or open hatred of, the State of Israel, as contrasted to previous forms of anti-Semitism that were directed towards Jews as a distinct group'. This survey found a clear correlation between Israel's involvement in military operation and the number of anti-Semitic incidents in the UK.

There is a disproportionate gap in literature about Judaism and Jewish people in the British media between films/television and news media. Scholarly works on Judaism in the British media are largely outnumbered by works on American Jews in American media. Because the study of religion and media has been pioneered in the United States and that the number of Jews is much higher in America compared to Britain, it is not unusual to find this difference between the two countries. What is common in both the countries is overemphasis on representation of the Jewish community in films and television, whereas coverage on Judaism and the Jewish people in news media is almost exclusively confined to politics in the Middle East or news about anti-Semitism. As Wosk (1995) observes, the news media has little interest on the daily life of an average Jew and does not have any depth or sensitivity on issues that are close to their hearts, as according to him, 'modern media by its very nature is somewhat threatening to the traditional religious community'. Whatever representation is found in the news media tends to be negative towards

the Jewish community, according to some Jewish scholars, such as Sebag (2004) who said, 'The response to Israel in the European media, particularly the BBC and *The Guardian*, has long been prejudiced, disproportionate, vicious often fictitious'.

This study found few stories or reports on Judaism and Jewish people in the news media. The two articles selected for the present study consists of a column of a known supporter of Israel and a report in *The Guardian* on a historical claim of the Jews. There was a conscious effort to exclude the politics in the Middle East from the premise of this study, but that was not possible. Efforts to find media articles on Judaism as a religion brought little success, whereas representations on issues related to the Jewish people were found to be intrinsically linked to Israel, a link clearly highlighted in a 2011 report of the Community Security Trust (CST), a charity to protect British Jews from anti-Semitism. The report found that, 'Israel plays an important or central role in the self-identity of British Jews' (CST Report 2011, p. 10).

The articles chosen for Discourse Analysis and audience response study on Judaism are a column against anti-Semitism in the UK in the *Daily Mail* and a blog by a left-wing columnist of *The Guardian*, representing two contrasting, but influential newspapers—a right-wing tabloid and a left-wing broadsheet. There was a conscious effort to avoid news articles on the Israel-Palestine conflict and look for topics that deal with Judaism as a religion and the Jewish people as a community in the context of Britain, so columns written by people with clear bias on one side or the other were the only options left at the time of selecting the media articles. As stated by Conboy (2007, p. 87), newspaper columnists in their opinion articles play an important part in today's newspapers, which are no longer just the resources for information, but sources for commentary as well. They generally give opinions on controversial issues that shape people's opinions in one way or another, '…to generate further opinion and debate within the paper as part of its communicative style' (ibid). Online versions of these columns create a lot of debate in the comments section.

For the current research, finding articles that completely avoid Israel proved to be impossible, so both the chosen opinion articles have discussions linked to the State of Israel, but at the same time they also include issues about Jews in Britain and some religious aspects of Judaism.

Article 1: The new anti-Semitism: How the Left reversed history to bring Judaism under attack; The Daily Mail; 6 July 2007

The writer of this column, Richard Littlejohn, is a renowned journalist with pro-Israeli views and a strong voice against anti-Semitism in Britain. He has many years' experience in working for different newspapers in Britain and is said to be '…the best-paid columnist in the country' (Conboy 2007, p. 87). The *field* of this article is the rise of anti-Semitism in Britain by the left, the Muslims, and some parts of the media, and the comparison between a sympathetic attitude towards Muslims and aggressive behaviour and conspiracy theories against Israel and Jews. Similar to Staetsky and Boyd's (2014, p. 7) concept of 'new anti-Semitism', the writer uses both 'new' and 'modern' with 'anti-Semitism' to refer to contemporary attacks on the Jewish people in the UK. The following sentence, referring to the TV programme he had planned to do for the BBC that didn't eventually take place—much to the disappointment of the writer, sums up the main theme of this article:

> *My thesis was that while the Far Right hasn't gone away, the motive force behind the recent increase in anti-Jewish activity comes from the* ***Fascist Left*** *and the* ***Islamonazis****.*

It is interesting to note the collocation of the phrase 'fascist left'. The *Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary* defines Fascism as, 'an authoritarian and nationalistic right-wing system of government and social organization', which means that by definition it is right wing, whereas the writer uses a new collocation to refer it to left wing. Historically, the term was used for the struggle against Socialism in Italy by the movement led by Mussolini (Paxton 2004, p. 5), whereas we can see the term used here for the followers of Socialism. This term is followed by another coined expression 'Islamonazis' in which 'Islam' and 'Nazism' are brought together as a compound word, whereas these two ideologies have no obvious relationship. The definition of the term 'Nazi' by *Oxford English Dictionary* clearly shows what it actually means both in the past and at present:

> The political doctrines evolved and implemented by Adolf Hitler and his followers, esp. those asserting Aryan racial superiority, or promoting

totalitarianism and the expansion of the German state; the German Nazi movement. In later use also more generally: right-wing authoritarianism.

Linguistically, these collocations seem to be used in a metaphorical sense. As El-Sharif (2014, p. 139) observes, metaphorical language can create awareness among the readers towards the literal illocutionary force of the message. Metaphors also, '…construct a frequent figurative discursive [strategy] that is copiously used in media discourse as they form primary means of semantic innovation by which a novel sense for some established word or word combination is created' (Warren 1992, p. 133) as observed in the writer's use of these two terms.

The writer fails to provide any evidence to justify why these opposing collocations were made to refer to leftist and Islamic ideologies, which indicates that they are used merely as sensationalist comments by a right-wing columnist in a right-wing newspaper. Throughout the article, the writer attempts to establish this theme that both the leftists and the Islamists are the new Fascists and Nazis, respectively, who are leading modern anti-Semitism in Britain.

As far as the *tenor* is concerned, the writer talks about several persons in the article and uses their quotes to provide evidence in support of his arguments. Seven out of eight people quoted in the article conform to the overall theme about the rising anti-Semitism and the antipathy shown towards it by the left and some Muslims. Only the former London Mayor Ken Livingstone, who supposedly behaved in an aggressive manner against a Jewish journalist, has been quoted as a voice from the other side, but the presentation of Livingstone's quote rather confirms the columnist's viewpoint about the attitude of left-wing politicians like Ken Livingstone.

The *mode* of this article is contemporary and discussions on the linguistic style can begin with the title where the terms 'new anti-Semitism' and 'the left' are explicitly correlated. According to Van Dijk (1998), ideologies of journalists influence their opinions, '…which in turn influence the discourse structures of opinion articles' (ibid, p. 21). The writer begins and ends the article with his perspectives on an historical event in 1936 known as the 'Battle of Cable Street' when Jews and trade unionists together fought against the fascists. Richard Littlejohn implies that

the left themselves have now turned into Fascists and have reversed the history by turning anti-Semitic. By using the question word 'how' in a rhetorical sense, the writer indicates in the title that he would address this change of hearts by the leftists in this opinion article. He clearly states that the left has joined hands with Islamic extremists and insists that anti-Israel and anti-Zionism sentiments of the left have now become *'straight- forward anti-Semitism'*. He finds that trend in universities as well, as according to him, *'Under the guise of "anti-Zionism", anti-Semitism is rife on British university campuses'*. However, at no point in the article does he provide any evidence about the supposed correlation between anti-Israel, anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism, or the turnaround of the left towards anti-Semitism. This is another example of an opinion article written on the basis of political and ideological positioning. The '…contention that criticism of Israel is necessarily anti-Semitic nearly always functions as a straw-man argument.' (Hirsh 2007, p. 140). Hirsh's report also does not find any evidence that the left are anti-Semitic and concludes that, 'There have always been pro-totalitarians and anti-Semites on the left but they have never constituted the left because they have always been opposed by anti-totalitarians and anti-anti-Semites' (ibid, p. 147).

The language is typical of an opinion article using words and phrases like 'thugs', 'far right', 'cancer of Fascism and anti-Semitism', and so on. Van Dijk (1998, p. 31), while talking about word choice in opinion articles says, 'Words may be chosen that generally or contextually express values and norms, and that therefore are used to express a value judgment.' Another value-judged adjective 'moronic' is used to refer to the National Front and the BNP while narrating the writer's own story from a young Labour-supporting journalist to his present state as a staunch fighter against anti-Semitism.

One of the key themes in Richard Littlejohn's article is the way he brings Islam/Muslims and Judaism/Jews in a confrontational manner. Apart from using the term 'Islamonazis' to refer to some Muslims' anti-Semitic activities, he implies that the nation is too sympathetic towards Muslims but are insensitive towards the small Jewish population, that according to him are facing a rising phenomenon of anti-Semitism. His statement *'The synagogues have been replaced by mosques'* is an example of fear-mongering with little evidence to support it. The number of mosques

is bound to be more than the number of synagogues due to the difference in the number of population (0.6% Jewish population as against 4.8% Muslims). This does not mean that the mosques have taken over synagogues by force. His biased opinion is clear in his following comment about former London Mayor's attacking remarks towards a Jewish journalist in which he compares not only the attitude towards Muslims versus Jews, but between blacks and Jews as well:

> *It's curious how in multicultural, diverse, inclusive, anti-racist Britain, the rules don't seem to extend to the Jews. Livingstone would never have dreamed of being that offensive to a Muslim, or Jamaican, journalist.*

The writer makes a paradoxical statement by first giving some positive attributes of modern Britain and then immediately contradicting them by saying that the Jews are not part of that inclusiveness. Perhaps he uses those attributes in a sarcastic way to suggest that the Jews have been excluded from multicultural Britain. This conclusion by the writer sharply contradicts what the Jews feel as Staetsky and Boyd's (2014) report states that more than 80% Jews strongly feel included in the British society.

While referring to BBC's failure to commission a documentary on anti-Semitism, the writer sarcastically comments that a similar programme on Islamophobia would, *'probably have become a six-part, primetime series and I'd have been up for a BAFTA by now'*. However, in reality, Islam is often the target of widespread media stereotyping and negative reporting about Islam and Muslims largely outnumber positive ones (Moore et al. 2008; Poole and Richardson 2006; Poole 2002; Said 1997).

Unlike news reports, opinion columns like this consist of hyperboles and idiomatic language, for example, the verb phrase 'vanished into the bowels of the commissioning process' pointing at BBC's failure to commission the documentary on anti-Semitism. This type of expression on matters related to anti-Semitism and Islamophobia indicate the writer's opinions rather than the real situation, which falls under the concept of *propositions* in Van Dijk's (1998) classification of discourse structures (pp. 32–33). The concept of *implications* (ibid, pp. 33–34) is evident in the following sentences:

Ever since 9/11 I've detected an increase in anxiety among Jewish friends and neighbours in my part of North London. As I've always argued: just because you're paranoid, it doesn't mean they're not out to get you.

Here, the 'implication' is that 9/11 and anti-Semitism in Britain are inter-linked without directly saying so. By using 'they', the writer here implies that Jews are likely to be targeted by Muslims. The two preceding sentences also have elements of *presuppositions*, which according to Van Dijk (ibid, pp. 34–25), are '…strategically used to obliquely introduce into a text propositions which may not be true at all'. There is no evidence to suggest any link between 9/11 and anti-Semitism or the possibility of Muslims trying to 'get' the Jews. However, that is what Richard Littlejohn seems to imply here.

Another confrontation between Muslims and Jews brought by the writer is over-generalising one evidence as a common phenomenon. Referring to a Channel 4 documentary *Undercover Mosque* in which a preacher supposedly made anti-Jewish remarks, the writer comes to the conclusion that, *'Anti-Jewish sermons are routinely preached in Britain'* by Muslims and that *'Anti-Semitic hatred is beamed in on satellite TV channels and over the Internet'*. The Channel 4 programme refers to only one or two mosques, whereas there are more than 2,000 mosques in Britain. Without providing any evidence how the practise is so widespread in mosques or among Muslims, the writer says that hatred against Jews is 'routinely preached' or is everywhere on television and over the Internet in Muslim discourses. However, it is true that due to the Arab-Israeli conflict, resentment against Jews has risen among the Muslim population in Europe in recent times. A survey report in Europe concludes that, '… anti-Semitic attitudes is significantly higher among Muslims than among non-Muslims, although many European Muslims do not share anti-Semitic beliefs' (Jikeli 2015, p. 19). The survey also found a correlation between fundamentalist interpretations of Islam and anti-Semitism. This opinion article by Richard Littlejohn, though published earlier than the previously mentioned report, does not provide any evidence of Muslim hostility towards Jews in Britain, but still concludes on the basis of one Channel 4 documentary and one instance of an Arabic translation of a book by Adolf Hitler that Muslims have created the more 'serious threat'

against Jews in the UK. An average *Daily Mail* reader is likely to be influenced by this stereotyping and may believe that Muslims are indeed 'routinely' threatening the Jews because this type of 'social theory' developed by journalists in opinion articles generally influences the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the audience (Richardson 2001, p. 148).

Article 2: The Old Testament's made-up camels are a problem for Zionism; The Guardian; 13 February 2014

The second article on Judaism is a column in *The Guardian's* 'Comment is Free' section in which a left-wing journalist Andrew Brown uses a scientific finding to prove that the 'Camel Story' on which the Zionist story of a Promised Land is supposedly based is fictitious. The *field* of the article is that the Camel Story is based on false claims and therefore the emotional basis of the creation of the State of Israel has no historical proof. Although the Camel Story is part of Genesis in the Old Testament, there is no academic proof that the concept of the 'Promised Land' came from this Camel Story that the writer attempts to disprove as the basis of Zionism. According to Prior (1999), the term 'Zionism' is linked to the term 'Zion', which is used quite often in Israelite and Jewish history as, '…a revered concept of Judaisme evidence for the desire to return to Zion (a symbol for Jerusalem, and, by extension for the whole land)' (p. 47). Although the mention of a 'Promised Land' occurs many times in the scriptures, there is little suggestion that the Camel Story is the main story behind that Promised Land and Zionism developed on the basis of that story. According to Pawel (1989, p. 271) Jewish activist Nathan Birnbaum first coined the terms 'Zionism' and 'Zionist' in 1890, who along with Theodore Herzl, together organised the first Zionist Congress in 1897. Andrew Brown's article came under intense criticisms because the basic premise of his article had no legitimate ground. As an opinion article published in a newspaper that shares the same ideology of that of the writer, this type of biased article is not uncommon in British newspapers. Van Dijk (1995), while analysing opinion articles in American newspapers, observes that language attitudes are often organised by ideologies, which indirectly control language and discourse resulting through the lexical choice of the discourse maker.

In the title *'The Old Testament's made-up camels are a problem for Zionism',* the writer makes a correlation between the 'Camel Story' and 'Zionism' and uses the phrase 'made-up' to refer to the Camel Story. The columnist wanted to ensure that the key points of his article were articulated in the headline and kept the title short and catchy not to put away readers, as catchy titles tend to help readers choose whether to read an article or not (Tinio 2003, p. 53). He justifies his conclusion on the basis of a scientific finding that the domesticated camel bones found could not be earlier than approximately 930 BC, whereas the Camel Story in Genesis was supposed to be 1500 years earlier. He even gives an excerpt from Genesis 24 in which the story is told to prove that it is a baseless story. The writer here brings a typical science versus religion debate to lay down his arguments against what he thought to be the Zionist narrative of a Promised Land. A key characteristic of a newspaper column is newsworthiness, and anything controversial, particularly a contemporary and widely debated topic like Israel is certainly newsworthy, which the columnist exploits here with support from hard facts like scientific proof. He uses approximately one-half the article trying to prove that the story in the Old Testament is false and then uses logic by saying that if the Camel Story is false, then the basis of establishing a state is illogical, which, according to him is based on 'emotion' rather than facts.

The *tenor* of the article is quite limited as it includes only the writer's perspective with a reference from the Genesis and mention of the two archaeozoologists whose scientific findings the writer uses to support his position. The *mode* includes declarative sentences, and semantically, the writer uses a style that demonstrates confidence and certainty rather than suggestive style often observed in news reporting. For example, the first sentence, *'Scientists have proved that the camels in the story of Abraham and Isaac are a fiction',* gives the readers a clear idea about the writer being confident that the information he is providing is a proven fact. He uses a present perfective aspect in sentence construction while talking about the scientific proof he bases his article on implying that there is no doubt about the falsehood of the religious claim of a Promised Land any more.

There are a lot of value judgments in the last two paragraphs before which the writer attempts to provide evidences from archaeozoological

findings to support his claims. The second to last paragraph begins with the sentence, *'Obviously it has upset fundamentalists'.* Using an adverb of certainty, he suggests that the religious fundamentalists are upset about the finding without giving any evidence of who those fundamentalists are and in what way they have expressed their disappointments. There is vagueness in this sentence as it is not clear whether he is talking about Christians or Jews; though he mentions Christian fundamentalists later in the paragraph. The religious scripture he wants to prove wrong is the *Bible*'s *Old Testament*, but the religious group he seems to have targeted in this article are the Jews. He then brings Islam into the discussion by comparing the authenticity between the *Bible* and the *Quran*. The sentence, *'Everyone else has known for decades that there is even less evidence for the historical truth of the Old Testament than there is for that of the Qur'an',* is another subjective sentence without any logical explanation. What he means by the subject of the sentence 'everyone' is not clear and the vagueness of his argument is demonstrated by the use of the adverb 'less'. To what extent the *Quran* is 'more' historically true than the *Old Testament* is kept to the reader's imagination. Perhaps there is a sarcastic tone here suggesting that even the *Quran* is more reliable than the *Old Testament*. Criticising this attitude of ridiculing religions without much logic, Wosk (1995) says that the secular media does a terrible job in reporting on religious issues.

The writer waited until the last paragraph to attack Zionism using the word 'mythology' to refer to the historical claim of modern Zionism and that the Camel Story *'never actually happened'.* He suggests that the history is *'invented'* and therefore makes *'little emotional sense'* and implies that it is the *'emotion'* that has driven the politics in Israel. However, he does acknowledge the reality of Israel's existence and the right of its citizens to *'live within secure boundaries'.* As Wosk (1995) argues, the secular media often interprets religions from their own perspectives and ends up expressing their ideologies in a subjective manner. This type of negative media representation is likely to be received negatively by the readers of the newspaper and may, '…reinforce racist attitudes in those members of the audience who do have them and can channel mass actions against the group that is stereotypically portrayed' (Wilson and Gutierrez 1995, p. 45).

TV Documentaries

Storytelling has increasingly become an essential component in television documentaries, which, according to Lorenzo-Dus (2009, p. 15), has "…undergone an explicit process of 'narratisation' where the purpose of storytelling is to construct 'socially situated identities" (ibid, p. 16), whereas according to Winston (1995) documentaries are always narrativised. Kozloff (1992) distinguishes between two types of narrators in documentaries: (a) heterodiegetic, where the narrators detach themselves from the stories they tell, often as off-screen tellers; and (b) homodiegetic, where the narrators become personally involved in their act of storytelling. Nichols (2001, p. 99) identified six types of modes in documentaries:

1. **Expository: (voice of god)**—Verbal commentary by a narrator.
2. **Poetic**—Subjective, that is, moves away from the 'objective' reality of a given situation or people to grasp at an inner 'truth'.
3. **Observational**—Tries to capture the objective reality with the filmmaker as a neutral observer.
4. **Participatory**—The filmmaker is directly involved with the subjects.
5. **Reflexive**—Reconstruction of a true incident.
6. **Performative**—Subjective, emphasises the emotional and social impact on the audience.

In this section, CDA is conducted on three television documentaries representing the three religions. As Islam often comes under media scrutiny in British media and the majority are negative towards Islam, a controversial documentary that questions the history of Islam's beginning has been chosen for analysis; the documentary on Christianity also touches on a controversial topic that involves Jews; and the third documentary is a non-controversial lifestyle documentary on Jews in the UK. As with news articles, there are not many documentaries that portray Judaism or Jews negatively, so a documentary that shows Jewish lifestyle has been chosen for analysis. It is important to clarify the fundamental premise of analysis of TV documentaries. Two out of the three documentaries talk about theological and historical issues related to Christianity

and Islam, whereas this book is about neither theology nor history. The discussion that follows deals with linguistic issues within the documentaries using Discourse Analysis theories.

All three documentaries have also been used in the audience response study in the next chapter to see how the followers of the three religions and those with no faith decode the messages of the programmes.

Documentary 1: Islam: The Untold Story, Channel 4, 28 August 2012

This 71-minute Channel 4 documentary challenges the fundamental history of the beginning of Islam. With interviews of academics such as historian Patricia Crone, Tom Holland, a prominent historian, argues that there is little evidence to prove the origins of Islam as believed by Muslims. He asserts that there is no clear evidence how Islam originated and suggests that Mecca may not have been the real birthplace of Prophet Muhammad and Islam. He also claims that much of the story of Islam's origin was later developed in the early years of the Arab Empire.

Tom Holland is an academic whose language throughout the programme maintains an academic style, but at the same time contains elements of investigative journalism and, as expected in a documentary on history, narrative style. The excerpt taken for analysis in this study takes place between 28 and 34 minutes of the programme where Tom Holland questions why the Arab conquerors of Jerusalem kept no evidence to suggest that they were indeed Muslims and that no inscriptions or literature from the then Jewish and Christian population in that area have any mention of the religion of the Arabs.

The first few sentences in the excerpt consists of figurative language, intertextuality, and use of past perfective sentence structures to set the scene of a key argument of the documentary. Figurative language features in the first four sentences with the first sentence, *'They set their eyes upon the Promised Land',* referring to the Arab conquerors of Jerusalem in the seventh century. The figurative phrase 'set eyes on' is followed by 'Promised Land'—a term used in the bible to refer to the place where Moses was asked to take his people. The next sentence, *'The land flowing with milk and honey',* refers to the metaphorical description of the Promised Land mentioned in the Bible many times.

The presenter then explains what it means in the following sentence, *'The land that God had promised to the Jews',* which apparently is a statement of a believer, but here Tom Holland is merely referring to what was said in the Bible. In the final of the sequence of description of the land, he says, *'Now the Arabs had come to claim that birth right' for themselves* where he uses another term from the Bible 'birth right' in a biblical sense. The presenter uses intertextuality here where he mixes his own language with that of biblical texts and combines them into a coherent discourse by maintaining a '…flow between texts, and the relationship of texts to the discourses that produce them' (Frow 1986, cited in Iqani 2009, p. 4). The next two sentences are a sequence of similar structures (past perfective aspect)—*'The Children of Israel had made it a Jewish land; the Romans had made it a Christian holy land',* leading to the main point of the excerpt. The argument here is that if Jews and Romans had made this land Jewish and Christian, respectively, then Muslims should have made it Islamic, but that didn't happen.

Tom Holland then inserts two interviews of experts in the fields of Religion and History to support his arguments, which according to Nichols (2001, p. 122), is a common characteristic in an academic documentary like this where, '…the voice of the filmmaker emerges from the weave of contributing voices'. Nichols finds it a useful method as it enables the presenter to present the documentary from a wide variety of perspectives roaming from personal to historical accounts (p. 123). However, the selection of interviewees and the messages they convey can sometimes cause controversies. For example, Neurith (2006, pp. 100–101) emphasises that a comprehensive textual evidence of the Quran should be done through systematic microstructural reading and concludes that these sceptics are too 'selective' in their textual observations. Interestingly, one of the interviewees in this excerpt, Fred Donner, who seems to be conforming to the arguments of the presenter in this documentary, had also criticised in his book those scholars who showed scepticism about early Islamic history for not offering, '…a convincing alternative reconstruction of what might have happened' (Donner 2010, p. 633).

Following the interviews, the presenter asks a series of rhetorical questions: *'What were the Arabs up to? What were their motives? We know they called themselves believers, but believers in what?… Was it a form of Judaism or some kind of Christianity? Did they have a whole new religion of their own?'* Rohde (2006, p. 135) calls rhetorical questions as 'redundant interrogatives' and concludes that '…participants in a discourse understand rhetorical questions when they share sufficiently obvious and similar answers' (p. 163). As we will observe in the next chapter, participants (audience) of a media representation like a documentary will have their own interpretive framework while encoding the message (Hall 1980), which may not necessarily lead to similar answers. The questions asked by Tom Holland here all relate to scepticisms whether those Arabs were indeed Muslims.

The presenter then moves to a suggestive mode, which is typical in investigative journalism, the characteristic of which this documentary shares. He appears to find a 'clue' that the Arab rulers were first close to the Jews, much to the disappointment of the Christians, but then they created 'eyebrows' by praying on the ruins of the old Jewish Temple. This raises the question what that religion was as it was neither Judaism nor Christianity. Tom Holland probably left the answer to his audience's imagination as he is confident that it is not Islam but does not investigate much what that religion was. Janisch (1998 cited in Bauer 2005, p. 5) says that the main purpose of investigative journalism is to create a 'scandal', which is done by first exposing an issue and then creating a strong public reaction to it. This documentary achieves both: First, it creates a scandal against Islam by suggesting that the fundamental tenet of the religion's history lacks evidence; and second, the documentary led to widespread criticisms from academics and members of the Muslim community accusing Tom Holland to be biased and selective in his search for evidence.

In the final segment of the excerpt, we see the presenter moving from suggestive to definitive mode by saying that it is *'absolutely clear'* that the religion of the Arabs is not *'a freshly minted and coherent new religion'.* This seems to contradict the whole premise of the documentary, because he is trying to say with certainty that there was no sign of Islam among the Arabs in seventh-century Jerusalem, just because he did not

find anything. The use of the phrase 'coherent new religion' is interesting here, which may suggest the presenter's acknowledgment that Islam is a 'coherent' religion, but the paradoxical factor here is that by challenging the foundation of the religion, he is trying to prove that the narrative of the religion's history is incoherent. Also, it is unusual to come to such a conclusion only 34 minutes into a 74-minute documentary that investigates the historical evidence of the origin of Islam. Then, the presenter goes back to rhetorical questions asking whether Islam existed at that time and why there was no mention of Prophet Muhammad anywhere.

The documentary maintains consistent academic reasoning, though many critics say they are one-sided. Unlike many news articles, there is little stereotyping or demonising of Islam or Muslims demonstrating less ideological positioning of broadcast media compared to the print media. However, the wider implication of the documentary has been of quite serious nature. There were more than 1200 complaints to Ofcom and also threats against Tom Holland for which Channel 4 had to cancel a screening of the documentary (Hall 2012). There were questions raised by academics that he was selective in choosing the scholarship to support his argument, particularly the heavy reliance on historian Patricia Crone (who does not feature in the excerpt used in this study) and that he completely rejected Islamic sources and oral traditions. Programmes like this are likely to have significant impact on the wider population as this type of representation of a religion practised by minority groups in a Western society can create tensions among communities due to the unequal power relationship between those who produce media programmes like this and those whose religious belief is questioned here. Jeffries (2010, p. 7) talks about the likely impact of these types of representations:

> … there are dominant groups whose ideologies are bound to be reproduced in the media to the point at which they become naturalized and become seen by the population at large as being common sense, and thus in some sense intrinsically true.

Tom Holland is an award-winning historian who has considerable 'power' to influence people through programmes like this. He is eloquent, has a convincing speaking style, and has academic credentials

to create a programme like this. In a couple words, he can be termed as a 'celebrity narrator' (Lorenzo-Dus 2009, p. 35) whose narration and involvement in the proceedings of this documentary creates a credible atmosphere, but at the same time it lacks the informality or conversational style (Fairclough 1995, pp. 137–138) of a celebrity from popular culture. The linguistic analysis presented here on his programme by looking at the use of figurative language, intertextuality, patterns of sentence structures, interviews of experts, rhetorical questions, investigative journalism, and so on again reinforces the unequal power relationship that exists between media presenters and the general public. The audience response to this documentary in the next chapter will further illustrate this hegemonic relationship.

Documentary 2: Christianity: A History (Episode 1: 'Jesus the Jew'), Channel 4, 11 January 2009

This is the first of an eight-part series on the history of Christianity on Channel 4 broadcast in 2009 where different writers, academics, historians, and journalists talk about the history of this religion from their own perspectives. In the first episode entitled, 'Jesus the Jew' the writer and broadcaster Howard Jacobson, who himself is a Jew, talks of 'Jesus's Jewish background, the continuing rift between Christianity and Judaism, and why, despite not believing in God, he thinks knowing religious history can release us from the burden of history (Jacobson 2009). The excerpt chosen for this study comes between the 24th and 29th minutes of the episode when Jacobson talks about the popular Christian narrative of the role of Judas in Jesus's death that led to anti-Semitism among the Christians throughout history including the Holocaust, and says how St. Paul turned Jesus the Jew into Jesus the Son of God.

Like the previous documentary, this one is also written and presented by a well-known writer and academic with wide experience of presenting documentaries. Reminding us that every documentary has its own 'voice', Nichols (2001, p. 99) says, '…it attests to the individuality of the filmmaker or director', which we can see in the personalisation of this documentary where Jacobson includes personal experiences and opinions along with different historical and academic evidences to support his

arguments using both poetic and participatory modes. Nichols suggests that to create a poetic effect the presenter not only uses film footage, combination of colour and black-and-white footage, occasional titles to identify time and place, and sometimes haunting music, but also plays with language that gives the documentary a real poetic flavour at crucial points of the film (ibid, p. 101). These poetic effects are evident in this excerpt as well. For example, the first sequence of the excerpt rapidly moves from past to present using black & white film footage of Judas' betrayal and the Roman Governor's hand washing, and between these two footages are real life scenes of the presenter walking in Jerusalem, people carrying crosses, and an interview of a Christian vicar. Here the intertextuality occurs with the juxtaposition of plain as well as poetic style of language inserted with corresponding scenes. Beginning with a narrative style, *'as the story has it',* he uses an unusual alliterated collocation in the phrase *'bloody break'* in the third sentence. In that process, he gives his central argument of this excerpt that Christians have taken out the Jewishness from Jesus by blaming Judas and the Jews for Jesus's death.

This excerpt also conforms to the 'participatory mode' of Nichols' documentary characteristics (2001, pp. 115–124) where we can see, 'how the filmmaker and subject negotiate a relationship, how they act toward one another, what forms of power and control come into play, and what levels of revelation or rapport stem from this specific form of encounter' (p. 118). Not only in this excerpt, but throughout the episode the presenter participates in the discussion with his subjects by sometimes asking a question or adding to a point made by them. For example, when Father O'Connor of Ecole Biblique, Jerusalem, talks about the changing hearts among the Christians that Judas might have merely acted upon Jesus's orders, Jacobson interrupts and says:

> *But if you are right in this account that Judas is an agent of Jesus's will, it is lamentable is it not that Judas then becomes the figure of derision, a by-word for treachery and evil, a malice?*

Here, the presenter clearly gives a value-judged opinion by calling the action of those who vilify Judas as 'lamentable'. Also notable here is the use of the adjectives 'treachery', 'evil', and 'malice' to emphasise

how hyperbolic their criticisms of Judas are. According to Renger (2013, pp. 1–2), Judas has become a mythical and contradictory figure due to '…the sheer variety' of portrayals in various Christian texts. From a traditional perspective, Renger describes Judas as, 'The disciple who, for thirty pieces of silver, betrays his master with the proverbial "Judas kiss" and then hangs himself presumably in remorse for his misdeed appears as a stereotypical negative figure, an incarnation of evil and an exemplary embodiment of the Traitor' (p. 2). In later parts of the episode, the presenter narrates how the modern hierarchy of Christianity has moved away from blaming the Jews for Jesus's death.

On another occasion the presenter can be seen adding to the point made by Rabbi Ken Spiro who was giving an account of anti-Semitism against him by his Irish Catholic friends in New York during his childhood. Here, the presenter says:

> *Well I had that too growing up. The Gentiles lived at the prefabs, we lived at the other side of the wall. They threw stones at us because we killed Christ.*

Despite not being a practising Jew, Jacobson here clearly manifests his Jewish identity and substantiates what his subject said from his own experience. He also uses metaphorical language here by saying, *'because we killed Christ',* rather than saying, 'they thought that we killed Christ'. Not only that, he immerses himself with the Christian narrative by saying that Jesus died *for our sins* in a metaphorical sense as this is not a part of his own belief. The two examples of participatory mode contrast with the interviews of the subjects of Tom Holland's documentary in which the presenter is never shown on camera during the interviews, let alone asking them questions or interacting with them.

In the last segment of the excerpt, the presenter claims that it was Saint Paul who was the key figure to the foundation of Christianity. Narrating the story of Saint Paul, the presenter says, *'In a vision on the road to Damascus, he claimed to have encountered the resurrected Jesus'* where he raises doubt whether Saint Paul actually met Jesus by using the word 'claimed'. His attitude towards Apostle Paul is even clearer when he appears to attribute the central concept of Christianity to Saint Paul by concluding in this excerpt, *'It was Paul who transformed Jesus the Jew into Jesus the Christ, not*

any human being, he said, but the son of God'. The presenter calls this 'the new movement' and suggests that the separation of Jesus from Judaism was apparently completed in this process where the message of Christ was to be spread not among the Jews, but among the non-Jewish 'Gentiles'.

While discussing who was responsible for Jesus's death Cohen (2006, p. 32) writes:

> …there are three possible theological-exegetical ways to lay blame for the death of Jesus. One could blame the people of Jesus, the Jews, in which case the Romans are only acting in their behalf. Or, one could blame the Romans, in which case Jesus (whether Judaized or not) and his people, the Jews, are all victims of their political oppression. Or, finally, one could blame both Jews and Romans, distributing the guilt in various proportions. Christian theology has overwhelmingly preferred the first option, blaming the Jews; from whence the Jews become "Christ-killers."

Apart from clearly manifesting his perspectives in the documentary, Jacobson also writes a column in *The Guardian* two days before the documentary was broadcast on TV where he says:

> It is a question of the deepest interest, how Christians have been able to maintain two parallel but entirely contradictory attitudes to Jews. The one, as described above, the effect of which has been to remove Jews from the sphere of the human altogether. The other, full of piety and respect, expressed in reverence for the Jewish *Bible*, in tender pilgrimages to the Jewish places of Jesus's birth and upbringing, and even, in some quarters, in the fond adoption of *Old Testament* names for their offspring. The mind is a wonderful thing, capable (when it chooses) of entertaining apparently irreconcilable emotions. In this case, it is as though Christians simultaneously know and don't know that Jesus was Jewish, but in order for the not knowing to win supremacy over the knowing they have had to do mental violence to themselves, of which the collateral victims have been the Jews.

Unlike the reaction of Tom Holland's documentary, Jacobson's perspectives on Jesus has not been subject to much criticism or serious protests by Christians. What this analysis shows is that there are some linguistic nuances, like alliteration, unusual collocation, metaphors, and so on in

this documentary, but what is most powerful here is Jacobson's power of persuasion through historical facts and academic interviews.

Documentary 3: Strictly Kosher (Season 1, Episode 1), ITV, 11 July 2011

This is a documentary on the Jewish community in Manchester. Those who are interviewed and filmed in the programme consist of both religious and secular Jews, and it is their culture, relationships, and festivals that form the focus of the programme. All of them seem to take a certain pride in being Jewish. As mentioned before, there has been a conscious effort in this study to find media representations of Judaism that focuses on Judaism and the Jewish people in the UK independent of the politics in the Middle East. Although that was not possible to find in the print media, this programme is entirely based on the lifestyle of various types of Jewish people in Manchester without any reference to Israel.

As the audience response study in the next chapter shows, the programme was well liked by the non-Jewish participants, but the small number of Jewish participants found it stereotyping the Jews. This was echoed in a review of the *Jewish Chronicle* which said, '…if the intention was to break stereotypes and avoid clichés, Strictly Kosher failed miserably' (Round 2012). The review also commented that the series had the feel of a '1970s sitcom full of characters that were 'eccentric' and 'quirky'. Another article in Jewish *Chronicle* (Kalmus 2012) criticised the show for its lack of depth and '…crude depictions of the religion as restrictive'.

The narrative style of this documentary is different from the previous two documentaries. Unlike the homodiegetic style of the other two programmes, the narrator Miriam Margolyesin of this documentary is heterodiegetic (Kozloff 1992) where she is detached from the story and narrates the events as an off-screen storyteller. Nichols (2001, pp. 105–109) calls this 'Expository Mode' or the 'Voice of God' where the narrator provides information by typically remaining distinct from the proceedings coming from '… some place that remains unspecified but associated with objectivity or omniscience' (p. 107). A renowned actor and voice artist, the narrator Miriam Margolyes is a Jew, but she is also a critic of a lot of Israel's policies in the Middle East as she believes that the blame for the situation there, '…lies firmly with the State of Israel' (Stadlen 2015).

It is not clear whether her personal perspectives on Israel had any influence, but the excerpt used in this study has almost no mention of Israel except the orthodox housewife referring to her daughter's family living in Israel.

The documentary revolves around the cultural lives of the Jews and emphasises more on the people rather than the perspective of the narrator. That is why out of approximately 800 words in this excerpt, only 147 words have been uttered by the narrator. The main characters talk to the camera but address the presenter who is the silent interviewer rather than the audience. There is little play with language by the narrator other than a plain description of events. The documentary starts with the narrator setting the context of the Jewish community in Manchester and saying that the Jews *'differ vastly in devotion*, *but most share a common sense of pride of being Jewish'.* De Lange (2000), while defining who the Jews are makes it clear that being born in a Jewish family is the most important aspect of being a Jew, not the religion itself:

> …even the most pious Jews would probably admit that it is not their religion that defines them as Jews. They practise the Jewish religion because they are Jews, not the other way around. (p. 1)

This is echoed by one of the characters, businessman Joel Lever, who calls himself a traditionalist, but not religious and says that 90% of the clients of his women's clothing shop are like him. The narrator's comment of the sense of 'pride in being Jewish' goes back to history when Moses led them out of Egyptian slavery, as De Lange (2000, p. 2) explains:

> The whole Jewish past, not the past of a single family or a local Jewish community, is in a sense part and parcel of the inner experience and identity of every single Jew. And since Jews everywhere share this sense of their history, they are all somehow part of the same huge, scattered family.

The programme was made for non-Jewish people, so apart from a few terms, Jewish terminologies are largely avoided. The ones that are used are also explained through the cultural ceremonies. For example, 'a bris', which means circumcision, has been clearly explained through the cer-

emonies and rituals that go with it. However, the two main characters use one Jewish term each in this excerpt without explanation. Bernette Clarke, the Orthodox housewife**,** uses the word 'shtetls' (small towns with large Jewish population, which existed in Central and Eastern Europe) to refer to the older generations who migrated from Russia and Lithuania; whereas Joel mentions 'bar mitzvah' to refer to the ceremony of a Jewish boy at 13 ready to observe religious precepts and is eligible to take part in public worship ('bat mitzvah' for girls when they are 12). The latter becomes clear to the audience through ceremonial rituals in the later part of the episode, but 'shtetls' is not explained at all. Perhaps the purpose was to maintain continuity in the programme without taking too much time explaining the term.

Both Joel and Bernette have a distinct Mancunian accent, which demonstrates the authenticity of a documentary on Jews in Manchester and also shows their upbringing in this northwest city. As expected, their language is much more informal than the narrator who speaks in an RP accent. They use colloquial and sometimes unconventional expressions in their language. For example, Joel, at the beginning of the clip says:

> *And then you get the very religious, and the **fanaticals**, if you can use that word. If it's that what they **wanna** do, live and let live. I am quite happy with that.*

There is no English word 'fanaticals', which he probably realises after he says it. He then uses a colloquial expression 'wanna'. Bernette, while talking about her Irish root says, *'I love it because they **go**, "Oh, Irish Jew, how can you have someone who is Irish and Jewish"'* where she uses 'go'—a colloquial expression to mean 'said'.

We can see the gender issue emerging from Bernette when she talks about male circumcision. *'It's mainly for the men',* she says at the beginning. After describing how important it is for men to be a Jew, she then shows her attitude towards the process saying, *'they cut the fore skin (makes a disgusted face), oh I don't know, makes me feel sick…'.* Like Islam, gender segregation is a key component in Orthodox Judaism and is still practised by strict adherents of the religion. Cohn-Sherbok (2006, p. 12) says:

> Traditionally Judaism is a patriarchal religion with clearly defined roles for men and women. Girls and boys are educated separately and follow a different religious curriculum. Women are not expected to take an active part in the ritual of the synagogue and are not encouraged to spend their time studying the ancient texts. In the past, marriage and motherhood was the only acceptable destiny for a girl from an Orthodox family.

In this clip, Bernette is seen to claim herself as a 'modern orthodox Jewish mum' playing a traditional Jewish housewife role. However, her modernity probably leads her to have a negative attitude towards the patriarchal nature of Orthodox Judaism, which is manifested in her comment about the pain a Jewish baby goes through during circumcision as *'the only pain a man goes through in their Jewish life'*. De Lange (2000) observes that these ancient traditions have largely become 'weakened, modified, or demolished' with women's emancipation getting stronger and stronger, but he still finds that '…the ritual aspects of the old division, together with some social features, have proved remarkably resistant to change' (p. 88). Bernette's everyday life in modern Britain is an illustration of that.

However, De Lange emphasises that the memories of the Holocaust has not perished from the minds of the world's Jewish population (2000, p. 215). The final section of this clip is the story of the Holocaust survivor Jack Aizenberg, who came to Britain from Poland. There is a dramatic end to this excerpt when Jack shows the Nazi flag and says, *'When you saw this flag 70 years ago, you trembled, you trembled'*. The repetition of the phrase 'you trembled' is a poignant moment of the documentary and this telling story of a survivor of Nazi Germany is likely to create a lasting effect on the audience.

Fictional Representations

According to Henry and Tator (2002, p. 4) '…media are one of the most powerful institutions in a democratic society because they help transmit its central cultural images, ideas, and symbols, as well as a nation's narratives and myths'. One of the most influential ways media can portray the majority [of] people of the society's views about

themselves and of the ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious or racial minorities is through fictional representation on television. Television dramas, therefore, make significant contribution in our understanding of the social attitudes of its audience. According to Morey (2010, p. 530), 'In drama, the imperatives of storytelling are shaped by telling visual images crafted at the service of a narrative arc that leads, in most cases, to a denouement that satisfies (or occasionally challenges) audience expectations'.

Although the primary purpose of television drama is to entertain, the significance of the underlying messages goes beyond the benignity of pure entertainment. Representation of religions in popular culture is generally a contentious issue because in the process of entertaining people, it often ends up stereotyping a religion or a religious group, leading to the adherents feeling offended. However, representations that stereotype a minority religion, the people, or their religious beliefs can influence the majority community as these representations may be the only way for them to gain some knowledge of a culture that is significantly different than what they are accustomed with. As Fleras and Kunz (2001, p. 53) observe, media has the power to stereotype other world views as 'invisible or problematic' and conclude that 'Television's greatest impact was on those whose physical location in society had restricted their social experiences' (ibid, p. 93). According to Henry and Tator, it is difficult to change people's perceptions that are developed through biased media representations of minorities because they, '…provide a deep reservoir of familiar myths, unexamined assumptions, and reassuring stereotypes' (2002, p. 16).

Thus, a negative portrayal of a minority culture depicted through the characters in a drama can eventually shape the perception of the audience towards that culture in such a way that they inadvertently develop the stereotype themselves. Often, an 'ethnonormative space' is created through a drama where the tensions between different groups in the drama either enable viewers to recognize the ambiguities and ambivalences, or merely accept predetermined ideological positions (Morey 2010, p. 531). These fictional representations through television drama can either change audience's perceptions about the minority groups (Greenberg et al. 2002) or reinforce the anxieties of the dominant culture (Hall 1990).

In this study, CDA of three fictional dramas on British television representing the three Abrahamic religions will be discussed.

Representation of Islam

BBC Spy Drama: Spooks (Series 2, Episode 2: 'Nest of Angels'), BBC 3, 2 June 2003

The positioning of Muslims in fictional dramas has been explained by Morey (2010, p. 532) as follows:

> In any given ethno-religiously marked drama involving Muslims, the visual signs of Islam work in three ways: first, to establish a location (in the manner of a cinematic establishing shot); second, to create a milieu (the Muslims under scrutiny will be placed in relation to a larger surrounding community figured, if only inadvertently as "the norm"); and third and most importantly, to connote cultural values that are in some way discrepant with those of the norm. This mode can then be made to tie in with established discourses about race, nation, and gender.

The second episode of the second series of the popular BBC spy drama *Spooks* represents Islam and Muslims in the UK with 'Islamic terrorism' as its key theme. This drama series was aired on BBC One in ten consecutive seasons from 2002 to 2011, and the second series broadcast was in 2003, two years before the 7/7 bombings. The series revolved around a group of MI5 officers solving various cases on national security. The episode in question deals with issues surrounding a religious leader in a mosque in Birmingham who inspires young Muslim boys to become suicide bombers and on a former university lecturer from Algeria who helps MI5 officers to prevent any damage to the public by the suicide bombing and in the process loses his life trying to stop a 16-year-old impressionable young Muslim detonating a bomb.

The term 'Islamic terrorism' is commonly used in the Western media to refer to modern-day terrorists. A popular saying in the Western world is 'All Muslims are not terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims', which is

probably the logic behind using this term. Baker et al.'s (2013) extensive study on media corpus over a decade found the collocation of these two terms common. They observed that, '…the term *Islamic* carries an extremely negative discourse prosody, heavily associated with religious and political extremism, militancy, and terror' (p. 262). This type of collocation is likely to make the audience worried about the term 'Islamic' because the use of words and phrases within a particular context enables the audience to construe meanings, especially in relation to minorities (Van Dijk 2000).

The name of the episode 'Nest of Angels' refers to the name the terrorist cell of the Birmingham Mosque in the episode gave itself. Tom Quinn, the senior officer of MI5, explains at one point that this was the name given to the school for suicide bombers by Hamas, the Palestinian militant group based in Gaza. Hamas is termed as a terrorist organisation by the United States and the European Union (Aljamal 2014, p. 39), though many countries in the world consider it as merely an armed resistant group against Israel, but not a threat to the West (ibid). The name is an oxymoron with the term 'angel' used for terrorists. It is used figuratively in one particular scene of the episode in which Tom enters the mosque as an officer from the Home Office and talks to Rashid, the leader of the terrorist cell. The following conversation takes place:

Tom: 'We are going to clear this mosque of the nest'.
Rashid: 'What do you think we have here, mice?'
Tom: 'We can get the health authorities, get the traps down'.
Rashid: 'But the mice are sweet, innocent creatures. You can put them on wheels and make them go round and round'.
Tom: 'Is that what you are doing to young men in your community?'

There are quite a few euphemistic expressions here. The terms 'nest' and 'mice' are used for the terrorist cell and the young people, respectively, whereas the 'health authorities' means the security services. When Rashid says that mice are innocent and can be made to go round and round, Tom's query whether that is what he is doing to the young people suggests that Rashid is making the vulnerable young people in his community go around the circle of his twisted interpretation of his faith. The

reason for the language of the whole scene to be suggestive and indirect is the lack of evidence Tom has against Rashid. Both of them know what they are talking about, but Tom's inability to directly accuse Rashid is probably the reason for this play with language. Another reason can be to remind the audience the lack of power that the British Intelligence Service has to intervene in situations like this without evidence, which is manifested in the next dialogue of the scene in which Rashid mocks MI5 by calling it *'a sad apology for an intelligent service'.* However, changes in legislations since July 7th bombings have given the security services more power to intervene in situations like this.

Rashid has a thick Indian English accent, which is a departure from the usual Arab stereotypes, but he has links with Arab terrorists like Abu Inan of Algeria and with his Arab accomplice Ibn Khaldun whom he initially suspects, but later trusts. This accent is probably given to make his Afghan background more authentic, though the English accent of Afghans differ considerably from Indian English accents.

Although in Islam there are a lot of Arabic terminologies used by Muslims even when they are using other languages, this programme understandably uses only three Arabic terms as it is intended for an English speaking audience. Two of them feature in the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED),* which means that there is no codeswitching, but borrowing in the use of non-Anglo Saxon words. *Codeswitching* refers to the transfer of linguistic elements between two languages by bilinguals who randomly switch from one language to another in everyday conversation. Gumperz (1982, p. 59) calls it 'the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or sub-systems'. However, borrowing refers to adopted words from another language, but completely or partially naturalising them and including them in the dictionary of the borrower's language. Out of the three Arabic words used in the episode, two of them—*Mullah* and *inshallah*—feature in the OED, whereas the third word *Zaqqum* has not been adopted in English. However, there is a notable absence of common Arabic terms used by Muslims in their everyday conversation; even the word 'God' is used instead of 'Allah' by Muslim characters.

The term 'Mullah', which is used much more by non-Muslims than 'inshallah', features several times in the programme to refer to the terrorist

cell leader Rashid. The OED defines the term as 'a person who is learned in Islamic theology and law; a Muslim cleric'. However, in this episode, Rashid is not represented as a Muslim cleric, but a ringleader of a terrorist group, who exploits vulnerable young teenagers to become suicide bombers. Therefore, this term is used here in a derogatory sense, conforming to the trend in the British media. It is also interesting that Rashid is called a 'Mullah' by both MI5 officers and the young suicide bomber Abu, showing the paradoxical connotations of the word. The second Arabic term 'inshallah', which means 'if Allah wills (it), a very frequent pious ejaculation among Muslims' (OED) is used in one scene by the Algerian agent of MI5, but it is rarely used by non-Muslims. Some viewers may find this word difficult to understand. The third Arabic word 'zaqqum' is used without translation by Ibn Khaldun, the Algerian agent for MI5, as part of a code *the food for the zaqqum tree shall be the sinner's food.* It is used to assure Rashid that he is a genuine member of the terrorist group in Algeria with whom Rashid is linked. The tree of *Zaqqum* is mentioned in several places in the Quran to refer to an awful fruit tree in Hell meant for sinners (for example, Chapter 17, verse 60). Here it is used as a code with two meanings: first as just a code to provide evidence of Ibn Khaldun's genuineness, and second, perhaps to show the terrorists' hatred towards non-believers (who, as implied here, are the 'sinners').

The mixture of religion and terrorism is perhaps the most notable stereotype in this episode of *Spooks*. Sir Harry Pearce, MI5 head, says at the beginning of the episode, *'Every religion has its crooked piece'.* The association of 'crooked' and 'religion' can be a secular perspective in which religion is considered a problem rather than to put blame on the person who is doing the evil activities. The words *martyr* and *paradise* are used by Rashid quite a few times to make the young people religiously inspired to be suicide bombers. *Martyr* is used extensively in Christianity as well, and *paradise* is where adherents of every religion wish to be in after death. However, 'martyrdom' is a commonly used term in the Western media with reference to 'Islamic terrorism' related discourse. For example, in this programme, after inspiring young people to become suicide bombers, Rashid says, *'You know the way to true paradise—the martyr's death'.* Abu, his young recruit, also uses similar narratives in the last scene of the episode, correlating 'martyrdom' and 'house of Islam' before detonating the

bomb. When Ibn Khaldun calls Rashid's regular evening discussions as 'religious', it has the potential for the audience to misunderstand the regular religious talks among Muslims, and by using the term *God-fearing* to the suicide team, spirituality and terrorism have been intrinsically mixed by the producers. Finally, in the suicide bomb scene at the end, we find several Islamic expressions mixed with terrorist discourse through the young suicide bomber Abu. Some examples follow:

'Victory is only granted by God'.
'I'm a martyr. I'm going to paradise'.
'The mulla said, as a martyr on doomsday, I am going to see 70 loved ones'.
'I am sending an unbeliever to hell. Then I'll see paradise'.

Kilani (1995 cited in Kilani 2015, p. 99) says that 'Martyrdom is regarded as the highest form of *Shahadah*, that is, witness which a Muslim can make to the religion of Islam', referring to fighting without fear and dying in the battlefield for the cause of Islam, and concludes that this concept has now been '…taken over to accentuate all forms of grievances by youths and people whose missions are greatly diametrically opposed to Islamic teachings and dictates' (ibid, p. 106).

A key character in the episode is Ibn Khaldun, a former university lecturer from Algeria who has high regard for Britain and decides to support MI5 in its effort to thwart the suicide bomb plot. Whether to remind the audience of his academic background or due to his love for England and therefore the English language, at the initial stage of his conversations with MI5 officers, he uses sentences full of figures of speech. Some of the examples are as follows:

'Bring on your lions'—Meaning he was ready for the challenge of being debriefed before joining MI5 as an agent.
'I disguised myself as a camel'—Used sarcastically when asked in the debrief how he had fled the Algerians.
'I disappeared to be reborn in England'—Another sarcastic comment referring to his transition from Algeria to Britain.
'So, now do I sing for my supper?'—An idiom meaning whether he would be getting what he wanted now that he has passed the debriefing.

The terrorist ringleader Rashid has been presented in a stereotypical manner with a beard a long garb, and with prayer beads in hand. Salaita (2008) calls this symbolic representation as political rather than Islamic and says, 'In the world in which Muslims are represented […] terrorism can be reduced to the articulation of visual symbols that signal the threatening presence of Islam […] beards, kuffiyehs, prayer beads, and distinguishing garb' (pp. 88, 140). This representation is likely to create a negative impression of the type of dress worn by Imams, Muslim clerics, or Islamic scholars, and it reinforces anti-Muslim prejudice (Fiske and Hartley 1989, p. 75). The scene in which Rashid exclusively speaks to the 16-year-old boy Abu whom he grooms into a suicide bomber demonstrates the mixing of religion and terrorism in this programme. There is a correlation between commitment to Islam and hatred towards America, which Rashid tends to exploit in his first private encounter with Abu. His initial reaction to Abu's extremist views tends to conform with Islamic teachings when he says, *'It is not for you to judge your parents'* when the boy informs about his father's un-Islamic lifestyle of having 'hamburger' and drinking 'tins of lager'. It is interesting how the two items of food and drink have been linked together because in Islam, alcohol is forbidden, but there can be halal hamburgers. It is the hatred towards America that is highlighted here—another stereotype of terrorists used through the cliché *'Americans are enemy of Islam',* said by Abu. Use of the term 'house of Islam', which means 'a region of Muslim sovereignty where Islamic law prevails' (Oxford Islamic Studies Online) is the turning point of this discussion when Rashid realises that Abu can be easily manipulated and promises him that *'One day England will become the house of Islam, no hamburgers, no tins of lager'.* This is a narrative that can easily worry an average British audience that Islam is going to take over Britain soon, whereas statistics prove it far from being remotely true (Brice 2011, p. 36). More stereotyping can be found when Abu says that he found the concept of 'house of Islam' from *the book*, but it is not explained which book he is referring to. It might lead the audience to guess that it is the *Quran* where it comes from and may create further panic about Islamification in Britain. After Ibn Khaldun joins the group and they all resolve to commit mass murder through suicide bombings, we see Rashid, along with others saying aloud, *'Praise be to God, the most*

compassionate, the most merciful'. This declaration is paradoxical as he is calling God to be 'compassionate' and 'merciful' while planning to kill in His name. This declaration, followed by the chorus slogans *'death to the American allies, death to unbelievers, and death to the West'* are further examples of stereotypical mixture between Muslims' regular Islamic practises and narratives of terrorists.

Finally, the producer seems to have lost an opportunity to minimise the damage of the stereotyping in this episode by not doing more with one of the scenes. Ibn Khaldun gives the MI5 officer Tom a translated version of the *Qur'an*, which Tom is seen opening at one point in his room in the evening. In the background Khaldun is heard saying, *'Strange, in this country, where for so long I've dreamt of being, I think more and more of the book'*. There was nothing as a follow up of this leading to the question of why this scene was included in the first place and what relevance it had to the narrative of the episode. This loss of opportunity can be summarised by Morey's (2010, pp. 537–538) conclusion:

> We ought also to take extremely seriously the cries from those Muslims who see representations such as those regularly displayed in the show as one more derogatory brick in a now very big wall of Islamophobia and prejudice. Even so, that Spooks can and does raise questions about how vigorously literal and ideological borders ought to be policed should turn our attention once more to the raw materials of cultural representation—genre, narrative arc, characterization, and so on—which are never deployed in quite the same way twice.

Representation of Christianity

BBC Spy Drama: Spooks (Series 5, Episode 8: 'Agenda'), BBC 3, 23 October 2006

Another episode of *Spooks* was chosen for analysing Christianity as Christians have been made the perpetrators of terrorism-related offence here with Muslims being the victims. The episode was shown little more than 15 months after the 7/7 bombings with the pretext that some radical

Muslim clerics were still preaching hatred and getting away through the loopholes of the British legal system. A radical Christian group leader, inspired by an Anglican Bishop, sends ex-military personnel that he groomed in his shelter house on suicide missions to kill some extremist Muslims and bomb mosques. An MI5 officer goes undercover with the mission to first delay and then expose the people behind the terror cell. The episode starts showing a devoted Christian with a cross behind him on the wall praying before picking up a bullet and kissing it. A bit later when a radical Muslim cleric is released by the court for lack of evidence, the 'devout' Christian shoots him dead outside the court and then shoots himself. Following the shooting, a BBC interviewer asks the Bishop of Whitechapel, *'Is this the start of a Christian retaliation against fundamentalist Islam?'*

The word 'fundamentalism' is closely linked with religious fundamentalism, particularly Islamic, though Christian and Jewish fundamentalists also attract considerable media attention. Choueiri (1993, cited in Losurdo 2004, p. 5) says that fundamentalists, '…derive political principles from a sacred text'. All religious adherents consider their religion to be the absolute truth and try to follow their respective religious texts at all times. In Judaism and Islam, the religious beliefs often transcend ritual practises, which means that the sacred texts control the lifestyles of their followers. Therefore, in these two religions, 'human societal norms have to be justified in the eyes of unimpeachable divine law' (ibid). Although Christianity does not control people's social and political lives to that extent, Losurdo finds a somewhat similar trend in Catholicism and uses the example of Pope John Paul II's resistance against legislation on pregnancy termination (2004, p. 6). Therefore, there is a '…danger of using the concept of fundamentalism in a dogmatic and trite way by applying it always to the enemies of the West and especially against Islam, (ibid, p. 39). Almond et al. conclude that all the three Abrahamic religions '… have the most fully developed fundamentalisms across the world's religions' (Emerson and Hartman 2006, p. 135)

Although the killing of a radical Muslim cleric is termed as 'retaliation' here and the word 'fundamentalist' is linked with Islam, Christians have been referred to by this term later in the programme. By using the word 'retaliation', it seems that Islam and Christianity are brought

against each other, which can be considered a significant deviation from the real problem of extremism. The whole episode is about Christians versus Muslims, and all the terrorist attacks by Muslims are implied to be targeted against the Christians. The language of all those who speak against the Muslims—the Bishop of Whitechapel, the terror ring leader, and the MI5 officer who pretend to be representing the fake 'League of Christ', imply that Christianity is under attack by Islamic terrorists, whereas the actual terrorists themselves never claimed it. Many civilians were killed in the 7/7 bombings, which include people from different religions and people of no religion. No church was targeted, yet the Bishop in this episode tells the BBC that Christians were attacked and they are fighting back. A Christian terrorist saying *'death to the enemies of Christ'* before killing a radical Muslim cleric in a restaurant in Bradford is evidence of ignorance about Islam as it contradicts a fundamental tenet of Islam that describes Jesus as a prophet of God. Another interesting fact is that the influential clergyman who was behind the first killing shown in the episode is said to be the Bishop of Whitechapel, an area which has one of the largest concentrations of Muslims in Britain. Hatred against Muslims coming from a Bishop who sees many Muslims every day is not likely to bring Muslims and Christians close to each other. Later in the episode, the terror cell leader says that Bishop Newman asked him to kill the radical Muslim cleric *'to protect the church* and *to send a message to Islam that we can't be pushed around'*. Protecting hundreds and thousands of churches of a country with almost 60% Christian population from less than 5% Muslims (ONS 2011) is an unrealistic proposition and has the potential to reinforce prejudices against Islam while hurting Christians whose religion is represented so badly. The most provocative statement that potentially incites the two religious communities head to head comes in the following statement by the terrorist group:

> *Britain is a nation under Christ and we will no longer tolerate the Muslims in our ranks. This is a declaration of war against Islam. We will drive Islam from our shores and turn the sea red with Muslim blood.*

Nowhere in this statement is there a mention of any 'retaliation' against any Muslim attack against Christians. It sounds like Christians have taken this war on themselves, which is far from reality in modern Britain. This

is why many Christians condemned the programme as an 'incitement to hatred against Christians' (Revoir 2006). The language seems to bring back the days of the Crusades. However, unlike the situation centuries ago, the terrorism that we see today is not a holy war between Islam and Christianity as mentioned in this episode; instead, the underlying reasons behind most terrorist attacks in the past few decades have been political, nationalist, sectarian, anti-imperialist and so on. Although there have been sporadic religious killings between Christians and Muslims in some African countries and the so-called Islamic State has attacked some Christian communities in the Middle East, the most common rhetoric by the Muslim terrorists seems to be anti-Western rather than anti-Christian. Therefore, the anti-Muslim message by Christians in this *Spooks* episode does not hold much weight in terms of reality. A newspaper article on the episode reported reactions by some Christian groups as a 'sinister' and 'malicious' agenda of the BBC against their faith, which they considered to be similar to an 'incitement to hatred' (Revoir 2006). It is true that this is a work of fiction, which the BBC also claimed while answering to criticisms from Christian groups (ibid), but by bringing in historical facts, the programme goes beyond the 'pure fiction' argument of the makers of *Spooks*. The old wounds of Christian-Muslim relationships are brought back when the terrorist cell leader Steven Payntor tells the story of how the world's largest cathedral was turned into a mosque by the Ottomans in the fifteenth century. This type of depiction of a religious majority against a minority religious group already under scrutiny can have an adverse effect on the audience.

While talking about the background of the killer, one of the MI5 officers Ros Myers uses some cynical remarks about religion and Christianity. Talking about the homeless shelter where the killer was suspected to be radicalised, she says, *'These places offer free bed and board as long as you accept Jesus at your heart'*. Answering to a question about whether this place cured the killer's previous drug addiction, she says, '*Yes, and introduced him to a new one—religion, the opium of the masses'*. Here, she reminds the audience of the famous quote of Karl Marx who said, 'Religion is the opium of the people' and stereotypes people's beliefs by comparing religious adherence to drug addiction. This attitude is quite common in secular British media, which is considered to be against both Islam and fundamentalist Christianity (Taira et al. 2010 cited in Mcanulla 2014, p. 125). Secularism often leads to atheism, which, according to Mcanulla

(2014, p. 126), popularises anti-religious sentiment rather than making an academic or intellectual argument for atheism in order '…to challenge the institutional and social power of religion'.

As observed in the episode on Islamic terrorism, this episode also mixes religion and terrorism in a way that implies that their terrorist acts derive from their religious teachings. For example, the MI5 officer who goes undercover to expose the terror cell tries to make himself believable by making an emotional speech about the Christian root of this country while looking at the top of St. Paul's Cathedral:

> *Two thousand years of Christian achievement—The Romans, the Spanish, the French, and we have withstood them all. The Great Fire of London came closer than anything else to destroying it, and out of the ashes rose the greatest cathedral in the world. God watches over London, and now these people with their homemade bombs think they can bring this city to its knees?*

Here, the suggestion is that the Christian root of this country is now under threat by the Muslim extremists. In addition to giving some of the historical background of the city and the cathedral, the undercover officer implies that there is a religious duty of protecting the city by saying that God is watching over London and that it is their responsibility to protect this 'holy' land. Subtlety in the language is used here, but Steven Paynter, the terror cell leader is straightforward in linking religion and terrorism by saying, *'The war on the streets will become a war that engulfs the whole world and seize the arms of Christ',* where 'war', 'arms,' and 'Christ' are all linked together. He then relates this so called war with the biblical predictions of the second coming of the Messiah and the battle of *Armageddon* (the final war between human governments and God). By Bishop Newman referring to Steven Paynter's image of God as *'a God of hatred and violence',* the concept of God has been drawn into the narrative of terrorism. It is ironic that this is mentioned by a senior clergyman of the country, whereas this association is generally used by anti-religious people. A bit later, in his own church, Bishop Newman is found talking to God and associating religion and terrorism by saying, *'Then why are these murderers feeling themselves touched by your grace while I stand alone staring into the abyss?'* Here, the Bishop seems to be accusing God of supporting the murderers, whereas by the terror cell leader saying, '*I am*

doing His will…I am going to restore His kingdom', God in Christianity is portrayed as one who condones violence and murder. These representations are generally argued by atheists like Dawkins who calls the God represented in the Old Testament. "a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully" (2006, p. 31)

Bishop Newman may not share the same attitude towards God with Richard Dawkins, but by suggesting that God is supporting a terrorist in his own church is not likely to go down well with both the religious and non-religious audience.

Elements of irony are displayed throughout this episode in the language used by the terrorist Steven Payntor, particularly when he utters the 'Lord's Prayer' (Matthew 6, pp. 9–13) with his fellow terrorists. The prayer says:

> *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation.*

On the one hand, he says, *'we forgive those who trespass against us',* and on the other hand, he says, *'I want a war. When I close my eyes I can see the smoke; I can see the fire; I can hear the screams'.* These contradictory statements by a devout Christian are not representative of the feelings of Christians in this country who would feel offended to be portrayed in this manner.

Representation of Judaism

Family Guy (Season 8, Episode 2: 'Family Goy'), BBC 3, 2 June 2003

After spending a considerable amount of time searching for a drama on Judaism or Jewish people in the UK, it became obvious that neither the religion nor the people feature prominently in British TV dramas, other

than the Holocaust and the Arab-Israeli conflict. As mentioned before, there has been a conscious effort to avoid using materials related to the Middle East context for this study and to concentrate on issues related to the representation of Judaism or the Jewish community in the mainstream British media. The documentary *Strictly Kosher* fulfilled that criterion well, but it was a struggle to find similar themes in a fictional drama. Therefore, an American drama shown on British television was the only other option for which the animated TV sitcom *Family Guy* was chosen where we can see the attitude towards the religion and its people depicted in a season eight episode called 'Family Goy', which was shown in the USA in October 2009, but aired on BBC in August 2015.

The name of the episode 'Family Goy' is linguistically significant. 'Goy' is 'a Jewish designation of a non-Jew, a Gentile' (*OED*), which immediately will give one the idea that Judaism and Jewish people would feature in the episode. The term, however, does not bear any negative connotation and does not indicate how the religion and its people are negatively portrayed in the episode.

Family Guy is an American Fox network animated series that uses the sitcom recipe, caters to adults, and reflects modern popular culture with its absurd humour feeding on an incredible diversity of cultural products (Anton 2015, p. 214). In this episode, apart from some other issues at the beginning, the main plot is the discovery of the Jewish heritage of Lois, wife of the protagonist Peter who initially goes overboard in accepting his wife's Jewish heritage, but later resists it after his father tells him in his dream that he is committing a sin by accepting Judaism in the house. Peter then decides to resist any Jewish-related activity in the house, and all ends well when Jesus appears at the end and says that all religions are 'crap'.

One of the most notable representations of Jews in this episode is stereotyping, which Blum (2004, p. 288) defines as, '…false or misleading associations between a group and an attribute that are held by their subjects in a rigid manner, resistant to counterevidence'. Jews are one of the most stereotyped communities in American society. This comedy used those stereotypes with the common negative ones being 'greedy' or 'power-hungry' (Berinsky and Mendelberg 2005, p. 848). An example from the 'Family Goy' episode reinforces the 'greedy' stereotype

through the following conversation between Lois, the wife of the main protagonist Peter Griffin, and her mother:

> *'Oh my god! So grandmother Hebrewberg is actually Jewish?'*
> *'Yes, when she moved to America, her family changed their name. It was originally "Hebrewberg Moneygrabber". That makes you Jewish, Lois, and your children, too'.*

The obvious stereotyping of Jews is reflected in the use of 'moneygrabbers' in the name, which has been ditched to eliminate the Jewish element in the name. However, the remaining name (Hebrewberg) that has been kept also has clear Jewish roots. Both 'Hebrew', the language of Tora and the state language of Israel, and '-berg', an ending often found in Jewish surnames such as Goldberg, should not make anyone guess what root she might have had. However, probably due to creating a comic effect Lois does not seem to understand it. One classic stereotype is Shylock in Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice', in which the Jewish antagonist Shylock is characterised as a money-hungry man. In addition to the 'moneygrabber' title, this episode of the animated series also has several more statements suggesting that Jews are after money. For example, in a scene in which Lois was talking to her mother about her husband Peter's anti-Jewish behaviour, her father is seen stretching towards them a dollar note with a string and saying, *'Come on, you know you Jew girl want that dollar'.* In the last scene when Jesus comes and says he is a Jew, Peter says, '*Prove it, what's a 9% tip on a 200-dollar bill?'* Jesus answers correctly to remind the audience that a Jew is always good on money matters. There is a historical background to this stereotyping as explained by Balser et al. (2006, p. 18), 'The myth of Jewish greed dates back at least to the New Testament story of Jesus forcing the Jewish moneychangers out of the Temple. Teachings concerning the "cursed" Jews radiated into all aspects of Christian culture, and notions of Jews as miserly and greedy took hold throughout Christendom.' This stereotype still persists and the 'Family Goy' episode is an illustration of this phenomenon in twenty-first century Western society.

Another stereotype can be found when Stewie, the baby, calls Jewish people *'a bunch of short hairy guys',* referring to Orthodox Jews. When Lois arranges a family Seder (retelling the story of the liberation of the Israelites), Brian, their son, probably referring to escaping from Jewish annihilation in Europe, says, *'Doesn't it seem like every Jewish holiday has to do with them escaping from stuff?'* Some Christians' belief of the famous 'blood libel that' Jews desecrated communion wafers and killed Christian children to use their blood for matzah (Balser et al. 2006, p. 24) was stereotyped when Stewie, dressed in Jewish appearance and hairstyle, rips out his sister Meg's heart.

As Blum (2004) concludes, stereotyping looks at individual members from the narrow perspective of group-based image, instead of considering the range of characteristics each member may possess as a distinct individual (p. 271). This type of stereotyping reinforces the prejudices against a minority community, which still faces anti-Semitism in Western countries. Although this is an American show, stereotypical representation like this can influence the British audience against the Jewish community in this country.

Making the mockery of the Jewish language and culture could be found in a number of dialogues by Peter, who according to Anton (2015, p. 214), is a man of contradictory characteristics as he is sometimes concerned about his family but at other times is stupid, arrogant, and indecent. For example, he mocks the glottal fricative /x/ sound (a consonant produced by forcing air through a constricted space in the throat area) of Hebrew by giving himself a Jewish name, which is nothing but a continuous string of the /x/ sound. Similar mockery of the Hebrew language is observed when baby Stewie is seen with an orthodox Jewish outfit saying a prayer using gibberish language with a lot of /x/ sounds at the family Sider organised by Lois. One of the biggest stereotypes in the Christian world is depicting the Jews as 'Christ killers', though Christian religious hierarchy, including the Catholic Church, has come out in recent times to say that this is not historically true (Balser et al. 2006, p. 25). According to them, the '…myth of Jewish responsibility for Jesus's death is embedded in 2000 years' worth of Christian teaching and Western culture, starting with the gospels' attempt to define who the true Jews were. While most people respect the rights of others to adhere to the tenets of their religion, there

has been a historic resentment against Jews by many Christians who cannot understand why Jesus has been so stubbornly rejected' (p. 24). Mayers also has similar observations calling the allegation 'a complex and protean myth' that '…the long awaited Jewish messiah whose coming was foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures was rejected and killed by the Jews (2011, p. 32). In this episode of *Family Guy*, several dialogues imply that Jews are killers of Jesus. For example, when Peter changes his attitude towards Jews, he puts his wife, who has a Jewish heritage, on a cross as a revenge for killing Christ and says, *'How do you like it, huh?'* Baby Stewie makes a provocative statement in the Jewish school when he says, *'What are you gonna do when Jesus comes back and put[s] a boot up your ass?'* When Jesus himself arrives at the end of the episode, Peter tells his Jewish wife Lois that *'Jesus is gonna kill ya'*. In the last two examples, the implication is that Jesus will avenge his death by attacking the Jews when he comes back to this earth.

Peter is sarcastic about Jewish modest clothing and says that he bought 'a sexy little Jewish outfit' for Lois, which he asks his wife to wear. He then says, *'Oh, my God Lois, if you put on this long, thick dress right now, I will lose it'*. The adjectives 'long' and 'thick' to refer to a dress worn by a woman for her husband in bed can hardly be 'sexy' or 'sensuous', but Peter keeps insisting that he will 'lose it' if she wears it. He even goes further and asks her to wear a shawl over her head, referring to headscarves worn by married Jewish women.

Some of the comments made about Judaism and Jews are outright offensive and insulting. For example, after Peter changes his attitude towards Judaism because he was told by his father in a dream that it is a sin to leave Catholicism, he insults the religion saying, *'Jews are gross, Lois, it's the only religion with the word "ew" in it'*. 'Gross' is used here as a negative adjective, possibly 'disgusting', while *OED* defines 'ew' as 'an emphatic expression, chiefly of disgust'; therefore, the religion and its followers are implied as 'disgusting' and 'monstrous', which are offensive comments against a community. Another offensive statement is made when Peter enters the synagogue and says, *'Check it out! I'm one of you guys now, huh! I'm Jewish, yeah! Holocaust! We never won!'* Holocaust epitomises misery and sufferings to Jews, but by reminding the Jews in a synagogue by saying 'we never won' the Holocaust is not only insulting, but also anti-Semitic. Catholicism and Judaism are brought up against

each other when Peter, after his father tells him in the dream *'better knock off all that Jewish stuff',* announces that he needs to get rid of the 'Jewish curse' from the house as a Catholic.

Apart from these obvious insults, there are some indirect or suggestive insults as well. For example, when a Jewish boy tries to flirt with Peter and Lois's daughter, Meg, she asks her mother, *'Is sodomy illegal if you're Jewish?'* This probably suggests that having a relationship with a Jew is a type of sodomy.

Even Christianity was not spared in this episode as Peter, referring to Jesus's death, tells Lois at one point, *'He dies for our sins in that helicopter crash',* mocking Jesus's death; and finally, the last dialogue of the episode attacks religion as a whole by having Jesus call all religions 'crap'. As Anton (2015, p. 215) observes, *'Family Guy* makes jokes about absolutely anything and everything, all in [a] schizoid, non-sequitur style, but by doing that, it created its own identity and contributed, alongside *The Simpsons* and *South Park,* to a whole new genre'. As it is a comedy, the overall purpose is entertainment in order to '…generate short-term gratification for its public' (ibid).

However, among all these negative stereotypes, insults, and mockery, there are a couple of positive comments and stereotypes, for example, when Peter takes his children to a Jewish school saying, *'One of the best parts of being Jewish is getting to take advantage of their excellent schools'.* Jews are also shown in a positive light in the portrayal and sayings of the Jewish person who comes to help Lois understand Judaism when she discovers her Jewish origin. Cautioning Peter what it means to be Jewish, he says, *'It's a process that involves spiritual education and good works'.* There is no counter argument against this positive attribute towards the religion. Rather than bringing Judaism and Catholicism against each other, Jesus in the last scene calls the two religions *'two sides of the same coin'.* It seems that there has been some effort to balance things, but these positive things are not enough compared to the stereotypes, offences, insults, and anti-Semitic comments towards Jews.

3

Media Representation: Audience Response

All representations of religion have the potential to provoke controversy, in which members of faith communities can feel excluded, marginalised, and misrepresented. However, some representations can find a deep resonance with members of faith communities. Those who do not have a religion may also have some say about media representation of religions as religious practices and beliefs may have some indirect influences on their lives as well. Therefore, to get a wider perspective of the relationship between media and religion in contemporary Britain, it is important to examine how people belonging to the three religions under study, as well as those who have no religion, respond to the ways the media portrays these religions. After a linguistic study of the representation of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in mainstream British newspapers, TV documentaries, and TV dramas, it is necessary to investigate how effective these representations are in influencing the recipients of these messages. This chapter analyses how the members of the three religious groups perceive media representations of their own religions, as well as the other two religions, and also investigates the reactions of those who have no religion to the way the three religions are represented. Although separate studies have been made to analyse representation of different faiths, no

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study has so far covered three religions together, which can bring a new dimension to an audience reception study of religion in the media.

Audience Response Study

Livingstone (1998, pp. 1–3) identified the following six 'trajectories' towards audience reception studies developing after the late 1970s:

1. **Encoding/Decoding**—Hall's (1980) Encoding/Decoding model used cultural studies to investigate the process of communicative exchange between the media and the audience in which the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry between the encoder/producer and decoder/receiver plays the most vital role in communication.
2. **Active Audience**—Scholars (Carey 1975; Dayan and Katz 1992; Dayan and Carey 1998) who were opposed to cultural studies wanted '…to account for the selective responses of audiences in the face of media excess', focusing on the active audience.
3. **Resistant Audience**—This route shifted '…attention away from an exclusive focus on the ideological and institutional determinants of media texts towards including a role for a possibly active, but hitherto "disappearing", audience' (Fejes 1984).
4. **The Role of the Reader**—Eco's theory (1979) of 'the role of the reader' was crucial to the theorisation of an integrated approach to the text and reader in which the concepts of the text and the reader are mutually defined.
5. **Marginalised Audience**—This feminist approach to popular culture brought '…the often vilified (i.e., feminised) role of the popular culture audience within cultural theory'.
6. **Culture of the Everyday**—The recent 'ethnographic turn' has shifted focus from textual interpretation towards the contextualisation of that moment involving '… the detailed analysis of the culture of the everyday'.

Ferdinand de Sasussure, in his posthumous publication *Course in General Linguistics* (1966), presents the founding principle of semiology (the signifier + the signified = the sign) and discusses the status of

meaning as a concept. As Lewis (1991, p. 31) observes, de Saussure's theory '…allows us to appreciate the nature of ambiguity, and provides us with an analytical framework for investigating why things mean what they mean'. De Saussure says:

> The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it "material," it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract.
>
> The psychological character of our sound-images becomes apparent when we observe our own speech. Without moving our lips or tongue, we can talk to ourselves or recite mentally a selection of verse. Because we regard the words of our language as sound images, we must avoid speaking of the "phonemes" that make up the words. This term, which suggests vocal activity, is applicable to the spoken word only, to the realization of the inner image in discourse. We can avoid that misunderstanding by speaking of the sounds and syllables of a word provided we remember that the names refer to the sound-image. (1966, p. 66)

However, the 'Saussurean' concept was changed significantly in later years as a more materialistic model interpreted the signifier as the material (or physical) form of the sign, which some called 'referent' (Chandler 2002, p. 15; Lewis 1991, pp. 26–28); but as Lewis (1991, p. 29) observes, '…the images we tend to construct, in response to a word, are based upon non-linguistic rather than linguistic objects'.

Lewis (1991, p. 31) says that in contemporary societies meaning becomes a '…battleground between folk cultures, class subcultures, ethnic cultures, and national cultures, between different communications media, the home and school, between churches and advertising agencies, and between different versions of history and political ideologies. The sign is no longer inscribed within a cultural order. The meanings of things seem less predictable and less certain'. Looking at a television audience in detail, he concludes that we are surrounded by the mighty structures of our cultures and our economy, and the viewer's semiotic environments play a vital role in understanding the 'meaningful contexts'

(ibid, pp. 41–42). Lewis points out that audience response studies facilitate the development of a cultural product, which he terms as 'the voice of the viewer' through which the cultural product (or 'text') can be contextualised and evaluated (ibid, p. 49). He concludes that 'the power to produce meanings lies neither within the TV message nor within the viewer, but in the active engagement between the two' (p. 58).

The Encoding/Decoding Model

The encoding/decoding model was developed by Stuart Hall (1980) and applied by David Morley (1980). The model is a seminal work in audience research where the viewers are considered to be active meaning producers. The model suggests that social experiences, social class, and the cultural knowledge of the audience determine how a message is received.

This model saw television programmes as a set of highly coded *significations*, the product of specific aesthetic, political, technical, and professional ideologies rather than as reflections or distortions of reality. According to this model, the production of a media text in television (encoding) and its consumption by the audience (decoding) consist of two distinct semiological processes. Hall suggests that the encoders use their semiological skills to make the viewer conform to their preferred meanings, but that does not necessarily happen. He considers decoding to be an active process for which there is no certainty that the encoders' efforts to attain power over the decoders will always materialise. Hall says:

> The codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical. The degrees of symmetry—that is, the degrees of "understanding" and "misunderstanding" in the communicative exchange—depend on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry (relations of equivalence) established between the positions of the "personifications", encoder-producer and decoder-receiver. But this, in turn, depends on the degrees of identity/non-identity between the codes which perfectly or imperfectly transmit, interrupt or systematically distort what has been transmitted. The lack of fit between the codes has a great deal to do with the structural differences of relation and position between broadcasters and audiences, but it also has something to do with

> the asymmetry between the codes of "source" and "receiver" at the moment of transformation into and out of the discursive form. What are called "distortions" or "misunderstandings" arise precisely from the lack of equivalence between the two sides in the communicative exchange. Once again, this defines the "relative autonomy", but "determinateness", of the entry and exit of the message in its discursive moments. (p. 131)

The main idea of Hall's theory is that the meaning of encoding is not identical to the meaning of decoding as both the production and reception have their own particular interpretive frameworks. The media messages are thus interpreted in different ways by the audience based on their cultural background, economic standing, and personal experiences. Hall (ibid, p. 136) identifies three hypothetical positions from which the audience constructs the decoding of a televisual discourse:

1. **The dominant-hegemonic position**—Here the audience operates inside the dominant code by decoding the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded full and straight and thus follows the text's 'preferred reading'. 'This is the ideal-typical case of "perfectly transparent communication"—or as close as we are likely to come to it "for all practical purposes"' (ibid). This means that the decoder's perceived message is in line with the encoder's intended message. Generally, these types of viewers, though active, are not able to interpret the message as they choose because they are '…limited both by the message and by their own ideological world' (Lewis 1991, p. 59).
2. **The negotiated code or position**—This contains both adaptive and oppositional elements whereby the text's 'preferred reading' is not straightforwardly accepted by the audience. Hall explains this position as '…a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: It acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), whereas, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules—it operates with exceptions to the rule. It accords the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to "local conditions", to its own more corporate positions' (p. 137). The 'active audience' here negotiates between what is said and what they

perceive to be acceptable. Although they are within the hegemonic structure of the society, they do operate through their own particular logics, which according to Hall, '…are sustained by their differential and unequal relation to the discourses and logics of power' (ibid).

3. **The oppositional code**—Here the audience outrightly rejects the 'preferred reading', that is, they decode the message contrary to the intended message. 'He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference' (ibid). According to Hall, the broadcasters often consider these situations as the audience's failure to understand the encoder's intended meaning, but the fact is that the audiences are not operating within the 'dominant' or 'preferred' code (p. 135).

Lewis (1991, p. 62), while summarizing this model, observes the importance of potential rather than actual power of the message. 'The audience will either endorse the preferred meaning, oppose it, or produce a response that negotiates between acceptance and rejection'.

Stuart Hall's colleague David Morley (1980) applied the encoding/decoding model in his *Nationwide* study where he investigated how people's different socio-cultural backgrounds contribute towards 'differential decoding' by the groups. He showed one episode of *Nationwide*, a BBC weekday current affairs programme, by dividing his respondents into 29 different groups of 5–10 people to test which of the three positions (dominant, negotiated, or oppositional) his respondents conform to. The findings show that those conforming to the dominant position included bank managers and apprentices, whereas those who produced oppositional reading were black, further education students, and shop stewards. The negotiated position was held by teacher training and university students and trade union officials (Dutton 1997, pp. 116–117). However, Morley found the process of making a television text meaningful to be much more complex than the Encoding/Decoding model, which suggests that people accepting the encoded message would be a part of the hegemonic ideology and would be unaware of the processes by which the ideology was being 'preferred'. He found groups with similar class position giving dissimilar interpretations (1980, p. 159). What he found was that

his audiences could sometimes see through the messages and deconstruct them, though not necessarily rejecting the view. Morley says:

> The recognition of "preferring" mechanisms is widespread in the groups and combines with either acceptance or rejection of the encoded preferred meaning; the awareness of the construction by no means entails the rejection of what is constructed. (1980, p. 140)

Elizabeth Poole (2002) applied this model in her study of media representation of Muslims in British press to '…discover how far audiences share the discourse of the press and the variety of socio-cultural factors important in the decoding of mediated information' (p. 188). The study found cultural or religious proximity as an important element for decoding culturally encoded texts. Poole suggests that rather than just knowing others, knowing about others is crucial, which involves 'understanding complex identities' and the ability to 'recognise and deconstruct one's own cultural values in relation to others' (p. 241). She found that in some cases, non-Muslims who were within close proximity of Muslims conformed to preferred meaning. Poole concludes that cultural proximity is not enough to override dominant media representations and suggests that the contact, '…must include dialogue that encourages an understanding of Islamic beliefs and practise, and a sense of how these are interpreted through one's own cultural frameworks' (ibid). This finding contrasts with the result of a study by Al-Azami (2008) where non-Muslims who had visited the mosques that were negatively portrayed in the media rejected media representations of those mosques. However, there is some conformity with Poole's observation as by visiting the mosques, the participants in Al-Azami's study might have developed some understanding of the 'Islamic beliefs and practice' that Poole (2002, p. 241) refers to.

Philo (2008) criticises the Encoding/Decoding model and says that viewers generally do not construct a new meaning with each encounter with a news text and do not always remain occupied in their own cultural space with no understanding of other people's values (p. 538).

He asks three 'central questions' on the relationship between media, audiences, and ideologies (pp. 539–540):

1. What are the conditions under which people accept or reject a perspective when they are aware of the range of alternatives?
2. What are the conditions under which information about these alternatives is either made available or is limited in public discourse, and what happens to Hall's group of people who are living within the hegemonic ideology if they are given different information?
3. What are the conditions under which such ideologies (in the encoded message) can be critiqued by audiences?

Philo's main criticism of this model is the influence this theory has in the study of media and cultural studies in viewing that audiences have the ability to resist, agree, and negotiate messages, ignoring the strength of media influence. He argues that recent studies prove that audiences are largely dependent on traditional news sources. Although the capacity of audiences to engage actively with texts cannot be underestimated, yet evidence suggests that media messages have considerable influence on the construction of public knowledge (ibid, pp. 541–542).

Although Philo puts forward some valid arguments on the deficiencies of Hall's theory, this model has been applied to investigate people's reactions to both the print and broadcast media representations of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in the audience response study in this chapter. The model was chosen for this study as it focuses on the effectiveness of a media message in the context of the receiver's personal circumstances. Religious beliefs are personal to an individual, and someone who has a religion will have particular interpretive frameworks to decode a media message about their own religion and also about other religions that may differ significantly from the intended message of the encoder. Even those who claim to have no religion can differ from a fellow non-religious person as there are differences in the attitudes of non-religious people towards different religions and religious groups. Morley (1980) argues, '…all meanings do not exist equally in the message, it has been structured in dominance' (p. 10), whereas Poole (2002, p. 189) justifies the use of this model in her study of print media representation of Islam and Muslims as it allowed her to examine '…the extent to which the determinants of meaning are inscribed within or are external to the text, and which variables are important to our understanding of Muslims'.

The CDA theory applied in the previous chapter provides ample evidence of the dominant or hegemonic position from which the British media represents the three Abrahamic religions, and unravels the underlying messages in the media about the religions in question. Discussing some of the media texts analysed in Chapter 2 with the audience provides the opportunity to examine where the audience conforms to the intended meaning of a text, where it opposes, or where some conformity and some opposition exist. The findings of this audience response study prove that the decoding of media portrayals of religions largely depend on which positional code the respondents belong to.

Innovative Aspects of This Study

Studies on religion in the media, though relatively recent, have been quite extensive, particularly in the United States. However, perspectives of different religious groups on how their religions are represented in the media have not attracted much scholarly attention. There have been works on how Muslims receive media portrayal of Islam (e.g., Poole 2002). We also see a number of surveys on what different religious groups feel about media representation of their respective religions, for example, on Christianity the BBC consultation on diversity (Public Knowledge, 2011), on Judaism the Anti-Semitic Barometer Report (Campaign Against Antisemitism 2015), or on Islam (Ameli 2007). Almost all the studies and surveys ask religious communities to respond to media portrayal of their own religions, not on their reactions to how other religions are represented. Also, those with no religion have seldom been asked to comment on how different religions are covered in the media. Therefore, the following methodological approaches can be considered as a new contribution to this field of research:

1. Each religious group not only responds to how its religion is represented, but also reacts to representations of the other two religions.
2. Those who consider themselves without a religion also have their say in how the three religions are portrayed in the media.

3. The same news articles and TV documentaries analysed in Chapter 2 are used in the audience response study to investigate the effectiveness of the language used in those representations.

The rationale for this multidimensional approach in studying audience response to religion in the media stems from the changing demography, an ever increasing interest in religions by the media, and the audience's non-stop access to media through 24/7 news service and social media. People do not need to look for news in the modern world of smartphones and social media; rather they are continuously notified about what is happening around the world by just browsing their Facebook page or twitter feed. Therefore, people are exposed to issues related to different religions more frequently than they used to be in the past that can either challenge their existing knowledge or reinforce their stereotype of different religions. In this modern age, in a multicultural country like Britain, it is almost impossible for an individual to remain completely oblivious about religions, so irrespective of whether a person believes in a religion they cannot avoid hearing about different religions, particularly the three Abrahamic religions this study investigates. Talking with more than a hundred people belonging to all three religions and those with no religion demonstrates that they were fully aware of all these religions and had already developed their interpretive frameworks in decoding media representations about them.

It is important to justify the inclusion of non-religious people in this study. One-quarter of the population have no religion and share the secular values of majority of the media, but their opinions are rarely sought when researching religion in the media. As they do not have a religion, they can compare the representation of the three religions and give a neutral view, whereas followers of a religion are likely to be biased about their own religion and find it difficult to compare between the religions objectively.

Methodology

Focus group meetings were used as the main method for data collection to allow the participants to speak freely on controversial and debatable issues that would not have been possible in other formats. Focus groups

can provide a researcher with ample data to analyse in this modern era of social research where both consensus and diversity are of huge interest to academics (Morgan 1997, p. 15). This type of methodology enables the researcher to include a relatively large number of participants who can take part in discussions in a safe public setting (Lewis 1991, p. 91) so that the researcher can explore how people construct meaning and how they respond when they are faced with other people who may agree or disagree to their position. Comparing between focus groups and participant observation, Morgan (1997, p. 8) says that the main advantage of focus groups is '…the opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited period of time based on the researcher's ability to assemble and direct the focus group sessions'. Other advantages Morgan suggests include covering more people's views in a shorter period of time, the participants' ability to learn from each other's opinions and experiences, and the researcher having greater control of the proceedings that lead to producing data according to the researcher's needs (ibid, pp. 14–16).

There are also some disadvantages of the focus group method; for example, when one or two dominant members try to control the discussions, whereas others may tend to agree with the dominant views and remain silent, making the exercise less participatory, or, as suggested by Morgan (1997), making participants travel to a focus group can sometimes be stressful for a researcher (p. 14).

Special care was given to overcome some of these disadvantages by sometimes directing questions towards those who remained relatively quiet and arranging focus groups at local places of worship, such as mosques or churches, where the participants took part in familiar environments and interacted with people they personally knew. There were no financial incentives for participants, so each participant took part because they had an interest in the subject, which enabled the focus group meetings to be more interactive and participatory. Hence, none of the focus group meetings had disengaged participants.

The three Abrahamic faiths—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—have been chosen for the study because of the similarities among the three religions. They share some common beliefs, particularly the story of creationism and many stories/traditions of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Second, apart from Christianity, which has been the religion of the common

people in this land for centuries, Jewish immigration in the middle of the last century and Muslim immigration in the last few decades have significantly changed the religious and political landscape in this country with Muslims being the second largest religious group in Britain. Although there are more Hindus and Sikhs than Jews, the Jewish community in Britain is an important geo-political player in the context of the current world politics that also links Christians and Muslims.

It is also important to clarify the remit of this research in terms of the media practitioners. A media practitioner can be a decoder of a media text and can also be a part of the religious and non-religious audience. However, members of the audience can also be directly or indirectly related to the media. Therefore, the study is strictly confined to what is encoded in the media text—not the encoder—and considers the decoders as merely media audiences of particular media messages used in this study, not as a producer of media messages in other contexts. This was indeed the case with one participant who works for a national newspaper, but that person's contribution in the study has been only as a decoder of the media materials used in the study.

Focus Group Meetings

Focus groups were arranged in four major cities in England: London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool. At the initial stage, separate focus group meetings were held with Muslims, Christians, and non-religious groups. The second stage included a mixed group between Christians and Muslims, and in the third stage interviews were held with a few Jewish participants. Finally, an online questionnaire was completed by some members of the Jewish community.

The number of people who participated in the focus groups is 106, which included Christians, Muslims, and non-religious people, whereas 17 members of the Jewish community took part in interviews and in an online questionnaire. The details of the number of focus group meetings in each city and the number of participants are given here. The list also includes Jewish participants.

1. Christian Focus Groups (3):
   (a) London—15 participants
   (b) Manchester—16 participants
   (c) Birmingham—14 participants

2. Muslim Focus Groups (3):
   (a) London—8 participants
   (b) Manchester—12 participants
   (c) Birmingham—10 participants

3. Non-religious Focus Groups (2):
   (a) Manchester—7 participants
   (b) Liverpool—7 participants

4. Mixed Focus Group (Christians and Muslims) (1):
   (a) London—12 participants (5 Muslims and 7 Christians)

5. Jewish Interviews:
   (a) Liverpool—2 participants

6. Online questionnaire for Jews—15 participants

Links to media materials were sent to all the participants of focus groups and interviews a week before each event so that they were informed of the issues to discuss at the meetings or interviews. All the newspaper articles were available on their online versions, whereas the video materials were taken from YouTube. There were some efforts initially to collect the original versions of the videos from the TV channels, but that proved to be difficult. The materials included six newspaper articles published in *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail*, two each on the three religions, comprising both positive and negative portrayals. Five TV documentaries were included representing the three religions. On Islam, there was a positive portrayal of the life of Prophet Muhammad on the BBC, whereas the other one was a Channel 4 documentary by the historian Tom Holland,

which challenged the Islamic version of the religion's early years. Clips from two versions of the Channel 4 documentary Christianity: A History covered both positive and negative portrayals of the religion. As no documentary was found that portrayed Judaism overtly negatively, a lifestyle documentary on the Jewish community in Manchester on ITV was chosen, which was taken largely and positively by the non-Jewish people, but had mostly negative reactions from the Jewish community. Fictional representation was not included in the audience response study as six newspaper articles and five video clips were considered sufficient to discuss in a 90-minute focus group meeting as well as ensuring that the participants did not feel overwhelmed by the materials.

The duration of each focus group was 90 minutes, whereas the interviews lasted one hour each. The online questionnaire was prepared as a google form and sent to different Jewish and interfaith groups on Facebook as well as the synagogues and interfaith groups with whom there were contacts previously.

None of the three religions is monolithic as there are various denominations within each religion. However, this study covers the macro level of religious affiliation with anyone calling themselves a Christian, a Jew, or a Muslim was eligible to participate. There was also no issue of whether an individual practised the religion regularly. This study is not theological, but a study on people who define themselves as a member of one of these three religions and are interested in the way the media represent their religion. Diversity of participants was sought while forming the focus groups, including multiplicity in terms of their ethnicity, gender, age, or professional backgrounds rather than choosing them based on their religiosity or religious denominations.

At the beginning of each focus group and interview, the purpose of the project was clearly explained to participants. People were strongly encouraged to give their opinions without any worries and were reassured that they would remain anonymous. They were reminded that the researcher's personal faith had no role in this research and that they could speak freely without being politically correct. Fortunately, the participants took this on board and spoke frankly on all the topics discussed in the meetings. All proceedings were recorded on a Dictaphone after the participants signed a consent form.

The Participants

Muslims

Focus group meetings with Muslims were held in London, Birmingham, and Manchester. There was an expectation that with the researcher being a Muslim, organising Muslim focus groups would be less problematic than the other two faith groups. Although it was obviously true compared to the struggle with the Jewish community, it turned out that it was not that easy. Perhaps the initial thought of contacting big Islamic centres like the London Muslim Centre was not the best idea as it had too many activities going on to give time to an individual project like this. Having learned that lesson, two smaller mosques in Manchester and Birmingham were approached using personal contacts, which proved to be much easier to organise. The London event took place at the office of a Muslim charity, again through a personal contact. The formation of the three Muslim focus groups and the overall mood of the three meetings are briefly discussed next.

Manchester

The focus group with Muslims in Manchester was held in a mosque in Stockport in Greater Manchester. One of the reasons this mosque was chosen is its wide range of ethnic mix; Muslims from different parts of the world assemble at this mosque. The chairperson of the mosque committee encouraged the regular attendees to participate and also helped in ensuring diversity among the participants. Among the 12 participants, the male-female ratio was almost 50–50; the age range varied from a 20-year-old university student to an 80-year-old retired officer; and ethnicities included Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Syrian, Sudanese, and Trinidadian. It was the ideal type of mix for a project like this.

Although the discussions were lively and insightful, one of the drawbacks was that a number of participants could not go through the print and video materials they were sent a week before the event. This could be considered one of the limitations of this method, particularly when the

participation is voluntary and without any incentives. The researcher can only request the participants to come with some preparation, but cannot enforce it. The only effect of the lack of preparation of some participants was that not everyone could give informed opinions on the media materials on Christianity and Judaism. As they were well aware of Islam in the media, everyone actively participated in discussions on Islam and Muslims.

London

Failing to recruit participants through a big Islamic centre, the only other option was to take help of personal contacts. A relative of the researcher helped organise the event at the Muslim charity office he worked, and six staff of the charity took part in the discussions. The other two participants were personal contacts of the researcher. Like Manchester, this group was also mixed with gender ratio being 50–50 and their ethnicities included Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali, White British, and Afro-Caribbean mixed. Two participants were converted Muslims who could give their own perspectives on the *Daily Mail* article on Muslim converts.

Although the number of participants was less than the one in Manchester, the meeting was lively with everyone actively participating. As with the Manchester group, the women were more eloquent in speaking on the issues compared to men, though everyone contributed reasonably well. Participants in London were more prepared and were better informed about media representations of Christianity and Judaism compared to participants in Manchester and Birmingham.

Birmingham

The focus group in Birmingham was held in a small community mosque attended by Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds. A personal acquaintance, who is the chair of the mosque committee helped in arranging the meeting. The group was diverse in terms of ethnicity, age, and profession of the participants, but unfortunately there was no woman. The organiser did invite some women, but they were unable to come. This is a significant setback of this group, but something that was beyond anyone's control.

Like in Manchester, some participants did not go through all the materials and did not contribute much on media representations of Christianity and Judaism.

Christians

Christian focus groups were held in London, Birmingham, and Manchester, and the number of participants in every meeting surpassed the Muslim numbers. The organisation of all three meetings were done by the priests of the respective churches, so the trust the church leader had among the congregation helped in getting people to volunteer to participate. Of the three faith groups, the Christian focus groups were the easiest to organise. The priests were reached through interfaith networks and personal contacts, and all the three churches were warm, hospitable, and supportive with one of them even offering to organise a mixed focus group later. Following is a brief outline of the three Christian focus groups.

Manchester

A Catholic church in Altrincham in Greater Manchester was accessed through an interfaith network. The priest of the church was helpful and organised the first Christian focus group attended by 15 people. There was a good mix of gender, age, and professions, but the group was not much ethnically diverse with the majority being White English apart from one or two with an Irish background. This was not surprising as being the faith of the indigenous population, not much variety was expected in terms of ethnicity. Most of the participants had gone through the media materials and were well informed of the issues; hence, the participation was lively with people speaking freely on the points raised during the discussion.

Birmingham

A departmental colleague of the researcher helped in contacting a Catholic Church in Birmingham where 16 people attended a lively session. Of the three Christian groups, this was the most ethnically diverse with a number of

participants from Afro-Caribbean background. It was also mixed in terms of age, gender, and profession. Participants here, too, spoke frankly on the topics and did not hesitate to give their honest opinions on controversial topics.

London

With the Manchester and Birmingham groups being Catholic, it was necessary to get an Anglican church in London. The Roman Catholic Chaplain of Liverpool Hope University helped in finding an Anglican priest in London who organised the focus group in a church in North London. The priest had previously worked at this university, and although he was not the priest of any church, he regularly led services at an Anglican church in North London where he organised the focus group with help from its priest, who also took part as a participant. The event took place immediately after a Sunday service and was attended by 12 people, mostly White English, though, there were a couple of people with Irish background and a woman from Japanese origin. This was another meeting with widespread participation and opinions.

Non-Religious

Apart from the difficulty in organising Jewish groups, non-religious groups were another problematic group in terms of getting people on board. Ironically, the first focus group of the project was with non-religious participants in Manchester, but since then it was difficult to get groups organised in other cities, as unlike the religious communities, they do not have a common place where they regularly attend with a leadership that is religiously followed. Despite many people having no religion, they are not organised like the religious groups. The only organisation that could be approached is the British Humanist Association through which the Manchester focus group could take place. Unfortunately, there was not much response from London and Birmingham branches of the organisation, so alternative approaches had to be taken, and it was decided that a focus group would be formed with Liverpool Hope University students who call themselves non-religious.

An outline of participants in the two non-religious groups is given here:

Manchester

The British Humanist Association's Manchester branch provided four of the seven participants in this focus group with whom the meeting took place at the office of an interfaith network. The other three participants included a school teacher, a retired woman, and a Ph.D. student at Manchester University. Although the humanists called themselves atheists, the student participant called herself 'non-religious', but not an 'atheist'—a term, which is often associated with those who demonise religions. She said that she respected all the religions but did not belong to any of them.

There was diversity in gender, age, and professions, but not ethnic as all participants were White English. As most participants were organised by the Humanist Association, it was not possible to ensure the ethnic diversity. Also, the fact that ethnic minorities tend to have less proportion of non-religious people compared to the indigenous population may have been another factor for the mono-ethnic formation of the group. However, discussions were lively with a lot of negative views against religions, particularly Islam. Another interesting aspect was that there was a lot of conflicting views and strong counter arguments, which was not common among the religious groups. Even the mixed group in Liverpool was less argumentative than this one.

Liverpool

The student focus group at Liverpool Hope University was organised by a BA final-year student who volunteered to recruit participants with no religion. He organised seven participants who were all undergraduate students of the university, mostly in the final year.

This was the least diverse group among all the focus groups with gender difference the only notable diversity. They were all full-time students of the same age group, and all but one were White English with the other being a Chinese international student; therefore, the arguments were not as intensive as the other non-religious group. However, the discussions consisted of a lot of interesting insights that will be examined in details in the findings section.

Lack of Jewish Participation

One of the major setbacks of this study is the lack of sufficient Jewish perspectives due to the reluctance of the community to participate in this research. No stone was unturned in the effort to organise Jewish focus groups applying multiple approaches, but with little success. The first step taken to recruit Jewish participants was similar to the approaches taken with Christians and Muslims, which was contacting the places of worship to get the Imams, Priests, and Rabbis to invite their congregations in mosques, churches, and synagogues, respectively, to participate in the project. This was to minimise any scepticisms or anxieties the prospective participants might have had as the leader of their local places of worship would act as the reassuring factor for participation. This approach worked well with Christians and reasonably well with Muslims, but failed miserably with the Jews. The churches and mosques that agreed to take part announced in their congregations about the research and encouraged them to participate. Not only that, they arranged the focus group meetings in their respective places of worship, which made the participants feel at home, and as most of them knew each other, the atmosphere in these focus group meetings was friendly and cordial with people participating actively giving frank opinions. However, despite approaching several synagogues, not a single one opened its doors, nor was there any Rabbi available over the phone to talk to in order to explain what the research was all about. A few synagogues replied to emails, and two of them agreed to inform their congregations about the project. However, they informed that they would not organise the focus group and could only forward the information to their congregation so that if anyone was interested, they could contact the researcher directly. Unfortunately, not a single member of these synagogues contacted the researcher.

In step two, Jewish media was approached and a radio station in Salford in Greater Manchester interviewed the researcher in its weekly Jewish Hour programme where the project was explained for 10 minutes and the researcher answered different questions and encouraged people to participate in the focus groups. This approach also bore no result, and even the presenter of the programme could not participate.

Third, different interfaith organisations were approached to get their support to organise focus groups with Jews, but the result was the same. Some well-known Muslim community leaders tried to help and introduced the researcher to some Jewish leaders they work with in interfaith networks; yet no success could be achieved. There were some initial positive responses, but the interests gradually died down and subsequent correspondences brought fewer responses. Due to this unexpected resistance from the Jewish community, as the fourth step, the Director of the Centre for Jewish Studies at Liverpool hope University was approached for his advice and support. He also wrote to some people, but none of them agreed to take part.

Fifth, as time was ticking and data collection was taking much longer than anticipated, after consulting with the senior Jewish academic in the university, the format of data collection with the Jews was changed, and it was decided that interviews would be conducted as it would be impossible to get approximately 10 people for a focus group meeting. He gave email addresses of 30 people well known to him to whom the researcher wrote giving his reference. Out of 30, only 2 emailed back and one agreed to be interviewed. The person who agreed to take part helped to get one other person for the interview. Meanwhile, all those Jewish people with whom the researcher had communications previously for focus groups were approached to take part in the interview, but no one replied. Options were open for face-to-face, telephone, or Skype interviews, but despite all the efforts only two interviews could be organised.

Finally, in a desperate attempt to get more Jewish perspectives for this study, further changes were made to the methodology, and an online questionnaire was prepared and distributed to all the Jewish contacts the researcher had and also to many other organisations that had not been contacted before. A departmental colleague, who is Jewish, was approached to help through her contacts. Invitations were sent through different Facebook pages with Jewish presence. All these efforts brought only 15 responses to the online questionnaire.

It is difficult to come to a conclusion about what could be the reasons for such widespread non-cooperation from the Jewish community for this research. First, it became clear through the progress of the project that arranging focus groups is an extremely difficult task, particularly in cities far away. The university granted a full-time graduate intern for

3 months to help organise the focus groups, but organising such events proved to be extremely difficult and time-consuming, and only two focus groups could be organised during the 3-month internship programme.

Despite clearly mentioning in all correspondences that the Middle East conflict was not within the remit of this research and only how the British media represents Judaism as a religion and the Jewish community in Britain would feature in the focus groups, it is highly likely that many Jews were not convinced that this was at all possible. The researcher's faith did not help the cause. In fact, one of the two people interviewed suspected that due to having an Arab surname, the suspicion could be even higherthough, the researcher came from a South Asian ethnic background. Most probably the timing of this research coincided with the rise of anti-Semitism in Britain (Campaign Against Antisemitism 2015) resulting in the Jewish community showing reluctance to talk about its religion or community to avoid talking about issues in the Middle East, particularly to an individual who happens to be a Muslim with an Arab surname.

The two interviews were held at the residences of the two participants, both in Liverpool. Both of them were retired men living with their wives. There was a good mix of diversity among the online questionnaire participants in terms of age, gender, and profession. Most of them are second- and third-generation people whose parents or grandparents migrated from Germany and Eastern Europe during and after the Second World War. Despite the small numbers, the two interviews and the comments sections of the 15 online questionnaires brought interesting insights of the Jewish perspectives in this debate. Although not comprehensive by any means, it was satisfying that at least some voices of the Jewish community could be included in this project.

Hypotheses

As the Encoding/Decoding model suggests, the audience received a media message independent of the intended message of the text. The circumstances an individual is surrounded by, such as personal, social, religious, and so on all contribute to the way a media message is decoded. This phenomenon is particularly applicable to media texts on religions as the portrayal of religions

in the secular press is often rejected by people who follow a religion, whereas those who do not have a religion tend to agree with the press. Therefore, based on previous research on religion in the media, this study makes the following assumptions about the different kinds of respondents in this study. The hypotheses are formed on the basis of Hall's Encoding/Decoding model.

Hypothesis 1

According to the latest census almost one-quarter of the population does not have a religion (*ONS* 2011). The society we live in is largely secular and the media plays a significant part in keeping religion away from the society. As Brown (200, p. 1) observes, it took several centuries for Christianity to establish in Britain, 'but it has taken less than forty years for the country to forsake it'. Although religious diversity is on the rise in Britain, Christianity is on the decline though Christianity is still part of the country's national heritage. There is an increase of religiously illiterate people in Britain among whom the media plays an important role in informing about religious matters (Hoover 2006; Knott et al. 2013). Although religious issues frequently feature in the media, most cover religions in a negative way. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is:

People with no religion will take the dominant-hegemonic position due to their limited knowledge of religion. As they do not have a religion, they will follow the text's 'preferred reading', ensuring a 'perfectly transparent communication' between the encoder and decoder. Therefore, they will tend to agree with most of the media representations of religions.

Hypothesis 2

The secular media's portrayal of religion often creates discontent among those who follow a religion. They consider media to be unkind to their religion and consider media messages about their religion to be mostly unfair. When a particular religion or religious community is portrayed in the media, be it in a newspaper article, a television documentary, or a television

drama, most people belonging to the religion being portrayed would reject it as biased against them. That is why hypothesis 2 is:

Followers of a religion will prefer an 'oppositional code' while decoding a media message about their religion. Here, they will reject the 'preferred reading' as they do not operate within the 'dominant' or 'preferred' code due to considering the media biased against their religion. Therefore, they will tend to disagree with most of the media representations of their religion.

Hypothesis 3

Following a religion is deeply personal and people follow a religion because they consider it to be the only true faith. Although they may respect other people's religious beliefs, they would feel less sympathetic towards other religions as they do not have the same belief as others. Therefore, their reaction to media portrayal of other religions depends on their understanding of those religions and their followers. They may sometimes accept the media portrayals while reject them at other times. On this basis, hypothesis 3 is:

Followers of a religion have a 'negotiated position' while decoding media messages about other religions. They may accept the hegemonic definitions but will not conform entirely to the 'preferred meaning' applying their own ground rules. Therefore, as 'active audiences' they neither entirely agree nor fully disagree to the media representation of other religions.

Hypothesis 4

Philo's (2008) criticism of the Encoding/Decoding model cannot be rejected altogether, particularly when one religion is constantly portrayed negatively in the media. Unlike Christianity and Judaism that share a common history, Islam is fairly new in this country and has significant cultural difference from the majority of the population in Britain.

Christians in general have little knowledge about Islam and are largely dependent on traditional news sources. However, Jews, apart from having little knowledge about Islam like Christians, also have a deep emotional relationship with the State of Israel, which is in an antagonistic relationship with Muslims in the Middle East. Hence, media messages about Islam are likely to influence Christians and Jews considerably. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is:

Christians and Jews' reaction to media representation of Islam will mostly conform to the dominant hegemonic position due to being influenced by constant negative media portrayals of Islam and Muslims. Therefore, they tend to agree with most of the media representation about Islam.

Hypothesis 5

The option to comment on online versions of newspapers has provided the opportunity to get instant reactions from the audience about an article. Readers can use pseudonyms to remain anonymous and can express their feelings without any fear of being targeted by others for their views. With many people unhappy with the level of political correctness within the society, a large number of readers consider this as an opportunity to give opinions freely. Online versions of all newspapers, and all videos on YouTube provide facilities for their readers and viewers to write comments. Comments on controversial issues tend to be much higher in the comments section of the newspapers than those that are not so controversial. With the majority of the media reports, columns, and comments on religions being on controversial aspects of the religion concerned, it prompts many readers to make comments. Therefore, hypothesis 5 is:

Language in the comments section of online versions of newspaper articles will be much more aggressive than in focus group discussions, and articles on Islam and Muslims will be subject to the most aggressive language followed by articles on Christianity and Judaism.

Findings

In this section, data analysis is done by taking the three religious groups, the two non-religious groups, the mixed group, the two Jewish interviews, online questionnaire for Jews, and comments on online versions of newspapers in separate sections. Each section is composed of the views coming out of all the focus group meetings, interviews, questionnaires, and comments. The Encoding/Decoding model is applied to see where the hypothesis is proved correct and where there are deviations. Through all the discussions, a coherent decoding pattern of the audiences in this study is sought, first as intra-group, and then as inter-group leading to the conclusion and recommendations of this study in the next chapter. Analyses in this section will be done to find the following:

(a) The way each religious group responds to how its respective religions are represented
(b) The way each religious group perceives representations of other religions than their own
(c) The way people with no faith decode these representations
(d) Whether the Christians and the Jews take a dominant hegemonic position while decoding the representation of Islam
(e) How differently the audiences approach the same topics when they discuss with members of other faiths in mixed-group discussions
(f) How differently people use language while commenting on online versions of newspapers as opposed to face-to-face interaction

Muslim Audience: Rejecting Media Portrayals of Islam

Unsurprisingly, proving hypothesis 2 correct, all participants completely rejected the negative portrayals of Islam in the two *Daily Mail* articles and the Channel 4 documentary on Islam's history by Tom Holland. They appreciated the positive representation in the BBC documentary on Prophet Muhammad and found it an authentic programme. They used strong language to condemn media propaganda against Islam and

Muslims, and their use of language demonstrated a strong sense of antagonism against the media. The article on Muslim converts, though not overtly negative, had quite a few subtle negativities that was discussed in Chapter 2. The participants identified some of those covert issues and took the whole article as a negative portrayal of Islam. The participants in all three focus groups clearly positioned themselves in the 'oppositional code' (Hall 1980). Although this was expected, there were some unexpected findings as well, for example, failures of the Muslim community was a common self-reflection in all the groups. We can categorise the Muslim audience's opinions on the media representations of Islam through the following points.

Why and How the Media Portray Islam Negatively

Looking at the media portrayals of Islam and Muslims from their own interpretive frameworks, they not only rejected these representations, but also gave reasons why and how the media stereotyped their faith so negatively. The observation was that since 9/11, the whole media sensationalism just sky-rocketed against Islam and Muslims, and that the whole paradigm on 9/11 and terrorism were hijacked by the media. Many viewed that there was a political agenda against Islam, which the media was trying to propagate.

According to most of the participants, the continuous rise of the Muslim population and the increase in Muslims' religiosity created a sense of fear in the media, which they were passing on to the general public. However, they believed that this fear was blown out of proportion by the media as the actual numbers did not validate their claims. The overwhelming view was that the media chose only bad news on Muslims and promoted hate preachers like Anjem Chowdhury in such a way that they represented the views of all the Muslims in the world. One participant's comment in Manchester summarises this feeling:

> *They will choose the nuttiest Muslim, Islamic person that they know, get his view and they will put it on the camera, and they'll rerun it about one million times on prime time. Anything positive going on in the Islamic world will be given a little tiny slot at about one o'clock when nobody's watching.*

Some participants used the term *secular fundamentalists* to refer to the media's hegemonic attitude towards religions, a term used for those secularists whose '…demand for conformity and its totalitarian system of values appear like the "great beast", one that attempts to unfold its net of supremacy'. (Cristini 2013, p. 165) They said that the secularists were failing to beat Islam, so they decided to take a fight against Islam in an aggressive manner as found in the following comment:

If you look at the most strongest in the world at the moment are the secularists, they go to an extent to fanatic secularism, if you can call them fundamentalist, they will do everything,…the secular movement is very, very strong. Only one place they couldn't penetrate is Islam.

The reason for these biased representations, according to a participant in Birmingham, was considering Islam and Muslims to be problematic. He says:

What we see is that Islam is presented as the main cause for all the problems. I have never seen the media saying that Islam is making any contribution to the society, or doing something good for the humanity, or they are beneficial for humanity.

Some Muslim participants found covert racism in the representation of Islam, which came out strongly in the following statement of a female London participant:

When my parents came to the UK, we were African and we were black and we were facing certain types of racism and now people have decided you can't say these types of things against black people anymore but you hear the exact type of rhetoric as a Muslim. …I was in this conference…they were using this phrase, 'anti-muslim racism,' It's literally, it's like that.

The main cause, according to almost all the participants, was that Islamophobia was taking a firm root in the British media. There was an agreement that Huntington's (1996) theory of 'Clash of Civilizations' was taking some form of establishment in Western governments and the

media, manifested in the following comment by a female participant in Manchester:

> *If you look at, when the Cold War ended, who is the biggest threat to the western world or the so-called 'developed world?' It's Muslims. Whether it's Iran, whether it's Iraq, whether it's Afghanistan, whether it's Bosnia, whether it's Syria, whether it's—there's always a big agenda, and they want to give this impression that Muslims and Islam are not good for us.*

Religion in General Marginalised

Most Muslim participants believed that the secular media were against religion in general, though Islam was targeted the most. Some participants mentioned the history of the struggle against religious dominance in Europe and how the free press evolved from a fight for freedom of speech, and that the anti-religion stance of the media came from that sense of 'self-protection'. There was a consensus that religion was being caricatured and mocked, and none of the three religions got good press, though Islam was the one attacked most. One London participant observed that Islam's and Muslims' representation was disproportionately higher than the other two religions. Another London participant found some differences in the way local and national press portrayed religions and said that positive news stories of religious people rarely featured in national media.

Some participants used adjectives like *backward, less intelligent,* and *less progressive* to refer to the way media viewed religious people referring to the power they demonstrate while depicting religions. They found religious people often ridiculed in popular media, for example, the portrayal of the conservative Christian mother in the American television comedy *The Big Bang Theory*. A female participant in London, commenting on media's general attitude towards religions, said:

> *It's just ridiculous and all this is just periphery to people's lives as opposed to people who live their religion who are quite happy and not crazy, they're not blowing people up, that kind of contextualisation that I know that I live I never see reflected.*

A participant in Manchester also had a similar opinion:

> *…there is an anti-religious sentiment in the media because of the secular nature of our society… although they might be a little bit more lenient towards Christianity and Judaism, it doesn't mean they let religion off the hook altogether.*

Segregation of Islam Blown Out of Proportion

The *Daily Mail* article on segregation in a British university was the one that got the most reaction from all three groups. The reason may be that women issues probably resonate the mood of most of the majority community against Muslims who are constantly reminded that their religion is discriminatory against women. Interestingly, the people most vocal on this issue in London and Manchester were the women, and similar to the analysis in Chapter 2, most people highlighted the absence of any women voice in the article that apparently was sympathetic to women's cause. Some participants gave examples of the language of the article, for example, phrases like 'shocking' or 'disturbing' to refer to gender segregation in Islam and rejected the article using adjectives like *exaggerating, sensationalised,* or *wishy-washy.*

A young woman in Manchester used the same adjectives mentioned for segregation in the article to refer to the offensive nature of the article:

> *I found that article 'shocking' and 'disturbing', because I know, for a fact, that it is so out of touch with the reality on the ground. Ask any woman in that room, and she won't feel disturbed by the whole situation, she won't feel shocked by the situation, not one bit. In fact…it tends to happen naturally. And I think at a lot of events, where there's absolute freedom—you know, you're free to sit wherever you want. It still happens quite naturally….*

This apparent defence of the Muslim tradition echoes the findings of Poole (2002, p. 198) who also applied the same model in her study and found similar oppositional codes among the Muslims for whom 'upholding the values of Islam was more important than any of the values the Western press espoused'.

Some participants commented that the media were obsessed about segregation in Islam whereas Orthodox Judaism also kept men and women separate in most of their ceremonies.

Islam Treated Unfairly Compared to Other Religions

There was a consensus among the Muslim participants through their own experience of religion in the media and through the materials used in this research that Islam was treated much more unfairly than Christianity and Judaism in the British media. There was an agreement that if an individual Christian or a Jew committed a crime, their faith would never be mentioned, but the label 'Muslim' would be used for the same crime if the perpetrator happened to be a Muslim. They gave the example that if Hamas did anything wrong in the Middle East conflict, they were termed as Muslims, but when Israel did even worse things, they were never referred to as Jews. They also compared the representations in terms of politics and religion as manifested in the following comment by a participant in Birmingham:

> *When they represent Islam it is political, but when they represent other religions, it's religious.*

While comparing between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, they felt that although anti-Semitism was considered to be one of the worst things, Islamophobia was considered not a problem at all. A middle-aged man in Manchester said:

> *There is a bully culture in the media and generally, I think it's okay to bully Muslims, it's okay to pick on Muslims and…there is a culture of being sympathetic to the Jews because of their Holocaust past, because of the trauma that they've been through.*

A male participant in London summarised this comparison by saying:

> *If you did a simple experiment, there's an article about Muslims and if you just substitute the words 'Muslims' and 'Islam' with 'Jews' and 'Christians' and you just read it through and that would never get past an editor.*

In terms of representation, one participant in Manchester used the terms *academically neutral* for Christianity, *quite sympathetic* for Judaism, but *inflammatory* for Islam. Some talked about how each religion was

'packaged' in the media, like Islam as *foreign* and *exotic* while Christianity as *nice* and *neutral.* Talking about the language used in the media to depict Islam, a London female participant said:

> *I feel like the tone of discourse about religions specifically in respect to Muslims is overwhelmingly negative and problematized and also linked with almost criminal, so Islamic terrorism, or Muslim extremism—these phrases go together so often.*

There were also opinions that Muslims should not only protest when Muhammad is depicted negatively in the media, but also stand up against the way Jesus is sometimes portrayed as they consider him as their prophet-too. However, violent protests were rejected by all participants calling for a *patient* and *sensible* approach to protesting against insults of the prophets

Comparing between Jewish unity and Muslim disunity, there was self-reflection that Muslims were too fragmented to effectively do something against the negative portrayal of their religion, whereas Jews were very proactive in raising their voice against anything that they considered to be anti-Semitic. Referring to the former BBC Boss's comments, there was a feeling that Christians were not bothered if Jesus was portrayed in such a tasteless way as on *The Jerry Springer Show;* some participants reminded that Muslims were passionate about their love for the prophet and could not sit quiet without protesting when he was insulted.

Comments on Other Religions

One disappointment in the Muslim focus groups is that, apart from some participants in London, most of them did not have much to say about the way Christianity and Judaism are represented. The main reason was lack of knowledge on the issue. These religions do not feature in the media as much as Islam, so some people were unaware of media's attitudes towards them. It was thought that sending materials a week before each meeting would help them gain some understanding, but not many Muslim participants went through them, so they could not comment much on how other religions were portrayed. Some participants made general comments about other religions rather than giving opinions about particular issues covered in the media materials. For example, when asked about

The Guardian article on a man who pretended to be gay for a year, most Muslim participants chose to speak about homosexuality in general rather than being specific about Christianity that was highlighted in the article.

Self-Critical on Muslims

An important feature common in all Muslim focus groups was self-reflection in which they were found criticising their own community, particularly the extreme elements among the Muslims. For example, a retired officer in Manchester said the following about the terrorist elements within Muslims:

> *I think the Muslims really have to be blamed for the situation we're in now. You can't blame the media for everything. The media reports the bad things…I've never heard of a Jewish or a Christian suicide bomber. It happens only with Muslims.*

Some talked about the tolerant past of Islam, which these terrorists had forgotten and reminded that Islam never operated in this manner. That is why media's negative portrayal of Islam was the only way a non-Muslim would know about Islam. A young woman in Manchester blamed Muslims themselves for not knowing their past. She said:

> *All the media negativity is because we don't know our own religion properly. I mean, we talk about Islam like it's such a harsh religion. If you look at Islamic history, Islamic government was a liberal government—social law only applied to Muslims under an Islamic state. Christians had their own judicial law, Jews had their own judicial law…it wasn't exactly like the Ottoman system, it was more liberal than that…whereas the prophet himself, in that situation, where Jews, Christians and Muslims were living together, they were drinking, they had their own prayer facilities, they had everything going on.*

Some argued in favour of intellectual arguments rather than reacting angrily when Islam is vilified in the media as one woman in Manchester said

> *if we really, really feel strongly about an opposite view then we should come up with the opposite argument.*

Others blamed that lack of knowledge among some Muslims could be one of the reasons why one would like to kill those who insulted the prophet. A participant in Birmingham reminded that

Islam teaches us to be tolerant. Islamic rituals like Ramadan, Hajj are all about patience.

Another participant in Birmingham observed that the media was trying to provoke Muslims to react angrily.

If we don't react then they will stop doing these.

Christian Audience: Rejecting Media Representation of Christians and Muslims

How Religions Are Represented in the Media

Most Christian participants not only thought that their own religion was negatively portrayed in the media, but also found the media to be 'anti-religious', and some even considered the media to be 'biased against all religions'. According to most of them, the media were after bad stories as many people enjoyed reading bad stories in the media. They also observed that many of those who produced media materials did not have faith themselves, which was reflected in the way they represented religions. One participant in Birmingham felt that the media no longer gave us news, but gave opinions:

One of the reasons I take media reports with a pinch of salt is that they don't just relay the news, they give opinion on it. To me the news should be—this is what's happening, make your own mind about it. But it's not that.

The language of some participants reflected cynicism towards the media considering them having 'less sense of morality' and having a 'hidden agenda' with the media moguls representing what they want rather than the truth. Most participants agreed that the media were powerful and had strong influence over politicians as explicitly expressed by one Birmingham participant:

I think we can also see how media moguls like Rupert Murdoch have influence over the government. They can make or break. They can make political agenda, policies. We can see how government people have mixed with these people and push forward their agendas. You can see how the politicians have fulfilled someone else's agenda.

Most Christian participants agreed that the media were secular and some media were against religion in general. The feeling was that the media were not community-orientated and that the normality of life would never be broadcasted because it was boring. A similar view was expressed by a female participant in London who felt that sensationalism and money were the root causes for media's negative attitude towards religions. She said:

Media wants to sensationalise things and report things that people want to hear. And positive news doesn't bring money.

The media attitude towards religions can be summarised in the following comment by a male participant in Manchester who used a compound sentence with the coordinating conjunction 'but':

It [the media] is seeking not to present faiths, but to undermine it.

Another Manchester participant wished that the media's attitude towards religions in general would not be so derogatory:

Just as you would expect that people from all religions would have respect for one another, so you would expect that the media would have respect for religions and you wouldn't do something to offend any of the faiths. This may sound idealistic, but nevertheless it is an ideal that we should be striving to proclaim and urge politicians to speak out that when the media ridicules a faith or shows a faith in a derogatory way, you condemn whatever the faith.

Christianity in the Media

Conforming to hypothesis 2, the Christian participants followed the oppositional code and mostly rejected media representation of Christianity. Some participants thought that it was unfair and a false premise within

the media to put Christianity against science, which was commonly observed, particularly on the debate over creationism, as according to one participant in Manchester, *science is factual and faith is a matter of choice*.

A priest in London compared between the way Christianity was represented differently in terms of general representation and public service broadcasting, which he found to be 'superficial'. Although the latter depicted a good picture of Christianity, it was entirely the opposite otherwise. He used a series of negative adjectives to describe why and how the media behaved in this way:

> *I think the perception in the papers is often skewed because the correspondences fight to get their stories on to the front page and to do that they have to give arresting and slightly wacky point of view. The way religion appears in the media, sometimes it's awful.*

There were resentments that people like Richard Dawkins, who spoke strongly against Christianity, got a lot of media coverage whereas Christian perspectives were largely absent. A female participant in London lamented the absence of positive programmes on Christianity:

> *It's a shame that we no longer have programmes about Christianity as much we used to have in the past. The world has become too materialistic. All those programmes about Jesus' life have now disappeared. It's very very sad…it's difficult to understand what's going on, there is nothing about religion nowadays.*

Media's Attitude Towards Christianity Compared to Other Religions

A common theme coming out from all three Christian groups is that Christianity gets the least sensitive treatment by the media, which echoes the views by the former BBC Chief in one of the articles used in this research. They felt that the media were careful about Jews due to the fear of anti-Semitism, and they avoided being overly critical of Islam due to the fear of violent reactions by some Muslims. However, anything negative about Christianity was blown out of proportion, as they did not care what they said about Christians at all. They particularly felt upset by the way Jesus was mocked at and the way his name had become a swear word

in popular culture. Referring to former BBC Chief's comments, one participant in Manchester made the following comment:

> *I think Mark Thompson was remarkably frank and honest, particularly about the analogy of The Jerry Springer Show. I think this is we as Christians need to speak up about. We can even see the name Jesus Christ used as swear words in films and plays, and in television after 9 o'clock. If there [were] an equivalent about other religions there would be legitimate protests. I think we have been too quiet not protesting against these.*

Catholics in particular felt more let down by the media, and the Catholic group in Manchester felt that it was treated much worse than the Anglicans, which it thought was due to the dominance of the Anglican Church in this country. A Catholic participant in Birmingham showed his frustration through the following comment:

> *They cannot talk about a Catholic story, even the Pope, without saying that they have to deal with child abuse cases…they are always pumping people with this negative message.*

A participant in London expressed the view that the media were trying to separate different religions, whereas there was a lot of scope to come together for common good. Some argued that the negative coverage about religion was not about particular religions, but against people who followed those religions. Criticising the media coverage of Islam, particularly by the right-wing media and political parties, a female participant in Manchester observed that the media often mixed up between religion and culture:

> *I find that they are mostly against the cultural aspects of Islam rather than Islam itself.… Many Muslims in this country come from a particular rural culture of Pakistan, and that is considered by many as Muslim culture.*

Islam and Judaism in the Media

Proving hypothesis 3 correct, the majority of the Christian participants took the negotiated position while talking about media representation of Islam and Judaism. They conformed to some representations whereas

disagreed to others. The discussions also got conflated at times with the Israel-Palestine conflict with little consensus who the media favoured more in the conflict as evident in the following two contrasting views in the Birmingham focus group:

I am really struggling to understand what's happening in the Middle East with Israel and Gaza and all that. Jews have been persecuted for centuries. They know what's it like to be battered and denigrated and whatever. And then they are doing it to those people there. They are suppressing the Palestinians relentlessly. Yes, I know there's Hamas sending missiles against them and all that. They seemed to have lost the humanitarian feelings. But the media is not giving the total picture what's going on there.

I think the media is showing the side of Palestine how they have come under attack and plight of children. We don't want that. But I don't think anyone is going to Israel and telling the story of how they have been suffering. No one said that the ceasefire was broken, so Israel responded. I didn't think truth was fully out. Every time that missiles come in from Palestine Israel is firing back. But that wasn't discussed.

Overall, there was more sympathy for Muslims as most participants found Muslims 'battered' by the media relentlessly since 9/11, which they found to be unfair as they agreed that majority of the Muslims were peace loving. Some argued that it was easy for the media to go against Muslims, but difficult to say against the Jews, because of the Holocaust. They also agreed that the anti-Semitism law prevented the media to go against the Jews. One participant in Birmingham was particular about the power of the 'Jewish lobby':

I think the Jewish lobby is very powerful. If you look at America, the Jewish lobby is tiny, but they totally control the two big parties there. And they do control the media. That's a fact.

One of the participants in Manchester observed that the British media were quite respectful towards Judaism; though, there was negative feeling about the Jewish community among some members of the public, which was not reflected in the media.

I would say that the media coverage about Judaism is rather more responsible, than some members of the public.

Another member from the Manchester group found that many members of the Jewish community conflated criticism against Israel as criticism against their faith, which he found to be wrong.

Although some criticised the role of Israel and the Jewish lobby, almost all the participants were sympathetic towards the Jewish people in general because of the persecution they had to face for centuries, particularly in Europe.

The Gay Experiment

While discussing the article on the person in America who spent a year pretending to be gay, a lot of views were expressed about homosexuality and the way the media tried to portray religions as homophobic. The Catholics felt more targeted on this matter and one participant in Birmingham summarised their feeling:

The Catholic Church doesn't support gay marriage, but it doesn't support discrimination against homosexuals…the media will have you believe that we are very reactive, but we are not.

Most participants expressed concern on the way the media tried to vilify their faith about homosexuality. They found it disturbing that the media was trying to show that the religious people were 'behind the time' or very 'intolerant'. The feeling was that the media was not even allowing people to debate on the issue and quickly ostracised people for their religious beliefs. Comparing between anti-Semitism and homophobia, a London participant said:

There is a similarity between anti-Semitism and homophobia. If you criticise the policy of Israel and support Palestine, very quickly in some context you will be considered anti-Semitic. Similarly, like me, if you say that it's a mistake to have gay marriage, you will very quickly, in some context, be considered as homophobic. And I think the media do make that move.

There was also the opinion that the media was biased against the religious people on this issue as summarised in the following comment by a Manchester participant:

In discussion programmes on gay issues in the media you would always see the presenter provoking those who are religious to react in a particular way. And you will often find that the voice of the gay community is raised as opposed to the church community. But the presenter will still try to vilify the religious people.

There was a common objection about the terms 'Gay Christian' in the article and all agreed that there could be no 'gay Christian' or a 'straight Christian', but only 'Christian'. Some objected that if there were gay rights, religious people should also be allowed to have their views; otherwise it would be discrimination against religious beliefs. A participant in Manchester felt that journalists were finding it difficult to understand the religious perspectives on this issue. Most participants found it strange that someone had to pretend to be gay in that manner, and a participant in Manchester came out with an explanation why this experiment was carried out:

Why did he feel that he rediscovered his Christianity by doing something bizarre as pretending to be homosexual?… What actually happened that he has written a book and got a large amount of money out of it. It's more to do with that than his Christianity.

Another participant explained why the media found this story so interesting:

I think the media is more interested in the sensational aspects of stories like this rather than the religious perspectives on homosexuality. I don't think there will be any headline in normal day to day situation about homosexuality and religions.

Christian Demonization of Jews

As expected, the Christian participants from all three cities took an oppositional view to the portrayal of Christianity in the documentary Christianity: A History where Christians were blamed for demonising Jews as "Christ killers". A participant in Manchester was scathing in his criticism of the programme:

That was an extraordinary programme, being the first episode of eight. It was a perverted history of the presentation of Christ and his origin. I think it says a

lot of the things of the media as producers of that series were so derogatory about Christianity.

Another participant gave an interesting perspective that the Jewish presenter in this episode had, in fact, done a disservice to the Jews as well as Christians:

I think that the programme gave a negative portrayal of Judaism, because he meant that all Jews hate Christians because they think that Christians hate them. It is quite biased against Christianity.

The common feeling coming out from the Christian groups was that the concept that Christians blame Jews for Jesus' death could be dated back to the medieval period or by people like Hitler who used it as an excuse to kill the Jews. A participant in Birmingham said:

The Christians have moved a long way from the medieval period and every effort has been made by the church to come out of this sentiment…it's not because of the media, but through our own reflection and dialogue we have come to this stage of engaging with the Jews.

Judaism: The Camel Story

Although the Christian participants did conform to some extent to the third hypothesis that they were in negotiated position about the way media portrayed Judaism and the Jewish people, most participants' opposition to the majority of the representation of Judaism suggested that the hypothesis was proved partially correct. Most Christians found the media to be negative towards all three religions, so they had a cynical perspective towards media representation of all religions.

The Guardian article that tried to prove that the 'Camel Story' and the subsequent claim of a Promised Land was false was severely criticised by all the three Christian groups. They thought that the newspaper and the writer of the article had an obvious agenda, which was to 'belittle' religious belief. Some of them found the approach of the article 'pugnacious',

similar to 'a nasty politician'. A Manchester participant observed that the article was against all the three Abrahamic religions:

> *He also argues that there is even less evidence for the Old Testament than the Quran. The article is anti-Semitic, but there is a sideswipe against Christianity, the Old Testament is a nonsense, and the Quran is a nonsense. One has to see which newspaper it was published [in]. It is [T]he Guardian which represents humanism, the national secular society. One of the problems in media and religion is that there is no such thing as the media, they are discrete organs.*

The other approach to this article was that religion was one's personal belief; therefore, it didn't matter if everything from the religious scripts matched with archaeological evidence. A London participant said:

> *The more we dug up we found stories of the bible to be true, we found wells, we found other things which contributed to reaffirm the bible stories. But they are not fact facts, they are spiritual truths. A lot of it is historically true, a lot is factually true. But it's much bigger than a camel or what have you.*

Strictly Kosher

There was little agreement among the Christian participants whether the reality TV show *Strictly Kosher* shown on ITV reflected a positive portrayal of the Jewish community or stereotyped the Jews. Some felt that the programme showed Jews being rich and loyal to themselves. Some thought it was brilliant, positive about the Jewish community, and told human stories about them, whereas others thought it was disparaging and belittling Judaism. A significant number of people just found it to be an entertaining television programme where it was difficult to get the real picture because of the editing that was done for the purpose of entertainment.

One participant in London tried to dig up the subtle message of the programme:

> *There is a message that look out, Manchester is taken over by the Jews. They wouldn't of course say that as it would be anti-Semitic, but it is something they*

meant…Jews are a tiny population in this country, but still there are concerns about this tiny tiny group. You get something like that in the media that stirs people up in a very subtle way.

Islam: Gender Segregation

The Christian groups proved the fourth hypothesis mostly wrong, as instead of supporting the negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims, most Christians rejected the way the media represented Islam. There was some conformity among some of the participants, but the overwhelming majority were sympathetic towards Muslims and rejected the media portrayals about them. The most significant finding was the way they rejected the *Daily Mail* article that fiercely criticised gender segregation in Islam. The point that was identified in Muslim focus groups and highlighted in the 2 of this book also came strongly during Christian focus group meetings that the absence of any Muslim woman's voice affected the neutrality of the article and made it nothing but a provocative article against Muslims. Some Christians found the absence of a Muslim woman's perspective to be intentional' because then it would not serve the purpose of the article. Most Christian participants felt that if Muslim women were not forced to sit separately and were happy with that type of arrangement, then they were entitled to practice that belief.

A female participant in Birmingham said:

The media is always taking the men's perspective and saying that they don't allow women to do this and that. Why don't they ask the women about how they feel?

There was also comparison with Orthodox Judaism and the suggestion that the media were never bothered that there was still segregation between men and women in synagogues, but were giving value judgments against Muslims as found in the following comment:

The media is drip-feeding these issues. Instead of presenting people's different opinions, they are giving their own opinion. They are trying to brain wash people's opinions.

There was strong cynicism towards tabloid newspapers in general and *The Daily Mail* in particular encapsulated in a Manchester participant's comment about sensationalist language in tabloids:

> *I think whenever these tabloids say something very astonishing, generally it's less astonishing. It told me to be shocked three times in the first paragraph.*

Some participants did find gender segregation in Islam unacceptable and thought that it was more cultural than religious. One female participant found it difficult to understand why Muslim women needed to cover up in that way. However, even she thought that repeating the words 'shocking' and 'disturbing' several times in the article was annoying.

Article on Muslim Converts

The participants rejected the *Daily Mail* article on Muslim converts as well, particularly the way it tried to correlate the increase of terrorism since 9/11 with the increase in the number of converted Muslims. They found this correlation completely based on fear, which the far right would pick up on. One London participant said:

> *They are making a completely false correlation here and planting in the minds of the readers.*

Another London participant reminded that many people converted to Islam only to get married to a Muslim and found it interesting that this notion was not mentioned in the article at all.

Some participants were ready to accept the term 'Islamification' in a different sense than that suggested in the article. They used the term to refer to the increase in Muslim population and the presence of many mosques in this country, but they never accepted that Muslims in any way were taking over the country. Others found some sort of Islamification with

some cities having a large number of Muslims, like Bolton, Leicester, and so on. One Birmingham participants found it to be an issue of integration rather than Islamificaiton:

> *If you want to call that Islamification, you may call [it] so, but it's more the case of integration rather than Islamification. In terms of the culture of this country, whether it's becoming Islamic, no, not at all.*

The Two Documentaries About Islam

The Christian participants also proved hypothesis 4 wrong by rejecting Tom Holland's style of questioning the origin of Islam and praising Rageh Omaar's documentary about Prophet Muhammad. A London participant's comment on Tom Holland's 'Islam: the Untold Story' is one such evidence of this rejection:

> *It seems that it's trying to say all the way through that Muslims are liars. This is how the programmes are made. I don't think that was right.*

One of the most striking finding that contrasts significantly with the non-religious groups is the widespread acceptance of Rageh Omaar's three-part documentary on Prophet Muhammad as an authentic and positive programme. None of the participants in any of the group thought that the credibility of the programme could be affected due to the presenter being a Muslim. They all had respect for Rageh Omaar as an objective journalist and a presenter. A Birmingham participant found the programme to be 'educational' and 'sympathetic', whereas a Manchester participant said:

> *Rageh Omaar is somebody we can trust. And here he says something positive about Islam, doesn't he? We are happy to have someone like Rageh Omaar give his perspective. It's not a strange Muslim that's telling us the story. So that's positive to me. He is a sort of credible commentator. It was a terrific programme.*

Non-Religious Audience: A Combination of All Three Codes

The findings in the non-religious groups brought unexpected results with hypothesis 1 proving to be partially correct as participants followed all three codes of media decoding. The expectation was that non-religious people would disapprove religion and would agree to the overall negative portrayal of religions in the media. Although this proved correct with most members of the Manchester focus group, a few members in that group mostly fluctuated between negotiated and oppositional codes, and apart from one or two exceptions, the Liverpool group were mostly in opposition to the preferred code of the media. Despite not being religious themselves, they were sympathetic towards the religions and were mostly cynical and in opposition to the way media portrayed them. The Manchester group had quite polarised opinions on some of the issues with little consensus, whereas the Liverpool group were mostly positive towards religions and negative towards the media though some participants had negative views on Christianity as a hegemonic entity and a part of the establishment elites.

Non-religious groups were not homogenous, and apart from those who were humanists, they all had different reasons for not being religious; therefore contradictions in their opinions are not surprising. The only thing common among the non-religious participants was that they did not have a religion; otherwise they demonstrated different views on media representation of religions, particularly how Islam was portrayed. The Manchester humanists found negative media portrayal of Islam justified, but the Liverpool non-religious group completely rejected them calling them Islamophobic and stigmatization of Islam. Therefore, the trends among the non-religious participants could be described as humanists mostly following the hegemonic code; the non-humanists in Manchester in negotiated code; and the students in Liverpool almost fully in the oppositional code.

Aligning with the secularist views of most of the mainstream media, the humanist participants blamed religions for most of the problems

and conflicts in contemporary world with one of them referring to verses in the *Bible* and the *Quran* that encouraged killing. They suggested that religions needed to reform at a much faster rate. Calling religious beliefs as 'fiction', there were suggestions that religions should move on from the concept of 'sin' and bring about a new set of rules. There was also the feeling that religions tended to play the victim game well and there was a suggestion that although the Holocaust was duly highlighted, other non-religious genocides like the one in Rwanda was rarely spoken about.

Some non-religious participants in Manchester, to distance themselves from the likes of Richard Dawkins, distinguished non-religious people from atheists and considered themselves belonging to the former. Although they did not believe in any religion, they were not against any religion, while according to them, atheists were anti-religion. Interestingly, some participants in Liverpool, though sympathetic about religions, called themselves atheists.

Let us now analyse the participants' views on different issues discussed in the meetings.

Women in Islam: Segregation

For a non-Muslim who has reservations about Islam, one of the most common criticism was the role of women in Islam and how they were treated. This was the theme of the *Daily Mail* article on gender segregation in Islam. The article's criticism of gender segregation in Islam and the use of words like 'shocking' or 'disturbing' and that the women were 'obliged' or 'imposed' into segregation were wholeheartedly supported by the humanists. One of them said that the concept was so wrong that "we don't have to listen to the women's viewpoint on it." There were agreements with the article's criticism of separate entrances for men and women and men sitting at the front while women were left to sit at the back. They even went beyond the article's points with one participant asking why there were no female speakers.

The Liverpool non-religious student group decoded this article opposite to the preferred meaning. They all were fine with gender segregation if people willingly chose to sit separately and if it were a culturally embedded phenomenon. They felt that if this was part of the Muslim culture, it should not be taken as sexist. There were overwhelming criticism of the *Daily Mail*, with some participants using the words 'sexist' and 'misogynistic' to refer to this newspaper, which according to them, tended to objectify women like in *The Sun.* They found that by calling a cultural phenomenon of gender segregation as 'disturbing' the *Daily Mail* article had been 'hypocritical' and 'changed its morals completely' while talking about Muslims. Although the absence of any Muslim woman's perspective was not considered a problem at all by some participants in Manchester, the absence of a female voice was strongly highlighted by the Liverpool group. The criticism of the article on how gender segregation in Islam was represented was not only from linguistic perspective, but also from the semiotic point of view as they did not like the use of a photo of males-females sitting separately to be called 'disturbing'.

The Liverpool group's perspective on this issue can be summed up by the following comment by a female participant:

> *How do you know she is segregated? She might choose to sit at the back…the article makes it seem like that decision was imposed on them. …People not knowing would feel that men and women are asked to sit separately without knowing anything further that it was down to their own choice. And it gives the wrong impression…it's that thing again, isn't it, stigmatization—look they are segregating women from men, look how backward they are.*

Women in Islam: Modest Clothing

The inevitable link created with gender segregation was Muslim women's modest clothing, which was discussed at length in Manchester. The dress code in Islam was indirectly referred through photos published in the article on Muslim converts and the mention of the choice of some of them to wear a headscarf or veil. This provoked a lot of discussion among the participants with the humanists finding it *alarming* that westernised Muslim women were choosing to cover themselves and identifying themselves as Muslims.

"I think that's sad" said one participant. There was a feeling among these participants that the main reason for women covering up was because their self-esteem and self-confidence were low and they wanted a different 'status' by choosing to wear clothes in this manner. When a participant who was not a member of the Humanist group said that she didn't have a problem with women covering, the female participant who was strongly against it said, *'I do, as a feminist, I'm really against that; it's awful'.* She also made a sarcastic reference to what she felt to be the historic reason why Muslim women wore such clothes and why they should not be part of today's religion:

Historically, the covering up in Islam, as I understand it, is that women intrinsically were considered to be a temptation to men and so they had to be covered up so that they don't go around, having men leap on them and—or whatever….

Poole (2002, p. 210) used the term 'religion-blind' to refer to some non-Muslims' lack of understanding of the importance of religion to Muslims. Poole also found their ignorance as a factor for taking the hegemonic position and that, 'the media compounded the situation by limiting knowledge that might have improved the relations and by causing people to be suspicious of Islam, thus contributing to boundary making'. (ibid, 220) The attitudes of the humanists towards Islam are quite in line with these observations of Poole.

However, like on most other topics, there were some participants in Manchester who took oppositional position on this. A school teacher asked whether asking women to not cover up like this was 'patronising', whereas a university student thought that the women chose to express their distinct religious identity in that way. She also felt that all Muslim women who covered might not have the same viewpoints. Another non-humanist participant suggested that this phenomenon could be to reject the modern materialistic life. The oppositional code was clearly evident in the following comment by one participant:

I think it's dangerous to generalise, 'They're all doing this, they're all repressed' I think some may be, but I don't think they all are. I think things like the Daily Mail try to tell you that they are.

The oppositional views also found the media creating a 'fear factor' against Muslims as observed by one woman in Manchester who found a clear 'us' versus 'them' approach to Muslims. She also contradicted with the blanket criticism of Muslim women's clothing and asked if covering was not liked, then why over sexualised young women going out 'half-naked' was deemed acceptable. When the Humanists said these two were not comparable, she kept on insisting that they were. She also criticised singling out only Muslims because Orthodox Jews also had a segregation system and Christian nuns also covered their hair. She asked:

> *Why weren't Christian nuns treated in exactly the same way when they're actually deified and treated as spiritual, pure, all those kind of things, whereas Muslim women are treated in exactly the opposite way?*

The Liverpool group had no such arguments on this issue as there was a unanimous opposition to the preferred meaning of the article on Muslim converts where dress code in Islam was covertly criticized. They found it strange that the photo of two veiled women was published with the article, which could do nothing other than create negative impression about Islam among the readers. They found that typically conversion to Islam and the face veil were not related issues, but observed that the article was trying to build a narrative that Islam was a bad thing. One male participant said:

> *People are gonna see this and think oh they are gonna make British women dress like that…what they are trying to do is bring an argument made in the past and make it a story about women…and people read and think that Islam is bad….*

Conversion to Islam

Although some participants in Manchester were negative about Muslim converts and had no word of sympathy for the white British women converting to Islam in large numbers conforming to the fear of 'Islamification' raised in the article, the overwhelming reaction to this story in Liverpool was *let them choose whatever they think is best for them.* They tended to agree with the views of the converts interviewed in the article and asked

that if some people wanted to become a Muslim and found comfort in it, then it should not be anybody's problem. A participant said:

> *These people have found peace in being a Muslim and like they are really really happy. Surely that can only be a positive thing. Why does the Daily Mail think this is terrible? These people are happy!*

Some thought that Islam's stricter lifestyle might have been attractive for those people to choose Islam over Christianity. There was an agreement that the media tended to use expressions like 'Islamification', or 'they are spreading out', or 'they are conquering', because many English people were scared and narrow minded. They thought that the *media is the one that mediates the fear*.

One participant found some hidden agenda behind this attitude towards conversion:

> *I think it's more political than religious. They think, "Oh they come here and like they are radicalizing the girls or converting the girls". They actually want to control the immigration. It's scaremongering.*

Islamic Extremism

One issue that is most likely to be raised during any discussions on Islam by non-Muslims is Islamic fundamentalism or extremism. Since 9/11 and 7/7, the most common phrases in the media with '…concepts such as terrorism, extremism and militancy tended to be more strongly associated with the abstract *Islamic* rather than the identity of the person who practises the religion: *Muslim*' (Baker et al. 2013, p. 255). This type of representation often has direct influence on public opinions about Islam. In Manchester, one participant, who was consistently critical of Islam and followed the hegemonic code, said:

> *I think…it's only Islam that really commits acts of violence, it's not the Jews in this country and it isn't the Christians in this country so this country sees, rightly or wrongly, perceives Islam and those who claim to be doing these, you know, terrible things in the name of Islam…the perception is that there had been lots*

of bad things done in this country by people who claim to be representing Islam and, uh, claim to be operating under Jihad, which is Islam.

However, his view did not go unchallenged and the same people who opposed the hegemonic view on segregation also opposed this as 'stereotyping'. In Liverpool, the consensus was that Islam was looked at like 'others', and there was massive scaremongering by the media, which many people were buying into. Referring to the media, one woman in Manchester said:

It (the media) plays a role in creating hate and that hate is directed towards people of colour who are specifically Muslims.

Religion in Schools

A phenomenon particularly observed in the Manchester group was that some participants tended to deviate from the issue of media representation and chose to be overtly critical about religions in general without any reference to the media. One such issue that was not raised in any of the media representations, but discussed in the Manchester group was faith schools. Those who held strong anti-religious views like the humanists were concerned about the existence of faith schools. Their opinion was that religion had no place in secular education, so teaching children about religions as if they were facts was unacceptable. They suggested that schools should teach ethics, not religion. This issue had broader consensus in Manchester than most other topics with the non-humanists also preferring religion to be taught as a separate subject. There was also a suggestion that faith schools should teach all religions rather than only teaching their own faith. The mood among the participants on this issue can be summarised through the following comment:

…Christian schools in this country who've been pushing creationism, uh, within the science class, andI think that's appalling. If—if you're going to talk about creationism at all, and why not, do it within the religious education class, not in a science class.

The Gay Experiment

Among the media articles and documentaries discussed in the groups, one that created a lot of interest and stimulated a lot of opinions was the article about a Christian man in the United States spending a year pretending to be gay. Issues related to homosexuality often come out in the media, particularly related to their rights to equality. However, one other reason for this issue to be of special interest to the non-religious group may be because all religions considered homosexuality a sin; therefore, some non-religious people felt strongly against religions for their attitudes towards gay people.

One participant in Manchester thought that the reason religions were against homosexuality was because gay people were unable to procreate, whereas religious communities would like to grow in numbers. Most people agreed that Christianity was going through a 'transition' in which attitudes towards homosexuality was changing significantly from being strongly against it to starting to accept it. However, some members took an oppositional view towards the article, which according to them, had a clear positive tone in favour of the Christian man who took that stance. Why would someone pretend to be gay? In addition, how it 'reaffirmed' his Christianity were questioned as found in the comment, *'How can they say it's reaffirmed their faith? I don't accept that it's reaffirmed his faith'.*

There was a lot of discussion on the terms 'Gay Christian' and 'Straight Christian' in both the groups. Most people did not accept these terms and disagreed that indulging in something that was 'a sin' in his religion could make him a better Christian. They felt that it would not remain the same religion in this process. Although they found this aspect to be disingenuous, they found it absolutely fine for a Christian to be gay. Some thought that the media unnecessarily hyped this story as one participant in Liverpool said:

> *People take religion and do with it as they please now, that's how it should be. But the media are like, "Oh, this is a good story, he is a gay Christian, this or that".*

Although the article was not overtly critical of Christianity and its attitude towards homosexuality, there were references to the person being

ostracized by some members of the Christian community including his mother. Most participants thought that Christianity had come a long way in accepting gay people, but the media tended to highlight those Christians who were extremely religious or fundamentalists and had homophobic attitudes. Some participants in Liverpool felt that the media tended not to take Christianity seriously and wanted to portray that Christians did not take their religion seriously, hence the use of phrases like 'gay Christian'. The underlying agenda of the media, according to them, was an implication that the man was hypocritical to be both a gay and a Christian. *'It is like the media is saying he is gay, so he can't be that good as a Christian'.*

Some were confused whether he was actually gay or not as it was only possible to know from what he had said. They felt that one could either be gay or not be gay, but no one could ever internalise the feeling of being gay if one had not experienced it. One participant even called this experiment 'sick'; though others did not agree to such an extreme position.

Documentaries on Islam

There were disagreements about the authenticity of two contrasting documentaries on Islam. Tom Holland's documentary questioned the existence of early Islam, whereas Rageh Omaar's programme gave a positive story of the life of Prophet Muhammad. The humanists in Manchester had a hegemonic position with Tom Holland's negative portrayal of Islam's early history but had an oppositional view on the positive life story of Muhammad. This illustrates how the audience's personal circumstances influence whether or not to believe a media presentation. Tom Holland's documentary was found to be 'honest' because he was a historian; though history is not always accepted as the true reflection of what happened before and has often been considered biased and misinterpreting evidence (McCullagh 2000, p. 40).

They rejected any thought of this programme being against Islam or a 'conspiracy theory' to suggest that Islamic history was a lie. They agreed that Tom Holland's account was a genuine work of a historian. However, Rageh Omaar's historical account of prophet Muhammad was rejected because it *'gives a great account of Islam, as it is believed by Muslims'.*

Although Tom Holland was accepted as an authentic historian *'looking for the real evidence',* Rageh Omaar was rejected as a journalist who, they felt, *'was given money to glorify Muhammad'*.

Contrary to the humanists, there was a completely opposite perspective by a participant who was a Ph.D. student having access to different interfaith groups. She was much more sympathetic to the religious groups and was oppositional to Tom Holland's approach to the history of Islam:

> *I think, the fact is, "normal" doesn't sell. They want something outlandish, like "Look, we're being lied to, these people are doing this". Erm, I felt, like the whole way through it, it was, kind of, "I'm trying to find the evidence. Look, there isn't any", as if he's really struggling through the programme. You think, "Well, I know, at the beginning of this programme, there is an agenda to show something". I felt like it was quite, quite a negative portrayal but, kind of being—suggesting that there's a scientific truth—you try and do that with any of the religions, not just Islam, you're gonna struggle.*

Others were cynical about both the documentaries and rejected both the accounts with one participant thinking that *'both had quite clear agendas. …one's gonna disprove, one's gonna prove'*. Another participant found the Channel 4 documentary of Tom Holland parallel to the channel's undercover stories like Undercover Mosque. Her cynicism of both Tom Holland and Rageh Omaar's programmes came from her opinion that the two programmes merely catered to the values of the respective channels:

> *But I thought they both were deliberately showing completely opposing views and also a lot of that is based on the network they're broadcasting on…Different channels have a different agenda on what they sell to their public. And I felt like it was an undercurrent.*

The Liverpool group took a different perspective towards both the documentaries and debated whether these historical figures like Jesus and Muhammad actually existed. As non-believers they did not believe either account but were more inclined to accept Tom Holland's view as he negated the Islamic account of history. They also found Rageh Omaar's depiction of Muhammad's life to be biased due to him being a Muslim and suggested that it might have been more authentic if the documentary were

presented by a non-Muslim. This was the only issue where the humanists in Manchester and the students in Liverpool had similar views, and by accepting Tom Holland's account, they also conformed to the preferred meaning of the encoder. Some argued about the biasness of every piece of history, whereas others argued that whether Jesus or Muhammad existed was irrelevant as these people have had huge influence on people's lives till today, and even after thousands of years, they were still relevant.

Representation of Judaism

Anti-Semitism and Israel featured significantly while discussing representation of Judaism or the Jewish community. Participants in Liverpool felt that anti-Semitism was less reported in the media. Some felt that the fascist attitudes towards the Jews still persisted in modern Britain, but the media pretended that it was not happening. They blamed the rise of anti-Semitism to the rise of far-right movement across Europe. One participant highlighted the reason for this indifference in the media:

> *I think in the media if you tell a story about Islam, there is a background to it, like ISIS and what's going on. If they report about Judaism no one is going to read it, so why report it if a synagogue is attacked? They'd build a story around what story people wanna read.*

The Liverpool group also discussed at length about the relationship between anti-Semitism and anti-Israel and felt that although they were not synonymous, they did merge into one another now and again. They all agreed that being anti-Israel did not make one anti-Semitic as implied in the column by Richard Littlejohn. They distinguished between anti-Israel as the *political entity* and anti-Semitic as the *complete entity* that included the people, culture, religion, and so on in Israel. Speaking on the Israel-Palestine conflict, one participant said:

> *I am not anti-Israel, but as a state any imperialistic acts they do I am against it…anti-Israel counts for the country, not the people…if I stand for the people of Palestine doesn't make me pro-Muslim. These are just principles of politics and I think Israel is a political state, and anti-Semitism is an ideology.*

The only negative media portrayal of Judaism that was found was a column in *The Guardian* that questioned the authenticity of the establishment of Israel on the basis of 'the Camel Story' in the Old Testament. None of the participants accepted that view, which can be summed up by the following comment of a university student in Manchester:

> *There's gonna be some problems, if you try and look at any ancient texts, a lot's been changed, a lot's been written by people over time and if you try and prove historical facts about everything, you're gonna come into some difficulties. But I felt like they focused on that in order to say, "Look, see, they're all lying to us".*

There were more discussions on the *Strictly Kosher* documentary with most people liking it, though a couple of participants spoke from the perspectives of their own experiences mixing with the Jews. One participant in Manchester knew many Jews while working on a Jewish radio programme and had spoken to some Jewish and non-Jewish people about the programme. The non-Jewish people had been positive about the programme, whereas the Jewish people had found it a bit patronising. Her experience also matches with the comments about the programme by the small number of Jewish participants in the project. She summarised the Jewish and non-Jewish reactions as follows:

> *Everybody that I spoke to who watched it who wasn't Jewish said, "The Jewish community are great and it's really fantastic." All the Jews that watched it said, "I can't believe they did this. They've made us look stupid. They've got the eccentrics in the community and they're saying that this is Judaism." So the Jews I spoke to were really unhappy about it. And yet everybody else was like, "Ooh, it's really positive about Judaism." So it's interesting that something that was supposedly positive, the group that were talking about or being positive about weren't perceiving it that way at all. They found it rude.*

Most participants agreed that the programme had little to do with Judaism as a religion and mostly represented their cultural practices. They found the programme *focusing on a race and a community rather than on religious beliefs*. They also agreed that many Jews were culturally Jew, but not religious.

It's the only religion where you'll hear about the secular Jew. You don't ever talk about secular Muslims or secular Christians in the same way.

One participant in Liverpool noticed that *Strictly Kosher* was the only media portrayal that represented a community, whereas all others were about ideologies. They felt that similar programmes about Christians and Muslims should also be telecast. They found that Islam was always shown as an ideology, but Muslims as a community were rarely represented.

The Liverpool group also talked about different issues related to religions in the media, like comparison between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, free speech versus censorship, protection of religious sentiments, and more. They were strongly against any censorship including the recent legislations against hate speech and felt that although free speech should be absolutely allowed, people should also be educated about being sensitive to others' feelings. They felt that the media should play a neutral role and bring the perspectives from both sides and not just talk about free speech and attack religions. The Liverpool participants felt that the British law protects the Jews from hate speech, but Muslims were subject to a lot of abuse that got ignored. This, according to one participant was prioritizing the Jews over Muslims:

I think the anti-Semitism law is unfair because you can't say anything against the Jewish religion, but you can say anything against any other religion. Actually anti-Semitism might be on the rise, and terribly so, but isn't that as bad as Islamophobia on the rise?

Jewish Interviews and Questionnaires

Unlike Muslims and Christians the Jewish participants did not take a completely oppositional perspective to the way media portray their religion. They felt that some media outlets were sympathetic towards them whereas others were hostile. The BBC and *The Guardian* were the two media institutions most participants found negative towards them. As with their other two religious counterparts, the Jews were also in the negotiated position about Islam and Christianity.

It is important to highlight the intrinsic link all the Jewish participants felt with the State of Israel, which not only proves the author's initial idea wrong about British Jews and Israel being separate matters, but also explains to some extent why it was impossible to organise Jewish focus groups. A number of Rabbis contacted for the focus groups had said that the Jews would be reluctant to talk about the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the author kept reassuring them that this research is only about Judaism as a religion in the British media and has nothing to do with politics in the Middle East. Looking at the responses to the questionnaire and the two interviews, it becomes clear that the Jews cannot separate themselves from Israel, so sitting down with a Muslim with an Arab surname to discuss things that are uncomfortable might have been the main cause for the non-cooperation of the Jewish community in attending focus group meetings.

Interviews

The two interviewees will be referred to here as participants A and B. Both participants felt strongly linked with Israel and found Judaism and Israel inseparable as summarised below by participant B:

> *You can't separate Jews from the Middle East. Religion and politics are inseparable. When people in the media talk about Israel, I being a Jew living in England feel partly involved…Israel is one country with which I feel inevitably connected. If there was a vote between Israel and this country I would abstain as I feel affinity to both…. I do have reservations about some of the things they do, but that's politics.*

There is an apparent contradiction here as he first says that religion and politics are inseparable, but later terms his reservations of some activities of the Israeli government as 'politics'.

Participant A, while talking about his close emotional bond with Israel, lamented the anti-Israel stance of some media institutions like the BBC:

> *As Israel is closely linked with Judaism, so currently Jews have a very bad press…. They are trying to say that the behaviour of the Jews towards the Arab is as bad as what happened to the …. They will show you a bombed village,*

which may not be accurate, but they don't say that hundreds of rockets are fired from Gaza every day…. The fact is that the reporting is very one sided. They [Israel] get very bad press.

Both participants thought that anti-Semitism in Britain was linked with Israel and that the media brought Jews in the discussion when they talked anything about Israel. However, participant B observed that it was not a deliberate attempt by the media to undermine the Jews:

The press is very strange in general; when they want to talk about a subject they will bring their religion or ethnicity. For example they will talk about an individual as a Jew or a Pakistani, but they will never say if he is a catholic or a protestant.

Participant B found some similarities between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia:

There is wrong perception, media coverage, and the stereotype that they go around bombing people and beheading them, and the women have got to do this stuff and that other. They do the same with Orthodox Jewry that the women are marginalised.

Strictly Kosher

While the majority of the non-Jewish participants liked the *Strictly Kosher* programme and some Muslim participants went as far as hoping that there could be a similar programme on Muslims, both the interviewees were critical of the programme and felt that it represented Jewish cultural life more than Judaism as a religion. Participant A said:

These programmes show the Jews as having a bit of ghettoed life, being together, you know all the parties and the food … it's all edited.

Participant B, whose daughter was a friend of Bennett—one of the key characters in the programme—said that the programme was too much of an entertainment rather than describing the Jewish community.

I don't think it did a lot of good for the Jewish community, but that's me being a little sensitive. But I think non-Jewish people would find this programme of interest, but the programme did not get at all underneath the real life of the Jews.

Participant B also wanted a programme that would show similarities between Muslims and Jewish religion and culture:

Starting with monotheism, then the types of food we eat, the way children are brought up, even the greetings 'salam' and 'shalom'; they come from the same root, we are really cousins. The similarities are so important and that's where I would like to see the effort put in. I think we should be working harder to bring these two communities together. Unfortunately, the politics in the Middle East has become so convoluted, I can't see any way out of it at all.

'The Camel Story'

Both participants had similar views on *The Guardian* article on 'The Camel Story' and felt that it took the story too literally. They felt that journalists needed to analyse the biblical stories to realise that they were stories for the population of that time so that they could understand and were more of a parable. Participant B gave the religious perspective of such stories:

These stories were written many, many years ago and there must be elements of truth in them. I don't see them as facts, I see them as stories. All religious writings are like this. … The fundamental point here is that if you question these things, the answer is you have to have faith to believe them.

Views of Former BBC Boss Mark Thompson

The issue both participants picked up on from the interview of former BBC boss Mark Thompson was the way Jerry Springer insulted Jesus in a play. Participant A found the media pushing the barriers too much and felt that nowadays they were more or less allowed to say anything… *'You have on one side too much political correctness, but on the other side you have excessive insults to famous people'.*

Having similar views about Jerry Springer, participant A said that he made a career out of being over the top in everything he did and was a harmful individual.

> *I think no one has the right to comment on any religion unless they have read enough. All religions talk about humanity and peace. That's all you really need to know. Yes they will do things that is custom. They are not religion, they are customs.*

The Gay Experiment

The two participants took different perspectives while talking about the article on the person who pretended to be gay for a year. Participant A thought that fundamentally religions were against homosexuality, but the media was attacking people's religious beliefs on homosexuality, which was unfair… *'The religious views have been there for thousands of years, so why are you challenging it? You may not agree with it, but that's it'.* Participant B found it difficult to understand how that experiment could make his feeling towards his religion in a better way and felt quite 'lost' reading the article… *'I don't think it would change someone's idea about their faith in this way. It can certainly change his attitude about the group he pretended to be a part of'.*

Gender Segregation in Islam

Proving hypothesis 4 wrong, both participants completely rejected the *Daily Mail* article on gender segregation in Islam. The reason may be that segregation is also present in Orthodox Judaism, so the participants, though not Orthodox Jews, understood the reason behind it, whereas among the Christian groups, despite mostly rejecting the article, some did show concerns on gender segregation. Participant A said:

> *It isn't right that you marginalise a group because you have a totally erroneous perception about them…if there is any minority which has culture different from the majority, the only way you can survive is by not diluting it. So you got to keep it together, you got to segregate yourself…. If the society is content what's the problem? They didn't ask any Muslim woman what they think.*

Almost identical views were given by participant B who highlighted the distinction between choice and imposition and felt that the article distorted the facts by merely showing a photo:

If you see the photo it is shown as if that woman [were] made to sit there. This is how the media deliberately distorts things.… If people choose to sit separately and if it is not imposed then it should be respected… even in normal circumstances, on occasions men would want to be together or women would want to be together. It's only the impression in this article that the segregation has been forced upon women.

Article on Anti-Semitism

Both participants agreed with Richard Littlejohn that anti-Semitism was on the rise, but their perspectives differed on the issue. Participant A felt that it was to do with perception of the majority community against the Jews:

The perception of a Jew in England is a wealthy guy. There are a lot of poor Jewish people, but the perception here is they are all rich…also we avoid taxes. Scratch the surface and look deeply in the societies around the country you will see there is a rise of anti-Semitism.

He also rejected the author's claim and denied that Muslims and Jews were against each other:

I don't think Jews in any sense have any fear of Muslims or whatever. I wouldn't think the average Muslim man in the street would have any fear of the Jews either. Yes, there are extremes of the religions.

Participant B felt that anti-Semitism in Britain was linked with Israel. However, like participant A, he also completely differed with the author's views that Muslims hated Jews:

I understand the problems some Muslims have, but I don't think the problem is with the Jews, but the politics. I don't think there is a deep down problem, but I understand from Rageh Omaar's programme the attitude that developed from

the beginning…I found the fact that Muhammad signed treaty with the Jews fascinating…I know that Jews and Muslims have lived together peacefully for centuries, but all on a sudden in 1948 everything changed. I don't understand why the Arabs don't want us. They got on very well before, so why not now I don't understand.

Although he rejected the term 'Islamonazis', he understood why the author used the term as he was quite familiar with his writings. His following comment on the author makes his position clear about the article:

Richard Littlejohn has always been an extremist. He has severe prejudices.

Rageh Omaar's Documentary on Muhammad

Like the Christian participants both the Jewish participants found Rageh Omaar's documentary on *The Life of Prophet Muhammad* interesting and informative. Because of the presenter's profile, they did not feel that his Muslim faith made the programme less authentic, rather they felt the opposite. Participant B was full of praise:

I found it absolutely absorbing. To understand how the religion developed, the Mecca and Medina parts were mostly intriguing. I was being exposed to something I knew nothing about. And the more you learn the more interesting it becomes. I was just swept over by it.

Questionnaires

Ten questions were asked in the online questionnaire.

On the question about how the British media represents Judaism, most participants felt that it was either favourable or neutral with 46.7% considering them to be favourable and 33.3% finding it neutral. Only 20% thought that the British media was unfavourable to the Jews. However, one-third of the respondents (33.3%) were unhappy with the media as against 40% happy, whereas 26.7% were neither happy nor unhappy.

This is an interesting finding as it is different from the views of Muslim and Christian participants who were overwhelmingly in oppositional code when reacting to the depiction of their respective religions conforming to hypothesis 2. The Jewish participants, however, took a 'negotiated' position suggesting that the media were less negative towards the representation of their faith.

One participant commented that *The Daily Telegraph* was usually fair towards Judaism, whereas some other participants felt that *The Guardian* had a policy of discrediting Israel and portraying their religion as 'oddities'. Some participants also specified the BBC and Channel 4 that, according to them, tended to represent extreme views as mainstream without context. There was also the dissatisfaction that the media tended to stereotype Jews as orthodox and devout and neglects secular Jews. One participant tried to distinguish between the media portrayal of British Jews and the conflict in the Middle East finding the media positive towards British Jews, but negative towards Israel:

> *With regard to Israel, Jerusalem and the holy places I feel that the common connection between Jews, Judaism and Zionism is little understood and often misrepresented. With regard to Jews in the UK and Judaism—generally fair.*

Another participant, speaking from a neutral perspective, tried to summarise the way Jews were portrayed in the media:

> *Jews are often portrayed as a little eccentric, erudite, brash, isolated, funny—all of which is true depending on the Jews you chose to write about or portray. The media likes the traditional idea of the European Jew, whereas the Israeli Jew is often treated with hostility. So overall neutral.*

Some also blamed the failure of the media and the general British public in understanding Judaism and Israel as reflected in the following comment:

> *The media can easily skew any story through simply omitting a few facts, and can completely misrepresent any situation they choose. They are consistent in misrepresenting Israel, and the consequence is that about 95% of the British political Left is hostile to Israel, and regards calamities that befall Israel or Jews*

in Europe as something Jews brought on themselves. The media do not actually know anything about Judaism. It might be helpful if more proper information about all religions was shared.

Although all Muslims and the majority of Christian participants felt that the media was unfair towards the Palestinians, the Jewish participants universally perceived the media's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict as anti-Israel. This is an example of the level of polarisation that exists on this conflict and the thankless position the media find themselves in while covering this conflict.

The Jewish participants also differed from their Christian and Muslim counterparts through their opposition to the idea that the British media was anti-religion where only 14.3% agreed to this idea whereas 21.4% disagreed. Almost two-thirds of the respondents (64.3%) were ambivalent with neither agreeing or disagreeing with the point. One comment summarises that perspective:

I see no evidence either way. Society is gradually moving towards increasing antipathy to religious groups fuelled by religious terrorism and intolerance. The press reflects this.

For Islam and Christianity, the majority of the Jewish participants (57.1%) thought that Islam was represented unfavourably in the media. However, despite most studies suggesting overwhelming negativity towards Muslims (Baker et al. 2013; Poole and Richardson 2006; Poole 2002; Said 1997) as many as 28.6% of Jews thought that the media favoured Islam with 14.3% having a neutral view. This attitude is significantly different from those expressed by Christian and Muslim participants. There seemed to be some sympathy among the Jews for the negative portrayal of Muslims, but also support for the media due to terrorism issues in the Muslim world. There was also the feeling that the average moderate Muslims' perspectives were mostly missing in the media. The following two comments encapsulate these feelings eloquently:

We are bombarded daily with negativity about Muslims and this must be very unsettling for the Muslim community. But overall, considering widespread

issues in the Islamic world with terrorism and given 7/7 and the Lee Rigby murder, I think it's fair.

It is more complicated than this, because it is presented both favourably and unfavourably. Politicians and some of the media, for example the BBC, go to great lengths to tell the public that terrorist groups like IS have 'nothing to do with Islam', and that Islam is a religion of peace. To the man in the street, Islam does not look like a religion of peace, so there is a cognitive dissonance. It's only when the media present individual Muslims speaking out about the goodness that they see in their religion, and speaks to Muslims who deplore the violence of Islamist extremism, that we see a fuller picture.

Interestingly, not a single participant felt that the media was unfavourable towards Christianity. This is in sharp contrast to the views of Muslims and Christians, which some participants justified by commenting that Britain was fundamentally a Christian country. However, almost one-half (46.7%) were neutral about Christianity in the media as opposed to 53.3% having the opinion that the media favoured Christianity. This clarifies the position to some extent that not all of them thought that the media favoured Christianity.

All participants thought that the media was either favourable (42.9%) or neutral (57.1%) towards non-Abrahamic religions. More than one-half of the respondents felt that the media did not treat all religions fairly by favouring one over the other. Here, they did conform to hypothesis 1 by saying that the media favoured Christianity and Islam over Judaism. They came to this conclusion on the latter two religions entirely based on the media representation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. One participant expressed strong views that the media was soft towards the Muslim world while not showing that attitude towards Israel:

The Saudis have been bombing Yemen for months, but if they drop leaflets and send text messages before dropping bombs, I am not aware of it. There are no journalists reporting from the ruins and calling the Saudis baby killers and war criminals, and I am not aware of calls to have Saudi diplomats expelled or calls for the destruction of the country—or any other Muslim country. There is a refugee camp full of Palestinians in Syria who have been attacked by

terrorists, but no one is speaking about their plight. Christians are being killed throughout the Muslim world, but little is being said about it apart from in Christian news media.

Almost one-half of the participants (46.7%) felt that the British law did not protect the Jewish community from hostile media representation, though 26.7% did think so, whereas the remaining participants neither agreed nor disagreed. Some respondents said that it was not Judaism that was protected and it did not need protection; rather, it was Jews who needed protection and they were protected under the 'Race Relations Act' and the law on religions and belief. However, they felt that the law was weak in implementation. As found throughout among the Jews, Israel was the common denominator in determining the media's attitude towards their faith as summarised in the following two comments:

The problem is most prevalent in discussions around Israel. In any news story, Israel is always cast as the aggressor.

If you don't want to be accused of anti-Semitism, switch to anti-Zionism and you get a free pass. Anti-Zionism does not mean you disagree with Israeli politics; it means you disagree with Israel per se as the home of the Jewish people where they can exercise self-determination. Anti-Zionism is almost always anti-Semitism if you dig below the surface.

Finally, 53.3 % of the respondents felt that there should be laws to protect religions from media hostility with a significant 33.3% feeling neutral about this proposition. Only 13.4% thought that there should not be any such law. However, the comments on this question suggest that they would like to distinguish between Judaism and other religions because of the history of their persecution and the increase of anti-Semitic attacks. There was a feeling that the government physically protected the Jews but did not protect them from lies, vilification, and slander, particularly in the media as reflected in the following comment:

No, media should be allowed to criticize religions. The law should come into action where hostile representation of a religion becomes hostility towards some groups of people practicing this religion.

Mixed Focus Group: London

The purpose of organising a mixed focus group was to provide opportunities for the participants to listen to the views of other religious groups that would either reinforce or challenge their previously held perceptions of each other. The other purpose was to facilitate constructive debates where they could ask questions to each other and understand each other's cultural practices. It is human nature to be afraid of the unknown and be prejudiced against others based on what they hear rather than knowing what is factually correct. Furedi (2009, p. 199) observes that people often respond uncertainty with anxiety '…and regard the unknown as merely a threat to avoid rather than as an opportunity for discovery'. The media often reinforces the stereotypes and prejudices of the majority population against minority communities by publishing or showing negative stories about the minority groups. The power of the media in influencing public perception and lack of exposure to the cultural practices of the minority communities often makes the majority community suspicious towards the minorities affecting community cohesion.

Exposure to the unknown culture may lead to less prejudice against the minority group. Al-Azami (2008) found that non-Muslims who visited a mosque are likely to have an oppositional code while reacting to negative portrayal of a mosque, whereas those who never visited a mosque would take the hegemonic position. However, this is not a universal phenomenon as Poole (2002) found that people who knew Muslims were more in hegemonic position on negative media portrayal of Muslims than those who did not know Muslims.

Therefore, it was decided that there would be a mixed focus group where people from different faiths and none could come together and openly debate about issues in the three religions that are often portrayed in the media. Through this, participants would have the opportunity to compare their previous knowledge about other religions gained through media representations against what people of those religions actually say and practice.

The only mixed focus group between Muslims and Christians took place in an Anglican Church in London. Jews were also supposed to be in the mixed group, but due to the failure in organising Jewish focus groups,

it had to be organised without them. Another notable absence was people with no religion. As no non-religious focus group could be organised in London and due to both non-religious groups in this study based in the North West, it was not possible to find any non-religious participant attending this event in London. However, the meeting was lively with a lot of inputs from both the religious groups, which are discussed here.

Judaism

The two religious groups first discussed how the media portrayed Judaism and started by talking about the most contemporary issue on the Jewish community at that time—the issue of the ban on women's driving in two ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools in London. There were a lot of media reports on the issue at that time, and all the participants were well aware of the topic.

Muslims and Christians came from two different perspectives while talking about the issue. Most Christians were sympathetic towards the Jews and blamed the media for unnecessarily hyping the issue, which actually related to a tiny Jewish group with which most Jews disagreed. Others felt that if people were willing to accept it, then they should be allowed to do so as expressed by one female participant:

If this how they want to live as a group, then why should we say it's wrong?

The Muslim participants felt that they were often marginalised by the media in almost similar contexts in which a tiny minority's extremist ideology was overblown by the media and depicted as mainstream, and expressed that the response to this story, both by the media and the government, had been much more lenient than stories about Muslims. A male Muslim participants summarised this point of view through the following comment:

Possibly if any Muslim group did this it would be a front page news with the Prime Minister talking about this.

Discussion on Judaism is incomplete without the mention of the Israel-Palestine issue in the Middle East. There was a brief discussion on the media coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict with the two groups

disagreeing who was favoured more by the media, though both groups agreed that Judaism as a religion usually was not covered much in the media, but the conflict in the Middle East was often conflated with Judaism. Unlike most participants in the Birmingham and Manchester Christian groups, London Christians felt that the Palestinians got more support in the media than the Israelis. This view can also be taken in the context of Christian denominations as the Christian groups in both Birmingham and Manchester were Catholics, whereas the London group was Anglican. Traditionally, the Catholics are perceived to be relatively more hostile to the Jews due to the historical perception that Jews killed Christ, the position from which the Catholic Church retracted later on. Unsurprisingly, the Muslims felt exactly the opposite and blamed the media as biased towards Israel. Some Muslim participants highlighted that they no longer trusted the mainstream media on that conflict and relied on social media much more than the traditional media.

Lifestyle Programme on Religious Groups Like Strictly Kosher

One of the documentaries used in this research was the ITV reality show on Manchester's Jewish community *Strictly Kosher*. The participants in the mixed group discussed whether it was a good idea to have lifestyle television programmes on other religions, particularly Islam about which most people generally heard bad stories. One of the Muslim participants really liked *Strictly Kosher* and said:

> *I had little idea about Jewish lifestyle and culture and this type of programme helped me know their culture better. I find some similarities with Muslim culture, for example, male-female segregation in wedding ceremonies.*

A female Christian participant also loved the programme and called for something similar on Muslims as she knew little about Muslim culture:

> *I think the programme is brilliant, their celebration of Jewish heritage and also the programme is quite humorous … And I think it's quite cool to celebrate Jewish culture. But with Muslims, people sometimes say you don't see funny*

Muslims. And that's because that side of Muslims is never shown. Also Muslims themselves need to come up with ideas to do something similar.

There were discussions on programmes on Muslims, for example, the BBC show Citizen Khan, which Muslim participants did not like because it focused on South Asian culture rather than Islamic culture. A Christian participant talked about the Channel 4 Muslim beauty pageant show, which she found to be quite humorous showing the other side of Muslim women she was not used to:

I think this will lead to a series on Muslim life, because the problem is we only see Muslim women represented in the media as subservient. But they have strong females coming out of that programme, and I think that's brilliant.

Another female Christian participant emphasised the need for Christians to know more about Muslim culture and the Muslims to be more open about themselves:

As Christians are we guilty of ignorance? We know a bit of the Jewish culture, but are we guilty of being too innocent about Muslim culture or Hindu culture? I would like to walk into a mosque, but I don't know the protocols, I don't know if I need to dress differently or not. If I had a friend who could take me in there and tell me what to do and what not to do. I feel that our Muslim brothers and sisters seem to have this enclosure that needs to be more open, because this is relatively new in our society and we need to know more about them. That is why a lot of people have fear about them.

Agreeing to the need to have more programmes that show Muslims as normal people rather than extremists, one of the Muslim participants gave the example of a successful Canadian sitcom called *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, which tried to humanise the Muslims.

It was like the Cosby show that humanised the black people, like normal family life, normal aspirations—they are not dangerous, other, drug dealers whatever. Shows like that can work if people watch it.

Is Christianity Getting a Fair Deal?

Both Muslims and Christians felt that Christianity did not get a fair deal in the British media. A Muslim participant observed that there were a lot of stereotypes based on some individual cases, for example child sex abuse, but it was blown out of proportion. Christian participants all agreed that the media got away criticising the Christians unfairly because the Christians had been quiet about their faith. Some said that groups like the Evangelicals were quite dynamic, but the Church of England was low key. Comparing with how Muslims reacted when their faith was insulted, one Christian participant thought that Christians should not be so quiet about it:

> *There would be absolutely tremendous reaction among the Muslims if there was a Jerry Springer Show on Muhammad like the one on Jesus. As Christians we are not very defensive, and I am quite annoyed that no one is defending our faith. I just wish someone would come out and defend Christianity.*

Islam and Terrorism

As expected it was Islam that dominated the mixed focus group where the main point of discussion on the representation of Islam in general was whether the mainstream Muslims and their leadership were doing enough to condemn the terrorist acts of some extremist Muslims. A Christian participant asked why the Imams were not going out and condemning what the ISIS were doing. When a Muslim participant said that there were many examples that they had been doing this including statements by the Imams around the world saying that this was against Islam, another Christian participant said that this hardly came in the media. Some Muslim participants blamed the media for not representing the mainstream Muslim voice and for giving more platform to those who had hatred. Two young female Muslim participants, who were university graduates and were in professional jobs, spoke passionately about their frustrations for being harassed and suspected for their faith in the current climate:

Who will hear our voice? Who is suffering due to this? Us Muslims. We are the ones who are stopped and harassed at the airports. I was going abroad two weeks ago. I was stopped by the police before I boarded. No one else was stopped. So, my point is, what do you want me to do?

I as a Muslim have nothing to do with ISIS or any terrorism, but every single time I am suspected. Doesn't matter how many degrees you have got, doesn't matter how much you give back to the society, people continue to see you with suspicion, and that's a problem.

A male Muslim participant felt that the media deliberately linked evil things with Islam. For example, if a Muslim did an evil thing, even if he was not a practising Muslim, it was portrayed that Islam was bad. A female Christian participants compared the situation of Muslims with the child sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. She said:

It doesn't mean that all Catholics are paedophiles. There have been shocking levels of paedophilia in the Catholic Church, but that can't be a Catholic problem. If people assume because someone is Catholic he would be a paedophile, it will be ridiculous. Why should a Catholic have to defend the fault of some individuals?

A male Muslim participant, who had a young family, expressed his concerns about the future of his children in this country where Muslims would be looked at suspiciously fuelled by media stereotyping:

I am worried what the future will be like. This type of profiling and stereotypes will certainly affect the future generation. I am worried whether my children will get the opportunities that I got to succeed in 10/15 years' time. My concern is that the media is propagating this type of impression about Muslims on the minds of everyday people, which is not fair and not objective.

Most Muslim participants felt that the media represented Islam in that way because they did not understand the culture, and also because they deliberately provoked Muslims to react angrily to their portrayals of Islam. They concluded that the logic behind the latter approach was to sell their papers as well as having particular agenda against Islam and Muslims due to the media institutions they represented.

Gender Segregation and Treatment of Women in Islam

As with all other focus groups and interviews, gender segregation and treatment of women in Islam were the most talked about issues in this focus group. The difference in this group was that the Christian participants had the opportunity to ask Muslims directly about these issues and hear their perspectives on this contentious topic. The makeup of the group was such that the Christians could hear from two young Muslim women who were brought up in the UK, were successful professionals, and made their own decision to wear the headscarf. For most Christian participants, it was the first time they had the opportunity to ask them how they felt Islam treated them as women.

Muslim participants reminded their Christian counterparts that the media often muddled up between religion and culture. They reminded them that a lot of the things that were presented in the media as Muslim culture were more ethnic than Islamic. A male participant gave the example that some families might not want their women to work, which was more to do with where they came from than anything to do with Islam as a religion. He reminded that there was nothing in Islam that prohibited women from working. The Muslim participants showed their annoyance at the way Muslim women were represented and how the conversations about them were always about what they wore. A female participant said:

> *It's very rare to see a Muslim woman being portrayed as an activist, she is always portrayed in terms of very gender specific issues, whether it's hijab; whether it's abuse; or whether it's forced marriage—not her entire agency being educated. You don't see that mentioned very much. It's more to do with looks.*

The following conversation between two Christian female participants and two Muslim female participants encapsulates the topic of women in Islam in an interesting way, and gives an outline of how Muslim women feel about their role in their religion. The abbreviations CF1 and CF2 represent the two Christian female participants and MF1 and MF2 refer to the two Muslim female participants.

CF1: Are there any female imams? Are there going to be any female imams? Is there a move towards that?
MF1: I don't think Islam and Christianity should necessarily be compared in this way. I think this type of questions we should address within the Muslim community, but I don't agree that we have to play catch up to other religions. There are some women-only mosques where there are female imams.
MF2: There are many women scholars in Islam. The main issue here is women leading men in prayers, but there is no problem women leading women in prayers.
CF1: Why do we always see men praying in the mosque? Aren't there any women?
MF1: They are in a separate area, and they are equally full and equally active. It's just that the two genders are not praying together.
MF2: Women play active roles in mosque and communities as men do, but it's the ritual of praying that is separate.

A third Christian woman, who seemed to have some idea about Muslim prayer justified why Muslim men and women prayed separately:

It is also the way they pray as well. The way they bend, it's not very modest to have guys behind them.

The conversation then moved towards the two Muslim women's backgrounds and their personal outlooks towards their faith.

CF2: Do you think you have become more westernised? If you were still back in the Middle East…?
MF1: I am not from the Middle East…my family is from Bangladesh and my mother and women in my family are very strong women. I think it's unfair to look at us that way.
MF2: To answer your question, of course I am western, I was born in London and I am British, so it's not that tug of war in that sense. We are mixture of both, we are hybrids.
CF2: Do you think the Muslim women are pressurised to become more western than keeping to their original culture?
MF1: To be honest, I think it's my religion that has made me more proactive. If I [were] more cultural, then I wouldn't be where I am….

CF1: You mean your faith is above your culture? It's so interesting to hear your view.
MF1: I think that being a Muslim, I believe in being excellent in what I do and try to be the best. And actually what I do and believe come from my Islam, and actually drives me to be as best as I can.

The whole issue of gender segregation in Islam and the Muslim women's perspective can be found in the following statement by one of the female participants:

It's so funny that this issue comes up every time, and I can't believe they are still reporting on it. What does the word 'segregation' remind us? Division or civil rights movement. That's what it is and that's what people get into their head, but why are Muslims segregating, do they really understand why Muslims do it? To me, sometimes some men or some women feel more comfortable sitting separately from one another. May be the separation allows the two sexes to grow wholly as individuals without thinking, oh, what does that guy think about my headscarf, I don't know, that's the way I see it. And people should recognise that this is a healthy way of psycho-social development.

Freedom of Expression Versus Religious Sentiment

The issue of how far freedom of expression should go and whether the media should be allowed to insult the sentiments of people's religious faith was another topic that generated a lot of discussion and viewpoints. Christian participants were happy that the blasphemy law had been abolished and were not in favour to ban freedom of expression. Some participants said that they did not get angry when they saw the media ridicule their faith as they did not feel the need to defend their faith. Others felt that although they found some representations of Christ as highly offensive coming from narrow minded people, they did not think that people who offend their faith were criminals. There were also those who thought that if the media were asked not to do it, they would do even more, but if everyone was quiet about it, they would not bother doing it any more. However, one Christian participant showed her disappointment by the behaviour of the media through the following statement:

I think we need to find some way getting around this, because insults are getting worse by the day. If they have freedom of speech why don't they use it intelligently? Why do they have to aggressively attack other people's beliefs? Why do they have to be horrible? I think the concept of freedom of speech is completely hijacked by some truly horrible people in the media.

Christian and Muslim participants were in disagreement about the way Muslims should react to insults against their religion, particularly their prophet. One Christian participant felt that Muslims should explain to others why they feel so offended when their prophet is insulted so that people understand their feelings and then choose whether they want to still offend. She suggested that they should not react to these insults, like the Christians ignore insults against Jesus and Mary:

If Muslims don't react, then what are they going to do? When you react like this, they feel that they got what they wanted…if you just let it go, like the Christians, it may not continue.

The suggestion from the Christians was that the reaction from Muslims should not be aggressive, rather it should be peaceful. However, a Muslim participant said that anger was a valid reaction as long it did not cross the boundary of law. Another Muslim participant asked how far this free exercise of freedom of expression could go before people react. Comparing to the way black people used to be treated, a third Muslim participant asked whether drawing cartoons where people were compared to monkeys would be acceptable. If not, then they should not draw racist cartoons like the ones against Prophet Muhammad. Otherwise, people had the right to protest peacefully. He also compared media's differing attitude towards Jews and Muslims:

There is a law that prevents people drawing cartoons or saying stuff that is anti-Semitic, but as far as the Muslims are concerned, it's open house and they can say whatever they like, and it's accepted.

There was also the discussion about power dynamics, A female Muslim participant, trying to answer to the suggestions given by the Christians not to react to the insults against Islam, compared between the contexts in which Muslims and Christians operated in this country:

I don't think it's fair to say that they mock the Pope in the same way they mock Muhammad. There's a bit of a difference there…. It's the difference of the climate. It's not only mocking the religion, it's the way they look, it's the way they got evil eye; it's the way their hair is or their lips are…it's the very nature—they are seen as other, they are seen as alien, and that's how the historical depiction has always been. And I can see how there has been so much anti-Semitism and racism in Europe. I think it's quite fair to say right now that's how Muslims are being depicted.

Both the groups agreed that the mixed focus group was useful in understanding each other's culture, particularly the Christian participants who had little knowledge about the religion and culture of the Muslim participants. One Christian participant felt that it would be nice if a Muslim speaker could give a talk about their religion in his church. Another participant said:

As Christians we are a bit naive. It would be nice if we interact with Muslims more.

Online Comments

Readers are increasingly getting engaged with online news articles and the comment sections of online versions of newspapers attract a lot of readers. A recent survey by Pew Research centre (Purcell et al. 2010) in the United States found that 25% of the readers have commented on online news articles, whereas 37% consider it an important thing to do. The figure is even higher (51%) for 18–29 year olds. Therefore, it was decided that analysis of comments on online versions of the same newspaper articles used in Chapter 2 and in the focus groups in this chapter would be included in this study, though on a small scale.

The main purpose of including this analysis is to examine whether people's views are more restricted while speaking in focus groups than giving opinions online where they can use pseudonyms and can be more candid. The remit of this section will be limited to only the articles used in this research as they are official online versions of the newspaper articles analysed. Among the six newspaper articles on the three religions, one article in the *Daily Mail* by Richard Littlejohn had no comments.

The first ten comments in the online versions of the five articles have been analysed in this section. While selecting the comments, only the main comments have been used for analysis, not the ones that are replies to other comments. The reason for selecting the first ten comments as it appears in the comment section of the newspapers is to ensure that the author's personal choice is not prioritised during the selection process, therefore maintaining authenticity and consistency in the data selection process.

Data analysis in this section has been done by synchronising data analysis in Chapter 2 and audience responses in this chapter to investigate how the language used in the article influences readers to comment in particular ways and to examine how their comments are similar or different to the comments made in focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires. Hall's Encoding/Decoding model is again used here to maintain the continuity of the theoretical model and to observe what decoding pattern people tend to have when commenting on the online version of a newspaper article.

Article on Islam 1: The Daily Mail Article on Gender Segregation in Islam

This article deals with an issue that attracts views from everyone. As discussed in Chapter 2, the *Daily Mail* is a right-wing newspaper with many of its readership conforming to the political views of the newspaper. The way the article has been written (refer to Chapter 2 for its Critical Discourse Analysis) has the potential to evoke strong reactions among the readership of the newspaper, which is clearly manifested in the first ten comments of the article.

All ten comments were hostile towards Islam and Muslims and conformed to the hegemonic code. As found in the CDA of the article in Chapter 2, the gap between the reality and the way the article was written was significant, and the audience's comments reflected that gap explicitly. For example, the article referred to an event of the Islamic Society in a university in which Muslim males and females sat separately. However, it was written in such a way that it implied that it was an event organised by the university, whereas

there was a comment from a university spokesperson that the university had nothing to do with that programme. Yet, a woman from Swansea wrote:

> *I am a 53 year old woman. I remember fighting for the right to wear trousers in school (1970's), the right to sign for my own operation as a married woman (1980's), for rape in marriage to be a crime (1990's) and many other gender inequalities in the U.K. And yes, these are my personal experiences. SHAME ON THIS UNIVERSITY.*

An unnamed reader from Manchester asked for the dismissal of the 'lecturer', whereas a person from Woking with a pseudonym went one step further and commented that the Vice Chancellor of the university should be sacked for allowing this, whereas no university staff had been actually involved in this event. There was also cynicism at the end of one of the comments generalising a small Islamic Society event into a problem in British universities as a whole:

> *Any lecturer requiring women to sit at the back of the room should be dismissed immediately. My daughter is a smart intelligent woman in the top 5% of her year and I would be horrified if she were discriminated at university simply for being female. What is next—being declined a space at university because a male wants to attend?*

Often, while commenting on a negative report about immigration and Islam, some readers would remind everyone that this was their country and others had to either abide by its 'rules' or leave. The following comment, apparently from an expatriate in Australia summarises that viewpoint:

> *My country, my people, our laws, if not suitable then leave and stop taking advantage of this country.*

Another expatriate from Paris reminded that this was not an 'Islamic country' and that one should be allowed to sit wherever they wanted in a university in the UK, which conformed to the implication of the article that women were forced to sit separately, though the organisers of the event clearly said that they were allowed to choose where to sit. Someone from London also highlighted that this was not a Muslim country and

called for a ban on such segregation. Finally, a reader from Wakefield with a pseudonym not only showed anger but also castigated women who decide to accept this 'discrimination':

I find this depressing and infuriating in equal measures. Depressing that this can happen in a British university and infuriating that there are woman who choose to be discriminated against by going along and taking part!

Article on Islam 2: The Daily Mail Article on Muslim Converts

The article on Muslim converts led to mixed reactions consisting of both positive and negative comments on Muslims. The negative comments hardly related to the article, but reflected the hostile attitude towards religion in general and Islam in particular. Saying that he was 'exceptionally disturbed' by the story, a reader calling himself 'shocked' said:

Religion of any kind is outdated, why would we follow anything that causes war and hatred between the human races? We are not children, yet we still follow books written in the early dawning of humanity. Are we so stupid that we must be led by some men, who wrote books before civilization? Stand up and be responsible for your own actions, do not blame some faceless god or devil. Only then can we truly be enlightened!

Another reader with a pseudonym gave similar views, but specified Islam in its attack referring it to be founded by 'desert wandering people':

It's a book written by men in order to keep power over people. It was founded 600 years after the second great monotheistic religion putting it in third place for a desert wandering people. It has no significance in the twenty first century! The laws of physics govern the universe, not an omnipotent mysterious being.

The third comment was a cynical one in which a reader from Hertford brought issues of immigration and political correctness to suggest that the majority community and its culture were now threatened, though the article had nothing to do with these issues:

Its only a matter of time before Europe interferes with our legal and freedom rights and then tells us that we can't celebrate Christmas time any longer because it offends other religions. I give it 10 to 15 years before we read this nonsense in the papers. We won't have any religious freedoms left in our own country the way our own culture is being slowly taken from us!

All these comments, though made four years ago, are even more relevant in the context of today's Britain where immigration is blamed for almost every problem in the country. Although the article is about Muslim converts and is relatively less negative about Islam apart from some suggestive statements linking the rise of terrorism with the rise of Muslims without any substantial proof, the three preceding comments overly simplify the problem and stereotype people and their religious beliefs.

All comments on this article were not negative as some readers tried to be specific about the article and suggested that some of the women who converted to Islam were probably desperately searching for a way to get out of the booze and drugs culture that they found themselves in and saw Islam as a suitable way to get out of their situation. Others believed that some conversions were nothing but to get married to their loved ones. There was also a reader who was against religions, but called for respecting the decision of those who decided to convert to Islam. Although most cynical comments were usually directed against the Muslims, the suggestion that the country was undergoing 'Islamification' mentioned in the article was ridiculed by a reader from Glasgow as illustrated here:

Wow at this rate unless we take action the UK will be 100 % Muslim by the year 14700. I suggest that we all shave our heads, down ten cans of super strength lager and stand outside mosques chanting racial slurs while performing Nazi salutes.

Muslim perspectives are rare in the comments sections of newspapers, but incidentally, the first comment that appeared after this article was by a reader with a Muslim name. The following comment suggests that only those who had no personal experience of Islam or Muslims could have the 'fear that Islam is full of barbaric punishments, is oppressive to women, and is full of terrorists':

It's interesting isn't it that some people are actually forming opinions on other people's opinions through the media etc not really taking the responsibility to go and find out what Islam is really about. Would you buy a car based on what someone tells you about the car or would you go and check out the car yourself and make sure that it runs well and it has no defects? You might even go as far as get a mechanic to look at or do your research before departing with your money. So why do people form opinions based on shallow thought and demonise Muslims based on these shallow opinions?

Article on Christianity 1: Daily Mail's Article on the Then BBC Boss's Views on Christianity in the Media

This article on the views of the then BBC Director General Mark Thompson about the representation of Christianity provoked some sharp comments including attacks on Islam. Some agreed with Mark Thompson that Christians were rightly 'broad-shouldered' in reacting to negative portrayals of their religion as reflected in the following comment:

Well, according to the powers of BBC, the Christians are abused because they refuse to respond violently. In that sense, I would say that the abused are responding in a manner that is decidedly—Christian.

Most readers made a scathing attack on Mr. Thompson and the BBC for being harsh on Christianity, but being soft on other religions, particularly Islam. His decision to stand by the broadcasting of the controversial episode of *The Jerry Springer Show* that ridiculed Jesus and showed him wearing a nappy was taken by a reader as contravening the laws against 'inciting religious hatred'. Another reader reminded that the population would one day realise how much they were paying for the 'brainwashing propaganda' by the BBC. The following comment accused Mr. Thompson of collaborating with Muslims for whom he used the term 'muzz'.

Pathetic. What do you expect from a country that has been taken over by the muzz? Anyone smell collaborators?

Another personal attack calls him 'pathetic' that he should allow Christianity to be ridiculed and calls for the BBC to shut down:

*Not broad shouldered Mr Thomson, just easy to get away with ridicule. You don't have the bo****s to have a go at other religions. You pathetic little specimen. The sooner you are shut down or sold off the better. Or is that the long term plan?*

Another comment on the former BBC boss was even more aggressive:

This man is disgusting. He should be taken out and put up on a cross. That would teach him not to disrespect this country and its Christian faith.

Article on Christianity 2: The Guardian Article on the 'Gay Experiment'

There were mixed reactions to this article. Some praised the efforts of the Evangelical Christian who spent a year pretending to be gay while most of the first ten comments on this article evoked negative comments. One person found the article to be an 'uncritical advertorial', whereas another reader called this experiment as 'an utterly pointless journey'. A reader with a pseudonym used the term 'superficial' to explain their feeling and agreed with some other readers' views that he was actually a gay himself:

He had obviously made his mind up before he began his 'journey'. He just wanted material for his argument, and, as someone above says, he probably is a bit gay and will likely 'come out' in due course.

There was also sarcasm in some comments like the next one, which mocked the idea that someone felt the need to spend a year as a gay to realise that they were normal people:

funny cos i was born and then brought up reasonably well and didn't need to 'realise' that gay people are normal too... for his next book he lives the life of a bear and concludes they shit in the woods…

There was a sceptical comment by another reader who questioned whether he was pretending at all, but condemned the 'few Christian wingnuts in the U.S.' for being hateful bigots' against gay people.

There were a couple of positive comments as well with one reader feeling that the book he was writing would be 'interesting'. Another reader found this experiment giving a vivid picture of the church's attitude towards homosexuals:

> *Through challenging his own beliefs and using first-hand experience to create empathy, this man has put himself in a unique position of authority to comment on the church's attitude towards gay people.*

Article on Judaism: The Guardian Article on 'the Camel Story'

The article tries to undermine the Zionist claim of the 'Promised Land' and concludes that the 'Camel Story' in the Old Testament is not scientifically proven to be a fact. The first ten comments of this article tended to show evenly mixed reactions to the story. One of those who believed in the story suggested that *'the absence of evidence isn't the evidence of absence'*. Another reader had similar views by saying that *'the idea that something wasn't there because we haven't found its fossils seems a little dubious'*. One comment tried to explain that everything in history could not be proved:

> *If we find a decent amount of evidence of domesticated camels back to a certain point in time, and nothing before it, we can make a decent inference about the date of domestication of camels. The date isn't proven finally,' but that isn't what we're looking for—such things never can be proven finally.*

Among those who were against the Zionists' claim there was one reader who thought that it was problematic for Zionism that there was the continual presence of non-kosher food waste throughout the history of what is now Israel.

> *Even when a supposedly entirely Jewish homeland state, everyone's eating pig pretty often. Possibly a good indication that the Israelite and Canaanite populations shared the area quite peaceably.*

Others were less subtle asking whether 'the rest of Genesis is literal' or 'everything else in there (Old Testament) is true' as in the following comment:

The Old Testament isn't historically true in every detail? It's a mythology written to support a worldview? Good god man, that's a surprise!

Another sceptic asked a similar question:

Didn't we go through all of this when it was discovered that the pyramids in Egypt were built by contractors rather than Jewish slaves?

It is evident that even the most critical comments on Judaism were not nearly as aggressive as the ones on Christianity and Islam. It is not clear whether this cautious approach was to avoid being accused of anti-Semitism. However, the small sample of data analysed in this section provides some indication that people's reactions in online versions of newspapers vary from being aggressive to mild criticism. This variation may depend on readership differences between different newspapers as well as differing attitudes towards the three faith groups with hostility against Islam, mixture of positive and negative attitudes towards Christianity, and mostly positive, but some mild negativity towards Judaism by the readership of the two newspapers' online versions.

Comparative Analysis Between Focus Group Findings and Online Comments

Comments in online versions of newspapers often tend to be offensive (Diakopoulos & Naaman 2011). It will naturally be significantly different from face-to-face focus group discussions or interviews. The readers have the flexibility of using a pseudonym to avoid being identified, which gives them much more freedom to give opinions freely without worrying to offend others. Comparing between the language used in focus groups participants and comments on online versions of newspapers, three major differences between the two types of audience response were found.

First, discussions in focus group meetings were about media representations of religions and people's comments were mainly about the way media portrayed religions. Online comments in most cases, particularly the ones analysed in this chapter talked about the issues raised in the media article, not about how media presented those issues.

Second, the focus group discussions mostly comprised the audience's attitude towards the media, but online comments in the present study showed attitude towards different religious groups or people mentioned in the articles.

Third, the language in focus group meetings was much more restrained than online comments. People occasionally used strong expressions and said controversial things in face-to-face meetings, but usually they did not cross the limit of decent conversation. Online comments, however, allowed people to be candid due to the opportunity to remain anonymous, which often led to aggressive or offensive comments that could sometimes be taken as abusive. For example, no one in face-to-face interaction is expected to ask for the former BBC boss to be 'put up on a cross' as found in an online comment.

4

Conclusion—Towards a New Interdisciplinary Field

This book is an attempt to study religion in the media from a linguistic perspective using two analytical frameworks in two chapters to make sense of media representations of the three Abrahamic religions in mainstream British media. The linguistic analytical method 'Critical Discourse Analysis' was applied in Chapter 2 to examine the power dynamics applied in the media to influence the audience through words, phrases, and sentences in particular styles. The study then focused on how followers of the three religions and those with no religion received the same media materials analysed in Chapter 2. The audience response study in Chapter 3 applied the Encoding/Decoding model to investigate whether the audience conformed to the intended message of media text, opposed it, or positioned themselves between the two by accepting some messages, but rejecting others.

In this chapter, key findings in Chapters 2 and 3 have been summarised to show how the media manipulates language to create maximum effects on their audiences and what common trends exist in the representation of the three religions. The chapter will also examine whether the hypotheses were correct about the interpretive frameworks used by the religious and non-religious groups while decoding media messages.

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A key observation in this study is how intrinsically British Jews link themselves to Israel, which was not what the researcher had thought. This also explains why the Jewish community was not keen to take part in this project, as members felt uneasy talking about Israel to someone with an Arab Muslim surname.

Chapter 2 first introduced the concepts 'Discourse Analysis' and 'Critical Discourse Analysis' (CDA) with detailed descriptions of Fairclough's (1992; 1995a; 2003) and Van Dijk's (2001) works in the area. The chapter contextualised the study within the theoretical framework it used in its analyses of media texts about religions. It then introduced various definitions of media discourse and justified the use of CDA as an appropriate analytical tool for understanding media discourse, highlighting the distinctive linguistic features of media language and analytical approaches to media Discourse Analysis. Another analytical framework used in this chapter is Halliday and Hasan's (1976) concept of Register composed of *field, tenor*, and *mode*, which look at the themes, participants, channels of communication, and linguistic styles used in the texts. Reminding the readers that Discourse Analysis of media representation of religions is a relatively new area of academic research, the chapter then went on to analyse media discourses on the three Abrahamic religions by analysing some news reports and columns in national newspapers, television documentaries, and fictional representations through television dramas.

Findings of Chapter 2

Newspaper Articles

Islam—Overt and Covert Negativity

The CDA of the article in the *Daily Mail* on gender segregation found the title implied that the university organised the event to create a sense of paranoia among some readers about the intensity of the supposed problem. Readers' comments analysed in Chapter 3 showed that a significant number of the sample thought it was an event of the university, whereas the Islamic Society branch of the university had organised it.

Although the main theme of the article is to highlight how Muslim women are subject to discrimination and inequality, the absence of any Muslim female voice was a notable omission in the article, which was picked up by participants from all groups in the audience response study. Use of passive sentences to imply women's subservient role and adjectives such as 'shocking' and 'disturbing' to refer to gender segregation in Islam are evidences of value judgments on a common religious culture among Muslims around the world. Demonstration of ethnocentrism could be observed through the author's questioning of a cultural practice of another community from the perspective of its ideological and cultural viewpoint without investigating whether the segregation is voluntarily accepted by both sexes or coerced by men. The author shows unequal power relationships by positioning Muslim minorities as 'other' and by attempting to covertly link gender segregation with extremism without any evidence to suggest any link between the two.

The second article on Islam, also in the *Daily Mail*, was found to be relatively less critical about Muslims compared to the other article, though covert negativities throughout the article were identified by most participants. The article took a different position than the typical media stereotype of a Muslim convert, which shows them as mentally disturbed men indulging in acts of terrorism. Rather, this article repeats several times that the average age and gender of Muslim converts are 27-year-old white women. However, publishing an image of two women with *niqab* or full veil, which has little relevance to the article, is evidence of a covert negative attitude of the article. CDA of the article also found two major correlations that are unsubstantiated. The whole article is based on The Faith Matters report (Brice 2011, p. 16), but the attempt to find a correlation between Muslim converts and terrorism by mentioning the rise of terrorism in the same sentence where the increase in Muslim converts are mentioned, and by suggesting that the increase in Muslim converts is an indication of 'Islamification' are almost entirely the opposites of what the original report says. The former aspect was noticed by the focus group participants and interviewees of all three religious groups. Moreover, it was found that the use of numbers and statistics about Muslim converts in the article is misleading and presents a negative image, whereas the actual figures tell a different story.

Christianity—Less Sensitive Treatment

The first article on Christianity, published in *The Guardian* is about an Evangelical Christian young man in the United States who spends a year pretending to be gay. The analysis of this article found the writer being sympathetic to the story as its overall appeal fits in well with the ideology of the newspaper. The language used by the author evidently shows negative attitude towards Evangelical Christians by using passive sentences to denote the way the young man was brought up to hate homosexuals and it uses active sentences to denote practicing Christians showing hatred towards gay people. The whole Christian community the boy was brought up in was implicitly portrayed as homophobic in the article, whereas only one or two examples of actual homophobic practices were given, and the individual about whom the article is written clearly states that this is not the case. Another key finding in the analysis is the writer's failure to justify the use of the term 'gay Christian' and the claim that spending one year as a gay man reaffirmed his Christian faith. Most participants in the audience response study, particularly the Christians, also failed to understand this logic.

The second article on Christianity is based on an interview with the former Director General of the BBC Mark Thompson who said that Christianity gets less sensitive treatment in the media compared to Islam. With an obvious pro-Christian perspective, the word 'broad-shouldered' was found to be repeated several times; it referred to the religion rather than the followers of the religion, though, tolerant reactions by Christians are highlighted throughout the article. CDA of the article shows that at a time when academics around the world are widely publishing on the negative portrayal of Islam, this article gives a counter-argument that Christianity receives less sympathy in British broadcast media than Islam. Another observation is that the title uses the term 'other religions' compared to Christianity, but all comparisons in the article attributed to the former BBC boss are almost exclusively between Christianity and Islam. Although the article is an excerpt of an interview of the former BBC boss, there seems to be an attempt by the writer to provide their own perspectives on the issue through the use of coordinating conjunctions 'but' and 'however' several times, probably to show apparent contradictions in Mark Thompson's statements.

Judaism—Sympathy and Scepticism

This study found that although Judaism and Jewish people are well represented in films and television, there is little coverage about them in news media, which is mostly confined to politics in the Middle East or news about anti-Semitism. The *Daily Mail* column by a renowned pro-Israeli journalist Richard Littlejohn highlighted the rise of anti-Semitism in Britain by the left, the Muslims, and some parts of the media with particular emphasis on the apparent sympathy towards Muslims, but aggressive behaviour and conspiracy theories against Israel and Jews. Linguistically, two coined expressions were found to be distinctive in this article: first, the use of unusual collocation 'fascist left' as the term 'fascism' is essentially a term used with right-wing views; and second, coining of a new word 'Islamonazis', which combines 'Islam' and 'Nazism' without any evidence to prove how these two ideologies could be related. The analysis also failed to find any evidence about the supposed correlation between anti-Israel, anti-Zionism, and anti-Semitism. Contrary to the findings of most academic studies that provide evidence that the media is overwhelmingly negative towards Muslims, this article suggests the opposite that the media loves to portray positive images about Islam. The analysis also found an unsubstantiated effort of the writer to link 9/11 with anti-Semitism in Britain. An example of overgeneralisation that implies Muslims' animosity against the Jews could be found when the writer suggests widespread anti-Semitism in British mosques by referring to one or two instances of anti-Jewish comments by some Islamic teachers, shown on a Channel 4 documentary.

The second article on Judaism is also an opinion column published in *The Guardian* where a left-wing journalist attempts to provide evidence from a scientific finding to prove that the 'Camel Story' about the Promised Land is actually fictitious. The analysis proved that the 'Promised Land' in Zionism is not necessarily linked to the 'Camel Story'. It was found that the writer attempts to bring a typical science versus religion debate through the article, whereas, the most basic tenet of a religion is the belief of the unseen. This aspect is highlighted by some of the Christian and Jewish participants in Chapter 3 who viewed that stories in religious scriptures are not necessarily facts all the time and are often told as parables to provide teachings to the adherents. It emerged from the CDA of the article that the writer's grammatical constructions of adverbials, declarative sentences,

and present perfective aspects demonstrate a written style of confidence and certainty rather than a suggestive style that is often observed in news reporting; he tends to imply that there is no doubt about the falsehood of the religious claim of a Promised Land.

TV Documentaries

Islam—Questioning Its Origin

Minutes 28 to 34 of a Channel 4 documentary on the history of Islam showed how historian Tom Holland challenges fundamental aspects of Islam's origin and concludes that there is little evidence to prove the origins of Islam as believed by Muslims. Linguistically, it was found that the presenter uses a combination of figurative language and intertextuality through mixing biblical terms with his own language and combines them into a coherent discourse. The series of rhetorical questions the presenter asks about the Arab invaders are all related to scepticisms about whether they were indeed Muslims.

The analysis of this documentary found that the presenter initially uses a suggestive mode conforming to the investigative nature of the programme, but within 34 minutes of a 74-minute programme, moves to a definitive mode by concluding that it is 'absolutely clear' that the religion of the Arab invaders was not Islam, which contradicts the whole purpose of searching for the origin of Islam less than midway into the programme. However, it was evident that the documentary maintains consistent academic reasoning; the presenter has eloquent and convincing speaking style and has academic credentials to create a programme like this. Unlike many news articles, the presenter does not attempt to stereotype or demonise Islam or Muslims.

Christianity—Christian Demonization of Jews

The documentary chosen for Christianity is the 24th to 29th minutes' clip of the first of an eight-part series on the history of Christianity on

Channel 4 titled, 'Jesus the Jew' in which writer and broadcaster Howard Jacobson questions the authenticity of the traditional Christian narrative of the role of Judas in Jesus's death that led to some Christians believing that Jews killed Jesus. The CDA of the documentary found the presenter not only playing with language, but also using film footage, combining colour and black-and-white footage, using occasional titles to identify time and place, and playing haunting music to create a poetic effect. There is also evidence of intertextuality, metaphor, and unusual alliterated collocation along with the juxtaposition of a plain style and a poetic style of language inserted with corresponding scenes. The 'participatory mode' of the presenter enables him to give value-judged opinions as well, for example, when he calls the action of those who vilify Judas as 'lamentable'.

Judaism—Cultural Representation

The documentary *Strictly Kosher* on ITV was chosen because of its depiction of one of the largest Jewish communities in the UK in Manchester and for its representation of culture, relationships, and festivals of both religious and secular Jews. Unlike the documentaries on Islam and Christianity, the perspective of the narrator is absent in this documentary; she merely describes the cultural lives of the Jews using only 147 words out of approximately 800 words in this excerpt. The other significant difference is the style of language by the narrator, which is a plain description of events rather than a poetic style.

The linguistic features of the documentary include a colloquial Mancunian accent by the major characters of the programme as well as informal and sometimes coined expressions. Due to targeting a non-Jewish audience, few Jewish terminologies are used that are not explained. Through the depiction of Orthodox Jewish culture where gender segregation is common, the documentary gives the perspectives of Jewish women through a leading character who seemed not happy with the patriarchal nature of her religion. The analysis also found that the addition of a Holocaust survivor at the end of the clip added significant value to the programme for the audience to receive the programme with some perspectives on the historical past of British Jews.

Fictional Representations

Islam—Linking Islam with Terrorism

BBC spy drama *Spooks*' second episode of series 2, which aired before the 7/7 attacks, was analysed in Chapter 2, with 'Islamic terrorism' being the main theme. The name of the episode 'Nest of Angels' is an oxymoron as the term 'angel' is used for terrorists and also used figuratively to refer to the young terrorist recruits of a radical preacher. Elements of euphemisms were found in the use of the words 'nest' and 'mice' to refer to the terrorist cell and the young people, respectively, during a conversation between an MI5 officer and the radical preacher at the initial stage of the episode. The analysis concluded that the reason for the suggestive and indirect language of that scene may have been to remind the audience about the lack of power of the British Intelligence Service to directly implicate the man due to lack of evidence and enough legislative powers at that time. Though the thick Indian English accent of the terrorist cell leader is a departure from usual Arab stereotypes, efforts to establish his Afghan background lack linguistic authenticity as an English accent in Afghanistan is considerably different from an Indian English accent attributed to the terrorist. The CDA observed that the borrowed word *Mullah* is used in paradoxical connotations—a term for a knowledgeable person is used in a derogatory sense by using it for the terrorist ring leader. Many terminologies of Islam, such as *martyr*, *paradise*, *God-fearing*, and *house of Allah*, have been used in the episode that intrinsically link Islam with terrorism and are likely to make a significant negative impact on the audience with regard to Islam.

Semiotic analysis of the episode found some stereotypical representation of the dress of an Imam or a religious scholar by showing the terrorist ringleader having a beard, holding prayer beads, and wearing a distinguishing long garb. However, it is his language for which he hopes Islam will be victorious in Britain that can easily worry an average British audience that Islam is going to take over Britain soon, whereas statistics prove it is far from being remotely true. There is also an oxymoron found in the episode when the terrorists praise God for being *compassionate* and *merciful* but resolve to commit mass murder and call for the *death* of

'American allies', 'unbelievers', and 'the West'. The analysis also found a lost opportunity to minimise the damage of the stereotyping of Muslims in this episode by not including a follow-up of one of the scenes in which the positive Muslim character gives the MI5 officer a translated version of the *Quran*.

Christianity—Insensitive Approach Towards Muslim-Christian Relationship

BBC spy drama *Spooks* was chosen to analyse fictional representation of Christianity as well. Series 5, episode 8 of the drama called 'Agenda' shows Christians as the perpetrators of terrorism-related offences with Muslims being the victims when a radical Christian group leader, inspired by an Anglican Bishop, plans to kill some extremist Muslims and bomb mosques. Another example of an insensitive approach to the Muslim-Christian relationship is the hatred against Muslims coming from the Bishop of Whitechapel who is supposed to meet many Muslims around him due to the high percentage of Muslims living in the area. Also evident is the unrealistic proposition in the episode that a senior Anglican Church leader in a country with a 60% Christian population can feel that the churches need to be protected from the attacks of 5% of Muslims. Provocative messages from the devout Christian terrorist ring leader declaring 'war against Islam' and planning to 'turn the sea red with Muslim blood' is likely to hurt Christians more as evidenced with Christian groups protesting this episode as 'incitement to hatred' against Christians.

The main premise of the episode was found to be a deviation from the real problem of extremism as Islam and Christianity are brought against each other by portraying Christianity to be under attack by Islamic terrorists, which is not something that can be found in modern terrorism. It was also noticed that using the term 'enemy of Christ' for Muslims is a manifestation of ignorance as Muslims consider Jesus as one of their most revered prophets. There is an implication in this episode that terrorist acts derive from their religious teachings with 'war', 'arms', and 'Christ' all linked together in one sentence of the terrorist leader. Even the term 'God' has been drawn into the narrative of terrorism when the Bishop of

Whitechapel accuses God of supporting the murderers. Finally, there is an implication of inconsistency between prayer and practice when the terror cell leader, immediately after saying the 'Lord's Prayer', where Christians promise to *'forgive those who trespass against us',* breaks the promise and longs for 'war', 'smoke', 'fire', 'screams', and so on.

Judaism—Stereotyping Jews

After failing to find any significant fictional representation of Jews or Judaism by British television producers, an animated American TV sitcom shown on British television called *Family Guy* was chosen that represented stereotypical attitudes towards Judaism and its people in a season 8 episode called 'Family Goy'. Although the episode was aired in the United States in October 2009, the BBC broadcasted it in August 2015.

A notable representation of Jews in this episode is stereotyping them as greedy by using the surname 'moneygrabber', suggesting that Jews tend to 'escape from stuff' or that they like to 'rip out' the hearts of Christian children, which is based on an ancient Christian myth, and the biggest myth of all calling Jews Christ killers. The Hebrew language and Jewish culture were mocked in a number of dialogues by the main character. There are evidences of offensive language and outright insult towards the Jews when terms like 'gross' and 'ew' are used with the religion to imply it as 'disgusting' and 'monstrous'. Anti-Semitism is evident when the main character says, *'Holocaust! We never won!'* in a synagogue. The episode also brings Catholicism and Judaism against each other by suggesting that the main character needs to get rid of the 'Jewish curse' from the house as a Catholic.

Summary of Chapter 2

The most common trend found in Chapter 2 is the negative attitudes towards religions in secular British media; though all three religions are not demonised in the same way, with Islam getting the most negative press followed by Christianity and Judaism. The study conforms to previous studies finding little positive representation of Islam as both news

and broadcast media stereotype Islam and Muslims and criticise their religious practices with issues like gender segregation, women's rights, women's clothing, terrorism, and interpretation of Quranic verses featuring prominently in the media, often from ethnocentric perspectives. Christianity, though not as negatively portrayed as Islam, is stereotyped suggesting that they demonise homosexuals and are anti-Jew. The Jewish culture, not Judaism as a religion, is represented with the only negative portrayal coming from a secular perspective that the concept of a 'Promised Land' has no archaeological evidence. There is, however, a lot of sympathy in terms of the rise of anti-Semitism and Christian demonization of Jews as 'Christ killers'.

Findings of Chapter 3

To investigate how the different religious groups and those without a religion respond to the same set of newspaper articles and documentaries used in Chapter 2, Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory (1980) was used as a model for testing audience response to media representations of the three Abrahamic faiths. Despite its criticisms by some scholars, it was thought to be an appropriate model to apply on religious groups as they are the ones most likely to be less influenced by the media and have their personal interpretive frameworks while decoding media portrayals of their own as well as other religions. With some exceptions, the majority of the hypotheses in Chapter 3 were proved correct and the focus groups, interviews, and questionnaire responses show that the media have less influence on a religious audience than a non-religious audience, and even among non-religious people, the dominant hegemonic code is far from being obvious. The Critical Discourse Analysis theory applied in Chapter 2 shows the hegemonic position of the mainstream British media in portraying the three religions under study and the findings of audience response study in Chapter 3 prove that the decoding of media portrayals of religions largely depend on which interpretive framework the respondents decode these messages. The findings justify the choice of the theoretical underpinning of this study.

Focus group meetings were the main method of data collection and were initially planned as the only way of accessing the audience's views. However, due to the struggle in organising Jewish focus groups, interview and questionnaire methods were later introduced to get the Jewish community involved in the project. For focus groups and interviews, media materials were sent to participants a week before each event for participants to make informed contributions about the media representations. The majority of the Christian participants and both the Jewish interviewees went through the materials, but a significant number of Muslim participants did not go through them resulting in less contribution by some Muslims on Christian and Jewish issues.

Most participants belonging to the three religious groups agreed that the secular media in the UK were generally anti-religion and that religious people were portrayed in the media as *backward, less intelligent,* and *less progressive.* Christian and Muslims were more cynical towards the media accusing that the media moguls have a hidden agenda and give more opinions than news. Most participants agreed that the media were powerful and had strong influence over politicians. Some found sensationalism and money the main reasons for media's negative attitude towards religions. There were also arguments that the media were more negative about people who followed religions than the religions themselves and that they often were confused between religion and culture.

Key findings of this chapter are presented here by discussing the results in terms of the hypotheses that were set at the beginning of the research.

Hypothesis1—Partially Correct

The first hypothesis was that non-religious people would take the dominant-hegemonic position due to their limited knowledge of religions and would agree with most of the media representations of religions.

The study found some unexpected results from the two non-religious groups, proving the hypothesis partially correct as participants followed all three codes of media decoding. The assumption that non-religious people would fully agree to the overall negative portrayal of religions in the media proved wrong with the trends being that members of the

British Humanist Association mostly followed the hegemonic code finding negative media portrayal of religions, particularly Islam justified; the non-humanists in Manchester were in negotiated code by being selective which representation to believe and which to reject. The students in Liverpool were mostly in the oppositional code calling the media portrayal of Islam in particular as 'Islamophobic' and 'stigmatization'.

The opposing views between Manchester humanists and Liverpool's non-religious student group were clear on most topics, particularly on issues related to Islam and Muslims. For example, although the former wholeheartedly supported the *Daily Mail's* criticism of gender segregation in Islam, the latter rejected it saying that if it is not forced, it should not be taken as sexist. Second, the Liverpool group criticized the absence of a Muslim woman's voice in the article, but the Manchester humanists felt that those Muslim women who want to be segregated in a Western country should not have such a voice. Third, conforming to the article on Muslim converts for which dress code in Islam was covertly criticized, the humanists found it 'alarming' that Western Muslim women were choosing to cover themselves and identifying themselves as Muslims; but there was unanimous opposition to the preferred meaning of this article by the Liverpool student group. Fourth, Manchester humanists agreed with the article on Muslim converts that 'Islamification' was taking place in Britain, but the overwhelming reaction to this story in Liverpool was that people should be allowed to convert to any religion if they find comfort in it.

The two groups, however, conformed to the preferred code on the two documentaries on Islam. As non-believers, both groups were similarly skeptical about Islam's early history and agreed with Tom Holland. They also believed that Rageh Omaar's own faith as a Muslim made his documentary on Muhammad's life less authentic. However, some non-humanist participants in Manchester took a different view and criticised Tom Holland's approach and also found Rageh Omaar's documentary insightful.

There was an agreement that anti-Semitism was on the rise, particularly by the Liverpool participants who felt that it was due to the rise of a far-right movement across Europe. They differed, however, with the article on anti-Semitism by expressing that anti-Israel did not make one anti-Semitic calling Israel as a 'political entity' and that anti-Semitism included the people, culture, religion, and more in Israel.

Most participants agreed that the *Strictly Kosher* programme had little to do with Judaism as a religion and mostly represented their cultural practices. Participants in Liverpool noticed the programme as representing a community rather than an ideology, something that could be replicated on Muslims who were rarely presented as a community. They also found it unfair that Jews were protected by the law, but Muslims were not—a feeling that did not concur with the feelings of Manchester humanist participants.

Hypothesis 2—Mostly Correct

The second hypothesis covers all three religions and assumes that religious groups will prefer an 'oppositional code' while decoding a media message about their religion and will tend to disagree with most of the media representation of their religion.

Although Muslim and Christian focus groups proved the hypothesis correct and found the media representing their religions negatively, the Jewish participants were more in a negotiated position considering the British media to be positive towards British Jews but negative towards Israel. Following are the main findings from the focus group discussions with Muslims and Christians, and interviews and questionnaire responses with Jews.

Muslim Focus Groups—Oppositional Code

Muslims in all three focus groups clearly positioned themselves in the 'oppositional code' and outrightly rejected the portrayals of Islam and Muslims in the media. Calling the British media 'secular fundamentalists' and 'Islamophobic' for being prejudiced and provocative against Islam and Muslims, all Muslim participants felt that the media treated Islam unfairly compared to Christianity and Judaism—they highlighted only bad news on Muslims; they promoted hate preachers by giving them prime time coverage; and they propagated anti-Muslim racism being inspired and driven by Huntington's (1996) theory of 'Clash of Civilizations'.

The issue of gender segregation in Islam in the *Daily Mail* article was the most talked about subject, and the absence of a woman's voice in the article was picked up by most people, particularly the women who found the article out of touch with reality and failing to understand how naturally gender segregation happens among Muslims. Gender segregation among Orthodox Judaism not getting any mention in the media was also highlighted.

However, although this rejection was expected, there were some unexpected findings as well. For example, many participants criticised the extreme elements within Islam and felt that these people had forgotten the tolerant history of Islam's golden age and had given the media ammunition to attack their faith.

Christian Focus Groups—Oppositional Code

The three focus group meetings with Christians found them in the oppositional code proving hypothesis 2 correct. In terms of representation of the two major Christian denominations, Catholics found themselves treated much worse in the media than the Anglicans, which they thought was due to the dominance of the Anglican Church in this country.

The Christian participants in general found it objectionable and unfair that the media put Christianity against science and gave a lot of coverage to people like Richard Dawkins who talks strongly against Christianity; they were concerned how the media vilified their faith on homosexuality because they did not understand the religious perspectives of this issue; they felt offended how the documentary Christianity: A Story tried to blame Christians for demonising Jews as 'Christ killers'; and they severely criticised *The Guardian* article against the 'Camel Story' finding it pugnacious, *similar to a nasty politician*.

Jewish Interviews and Questionnaires—Negotiated Code

Hypothesis 2 is proved partially correct with the Jewish participants as, unlike Muslims and Christians, they were in a negotiated position finding less negativity towards the representation of their faith. The failure

of the media to distinguish between Orthodox and Secular Jews was a key point as well as the observation that the media was positive towards British Jews but negative towards Israel.

Although the reality show *Strictly Kosher* was liked by the majority of the non-Jewish participants, the Jewish interviewees were critical of the programme and felt that it represented Jewish cultural life more than Judaism as a religion. Understandably, Jewish participants were critical about *The Guardian* article on 'The Camel Story' and expressed that the journalists needed to analyse the biblical stories to realise that they were stories for the population of that time so that they could understand and were more of a parable.

Hypothesis 3—Almost Correct

The third hypothesis was the assumption that religious groups would take a 'negotiated position' while decoding media messages about other religions, and as 'active audiences' would neither entirely agree nor fully disagree with the media representation of other religions.

Muslims proved hypothesis 3 correct by taking the negotiated position on the other two faiths. Some Muslims agreed that other religions also got bad press, though nowhere near as bad as Islam, but others felt that the media was too critical of Islam, sympathetic towards Judaism, and neutral about Christianity.

Christians also conformed to hypothesis 3 as they interpreted the other two faiths through their own interpreting frameworks conforming to some representations while rejecting others. Most of them agreed that Islam was vilified in the media, whereas Judaism got sympathetic treatment due to the oppression they had been through during the Holocaust.

As with their other two religious counterparts, the Jews were also in negotiated position on the other two religions; though, the negotiated position applied to media representation of Islam, whereas they were mostly in a hegemonic position about Christianity. They did not think that the media were unfavourable towards Christianity, because this is fundamentally a 'Christian country'. However, they were sympathetic towards Christianity regarding Jerry Springer's insult of Jesus in a play saying that the media sometimes pushed the barriers too much.

Hypothesis 4—Mostly Wrong

The fourth hypothesis was on Christians' and Jews' reaction to media representation of Islam. It was assumed that the two groups would mostly conform to the dominant hegemonic position due to being influenced by constant negative media portrayals of Islam and Muslims.

Contrary to the assumption, hypothesis 4 proved to be mostly wrong with both the groups as they were in negotiated position rather than taking the hegemonic code.

Christians mostly rejected media representations of Islam questioning the neutrality of the *Daily Mail* article that fiercely criticised gender segregation in Islam. They found that the absence of a Muslim woman's voice in the article made it a provocative article against Muslims. They compared how gender segregation in Orthodox Judaism did not bother the media, but they gave value judgments against Muslims on the same issue. They rejected the way the *Daily Mail* article on Muslim converts correlated the increase of terrorism since 9/11 with the increase in the number of converted Muslims, which they found to be completely based on fear; and they questioned Tom Holland's approach towards the origin of Islam while praising Rageh Omaar's positive documentary about Prophet Muhammad.

The Jewish participants also showed sympathy towards Muslims for the negative portrayal of their religion, but terrorism also led them to support the media. The questionnaire participants related their attitude towards Muslims entirely based on the media representation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which led to some feeling that the media were soft towards the Muslim world, whereas not showing that attitude towards Israel. However, the two interviewees took oppositional code and proved hypothesis 4 wrong by rejecting the *Daily Mail* article on gender segregation in Islam while praising Rageh Omaar's documentary on *The Life of Prophet Muhammad*.

Hypothesis 5—Mostly Correct

The fifth and the final hypothesis assumed that the language in the comments section of online versions of newspaper articles would be much more aggressive than in focus group discussions and that articles on Islam

and Muslims would be subject to the most aggressive language followed by articles on Christianity and Judaism.

This hypothesis was proved correct as attitudes towards Islam showed hostility, comments on articles on Christianity were a mix of positivity and negativity, and reactions to the article on Judaism were mildly negative. The language of the comments, particularly about Islam and towards the former BBC boss, was quite candid and sometimes aggressive. Although the comments on articles on Islam showed a negative attitude towards Islam and Muslims, the aggressive language towards the former BBC boss was not against Christianity but was pro-Christianity as his support for the broadcast of *The Jerry Springer Show* on Jesus received the most negative comments.

The article on gender segregation in Islam found the audience conforming to the hegemonic code mostly due to the negative title of the article as they demonstrated little engagement with the content of the article making comments against the university, its lecturers, and even the Vice Chancellor, whereas it was merely an event organised by the Islamic Society. Patriotism and nationalism were overtly expressed by asking Muslims to either abide by the rules of the country or leave. The other article on Muslim converts referred to a negotiated position as there were some cynicisms towards the claim of 'Islamification' in the article. Negative comments included a hostile attitude towards religion in general and Islam in particular, and discontentment on immigration and political correctness in the country.

Oppositional code was found in the comments on the article on former BBC Boss's views on Christianity in the media with some comments being aggressive towards him for broadcasting the controversial episode of *The Jerry Springer Show* that ridiculed Jesus. There were even calls for the BBC to be closed down and the accusation that he collaborated with Muslims. The article on the 'gay experiment' conformed to negotiated position with mixed reactions. Some praised it, but most comments criticised it and found it 'superficial' and 'pointless'.

The article on 'the Camel Story' that tried to undermine the Zionist claim of the 'Promised Land' also brought comments in the negotiated position. Those who believed in the story rejected it suggesting that everything in history could not be proved, whereas those against it followed

the hegemonic code calling the claim nothing but mythology. However, criticisms of Judaism were found to be softer than those of Christianity and Islam, which may be because of people's sympathy towards Jews due to their persecution by the Nazis.

Mixed Focus Group—Demystifying Islam and Muslims

The only mixed focus group between Muslims and Christians took place in an Anglican Church in London. The purpose was to facilitate constructive debates to investigate whether the two faith groups' previous prejudices and/or misunderstandings of each other's religion were removed or reinforced through talking directly to each other. It was evident that the discussions were almost exclusively directed towards the Muslims from their Christian hosts who thought that their conversations with their Muslim counterparts were informative and useful, and helped remove some of the prejudices they had. This is not unusual as the majority community will have lesser knowledge of religious practices of ethnic minorities rather than the other way round. Being victims of media attacks themselves, Muslims were sympathetic towards Christians about unfair portrayals of Christianity in the media.

Although terrorism was not an issue in the media representations discussed in previous focus groups, it was one of the main topics of the mixed group in which British Muslims' roles against terrorists featured heavily with both groups agreeing that the voice of mainstream Muslims was rarely heard in the terrorism debate. There was also a comparison between media stereotyping of Muslims as terrorists and the portrayal of the Catholic Church as perpetrators of child sex abuse. Both groups underscored the need for the media to represent average Muslims rather than the extremists.

The media's lack of cultural understanding of Islam and its conflation of religion with ethnic culture were the main frustrations among the Muslims while talking about the issues of gender segregation and women's clothing; however, Christians were interested to know the perspectives of Muslim women on this. Two young professional Muslim women, who were born and brought up in the UK, told how their faith

enabled them to feel more independent, how their headscarf made them feel more liberated, and how gender segregation happened organically among most Muslims rather than being enforced by men. Christian participants found this to be fascinating and something that they had never known or thought about.

Debating how far freedom of expression should go while criticising religions, Christian participants preferred a calm and measured response rather than being angry and aggressive. Muslims compared between racist cartoons on black people and the ones on Prophet Muhammad highlighting why peaceful protests were necessary when such representation occurred.

The two groups had opposing views on attitudes towards the way the media represents Judaism with Christians showing sympathy towards the Jews, whereas Muslims felt marginalised by the media in some contexts in which there were similarities in both the religions, such as gender segregation. The two groups also disagreed on the media representation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Unlike Christians in Birmingham and Manchester, the London Christian group blamed the media as biased against Israel, but the Muslims had the opposite views on this matter.

Christian participants, who had little knowledge about the religion and culture of the Muslim participants, found the mixed group discussion helpful in demystifying Islam and Muslims and emphasised the need for more interfaith debates like this.

Summary of Chapter 3

Results in the audience response study vindicates the use of Hall's Encoding/Decoding model as the analytical framework for the study. The analyses here prove that Philo's (2008, pp. 54–42) criticisms of the model that media messages have considerable influence on the construction of public knowledge is less applicable to religious communities as they decode media representations from their own view of the world. Even some of the non-religious participants do not follow the dominant position on the negative portrayal of religions. Finally, an important finding is the way the mixed group meeting between Christians and Muslims helped in demystifying some aspects of Muslim culture, particularly the gender issues in Islam.

Main Contributions of This Book

As a scholarly work, the main academic contribution of this book is bringing together language, religion, and the media, something that has rarely been a focus of serious academic inquiry. Critical Discourse Analysis combined with audience research on the same media materials provided the opportunity to investigate whether the way the media uses its power of language to portray religions matches with the way the audiences receive those representations. As clearly evident from the literature review, until now, linguists have not taken much interest in the field of religion and media. The findings of the present study should enable scholars to realise that there is an enormous scope of research that can be undertaken in this area. In the current geo-political environment, religion is one of the most talked about subjects in the media. Chapter 2 shows the way the media uses its power to influence an audience by playing with language. Therefore, there needs to be more linguistic work on religion in the media, and the development of a new interdisciplinary area needs to be prioritised by linguists who at present analyse either media or religion. This book may be a humble beginning in that direction.

The impact of this study, however, goes much beyond academia as findings from the mixed focus group between Christians and Muslims may encourage more interactions between people from different faiths and people of no faith. Although the purpose was to see whether participants react to media representations differently when in a mixed group, the discussions led to the conclusion that bringing together people from different religious groups provides an opportunity to dispel a lot of myths, stereotypes, and prejudices against minorities that develop because of the majority group's lack of knowledge of other religions and less exposure to other religious communities. That is why it was not surprising that Christian participants were more interested to know about Islam and Muslims than the other way around. Understanding the religion and culture of a majority community is not difficult, but members of the majority community have little opportunity to know about ethnic minority communities or religions other than relying on the media. Previous studies and findings of this study prove beyond doubt that the media representations of a minority religion like Islam are not helpful in developing a balanced view of a community that often finds itself in the crossfire between

terrorists who use their faith as a justification of their heinous acts and people who demonstrate hatred against them. For example, Christian participants were intrigued when they heard from young British Muslim women how their faith makes them feel more empowered as opposed to media representation of Muslim women depicting them as oppressed, forcefully segregated, and victimised due to the patriarchal positioning of their religion. Despite the limitation of this mixed group due to the absence of Jewish and non-religious groups, this meeting brings to light the importance of dialogue between different faith groups and people with no faith. It also provides opportunities for the majority community to compare between what they read, see, or hear in the media and the actual situation of religious minorities. The findings of this focus group justify the importance of more mixed interactions between different groups, particularly between Muslims and other faith groups as well as those with no religion.

It is important to distinguish between a mixed focus group in this study and different interfaith groups that already do a lot of work to bring communities together. Interfaith groups generally do not include non-religious people, whereas the secular media is largely constituted with non-religious people. There is also a significant increase in the number of people who have no faith in this country who are largely ignored by interfaith groups. Therefore, a mixed group meeting that includes people from different faiths as well as those without a faith can facilitate debates about people's religious and cultural practices. Another important distinction from interfaith groups is the role of media as the central element in the debate. In the mixed focus group of this study, the media was a key player in the discussions as they were the main resources of information for the majority group to know about the minorities before the meeting and these media representations were used to stimulate discussions. Finally, while interfaith groups try to bring peace and community cohesion and work in the premise that they would find common issues between different groups, participants in meetings like the one in London are encouraged to give open and frank opinions and not worry about political correctness. Through healthy debates in a respectful environment, people get the opportunity to challenge their own prejudices and understand the perspectives of others.

Another possible impact of this study is to help media practitioners understand the importance of their role in an increasingly polarised society that is being unleashed due to contemporary global politics. A headline of the most widely circulated British newspaper *The Sun* on 23 November 2015 (Dunn 2015) after the Paris attacks is an illustration of the current state of media reporting on Islam in the British press. The newspaper reported on a survey by a pollster company (Survation 2015) after the Paris attacks claiming that one in five British Muslims had sympathy for ISIS terrorists. It turned out to be a wrong interpretation of the survey question that actually asked whether they had sympathy for those who were fighting in Syria—not specific to those fighting for ISIS. The pollster that conducted the survey distanced himself from the report and called the newspaper report misleading. Interestingly, the same company conducted a poll in March 2015 (Survation on behalf of Sky News 2015) showing that approximately 14% of non-Muslims had sympathy for Muslims fighting in Syria. The word 'sympathy' was used in the report as 'support' for ISIS, but the word has many other shades of meaning and can have several interpretations.

This example highlights the importance of responsible reporting on issues of sensitivity. Freedom of expression is a cornerstone of democracy, but that freedom is essentially linked to responsibility as well. Approximately 3 million Muslims live in the UK and an overwhelming majority of them are proud British citizens. A recent survey (Shorthouse and Kirkby 2015) showed that 93% of ethnic minorities in Britain '.... have very positive conceptions of Britain. They are proud to live here and feel respect for the British political system' (p. 56). Another study by the Institute for Social and Economic Research, at the University of Essex (2012), found that Muslims were more proud to be British (83%) compared to 79% of the general public. The media should take into account the opinions of the majority of the Muslim population while reporting about Islam and Muslims. There is no evidence to suggest that every negative media portrayal of Islam is deliberate, and it will be unfair to lay all the blame on the media, which Baker et al. (2013, p. 270) observed in their comprehensive analysis of media discourse on Islam. However, as the authors in that study concluded, the role of the media is not responsible either as some members of the British press are playing into the hands of the extremists and reacting in exactly the way the terrorists want (ibid).

The media's attitude towards other religions is not helpful either. Although Judaism gets less negative coverage, Christianity is often ridiculed in the media, and issues like homosexuality are often represented in a way that may suggest that religious people are homophobic. However, the Jewish participants universally perceived the media's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict as anti-Israel. Contrary to the Jewish perspective, all Muslim and majority Christian participants felt that the media is unfair towards the Palestinians and favour Israel. Therefore, this research observes the dilemma the media finds itself in; it can please nobody while covering the Middle East conflict due to the level of polarisation that exists.

Although the media is entitled to criticise religions, there needs to be fairness, sensitivity, and responsibility in its depictions because representations may have far-reaching consequences. The reason the overwhelming majority of the participants in this study rejected media portrayals of religions is because they were the targets of negative media representations. There are many people who are likely to be influenced by these representations. Sometimes, people from minority religious groups may be subject to hate crimes. For example, an ITV report (30 November 2015) on anti-Muslim hate crimes, which is based on Metropolitan Police statistics provided to ITV, shows a 216% increase in Islamophobic hate crimes in London after the Paris attacks. The media can certainly play a positive role in trying to minimise these hate crimes.

Limitations of the Study

The study brought a number of new insights in religion and media research and hopes that it will pave the way towards a new interdisciplinary area of language, religion, and the media. However, if it were possible to overcome the following limitations this research could have achieved more:

1. The sample of the audience response study is small, so it is difficult to come to a definitive conclusion about the actual perceptions of various religious groups and those of no faith.
2. The absence of enough voice from the Jewish community and failure to organise a single Jewish focus group is a major setback of this study,

and although some quality data could be attained through the limited number of participants, it is clear that the richness of the data could have enhanced manifold if more Jewish participants could take part in the study.

3. The mixed focus group is a significant contribution of this study, but the absence of all groups involved in this project affected its overall impact. The initial plan was to hold one mixed focus group in each of the three major cities composed of all three religious groups and those with no religion, but that was not possible to achieve. Efforts then were made to at least make all four groups attend the only mixed focus group in London, but only Muslim and Christian participants attended it.
4. It was difficult to give more linguistic flavour in the analysis of Chapter 3 as most participants were unable to understand the linguistic nuances of a media article. The linguistic impact of media representations on the audience was less than obvious; though it has been done wherever possible. Hence, some analyses of audiences' linguistic styles in focus groups, interviews, and online comments have been incorporated.

Recommendations for Future Research

This book hopes to inspire more academics to combine language, religion, and media in their research. Researchers in the field of sociolinguistics may take more interest in exploring many aspects of this interdisciplinary field. Some of the approaches that could be taken up by researchers in the future are outlined here:

1. This book includes participants from four major English cities: London, Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool. It should lead to a more comprehensive study in this area in which more cities across the UK are covered and investigations are done to see whether regional differences can be a factor in people's receptions of media representations of religions.
2. A comparative study to investigate people's decoding patterns between areas with large religious minorities and areas with majority indigenous population can provide interesting insights into the area.

3. People's age, gender, ethnicity, religiosity, profession, proximity to other religious groups, length of stay in the UK, and more can also be studied as variables for examining their decoding patterns of media texts on religions.
4. More religions can be incorporated to get a wider spectrum of religious groups. The ancient religion of Hinduism has many followers in this country and so has Sikhism. These religions and many smaller religions are often underreported in the media. The reason for their underrepresentation and the perspectives of the followers of these religions can be an interesting area of study.
5. Religion in the media as a discipline has been studied extensively in the United States. A similar study to this one that compares the language used in the media and audiences' reactions to it between the UK and the United States has the potential to make a significant contribution in this field of study.
6. This study incorporated media texts and different religious groups that are affected by the media texts on their religions but does not take the perspective of the producers of media messages. CDA of media texts can take a new dimension if the producers of media language that discourse analysts study can be added through a multifaceted approach to the study of language, religion, and media. Talking to media practitioners about how and why they represent religions in a particular way can be an important contribution—something that has not been studied much by scholars in religion and media.
7. This study did not take into account the role of film in depicting religions. Film is an important media in which religions are regularly represented. There are more films on Judaism or the Jewish community than television programmes. Linguistic analysis of the way religions are portrayed in popular cinema can be another important area of academic research.

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