

## What the British papers said on the second anniversary of the London bombing

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### ***Abstract***<sup>1</sup>

*In our previous refereed ANZCA conference paper, presented in July 2007, we discussed what the British newspapers (four British broadsheets and four tabloids) said on the first anniversary of the London bombings. We discussed the pattern of reporting, whether it was “nationalistic”, and whether it was “discriminatory”. In this paper we examine the same newspapers and evaluate how they reported on the second anniversary of London bombing and what that says about the continuing development of the British response to this terrorist attack. In this paper we take our argument beyond perceptions of “nationalistic” and “discriminatory” to raise the issue of whether such coverage can be construed as inspiring terrorists to commit more violence for media publicity.*

### ***Introduction***

It is said that terrorists desire “three Rs: Revenge, Renown, Reaction” (L. Richardson, 2006b, pp. 95-132); and when the media pays attention to terrorist acts, it gives them both reaction and renown. Given this hypothesis—that terrorists crave media attention (L. Richardson, 2006b, pp. 95-132; Doran, 2002, p. 73; Perl, 2002, pp.143-145)—then it is possible that the alleged terrorist acts at Glasgow airport just before the second anniversary of the London Transport bombings occurred partly because the perpetrators were expecting publicity on the anniversary of the 7/7 London bombings. This dynamic had also been seen the previous year when the suicide video of Shehzad

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Tanweer, one of the 7/7 bombers, was released to Al Jazeera on the eve of the anniversary.

In our previous study, “What the British papers said on the first anniversary of the London bombing” (Green & Kabir, 2007), we found that the press was heavily focused on the newly-released London bombers’ video footage, which emphasised to the reader the “enemy within”; and that there was arguably a meta-communication that “they (the terrorists) resent our (superior) culture”. In light of this, it was decided to follow up the evolving discourse and examine what the British press said on the second anniversary of the 7 July 2005 bombings. Further, it was hypothesised that terrorists might provoke additional coverage by acts to attract British press publicity on the eve of the anniversary of the London bombings: this was the impact in part of the alleged Glasgow airport terrorists (discussed next). It is possible to infer that there is a strategic ‘exchange’ whereby terrorists attempt to stage high profile events on an emotive anniversary but are aware that law enforcement agencies ramp up surveillance as anniversaries approach, thus moving possible terrorist activity earlier than the anniversary in question.

Just before this second anniversary of the London bombings, Britain was shocked to experience further bomb plots, though in these cases the attempts ultimately failed. Two car bombs were discovered and disabled in London on 29 June while on 30 June a burning Jeep Cherokee, packed with explosive material, slammed into the airport terminal building in Glasgow, Scotland. Two men, a British-born doctor of Iraqi descent, Bilal Abdullah, and an Indian engineer, Kafeel Ahmed, were engulfed in flames. Kafeel Ahmed received burns to 90 per cent of his body, was taken to hospital and treated in intensive care, but later died (Jackson, 2007).

It is alleged that this act of terrorism was retaliation against the Western occupation of Iraq. Bilal Abdullah said he was deeply disturbed by the deaths of his friends in the “resistance to the occupation” of Iraq (Page & Lister, 2007, p. 10). Abdullah had spent some years in Iraq, where he received his medical degree in 2004. He had been registered as a doctor in the UK in 2006, and employed as a locum at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Paisley (Macdermid, 2007, p. 3). In Britain, Abdullah was associated with a group of hard-line Muslims (Page & Lister, 2007, p. 10). Kafeel Ahmed had arrived in Britain in 2001 and obtained his PhD in the UK. He

subsequently worked for some time in India, where he apparently came under the influence of the al-Qaeda ideology (Bin Laden's Speeches, 2007), then moved back to Britain in 2007.

A few hours after the Glasgow incident in June 2007, Kafeel's brother, Dr Sabeel Ahmed, who was working in Britain, was taken into police custody. He was charged with knowing every detail of the plot and not informing the police. Sabeel had received a text message from his brother Kafeel before the attack on the Glasgow Airport. Less than 48 hours after the failed attempt, the Australian Federal Police arrested Kafeel Ahmed's cousin, Dr Mohammad Haneef, at Brisbane International Airport as he was attempting to board a one-way flight to India. Haneef was held for 12 days before being charged with providing support to a terrorist organisation, allegedly as a result of giving his mobile phone SIM card to his second cousin, Sabeel Ahmed. The charge was dropped a fortnight later when it was found that there was no reasonable evidence against Haneef (Jackson, 2007).

About to grieve the second anniversary of the 7/7 tragedy that had killed 52 people on London Transport buses and trains, the British nation was alarmed and distracted by these bomb plots. In this paper, we compare the reporting pattern of the British newspapers (four broadsheets and four tabloids) on 7 July 2007 to that in evidence on 7 July 2006. First we outline our research methodology. Second, we examine the existing literature on media focus on minorities, particularly Muslim minorities in Western nations, and see whether the press representation of Islam and Muslims fits within the conceptual framework of the existing literature (the "Us" and "Them" scenario), and third, we consider whether media publicity given to terrorists could be counter-productive in fuelling terrorist activity.

### ***The research methodology***

As with our previous study (Green & Kabir, 2007) on "What the British papers said on the first anniversary of the London bombing", for this study we also conducted a snapshot analysis which is in keeping with a constructionist interpretative approach (Ogle, Eckman, & Leslie, 2006; Weaver & Carter, 2006; Kabir, 2007). This means that the same methodology was used to examine British papers on both the first and second anniversaries of the 7/7 London bombing. We examined the language

(headlines and content) used in the newspapers in terms of what these signified to readers (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2002, p. 41-43). We also examined the photographic and other images associated with the news reports/content, which are designed to further the audience's understanding and engage readers more deeply with the people, events and issues in the news (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2002, p. 55).

In our previous study (Green and Kabir, 2007), we particularly wanted to investigate whether Elizabeth Poole's (2002) observations of the British print media's reporting of Islam (or Muslims) was consistent with our findings. For example, in *Reporting Islam*, Poole (2002, pp. 5-7; 84) had noted that some Western print media worked hard to be inclusive of Muslim writers' opinions (for example the UK newspaper *The Guardian*) whereas others, such as *The Times*, leaned more towards a conventional establishment or 'Christian' perspective which was counter pointed against representations of Muslim extremism and set up a 'clash of cultures/faiths' discourse. Poole also identified (2002, p. 84) some defining themes in Britain's broadsheet coverage of Muslims and Islam prior to the London 2005 bombings, as follows:

- Muslim involvement in deviant activities threatens security in the UK;
- Muslims are a threat to British 'mainstream' values and thus provoke concerns about integration;
- There are inherent cultural differences between Muslims and the host community, which create tension in interpersonal relations;
- Muslims are increasingly making their presence felt in the public sphere.

In our previous study (Green & Kabir, 2007), we found some consistency with Poole's observations regarding mainstream British print media reports on Islam, while there were also some counter-indications. For example *The Guardian*, which had been identified as 'inclusive' of Muslim opinions, conveyed an 'Us' and 'Them' message to their readers on the first anniversary of the London bombings, and there was no opinion piece from a Muslim columnist.

Further, from Poole's observations of the broadsheet press, it was expected that all tabloid press would represent Muslims in an 'Us' and 'Them' framework. However, on the first anniversary of the London bombings, the *Daily Express* appeared to be less conventional in its coverage; indeed, counter-intuitively liberal. In this paper, we will compare whether the British press representation of news regarding Islam, Muslims and terrorist attacks on the second anniversary of the London bombings was similar to that of the first anniversary; and whether the observation of other scholars (discussed below) on the Western media's 'Us' and 'Them' framework for the reporting of Muslim news and issues is borne out in coverage of such stories on this highly emotive anniversary.

### ***Other academic literature***

In *Covering Islam* (1997), Said observed that there are many troubling incidents associated with the Muslim world, such as the killing of 240 American marines by a Muslim group in Lebanon in 1983, the Lockerbie bombing of Pan Am flight 109 in 1988, and Khomeini's *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie in 1989; but when the Western mass media apply a blanket label of 'Islam' to an event, either as an explanation (or to indiscriminately condemn 'Islam') this is usually a form of attack against the Islamic world (Said, 1997, pp. ix-xvi).

In the Australian context, Kabir (2006; 2007) observes that in times of crisis, the *Australian* and *West Australian* newspapers have generally leaned towards the mainstream Australian/Western world view; for example, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 tragedy and the Cronulla riots in December 2005, it labelled Muslims as the 'Other'. In the UK context, in *Media audiences*, Herbert (2005, p. 114) suggests that through the use of powerful headlines, the print media overtly influences its audience. One example of this might be the *Sun* newspaper's headline on the day of the 1992 UK General Election (9 April) stated, "If Kinnock wins today, will the last person to leave Britain please turn out the lights". Arguably, this may have influenced undecided voters against the Labour Party leader, Neil Kinnock, and affected the outcome of the election (Herbert, 2005, p. 114). A recent example of this is the *Sun*'s Feb 8 2008 front page headline "What a burka!", referring to the paper's opposition to the Archbishop of Canterbury's comments on the likelihood of Sharia law becoming an approved option for some British Muslims, for example in divorce

and property settlements. So, in the case of the Glasgow airport bombing, the powerful British press may have inadvertently been rewarding and strengthening the terrorists' desire to achieve additional media impact through new events to be reported (as they had received extra publicity on the eve of the first anniversary with the release of Tanweer's suicide video).

In his book, *Racism and the press* (1991), Van Dijk investigated the British media and analysed 2,700 newspaper articles on ethnic issues in the period 1985-1986. He recognised the importance of the connections between unequal power relations in society (in this instance in terms of reduced power relations associated with ethnicity); media content; and public or audience attitudes and beliefs. The study sought to explain how 'white in-group' members expressed and communicated their ethnic and racial attitudes within the group, and how such attitudes were adopted in the wider society. Van Dijk (1991, pp. 176-177, see also Devereux, 2003, p. 130) noted that the editorials of some newspapers conform to a wider conservative or right-wing discourse about ethnic issues; for example, from an editorial published in the *Mail* newspaper (28 November 1985), Van Dijk (quoted in Devereux, 2003, p. 130) identified the following themes: First, "the editorial 'presupposes' that 'we [British] are hospitable and tolerant'"; and secondly, "[the editorial] employs a number of euphemisms when applied to how 'we' should deal with immigrants. We (or us) the tolerant and hospitable British must be 'brisk', 'in saying no', 'in showing the door' to them (the immigrants)" (Van Dijk, 1991, pp. 176-177, cited in Devereux, 2003, p. 130). We will now conduct a qualitative content analysis of the print media within the theoretical framework of an 'Us' and 'Them' divide as discussed by the media commentators cited above.

### ***What the broadsheets said on 7 July, 2007***

In this section, we compare the first and second anniversary texts of four broadsheets, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent*, followed by a brief analysis.

#### *The Times*

On the first anniversary of the London bombings, *The Times* (7 July 2006) dedicated pages 1-7 to the events of the previous year and their aftermath. The cover page had

juxtaposed the images of 22-year old bomber, Shehzad Tanweer, and 20-year old Muslim victim, Shahara Islam. It revealed two faces of Islam through its headlines: the militant Islam of the terrorist, and the moderate Islam of Shahara, a victim of the attacks. *The Times* also made explicit reference to Christian values and, in an article titled “Faiths unite against terrorism”, it implied to its readers that Judeo-Christian values were superior to others (Gledhill, 2006, p. 3).

On the second anniversary of the 7/7 bombing, the media once again gave oxygen to the terrorists. Under the headline “Bomb plot suspect ‘had engineering expertise to construct explosive’” (Evans, Foster & Lagan, 2007, p. 2), the *Times* focused on the Glasgow airport bomb plot. It conveyed to its readers that British PhD-educated terrorist suspect, Kafeel Ahmed, who was critically ill in a hospital burns unit, had engineering expertise and the police believed that because Ahmed was an engineer he could make bombs, “consisting of gas cylinders, petrol and a detonating system using mobile phones”. Kafeel Ahmed was also reported to have misinformed his family members in India about his intentions by saying that he was involved in a “large-scale confidential project”. There was brief news on Sabeel Ahmed, Mohammad Haneef and four other Indian doctors who were questioned in Australia, but the emphasis on the report was the academic history of Kafeel Ahmed (Evans et al, 2007, p. 2). Only at the bottom section of page 2 was there mention about the 7/7 London bombings, stating that more than 120 of the victims injured in 2005 were still waiting for full compensation.

On the other hand, pages 6 and 7 of *The Times* had a banner headline “Turning to jihad”, which indicated the theme of that section of the paper. On page 6 there was a bigger headline “Average age: 26. From a caring family, married, with children, graduate. The unexpected profile of the modern terrorist” (Norfolk, 2007, p. 6). It conveyed the message, “We expect suicide bombers to be uneducated social outcasts who have been twisted by fanatics. But the reality can be very different”.

The article discussed Dr Marc Sageman’s research findings, published in 2004 in *Understanding terrorist networks*, which concluded that most terrorists were “upwardly and geographically mobile”. Dr Sageman told the *Times* that the existence of a terror plot involving foreign doctors (such as the then suspects, Drs Bilal Abdulla

and Kafeel Ahmed) should surprise no one. Dr Sageman told the *Times* correspondent (Norfolk, 2007):

When you look at the global Salafi jihad, you have three waves. The first were the companions of bin Laden, the characters in Afghanistan in the 1980s. The second, [...] were the best and the brightest from the Middle East. Those are the guys who became radicalised in the West. Many of them are engineers and physicians (for example Osama bin Laden, Mohammad Atta). And the third are what people call the home-grown (7/7 London bombers), these are the guys who are second or third generation in the West, and they are less well-educated. Their average age is about 19 or 20, and there are more criminal elements there. (p.6)

The report was associated with the images of Ayman al-Zawahiri, surgeon and Osama bin Laden's deputy; Mohammad Atta, engineer and 9/11 terrorist; and Khalid Mohammed, another associate of Osama bin Laden, who was behind the murder of Daniel Pearl and the Bali bombings. There were also images of the Twin Towers burning and *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Daniel Pearl tied with a metal chain. The headlines and images seemed designed to create fear of the global threat of terrorism among readers, and especially so in the UK with Kafeel Ahmed and the recent bomb plots. *The Times* further reported (Norfolk, 2007):

That jihadist terrorism is abhorrent to the vast majority of Muslims, and Muslim doctors, living in Britain was emphasised yesterday when a coalition of groups calling itself Muslims United took out advertisements in national newspapers to condemn the car bomb attacks. "Not in our name", they said, quoting a verse from the Koran: "Who ever kills an innocent soul, it is as if he killed the whole of mankind." [...] The Koran's fifth chapter continues, "Those that make war against God and his apostle and spread disorder in the land shall be slain." [...] For some Muslims [...] it does not demand a great leap of faith, whatever their profession, to include the United States and Britain among those" that make war against God". And so a few dislocated individuals meet, bond and grow to share a belief system in which they are the chosen for whom Allah has reserved a place in paradise. Martyrdom is heavy stuff. (p. 6)

*The Times* (Norfolk, 2007, p. 6) differentiated between the majority of good Muslims who do not condone violence and a few who endorse martyrdom through terrorism in the name of jihad. However, the aforementioned headline "Average age: 26. From a

caring family, married, with children, graduate. The unexpected profile of the modern terrorist” (Norfolk, 2007, p. 6) might have already induced fear among readers that there are suicide bombers ready and waiting, educated and young, amongst us. Thus the print media do not only promote the ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ rhetoric, they also indicate that we cannot necessarily distinguish ‘them’ from ‘us’ and promote fear and suspicion through headlines and television video footage (Kabir 2006; Christians, Rotzoll, Fackler, & Makee, 2001, p. 211).

While acknowledging that Islamic terrorism is a real threat (Roy, 2004; Humphrey, 2007), as is random and criminal violence of all kinds, it is a threat for all people (including mainstream Muslims). Had *The Times* chosen an inclusive headline such as “Mainstream British Muslims do not condone terrorism”, this would have placed British Muslims in a more favourable (and arguably more appropriate) light.

On page 7 (“Turning to jihad”) there was another small headline: “Airport hit by suicide bombers? You’ve got to laugh...” (Lister, 2007, p. 7). This was a light hearted piece that reminded the reader that amidst the airport debacle the Glaswegians retained their sense of humour. It should be noted that a year earlier (7 July 2006) *The Times* had celebrated inter-faith Judeo-Christian calls for harmony as being a positive influence; and on this occasion they linked similar sentiments with the people of Glasgow, applauding their refined sense of humour amidst such chaos and tension. Finally, in a comment column subtitled “Evil plotters? More like sad and crackpot”, Mathew Parris’s overall argument was summed up in the headline, “The tide is turning against Islamic terrorism” (Parris, 7 July 2007, p. 15). This was a comparatively positive note on which to end the coverage.

*The Times* in general highlighted the theme of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’, and the Islamic *jihadists* as ‘the Other’. However, such reporting continued to give publicity to the *jihadists*, rather than to mainstream British Muslims. In *Terrorism in perspective*, Perl (2002, pp. 143-145) observed that terrorists need publicity, usually free publicity that a group normally cannot afford or buy. When invited to an interview, for example, terrorist recruiters seek to convey a favourable understanding of their cause, if not their acts. Terrorists believe that the public needs help to understand their cause, with the hope of persuading audiences that it is just, and that terrorist violence is the

only action available to them against the superior forces of state and establishment (Perl, 2002, p. 143). News coverage such as that which seeks to understand the Glasgow airport bombing and the 7/7 attacks can be interpreted as promoting the terrorists' cause (such as the bombers' anger against the allied occupation of Iraq). So Perl (2002) suggests that the challenge to both the government and press communities is to understand the dynamics of the terrorist endeavour and develop policy options designed to serve the interest of the government, the media and society.

*The Daily Telegraph*

On the first anniversary of the 7/7 London bombings (7 July 2006), the news reporting of the *Daily Telegraph* was sensational in that it associated its news with a photo of the father of a London bomber, Hasib Hussain. This appeared to be irrelevant in the context, but we noticed that Hussain's father had the appearance of a 'typical' Muslim man with beard and Islamic cap (*topi*); so at a glance it could have conveyed to the reader "Muslimness" and violence (Kabir, 2006).

On the second anniversary (7 July 2007), the *Daily Telegraph* had the largest coverage of security issues (pp. 10-11; 19-20 and 25), reminding readers of the current threats (Glasgow airport bomb plot and the 7/7 second anniversary). The newspaper retained its sensational stance with its headlines and images. The "Britain on alert" pages (marked by banner headlines at the top of pages 10-11), had reports on the Glasgow airport attack with images of Kafeel Ahmed and Sabeel Ahmed (including a well-used photo of the burnt figure of Kafeel Ahmed being handcuffed by police). The Glasgow airport bomb plot was discussed under the headline "The time has come now, said suspect" (Gardham, Tibbetts & Bedi, 2007, p. 10). There was another report titled "Few imams in British mosques born in the UK" (Petre, 2007, p. 10). This article informed readers of research that indicates only eight per cent of imams preaching in British mosques had been born in the United Kingdom, and just six per cent of them spoke English as a first language. Further, according to the research, most imams had been living in the UK for less than five years. *The Daily Telegraph* further reported (Petre, 2007):

A study painted a picture of a deeply conservative body of individuals wedded to traditional languages who were still largely

recruited from the Indian sub-continent. [...] Patrick Mercer, a Conservative MP, said the UK should adopt a tougher system [...] (p. 10)

In this context, the newspaper was revisiting news reports that Muslim militants had been indoctrinated by fanatical imams. For example, the Egyptian-born cleric Abu Hamza al-Masri was alleged to have indoctrinated the September 11, 2001, plotter Zacarias Moussaoui, and ‘shoe bomber’ Richard Reid, while he was the imam of the Finsbury Park mosque. When al-Masri was arrested in May 2004, he was sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment; he is to be extradited during 2008. The British (Muslim) Labour MP, Khalid Mahmood, said that the extradition was a victory for moderate Muslims. This was interpreted by *The Weekend Australian* as sending “out a clear message to preachers of hate – you are not welcome” (*The Weekend Australian*, February 9-10 2008, p. 13).

In its anniversary coverage *The Daily Telegraph* published a large photograph of 7/7 London bombing victim, Jill Nicks, alongside the St Thomas Hospital medical team who treated her after the bomb attack. Next to the group photo was an article alerting readers about security measures being taken by police for upcoming weekend sports events, under the headline, “Security is stepped up for the weekend of sport” (Edwards, 2007, p. 11).

*The Daily Telegraph’s* report on “The textbook terrorists”, (Pierce, 2007, p. 19), was similar to *The Times’s*, noting that the terrorists were well-educated. It published some graphics of the burning Jeep at Glasgow airport and the bearded terror suspect, Mohammad Asha, holding his son. In its reprise of the previous year’s coverage (Gardham, 2006, p. 15), the *Daily Telegraph* effectively primed readers about the probable physical appearance of a Muslim terrorist. Finally, in the editorial section, the newspaper reiterated its conventional conservative approach with the headline: “We must make Muslims loyal subjects once more” (2007, p. 25). The message conveyed became, ‘We’ (the loyal British) must make the ‘Other’ (i.e., British Muslims) loyal subjects once more. Here the newspaper coverage is a reminder of Said’s thesis in *Covering Islam* (1997, p. 35), where he argues that in any opportune moment the Western media generalises religious and national cultures (such as

representing Muslims of diverse ethnicities as one Islamic group). In other words, Muslims are consistently labelled as the 'Other'.

The structure of the *Telegraph* coverage was similar to the *Times*. That is, while being stereotypical of the 'Muslim Other', it gave the 2008 terrorist attack additional publicity: i.e. "What the terrorists want- 3Rs – Revenge, Renown and Reaction" (L. Richardson, 2006b, pp. 95-132). It has been suggested that terrorism could decline if it received less media attention (Doran, 2002, p, 73). Terrorism is said to thrive on publicity, so presumably media attention, especially sensationalist coverage, stimulates terrorism and (possibly) terrorist recruitment. Terrorists want to communicate a message and the commercial press wants to attract readers and watchers with the 'Us' and 'Them' rhetoric (Doran, 2002, p, 73).

#### *The Guardian*

While Poole's (2002) analysis had indicated that a reader might expect *The Guardian* to be the broadsheet most sympathetic to the British Muslims' situation, the paper had proven surprisingly sensational in its coverage. Under the headline "One year on, a London bomber issues a threat from the dead", *The Guardian* had lead heavily with an article featuring Shehzad Tanweer's suicide video image (Laville & Dodd, 2006, p. 1).

However, on the second anniversary *The Guardian* aligned itself more with its anticipated stance, offering more balanced reporting of the 'Terror threat' than was the norm on that day. Alongside a report on the flaws in the emergency service response revealed during the 7/7 tragedy was a piece on how overseas doctors feared repercussions following Kafeel Ahmed's failed bomb plot. The newspaper emphasised that many overseas doctors had provided service to the victims of the 7/7 tragedy. There was also an article on how the Australian federal police had dealt effectively with security issues. There was also a large photograph (covering almost half the page) of the burnt Kafeel Ahmed being handcuffed by British police.

#### *The Independent*

Unlike the other broadsheets, *The Independent's* front page on the first anniversary of the 7/7 bombings did not have a scare-mongering graphic or headline. However, in its

follow-up 9-page *EXTRA* lift-out, *The Independent* had similar images of the London bombers to the other newspapers.

On the second anniversary of the London bombings, *The Independent* carried the headline: “Police identify bomb-maker as Iraqi becomes first man to be charged over terror attacks” (Sengupta & Marks, 2007, p. 8). This article reported on the latest findings about the Glasgow bomb plotters (Kafeel Ahmed and his associates), and the story was associated with two small images of Bilal Abdulla and Kafeel Ahmed (p. 9). On page 30 (Grice, 2007), the newspaper informed readers that the current British Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s language was restrained, and so was the language of Jacqui Smith, the Home Secretary. Apparently neither of them used the word “Islam”, “Islamist”, or “Muslim”; they were adamant that the perpetrators of the London and the Glasgow attacks were criminals (Grice, 2007, p. 30).

### *An analysis*

Poole (2002, 5-7) and Rigoni (2006, p. 77-78) suggest that *The Guardian* and *The Independent* are more inclined to give space to Muslim contributors in their newspapers than is the case with other titles. Poole’s content analysis of *The Guardian* in 2003 found it to be broadly inclusive, with 29 per cent of 149 articles putting Muslims in a positive frame regarding the war in Iraq; discrimination; and race relations (Poole, 2006, p. 76). On 7 July 2007 *The Guardian* generally maintained its balanced reporting. However, *The Guardian* included a caricature from the Anglican-raised Australian cartoonist, Michael Leunig, whose elderly cartoon character was reminded of an appointment with his (presumably) Muslim doctor by seeing a backfiring car drive past. In contrast *The Guardian*’s lead opinion piece, “On terror, the rhetoric is different, not the reasoning”, was an overview of the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s temperate comments on terrorism that referred only to criminals (Kettle, 2007, p. 37). Likewise *The Independent*, also a libertarian-leaning newspaper, ignored the Muslim stereotype in its commemoration of the second anniversary. In fact, *The Independent* did not have an opinion piece on Islam, Muslims or terrorism.

Of course, the British press’s reporting of the Glasgow terrorist incident (particularly *The Times* and *The Telegraph*), did fit in well with the observation of scholars such as

Edward Said (1997) and Elizabeth Poole (2002) as engaging with an ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ rhetoric, but the argument here is that such negative reporting is doing a disservice to moderate Muslims as they are sometimes portrayed by association as the ‘dangerous Other’ and this militates against social inclusion; while at the same time giving ‘renown’ to terrorists which may further encourage suicide attacks on British soil.

The 7 July 2007 reporting in both *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* brought up the ‘we/us’ and ‘they/them’ discourse in editorial comments. Whereas *The Times* did convey the voice of a mainstream Muslim group (Muslims United) (perhaps in an attempt to provide balance), it also conveyed the ‘us’ ‘them’ message when it praised the Glaswegian response to the airport attack. Richardson (2006a, p. 115) observes that some Western media undoubtedly excludes Muslim voices, and that Muslim sources are overwhelmingly only included and only quoted in reporting contexts critical of their actions and critical of their religion. Richardson (2006a) further notes:

When Muslim activities are not criticised – or when reported activities are not labelled as *Muslim* actions – Muslim sources are, almost without exception, absent from journalistic texts. Such an approach not only contributes to a popular association between Islam and negativity, it also distances Muslims from non-Muslims (since “Their” opinions are often placed in opposition to “Ours”) and symbolically implies that Muslims are only qualified to speak in response to certain (negative) events. (Richardson, 2006a, p. 115)

This is particularly important given the findings of scholars Edward Said (1997), Van Dijk (1991) and Herbert (2005) that Western media can be a very powerful tool in forming public opinion. Overall, on the second anniversary of the London bombings, among the broadsheet press discussed here, the ‘us’ and ‘them’ discourse appeared only in *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*. However, this divisive coverage was uniformly present in the tabloid press, as discussed next.

#### ***What the major tabloids said on 7 July 2007***

On the first anniversary of London’s 7 July bombings the tabloid newspapers *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror* and *The Daily Mail* had marked the anniversary through images and headlines, rather than via detailed commentary. They carried almost identical messages on their front pages. In sum, these cover stories asserted that the terrorists failed; Londoners won and Britain will survive. However, and perhaps

surprisingly, on that occasion the *Daily Express* offered more balanced reporting. On the second anniversary of the 7 July London bombing, the tabloids' reporting of the Glasgow Airport bombing (and the images used to communicate this) were similar to the coverage offered by the broadsheets. But the tabloid newspapers had an additional take: a new piece on an alleged "asylum seeker terrorist".

#### *The Daily Mirror*

*The Daily Mirror* appeal to readers was the headline "Terror 'Sleeper' Jailed". This story was about "a failed asylum seeker (Omar Altimimi) who kept manuals on making car bombs [who] was jailed for nine years yesterday". The conviction was an example of pre-emptive (or preventative) justice under the UK's controversial Terrorism Acts where a person can be convicted on the grounds of the information they possess and the people with whom they associate ('Clean skin', 2007). Altimimi had arrived in Britain from the Netherlands in 2002 with his wife and three children (Disley, 2007, p. 7). The brief report was accompanied by Altimimi's photo indicating a bearded Muslim man. It was an effective reminder to readers that 'we' remain at risk from the threat created by the Muslim 'Other'.

#### *The Sun*

In a three-page story entitled "Bomb fiend's £5k bill" (Sullivan, 2007, pp. 1, 8, 9), *The Sun* commented that British people had become furious when it was revealed that the National Health Service was spending more than £5,000 a day in an attempt to save the life of alleged car bomber, Kafeel Ahmed, who had "plotted death", and turned himself into "a human torch at Glasgow airport" (Sullivan 2007, p. 9). *The Sun* was very critical of spending such sums on a would-be bomber's medical treatment (see "Terror madness", p. 5). It also ran a story on the terrorist conviction of Omar Altimimi (p. 9).

#### *The Daily Mail*

Under the headline, "Al Qaeda fanatics working in politics" (Wright, 2007, pp. 1, 8),

*The Daily Mail* informed its readers:

Up to eight police officers and civilian staff [in the UK] are suspected of links to extremist groups including Al Qaeda. Some of them are even believed to have attended terror camps in Pakistan or Afghanistan. Their names feature on a secret list of

alleged radicals said to be working in the Metropolitan and other forces (p. 1).

*The Daily Mail* further instilled suspicion by reporting (Wright, 2007):

Sources said it is unlikely that the Met [Metropolitan police] is the only force which may have been infiltrated by Al Qaeda sympathisers. Omar Altimimi, a failed asylum seeker jailed for nine years yesterday for hoarding manuals on how to carry out car bombings, had applied to work as a cleaner for the Greater Manchester force. (p. 8)

Of the three tabloid papers discussed, the *Daily Mail* appears to have tried to instil the greatest fear among readers that ‘We’ are living with our ‘enemy’.

#### *The Daily Express*

As mentioned above, *The Daily Express* had maintained a balanced stance on the first anniversary of the London bombing. It had only two pages of news coverage, and these were comparatively restrained. But on the second anniversary of the London bombings (7 July 2007), the *Daily Express* devoted four pages to topics about Muslims. Under the headline “Suspect told mum: I will not fail” (Thorne & Twomey, 2007, pp. 6-7), the newspaper offered another angle in their coverage of the Glasgow airport bombing. It also provided an image of the bomb plotter, Kafeel Ahmed, and his mother, who was pictured as a fully-covered Muslim woman wearing the *burka* (long black gown), *hijab* (head scarf) and the *niqab* (face veil). The image of Kafeel Ahmed’s mother can be interpreted as confirming prejudices because it has been established elsewhere that fully-covered Muslim women carry negative connotations for Western audiences (Kabir, 2006). There was a further headline, “Attack fears grow on 7/7 anniversary” (*The Daily Express*, 2007a, p. 6), which reported: “Police fear the terrorists could attack again in a sickening ‘celebration’ of the outrage which left 52 people dead and 700 injured”. *The Daily Express* further commented, under the heading “Multiculturalism has let terror flourish in Britain”:

Today is the second anniversary of the London bombings when 52 innocent people died and hundreds were injured. In the aftermath of that atrocity we learned that the young bombers were

British-born and appeared to have fallen under the evil spell of imams who preached hatred of the West. It was imperative that the Muslim community looked within itself and dug out this poison [...] As we now see this will be a mammoth task (2007b, p. 14).

A few pages later there was further coverage featuring Muslims. This time the story was a report on a Muslim man who had demanded £150,000 compensation after claiming he was falsely branded a suicide bomber, presumably because he was 'profiled' as a result of wearing a traditional Islamic dress. The article appeared under the headline, "'Insulted' Muslim sues Homebase for £150,000 (That's £143,000 more than some 7/7 victims [received])" (Dixon, 2007, p. 19). On this page the newspaper underlined its sympathy for the 7/7 bomb survivors by also including a second article under the headline, "Bomb survivors 'are the forgotten people'" (Dixon, 2007, p. 19). Finally, the *Daily Express* allotted another two pages to the Glasgow airport bomb plot under the heading "Accidental Hero" (Mallon, 2007, pp. 22-23). This coverage was associated with photographs of the burnt and handcuffed Kafeel Ahmed; Osama bin Laden; and local hero John Smeaton, who had tackled the bomb suspect Kafeel Ahmed at the site of the failed Glasgow bombing. The images clearly depicted John Smeaton as one of 'us': "the accidental hero".

Overall, the tabloid press employed the 'Us' and 'Them' framework, and risked painting all Muslims with the same brush by proclaiming, for example, that "Multiculturalism has let terror flourish in Britain" (*The Daily Express*, 2007b, p. 14).

### ***Conclusion***

On the first anniversary of the London bombing, the general theme of the broadsheet press was that the anniversary was time for grief and reflection; while the message from the tabloid press was one of defiance, occasionally with a tone of belligerence along the lines of: "We won't give in: terrorists can go to hell". Overall, the coverage was structured within an 'Us' and 'Them' framework, with a few exceptions.

On the second anniversary of the 7/7 bombing there was a shift in focus to the recent bomb plots in London and the attack on Glasgow airport. Again, the predominant message from the press was that Muslim militants posed a 'real' threat; however, the

reporting overall was less strident, presumably because the Glasgow and London 2007 attempts had been foiled, and a second anniversary is less anguished than a first one. Nevertheless, the broadsheet *Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, and the tabloid press titles *The Sun*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express* all maintained a stance of nurturing moral panic about the ‘enemy within’.

In contrast to the majority newsprint position, *The Guardian* adopted a more subdued tone, even though this included Leunig’s cartoon of a backfiring car triggering an elderly man’s recollection of a doctor’s appointment. Only the *Independent* was entirely even-handed, coinciding with (and celebrating) the position taken by new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, that the alleged bomb plotters were criminals and that their religion should be disassociated from their actions.

We close with the observation that since terrorists seek publicity for their criminal acts, the media may be aiding and abetting terrorists by sensationalising and prolonging news coverage of their behaviour. Further, the ‘religionising’ of this coverage – along with any overreaction and vilification of the faith concerned – may negatively influence some people, encouraging them to construct terrorists as martyrs. This could clearly be unhelpful to British national security. Perl’s (2002) challenge to policy, media, and law enforcement agencies to undermine the terrorist agenda by developing policy approaches that fail to respond to provocations in predictable ways deserves a further hearing, even if work needs to be done to combine this with what we understand to be the traditional rights and responsibilities of a free press to report the news as it unfolds.

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