



Learning outcomes

- ◇ Students will learn about common misconceptions of Muslims and Arabs in the British print media
- ◇ Students will gain a greater understanding of the cumulative effects of negative stories about Muslims and Arabs
- ◇ Students will explore how stories featuring Muslims can affect how non-Muslims feel about Muslims and about Britain as a multicultural society

Lesson in brief

Students will analyse stories from the British print media and explore the feelings that these stories evoke with regard to Muslims and to Britain as a multicultural society more broadly. They will then examine how the accuracy of the stories.

Materials: Copies of articles and background to articles

Lesson Plan

Starter

- ◆ Brainstorm what students expect from the news media – for example do they expect to be entertained or learn more about the world etc? Brainstorm whether they think the news media has any responsibilities – for example not to mislead, not to incite hatred etc.

Main activity

- ◆ Split the class into pairs or groups of three. Give each pair or group a copy of an article. There are six article that are all discussed in a 2008 report on prejudice towards Muslims in the British print media
- ◆ Ask each pair/group to read the story, to clarify what the story is about, and to ask any questions that they may have or if there are any words they do not understand.
- ◆ Then ask each pair/group to answer the following questions:
 - ◇ What feelings do you have about Islam after reading this story?
 - ◇ Does it make you feel unsure/reluctant to get to know Muslims?
 - ◇ Does this story give the impression that Islam and Muslims have something to offer British society?
 - ◇ How does it make you feel about Britain being a place where people who have different beliefs and backgrounds can live together?
- ◆ Next give each pair/group the background to the article and ask them whether the information provided in the background changes their attitude to the article.

N.B. There are six articles—four from tabloids, and one from the *Guardian* and one from the *Economist*. The article from the *Guardian* is long and complex, so extracts rather than the whole article have been used for the purpose of this exercise. The group working on this article may however require some extra assistance.



Plenary

What are the effects of these kind of stories on perceptions of Muslims and multicultural Britain?

You could go around each group eliciting their answers to the questions and writing their answers on the board to help students understand the cumulative effect of these articles.

Homework

Write a letter to the newspaper about the article you read.

Begin the article "Dear editor," and explain in a couple of paragraphs why you object to or support the article.



What feelings do you have about Islam after reading this story?

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Does it make you feel unsure/reluctant to get to know Muslims?

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Does this story give the impression that Islam and Muslims have something to offer British society?

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How does it make you feel about Britain being a place where people who have different beliefs and backgrounds can live together?

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Christmas is banned: It offends Muslims – Council is ‘ashamed’ to be Christian

Daily Express

BRITAIN’S proud heritage suffered a devastating blow yesterday after council chiefs banned Christmas. Critics immediately accused a politically correct local authority of being ashamed to be Christian. The council ordered Christmas lights in its town centres to be called “winter” or even “celebrity” lights to avoid upsetting other faiths. The astonishing diktat is one of a string of decisions by town hall bureaucrats which have undermined many age-old traditions. Their obsession has already seen crucifixes removed for being too Christian, Bibles taken out of some hospitals and even teachers told they can no longer “fail” children.

Last night there was widespread condemnation of the ruling with residents, MPs and leaders from all faiths joining forces to condemn the outrageous move. Steve Jenkins, spokesman for the Church of England, said the move by Lambeth in south London left him speechless. “I thought we were over all this stuff. I thought people had stopped this, he said. “The way for everybody to recognise everybody in their community is to recognise each other’s festivals in the way we saw recently with the Diwali celebrations. We would not call Diwali lights celebrity lights would we? Christmas is Christmas, Diwali is Diwali and Ramadan is Ramadan.”

The Muslim Council of Britain agreed, saying the decision beggared belief. Lambeth, which has earned a reputation as one of the worst-run councils, is home to the official residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The council, which includes Brixton and Clapham, has now replaced the word “Christmas” in its advertising material for the various switch-ons of lights over the festive season. In three districts it will now be the “winter lights” while, in a fourth area, locals will be invited to enjoy the “celebrity lights”.

The council’s latest attack on the symbols of the festival celebrating the birth of Christ provoked widespread outrage. Culture secretary and local MP Tessa Jowell branded the order “ridiculous”, adding: “It is a completely misguided way to recognise and respect Lambeth’s diversity. Children right across my constituency get excited about Christmas and what it means.”



Background

Christmas is banned: It offends Muslims – Council is ‘ashamed’ to be Christian

Daily Express

Besides the attention seeking headline, there was no evidence at all the Muslims had had anything to do with the decision by Lambeth council to change the name of its Christmas lights. There was a very good reason for this: they didn't. We discovered that the front page splash was based on a report by journalist Lambeth council said that the entire story, not merely the Muslim involvement but also the claim that Christmas had been banned, was deeply misleading: “Christmas was going on as usual, the Christmas tree was up in the town hall, the usual Christmas carols were being sung, the lights were up. The different names really were born out of inconsistency, they were never the official council policy, yet it escalated into this huge story.”



Hogwash: Now the PC brigade bans piggy banks in case they upset Muslims *Daily Express*

Piggy banks are being banned in case they offend Muslim customers, it emerged last night. The decision by high street banks was condemned as "barmy" and "bonkers" by critics. They warned that such moves would only fuel inter-community tensions. Branch bosses imposed the ban because they fear the time-honoured symbol for thriftiness could upset ethnic customers.

All promotional material bearing the figure has now been scrapped because the Koran forbids Muslims from eating pork and pigs are considered by them to be unclean. Muslim leaders in East Lancashire, where there is a large immigrant community and the first bans were imposed, applauded the action by the Halifax and NatWest.

But the move was condemned by critics headed by a leading Church of England clergyman. The Dean of Blackburn, the Very Reverend Christopher Armstrong, said: "This is petty and political correctness gone mad. The next thing we will be banning Christmas trees and cribs and the logical result of that process is a bland uniformity. We should learn to celebrate our differences, not be fearful of them."

He was supported by Andrew Rosindell, Tory MP for Romford, who said: "Those responsible for this decision are making themselves look extremely foolish. It is quite absurd. In no way can piggy banks be termed offensive. I cannot believe the majority of Muslims genuinely object to seeing a picture of a piggy bank on a wall or in a leaflet. This is the sort of political correctness that makes normal-thinking people very angry. It's barmy."

Mike Penning, Tory MP for Hemel Hempstead, described the decision as "bonkers". He said: "I have never met a single Muslim, and I know many, who would be offended by the image of a piggy bank. It is sheer stupidity."

But the plan was backed by Salim Mulla, secretary of the Lancashire Council of Mosques, who said: "Within our faith there are strict rules about not consuming pork or coming into contact with pigs. "This is a sensitive issue and I think the banks are simply being courteous to their customers."

A spokesman from the Halifax said: "We no longer have any advertising that features piggy banks or is piggy bank related." NatWest admitted that piggy banks had been removed from branches in the area but insisted there had been no direction from head office. "The decision has been taken at local branch level," said a spokesman.



Background

Hogwash: Now the PC brigade bans piggy banks in case they upset Muslims *Daily Express*

NatWest was originally called by journalists from the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* who were told in no uncertain terms that the end of one promotion had nothing to do with fear of causing offence. The *Express* then ran the story without making reasonable checks with the banks. The article manages to cite no evidence that piggy banks had been removed for the reason cited in the inflammatory headline, confining itself to expressing outrage from MPs and church leaders. The banks themselves soon cleared up the matter. The Halifax drily noted that it “has not withdrawn any piggy banks from branches” and noted that in fact it had not used piggy banks in its branches for a number of years. The NatWest press statement noted that: “There is absolutely no fact in the story. We simply had a UK wide savings marketing campaign, which included pictures of piggy banks, running until the end of September. Piggy banks have been and will continue to be used as a promotional item by NatWest.” That is indeed the case, as NatWest’s piggy banks feature prominently in their promotions to this day.



Get off my bus I need to pray

The Sun

A MUSLIM bus driver told stunned passengers to get off so he could PRAY.

The white Islamic convert rolled out his prayer mat in the aisle and knelt on the floor facing Mecca. Passengers watched in amazement as he held out his palms towards the sky, bowed his head and began to chant. One, who filmed the man on his mobile phone, said: "He was clearly praying and chanting in Arabic.

"We thought it was a wind-up at first, like Jeremy Beadle." The 21-year-old plumber added: "He looked English and had a London accent. He looked like a Muslim convert, with a big, bushy beard.

"Eventually everyone started complaining. One woman said, 'What the hell are you doing? I'm going to be late for work'." After a few minutes the driver calmly got up, opened the doors and asked everyone back on board. But they saw a rucksack lying on the floor of the red single-decker and feared he might be a fanatic. So they all refused.

The passenger added: "One chap said, 'I'm not getting on there now'.

"An elderly couple also looked really confused and worried.

"After seeing that no-one wanted to get on he drove off and we all waited until the next bus came about 20 minutes later. I was left totally stunned. It made me not want to get on a bus again."

The bizarre event unfolded on the number 81 in Langley, Berkshire, at around 1.30pm on Thursday.

The passenger said he rang the bus firm to complain but claimed it did not believe him. He said: "They asked me, 'Are you sure?'. Then they said they would get back to me, but they weren't taking me seriously at all."

Yesterday the driver, who said his name was Hrun, told The Sun: "I asked everyone to get off because I needed to pray. I was running late and had not had time. "I pray five times a day as a Muslim – but I don't normally ask people to get off the bus to do it."

Muslims pray at pre-dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset and evening. A spokesperson for bus company London United said: "We are aware of a reported incident involving our route 81. "We are currently undertaking a full investigation into the matter."



Background

Get off my bus I need to pray

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The newspaper ran the story after giving London United Bus Company very little time to investigate, obliging them to issue a holding statement saying they would look into the matter. Once they had done so it was clear that the story was rather different. The bus had been delayed, so in order to maintain frequency the bus company had ordered the driver to stop his bus and allow passengers to board the bus behind. Tickets and CCTV evidence show that all the passengers were on that bus within a minute. The driver was under strict instructions not to allow any passengers onto his bus. He was on a ten-minute break so could do what he wanted.

The so-called witness, a 21 year old plumber, who recorded the bus driver praying, had not in fact been on the bus, and had arrived after the incident to find a small crowd waiting outside a bus. Jumping to a false conclusion, he sold his story to the *Sun*.



Nurses Told to Turn Muslims' Beds to Mecca

Daily Express

OVERWORKED nurses have been ordered to stop all medical work five times every day to move Muslim patients' beds so they face towards Mecca.

The lengthy procedure, which also includes providing fresh bathing water, is creating turmoil among overstretched staff on bustling NHS wards.

But despite the havoc, Mid-Yorkshire NHS Trust says the rule must be instigated whenever possible to ensure Muslim patients have "a more comfortable stay in hospital".

And a taxpayer-funded training programme for several hundred hospital staff has begun to ensure that all are familiar with the workings of the Muslim faith.

The scheme is initially being run at Dewsbury and District Hospital, West Yorkshire, but is set to be introduced at other hospitals in the new year.

It comes on the back of the introduction in some NHS hospitals last year of Burka-style gowns for Muslim patients who did not wish medical staff to see their face while operating or caring for them

Last night critics slammed the procedure and claimed the NHS would be better off investing its resources in tackling killer superbugs such as C.diff and MRSA.

One experienced nurse working at Dewsbury said: "It would be easier to create Muslim-only wards with every bed facing Mecca than have to deal with this.

"Some people might think it is not that big a deal, but we have a huge Muslim population in Dewsbury and if we are having to turn dozens of beds to face Mecca five times a day, plus provide running water for them to wash before and after prayers, it is bound to impact on the essential medical service we are supposed to be providing.

"Although the beds are designed to be moved, the bays are not really suitable for having loads of beds moved around to face a different direction, and despite our best efforts it does cause disruption for non-Muslim patients."

The changes have been instigated by Dewsbury and District Hospital's chief matron, Catherine Briggs, after she held a series of consultation meetings with local Asian GPs, ethnic minority patients groups and Muslim chaplain Ilyas Dalal to find out what staff could do to further improve Muslim patients' experience of the NHS.



Background

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Daily Express

In reality nurses would only move terminally-ill Muslim patients' beds at their family's request. The concession did not apply to all Muslim patients, and certainly not five times a day.

Julia Squire, chief executive of The Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust, which runs Dewsbury and District Hospital, said. "The press reporting on this matter is simply incorrect. Let me be absolutely clear: no employee of The Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust has been or will be ordered to turn hospital beds to face Mecca five times a day."

The story originated from an anonymous quote from a nurse at the Dewsbury hospital used in the *Daily Express* (and also in a similar account which appeared and in the same day's *Daily Star*, which is under the same ownership). According to the anonymous source, "If we are having to turn dozens of beds to face Mecca five times a day, plus provide running water for them to wash before and after prayers, it is bound to impact on the essential medical service we are supposed to be providing."

The story then gained momentum as angry letters poured in and MPs voiced their outrage, prompting the *Daily Star* to glory in its investigative journalism, boasting "OUR revelation that nurses are having to turn Muslim patients' beds to face Mecca has prompted a furious response from Brits. In the biggest response the *Daily Star* has ever had to a story, thousands of angry readers swamped our offices with texts, phone calls and e-mails"

When the *Daily Star* finally quoted the NHS denials, they were presented as a U-turn rather than a mistake on the part of the newspapers.



The crescent and the canteen – How an influx of Muslims is changing university diets

The Economist

...Entrepreneurs are good at satisfying niche appetites, large institutions often less so. But British universities are changing. Last November students at Leicester University persuaded their union cafeteria to ban pork and go exclusively halal. Sheffield Hallam University now boasts an on-campus branch of Hally Ally's, a halal fast-food outfit. Two further branches of the chain are expected to follow in other northern universities by the end of the year.

Masood Khawaja, president of the Halal Food Authority, has spent six months scrutinising campus kitchens. He plans to assess university caterers in the same way that his organisation judges supermarkets and slaughterhouses. That ought to be an improvement on the hit-and-miss experiments of the past. Sheffield served halal dishes in its main canteen for years before realising Muslim students mistrusted the purity of the meat, which sat alongside forbidden foods. These days, by contrast, college caterers tend to phone ahead to check if they may cook food in certain oils or pans.

The changing menus partly reflect a growth in the numbers of Muslim students. Last year, 8,450 British Pakistani students entered university—up from 4,040 ten years ago. The number of Bangladeshis, another overwhelmingly Muslim group, roughly trebled over the same period.

What of non-Muslim students' tastes? “You don't have to be a vegetarian to enjoy the food in a vegetarian restaurant,” argues Nick Robinson, Leicester's catering manager. Not everyone agrees. At Oxford University, where an almighty animal-rights rumpus is already under way over a new laboratory, some chefs have objected to preparing halal meat because of the way it is slaughtered. The university's secular society has also protested.

In the end, financial imperatives are likely to erode such concerns. Some of the most observant Muslim students come from Asia and the Middle East, and they are worth three times as much to most universities as British students. Sheffield Hallam recently hosted a summer school for 513 Malaysian students, many of them Muslims. If halal kebabs help to persuade some to enroll for further courses, each will bring the university some £9,000 (\$16,800) a year in fees. A mouthwatering prospect.



Background

The crescent and the canteen – How an influx of Muslims is changing university diets

The Economist

This article then generated rumours online that Leicester University had banned pork from campus. On a BBC forum, Leicester was even dubbed “Sharia University”

There was no truth in the rumour that Leicester had banned pork on campus. In actual fact, the university Student Union had made just one out of the numerous cafes on campus halal, in a decision which had as much to do with economic factors as cultural sensitivity as Leicester has a large number of Muslim students. The other 26 cafes on the campus, including the main canteen, were still serving pork as usual.



Last chance to speak out – Religious extremism must not be put beyond criticism by legislation - or accusations of Islamophobia

The Guardian

...The list of countries wrecked by religion is long. But the present danger is caused by Islamist theocracy.

There is no point in pretending it is not so. Wherever Islam either is the government or bears down upon the government, it imposes harsh regimes that deny the most basic human rights. Religions never accept universal human rights because their notion of rights derives from a higher revealed truth. Hundreds of emails from Muslims around the world flooded in this week claiming that UN human rights are a western construct, alien to their culture. A moderate one wrote: "Islam has its own understanding on human rights and the social order and the relationship between men and women established 1,400 years ago." Islam does have as wide a spectrum of interpretation as Christianity's long stretch from Ian Paisley to the Pope to the Quakers - but their Paisley element is alarmingly powerful.

But the blood-curdling words of the Prophet are there for all to read: "Kill those who join other gods" (Koran, 6: 5-6). Muslims must "slay or crucify or cut the hands and feet of the unbeliever" (5:34). "From them [the unbelievers] garments of fire shall be cut and there shall be poured over their head a boiling water whereby whatever is in their bowels and skin shall be dissolved and they will be punished with hooked iron rods" (22:19-22). The Prophet commands for any unbeliever, "Seize ye him and bind ye him, And burn ye him in the Blazing Fire. Further make him march in a chain whereof the length is seventy cubits... Nor hath he any food except the corruption from the washing of wounds." There is much more, with smiting above necks and smiting all fingertips off. It is notable that his early words of tolerance spring from when he was weak, while the murderous talk comes from his later all-conquering days. As for women's rights, slave-maids are the spoils of war, just as scores of celestial virgins are the reward for martyrs. Husbands have the right to scourge disobedient wives, women's evidence is inadmissible in court - all this jars with the hundreds of emails I had explaining how well Islam respects women.



Background

Last chance to speak out – Religious extremism must not be put beyond criticism by legislation - or accusations of Islamophobia

The Guardian

The author refers to Chapter 5, verse 34, saying Muslims must “crucify or cut the hands and feet of the unbeliever” but omits to mention that this is in the context of a defensive war launched against Muslims by non-Muslims.

She refers to Chapter 22, verses 19-22 – the section dealing with “garments of fire” – without informing the reader that this is a description of Hell and of punishment for sinners in the After Life, and by is quite similar to other religions’ standard descriptions of Hell. It has nothing to do with how Muslims treat non-Muslims in this world, in this life.

She refers to a Prophetic (actually Koranic) instruction: “Seize ye him and bind him” which again refers to the punishment for the unbelievers and sinners in the fire of Hell, in the After Life, and has no worldly or earthly relevance to Muslim/ non-Muslim relations.

As for her quotation, “Kill those who join other gods”, it is only part of the quote. It is part of a historically specific group of verses that refers to a period when certain pagan tribes broke their peace treaty with the early Muslims. It is here that this group of verses that “Kill those who join other Gods” and so on appears (i.e. “those who join other Gods” being that specific group of non-Muslims who had betrayed the Muslims and their treaty). The group of verses ends with the instruction to “leave them free” if they repent and, “If they ask for asylum... grant them”.

Does the article mention the countless verses in the Koran calling for peace and tolerance: e.g. Chapter 2: 256: “Let there be no compulsion in religion” and Chapter 2:190: “Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors”.