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# ‘Islamonausea, not Islamophobia’: The many faces of cyber hate speech

## ABSTRACT

1. *Muslims have been the target of discriminatory attitudes – especially after 9/11 – by*
2. *certain sectors of society, leading to what is known as ‘Islamophobia’. This exclu-*
3. *sionary tendency sees its most common manifestation in hate speech. Hate speech*
4. *is multifaceted: it can attribute false assumptions to a religion, ascribe despic-*
5. *able facts to a religious community, mock their traditions and practices or, in the*
6. *harshest cases, employ threat and verbal abuse. In the technological society we live*
7. *in, the channel most commonly used for the expression of Islamophobia is social*
8. *media; giving rise to a new variety of Islamophobia: Cyber Islamophobia. The aim*
9. *of this article is to study how Cyber Islamophobia is articulated discursively by*
10. *the average netizen (as opposed to the mainstream media), taking as its point of*
11. *departure the analysis of a corpus of more than 10,000 tweets compiled around the*
12. *hashtag #jihad. The study shows how discourse on social media amplifies and is*
13. *more explicit in expressing the stereotypes and negative representations of Muslims*
14. *present in mainstream media. The concept of ‘jihad’ is largely related with violence*
15. *and war, and such acts are associated with Islamic religious duty. Narratives*
16. *‘otherizing’ Muslims are promoted and Islam is depicted as being ‘at war’ with the*
17. *West. Furthermore, the analysis suggests that in this corpus, the vast majority of*

## KEYWORDS

Islam  
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Critical Discourse  
Analysis

*online discourse on jihad is carried out not by Muslims themselves, but by people with a clear Islamophobic/racist bias. In the light of Critical Discourse Analysis and the Corpus Linguistics methodology, we focus on a twofold target: (1) to identify the virtual communities created around certain religious and socio-political values; and (2) to unveil the correlations between them and the evaluation of Muslims and Islam by social media users.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a globalized world where the Internet plays a predominant role in the daily lives of millions, religion in cyberspace enjoys a significant and rapidly increasing presence. The internet shapes and controls public opinion based on a new paradigm of power relations. The presence of Islam in social media in particular is outstanding (Bunt 2003; Larsson 2007; Mohideen and Mohideen 2008). As expected in a highly networked environment, any comment on Islam has both fervent defenders (more religiously oriented users) as well as vehement detractors (more politically oriented users); the latter tend to focus on the sensationalized and controversial aspects associated with the religion, which, by its nature, is multidimensional and often overlaps with socio-political factors.

The birth of social media has transformed formerly passive audiences into active participants who not only receive and digest information but also create and comment publicly on any event of their interest. As Allen argues:

[...] today social media is beginning to change the form and nature of 'the media' in turn presenting many new and different challenges. In the social media sphere, we have recently seen existing boundaries being pushed, not just in what can and cannot be said, but so too by whom and to which audiences. [...] Similarly also is the use of Twitter where taste and decency as well as the manifestation of hate speech and other problems have recently come to the fore.

(2012: 3)

The consequence of this change has been the transfer of Islamophobia into the online sphere; a phenomenon described as 'Cyber Islamophobia'.

## 2. HATE SPEECH, ISLAMOPHOBIA AND CYBER ISLAMOPHOBIA

In the information age, it is impossible to deny the power and influence of the media. The media can impact and mould audiences according to their own interests and has therefore arisen as the most powerful tool sought by anyone who wishes to drive an audience in a given direction: 'What they (media) exercise is the power to represent the world in certain different ways' (Miller 2002: 246). In the last years, the birth and consolidation of social media has changed the scenario in which information is created, distributed and received. Citizens have changed their role from being mere consumers to active creators of information. Speakers now have the power to determine which information is of value and should be spread (or retweeted), therefore deciding the importance of the original tweet (Kwak et al. 2010). This new transferred power that average citizens now have has entitled them with the privilege of being potential opinion leaders with some of the same responsibilities we may expect from the media.

One of these new powers the layman has been given lately is the potential to spread hate speech. Hate speech itself is a concept that has been defined in various ways, and no single universal definition of hate speech exists. The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers Recommendation 97(20) on hate speech defined it as follows:

The term 'hate speech' shall be understood as covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.

Other definitions of hate speech have been given by Langton (2012: 72): 'speech that promotes racial or sexual [or perhaps some other sort of] hatred'.

As easy as it seems to define it, the difficulty of identifying acts of hate speech seem to be of a double nature. The first is, as Lakoff (2000: 18) suggests, the problematic nature of the object of study itself; i.e., language: 'It's easier to legislate about actions than about language because of its intermediate nature between thought and action: it is thought made observable'. The second is, the problem posed in deciding the criteria to classify certain types of speech as hate speech. In this sense, Lakoff (2000:18) states, 'we don't know how to legislate hate speech, because we don't really know how to classify any kind of speech, which we would have to do before we could safely legislate against it'.

From another perspective, the problem of defining and legislating against hate speech is the apparent contradiction of such legislation with the right of free speech guaranteed in a liberal democracy.

Benesch (2013) tries to overcome the contradiction between preventing hate speech and ensuring free speech by looking at what she terms 'dangerous speech', outlining several criteria under which 'hate speech' becomes 'dangerous' and hence harmful to society. According to her, 'When an act of speech has a reasonable chance of catalyzing or amplifying violence by one group against another, given the circumstances in which it was made or disseminated, it is Dangerous Speech' (2013: 1). She identifies five variables that affect the degree of dangerousness of any given speech act:

- (a) The speaker, who is much more likely to commit successful incitement if he or she has some form of pre-existing influence or authority over an audience.
- (b) The audience, the more fearful it is, the more vulnerable it is to incitement.
- (c) The speech act itself, by way of the use of certain rhetorical devices, such as the 'accusation in a mirror' strategy; persuading the audience that they are going to be attacked.
- (d) The social and historical context.
- (e) The mode of dissemination.

The most dangerous speech act would be the one in which these five variables are maximized.

A much discussed contemporary 'problem' connected with hate speech is the way Muslims are treated by the media, which, in many instances, has manifested in the phenomenon known as Islamophobia. Islamophobia, a neologism that covers the irrational hostility towards Muslims and Islam,

started to become popular in 1996 after the Runnymede Trust established the Commission on British Muslims.

In a follow-up report entitled 'Islamophobia: A challenge for us all' the organization highlighted several areas of contention, differentiating between discriminatory or Islamophobic 'closed' views of Islam and progressive and inclusive 'open' views of Islam. Closed views included looking at Islam as a monolithic group as opposed to a religion that contains a diverse multitude of outlooks among its adherents; seeing Islam as an alien or an 'other' with no overlaps with the West's values; and seeing Islam as inferior as opposed to merely different. The usage of the term reached a peak in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror, featuring in many academic debates. Islamophobia in the mainstream media has now found its way into social media, where the general public can be witnessed voicing their opinions on Islam and Muslims.

Islamophobia is multifaceted. It 'groups together all kinds of different forms of discourse, speech and acts, by suggesting that they all emanate from an identical ideological core, which is an "irrational fear" (a phobia) of Islam' (Maussen 2006). Islamophobia in the West has manifested itself in two primary ways: individual Islamophobia and institutional Islamophobia. The latter is largely a result of the former's encroachment into legal frameworks, where Islamophobic ideas have been enforced in societies under the guise of laws that are touted as being for the general good, such as the regulation of dress codes adopted by some countries (Sway 2005).

Said (1978) has argued that Islamophobia is an inherent part of how the West understands the East. In a key interview with Time magazine in 1979, he stated that 'for the West, to understand Islam has meant trying to convert its variety into a monolithic undeveloping essence, its originality into a debased copy of Christian culture, its people into fearsome caricatures'. In the post-Cold-War world Islamophobia has come to be defined by the clash between the East and the West, framed by Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of civilizations' thesis (1993). Here 'Islam' is defined as 'the new enemy of the West, replacing the Soviet Bloc. The driving force underpinning the Huntingtonian thesis is the perceived incongruity between the politico-religious aspirations of the Muslim world – crystallized in the epiphenomenon known as Islamism – and the ideals of the secular liberal West' (Turner 2007).

The rise of Islamophobia has seen the increasing cast of Muslims as a global 'other'. This 'otherization' has been largely assisted by geopolitical theories such as the aforementioned 'clash of civilizations' thesis and the role of the media in the negative portrayal of Islam resulting in Muslims and Islam being generalized and attributed many stereotypes ranging from terrorism, misogyny, brutalism and violence (Said 1981; Alsultany 2012). With the advent of the Internet, Cyber Islamophobia has seen a large increase (Awan 2012; Larsson 2007), with spaces on the Internet now becoming a platform for the spreading of its rhetoric.

Cyber Islamophobia takes place primarily through blogs and social media, though also through traditional media outlets seen online. Henzell-Thomas of the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR) has stated in 2001 that the Internet is a rich source of Islamophobic utterances. The Online Hate Prevention Institute of Australia in 2013 called online Islamophobia not only an attack on the Muslim community but an attack on society as a whole, noting that one of the primary dangers of online Islamophobia and online hate speech in general is the normalization of hate speech aimed at making hate against the target group appear acceptable.

### 3. THE IMAGE OF ISLAM AND MUSLIMS IN THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA

The representation of Islam and Muslims in the media has been at the centre of attention for academics and civil sectors of society in the last decades; however, as Whittaker (2002) and Saeed (2007) point out, the interest of media in the coverage of news concerning Muslims and Islam increased extraordinarily in the post-9/11 world, reaching the peaks we see today.<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon has been approached from many perspectives as different as anthropology, sociology, media studies and linguistics.

The question of how Muslims are represented or misrepresented should be understood not as a mere reflection of life but as the interpretation of a given subject within a given reality, a shared cultural map. According to Hall (1997), there are three main theories of representation. The reflective or reductionist approach whose main tenet is that meaning mirrors reality. The intentional approach, on the contrary, states that it is the author who imposes his or her particular meaning on the world through language. Hall rejects these theories because accepting it would mean communication would be made impossible due to the multiplicity of individual codes used exclusively by every speaker. The third, the constructional approach, contends that meaning does not depend either on reality itself or on the speaker but on the systems and shared understandings we use to create our concepts about elements in society (for e.g. Muslims), which we then 'represent' through the use of language. Ameli et al. (2007: 11) point out that the three theories, however, disregard the potential or lack of power the reader has.

Interestingly, and irrespective of the diverse approaches and methodologies used, conclusions about the way western media reports the news that involves Muslims are quite similar. Islam and Muslims tend to be linked to very negative images, usually associated with extreme violence or terrorism. While placing the sole responsibility of the way western citizens perceive Islam on the media might seem quite unfair, the power wielded by the media today to represent the world is quite significant and must be acknowledged. In the words of Van Dijk (1991: 245), 'The media not only set the agenda for public discussion ... but more importantly they strongly suggest how readers should think and talk about ethnic affairs'.

Akbarzadeh and Smith (2005) studied the representation of Islam and Muslims in two Australian newspapers for a period of three years (2001–2004). Their conclusions were that the two newspapers were not Islamophobic, although their depiction of Muslims and Islam enhanced the 'us' vs 'them' dichotomy and Muslims were portrayed as anti-social, unclean and a threat to national and social security.

Several studies have been carried out within the British context. The first, by Moore et al. (2008), studied the representation of Muslims in the press for almost a decade (2000–2008). After the analysis of almost a thousand newspaper articles, the images used in them and of a series of case studies, they concluded that British Muslims appeared in a restricted number of contexts in the media; as a threat (due to their terrorist natural tendencies), as a problem (because their values clash with the ones proper of British culture) or both. The images of Muslims found in the press were mainly of males (rather than females), depicted either in mugshots or being involved in religious practices.

The comprehensive work of Baker et al. (2012) reached similar conclusions in its study of the contexts in which the word 'Muslim' appeared in British

1. The magnitude of that increase was summarized in a report by the Islamic Human Rights Commission (2007).

2. For privacy reasons, the names of the authors of the tweets have been removed and replaced by the anonymous @username. The content of the tweets, including the grammatical and spelling mistakes, has not been altered, although we have emphasized certain words in bold to highlight particular aspects of the message.

broadsheets and tabloids from 1998 to 2009. The findings of the qualitative and quantitative analyses were complementary: Muslims were depicted as a homogeneous group associated with conflict who finds it very difficult to integrate with the West (i.e., British culture).

This negative bias towards Islam is also revealed in the study carried out by Dahinden et al. (2011) on how Islam is represented in Swiss media. The results coincide with those of the studies quoted above. Dahinden et al. applied Lule's taxonomy of the five master myths typical of tales in relation to the following archetypes: the hero, the good mother, the victim, the scapegoat and the trickster. The image of Islam was not positive; was associated with negative archetypes (the guilty one, the villain); and Muslims were presented in a passive role, unable to speak for themselves. Islam was also over-represented in the Swiss media despite its adherents amounting to only 4.3 per cent of the population.

In 2002 Whittaker (2002: 55) stated that, in general terms, Muslim representation in the British Press was characterized by four persistent stereotypes. Muslims were intolerant; misogynistic; violent or cruel; and strange or different. Current studies show no change in the situation.

#### 4. THE CORPUS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The corpus analysed in this work is composed of 10,025 tweets containing the string #jihad. It was collected using the search engine topsy.com and the compilation was established on two variables: on the one hand, time (tweets posted from 1 to 30 April 2013) and, on the other hand, language (only tweets written in English were retrieved)<sup>2</sup>:

- (1) 2 #jihad is arrested in foiled #terrorism plot are devout and religious #Muslims <http://t.co/An7r08i0ws> #Islam #jihad #Quran3:151 #Canada
- (2) Next govt will have to act against #JI's control of universities and colleges. We are producing dumb, duffers & jihadists. #Pakistan #jihad

The corpus includes 204,279 tokens (occurrences of any given word form) and 23,913 word types (word forms). The software used to carry out the linguistic analysis was Antconc 3.2.4w. The amount of data was clearly affected by the Boston bombing, an attack perpetrated by the brothers Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev during the celebration of the Boston marathon on 15 April. In the wake of the attacks the number of tweets containing the hashtag #jihad almost doubled; increasing from 3953 to 6072.

This project is based on several linguistic frameworks: Systemic Functional Linguistics (mainly Halliday [1985] and Martin and White [2005]) as a linguistic framework that conceives language as a social semiotic system; Van Leeuwen's Social Actor Theory, which was extremely useful to unveil the role of social actors in the corpus; and Critical Discourse Analysis, especially the works of Fairclough (1989), Van Leeuwen (2008, 2009), Wodak and Meyer (2001) and Wodak (2011), which was particularly useful to explore the concepts of the power exerted by certain groups on others as well as the ideology underlying their views.

We adopted a bottom-up approach, going from the analysis of the linguistic units (pronouns, transitive patterns, semantic roles, etc.) to the social interpretation provided by Critical Discourse Analysis. For a research of this type, Corpus Linguistics seemed to be the perfect methodology, enabling us to study language in use (tweets) and connect it to a higher socio-discursive level.



## 5. 'JIHAD' IN THE MEDIA

'Jihad' is a concept that has been at the centre of the controversy regarding the representation of Muslims. The use of 'jihad' in the Western media is an example of the treatment of Muslims as a 'muted group' subject to being defined by a language spoken of by others (Ameli et al. 2007: 14). Conceived of widely as "Holy War" in the post-9/11 era as the Bush administration pushed to identify the War on Terror in religious terms, it is an idea that has stuck to the present day.

With 'jihad' being consistently painted in terms of violent war-like intent emanating from a monolithic 'Islamic world', the definition strongly furthers the Huntingtonian thesis that casts the post-Cold-War world in the framework of a war between civilizations, motivating the 'us vs them' rhetoric and casting 'the West' and the 'Islamic World' as diametrically oppositional, essentialized and clashing entities. In the process, the western media 'reduces "jihad" to a one-dimensional caricature of terrorism as religious martyrdom' (Tagg 2009: 320). This effect is apparent both in the Muslim world and in the West and thus furthers conflict and misunderstanding, playing into the interests of terrorists and warmongers alike.

An example relevant to the corpus studied is the reportage of the Boston bombings. An April 2013 *New York Times* story entitled 'Phone calls discussing "jihad" prompted Russian warning on Tsarnaev' discussed how the mention of the word 'jihad', which according to the aforementioned newspaper can sometimes mean Holy War, alerted Russian authorities to the Tsarnaev plot. Its statement that 'jihad' can sometimes mean 'holy war' is a highly inaccurate deduction, the effect of which is made worse by its flippant and matter-of-fact execution. The phrase 'holy war' is a highly inaccurate and misleading description of 'jihad'. As Tagg states, 'the phrase "holy war" is most appropriately used to describe the Crusades against Muslims during the late Middle Ages' (2009: 30, original emphasis).

Another article in the *Times* entitled 'An Internet "jihad" aims at U.S. viewers' said 'When Osama bin Laden issued his videotaped message to the American people last month, a young "jihad" enthusiast went online to help spread the word'. Here it is interesting that the young enthusiast that went online to support Bin Laden's campaign is not referred to as a 'Bin Laden supporter' but as a 'jihad enthusiast' – a concept that is tied to the very foundations of Islam. Referring to members of terrorist organizations as 'jihadists' is another obvious way the media succeeds in misrepresenting the meaning of 'jihad'.

The concept of 'jihad' has been misappropriated by the media to mean something entirely different to how it is conceived by most Muslims (Ameli et al. 2007: 14). This leaves the vast majority of Muslims, who have quite a different idea of what the word 'jihad' means, entirely disenfranchized. A Gallup poll carried out in 2002 revealed that the meaning of the word 'jihad' among the vast majority of Muslims took various nuances, with the majority of the meanings denoting an entirely spiritual understanding of the term.

## 6. ANALYSIS: #JIHAD IN THE CORPUS

Despite the concept of 'jihad' being one of the main pillars in Islam and a duty of every Muslim, the great majority of tweets that contain the hashtag #jihad in our corpus were not written by Muslims trying to clarify the nature of the notion. Most of the data instead originates from speakers with apparent

3. Letting aside the verbs 'be' and 'have' when they act as auxiliaries.
4. We discarded the fifteen tweets that made reference to Michelle Obama.

Islamophobic intent, who predominantly associate the idea of 'jihad' with any violent act committed by a Muslim.

Clear evidence of this is shown by the fact that in a corpus of 10, 025 tweets containing the hashtag #jihad, the most frequent verbs<sup>3</sup> are attack (364 times), kill (354 times), hate (150 times), fight (104 times), rape (59 times), beat (49 times) and murder (46 times), which dictates the mood of the corpus itself.

In general, a taxonomy of the tweets can be described in relation to their content:

- a. Tweets referencing acts of violence by person/s who happen to be Muslims: This is the most frequent type. Any evil deed committed by either a person or a group of people who happen to be Muslim is associated with the religion of Islam and with the concept of #jihad, depicted as an indispensable religious duty defining the act in question.

(1) Boston only 1 act of **#jihad** this week #Muslims also done 52 other attacks killing 262 injuring 725 #Islam is waging a global war #edl #bnp

(2) Afghan policeman who killed 2 U.S. soldiers seen as a hero by Muslims <http://t.co/n0RhOQFUNH> #sharia **#jihad** #news

(3) Egypt: Angry Muslims Kill Five Seven After Copt Child Draws A 'Cross': Notice how Reuters blame Christians and Muslims... <http://t.co/F5tXJCoUiU> **#jihad** #tcot #

- b. Tweets referencing offences committed by individuals or groups whose religions identity is not clear but are nevertheless attributed to Muslims due to their evil nature:

(4) SEX GROOMING GANG BUSTED YET AGAIN, VICTIMS AS YOUNG AS 12 YRS.....: Extremely sad and it... <http://t.co/ccKS9S32aZ> **#jihad** #sharia #tcot

(5) Easter jihad? Man drives car into Cali Walmart, attacks customers (video) <http://t.co/vcEPdb656T> #sharia **#jihad** #news

The link included in example number (4) only refers to the criminals as 'Asian men', but the author straight off establishes a connection with Islam by the choice of the hashtags #jihad and #sharia, both basic tenets within Islam. In (5) the perpetrator was identified as a Muslim only because drivers crashing cars is apparently a typical 'jihad' killing strategy.

- c. Tweets referencing any political action taken by western governments (especially the Obama administration) that is understood as being supportive of Muslims and contributing to the spreading of Muslims' power in the West:

(6) Sec of State John Kerry reveals daughter married Iranian American with extensive ties to Iran <http://t.co/5T28ailVgd> #sharia **#jihad** #news

(7) #America has both smart and ignorant. #Catfish Obama preys on the 'low information' variety through deceit. #sharia **#jihad**

The presence of Obama in the corpus deserves a more detailed analysis. In general terms, almost the totality of tweets<sup>4</sup> (474 in total) that mention Obama depict the president as an ardent supporter of Muslims at many different levels. The ways speakers choose to convey this idea vary, ranging from



statements about Obama's genetic Muslimness to the reporting of political actions that, in a blatant or covert manner, apparently expose Obama's support for Muslims, as can be seen in the following examples:

(8) Can an **Islamophiliac Obama** Who Has Promised to Stand with the Muslims Protect Americans? NAH! <http://t.co/KUwImkf4hT> #jihad

(9) Of course #Obama won't answer a question regarding #jihad **he is protecting his people**

(10) IMAGE: Obama **Stands With the Muzzies** <http://t.co/CIS48rd8RE> #nobama #noIslam #Islamisevil #nosharia #resist44 #jihad

d. Tweets totally unrelated to Islam or to any religion or religious agenda/purpose:

(11) Indian engineers invent 'anti-rape' underwear which gives attackers electric shocks and automatic ... <http://t.co/LDiQWh01f1> #jihad #tcot

(12) Visit Chicago for a Rollickin' Clockwork Orange Time, O My Brothers: Anthony Burgess did it much ... <http://t.co/4ShS5lUsZM> #jihad #tcot

(13) Why Are Two Chicago Teachers Union [CTU] Thugs Concerned With Penis Sizes?: Jeremy Segal [ak ... <http://t.co/BdFqIT6z9G> #jihad #tcot #gop

e. Tweets that contain a positive image of Islam. Usually, these are also marked with the distinctive hashtag #Myjihad. #Myjihad began as a public education campaign launched by activists in the United States with the intention of sharing the meaning of the concept 'jihad' as understood and practised by the majority of Muslims. Its Twitter's biography 'Taking back "jihad" from Muslim and anti-Muslim Extremists' underscores this intent. #Myjihad carried out several campaigns in the United States; sponsoring ads in buses and trains and holding speaking events. The bulk of the campaigns took place on social media. Videos were uploaded to YouTube, an interactive Facebook page provided a space where community members could engage in discussions and the use of the active hashtag #Myjihad on Twitter allowed users to share their opinions and personal struggles.

(14) 1492 AD #Myjihad #jihad is the striving against injustice & persecution <http://t.co/d79oC3sr0c>

(15) '**#jihad** has NOTHING to do with holy war' – @tariqramadan #Myjihad #RiseandCall @CelebrateMercy

However, out of the 584 tweets that contain the hashtag #Myjihad in the corpus, only 34 occurrences saw it included in positive tweets, meant to express the 'true meaning' of 'jihad' as described by the #Myjihad campaign, see examples (14) and (15), the rest of the 550 tweets included negative information about Muslims:

(16) #Myjihad Muslims celebrate with sweets, praise to Allah over #Boston bombing <http://t.co/DcPJHjoz4> #Islam #jihad

(17) #Myjihad #Mauritania jails Canadian Muslim for 2 years for terrorist conspiracy <http://t.co/EstCZohcVM> #Canada #Quran #Islam #jihad

f. Neutral tweets (very rare) that seemingly do not contain neither a positive nor negative concept of 'jihad'.

(18) Smile :) Even in the midst of the #jihad

(19) Just Do It! #JIHAD

The hashtag #jihad has been associated in the corpus with a diversity of tweets, the great majority of which do not speak of it in terms of how it is understood by the majority of the followers of Islam; largely in terms of spiritual connotations (Burkholder 2002). The association of all acts of violence carried out by Muslims (and some cases even when not) with #jihad, not only categorizes these acts as coming within the purview of Islamic religious duty – but also succeeds in giving the concept of ‘jihad’ a negative and violent connotation.

As it can be seen in the corpus, when used by Islamophobes the meaning of the word ‘jihad’ becomes associated with ideas of ‘violence’ and ‘war’. From the data, we could not even state that they are talking about a ‘holy war’ because that would imply an ulterior religious motivation, but many of the tweets contain information only about assorted felonies and misdemeanours. It is not a unique phenomenon that a religious term transcends the religious lexical field and becomes part of the daily vocabulary of any language (for example the terms ‘apocalypse’ or ‘purgatory’ from Christianity), but most of them retain their original meaning or a part of it. In this sense, the process the word ‘jihad’ undergoes is a different one as there has been a lexical conversion that serves the speaker’s intention.

## 7. DISCUSSION: STEREOTYPES OF MUSLIMS ASSOCIATED WITH #JIHAD

The stereotypes of Muslims that emerge out of an analysis of the use of the hashtag #jihad in the corpus are almost invariably very violent, disparaging and extremist. Muslims are depicted as being strongly supportive of terrorism and attacks against America and the West, bent on violence against minorities, those of other faiths, women, and marginalized groups such as homosexuals. The monolithic stereotype of a Muslim that emerges out of how the corpus uses the word ‘jihad’ is of an unreasonable, irrational and violent person, based on destroying everyone who does not conform to his world-view. This ideology is achieved through the strategy of ‘naturalization’ (Thomson 1990) by means of which relations of dominance are presented as natural. In our corpus, a lot of speakers present their individual opinions as ‘the truth’, being removed of any trace of partiality and appearing as the essence of ‘common sense’.

According to the semantic description of Muslims, tweets with the hashtag #jihad can be classified among the following categories:

- a) The association of Muslims both implicitly and explicitly with terrorism: Terrorism is shown as a feature almost inherent to Islam, and even the most important element of it – portraying it as a militaristic, hostile religion whose main goal is the ‘spread by the sword’. Attention is also given to terror tactics like suicide bombing and the murder of innocent human beings and focus is also placed on the specific threat to America and other countries of the West from those that follow ‘jihad’:

(1) You can deny it all you want ... They want to **kill us all!** #jihad #Caliphate

1. (2) #Myjihad #tcot #p2 #a4a RT: – #BOSTON **#BOMBINGS** were the work
2. of #MUSLIMS fighting for #ISLAM to commit #JIHAD as commanded by
3. the #QURAN
- 4.
5. (3) The Quran said, **'kill.'** **They killed.** #aynrand #objectivism #jihad
6. #salafism #Islam <http://t.co/yzUNHsaLE3>.
- 7.
8. Muslims fall into two broad categories: either they are terrorists or they are
9. 'ordinary Muslims' who are depicted as being widely supportive of terrorism
10. and, therefore, sympathizers of the cause:
11. (4) **Muslims Praise Boston Bombing:** Some of the comments from
12. Muslims on Boston attacks: 'very good,'... <http://t.co/9YTI3IT8Up> #jihad
13. #tcot.
14. Broad support for terrorist acts such as the Boston bombings of 2013 (as in
15. example 4) among Muslims is depicted as existing, conveying the notion of
16. homogeneous violent intent.
17. 'Homegrown terrorism' is a key aspect especially with reference to the
18. Syrian conflict: that fighters from the West, going to Syria in order to fight,
19. would return as seasoned 'jihadis' who would then wage war against the West
20. while being in it. There is general fear of Muslim immigrants, and the image
21. conveyed of them is that they 'bring terrorism' into their host countries, while
22. also being perceived as taking resources away from others in the community:
- 23.
24. (5)↑ photos-Give ppl food, shelter and #baby food & **they turn around**
25. **and kill u?!** Not in my USA! #welfare #ebt <http://t.co/PN37zajfRG> #jihad,
- 26.
27. (6) **they kill us!** @truthzone: 80% to 90% #mosques in America are funded
28. by Saudi Arabia. Imams are teaching #jihad (cont) <http://t.co/WxYdBuf3hI>.
- 29.
30. In the corpus Islam is depicted as being the only barrier standing in the way
31. of global peace:
- 32.
33. (7) IMAGE: Without Islam peace could exist! <http://t.co/HSQ7xOBBv5>
34. #noIslam #Islamisevil #nosharia #jihad #evil
35. b) The portrayal of Muslims as inherently hostile to those of other faiths,
36. and to Jews in particular: Muslims are also depicted broadly and directly
37. as being against secularism. The attitude of Muslim majority countries to
38. the non-Muslim minorities in their midst is painted as being particularly
39. threatening and violent:
- 40.
41. (8) New video shows Egyptian police allowing **deadly attack on Coptic**
42. **cathedral** | Fox News <http://t.co/azAqQzndO5> via @foxnews #jihad
43. #Christians,
- 44.
45. (9) **Muslims kill 8 Buddhists** in Indonesian centre: MEDAN, Indonesia –
46. A group of Myanmar Muslims beat... <http://t.co/rzbUs1yJUy> #jihad #tcot,
47. (10) **SECULARISM – Pakistani Taliban warn they will attack secular**
48. **political parties** in the run-up to national May 11 elections. <http://t.co/ta6IqhmENX> #jihad,
- 49.
- 50.
51. (11) Warm Words From Moderate Muslim Cleric: On Judgement Day
52. **Muslims Will Kill The Jews:** <http://t.co/KQw82iKfqW> #jihad' #tcot

5. As we said in Section 4, the corpus was highly influenced by the Boston Marathon bombing, hence the big presence of the Tsarnaev brothers in the data.

In the latter example (11), the word 'moderate' is especially significant, denoting that even non-extreme Muslims think that way.

There is wide consensus that Muslims are violently opposed to other religions such as Christianity (example 7), Buddhism (example 8) and Judaism (example 10), and are opposed to belief systems such as secularism (example 9). The fear that Muslim immigrants will bring acts of terrorism to the West is also widely apparent in the corpus with 'homegrown terrorism'. The ultimate picture is of Islam as a 'civilization' that views everything outside its control as a 'house of war', a view maintained by extremists on both sides (Ramadan 2005) that is actively seeking to 'bring back the caliphate' (as in example 1).

- c) Violence against women and sex crimes. Wife beating, oppression and abuse of women and honour killings are shown as being essentially a part of the concept of 'jihad'. Special attention was given in the corpus to Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the Boston marathon bomber,<sup>5</sup> who allegedly abused his girlfriend by forcing her to wear a hijab (by some accounts and a niqab by others), giving further significance to the relationship between Islam, terrorism, 'jihad' and the abuse of women. Through the strategy of 'framing' (Entman 2004) speakers highlight some facets of events or issues, making connections among them, in this case, with the objective to promote a particular interpretation of Islam as a religion that justifies women's denigration.

(12) MAJORITY OF TURKS FAVOR **BEATING THEIR WIVES**.....: urkish men reveals wife ... <http://t.co/7B8OxrCx68> #jihad #sharia #tcot,

(13) '@username: Tamerlan Tsarnaev's ex-girlfriend: He **beat me into wearing burqas** <http://t.co/cFgaHsmzon>' #jihad #ReligionOfPeace,

(14) Toronto: Another Mohammed **attempts to kill** his wife: via Aurora woman fighting for life af ... <http://t.co/By4HovMKwd> #sharia #jihad #tcot

(15) **Girl struck 15 times with an axe** by her BROTHER in attempted 'honour killing': Islam is all about ... <http://t.co/5i5kKKzxK4> #jihad #tcot.

Along with violence against women, Muslim misogyny is portrayed via a strong tendency to engage in sex crimes. Indeed the fact that tweets describing 'Muslim sex crimes' are tagged with 'jihad' makes it appear as if a tendency to commit sex crimes is in-built into the concept of 'jihad' and considered acceptable:

(16) Comment on Traumatized 16-year-old British girl was brutally raped by **90 different Muslim men** in ... <http://t.co/3DsIEWEUZz> #tcot #jihad

(17) Suicide attacks, **rape**, beheadings, looting everything is part of #Syria #jihad!!! #Saudi Muftiyan.. Don't 4get, hoeres are awaiting.

- d) 'Jihad' as involving Muslims taking the law into their own hands: 'Mob justice' appears as being a key notion of 'jihad'. Anything from attacks on homosexuals, women, members of minorities and other faiths was portrayed as being a direct result of the attackers following the Islamic concept of 'jihad'.

(18) Gays beaten by **Muslims** in France: <http://t.co/iwJANJuPmg> #jihad #tcot,

1. (19) **Muslim mob** offended by Christian boys playing music on mobile
2. phones attacks Christian homes #Pakistan #jihad <http://t.co/FMm8ImXxf9>.
- 3.
4. e) The continuous association of #jihad with the word 'Islamist'. 'Islamism' is
5. a term lacking in strict definition within its use in the corpus but is gleaned
6. to mean some form of politically motivated Islam. 'Jihad' then becomes
7. the violence mechanism of 'Islamism':
8. (20) Officer Sean Collier, murdered by Islamists in Boston. <http://t.co/PGIgpukDc> #bostonmarathon #jihad.
- 9.
10. f) Other stereotypes and discourses associated with 'jihad'.
- 11.
12. - Insults to the prophet Mohammed:
13. (21) Comment on Yes, we hate Islam. Yes, we will mock your **paedophile**
14. **prophet** Mohammed as much as we w ... <http://t.co/MY3wJLqjSQ> #tcot
15. #jihad
- 16.
17. - Muslim intolerance for apostasy and intolerance in general:
18. (22) What happens when people leave the peaceful religion of #Islam?
19. Oh that's right ... they are **murdered for honor**. #BostonManhunt #jihad
20. #tcot.
- 21.
22. (23) How many religions will order you to **be killed for writing a medio-**
23. **cre novel or drawing a bad cartoon?** #Islam #jihad #tcot #p2.
- 24.
25. - Capital punishment and unusual cruelty:
26. (24) Saudi man who **paralysed his best friend** in knife **attack faces**
27. having his spinal cord severed in ... <http://t.co/A9YZY5utLR> #jihad #tcot,
- 28.
29. - Intra-Muslim conflict (Muslims fighting Muslims):
30. (25) **Syrian** Rebels Beheaded 20 Men Just for Being **Shia** Muslim. Muslims
31. do not ONLY kill infidels. #Islamkills #jihad #tcot <http://t.co/BfFrj9nqVR>
- 32.
33. - the brainwashing of people through Islamic teachings in order to commit
34. violence:
35. (26) The Truth from an EX-MUSLIM woman <http://t.co/XyYtthn5G0> The
36. #Language of #Islam used to **#Brainwash the young** #Violence #jihad
37. #Terror #Hate
- 38.
- 39.
40. Inaccurate and out-of-context statements about sharia law and the Quran
41. also pepper the corpus, backing up and supporting the overall image of Islam
42. as a religion of violence, hate, oppression of women and marginalized groups,
43. sexual perversion and warmongering:
- 44.
45. (27) IMAGE: **Sharia law not compatible** ... <http://t.co/EDHT7oQ52K>
46. #noIslam #Islamisevil #nosharia #jihad #carpetflyer
- 47.
48. (28) **#sharia law persecutes #gays**. But OK 2 have sex w/animals: <http://t.co/fCIECgQONn> #lgbt #christ #tcot #tlot #pjnet #noIslam #jihad #lmyhbt
- 49.
50. (29) #muslim gang rapes 13yr old 4 days: **WANT UR DAUGHTER 2**
51. **DATE A muslim?** <http://t.co/fUnxZsl8mm> #nra #cair #noIslam #jihad
52. #israel #msnbc #cnn

(30) Savages. 'I Have **Killed My Jew**. I Will Go To Heaven.' <http://t.co/VQT1jwSwya> via @PJMedia\_com #jihad #Islam #religionofpeace

(31) IMAGE: Islam survives by **fear and murder** <http://t.co/cqsuP5JMFD> #noIslam #Islamisevil #nosharia #jihad

The outcry raised by Muslims against Islamophobia and hate crimes against them is also covered and depicted as a conspiracy to paint itself as the victim:

(32) Yet another **Faked 'Hate Crime'** Against Mosque: <http://t.co/xa0NwVWiFY> #jihad #tcot #gop #MuslimsAreScumbags #Myjihad #IslamKills #Islam

Grammatical structures are clear indicators of authority, power and status (Van Dijk, 1980). As shown by our analysis of the corpus, the Social Actor Theory framework (Van Leeuwen 1996) is the most suitable theory to represent collective identities in the discourse. Tweets containing the hashtag #jihad tend to cast Muslims in a violent light when they appear as agents (or doers of the action). Generic reference was the most popular way of depicting agents in the corpus: that is, where the individual identity of an actor is diluted in favour of the group they belong to – in this case, in favour of their religious community (Muslim). This assimilation has what Van Leeuwen (1996: 282) calls a 'they're all the same' effect.

(33) @WashingtonDCTea The #BostonBomber was work of **devout #Muslims** fighting for #Islam as commanded by #Quran to commit #jihad #tcot #Manhunt RT

(34) Arab Spring Update: **Moderate Muslims** Attack Funeral Of Christians They Murdered: Clashes broke ... <http://t.co/R47gyzp8sj> #jihad #tcot

Passive voice tweets also favoured 'generic reference' as the most popular method of depicting agents such as 'Muslims' or 'Islamists' in the corpus. However, patients in passive voice were 'identified' – that is, depicted based on what society deems them to be: for example, 'gay man' – or nominalized, providing information about their proper names (as in example 35):

(35) 'Guy did NOTHING to deserve it RT @username Officer Collier murdered by **Islamists** in Boston <http://t.co/7zdYsQWq2b> #bostonmarathon #jihad

(36) 'GAY MAN BRUTALLY BEATEN AFTER WALKING WITH PARTNER **THROUGH MUSLIM AREA** IN PARIS.....: It... <http://t.co/UVNpcKxwmu> #jihad #sharia #tcot'

The most striking example in the corpus is the case of the Tsarnaev brothers. They were immediately identified by the security cameras as the authors of the Boston marathon bombings. However, the two brothers are referred to many times in the text as 'Chechens' (132 occurrences) or as 'Chechen Muslims' (27 occurrences), thus being collectivized instead of nominalized, although their identity became clear moments after the terrorist attack. By doing that, the speakers associate the qualities of 'being Chechen' and 'being Muslim' with terrorism and, at the same time, willingly distance themselves



(white, Christian, American-born citizens) from the Muslim immigrants (though the Tsarnaev brothers had American nationality) and demonize the whole community they belong to (immigrants and Muslims):

(37) Boston jihad: Boston Marathon bombers identified as **Chechen Muslims**: Boston Marathon bombers ide... <http://t.co/H5XXhRKwhs> #jihad #tcot

(38) The religion of peace & love! **#chechen #Islam** #jihad #terrorist Bomb #Boston Marathon #McCaughan

## 8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The examples from media and popular culture in the West that misrepresent the word 'jihad' are myriad. A primary problem appears to be that the media ascribes its own definitions to the meanings of words such as 'jihad' and 'Islamist'. Western mainstream media has played a key role in ensuring that the definition of 'jihad' points to the vilification of Islam as a religion and its followers as inherently violent, unstable and bent on destroying Western civilization. This is accomplished via the strong association of the word 'jihad' with violence and with the violent acts of various terror groups. Ironically, this narrative serves the very interests of terrorist organizations, justifying their adoption of violent meanings for the same.

The analysis shows that the conception of 'jihad' and the stereotypes of Muslims and Muslim culture associated with it in our corpus reflect the ways Muslims and 'jihad' has been represented in the mainstream media in the recent past. However, stereotyping and generalization are taken to a more explicit level in the corpus, as individuals do not subscribe to or adhere to journalistic ethics and sensibilities. Far from countering any of the clichés previously attributed to Muslims and Islam the corpus, on the contrary, reinforces and expands existing negative stereotypes.

In this sense, this study contradicts the theory of the 'Big Lie' by Ameli et al. (2007); the audience's tendency to mistrust anything produced by established media. However, an examination of the extent to which active citizens on social media are independent of or are influenced by particular political agendas, such as those of ideologically ultraconservative organizations will yield more information on the level of agency and choice in online discourses.

In the corpus, Muslims are portrayed as being inherently violent, backward and oriented to the destruction of the West. This depiction ties in strongly with the idea that Islam is essentially the 'New Soviet Republic', a replacement to the enemy of the West in the post-World War II era. This idea acknowledges the Huntingtonian 'clash of civilizations' thesis, which postulates that in the post-Cold-War era the biggest conflicts of the world will be defined not by national border or ideologies specifically but by 'civilizations' composed of broad cultural collectives. The corpus then strongly endorses the idea of an inherent conflict between 'the West' and 'Islam'.

The 'otherness' of Muslims is what Ameli et al. (2007: 14) call 'new ways of racism', defined by Van Dijk (2000) as being more subtle and of a symbolic nature; discursive and expressed in text and in everyday talk. The subtle new racism Van Dijk refers to is articulated linguistically in our corpus through the use of generic references to demonize a whole community even if the perpetrators of the offenses in question are in many cases clearly identified (e.g. the

Tsarnaev brothers). The presence of the hashtag #jihad as the evaluative classifier linked to any act of violence and the presence of other derogatory hashtags such as #carpetflyer #Islamkills or #Islamisevil enforce this. This demonization of Muslims and Islam has the potential of societal discord and has serious consequences for the everyday lives of the Muslim minorities (Ameli et al. 2007).

We have to also add that the data used for this research was compiled before the emergence of ISIS on social media. A re-analysis of the corpus at more recent date may shed insight into how the discourse around #jihad has been impacted by the emergence of ISIS. And, being an organization on the other extreme of Islamophobia, how this may or may not have changed the overall representation of the meaning of the term in the study. However Berger and Morgan's (2015) preliminary hashtag analysis does not indicate that the hashtag #jihad is prominently used by ISIS accounts.

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