

**The Tyranny of the Tabloids: Identifying methods of exclusion in press coverage of
British Muslims**

by
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Abstract

According to the Office of National Statistics, roughly 3.3 million Muslims live in Great Britain. Prominent political and social platforms have often been used to promote exclusionary narratives and mobilize populations to view this population as a threat to British identity and culture. Anti-Muslim sentiment faces particularly concerning manifestations in the British press. This thesis analyzes the role of the tabloid press — the most popular form of news in Britain — in crafting and promoting exclusionary narratives regarding British Muslims. Specifically, I utilize an identity-based framework to argue that the tabloids have created a community of readers, connected by a shared working class, predominantly white identity. This identity has subsequently been framed in contrast to the perceived values of Muslims, and used as the foundation of exclusionary coverage of Muslim Britons and Islam. I use profile analysis of four British Muslim celebrities — Zayn Malik, Riz Ahmed, Sajid Javid, and Sadiq Khan — to analyze the tabloid press' role in excluding Muslim Britons from mainstream cultural discourse. The selected tabloid personas each reveal different manifestations of exclusionary strategies within the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Mirror*, ultimately confirming both the ongoing prominence of the tabloid press' role in societal rhetoric, and the concerning degree to which Muslims face prejudice in British media today.

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Introduction

According to the Office of National Statistics, roughly 3.3 million Muslims live in Great Britain. This demographic — which makes up less than 5% of the national population — has faced particular and continual prejudice in British society.¹ Like many minority groups, political and social platforms have often been used to promote exclusionary narratives and mobilize populations to view Muslims as a threat to British identity and culture. However, anti-Muslim sentiment faces unique and pressing manifestations in modern Britain, a reflection of the perceived connection of Islam to recent current events and political debates, including the ongoing ‘War on Terror’, the role of immigration in the Brexit referendum, and changes in Britain’s own political system.

British press stands at the forefront of negative coverage of Muslim Britons. The British news has a long and well-documented role in generating atmospheres of fear, and even hatred, around topics concerning Islam and the people and practices associated with it. In November of 2015, the tabloid newspaper the *Sun* — the most popular publication in Great Britain — published an article stating that one in five British Muslims felt “sympathy” for jihadis.² Upon the article’s release, it faced pushback from both the Independent Press Standards Organization and members of the general public. However, when the *Sun* stood by its work and popular attention inevitably drifted, so too did concern about the long-term impact of the article. In fact, this cycle of controversy, reaction, and ultimate apathy reflects an important need to analyze the ongoing

¹ Office for National Statistics, “Muslim Population in the UK”. August 2, 2018.

² Safdar, Anealla. “UK: Poor reporting, media illiteracy fuels Islamophobia.” *Al Jazeera*, 29 March 2016.

prominence of Islamophobia in the British press. In particular, this thesis is interested in studying the tactics used by the tabloid press — as the most popular papers in Britain today — to exclude and misrepresent British Muslims. The paper is divided into three sections based on progressing essential questions regarding the relationship between the tabloids and British people who identify as Muslim.

The first section of the thesis aims to unpack how the tabloids came to be the most widely read and influential papers in Britain. This historical inquiry is supplemented by the effort to characterize the tabloids' readership as a cohesive community of consumers, and identify the values that the tabloids espouse to this community as they relate to the exclusion of British Muslims. The second section of the thesis traces the development of Islamophobia in Britain in order to understand the impact of its history on depictions of Muslims in the tabloids today. This section identifies a rapid rise in tabloid coverage of Muslims in response to the events of 9/11 and 7/7. It then analyzes a more recent change in negative portrayals of Muslims that has shifted criticism from being based in Islam's alleged propensity for extremism, to its alleged cultural incompatibility with modern British society. The third and final section of the thesis — comprised of Chapters Three and Four — analyzes tabloid coverage of four British Muslim celebrities in the entertainment and political fields. This analysis focuses on the creation of tabloid personas for each of the four figures, and argues that these personas reflect evidence of both active exclusion from the tabloid identity and the consequences of the development of Islamophobia in the press today. In summation, these profiles aim to showcase strategies of exclusion enacted by the tabloid press through the treatment of real and relevant British Muslim celebrities.

The first section of the thesis draws from past academic works that either trace the history of the tabloids in British society or analyze the tabloid press through an identity-based framework. The history of the tabloid press as papers created for working class Britons has been outlined in the works of Martin Conboy and Adrian Bingham. Their book, *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the Present*, recounts the modern proliferation of the tabloid press in the 1970s, and the subsequent influence of the papers in most pressing political, economic, and social topics in British society.³ The identity-based framework, however, has been a particularly defining feature of some Martin Conboy's other pieces. His book, *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community through Language*, introduces the argument that the style, content, and marketing strategies of the tabloid press — all products of their modern transformation — reflect an effort to address a particular group of readers that share a working class, predominantly white, British identity.⁴ Conboy outlines this tabloid identity as a powerful tool through which the tabloids frame their coverage of news and entertainment alike. Conboy's work presents the opportunity to analyze the intersection between his framework of tabloid identity and the tabloid-based perceptions of Muslim identity in Britain outlined in the following chapters.

The second section of the thesis offers insight into the history of Islamophobia in political, cultural, and press-based discourse in Britain. The chapter specifically identifies the origins of Islamophobia to the 1960s — following the first major influx of Muslim immigrants from South Asia — before discussing more recent changes in prejudicial attitudes towards British Muslims. Within this broad history, however, the chapter draws

³ Bingham, Adrian, and Martin Conboy. *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the Present*. Peter Lang Ltd., 2015.

⁴ Conboy, Martin. *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community through Language*. Routledge, 2005.

from works that have aimed to succinctly analyze the presence of Islamophobia in British society. This work begins with the Runnymede Trust's Report, published in 1997, which popularized the term 'Islamophobia' and presented one of the first in-depth definitions of the anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain.⁵ Moreover, Paul Baker and John Richardson have been credited with some of the most extensive research concerning the history of Islamophobia in the British press.⁶ Both Baker and Richardson sought to analyze Islamophobia by studying patterns within the press coverage of Muslims. This strategy is known as critical discourse analysis.

According to both Baker and Richardson, critical discourse analysis can be used "to carry out a qualitative examination of linguistic and social practices within British broadsheets" in reference to their treatment of Muslims.⁷ CDA pinpoints patterns of representation in British Muslims, particularly focusing on tools used to separate and diminish their presence in society. Both Baker and Richardson's theses indicate the creation of a dichotomy in the media based in identity. This argument poses a strikingly similar claim to that of Conboy's work in Chapter One, which attempted to identify both a tabloid community and a group of people excluded from this identity. While at first glance, the former dichotomous relationship focuses on targeting only Muslim populations in Britain, while the latter is more generally based in historical affiliations to the British working class, the two absolute systems of organizing the British population share a crucial link in the mutual exclusion of British Muslims from their respective 'in' identities. Analysis of the tabloid press and its interactions with Islamophobia, therefore,

⁵ Elahi, Farah. Khan, Omar, "Islamophobia: Still a challenge for us all". Runnymede Trust, 2017.

⁶ Baker, Paul, et al. *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: the Representation of Islam in the British Press*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

⁷ Ibid.

reflect both exclusionary attitudes based in the history of tabloid identity as well as the associative strategies that have normalized anti-Muslim sentiment. Furthermore, the format and tone of the tabloids demonstrates these exclusionary practices in a uniquely sensational manner, an effort to both perpetuate Islamophobic narratives and emphasize British Muslims' exclusion from tabloid discourse.

Although Baker and Richardson provide the primary framework through which patterns of Islamophobia in the British press will be studied in this thesis, their findings are supported by the research of numerous other academics in this field, including Altikriti and Al-Mahadin, who wrote on the construction of the British self and the Muslim other through analysis of the British press, and Allen, who established numerous patterns of exclusion regarding representation of Muslims in British media.⁸ Both of these works indicate the presence of a complex set of exclusionary methods within the British tabloids. However, as Baker particularly highlighted, these methods have adapted to include the individuation of Muslim identity in the British press.⁹ In other words, as Muslim Britons not only increased in numbers, but also experienced particular attention for a proliferation of famous Muslim individuals, the press has applied its exclusionary narratives to these figures.

Thus, the third section of the thesis includes profile analyses of four prominent British Muslim celebrities. These depictions reflect the reconstruction of each figure's tabloid persona — the identity created and publicized by the tabloid papers based in, but often not dependent on, the real features of a celebrity's life. The tabloid personas, which

⁸ Altikriti, Anas, and Al-Mahadin, Salam. "Muslim 'hate preachers' in British tabloids: Constructing the British self and the Muslim other." *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2015.

⁹ Baker, Paul, *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: the Representation of Islam in the British Press*. 2013.

include Zayn Malik, Riz Ahmed, Sajid Javid, and Sadiq Khan, represent the crucial intersection of tabloid practice and exclusionary coverage of British Muslims. Most importantly, these profiles aim to deliver a unique insight into the role the press in shaping and perpetuating Islamophobia in Britain today.

Chapter One: Creating an Identity: The history of the tabloid press in Great Britain

In 2015, the Ethical Journalism Network published a review on how media across European nations cover issues pertaining to migration.¹⁰ The report found that “Britain appears to be the only settled democracy in Europe where the problem of hate-speech is generated less from outside the newsroom – by extremist political or religious leaders – than from within, where it is flourishes amidst a mix of editorial stereotypes, political bias and commercial self-interest.”¹¹ At the heart of the EJV’s critique is the myriad of tabloid papers that define Britain’s media profile. Since their origins in the early 20th century — and mass proliferation in the mid-20th century — the tabloids have become the most circulated form of print and online media in Great Britain.¹² Their resounding popularity, driven by a predominant working class readership, has created a unique forum for news, gossip, sport, and the inner workings of everyday life. Yet, amid the partisan politics and scantily-clad women, the tabloids also form a powerful statement of identity, one that is deeply intertwined with the histories of class, race, and religion in the Great Britain. In order to understand the role of the tabloids in British society today, one must return to the history of the press, asking first, what is a modern tabloid, and second, how have the tabloids produce such a powerful identity-based following?

In their work, *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to Present*, Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy identify the origins of the tabloid press in the late 19th, and early 20th centuries, when numerous publications from New York and London emerged as sites of editorial experimentation and innovation focused on creating papers

¹⁰ Aidan White. “Moving Stories”, Ethical Journalism Network (EJV). 2015, London.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Conboy, Martin. *The Press and Popular Culture*. Sage Publications Ltd, 2002.

that appealed to the working class.¹³ In 1896, renowned publisher Alfred Harmsworth founded the *Daily Mail* as “Britain’s first morning daily newspaper aimed squarely at the mass market”.¹⁴ While it lacked the modern day tabloid style or sensationalist reporting, it had an unprecedented colloquial tone and subject matter aimed at working class readers. These early versions of the tabloids were also sold at lower prices than their more traditional counterparts, marking the beginning of a market strategy specifically intended for a wider demographic. In 1903, Harmsworth also created the *Daily Mirror*, which broke through barriers for both its innovative half-broadsheet format and its specific targeting of a female audience. The next fifty years of British press production were defined by the emergence of new outlets that similarly pushed for innovation in the press, as well as the transformation of established papers to new formats, all guided by the effort to produce the most popular papers in the country.

This period of creativity and competition over an emerging market shifted dramatically, however, in 1969, when Australian media mogul Rupert Murdoch purchased the *Sun*. The *Sun* had previously experienced modest success in the market as a broadsheet paper under its previous name, the *Daily Herald*.¹⁵ When Murdoch acquired the paper, he hired Larry Lamb, former northern editor of the *Daily Mail*, as his editor. Murdoch and Lamb set out to begin the process of dramatically reshaping the tabloid form. Conboy uses the term “tabloidization” to describe the visual, content, and market-based changes that have determined what the tabloids look like today. These transitions

¹³ Bingham, Adrian, and Martin Conboy. *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the Present*. Peter Lang Ltd., 2015.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

will be outlined throughout this chapter, revealing how “tabloidization quickly came to be seen as essential for survival”.¹⁶

While papers — both of the broadsheet and tabloid variety — had generally followed a standard format, Lamb bombarded his paper with color blocks and bold print. The use of photographs and pictures also dramatically rose. Beyond the visuals of the *Sun*, Lamb encouraged his writers to tackle topics that had previously been barred in the press. Scandalous tales of sex appeared alongside heavy hitting politics pieces, and both kinds of stories were written in and titled with a kind of colloquial - even crude - language that had never been printed before.¹⁷ The *Sun* immediately exploded in popularity. By 1978, less than ten years after Murdoch’s arrival, the *Sun* became the highest circulated paper in Britain, with a daily circulation rate of 3.8 million papers.¹⁸ This success, and the build up to it, did not go unnoticed, as other tabloids not only adopted similar print styles and market strategies, but also attempted to push the boundaries of their own tabloids even further. This competition to perfect a new and bold model of paper for the mass market marks the beginning of what is considered as the tabloid era.

While there were notable distinctions across some of the tabloids of the time, this period — broadly confined to the 1970s and 1980s — is characterized by common content and market strategies amongst almost all of the papers. First and foremost, the tabloids fought over the right to claim that their paper best represented the working class, or the ‘ordinary’ Briton. This competition was rooted in the fact that a wider audience led to a bigger market, and the tabloids’ survival depended on selling as many copies as possible. This reality led to cheaper papers,

¹⁶ Conboy, Martin. *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community through Language*. Routledge, 2005.

¹⁷ Chippindale, Peter, Chris Horrie. *Stick It Up Your Punter! The Uncut Story of the Sun Newspaper*. Faber & Faber, 2013.

¹⁸ Ibid.

fierce competition over suppliers and distributors, and most of all, the prioritization of what Conboy describes as the “desire of advertisers above all other concerns”.¹⁹

However, mass appeal had to be driven by more than the low cost of a paper; the tabloids worked to produce stories that would generate the widest interest, publishing articles on sports, the entertainment industry, politics, lifestyle topics, and most importantly, scandal. This wide range of subject matter contrasted with the more traditional politics and business-oriented content of broadsheets like the *Times*. With a casual tone, and the incorporation of slang and humor, these new papers were also intended to be enjoyable and easy to read. The papers’ covers not only intended to catch a potential reader’s eyes, but also convince that reader to select their paper over other tabloids. Thus, this flashy, entertainment-driven tabloid style emerged over the backdrop of intense rivalry. The tabloid era was defined by a national competition to produce attention-grabbing news at competitive prices.

This pattern of production and consumption maintained the tabloids as powerful and profitable media outlets throughout the 1970s, ‘80s, and ‘90s. However, the advent of the Internet and proliferation of online news has significantly impacted the modern role of the tabloid press. Britons have turned less to print, and more to digital sources, many have argued that the role of the tabloids in society has begun to decline.²⁰ Circulation numbers have dropped across all major tabloid papers, including the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Mirror*, the three most popular tabloids to date, as people more frequently turned to online sources over the flashy papers that once caught their eyes. This trajectory has prompted many to believe that this tabloid era has ended. Yet, the tabloids have

¹⁹ Martin Conboy. *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community through Language*. (210)

²⁰ Beckett, Andy. “Revenge of the Tabloids.” *The Guardian*, 27 October 2016.

responded to the decline of the printed press with a rise in online presence; the major tabloid publications now run websites with some of the highest traffic rates in English-language pages. This “decline”, or end of the tabloid era, therefore, could perhaps be better characterized as a shift in format for the tabloid world. To remain competitive in what is still an immensely fierce market, the papers now work to expand their influence through the Internet, and in doing so, draw in a wider audience than ever before.

The history of the tabloid press in Great Britain is a story of innovation and competition over the attention of the British public. Within this overarching narrative, three publications have had a particular influence on the tabloids today. The *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Mirror* are the three most widely read papers in Great Britain. Each tabloid has distinctly impacted the tabloid model and national market; each paper has also made a name for itself by producing distinct variations of the sought-after ‘ordinary Briton’s’ ideal paper. *Stick It Up Your Punter: The uncut story of “The Sun”* recounts the origins and development of the *Sun*.²¹ The book provides insight into the inside politics and personalities behind the most read publication in Britain today. The *Sun* transformed the tabloids through its format and marketing in the 1970s; *Stick It Up Your Punter* describes this transformation as part of Rupert Murdoch and Larry Lamb’s larger efforts to make the *Sun* the official paper of working class Britain.²² The *Sun* was envisioned as “strident, campaigning, working class, young, entertaining, politically aware, cheeky, radical, anti-establishment, fun, and most of all, hugely profitable”.²³ The Lamb era reflected his effort as editor to set up the paper to achieve these goals, and generate significant profits through the monopolized attention of the working class market.

²¹ Chippindale, Horrie. *Stick It Up Your Punter!* (34)

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, 13.

Within Lamb's far-reaching vision for the *Sun* and its readership, he enacted specific tactics to boost the paper's profits. A cornerstone of this strategy was sex appeal. Lamb relied on sex to catalyze the paper's sales, and used its presence as part of the *Sun*'s greater image as a scandalous and enjoyable publication. Beginning in 1970, the *Sun* began to regularly feature images of women. In between stories of politics, sports, and other news, pictures of topless women appeared on an almost daily basis. This practice began a feature that is now known as the "Page 3 Girls" — a series named after the placement of the girls' images on the third page of the paper.²⁴

In 1981, almost a decade after the *Sun* was re-launched, Murdoch appointment Kelvin Mackenzie as Lamb's successor. If the Lamb era was marked by the solidification of the *Sun*'s place in the British press, the Mackenzie era was defined by both the increased partisan nature and political influence of the publication. While the paper had generally taken a Conservative stance on politics from its outset, in 1979, the *Sun* publicly aligned with the Conservative Party to endorse Margaret Thatcher's bid for the Office of the Prime Minister. This endorsement began the famous relationship between the paper — namely, Murdoch and Mackenzie — and Prime Minister Thatcher. The *Sun* of the 1980s was politically defined by its fierce support for the Prime Minister and her policies. This relationship showcased the prominent role of politics in the publication, specifically, the influence of this personal relationship (among others) on the political content of the paper.

The *Sun*'s Conservative affiliation was supplemented by Mackenzie's infamous editing style: *Stick It Up Your Punter* describes the Mackenzie era as nothing short of

²⁴ Chippindale, Horrie. *Stick It Up Your Punter!* 2013. (3)

outrageous.²⁵ As editor, Mackenzie took the foundations of Lamb's tabloid vision and expanded on them: he made the *Sun* a bolder and more sensationalist paper, constantly pushing boundaries in content and tone. Mackenzie's efforts are cited as the primary influence over the *Sun*'s format today, but they also reflect the significance of this era in general as a time of fierce competition over the attention of the British public.²⁶ The Mackenzie era confirmed the *Sun*'s place as the most successful publication in Britain, and the progression of the paper's style and content in both the Lamb and Mackenzie years has ultimately influenced the creation of the tabloid culture itself.

The *Daily Mail*, the second most read publication in Britain, was created in 1896. The first half a century of the publication's existence brought moderate market success and a relatively small loyal readership. However, the 1970s and 1980s marked the beginning of the modern *Daily Mail*: a middle-market tabloid defined by its focus on interest stories and sensationalist reporting. Like Murdoch and Lamb at the *Sun*, David English, appointed editor of the *Daily Mail* in 1971, transformed the paper in terms of content, style, and desired audience. However, unlike the *Sun*, which actively targeted a young readership, the *Daily Mail* also catered to an older readership than its tabloid counterparts.²⁷ Following English's reforms, the paper rapidly rose in British markets and proliferated among the public. English actively hired staff that could report on stories of entertainment value, and demonstrated the investigative abilities necessary to pursue in depth, and often-personal articles. This focus positioned the *Daily Mail* as the go-to paper for gossip and lifestyle news, even among the tabloids. This popular content and sensational tone has carried over into the current day, adapting alongside the other

²⁵ Chippindale, Horrie. *Stick It Up Your Punter!* 2013.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

tabloids as they competed for sales. Today, the *Daily Mail* online produces more content than ever before, and generates one of the largest online readerships of any English-language news site.²⁸ The paper has grown to embody the sensationalism of the tabloids and the importance of the entertainment elements to the tabloid format.

The third tabloid of focus, the *Daily Mirror*, was first launched in 1903 as a publication for women. The paper initially faced limited financial success and an inconsistent readership before undergoing several changes in management and staff. In 1930, the *Daily Mirror* was rebranded as a left-wing paper for the working class.²⁹ Since that time, the *Mirror's* consistent alignment with the Labour party — a stance that has not shifted since the conclusion of WWII — has positioned itself as the most widely read left-wing tabloid in Britain. The politics of the new publication were supplemented by casual tone and the inclusion of humor in stories; the *Mirror* was intended to appeal to the general public through an approachable, yet relatively sensible style. Most importantly, the tabloid had a half-broadsheet, half-tabloid format since the 1930s, making it one of the first papers to experiment with tabloid formatting.³⁰ Both the political affiliation and tone of the *Daily Mirror* revamped its popularity, and the 1960s and 70s were defined by the paper's success in the market as it sought to challenge the political platforms of tabloids like the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* and claim to represent the ordinary Briton. The success of the tabloid, however, began to fluctuate in the 1980s, as the bold new formatting and sensational content of both the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* drew audiences away from the more moderate tone of the *Daily Mirror*. So, in the 1990s, the *Daily Mirror* underwent a slew of financial challenges.

²⁸ Bingham, Conboy. *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the Present*. 2015.

²⁹ Conboy, *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community through Language*. 2005.

³⁰ Bingham, Conboy. *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the Present*. 2015.

Furthermore, a series of scandals that occurred between 1995 and 2004 challenged the role of the *Daily Mirror* as a popular, but moderate tabloid. While both the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* had already garnered reputations for their tawdry content and questionable ethics in reporting, the *Daily Mirror* had, up until this time, remained relatively unscathed. The most prominent scandal during this time period occurred when the tabloid published images of British troops torturing Iraqi soldiers.³¹ When the news broke that these images had in fact been faked, the *Daily Mirror* was engulfed in a scandal that resulted in the resignation of the tabloid's editor, Piers Morgan. This event, as well as other more minor incidents also involving accuracy and ethics, prompted the *Daily Mirror* to respond, and work to reassert itself both in the market and amongst its desired readership. Thus, the identity of the *Daily Mirror* today is defined by its efforts to simultaneously compete in sales with other tabloid papers, while maintaining its reputation as a less sensational product. The paper's self-given title, "the intelligent tabloid", demonstrates the *Daily Mirror*'s unique function in the tabloid model, a role that maintains its readership level at the third highest in Britain.³²

However, the success of the tabloids has prompted by both widespread popularity and backlash. The tabloid papers have often reported on stories that have either been factually unsound or obtained through questionable methods. In 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron launched The Leveson Inquiry, an official investigation into the practices of the tabloid press. The Leveson Inquiry specifically responded to a series of scandals involving phone hacking that had emerged from the practices of another tabloid, *News of the World*. The scandal was not limited to *News of the World*. In fact, *News of the World*

³¹ Bingham, Conboy. *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the Present*. 2015.

³² Conboy. *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community through Language*. 2005.

and the *Sun* share a common publisher, a subsidiary company within the media conglomerate of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. The Leveson Inquiry highlighted the extent to which these reporting practices defined the tactics of the tabloids today. Although the *Daily Mail* had no connection to the scandal, it was also specifically mentioned for producing stories of questionable accuracy and ethics.³³ The expressions of concern over the paper's practices issued by the Leveson Inquiry also demonstrates the persisting prioritization of the publication's sales, and the impact of this focus on the content it produces. It is, arguably, the defining feature of the tabloids' presence in the press today.

The Tabloid Community

While this brief history of the tabloid press in Britain emphasizes the importance of tabloids' efforts to be profitable, it also raises questions regarding the development of tabloid readership as a specific and consistent demographic of people. Martin Conboy, in his work *Tabloid Britain*, argues that the British tabloids have created and maintained their prominence in society through the creation of a kind of community.³⁴ The tabloids occupy their place in Britain not only for their attractive formatting or scandalous content, but also because of an intentional and extensive strategy enacted by the papers over the years to speak for part of the British public. This framework for a desired community of readership —the tabloids' advertised identity as representative of the ordinary, or working class Briton — stems predominantly from Benedict Anderson's

³³ Leveson. *The Leveson Inquiry Reports: An Inquiry into the Culture, Practices, and Ethics of the Press*. Volume II. 2012

³⁴ Conboy. *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community through Language*. 2005.

work. In his book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Anderson writes that nationalism emerged through the creation of communities connected by a shared identity.³⁵ This identity was aided by numerous common factors, such as a shared language or creation of a common other, and was ultimately compelling enough to prompt the development of nation states. The application of Anderson's theory highlights the extent to which the tabloid press' readership could be compared to such a cohesive unit. If the tabloids produce the voice of a community, therefore, their content showcases the desired values and opinions of this group. In their material and their style, these papers aim to either include or exclude specific people from the tabloid community. The history of the tabloids to Conboy, therefore, is a history of both a product and an identity.

Understanding the tabloid community — or even attempting to establish if there could be a common identity among tabloid readers — begins with the basic assumption that the tabloids aim to speak to and for working class Britons. The idea of the ordinary person as the target readership stems from the origins of the tabloid papers as an alternative to middle class-associated broadsheets. This voice has persisted through the tabloids' modern transformation, and has been repeatedly insisted upon by the papers themselves. The *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Mirror* all have long history of claiming to represent the interests and values of the 'ordinary' person. This is the foundation of the idealized working class: British tabloids take what they know of a large demographic of the population and create a general outline of what working class Britons would want to

³⁵ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, 2006.

read.³⁶ This strategy, however, relies upon not producing content that appeals to a remarkably wide audience. Tabloids' survival depends on their ability to convince a large number of readers to keep coming back. In this immensely competitive market, each tabloid competes to claim that they represent the reader better than the other, and produce articles that seek to confirm that. Analyzing the content of the tabloid press, therefore, showcases some of the values that these papers aim to promote.

The most obvious identifying characteristic of the tabloids is their language. Tabloid articles typically take a far more causal tone than their broadsheet counterparts, and contain slang, humor, and innuendo. This style highlights the tabloid effort to produce content that mirrors the way that most British people actually speak. In contrast to the high-brow technical language of some publications — such as the *Guardian* and the *Times* — the tabloids have thrived on the powerful idea that people want to read papers that talk about events in the way that they might talk about them in their homes. While the distinction in tone between the broadsheets and tabloids should not be cited a sole basis of identity, it does begin to offer insight into why people might read and engage with the tabloid papers on a consistent basis.

Moving beyond tone, the tabloids are also known for their entertainment news. Tabloids reports on pop culture extensively and constantly; each paper competes to be the most informed in news surrounding television, music, sports, and celebrities. This emphasis on entertainment stems from their original model; tabloid papers were intended to produce stories with lighter content and wider-reaching appeal in order to attract populations that did not purchase papers that solely covered politics or business news.³⁷

³⁶ Conboy. *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community through Language*, 2005.

³⁷ Ibid.

Most importantly, the tabloids were intended to be fun to read. This competition for engagement today has translated into a race to provide the most up to date and scandalous gossip about prominent figures in British society. Papers such as the *Sun* originally aimed to get ahead in this competition through the use of sex and women. Today, numerous papers still include regular features containing suggestive images of women. While sex was a clear and successful marketing strategy, its continued importance highlights its role in the type of identity the tabloids hope to maintain: the scandalous, playful, and ultimately entertaining paper that the British public wants to read.

Within the broad category of entertainment news, the tabloid press has emphasized certain topics that shine light on the types of popular culture that they deem most important to the ordinary reader. These subjects — which include sports and national history— and the manner in which they report on them, emphasize the tabloids’ efforts to reinforce a community based in shared interests. Tabloids produce large numbers of pieces covering a variety of sports, competitions, and leagues both in England and throughout Europe. The professional athletes who play many of these sports are also featured in the tabloids as celebrities, and coverage of their lives makes up a considerable portion of the tabloid gossip model. However, the tabloids tend to feature some sports over others, historically favoring football over other popular sports including cricket, rugby, and tennis.³⁸ The focus on football and footballers reflects the respective popularity of the sport over its counterparts, but also emphasizes the fact that football is largely considered a sport of the general public. In contrast, sports like cricket and tennis have a greater association with the middle class and elites. The prioritized coverage of football highlights the tabloids’ intended readership and their efforts to maintain their

³⁸ Conboy. *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community through Language*, 2005.

relevance to this audience. This coverage, therefore, identifies and promotes a message of what working class Britons would be watching through its content.

However, perhaps one of the most powerful methods of studying tabloid identity comes not from their efforts to characterize their own readership, but rather, from their efforts to exclude and denounce other people, values, and communities in Britain through their publication. Through their articles, the tabloids create an ‘other’, from which they can contrast the values and identities of their readers. Since their mass proliferation, the tabloids have relied on galvanizing opposition to several consistent ‘others’, in order to reiterate their own principles. The first, and original, ‘other’ is the institutions of the privileged elite. The tabloids were created to represent the interests of the working class, a voice that has historically been disadvantaged compared to the middle and upper class populations of Britain. Today, this narrative translates to a general opposition to power, and ridicule of people with authority, particularly in the political field. In their articles, tabloids frequently create a dichotomous relationship between institutions and people, claiming to represent the latter.³⁹ Regardless of the specific tabloid’s political affiliation, the papers use their treatment of government officials, and the British government in general, to bolster the message that they embody the interests and values of the ordinary Briton in the face of exclusion from those in power. For example, the tabloids regularly report on the Prime Minister, senior Cabinet ministers, and various other politicians in a manner that focuses on either their personal failures or their supposed-inabilities to address the needs of the people, identifying them dismissively through the use of their first names, and phrases like “putting the interests of people first”, in order to convey a specific message of exclusion. This ‘other’-ing tool is effective; the tabloids utilize their

³⁹ Conboy. *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community through Language*, 2005.

sensationalism to create a monopoly around themselves as the true voice of the British people.

Moreover, the effort to assert this self-claimed identity as the voice of excluded, ordinary Britain extends beyond government officials. A particularly charged enemy of the tabloids has been the so-called “political correctness”. The tabloid press has envisioned this particular group of people — a demographic who often conflict in political beliefs with the majority of the tabloid papers — as a threat to the tabloid model. The tabloids depend on their ability to push the boundaries of acceptable press practice through their sensationalism and subject matter. A prominent example of this conflict between the tabloid press and the politically correct members of the public is the use of sex in their papers. While a small number of tabloid series featuring nude or almost-nude women have been discontinued, including the *Sun*’s infamous ‘Page 3 Girls’, most tabloids have responded to growing opposition towards these features with contempt, maintaining their usage of sex as a marketing tool.⁴⁰ The tabloids have defended their use of sex as a rejection of the liberal, politically correct, and feminist agenda – identities deemed contradictory to the values of working class people.⁴¹ The tabloids’ hard stance in this conversation reflects their efforts to promote the message that they include sex and women in their papers because most ordinary Britons consume this type of press. This message reiterates the tabloid identity as a broad-sweeping collection of people who are defined in opposition to the elite or liberals of Britain who would deem these images improper. While none of these examples capture a complete image of the tabloid community, they begin to paint a picture of the types of values the press aims to convey.

⁴⁰ Bingham, Conboy. *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the Present*, 2015.

⁴¹ Beckett, Andy. “Revenge of the Tabloids.” *The Guardian*, 27 October 2016.

Within each of these topics, the celebrity figure functions as a crucial point of study. Whether covering politics or music, tabloids tend to create articles that emphasize the roles of individual people over broader concepts or institutions. These individuals, therefore, function as important projections of the tabloid identity. Conboy describes celebrities in the tabloids as “contemporary prisms through which the standards of Britain are paraded and judged”.⁴² How the papers cover and treat certain celebrities based on both their identities and their actions will provide further insight into the principles of the tabloid community. Furthermore, while the tabloids appear to have sustained a marketable projection of working class identity through their papers, this success ultimately derives from the power of their representational rhetoric. Conboy comments that, “it is ironic that the national British tabloid press is able to present itself as being on the side of those excluded ordinary people while remaining part of powerful global economic forces themselves.”⁴³ The tabloids are the most widely read papers in Britain; they are owned and operated by some of the wealthiest and most powerful figures in media today. Yet, they continue to rely on their ability to convincingly represent a mass working class readership. It should be noted that the tabloid press did emerge in response to a genuine absence in press catered to the working class. However, Conboy highlights how even the original tabloids of the 19th and 20th centuries stemmed from a gap in the media market, rather than an intentional effort to elevate the voices of ordinary people. Tabloid identity, therefore, is first and foremost a marketable concept that has been adapted over time to make the tabloids the most widely read papers in the country, as well as a highly influential voice in British society.

⁴² Conboy. *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community through Language*, 2005.

⁴³ Ibid.

However, the truth of the tabloids' management is very much public knowledge, and a reality that has not diminished the papers' continuing influence within the British public. Those who identify with the values advertised by the tabloids loyally consume them because the content continues to be engaging. This widespread consumption showcases that large numbers of the British public derive not only entertainment from the tabloids, but also some political or social consequence. In fact, this influence impacts decisions that are as trivial as gossip, and as important as voting:

“For the last two decades, through Labour, coalition and Conservative governments, the tabloids have successfully chosen and then framed most of the debates that have dominated British domestic politics, ensuring that law and order, immigration, the role of the state, and Britain's relationship with Europe have all been discussed in ever more rightwing terms”.⁴⁴

A report published from the Migration Observatory in Oxford University offers a powerful example of the extent of influence held by the tabloid press today. The same tabloids that print pictures of scantily clad women and celebrity gossip have, without fail, the ability to influence Britain's political future. This combination showcases the tabloid press' successful effort to galvanize and represent a significant portion of the British population under a common idealized identity for a political agenda. More importantly, however, it also symbolizes the tabloids' unique role as both the proclaimed voice of the ordinary person and the market interest of some of the most powerful people in Britain.

⁴⁴ The Migration Observatory, “A Decade of Immigration in the British Press”, 2019.

Chapter Two: Defining Exclusion: The history of Islamophobia in the British press

"Muslims in the UK feel targeted by media and political institutions, which in their understanding contribute heavily towards a deteriorating climate of fear, a rise in far-right groups and a rise of anti-Muslim racism... Most Muslims now feel they are hated."⁴⁵

In 2015, The Islamic Human Rights Commission issued a report that outlined alarming evidence indicating the escalation of Islamophobia in Great Britain, and offered insight into the fear felt by many Muslims in the country today.⁴⁶ Like many studies before it, the report cited the role of media in perpetuating and exacerbating negative attitudes towards Muslims. The exact connection between the media and Islamophobia today, however, is a complex reflection of both the role of the press in British society and the history of anti-Muslim sentiment in Great Britain. Tabloids have often functioned as a particularly divisive manifestation of some of the most extreme views in Britain. Yet, the relationship between the tabloid press and Islamophobia has been the subject of widespread debate, ranging from outright rejection of the idea that the media has perpetuated anti-Muslim sentiment, to adamant insistence of the ability to actually prove a deep-rooted and powerful connection between the two. This chapter, therefore, aims to analyze the intersection of the tabloids' practices outlined in the previous chapter, with Islamophobia in British society today. Specifically, the chapter identifies a conflict between the parameters of envisioned tabloid community and depictions of British Muslims; the contradictory depictions of the two groups in popular culture reflect a conscious effort to exclude the latter from the tabloid identity.

⁴⁵ Ameli, Saied Reza. Merali, Arzu, "Environment of Hate: The new normal for Muslims in the UK". Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2015.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The definition of Islamophobia introduced in the introduction of this thesis focuses on the ideological prejudice towards Islam, and the people and practices associated with it. This prejudice is showcased through exclusionary practices that have dramatically changed form over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries in accordance with current events, various political trends, and an increase in Muslim populations in Britain. While the term Islamophobia only dates back to 1997, major instances of anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain originate in the 1960s.⁴⁷ During this period, the first major influx of South Asian – particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi – immigrants moved to Britain, and faced severe and often violent backlash. In the 1960s, ‘70s, and ‘80s, white supremacist groups in Britain carried out racist violence against Pakistani and South Asian individuals in attacks known as ‘Paki-bashing,’ manifesting British society’s extreme anti-Muslim and anti-South Asian attitudes. This history is crucial in establishing an Islamophobic precedent in Britain, and shining light on its extreme presence within this community.

However, the most important contributing factor to Islamophobia in Britain today were the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks that took place in 2001 and 2005 respectively.⁴⁸ Following these events, attitudes towards Muslims in Britain shifted dramatically. Anti-Muslim sentiment proliferated in Britain in various forms, ranging from a new frequency and magnitude of Islamophobia in mainstream discourse, to an increase in hate crimes, to the general creation of a hostile environment towards Muslim populations in the country. In the last few years, this trend has been exacerbated, as anti-refugee and anti-immigrant rhetoric has dominated political discourse.

⁴⁷ Elahi, Farah. Khan, Omar, “Islamophobia: Still a challenge for us all”. Runnymede Trust, 2017.

⁴⁸ Baker, Paul, et al. *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: the Representation of Islam in the British Press*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Islamophobia in the British parallels the development of anti-Muslim sentiments in the country as a whole. However, as Paul Baker writes, the British press is not solely a product of external changes in society:

“In the United Kingdom, national newspapers function as more than mere ‘mirrors’ of reality. Instead, they have the role of constructing ideologically motivated versions of reality, which are aimed at persuading people that certain phenomena are good or bad, leading John Richardson to describe journalism as an ‘argumentative discourse genre’.⁴⁹

The history of Islamophobia in the British press, then, is the history of the role of the media in diminishing, intensifying, and shaping perceptions of Islam. Early representations of Muslims in the British press reflected an ‘argumentative discourse genre’ rooted in the message that Islam is an antiquated religion. Popular press often invoked tropes such as Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* to position the religion in conflict with the norms of modern British society.⁵⁰ This depiction of Islam demonstrated ignorance towards Muslims from both the press and the general public. While these depictions were not positive, unlike today, there was not a particularly pressing fear voiced by either the media or society as a whole in regards to the faith itself. In other words, negative depictions of Islam stemmed from either negative attitudes towards people who happened to identify as Muslim or from the perception that the religion was out-of-touch with reality.

However, the events of 9/11 and 7/7 dramatically redefined the relationship between the press and Islam. The impact of 9/11 was instant: Islam was no longer

⁴⁹ Baker, Paul, *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: the Representation of Islam in the British Press*. 2015

⁵⁰ Richardson, John. *(Mis)Representing Islam: The racism and rhetoric of British broadsheet newspapers*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. 2004.

considered simply an antiquated faith; it became a threat. According to one study, in the month following the 9/11 attacks, around 82 percent of press concerning Islam discussed terror.⁵¹ After the 7/7 bombings in 2005, approximately 72 percent of media coverage about Islam was also connected to terrorism or extremism.⁵² No form of media offers a better example of this associative strategy than the tabloid press, which responded to 9/11 with particular ferocity. Utilizing the strategies that they had developed over the past decades – including their bold formatting, polarized views, and unique willingness to use extreme language — the tabloids produced countless sensational articles that created an atmosphere of panic, isolating and targeting Muslims both in and outside of Britain. This was not merely a temporary alarmist reaction to a series of tragedies. Rather, the extreme and sensationalist coverage of Islam that began during this time period became the new norm for content about the religion and its followers. According to another study, in five years between 2001 and 2006, there was a 270 percent increase in news on Islam.⁵³ Ninety-one percent of that coverage was negative in tone, often including associations with terrorism and religious fundamentalism, or generally attempting to portray the religion in a negative light. Eighty-four percent of press coverage specifically portrayed Muslims as ‘likely to cause damage or danger’.⁵⁴

A crucial part of the effort to isolate and exclude Muslim populations from society was the shift in the discourse surrounding Islam itself. The proliferation of negative press on Islam has also led to a more homogenous coverage of Muslims.

⁵¹ Baker, Paul, *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: the Representation of Islam in the British Press*. 2015

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Allen, Chris. “A review of the evidence relating to the representation of Muslims and Islam in the British media.” *Institute of Applied Social Studies, School of Social Policy*, 2012.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Muslims have been placed in “an indistinguishable and undifferentiated group where all of its members were seen to have the same attributes, qualities, capabilities, and characteristics, most of which were extremely negative”.⁵⁵ These stereotypes reflect the artificial mass association with terror, and the subsequent creation of a climate of fear and suspicion towards Muslim communities. The tabloids have championed this process: For example, in 2015, the *Sun* released an “exclusive poll” reporting that one in five British Muslims sympathized with “jihadis”.⁵⁶ According to Al Jazeera, the article prompted over 3000 complaints, including an official censure from Britain’s Independent Press Standards Organization (IPSO) for its misleading nature. The *Sun* maintained its support of the article, indicating that the telephone poll was conducted fairly and that “a graph inside the paper clarified that 5 percent of those surveyed had a lot of sympathy, 14 percent had some sympathy and 71 percent had no sympathy for young Muslims who leave the UK to join fighters in Syria”.⁵⁷ Yet, the contrast between the actual breakdown of the poll results and the extreme nature of the piece’s embodied the tabloids’ approach to portrayals of Muslims: The factual inaccuracy, reliance on fear, and continued associations between Islam and terror, all reflect the continued strategies of the press to associate Islam with this singular identity — almost fifteen years since its mass proliferation.

Moreover, two general trends characterize the widespread Islamophobia in the British press today. The first targets Muslims through the separation of Muslim identities in society from mainstream cultural narratives. In *Discourse Analysis and Media*

⁵⁵ Allen, Chris. “A review of the evidence relating to the representation of Muslims and Islam in the British media.” 2012.

⁵⁶ Safdar, Anealla. “UK: Poor reporting, media illiteracy fuels Islamophobia.” *Al Jazeera*, 29 March 2016.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Attitudes: the Representation of Islam in the British Press, Paul Baker argues that the British media excludes Muslims through the creation of two dichotomous ‘worlds’.⁵⁸ The first world refers to modern day reality, while the second refers to the “separation, differentiation, and negativisation” of spaces that are occupied by Muslims in society.⁵⁹ These spaces are based in language, and are the products of extensive linguistic effort to associate Muslims with distinct characteristics from the constructed norms of British society. In the press, this linguistic strategy reflects far more than the mass publishing of negative articles. Rather, the exclusionary practices towards Muslims are based in patterns of association between Islam and specific alarming, negative, or simply divisive images. The success of this ‘othering’ strategy has fundamentally contributed to the creation of a norm in press attitudes towards Muslims that now permits the use of unfairly negative or offensive content in the mainstream media.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the tabloids depend on the use of both imagery and buzzwords to attract a wide readership and promote their often-controversial platforms. Baker identifies the most frequent words used in articles related to Islam published by Britain’s most popular broadsheet and tabloid papers.⁶⁰ The results for each grouping shed light on the strategies of coverage of both types of papers, and particularly offer insight into the tabloids’ linguistic strategies of exclusion: In news coverage of ‘Muslim groups’, broadsheet papers most often included the words Taliban, Hamas, Fatah, Hezbollah, and Al Qaeda — as well as alternative spellings of each group — in

⁵⁸ Baker, Paul, *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: the Representation of Islam in the British Press*. 2015

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

their articles.⁶¹ The tabloids' most frequent word in stories covering 'Muslim groups', however, was only 'Al Qaeda'. The contrast in frequency within the citation of 'Muslim groups' between the two types of papers raises important questions concerning the focus of their press coverage. Both sets of terms emphasize the press' narrow scope of coverage concerning potential 'Muslim groups'. In the broadsheets, this list chiefly identifies 'Muslim groups' that are generally associated with negative press coverage and limited parameters of associated attributes. However, the sole inclusion of 'Al Qaeda' in Baker's findings indicates the extent to which these already-limited parameters of advertised Muslim identity in the press are further constrained by the chosen material of the tabloid news.

The lack of range in this set of key words, however, should be contrasted with the number of key words identified as commonly associated with articles on 'terror' or 'extremism': Hamza, fanatics, Bakri, hate, Choudary, fanatic, maniacs, hook, Omar, terror, terrorists, Bin, bomb, Laden, bomber, cops, police, jail, and PC all frequently occur in tabloid stories that feature both terrorism and Islam or Muslims.⁶² The stark contrast between the range of words associated with 'Muslim groups' and 'terror' highlights the types of articles most frequently produced by the tabloids. While the former group of key words in the broadsheets indicates a slightly more nuanced set of terms involving various religiously affiliated organizations, the tabloids' most frequent words highlight the frequency of tabloid pieces that discuss terror, a contrast that aligns with the tabloids' usage of sensationalism and extremity to generate mass sales and perpetuate more extreme views.

⁶¹ Baker, Paul, *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: the Representation of Islam in the British Press*. 2015

⁶² Ibid.

Furthermore, many of these frequently used words function as dichotomy symbols – terms or images utilized by the papers to exclude Muslims from mainstream discourse. Baker describes the use of dichotomy symbols in the press as a popular mechanism to remind the reader of negative or suspicious attitudes towards Muslims.⁶³ Common examples of these terms include hijab, mosque, imam, or other terms obviously connected to religion. However, the tabloids’ frequently used terms also include more extreme associative images, such as terror, fanatic, and jail. The frequency of these symbols highlights both the repeated efforts to stereotype and negatively portray Muslims in the press, and the particular focus of the tabloids on covering stories that promote the association between Islam and extremism.

The prominence of negative associative strategies in the British tabloids’ coverage of Islam extends beyond a selection of words: the tabloids have repeatedly manipulated terms associated with Islam to further exclude Muslims from British society. For example, the *Daily Mail* has a particular history of referring to followers of Islam as ‘Moslems’. This title, an antiquated and somewhat offensive version Muslim, has been specifically and repeatedly rejected by the media committee of the Muslim Council of Britain, one of the most well recognized representative groups in Britain for Muslims.⁶⁴ Despite the MCB’s request, the *Daily Mail* continued to produce articles using the term Moslem. In fact, the word experienced a spike in usage vis-à-vis its alternative, Muslims, following the 9/11 attacks and 7/7 bombings, as well as after the terror attacks in Paris in 2015 and London in 2017.⁶⁵ The *Daily Mail*’s insistence on using the word ‘Moslem’

⁶³ Baker, Paul, *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: the Representation of Islam in the British Press*. 2015

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

despite the paper's awareness of its offensive connotation during particular times of distress highlights the tabloids' brash and insensitive tactics to ultimately belittle and exclude the Muslim community.

Yet, the history of Islamophobia in the tabloids does not simply stem from negative portrayals, frequent associations with terrorism, and offensive language: anti-Muslim sentiment in the tabloid press reflects the contradiction between the idealized British society depicted in the papers and the Muslim identity defined in the press. Tabloids like the *Sun* — self-identifying as the protectors of an imagined British culture — have taken particular issue with the influence of Islam on the Britain.⁶⁶ The *Sun*, then, represents Islam's impact as a perceived threat to the very essence of their readership. The tabloids showcase this threat through increased coverage of Islam that emphasizes extreme cultural differences between the idealized tabloid community and the artificially homogenous depiction of the religion. A study conducted Dr. Chris Allen for a parliamentary group on Islamophobia in 2012 identified an increased emphasis on news stories that focused on the cultural differences between Muslim communities and the Christian or non-religiously-affiliated values that might appear in the tabloids. Allen's study found that in 2008, for the first time since 9/11, the press based their exclusionary practices towards Muslims not only around associations with terror, but also in reference to a pressing cultural conflict. In that year, the “volume of stories about religious and cultural differences (32 percent of stories by 2008) overtook terrorism related pieces (27 percent by 2008)”.⁶⁷ The rise of media covering a cultural divide — particularly when

⁶⁶ Allen, Chris. “A review of the evidence relating to the representation of Muslims and Islam in the British media.” *Institute of Applied Social Studies, School of Social Policy*, 2012.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

aligned with the persisting 91 percent negative portrayal rate of Muslims — reflects a crucial shift in the exclusionary framework created by the British press.

Alongside the growing trend in media that focuses on the perceived culture of Islam in Britain, there has been a gradual process of individuation among Muslim subjects of media attention. Baker writes that more and more news stories have featured personalized stories on Muslims, rather than a discussion of the religion as a whole.⁶⁸ This trend has been paired with a shift in focus away from Muslims outside of Britain, and towards those in the country. At first glance, the process of individuation in media portrayal seems to almost challenge the previous narrative of a uniform set of exclusionary tools that have been broadly placed upon Muslim communities by the British press. However, Baker clarifies his claims through the idea that the individuation of Muslims in the press has been combined with the powerful set of homogenized stereotypes crafted by the tabloid and broadsheet publications. Thus, while individualized portrayals of Muslims have proliferated in the media — a product of the rise in prominent British Muslims in popular culture — these depictions often represent different manifestations of similar exclusionary tactics. In short, the press has embraced the use of Muslim individuals to promote exclusionary messages on a personalized level. Islamophobia in the press today, then, is a widening space in which new individualized tools are being used to ultimately achieve the same goal of isolating and excluding the Muslim community in Britain.

⁶⁸ Baker, Paul, *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: the Representation of Islam in the British Press*. 2015

Chapter Three: Unpacking Islamophobia: Profile analysis of British Muslims in the entertainment industry

Two prominent developments shape current depictions of British Muslims in the British press: first, the role of the tabloids as a particularly prominent propagator of Islamophobia in society; second, the gradual individuation of British Muslims in tabloid coverage over the last few decades. In an article for *Middle East Eye*, London-based writer, researcher, and activist Arzu Merali argues that British society has created the figure of the “impossible Muslim”.⁶⁹ Identifying a central tension between being “Muslim” and being “British”, Merali argues that the current climate in Britain has prompted a perceived dichotomy between valuing a Muslim civil society and achieving acceptance in mainstream culture. British Muslims engage in complex identity negotiation dictated by ultimately exclusionary understandings of religion and civic identity in British society. Tabloid portrayals of British Muslim celebrities offer evidence of the consequences of this framework, perpetuating this dichotomy by creating celebrity personas in accordance with traits deemed acceptable in British society by the tabloid press. The tabloids portray certain British Muslims as Muslims without — to borrow Merali’s phrasing — the “excesses”.⁷⁰ They are Muslim just enough to be Muslim, but not enough to challenge the determined narratives of British identity that have been created by the tabloids. Some of the most important of these tabloid traits include political affiliation, social class, and cultural connections to the predominantly white working class English readership. This strategy — as well as the importance of these

⁶⁹ Merali, Arzu. “Defining extremism: What does 2019 hold for British Muslims?”. *Middle East Eye*, January 8, 2019.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

foundational characteristics in the tabloid press — allows tabloids to portray certain Muslims positively, while ultimately enacting a powerful tool of societal exclusion.

The tabloids publicize the persona of a “good” or “exceptional Muslim”, exemplified by certain celebrities, to define how British Muslims should act and think in modern day Britain. The exceptional British Muslim is a figure that identifies with Islam, and values certain aspects of their religious and cultural identity, but ultimately seeks to belong, or at least support, the normal tabloid understanding of British identity. The “exceptional Muslim” is promoted through standard tabloid strategies of celebrity coverage: constant and detailed coverage of private and public lives, producing a kind of persona by highlighting specific aspects of celebrity profiles. The assessment of religious identity is not about the beliefs or actions of the celebrities themselves, but rather, like all celebrity profiles, the personas created by the press. These personas simultaneously disseminate positive depictions of individual Muslims, while using their identities to create idealized profiles that reproduce ultimately Islamophobic messages.

This chapter explores these depictions through the analysis of celebrities who identify as both Muslim and British, and work within the entertainment industry. My analysis of famous Muslims in entertainment demonstrates the creation of the “exceptional Muslim” persona. Their coverage in the tabloids showcases both an overwhelmingly positive depiction of famous British Muslims in these fields and narratives intended to fit these figures within the dominant narrative of English national tabloid identity.

Zayn Malik

In 2017, *The Daily Mirror* identified 25-year-old Zayn Malik as “the most high profile British Muslim in the entertainment industry”⁷¹. Malik found fame through his membership in One Direction — a boy band that rose to international prominence after their success on British talent show *The X Factor* in 2011 — but has become an individual icon in the last few years after launching a solo singing career. Like most celebrities, most tabloid coverage focuses on Malik’s style, career, and love life. The *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Mirror* all present extensive accounts of sightings of Malik in public, both alone and with various love interests or friends. For example, all three tabloids report on Malik’s ongoing relationship with Gigi Hadid, and updates and sightings of the couple collectively represent the most frequent reason for Malik’s appearance in the press.⁷² Malik also regularly attracts attention from the tabloid press for his dramatic range of hairstyles and growing collection of tattoos.⁷³ While tabloid reporting on Zayn Malik is often indistinguishable from standard celebrity coverage, all three major papers also include articles on Malik that emphasize facets of his identity that are different from the normal tabloid focus. These do not necessarily aim to portray the singer in either a negative or positive light; rather, they separate the subject from the tabloid-manufactured English identity by shining light on topics that usually would not be included, such as

⁷¹ Nattrass, JJ. “Zayn Malik reveals he was detained by US officials at airport for THREE hours during One Direction tour”. *The Mirror*, June 20, 2017.

⁷² Pearce, Tilly. “HADID YOU KNOW..? Who is Gigi Hadid, how tall is Zayn Malik’s on-off girlfriend, who’s her sister Bella and what’s her age?”. *The Sun*, November 6, 2018.

⁷³ Morris, Robyn. “ZAYN MAL-INK: Zayn Malik tattoos explained – from his new head inking to Gigi’s eyes and the Perrie Edwards arm design”. *The Sun*, May 1, 2018.

extensive coverage of Malik's religion, his family, and relationship with both his faith and nationality.

The *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Mirror* have all published articles that feature Zayn Malik's background, specifically his identity as a Pakistani Briton of Muslim faith. The *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Mirror* regularly report on articles that either directly or indirectly involve Malik's identity as a Muslim, in the form of celebrating holidays such as Eid Al-Adha, discussing his father's background as a Pakistani Muslim, or tackling more serious issues regarding racism and Islamophobia.⁷⁴ Further, the integration of Islam into Malik's tabloid persona becomes evident as his religion is not only the focus of particular articles, but becomes repeated across several pieces, which include mention of Malik's religion and family, even when there is no additional gossip about his religious identity in the article. As Malik's religious affiliation becomes increasingly prevalent in recent news, it moves from a celebrity update to a prominent part of his tabloid identity. The frequent mention of Malik's Muslim identity stands in stark contrast to the fact that none of the tabloids have published stories on the family and religious background of other members of One Direction — despite their comparable fame as individuals.

Two styles of pieces consistently employ this association. The first set of tabloid news includes general passing references to Malik's Muslim background or family. In these instances, Malik's religion is not discussed or explored extensively, merely stated as a fact. These references function as reminders of his 'Muslimness', without a clear comment or judgment. By situating his religion within a greater story about a different topic, it serves as a crucial, but secondary reiteration of his associated identity. Other

⁷⁴ Stamell, Demeter. "Zayn Malik's girlfriend Gigi Hadid and her mum Yolanda join the star and his mother Trisha celebrating Eid al-Adha with a happy family selfie". *Daily Mail*, September 4, 2017.

articles, however, extensively cover Malik's religion and its demonstrations in daily life. For example, all three tabloids published stories covering Malik and Hadid celebrating Eid Al-Adha in 2018.⁷⁵ The articles present Eid as a stylish and fun event that feature Hadid and Malik's family.

They also, however, highlight that this lighthearted time has a deeper association for Malik, who takes on the "responsibility" of being a Muslim British pop star. In its 2018 coverage of the holiday, the *Daily Mail* reported that Hadid celebrated Eid with Malik and his family in London⁷⁶. The article includes images of Malik and Malik's family in traditional Pakistani clothes, and briefly alludes to the history of the holiday in Islam. In this sense, the tabloids cover Malik celebrating Eid in a typical combination of celebrity gossip and holiday festivities. The *Daily Mail* article, however, then proceeds to discuss Malik's religious background: that his father is British-Pakistani and Muslim and his mother converted from Christianity to Islam when she married her husband. While they vary in specific wording, all three publications followed the immediate coverage of the celebration, including the same quotation:

"I take a great sense of pride — and responsibility — in knowing that I am the first of my kind, from my background. I'm not currently practising but I was raised in the Islamic faith, so it will always be with me, and I identify a lot with the culture. But I'm just me. I don't want to be defined by my religion or my cultural background."⁷⁷

The significance of these references is perhaps best highlighted by contrasting how the tabloids reported on Eid in 2018 with how they reported on the same event in 2012. The *Daily Mail* covered Eid celebrations with Malik and his family in 2012 — when Malik

⁷⁵ Stamell, Demeter. "Zayn Malik's girlfriend Gigi Hadid and her mum Yolanda join the star and his mother Trisha celebrating Eid al-Adha with a happy family selfie". *Daily Mail*, September 4, 2017.

⁷⁶ Lawrence, Rebecca. "Gigi Hadid cosies up to Zayn Malik and his mother as she joins her beau's family to celebrate Eid". *Daily Mail*, August 28, 2018.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

brought his then-girlfriend Perrie Edwards to Eid festivities to meet his family — in a remarkably similar manner to the beginning of the 2018 article⁷⁸. Describing the couple's outfits and information about Eid, before further detailing gossip surrounding Edwards' and Malik's relationship, the article is entirely focused on the event and its significance within celebrity gossip. The contrast between 2012 and 2018, therefore, occurs when the former piece ties Eid to a narrative of celebrity gossip, while the latter situates the events within a discussion on Malik's religion. This distinction indicates more than a change in thoroughness of reporting: an important factor in this divergence is the change from Malik's status as a well known member of a popular boy band in 2012, to Malik's role as the most popular British Muslim entertainer in 2018. This contrast, then, may suggest a notable shift in the tabloids' reporting on Malik as his fame has developed. As Malik became a more notable figure in society, the extent to which ordinary events like Eid are shaped into revealing insights into his character became more noticeable. Malik's religion, therefore, became heavily focused on once the tabloids' need to produce an associated persona arose.

Another instance of this strategy can be found in June of 2017, when the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Mirror* all reported that Malik, after entering the United States to tour with the boy band One Direction, was detained at the airport for several hours. Unlike the previously discussed articles about Eid, there is no surface-level element to these stories. Rather, all three directly addresses the fact that Malik was singled out because of his race and perceived religion by American immigration and security. While this story is starkly different from the Eid pieces, the *Mirror* uses the exact same quotation as the 2018 article

⁷⁸ Gritt, Emma. "It's getting serious then! Little Mix's Perrie Edwards meets One Direction beau Zayn Malik's family members as they celebrate Eid". Daily Mail, August 12, 2012.

about Malik's opinions about being culturally Muslim. The repetition of a quote indicates a heavy emphasis on the idea that Malik is known for his religious identity. By consistently returning to the words that Malik sees his religious background as a source of pride and responsibility, the tabloids make stories that are already associated with Malik's identity as a Muslim, even more explicitly associated with his daily life. The use of the same quotation also suggests a kind of article connection between the two events, part of an event to place the two stories within a common narrative about the star. Yet, the context of this article is ultimately negative; Malik was stopped at the American border because of his race and religion. All three articles indicate that this event was an act of racial profiling, but then revert to Malik's response to the events. The *Mirror* reports, "And though the experience must have been unnerving to say the least, he has no hard-feelings left over from it, saying he understands the "need" for caution - especially given the events at home."⁷⁹ With this statement, the articles indicate that Malik is not outraged by these events, but rather, officially sees them as a cautious response to reality. This characterization shifts Malik's own portrayal, therefore, to not only emphasize his religious identity, but once again promote a platform of "responsibility" to not only comment, but justify these events, a part of being such a prominent British Muslim celebrity.

While an important insight into Malik's life, the airport events are not the first time that the tabloids reported on Malik voicing his moderate opinions on religion (and associated topics) as part of his associate profile. In December of 2016, the three publications put out stories that Malik's 14 year-old sister, Safaa, had received death

⁷⁹ Nattrass, JJ. "Zayn Malik reveals he was detained by US officials at airport for THREE hours during One Direction tour". The Mirror, June 20, 2017.

threats after she posted a photo of the family Christmas tree on her Instagram account. The *Sun*'s piece begins with the typically bold title, "Shock Death Threats", and explains that the family received threats from trolls claiming that they were "disgracing" Islam for celebrating Christmas.⁸⁰ Two components of this story are particularly insightful into Malik's tabloid persona. First, that this story focuses on Malik's family, and once again deepens the association between Malik as a celebrity today, and his personal background as a British Muslim. Second, that Malik and his family have been the victims of extreme online trolls and have responded as moderate, reasonable people. The tabloids express that Malik and his family have once again been singled out because of their religion. Malik is reported to have responded to the events by remarking that, "the hate that Safaa received was just disgusting", before discussing his own connection to Christmas celebrations.⁸¹

The previous articles have shed light on the development of Malik's tabloid persona as one of close cultural connection to Islam, defined by a self-determined responsibility to represent the religion in a moderate way. In November of 2018, however, the tabloids reported that in an interview with *British Vogue*, the iconic British Muslim no longer identified with the religion with which he was raised.⁸² This announcement generated widespread tabloid interest, as well as an impressive number of responses on social media. Malik's interview, where he stated, "I don't believe any of it. I just believe if you're a good person everything is going to go right for you", directly

⁸⁰ Hill, Rose. "SHOCK DEATH THREATS : Zayn Malik's family subjected to death threats from vile trolls for 'disgracing' Islam after his sister posts Instagram snap of their Christmas tree". December 11, 2016.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Buckland, Eve. "Zayn Malik confirms he has stopped identifying as Muslim because he no longer 'believes any of it'". November 15, 2018.

contradicts the previous development of his tabloid persona as a not particularly devout, but still representative figure for young Muslims. Instead, the tabloids reported that while Malik suggested he does believe in God, he does not “endorse Islamic practices”.⁸³

Coverage of the announcement by all three articles focused heavily on fans’ responses to the announcement, especially highlighting the noticeable presence of negative reactions from young British Muslims who were disappointed or angered by Malik’s announcement. The article appears to simultaneously recognize Malik’s role as a figure for young British Muslims — and explicitly harken back to the singer’s previous quote that indicated his sense of responsibility of a Muslim pop star — while marking this event as a permanent divergence from this identity. Thus, these articles suggest that Malik’s interview represents his conscious reaction to the public persona that has developed during his years of stardom, and an explicit effort to shift this identity away from its religious associations. Malik made this announcement during an extended interview, and his words were not fully explored in the tabloid pieces. Many other topics were covered during the discussion; yet, the tabloids seem to recognize Malik’s religious update as the most controversial and newsworthy update to the profile that they have created, and thus, both frame the article within their own existing persona and indicate an ambiguity in the future development of his identity. Ultimately, these pieces confirm Malik’s prominent place in popular representations of Muslim celebrities, while leaving unanswered questions in the future development of Malik’s tabloid persona.

⁸³ Buckland, Eve. “Zayn Malik confirms he has stopped identifying as Muslim because he no longer 'believes any of it'”. November 15, 2018..

Riz Ahmed

Riz Ahmed is an actor, a rapper, and an activist. He has been a subject of national fame since the late 2000s, when he played leading roles in films like *Four Lions*. In the last ten years, his domestic recognition has expanded to international fame. Ahmed has starred in the blockbusters like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Nightcrawler* and gained both popular recognition and critical praise for his role in an HBO miniseries entitled *The Night Of*. Most recently, Ahmed has been recognized for his work in *Rogue One*, the latest installment in the *Star Wars* series, a role that solidified his place as an entertainer of considerable international fame.⁸⁴ It is this high profile that, like Zayn Malik, qualifies him as a suitable profile to examine in the British tabloid press.

Unlike Malik, however, Ahmed also has gained recognition as a rapper and an activist, and his focus in both careers has often included his identity as a British Muslim and Briton of Pakistani descent. For example, in 2016 Ahmed — also known by the rap name Riz MC — released a track entitled “Englistan”.⁸⁵ The song features depictions of multicultural communities in England and specifically features scenes associated with South Asian culture and Islam. “Englistan” directly refers to the complicated relationship between immigrant communities and the historical narratives of a predominantly white England. Most notably for his profile however, the opening shots of the music video feature a collection of Islamophobic and generally xenophobic covers of tabloid papers, a powerful message that will be analyzed below.⁸⁶ Thus, his profile offers valuable

⁸⁴ Boyle, Simon. “RIZ’S RISE: Riz Ahmed explains how he beat racist jibes in order to become the first Asian to win an Emmy for acting”. *The Sun*. September 18, 2017.

⁸⁵ Godfrey, Alex. “Riz Ahmed: ‘You don’t need to tell me we live in scary times. I’m Muslim’”. *The Guardian*, July 23, 2016.

⁸⁶ Breihan, Tom. “Riz MC – ‘Englistan’ Video”, *Stereogun*. July 6, 2016.

supplementary evidence into the themes first identified in the portrayals of Malik, but also indicates an opportunity to examine how the tabloid press has enacted strategies of exclusion in regards to a British Muslim celebrity who more prominently publicizes his religious affiliation. The profile also shows the interaction between the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Mirror* and a celebrity who has prominently spoken out against the tabloids and the messages they produce.

Like with any actor, the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Mirror* have increased their coverage of Ahmed in accordance with his rise in recognition, and followed his professional and personal lives in typical tabloid fashion. All three tabloids report extensively on Ahmed's appearances on talk shows to publicize his role in the film *Rogue One*, or reference him in articles discussing his films or costars.⁸⁷ These appearances less frequently include his detailed background and rise to fame, but rather, focus much more on his current work. While these articles indicate a normalcy in Ahmed's tabloid press coverage — despite his prominent Muslim identity— articles that date back to a slightly earlier time in his career or discuss Ahmed in more detail often include what can be described as a “success story” narrative. This narrative includes Ahmed's journey from childhood in a working-class family to graduation from Oxford University, and then, success as an internationally recognized actor. The tabloid portrayal of Ahmed's success often includes challenges he has faced with typecasting and limited roles for actors of his identity, but ultimately concludes with his ability to overcome these obstacles and become an international star.

⁸⁷ Psaila, Lina. “Who is on The Jonathan Ross Show tonight? Lily Allen, Riz Ahmed and Jonas Blue”. *The Sun*, September 22, 2018.

While success stories in any industry are common in the tabloids, the integration of Ahmed's journey in relation to the tabloids' depiction of him as a symbol of diversity is worth examining in further detail. The intersection of the success story and Ahmed's identity as a Muslim showcase the tabloids' use of his journey to simultaneously praise him and vocalize exclusionary messages in regards to his identity. Insight into this portrayal comes from the tabloids' coverage of Ahmed after he received an Emmy Award for his role in *The Night Of* in 2017. The *Sun* reported this as the culmination of a powerful journey in which Ahmed "went from playing 'terrorist number 3'" to becoming the first South Asian and first Muslim actor to win an Emmy.⁸⁸ The article describes Ahmed as a driven actor from a working class neighborhood in North London, and "the son of hard-working Pakistani immigrants who had settled in Britain in the Seventies."⁸⁹ Ahmed's drive is also cited as his motivation to earn a scholarship to a private school and later, a place in the well respected Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) program at Oxford. This narrative concludes with Ahmed breaking down barriers and achieving both fame and critical recognition as a Muslim and an Asian Briton in entertainment. It is unsurprising that Ahmed's persona emphasizes his exceptionalism. Ahmed is praised not only because of his accomplishments as an actor, but also because his persona is defined by this personal and professional journey to fame.

Ahmed's tabloid persona is a narrative based in a respectable and well-established journey to success. Ahmed came from a working class family, pursued education and obtained scholarships to prestigious British institutions — studying in the same program at Oxford that jump-started the careers of several of Britain's Prime Ministers and senior

⁸⁸ Boyle, Simon. "RIZ'S RISE: Riz Ahmed explains how he beat racist jibes in order to become the first Asian to win an Emmy for acting". The Sun. September 18, 2017.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

politicians, including David Cameron, Harold Wilson, and Edward Heath.⁹⁰ Furthermore, the success story that the tabloids have disseminated specifically tells the tale of a young man who was disadvantaged not only by his socioeconomic status, but also by his religion and race. In fact, the tabloids frequently included Ahmed's accounts of instances of racist and Islamophobic interactions with fellow students and superiors in his life. Yet, Ahmed overcame all of this, according to the tabloids, by excelling within the existing system of education in Britain, and either ignoring the prejudices he faced or speaking out against them in an articulate manner. The language of these tabloids, in both the story they tell about Ahmed, and the reasons for their approving attitudes towards him, confirm the idea that the actor may represent an example of "an exceptional Muslim". The tabloids praise Ahmed as an exceptional individual, while ignoring the deeper issues of representation and Islamophobia that are also very much associated with his story.

That Ahmed can both be celebrated by the tabloids and excluded by their standard practices carries over to the press coverage of Ahmed's activism against racism and Islamophobia in the entertainment industry. Ahmed is a prominent activist and symbol in the British Muslim community; as a complex and dynamic figure, his actions cannot be easily contained within a standard narrative of exceptionalism and resilience in a prejudiced system. Two almost entirely distinct images of Ahmed, particularly in reference to his activism, are produced. The first image reflects the tabloids' attempt to integrate his activism within the exceptional Muslim narrative; the second depiction emerges in the exclusion or challenging of activism that does not fit into advertised norms of identity. The former can be seen in the tabloids' coverage of Ahmed's public discussions on diversity in the entertainment industry. In January of 2018, for example,

⁹⁰ Kelly, Jon. "Why does PPE Rule Britain?" BBC News Magazine, September 1, 2010.

the *Daily Mail* also reported on Ahmed’s recognition of black British talent in the entertainment industry, following the news that actor Daniel Kaluuya was nominated for an Oscar.⁹¹ According to the article, Ahmed also referenced the directorial debut of another black British star, Idris Elba. In July of the same year, the *Daily Mail* reported that Ahmed had publicly praised the success of actress Sandra Oh, as an Asian actress breaking through societal barriers.⁹² Both instances reassert Ahmed’s place as a beacon of diversity not only in his existence, but also in his public encouragement of other figures of diversity in the entertainment industry. This is in keeping with the tabloid persona of the “exceptional Muslim”. Moreover, these articles—particularly Ahmed’s support of Oh, which was reported on from Comic-Con, where he was promoting the film *Venom*—reaffirm an image of Ahmed as a fully included member of the entertainment industry.

A similar dynamic can be seen in Ahmed’s condemnation of U.S. President Donald Trump’s controversial Muslim ban at the SAG awards in January of 2017.⁹³ Ahmed, along with other stars, publicly protested Trump’s policies and called them out as Islamophobic. While the words of the celebrities were provocative and clear, the red-carpet setting and black-tie attire also delivered a message of privilege and association with the entertainment elite. The subtitle of the *Mirror* article covering the event read, “Amongst the gowns and glamour on the red carpet was a strong political message to the

⁹¹ Press Association, “Riz Ahmed ‘so proud’ over black British success as Daniel Kaluuya gets Oscar nod”. *Daily Mail*, January 24, 2018.

⁹² Associated Press, “Actor Riz Ahmed praises Sandra Oh as a diversity trailblazer”. *Daily Mail*, July 21, 2018.

⁹³ Evans, Natalie, “Ashton Kutcher, Simon Helberg and Dev Patel lead stars condemning Donald Trump’s Muslim ban at SAG Awards”. *Mirror*, January 30, 2017.

US president”.⁹⁴ The tabloids’ choice to integrate the message within the coverage of an awards show, ultimately focusing on which celebrities were a part of the effort, showcases the press’ strategies of reporting on certain social justice issues. Furthermore, the tabloids’ reports focused on the actions of a foreign president and the activism of Ahmed as an individual. Thus, the tabloids proliferate pieces that positively highlight Ahmed’s activism, but base this favorable assessment in the glamour of the settings, the positive tone of Ahmed’s words, and the relatively normal practice of celebrities occasionally making politics statements. The tabloid discussion of Ahmed’s rap career as Riz MC reveals a starkly different depiction of Ahmed’s activism that diverges significantly from that of the Oxford-educated movie star. This contrast showcases how the tabloids have created profiles for British Muslim celebrities like Ahmed that allow them to report on facets of the figures’ lives that they wish to highlight, while also either ignoring or condemning equally prominent features of the same person’s life. The tabloids assess and manipulate parts of Ahmed’s identity through their coverage of his life, whether it’s the strategic admission of certain facets of Ahmed’s career, or the subtly negative coverage of Ahmed’s work in rap.

In 2016, Ahmed released the title track of his album “Englistan”. The song celebrates English multiculturalism, focusing on the integration of South Asian and Muslim cultures with English identity. As the title suggests, Ahmed uses the track to both celebrate his identity and call out deeper prejudices against people of color and Muslims — particularly Pakistani-Britons — that exist in English society. The music video depicts Ahmed walking around North London — in an area implied to be similar to where he

⁹⁴ Evans, Natalie, “Ashton Kutcher, Simon Helberg and Dev Patel lead stars condemning Donald Trump’s Muslim ban at SAG Awards”. *Mirror*, January 30, 2017.

was brought up — while also depicting scenes of diverse English populations. The video focuses on South Asians, and particularly Muslims, with scenes of mosques, praying, and religious and family gatherings. The tabloids generally described the song and video as a “controversial” addition to his track record as a promoter of diversity.⁹⁵ In short, the tabloid press not only aimed to equate an album and music video with Ahmed’s Twitter activity and red carpet comments, but also described this work as the controversial, but ultimately minor facet of his overarching persona. “Englistan” thus became a tangential component of Ahmed’s tabloid persona as a mild mannered beacon of diversity in film.

If the tabloids support Ahmed’s activism and advocacy for racial and religious inclusion, why did they deem his frank depictions of multiculturalism in the UK “controversial”? One answer to this question lies in the setting and subject of these forms of activism. Ahmed’s tabloid persona includes a story of personal success, appearances in popular films and shows, and discussions of diversity in glamorous settings. “Englistan” shows and discusses scenes around England that are neither elite nor refined, but rather reflect the reality of the diversity and multiculturalism that Ahmed (and other celebrities) talks about. Furthermore, unlike the admonishment of a foreign president, or the celebration of Asian and black actors’ successes in the entertainment industry, “Englistan” does not focus on the individual, but addresses England as a nation, and diversity and segregation as structural problems that impact the entirety of society. Moreover, there is also a notable distinction in tone between the two forms of activism; while the more moderate, celebrity-focused activism highlights the accomplishment of fellow actors or reflects a solidarity among actors in opposition to prejudice, the other is a

⁹⁵ Press Association, ‘BBC announces Riz Ahmed-created drama series Englistan’. Daily Mail, April 30, 2018.

less optimistic and more frank outlook on the realities and challenges of prejudice in England. The distinction in coverage between these two, therefore, aligns with the tabloids' engagement with British Muslim identity more generally. While in the former, the image of the exceptional Muslim persists and evidence of diversity in the entertainment industry offers a positive depiction, the latter depiction of his British Muslim persona is diminished or designated some form of judgment. This strategy ultimately results in molding Ahmed's many pursuits into a single simplistic story that affirms a greater tabloid identity.

Chapter Four: Challenging Norms of Muslim Identity: Profile analysis of British Muslims in politics and government

This chapter examines strategies of exclusion in regards to prominent British Muslims in the political field. It links strategies of exclusion in the tabloids towards British Muslims across different professional fields, and highlights defining facets of tabloid treatment of politicians who identify as Muslim. Unlike celebrities in the entertainment world, tabloids' coverage of politicians — whether Muslim or not — are predominantly shaped by the papers' political affiliations. Tabloids' historical role as bold and often-incendiary voices in politics is particularly relevant when identifying exclusionary strategies versus standard political bias. Tabloids' historical poor treatment of politicians as well as the general societal norm of criticizing politicians — perhaps more than entertainers or athletes — means that strategies of exclusion directed toward British Muslim politicians exist alongside and in addition to existing politicized rhetoric.

British Muslims have advanced to prominent positions in politics only relatively recently. The two figures analyzed here, Home Minister Sajid Javid and Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, were appointed in 2018 and elected in 2016, respectively.⁹⁶ Javid and Khan are two of the first British Muslims to ever hold senior positions in the British government. Due to their professional occupations as politicians, the careers of Javid and Khan can also be traced in the tabloids in extensive detail, as all three papers followed their rises to power and times in office. As a result, their tabloid personas are robust.

⁹⁶ Duell, Mark. 'Home secretary Sajid Javid beats London mayor Sadiq Khan to title of most influential Asian in Britain'. Daily Mail, October 24, 2018.

Furthermore, while Javid and Khan are very different figures in British politics — with the former representing the Conservative government and the latter representing the Labour Party — the following profiles indicate the presence of some common and politically-based demonstration of exclusion by the tabloid press. Due to the political nature of the tabloids — which prompts to the obvious fact that the *Sun* would generally report more favorably on Sajid Javid while the *Mirror* would prefer Sadiq Khan’s policies — the tabloids’ strategies of exclusion, and efforts to produce an exceptional Muslim narrative, are not based in the positive or negative depictions of the two politicians. While the positive or negative coverage of these politicians can be related to their exclusion from a dominant tabloid narrative of identity, they are not one in the same thing. Rather, the tabloid personas of Khan and Javid are defined by differing strategies of exclusion that often include, but extend beyond political affiliation

The first demonstration of exclusion in the tabloids is the disproportional association between the two Muslim politicians and religious extremism. Khan and Javid have no affiliation with extremist religious groups either in or outside of the UK. However, the papers have particularly circulated this link in reference to Mayor Khan, and drawn from both existing Islamophobic stereotypes and the standard tabloid practices of sensationalism in order to occasionally link the Mayor with extremist figures.⁹⁷ While not the focus of the profile analysis, these references alone significantly indicate exclusionary and problematic practices by the tabloids towards the two figures based apparently in religion. This strategy is neither new for the tabloids, nor limited to figures in positions as senior as Khan and Javid.

⁹⁷ Devlin, Amanda. ‘London Mayor Sadiq Khan was bugged by a police officer when he visited terror suspect in prison’. *The Sun*, May 12, 2016.

All three tabloids, regardless of political affiliation, have also repeatedly defined the life trajectories of Khan and Javid as immigrant success stories. Both Khan and Javid are the children of working class immigrants to the UK: although the two figures could not differ more politically, both are the sons of bus conductors. This story is the foundation of the tabloids' depiction of the two figures as beacons of diversity in politics and examples of Muslims who have thrived in British political life. This narrative, which also appeared in the tabloid personas of Zayn Malik and Riz Ahmed, is not unique to politics, but needs to be specifically examined in further detail because of its unique manifestation in the political field: Javid and Khan's success stories as first generation Britons do not only end in their own fame, but also include their election or appointment to represent British society as a whole. In the creation of their personas, the tabloids navigate their efforts to utilize Javid and Khan's personas as tools of exclusion, while acknowledging their function as representative figures for not only the tabloid readership, but all of Britain. The tabloids' efforts to control this message, therefore, will be explored further below:

Sajid Javid

Sajid Javid assumed the position of Secretary of State for the Home Department — colloquially known as the Home Secretary — in April of 2018. Javid is the first Asian Briton and first Muslim to hold not only this position, but also any of the Great Offices of State.⁹⁸ His position as the Home Secretary, the fourth most powerful role in the British

⁹⁸ Gye, Hugo. 'SAJ 'SELLOUT' STORM: BBC star sparks race row after saying Home Secretary Sajid Javid 'isn't welcome in the hood' because he's a Tory'. The Sun, October 22, 2018.

Government, qualifies him to be included in this set of prominent British Muslims. Yet, his importance in British politics is not limited to a formal appointment; since becoming the Home Secretary Javid has been deemed the most influential Asian in Britain by multiple leadership rankings, including the GG2 Power List.⁹⁹ These qualifications make him the logical first choice to begin the analysis of British Muslim politicians. In addition to receiving recognition for his race and religion, Javid has been consistently covered in the tabloids for work in the Home Office on immigration and more recently, for his public responses to crime rates in London. It is important to highlight that, as a senior government official and a leading face in the Conservative Party, Javid is frequently covered in the tabloids. The quantity of articles in the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Mirror* about him surpasses the standard coverage of the British Muslim celebrities discussed in the entertainment and sports industries. This frequency reflects both the prominence of his role in politics, and the proportion of tabloid coverage that focuses on domestic politicians.

While it has been established that — like with all celebrities that will be discussed in this chapter — the tabloids produce a significant amount of content on Javid that has no apparent relation to developing strategies of exclusion towards British Muslims. This appears to be true across all three of the tabloids that are discussed in the thesis, a notable point due to the politicized nature of the publications. Many articles on Javid tend to focus on updates on general current events or stories in which he is a secondary figure. Yet, the focus of this analysis lies in the articles that extensively cover Javid as an individual and the Home Secretary, and offer insights both into how the tabloids seek to

⁹⁹ Duell, Mark. ‘Home secretary Sajid Javid beats London mayor Sadiq Khan to title of most influential Asian in Britain’. *Daily Mail*, October 24, 2018.

portray him, and how he works to respond to this persona. It is in these tabloid depictions that strategies of exclusion can be identified: throughout this section, I will aim to identify how Javid is identified and confined to the narrative that he exists in British society as an exceptional Muslim individual, a persona that both limits Javid's own identity and ultimately circulates harmful depictions of other Muslims throughout British society. This tabloid persona begins with Javid's background story. It is quite common for the tabloids to report on politician's personal and political journeys, particularly as they rise to national prominence. This background story, which is frequently repeated, often influences significant features of the politicians' tabloid profiles. For the Home Secretary, Javid's background is defined by his identity as the son of Pakistani immigrants. Javid's father moved to the Great Britain in 1961, where he became a bus conductor.¹⁰⁰ The tabloids tell the story of the ideal immigrant success story, where Javid rose from humble beginnings to become first, a millionaire and senior manager at Deutsche Bank, and then an MP in the Conservative Party. Javid then received multiple Cabinet appointments before becoming Home Secretary, and the most powerful minority in the British government in 2018.

The tabloids, particularly the conservative publications, have utilized this immigrant success story to define Javid as a beacon of diversity in politics. In a similar manner to the previously-discussed persona of Riz Ahmed, the tabloids have extensively covered Javid discussing his parents' immigration to the UK, and his subsequent efforts to gain an education and entrance into both the financial and political worlds. After Javid's appointment to the Home Office was announced in April, for example, the *Sun*

¹⁰⁰ Tolhurst, Alain. 'From the son of a Pakistani bus conductor to self-made millionaire and one of the Great Offices of State – the rise and rise of Sajid Javid'. The Sun, April 30, 2018.

immediately tailored coverage of the new Home Minister to include this immigrant success narrative, reporting Javid's comments, "My parents came to our great country in the 60s. They came from Pakistan to help build this country. I think for them to see one of their sons rise to this great office of state, I'm sure they will be very proud."¹⁰¹ However, unlike Riz Ahmed's profile development, coverage of Javid is, by nature of the tabloids, heavily politicized. Javid become not only a prominent British Muslim celebrity, but also the prominent British Muslim in the Conservative Party. His persona, therefore, not only reflects the promotion and celebration of the exceptional Muslim narrative that has been discussed throughout this chapter, but also showcases the inclusion of that narrative among the highest ranks of the Conservative party.

Furthermore, it would be inaccurate to suggest that Javid is lauded based on his diverse identity in the *Sun* and *Daily Mail*, the two conservative-affiliated tabloids, without question. However, both papers have produced significant content about specific aspects of Javid's life in a positive manner, and then framed these attributes within his overall tabloid persona. For example, in addition to Javid's parents' immigration story, the *Sun* has reported stories on multiple occasions that focus on Javid's relationship with "the love of his life", Laura Javid.¹⁰² While the tabloids regularly cover celebrities' love lives, there is a particularly positive and frequent reference to the couple's romantic history. Accompanying this tale, however, is often the tabloids' accounts of the Javid's family life, children, and the reality that while Sajid Javid is culturally Muslim, he and his family do not practice Islam. Yet, all three attributes of Javid's personal tabloid profile

¹⁰¹ Tolhurst, Alain. 'From the son of a Pakistani bus conductor to self-made millionaire and one of the Great Offices of State – the rise and rise of Sajid Javid'. *The Sun*, April 30, 2018.

¹⁰² Knox, Patrick. 'CHILDHOOD SWEETHEART: What did Sajid Javid say in his Tory Party conference speech, who is his wife Laura and how many children do they have?' *The Sun*, October 2, 2018.

make up a collective story that allows the tabloids to praise Javid as an individual that aligns with almost all of the idealized tabloids narratives, while failing to acknowledge Javid's status as an elite and exceptional person. It cannot be emphasized enough that, as both a national financial and political leader, Javid is an exception among not only British Muslims, but also all Britons. Moreover, unlike actors or athletes, Javid has been elected and appointment to represent the British people, and thus the advertisement of his religious identity reflects a highly politicized form of representation, one that — as the following examples will showcase — ultimately delivers an inaccurate and problematic message to the British public. This message reflects both the strategic politicization of Islam in the tabloids, and the enactment of exclusionary strategies towards British Muslims in the tabloid press.

Arguably the most useful insight into Sajid Javid's tabloid persona occurred in June of 2018, when the tabloids reported that in an interview with the BBC's Andrew Marr, the Home Secretary, announced that the Conservative Party did not have an "Islamophobia problem".¹⁰³ Responding to Marr's further questions, he said, "Let's look at who the Home Secretary is in this country. As you described me, my name is Sajid Javid. I am the Home Secretary in this country."¹⁰⁴ This interview embodies both the predominantly supported outlook on prejudice towards Muslims, and the fundamental role of Javid's persona in the tabloid press. The former point showcases the promoted ideology that Islamophobia, whether in the press or in politics, takes the form of hatred towards individual Muslims. This specific instance highlights the common strategy of individualizing a much wider and often systemic problem in order to make an argument

¹⁰³ Smith, Mikey. "Sajid Javid denies the Conservative Party has an Islamophobia problem". *The Mirror*, June 3, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

for a point that is often contradicted by reality. This strategy has been discussed in reference to the argument that the election of American President Barack Obama refuted claims of racism in the United States today. While this argument is obviously false, the tabloids' promotion of Sajid Javid's outlook on Islamophobia appears to make the same claims. With this announcement, the tabloids were able to disseminate a crucial message that rejects the many associations between both the Conservative party and tabloids, and Islamophobic practices. This is an active promotion of an argument that aligns with the tabloids' agendas in establishing both British identity, and in controlling the narratives of British Muslims.

However, there is a particularly important facet of this argument that does not appear in the case of President Obama: Sajid Javid himself publicly and repeatedly promotes the idea that members of the Conservative Party could not hold Islamophobic beliefs, and that the British population face problems with Islamophobia in a similar way to any form of prejudice.¹⁰⁵ This interview, and the tabloids' coverage of Javid's stance, highlights the extent to which the Home Secretary has become the promoted figure of Islam in British politics. Javid's tabloid persona is not only inclusive of his religious identity, but also defining of it in instances in which it can be applied to a politically advantageous message. Now, as with all of the profiles, it is almost impossible to separate the reality of individuals from their coverage in the press, and therefore, the circulated opinions and outlooks of the Home Secretary reflect the efforts of the tabloid press to craft a specific vision. However, based on this vision, defining Javid as a beacon of diversity in politics and voice for British Muslims — an identity he vocally takes on in

¹⁰⁵ Smith, Mikey. 'Sajid Javid denies the Conservative Party has an Islamophobia problem'. The Mirror, June 3, 2018.

this interview — enacts a powerful exclusionary strategy. As previously highlighted, Javid’s claims he represents a new voice and model for British Muslims. In reality, his actions and representations speak far more to his Conservative politics and impressive wealth than his religious identity, but it is precisely these qualifications that have allowed this image to exist. This event highlights the crucial intersection between the agendas of tabloid personas and many of the politics of the Conservative platforms, the political affiliations of the *Sun* and *Daily Mail*. Javid’s persona is able to create a Muslim profile that fits within the constructed tabloid identity, and utilizes Javid’s own conservative platforms to legitimize it. Thus, the lauding of Javid in the tabloids allows the press to successfully exclude the vast majority of British Muslims by presenting and legitimizing a prominent example of one particularly Muslim celebrity.

An incident from September of 2018 sheds further light on the tabloids’ depictions of Javid, and his persona’s contribution to exclusionary strategies of British Muslims. In September, the *Sun* reported that BBC-affiliated comedian Guz Khan, who is also a Pakistani-Briton, tweeted at Javid that “you aren’t supported by the working class, and you aren’t welcome in the hood”.¹⁰⁶ Khan’s issue with Javid, according to both the Tweet and Khan’s later follow up on the comment, was that the Home Secretary “has wholeheartedly forgotten where he came from, which you can see through his political allegiances.”¹⁰⁷ In short, Khan openly rejected Javid as a popular figure for working class and British Pakistanis based on his senior role and policies in the Conservative Party. This complaint introduces a fascinating tension between two figures in which Khan claims that the tabloid-approved idea that Javid represents British Muslims is false.

¹⁰⁶ Gye, Hugo. ‘SAJ ‘SELLOUT’ STORM: BBC star sparks race row after saying Home Secretary Sajid Javid ‘isn’t welcome in the hood’ because he’s a Tory’. *The Sun*, October 22, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Khan directly contradicts the tabloids' efforts to define Javid as an authority on British Muslim identity and Islamophobia. Unsurprisingly, the *Sun* immediately worked to refute and shame Khan's comments, even implying that Khan had used a racist slur towards Javid — a claim without evidence to support it.¹⁰⁸ The tabloids' coverage of this event indicates their concern over Khan's rejection of their promoted persona. However, the intentional coverage of the event — even despite its damaging comments in regards to Javid — reflects a response that not only supports Javid, but also condemns Khan for his opinions. The coverage and condemning of the event marks the tabloids' ardent support of their own persona; for it is this persona, and not Guz Khan's, that promotes their policies and agendas. While this event surely has almost nothing to do with the reality of the Home Secretary's mindsets and identity, the tabloid press' response strengthens the creation of this dichotomy between British Muslims that fit into and support the persona of Sajid Javid, and the British Muslims do not. This dichotomy ignores or rejects the complexity of religious and cultural identity, and functions as a powerful tool to simultaneously exclude British Muslims and control the narratives of their identity, while publicly claiming to promote and laud the Home Secretary. It is this platform and this power that makes the tabloids' exclusion of British Muslims through artificial personas so harmful.

The previous examples of Javid's persona focus on the tabloid press' efforts to establish Javid as an exceptional Muslim figure that promotes diversity, while affirming a limited cultural and political platform. In the last six months, the Home Secretary has identified or responded to multiple prominent political topics as “personal” priorities. The

¹⁰⁸ Gye, Hugo. 'SAJ 'SELLOUT' STORM: BBC star sparks race row after saying Home Secretary Sajid Javid 'isn't welcome in the hood' because he's a Tory'. *The Sun*, October 22, 2018.

tabloids have also emphasized and extended this personal outlook to form connections of their own between Javid and certain policies, often extrapolating isolated references to topics as defining features of his tabloid persona. The idea of Javid taking certain policies “personally” extends and specifies his significance in the tabloid narrative from a general representation of an exceptional Muslim figure to a politician who impacts the nation in accordance with this identity. It provides substantive evidence of the types of connections the tabloids aim to create between the Home Secretary and certain topics.

An example of this association occurred in October of 2018, when the tabloid press reported on the story of a group of ten Asian Britons in Huddersfield who were found guilty of the rape and sexual abuse of several British girls. The Home Secretary, in response to this event, posted on Twitter in support of the ruling, stating, “These sick Asian paedophiles are finally facing justice. I want to commend the bravery of the victims. For too long, they were ignored. Not on my watch. There will be no no-go areas.”¹⁰⁹ There was an immediate pushback to the Home Secretary’s comments, which specifically cite the race of the men convicted in the grooming scandal. Javid’s comments were denounced by many prominent figures in politics and media, and the Home Secretary was subsequently accused of racializing a tragic crime.¹¹⁰ Senior figures in the Labour Party, including Diane Abbott, adamantly denounced him for “attributing these crimes to one ethnic group”.¹¹¹ The tabloid reaction to the Home Secretary’s Tweet, however, occurred in two stages. First, numerous pieces from the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* quickly emerged in support of Javid, lauding him for rejecting “political correctness” in

¹⁰⁹ Kindred, Alahna. “JAVID RACE ROW: Sajid Javid defends calling grooming gang ‘sick Asian paedophiles’”. The Sun, December 26, 2018.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ O’Neill, Brendan. “Sajid Javid is a politician with guts who stands by his words and beliefs even when the PC set is raging against him”. The Sun, December 29, 2018.

order to effectively the issues of grooming in Britain.¹¹² Brendan O’Neill of the *Sun*, for example, published a column titled “Sajid Javid is a politician with guts who stands by his words and beliefs even when the PC set is raging against him”.¹¹³ As the title of the piece suggests, many members of the tabloid press jumped on the Home Secretary’s words, not as a racially charged statement, but rather, as a suitable assessment of the situation and powerful rejection of politically-correct culture — one of the highly recognized antithesis of the tabloid identity. Yet, the commentary on the incident did not stop there. Rather, O’Neill’s article offers insight into how the Home Secretary’s words were not only seen as appropriate comments, but also as authoritative ones. O’Neill reported that “As the BBC reported at the time, the 20 Huddersfield groomers were ‘all British Asians, mainly of Pakistani heritage’. Javid, who is also of Pakistani heritage, was telling the truth.”¹¹⁴ While it is delicately phrased, O’Neill’s inclusion of Javid’s race indicates a conscious effort to connect the race of the Home Secretary with the race of the groomers, and thus, establish a form of legitimacy behind Javid’s comments. He indicates that Javid’s comments are not just appropriate, but rooted in a unique, race-based authority.

O’Neill’s article also shines light on the second stage of the tabloids’ response to the incident. Several months after the initial post on Twitter, the Home Secretary carried out an interview with BBC Radio 4 with Kamila Shamsie, a British Pakistani novelist and guest presenter on the program. When asked if he felt his Tweets might have fueled hate

¹¹² O’Neill, Brendan. “Sajid Javid is a politician with guts who stands by his words and beliefs even when the PC set is raging against him”. *The Sun*, December 29, 2018.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

crimes, the Home Secretary publicly stood by his comments.¹¹⁵ However, in a follow up question, Shamsie asked Javid for his opinions on the Rochdale sex scandal, a similar grooming scandal that occurred in 2012 in the Home Secretary's hometown. The Home Secretary delivered a lengthy and measured response to the inquiry. His full reply included: "Sometimes, I have, yes. Especially with reference to Rochdale because it is my hometown, I still go there now and again because I have family there that I care deeply about. When I heard about — and there has been more than one case — grooming gangs where almost every individual involved is of Pakistani heritage . . . I can't help noting the fact that Rochdale is a town that means something to me and I am also of Pakistani heritage. But in terms of a response, what matters is, first of all, the law enforcement response which rightly is completely independent of government ministers."¹¹⁶

While, the full quotation indicates a nuanced outlook on the Rochdale grooming scandal, in which the Home Secretary identifies with the event, but ultimately advocates, for the role of the law and government in similar instances, the tabloid press' coverage of this interview delivered a very different message. While the tabloids eagerly presented the short and harsh Tweets of the Home Secretary in November in their entirety, their coverage of Javid's relationship to the Rochdale scandal reflected a selective representation of his words. For example, the headlines of several articles published on the story highlight the strategic coverage that occurred across the tabloids and their respective political affiliations. The *Sun* produced a piece entitled, "Sajid Javid says he took the Rochdale sex grooming scandal personally because the men were from his

¹¹⁵ Kindred, Alahna. "JAVID RACE ROW: Sajid Javid defends calling grooming gang 'sick Asian paedophiles'". The Sun, December 26, 2018.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

hometown”, while the *Mirror* simply reported that “Sajid Javid says he took grooming scandal in his hometown of Rochdale personally”.¹¹⁷ And while both articles do ultimately include or refer to the Home Secretary’s longer quotation, their predominant messages aim to highlight the personal connection between Javid and the Rochdale grooming scandal. Both the Home Secretary’s own Tweets and the tabloids’ use of Javid’s BBC 4 interview represent important contributions to Javid’s tabloid persona and the role of his selective exceptional identity. The tabloid press utilized the Tweets to both promote a problematic message and derive authority for that message from Javid’s own identity. The racialized Twitter story also showcases how Javid promoted problematic messages himself, and further demonstrated the tabloid narrative of an exceptional Muslim figure.

However, the tabloid press’ coverage of the Home Secretary’s BBC Radio 4 interview exhibits the persistence of an associative strategy between Javid and grooming scandals that extends beyond the Home Secretary’s own opinions. The sensationalizing of Javid’s interview highlights how the tabloids prioritized creating a dramatic connection between the Home Secretary and the grooming scandal. Thus, Javid’s profile was either organically used to affirm the intended tabloid narrative when applicable, or forcibly used to strategically associate certain scandalous stories to connections based in religious and racial identity. Javid’s persona offers the unique insight into how the tabloid press uses the identity of a figure that largely aligns with the majority of produced platforms, while ultimately representing one of the identities intended to be excluded from these platforms themselves.

¹¹⁷ Bartlett, Nicola. “Sajid Javid says he took grooming scandal in his hometown of Rochdale personally”. *The Mirror*, December 26, 2018.

Sadiq Khan

In May of 2016, the largest popular majority in British electoral history elected Sadiq Khan as the Mayor of London.¹¹⁸ Khan quickly became one of the most prominent political figures in the Great Britain. This recognition extended beyond national borders, as Khan became well recognized internationally for his identity as the first Muslim mayor of a major Western city. Khan — who was raised in South London by parents of Indian Muslim background who settled in Pakistan following the 1947 partition — began his career in human rights law. He then entered into politics, and ultimately secured the landslide victory against Conservative candidate, Zac Goldsmith in the 2016 London mayoral race.¹¹⁹ Khan’s electoral success was predominantly rooted in his promoted platform as a “mayor for all Londoners”; he often spoke about his humble beginnings as the son of immigrants living in a council estate in the city. The tabloids’ portrayal of the Mayor also embodies this story, and both Khan’s overarching profile and daily coverage has been rooted in his identity as a British Muslim and Pakistani-Briton.¹²⁰ The following section will outline the creation of Khan’s tabloid persona in the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Mirror*, focusing on coverage of the 2016 mayoral election and the recent reports of crime rates in London. This trajectory, and coverage of events that occur during this development, showcase the changes in Khan’s tabloid depictions across his four years of

¹¹⁸ Press Association, “Warm welcome as Sadiq Khan is sworn in as mayor of London”, *Daily Mail*. May 7, 2016.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

public life. Evidence of this change in persona will be tracked both by my analysis of Khan's depiction over time and by internal references from the tabloids that highlight the patterns and problems with past depictions of the mayor.

While the tabloid coverage of the celebrities discussed earlier in the chapter featured news coverage that widely varied in both topic and tone, the trajectory of Khan's tabloid persona stands out as particularly transformative. Across Khan's four years in public office there has been a stark shift in how the tabloids have depicted the Mayor in reference to his identity as a British Muslim. This shift, which first crafted Khan's tabloid persona as a politician deeply connected to Islam and Islamophobia in Britain, has consistently moved to re-characterize and expand depictions of the Mayor to include a wide range of topics and associations. This shift represents the adaptation of exclusionary strategies by the press in accordance with the Mayor's political and public development.

This tabloid narrative begins with Khan's coverage during the 2016 mayoral campaign in London. The race primarily featured Khan and his Conservative opposition, Zac Goldsmith, as they fought to succeed long time mayor Boris Johnson. During the Conservative's campaign, Goldsmith publicly linked Khan to Islamic "extremists".¹²¹ Goldsmith was not alone in his statements, however, as former Prime Minister David Cameron "sparked Labour fury twice using Prime Minister's Questions in the Commons as a launchpad for attacks on Mr. Khan's appearance on platforms alongside individuals he branded extreme."¹²² Tabloid coverage of the race heavily featured articles on the topic, detailing both Goldsmith and the party's role in these associations with extremism, as well as statements of opposition from prominent political figures. For example, the

¹²¹ Press Association, "Sadiq Khan set to be named London mayor". Daily Mail, May 6, 2016.

¹²² Ibid.

Daily Mail published an article titled “Labour accuses Zac Goldsmith of a 'racist scream' by linking Sadiq Khan to Islamist extremism in his London mayor campaign”.¹²³ The article featured denouncements of Goldsmiths’ attacks against Khan by both Labour and Conservative politicians, including Baroness Warsi, a Conservative member of the House of Lords and practicing Muslim. In the piece, Warsi denounces the Conservatives, stating that “our appalling dog whistle campaign for London Mayor 2016 lost us the election, our reputation and credibility on issues of race and religion.”¹²⁴ Warsi’s words exhibit the overwhelming criticism of Goldsmith’s campaign tactics that were publicized by the tabloid press. Other tabloid pieces discuss the campaign’s scandal in detail, while others focus on a more sensationalist and accusatory coverage of Goldsmith’s political antics. However, across the three publications, two primary features defined the tabloid press’ coverage of Khan and the campaign.

First, the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Mirror* — whether explicitly stated or more generally implied — promoted the narratives of Goldsmith’s denouncers. The tabloids condemned and ridiculed the Conservatives for their tactics in the mayoral campaign. Many of the negative portrayals of this scandal by traditionally Conservative publications like the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* focused on the ideas that Goldsmith’s words had both crossed a line of acceptable rhetoric, and proved unsuccessful in promoting a Conservative victory in the race. This contribution to Khan’s tabloid persona represents a rare example of the tabloids actively siding with a British Muslim outsider over a figure who would be considered a traditional Conservative English politician. This tactic across the tabloids likely represents the historical precedent of tabloids both denouncing flagrant

¹²³ Sculthorpe, Tim. “Labour accuses Zac Goldsmith of a 'racist scream' by linking Sadiq Khan to Islamist extremism in his London mayor campaign”. *Daily Mail*, April 12, 2016.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

examples of racism and heavily criticizing and ‘taking down’ politicians. Both of these strategies have been discussed in the previous chapter.

Yet, at the same time, while the contents of the tabloid press’ articles on Khan remained critical of Goldsmith, the extent of the coverage on the topic reflects an active proliferation of the story that is also noteworthy. In their constant, repetitive coverage of the controversy, the tabloids simultaneously denounced Goldsmith’s racist tactics while circulating stories that perpetuated the association between Khan and Islamic extremists. This association has sometimes positioned the tabloids as seemingly objective observers in an independent Islamophobia incident. For example, approximately a month after Khan assumed office, the tabloid press published several stories that revealed that the Special Branch of British Police had monitored Khan’s communications. The *Sun* featured an article that described how the police had bugged Khan after he communicated with a childhood friend, Babar Ahmad. Ahmad had been suspected of "inspiring a generation of extremists", and was subsequently incarcerated for alleged links to Al Qaeda.¹²⁵ Yet, despite the initial alarming nature of the story, all of the tabloid pieces ultimately reported that Khan and Ahmad’s conversations had been “normal” and “mundane”. According to the words of the police officer in charge of bugging Khan, “There wasn’t anything in the recording that was subversive in the slightest.”¹²⁶ Moreover, Khan has repeatedly denounced terrorism, extremism, and expressed public regret for anyone who assumed he held sympathies towards radicalism.¹²⁷ The popular presence of such articles in the tabloids during Khan’s initial months in office reflects the

¹²⁵ Devlin, Amanda. ‘London Mayor Sadiq Khan was bugged by a police officer when he visited terror suspect in prison’. The Sun, May 12, 2016.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Press Association, “Sadiq Khan 'regrets' impression he shared extremists' views”. Daily Mail, April 19, 2016.

tabloid press' consistent, unfounded association of Khan with extremism. This tactic, which is ultimately motivated by the mayor's religious identity, represents a clear exclusionary strategy enacted by the tabloid press.

However, while this coverage of Khan is problematic for its associative nature — the perpetuation of the link between Khan's political prominence and his religious identity — these articles remained relatively neutral in tone. The most powerful examples of the tabloids' exclusionary strategies in regards to Sadiq Khan have not come from their coverage of others' Islamophobic or racist comments, but rather, from their own reporters. The *Daily Mail* and *Sun* have repeatedly produced stories that explicitly connected Khan to Islamic extremist groups. For example, in February of 2016, the *Daily Mail* exclusively “revealed” that Khan “supported groups promoting Islamic extremism and gave a speech while the 'black flag of jihad' was openly flying”.¹²⁸ The article goes on to state that Khan promoted organizations that “advocated violence against women, been accused in Parliament of spreading anti-Semitism and homophobia, and staged events featuring extremists and terrorists.”¹²⁹ In reality, The Global Peace and Unity Conference, the event the *Daily Mail* referred to, is a prominent multipath and multicultural meeting that takes place in London, attracting over 55,000 attendees worldwide.¹³⁰ The organization does not have links to extremism, and when Khan spoke at the event, he promoted the same moderate principles that grounded his mayoral campaign. Yet, articles like these reflect the active effort of several tabloids to not only

¹²⁸ Wallis Simons, Jake, “Sadiq Khan, Labour candidate for London mayor, made a speech while the 'black flag of jihad' was flying and gave his support to groups linked to extremism”. *Daily Mail*, February 16, 2016.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ The Global Peace Unity. <http://www.theglobalunity.com/>, 2018.

disseminate potentially negative depictions of Khan, but rather, explicitly convince the public that he has links to Islamic extremism. These articles, the most flagrant examples of Islamophobia depicted thus far, are part of a consistent effort by the tabloid press to label Khan as an unfit mayor due to his religious identity.

The tabloid press' use of Islamophobic rhetoric to criticize Sadiq Khan clearly differs from the exclusionary strategies of not only Sajid Javid, but also Zayn Malik and Riz Ahmed. This distinction raises an important question: why is Sadiq Khan treated so differently from the other British Muslim celebrities. The unique treatment of Khan can perhaps partially be answered by the deeply partisan nature of the tabloids. The *Daily Mail* and *Sun* — the two papers that have produced particularly Islamophobic content in reference to Khan — are generally affiliated with the Conservative party, and thus, in opposition to Khan's success. Khan, as described in one article from the *Sun* has become a “powerhouse” in the Labour party, and both an important actor and powerful symbol for the nation as the leader of its capital city.¹³¹ It makes sense that Conservative tabloids would utilize Khan's religion against him, while not subjecting Javid to the same treatment. The partisan nature and historical reputation of the tabloids as crass, direct, and personal in their attacks might also offer insight into the kind of language used against Khan. Yet, while the well-known tabloid style might account for rude or personal jabs at Khan in the form of name-calling or sensationalist reporting, there is a clear distinction between a rude nickname or politically motivated personal attack and the explicit attempts to associate Khan with Islamic extremism. The exclusionary tactics enacted

¹³¹ Newton Dunn, Tom. “PRES SLAMS SADIQ: Donald Trump says London Mayor Sadiq Khan ‘has done a terrible job on terror’”. The Sun, July 13, 2018.

against Sadiq Khan reflect not only politics, but also, the creation of a tabloid persona that is treated entirely differently from the profile of Home Secretary Javid.

Unlike the patterns of coverage that largely depicted Home Secretary Sajid Javid as an exceptional Muslim figure in politics, Khan's tabloid persona notably lacks a conscious separation between his own religious identity and the identity of the general British Muslim population. In contrast, Khan's self-promoted identity suggests the opposite message. Whether in his early campaign platforms or later policies, Khan promoted the narrative of the ordinary Muslim. As he simultaneously identifies as Muslim and a typical Londoner as one of the defining facets of his political position, he not only challenges the tabloid-promoted narrative of the exceptional Muslim, but also consistently promotes a contradictory message. Yet, Khan did not only self-identify in this way, but rather, this message was supported and promoted by the population of the city of London. Khan won the mayoral campaign by the highest margin in British electoral history, a reality that offers powerful evidence in opposition to the norms of Muslim identity that the tabloids have historically promoted. In fact, Khan's success has shown that, in many ways, he is seen as a Londoner in the way that his opponent Zac Goldsmith was not, despite the ways that this may challenge the tabloids have viewed British identity.

The tabloids' opposition to Khan's political and identity-based platforms explains their persistent use of Islamophobic narratives to criticize and exclude him. Furthermore, while the range of policies and current events that the tabloids have reported on in association with Sadiq Khan have expanded in the three years since his election, the tabloid press has consistently returned to these strategies to characterize and exclude

Khan. Last year, the tabloids began to report on a rise in violent knife crime in London. The stories were sparked by several well-reported particularly violent knifings in the city, particularly involving young people. In typical tabloid fashion, however, the three publications produced large numbers of articles that depicted a “lawless London”, a city plagued by a “bloody knife crime epidemic”.¹³² Coverage of the crime rates in London heavily featured two types of articles: first, detailed true-crime-like accounts of the various incidents in the city; second, criticisms of Sadiq Khan over his inability to stop the crime spree. The first set of articles reflects the historical prominence of crime in the tabloid press and strategy of sensationalist reporting that has been employed to generate readership. The second type of article sheds light on how Khan’s responses to the violent crime fundamentally conflict with the tabloids’ usual attitudes towards crime policy. Khan has intentionally and repeatedly delivered measured responses to the news topic.

In a piece he wrote for the *Mirror*, Khan defined the spike in crimes rates as “extremely complex” and “involving deep-seated problems like poverty, inequality, social alienation, mental ill-health and a lack of work and opportunities for young people.”¹³³ In contrast, the tabloids have repeatedly advocated for far-reaching and vague responses to the incident, invoking scare tactics and hyperbole to do so. The most powerful among these scare tactics has been the tabloids’ attacks on Khan’s efforts. The tabloid press, particularly the *Sun* and *Daily Mail*, has deemed Khan — the Mayor and intended protector of the city — ineffective and unbothered by the fact that crime is

¹³² Ferguson, Kate. “Sadiq Khan says it could take a GENERATION to tackle the bloody knife crime epidemic gripping the capital as London's murder toll hits 116 this year alone”. *Daily Mail*, November 5, 2018.

¹³³ Khan, Sadiq. “Sadiq Khan: We need to cure the causes of knife crime”. *Daily Mirror*, November 10, 2018.

“spiraling out of control.”¹³⁴ These articles have constantly criticized Khan for stating that crime is a “disease” that “could take a generation to solve”, utilizing his remarks to place him in stark contrast to a figure who is tough on crime and determined to keep the country safe.

Yet, as these articles suggest, the tabloids have created Khan’s persona to suggest that he is not only an ineffective leader, but also an apathetic one. In March of 2019, the *Sun* reported that Khan “rolled his eyes” and claimed that he had done all that he could to fight knife crime.¹³⁵ The piece depicts a flippant and unprofessional mayor; it exhibits the tabloids’ efforts to not only make Khan appear to be bad at his job, but also question the dedication of the Mayor himself. The *Daily Mail* also produced an article on Khan’s “eye rolling” that delivered an almost identical message. The heavily politicized article accentuates Khan’s frustration with the unsolved problem, but uses his reaction to insinuate that the Mayor did not care about the well being of the city, a timely strategy within the overarching tabloid effort to exclude Khan. The crime spree in London functions, therefore, as a prominent intersection of a partisan tabloid message with the exclusionary strategy of the press.

Khan’s position not only as a politician, but also as the mayor of the capital city represents the image of a multicultural and tolerant Britain. However, Islamophobic backlash to this persona has motivated exclusionary rhetoric in many pressing political matters that has extended far beyond the scope of the crime spree coverage. In April of 2018, Leave EU — the loose political organization that spearheaded the Brexit initiative

¹³⁴ Ferguson, Kate. “Sadiq Khan says it could take a GENERATION to tackle the bloody knife crime epidemic gripping the capital as London's murder toll hits 116 this year alone”. *Daily Mail*, November 5, 2018.

¹³⁵ Clark, Natasha. “HOW DARE YOU! Sadiq Khan ROLLS HIS EYES and moans ‘I’ve done all I can do’ when confronted about his failure to tackle London knife crime epidemic”. *The Sun*, March 7, 2019.

— posted on Twitter “British multiculturalists feed Islamic fundamentalism. Londonistan, built on the sad ruins of English Christianity.”¹³⁶ The Tweet included a graphic featuring Sadiq Khan smiling in front of images of a crowd of Muslims praying and a mosque. The highly Islamophobic Tweet showcased how the Leave campaign directly and publicly attempted to showcase a connection between Islamic extremism and the London Mayor. The Tweet also indicated that under Khan, “Londonistan” would replace 500 churches with 423 mosques, as well as establish 100 Sharia courts.¹³⁷

The *Mirror* responded to this Tweet, publishing an article that fact-checked and then disproved the statistics of original post. It then condemned the association of Khan with extremism, as well as the accusation that Khan’s loyalties did not lie with the wellbeing of the city, but rather, the proliferation of Islam in British society. Yet, Khan’s image demonstrates his iconography in conservative camps as the symbol of diversity and Islam in the UK. This particular tabloid article — published from the *Mirror*, a Labour-affiliated publication that has tended to view Khan more favorably — calls out the Leave campaign for the use of Khan in a problematic and exclusionary manner. Although the article addresses the tactics used in a Brexit campaign, it also highlights the similarities between the associative strategies of this platform and some of the content produced by the *Daily Mail* and *Sun*. The reoccurrence of the same Islamophobic messages against Khan in the tabloid press demonstrates how Khan is viewed by these publications as a symbol of religious and racial diversity that challenges the tabloids’ norms. Khan’s religious identity challenges the narratives of the tabloid community to such a degree that he has faced Islamophobic, racist, and simply ludicrous coverage, all

¹³⁶ Smith, Mikey. “Every statistic in Brexit campaign's racist post about Sadiq Khan's 'Londonistan' is false”. *The Mirror*, April 3, 2018.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

under the excuse of heavy-hitting political news. This, in short, demonstrates the use of religious identity as a strategy of exclusion in politics.

Conclusion

This thesis has presented two historical narratives: one that traces the presence of the tabloids in British society, and one that outlines the development of Islamophobia in the British press. The frameworks used to consolidate and analyze these histories — namely the role of an identity-based framework in studying patterns of tabloid readership and the impact of shifting perceptions of Muslims as a response to global events — outline complex interactions between the tabloid press and their readers, as well as the Muslims impacted by the papers' content. Moreover, these two focuses of study are analyzed together in the third and final section of the thesis. Through the creation of tabloid personas for four prominent British Muslim celebrities, this thesis aims to analyze patterns of press coverage of British Muslims that confirmed narratives of exclusion based in religious identity.

In the analysis of Zayn Malik, tabloid coverage indicated a disproportionate number of stories related to Malik's religious identity. Moreover, the tone and content of these pieces tended to depict Malik as an exceptional Muslim figure, and frame his individual characteristics in contrast to problematic depictions of the wider Muslim community. The analysis of Riz Ahmed's tabloid persona revealed a splintering in the tabloids' depictions of the celebrity, highlighting and praising the actor's role in mainstream film and television, while avoiding Ahmed's experiences as a rapper. This selective coverage of Ahmed's identity within his profile highlights the tabloids' efforts to shape the actor's persona in accordance with their own narratives of Muslim identity, emphasizing aspects that aligned with their depiction of Ahmed as a highbrow and well spoken — as well as relatively apolitical celebrity — and denouncing those that did not.

However, in the analysis of Sajid Javid, the tabloids, particularly the *Sun* and *Daily Mail*, returned to similar exclusionary strategies to depict Javid as an exceptional Muslim figure. However, due to Javid's political prominence, the tabloids also utilized his profile — and the tabloids' own politically motivated agendas — to absolve themselves of other accusations of Islamophobia. In short, Javid's profile is used to promote the tabloids' narrative of exceptional Muslims, while also adding a political-affiliation behind this message. However, Javid's role in the tabloid press stands in stark contrast to Sadiq Khan's tabloid persona. For, it is in the analysis of Khan's profile that an explicit conflict can be identified between the tabloid-promoted narratives of Muslim identity and the political platforms of Khan's own agenda. Specifically, Khan has used his platform as mayor of London to self-identity as an "ordinary Muslim". Khan's claims that he represents the average Muslim in Britain directly challenge the tabloids' promoted narratives of exception. Thus, the tabloids' reactions to Khan's success — particularly the extreme criticism of the mayor from publications like the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* — can be viewed not only as politically motivated attacks, but also as identity-based reactions to Khan's self-promoted identity.

In summary, this thesis aims to utilize depictions of relevant figures in modern British culture to unpack the tabloid press' role in excluding Muslim Britons from mainstream cultural discourse. The selected tabloid personas each reveal different manifestations of these strategies within the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Mirror*, ultimately confirming both the ongoing prominence of the tabloid press' role in societal rhetoric, and the concerning degree to which Muslims face prejudice in British media today.

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