Abstract

On 7 July 2005, Britain suffered its first ever suicide attack. Four young British-born Muslims, apparently well-educated and from integrated backgrounds, killed their fellow citizens, including other Muslims. The incident raised the vision that British Muslims would be seen as the ‘enemy within’ and a ‘fifth column’ in British society. To examine how this view emerged, this thesis investigates the representation of British Muslims in two major British broadsheets, The Guardian and The Daily Telegraph, over a two-year period (7 July 2005-8 July 2007). A corpus of 274 news items, including editorials, comments, interviews, and news reports on the London bombings, has been collected and analysed using the inductive approach based upon thematic analysis. The thesis asks a significant question: How did these broadsheets present British Muslims in the wake of the London bombings? This thesis aims to present a narrative of how the London bombings (hereafter 7/7) emerged in these broadsheets based on their reaction to an interpretation and perception of the 7/7 event.

This research indicates that the two broadsheets shared a similar cultural approach in combating Islamist terrorism, by encouraging the embracing of British values, although their different political orientations led to them differing attitudes over the precise manner in which this should be achieved. The Guardian was more concerned about individual liberty and human rights, while The Daily Telegraph emphasised the adaptation of tough legislation to combat terrorism. Given modern Britain’s secular moral fibre, the supremacy of British values dominated the debates on British Muslims which somehow reflected a manifestation of a systematic campaign to redefine Islam as a religion that fits into secular Western society, validating terms such as ‘Moderate Muslim’, ‘Islamic terrorists’, ‘Islamic extremists’, ‘Islamic militants’ and ‘Islamic terrorism’. Although both newspapers argue that radicalisation is a foreign-imported dilemma that has its roots in “Islamic ideology”, they differ in their attitudes on how to deal with it.

This thesis uses Cohen’s (1972) text, which suggests that the media often portray certain groups within society as “deviant” and “folk devils” and blames them for crimes. This research into the reactions of two broadsheets permits a contemporary discussion of the London bombings and British Muslims in the light of Cohen’s concept. It aims to locate the presence of a nexus of the four Ps - political parties, pressure groups, the press, and public bodies - that influence reporting and shape the debates (Ost, 2002; Chas, 2006, p.75). It is evident that the reporting of the two broadsheets blends three significant components: the views of self-proclaimed Islamic scholars, experts and hate preachers; the use of out-of-context verses of the Quran; and the use of political language to represent British Muslims. Arguably, the press transformed the 7/7 event, suggesting that it was driven by religious theology rather than being a politically motivated act.
Folk Devils and Moral Panic has been added to your Cart. Add to Cart. Turn on 1-Click ordering. In lieu of actually solving the supposed problem, Cohen reveals, the latter stages of a moral panic in particular function instead to rehabilitate the ideological foundations of the status quo and the authority of those who represent it. He likewise reveals the actual causes of the disturbances on the beach and the ensuing moral panic to derive not from the wayward nature of the Mods and Rockers so much as the changing circumstances of the times, not least of which being the emergence of youth culture from which the young gained a sense of independent identity, and high unemployment which added