DIRECT HATE SPEECH VS. INDIRECT FEAR SPEECH
A multimodal critical discourse analysis of
the *Sun*'s editorial "1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis"

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Abstract – After the 2015 Paris attacks, hate speech against Muslims gathered momentum and was further legitimized in popular media outlets across Europe. After "decades of sustained and unrestrained anti-foreigner abuse, misinformation and distortion", the United Nations accused some British newspapers of "hate speech" (ECRI 2016). Following on previous research (Sindoni 2016, 2017), this paper sets out to investigate how hate speech in mainstream British media is constructed both verbally and multimodally, with particular reference to the investigation of rhetoric inducing anti-Muslim and Islamophobic hatred. The paper adopts a multimodal critical discourse framework of analysis (Fairclough 2000; Machin, Mayr 2012). As a case study, the "1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis", *The Sun*'s editorial reporting on a poll conducted by Survation and related multimodal materials will be investigated with a view to unearthing 1) linguistic strategies, such as classification of social actors, including, but not limited to, personalisation vs. impersonalisation, data aggregation, and structural opposition (van Leeuwen 1996; van Dijk 1993b); 2) visual strategies (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006; Bednarek, Caple 2012, 2015), including representational techniques (e.g. reactional processes, dimensional and quantitative topography), interactive perspectives, and organisational distribution of visual items. Considering the combination of linguistic and visual news value (Bell 1991; Bednarek, Caple 2014), the paper will ultimately suggest that 1) resources need to be investigated in their reciprocal interplay to scrutinize the covert agenda of media outlets that may promote indirect forms of hate speech and that 2) less explicit forms of hate speech are no less dangerous than explicit incitement to racial hatred in that they can foster a siege mentality by drawing on an us/them rhetoric.

Keywords: hate speech; British tabloids; multimodality; multimodal critical discourse analysis; media representation of Muslims; fear speech; Islamophobia.

> *History has shown us time and again*
> *the dangers of demonising foreigners and minorities*
> (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015).

1. Background: definitions and contextualization

As hate crime against Muslims is on the rise in UK, this paper sets out to investigate the role played by print and online mainstream media, with particular reference to a British tabloid, *The Sun*. To this end, an example will be discussed, along with the response of activists, who raised the issue of growing anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobic hatred, and the role of the UK press regulator IPSO (i.e. The Independent Press Standards Organisation). Concerns over media representations are widespread: for example, a recent evidence session on inquiry into Hate Crime by the Commons Select Committee in the British Parliament investigated into "the scale and impact of anti-Muslim sentiment in the

print media, journalistic handling of faith and religious issues, national and international reactions to hate in the British print media, the role and effectiveness of media regulators and finally the outcomes of upheld complaints, and the impact of regulator penalties" (Commons Select Committee, February 20, 2018).

With the aim of tracing back single and specific episodes of biased media representations against the Muslim community, we will discuss an example of controversy around accusations of breach of Code with reference to "accuracy" against the British tabloid *The Sun* in 2015. This controversy involves an article presenting a poll splashed over the print front page and titled "1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis" (November 23, 2015) and its online version, both published in the wake of the savage coordinated Paris terror attacks which shocked the world. This case study will be discussed by adopting a multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA henceforth) approach to shed light on the verbal and multimodal orchestration of resources that make meanings in their reciprocal interplay.

In Section 1.1, an overview of the broad phenomenon of hate speech, with some reference to online episodes, will be provided, with the aim of defining it, thus focusing on the narrower definition of "fear speech" that, even if it does not explicitly call for violent action and aggression, is nonetheless dangerous, as it actively helps build the *us/them* opposition, ultimately feeding siege mentality. Attention will be drawn to how negative and stereotyped representations of Muslims are interlaced with negative attributions linked to ethnicity, nationality and religion. Section 1.2 further contextualises the phenomenon by drawing on studies that explore media representations and by outlining the specific agenda of British tabloids in terms of their projected readership. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework of analysis adopted and the methodology used by illustrating its qualitative slant and along with some caveats. Section 3 discusses a case study with examples of MCD analysis of both verbal and visual materials and in Section 4 some conclusions are presented with a view to future lines of research.

1.1. Hate speech: definitions

A relatively recent Unesco report on online hate speech discusses its controversial nature, which is situated within the complex nexus between "freedom of expression, individual, group and minority rights, as well as concepts of dignity, liberty and equality" (Gagliardone *et al.* 2015, 10). International and national legislation, broadly speaking, refers to expressions that incite to harm a targeted individual, group or minority, for example via discrimination or violence, but it is sometimes extended to those verbal acts, or discourses in Foucauldian sense (1980), that actively promote a climate of hostility, prejudice, and aggression. Interestingly, the premise to the report recognizes the eminently multimodal nature of hate speech, that, even if it eschews clear-cut definitions, can be expressed in "text, images, or sound" (Gagliardone *et al.* 2015, 10), thus recognizing its multimodal nature. Consistent with this view, Relevant Code Provisions 17 mentioned in the IPSO ruling that will be discussed in the following Sections, refer to Clause 1 (Accuracy) that states: "The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information, *including pictures*."

Research has also shown that the recurring two-fold functions (and goals) of hate speech are 1) degrading and de-humanizing the targeted individual and/or group; 2) build a sense of in-group solidarity for groups under (presumed) threat (Waldron 2012). These two functions work in combination to produce meaning: while the "other" is objectified and de-humanized, a stronger sense of self is built and a reassuring feeling of belonging to

a community (e.g. "the community under threat") is established. The *us/them* opposition strategy, that can be developed in both verbal and multimodal terms (as will be discussed in the following Sections) creates the conditions for the development of a widespread siege mentality at all levels in society.

As the issue of hate speech involves the dynamics between freedom of expression and the right to dignity and equality, it has received different responses in different countries. Research comparing approaches at an international level to regulate hate speech have been mainly focused on the American and European contexts (Rosenfeld 2012; Bleich 2013). The legislative approach in the United States is generally believed to be far more tolerant than that adopted in Europe and tends to ban or punish forms of speech that explicitly can cause harm or immediate danger, whereas European countries, such as Germany or France, are more likely to adopt preventive measures that came in force not only when violence is directly advocated, but also for the contents of hate speech *per se.* However, deciding which contents can be harmful may be tricky, especially when the combination of multimodal elements may depict discriminatory representations that are not immediately identifiable as such.

However defined, hate speech is not about abstract ideas, ideologies or beliefs that can be uncritically conflated with specific and more or less restricted groups of people or communities, nor is about ready-made formulas that can be easily applied to individuals or groups that attack and individuals or groups that are attacked. Hate speech is a phenomenon that is evolving so rapidly and unpredictably that calls for apt and efficient frameworks for understanding, analysing and countering it. For example, the formulation of more precise definitions to which we may turn has been called for by many writers who feel that the somewhat blurry definition of "hate speech" is too far-ranging. After all, legitimised forms of hate speech exist in all societies, though thankfully, not all of them entail a real risk of degeneration into violence.[1] Following this line of thinking, some have argued for the use of narrower definitions, such as "dangerous speech" or "fear speech".

The definition of "dangerous speech" is useful to identify specific acts of speech that may be directed against others with the specific aim to damage and cause harm. With the aim of identifying and isolating specific forms of speech and avoiding distortion and manipulation often perpetrated by the media, Benesch (2012) developed a framework that defines a dangerous speech act on the basis of: 1) the personality and popularity of the speaker; 2) the emotional state of the audience; 3) the intrinsic content of the speech act as a call to action; 4) the socio-historical context; and 5) the means used to disseminate it (including the language variety, e.g. if speech is in vernacular, a person from the area where that language is spoken may hear it differently than if it is in the Standard variety). The delicacy of this categorization may be helpful when trying to understand all the strategies that are deployed to create a siege mentality and ultimately legitimize violent acts as means to safeguard a group's identity, cultural integrity or safety, and the role that different media outlets may play to incite or counter hatred.

Another strand of research focuses on the individuals that produce online hate speech acts in the attempt to understand their motivations for inciting hatred. Erjave and Kovačič (2012), for example, identified different categories, including *soldiers*, that are

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[1] By way of example, we may cite the many cases of verbal violence, or various legitimized derogatory forms of address, unleashed in oral performances in different cultural environments, such as in African or Caribbean countries. Even though these multifarious forms of 'folk art' or oral traditions, such the calypso in Caribbean islands or rap music in its original forms, may aggressively incite hatred, they are actually meant to be cathartic and liberating (see Finnegan 1992).

activists systematically disseminating hatred against their opponents with the aim of damaging the latter's reputation, and *watchdogs*, who use hate speech to draw attention to social issues. Their findings show that "soldiers" justify their online hate speech as something completely different from what happens in "real life" and that using extreme forms of violent speech is the only way to have their voice heard by their opponents.

These findings are consistent with research on online trolling or "haters" (see Buckels *et al.* 2014; Shin 2008; Herring *et al.* 2002), with the example is cybersexism, that is the unrelenting abuse of women online, making sexist stalking online one of the most worrying phenomena of online hatred (Poland 2016). However, according to *HateBase*,[2] a multilingual, usage-based repository of structured hate speech, the most frequent use of hate speech acts target individuals on the basis of their *ethnicity* (772 terms per 1000 occurrences), followed by *nationality* (362 per 1000), and *religion* (96 per 1000). The most cited language in *HateBase* is English (65%), and since it takes as its standpoint the regionality of hate vocabulary, the most active regions are the United States (38.5%) and United Kingdom (12.9%). Even though a basic lexical approach may be limited in extent, robustness of results, and applicability for an overall understanding of the phenomenon (*HateBase* lists terms added by users with the aim of localizing and contextualizing them), these indications prove useful to identify the critical area of investigation that is addressed in this paper, that lies within the nexus between ethnicity, nationality and religion, exemplified in the case of British Muslims and their media representation in the UK.

1.2. Threat or victim? Media representations

As early as 2008, a far-ranging analysis of press coverage of British Muslims showed that the number of news stories about Muslims had increased intensely between 2000 and 2008 (Moore *et al.* 2008). The analysis of c. 1000 newspaper articles published over that period and their accompanying images proved that such a noticeable increase was probably due to the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001 and London in 2005, but also as a consequence of general worries about Islam's impact on the British society. The study found: 1) an emphasis on terrorism and extremism, with specific reference to the "war on terror"; 2) removal of political motivations from acts of terrorism with a focus on religion; 3) representation of Islam as a "threat" as opposed to the perceived ideal of "British values".

Media representation of Muslims has been widely explored by research literature from a range of different perspectives, including media studies, philosophy, multicultural education, international affairs, linguistics, cultural studies, etc. (Ahmed, Matthes 2016; Baker 2010; Akbarzadeh, Smith 2005; Richardson 2004). Muslims are usually represented in polarised terms: they are optionally represented as a threat to society or are, less frequently, victimized (Horsti 2016; Innes 2010; Leudar *et al.* 2008; Lynch, McGoldrick, Russell 2012). Negative representations in both printed and online media are far more common and the framing of Muslims, often conflated, as a group, to migrants and asylum seekers, as a threat to society is usually shaped along three different lines: 1) *physical threat* to society and its members articulated in terms of sovereignty and security; 2) *economic threat* elaborated around purposely-created fear and suspect of undermining and/or exploiting social welfare and 3) *cultural threat* of menacing and endangering social and cultural values (Innes 2010).

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[2] See https://www.hatebase.org/, data last retrieved on 27 May, 2018.

When interviewed, Muslims themselves perceived media representations as biased, mainly negative, with associations with conservatism, economic backwardness and terrorism (Brown, Richards 2016). Other recent studies have investigated how several high-profile negative events involving Muslims have been covered by media in UK, for example finding that the same negative events are more likely to be labelled as acts of "terrorism" when they are perpetrated by Muslims than when they are committed by White non-Muslims (West, Loyd 2017). Studies using a combination of methodologies grounded in linguistics, including for example corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis, have shown how media representation of Muslims in UK are biased: via corpus-driven procedures, Baker (2012) has shown that Muslims tend to be linked to extreme forms of beliefs more than to moderate beliefs. Other studies adopting corpus linguistics methods, combined with discourse analysis, have followed the same line of investigation, providing robust data that prove the persistent prejudice of the British press against Muslims (Baker, Gabrielatos, McEnery 2013a, 2013b).

However, less research seems to be devoted to the study of online media neglecting visual/multimodal analysis (Ahmed, Matthes 2016), even though today's media are shaped by interlaced platforms where the border between "print" and "online" is blurred as well as the border between different platforms and social media outlets. However, some research has shown that Muslims are represented as de-personalised and de-humanised to efface the personal components and create a mis-representation of the Muslim-migrant as the 'Other', in both linguistic and multimodal terms (Bleiker *at al.* 2013).

Language descriptions have started to circulate alternate forms of representation (e.g. giving personal details or reporting on specific life stories) and the impact of images have contributed to the dissemination of a shared iconography or "visual quotations" (Sontag 2003, p. 22). Visual quotations come to be impressed in the viewers' minds to such an extent that they orient opinions and beliefs and shape social attitudes. Some researchers claim that the social domain is itself visually performed (Campbell 2007).

The Sun's column and poll, in particular, have been selected in this research as they were officially accused of "fuelling prejudice" in a report by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI 2016) on rising racism, hate speech and divisive campaigns in Britain. The report found a number of "areas of concern" over post-Brexit political discourse and hate speech, that result in violent racial and religious attacks (Horsti 2016). Metropolitan police figures covering London have shown a sharp rise in Islamophobic and xenophobic assaults over the past few years: for example, after the recent London Bridge attacks in 2017, anti-Muslim hate crimes rose five-fold with a dramatic 40% increase of racist incidents if compared to the same average the year before. In particular, the report mentioned *The Sun*'s "1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis" biased front page (November 23, 2015), concluding that "in light of the fact that Muslims are increasingly under the spotlight as a result of recent Isis-related terrorist acts around the world, fuelling prejudice against Muslims shows a reckless disregard" (ECRI 2016).

Before presenting the theoretical framework, method and data of this paper in Section 2, a concise overview of the tabloids as a genre will be provided here. Despite popular belief, tabloids are not defined by size: broadsheet newspapers are often labelled as "quality newspapers", whereas the "popular press" is identified with tabloids, which generally cover celebrity and sensationalist stories rather than political reporting or overseas affairs. Tabloids are subdivided into the more sensationalist down-market titles, the so-called "red-tops", such as *The Sun* and *The Mirror*, and the middle-market tabloids, such as *The Daily Express* and *The Daily Mail* (Conboy 2006). In the 1970s, when the *Daily Mail* was forced to reduce the broadsheet newspaper into a tabloid size due to a

financial crisis, it struggled to differentiate itself from the down-market slant of *The Sun* and *The Mirror* (Taylor 1998, p. 211). The *Daily Mail* generally targets middle-class and women in particular, whereas *The Sun* and *The Mirror* have always had a broader agenda, that incorporates "commercial concerns seeking to maximise profits by selling copies of newspapers, and advertising space within them, to the largest number of people possible" (Rooney 2000, p. 94). As Rooney argues, both *The Sun* and *The Mirror* are not outlets apt to the articulation of unbiased discourse that may help the shaping of reason-based public opinion (Rooney 2000). British tabloids are not interested in taking a politically critical stance as their ultimate goal is to maximise profit, and to do so they publish materials that can appeal to the widest audience possible.

2. Theoretical framework, research questions and method

In this Section, a general overview of the framework of analysis adopted in this paper will be presented with the aim of illustrating the research questions that we will address in Section 3 and the method used. The combination of tools drawn upon multimodal studies and critical discourse analysis will be helpful to recognize how verbal and multimodal resources work together to make overt and covert meanings. The different but compatible agendas of these two joint approaches can be applied to the domain of online and print media and used to scrutinize how indirect hate speech acts (or fear speech) can be produced and to which goal in mainstream media outlets. In sub-section 2.1 some indications on the theories and epistemologies of multimodal studies and critical discourse analysis will be illustrated with a view to exploring the kind of findings that can be produced along the lines of investigations of the two theoretical approaches, whereas in sub-section 2.2 the research questions will be introduced, along with the explanation of the selected qualitative method and data.

2.1. Theoretical framework

Some strands of multimodal studies and critical discourse analysis have in common the tools of analysis drawn from linguistics, in particular those developed within systemic-functional linguistics, or SFL (Halliday 1978; Halliday, Matthiessen 2004) that is used to analyse language across three different metafunctions that work together to produce meanings from three different standpoints: 1) the ideational metafunction – in turn subdivided into experiential and logical metafunction – is about what happens in the world, both externally and internally, and is about the *field* of discourse; 2) the interpersonal metafunction deals with the relationships that are instantiated via language, for example in epistemic terms (i.e. the degree of truth attached to any utterance) and is about the *tenor* of discourse; 3) the textual metafunction is about how discourse is constructed in terms of positioning of items within the clause or sentence, and is about the *mode* of discourse. However, these three metafunctions are conflated or instantiated in language production and speakers produce specific meanings intentionally by making specific choices in lexico-grammar by drawing on the resources that the language as a system make available to them.

Multimodal studies actually derive from SFL as the ground-breaking work written by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in the mid-Nineties was an attempt to "translate" the subtle mechanisms and dynamics of language into the domain of other semiotic resources, such as for example the resources of images (Kress, van Leeuwen

2006). In other words, the enterprise undertaken by these multimodal analysts was to understand the patterns of regularities of systems of signs *other* than language as translated into the *representational*, *interactive* and *textual* metafunctions.

Critical discourse analysis shares this critical approach with multimodal studies and is aimed, as well as the analysis, say, of images, at unveiling opinions, beliefs, ideas that may not be visible at first sight (Machin, Mayr 2012). The term "discourse" is central to CDA, as the broader ideas communicated by a text are referred to as discourses (van Dijk 1993a; Fairclough 2003; Wodak 2001). As anticipated in sub-section 1.1, these discourses can be equated with worldviews, in the sense described by Foucault (1980). The process of doing CDA involves looking at *choices* of lexico-grammar in texts, in line with Halliday's systemic-functional agenda.

By way of a summary, both multimodal studies and CDA are approaches that are particularly useful when qualitatively investigating texts. Even though it is equally valid to adopt a quantitative approach in combination with CDA, in this paper a qualitative method has been adopted for the very fine-grained research questions that will be presented in the following sub-sections. MCDA-based approaches have been used to investigate how hate speech acts can be produced, received and understood in mainstream media outlets in one specific instance.

2.2. Research questions, qualitative data, and method

Assuming that hate speech can take on different forms and is not less dangerous when it is articulated in indirect forms, I have selected a case study to explore how indirect forms of hate speech – that may appear so indirect that they can be easily withdrawn – can produce heated debates and induce subtle forms of hatred and discrimination.

The research questions addressed in this paper are:

• How are verbal and visual resources used to project in the audience a specific narrative and a biased representation of British Muslims?

• What are the specific verbal and visual strategies employed to construct a news frame of British Muslims? How are language and images associated to produce meaning?

The case study is an editorial commenting a poll and its splash published in 2015 by *The Sun*. Considering the very reduced amount of verbal data, our findings will be necessarily based on a fine-grained analysis that will be corroborated by the combination of methods from CDA and multimodality. This case study has been selected not because it is representative, but as it is symptomatically interesting for the controversies that arose, including formal complaints to the IPSO, the British press regulator body, public debates on popular social networking websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, and legal consequences. The data thus cannot be disentangled, but need to be analysed in their chronological sequence by taking into account all the involved social actors, their roles, positions, and how all these are articulated in discourse by means of verbal strategies, use of multimodal resources, etc. In particular, some strategies typical of a CDA approach will be analysed, including:

• lexical choices, such as structural oppositioning (*us vs. them*), use of quoting verbs;

• visual semiotic choices, such information value, salience, framing;

• representational, interpersonal and textual choices, such as classification of social actors (van Leeuwen 1996), transitivity and verb processes.

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*L*ₒ inguaggi

3. A case study: The *Sun*'s front page 'One in five Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis' (November 23, 2015)

Section 3 is devoted to a MCD analysis of *The Sun*'s front page published on November 23, 2015, in the wake of the Paris terrorist attacks, and the controversy it mounted, leading *The Times* to admit after three days that its stablemate red-tops had published a "misleading" headline. *The Sun*'s had reported on a poll conducted by Survation and summarised in the headline "1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis", accompanied by a captioned picture, presumably of Mohammad Emwazi, better known as Jihadi John, a radicalised young British Arab believed to be the person appearing in videos produced by the Islamic extremist ISIS group and showing the beheadings of prisoners in 2014 and 2015. The picture shows Emwazi in middle shot, brandishing a knife and wearing a black balaclava. The extremist was called "John" by a group of hostages who were kept captives by a group of four with an English accent, thus nicknamed "The Beatles".

The front page of the print edition of *The Sun* analysed in the following sub-section also features a bite-sized boxed editorial authored by the political editor Tom Newton Dunn, titled "'Wake up call' after Paris blitz", and a jumpline directing the reader to page 5. Within the boxed editorial, a sidebar includes a sub-boxed headline in blue that directs to columnist Kelvin MacKenzie's "Time for Britain to Shut Door" on page 13 with a cutline. Figure 1 reproduces the *Sun*'s front cover.

3.1. Classification of social actors

The editorial by Tom Newton Dunn is integrally reported in Annex 1. It is today unavailable online, since *The Sun* has removed the text that was published in the online version of the tabloid. However, traces of the controversy are still numerous online, as a quick search on Google, for example, shows: the so-called "1 in 5 Brit Muslims" episode is present in a very wide range of other British and international newspapers, tabloids, blogs and many other media outlets, including *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *BBC*, *Washington Post*, *Huffington Post*, *Daily Mirror*, to name but a few, as the poll's results and editorial raised heated debates, with the filing of over 3,000 complaints to the British press regulator body, IPSO, in less than 24 hours.

Figure 1
The *Sun*'s © print edition, front page (November 23, 2015).

A close critical discourse analysis of the multimodal text should firstly recognize the complex nature of the artefact, that is made up of several interlaced semiotic components on two different levels that can be categorised as "front page" and "inside the tabloid".

Front page:

- headline in the foreground working in combination with the picture bottom right of Jihadi John;
- deck in red above the headline "Exclusive: shock poll";
- bite-sized boxed editorial, placed middle-right, plus
    - an ingrained side-bar with a sub-boxed headline and a cutline.

Inside the tabloid:

- editorial number 1, "'Wake up call' after Paris blitz", by Tom Newton Dunn, page 5;
- editorial number 2, "Time for Britain to Shut Door", by Kelvin MacKenzie, page 13.

It needs to be likewise recognized that even though all these components work together to produce meanings, the front page is the most salient element, with headline and picture of Jihadi John being an example of the powerful orchestration of words and image to make meanings. Even without reading the editorials, not even the bite-size, the message is unambiguous, scary and deeply worrying. The deck in red above the headline also contributes to attract attention with the careful wording: *exclusive* refers to the uniqueness of information that is available to those who will buy (and, subsequently, read) and be *shocked* by the sensational news that is enhanced by the inflammatory language used in the headline.

3.1.1. Personalisation vs. impersonalisation, and structural opposition

The analysis of referential choices, involving verbal and visual techniques for the representation of social participants, is defined by the chosen representational strategies (Fowler 1991; Fairclough 2003). These go beyond mere choice of specific lexical items, as they are used to draw on (or omit) sets of ideas, beliefs and worldviews. Van Leeuwen (1996) provides an inventory of social actors to draw our attention to the ways in which these classifications can produce specific and systematic effects on readers and viewers, thus being grounded on discourses and their underlying ideologies.

In both headline and "Wake up" editorial, "Brit Muslims" are made *impersonal* and *collectivised*, they are treated as a homogeneous group. Additionally, "Brit Muslims" are *genericised*: according to Machin and Mayr (2012, 81), "the generic category of 'Muslim' can place [a] story into a news frame where Muslims are a contemporary problem in Britain, either because of their extremism or the cultural or religious 'otherness'". Consistent with this approach, the editorialist *anonymises* this group of people. Examples of the strategies of impersonalisation, collectivisation, genericisation and anonymization are used throughout to describe the groups being talked about. This consistent use can be explained by the fact that the editorial illustrates the results of a poll, so that informants are assumed to be anonymous and statistically considered as a group. However, *structural opposition* is constructed so as to suggest a clear "us vs. them" rift, even though it is double-layered: the first opposition is between the interviewed British Muslims and the scary "Other", namely the jihadis, the second, more covert, opposition is between the projected "Other", that conflates Muslims and jihadis via the strategic use of "sympathy" (suggesting a bond between Muslims, whose nationality "British" seems to fade out throughout the text, and jihadis), and "us", that is *The Sun*'s projected readership.

The structural opposition between the two equally impersonalised, collectivised, genericised and anonymized groups can be found below, divided into British Muslims (and their leaders) and jihadis, a group specifically made up of actual IS militants and other unspecified people going to Syria:

- British Muslims (3 occ.); young Muslims, prominent Muslims, Brits; Muslims (4 occ.); Muslim leaders; Islamic leaders; UK Muslims;
- those who have fled the UK to fight for IS in Syria; French and Belgian jihadis (3 occ.); IS (2 occ.); jihadis; those who join IS; those like barbaric Jihadi John who flee to Syria; young fanatics; people going out to Syria.

The opposition is interesting in the phrasing of the questions asked. In particular, the question evoked in the title was: "Which of the following statements is closest to your view?" With the following four options:

- I have a lot of sympathy with young Muslims who leave the UK to join fighters in Syria;
- I have some sympathy with young Muslims who leave the UK to join fighters in Syria;
- I have no sympathy with young Muslims who leave the UK to join fighters in Syria;
- Don't know.

Interestingly, the collective noun "jihadis" that is also widely used in the text does not appear in the questions. Additionally, "young Muslims who leave the UK to join fighters in Syria" are not necessarily going to fight in support of the so-called Islamic State or other militant Islamist groups; some could be going to join rebel groups *opposed* to IS. Furthermore, the key word "sympathy" is ambiguous, as is less clear than, for example, the word "support", as explained by the Manchester University's Maria Sobolewska, an expert on polling minority groups (Melley 2015).[3]

In stark contrast to this massive use of impersonalisation, collectivisation, genericisation, and anonymization, a parallel use for the classification of social actors can be detected in the text. Some examples of personalisation, nomination and functionalisation (Machin, Mayer 2012, pp. 79-82) are used to emphasise that the quoted opinions come from trustworthy people, politician or religious leaders, so as to reinforce the presumed neutrality of the whole discourse presented. All cases of personalisation are instantiated as specific nouns (nomination) accompanied by their functions (functionalisation): "Labour London Mayor hopeful Sadiq Khan", "Omar Elhamdoon, of the Muslim Association of Britain" (2 occ.), "Bashir Chaudhry, chairman of the League of British Muslims".

3.1.2. Aggregation of data

The strategy of *aggregation* is widely used and specifically so as the ensemble of texts are a hybrid genre, mixing poll results and opinions expressed by the columnist. By "opinions", I mean idiosyncratic comments that are not systematically and neutrally reporting on data, but that are systematically mixed with figures and data. With the aggregation technique, participants are objectified and treated as statistics, and as van Dijk (1991) argues, the use of numbers and figures gives the impression of neutrality, of mere reporting of "factual" truth, when in fact exact figures are omitted, or exact scale of

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[3] Soboleska's argument is the following: "Did [the respondents] simply mean that they felt the situation for Muslims is very hard around the world, with a lot of wars and conflict, and perhaps prejudice in Western Europe, and therefore, this particular person feels some sympathy with how desperation may lead some young people to terrorism?" […] "Is it just an emotional understanding? Or is it actually weak or tacit support of terrorism? I really think making that leap in to the second conclusion is taking it a bit too far." (Melley 2015).

measurement are not clearly indicated. The "1 in 5 Brit Muslims'" headline suggests in fact that 1 in 5 of *all* Muslims have shown "sympathy" for "those fighting in Syria", whereas we learn from the last line of the column that only 1003 informants were interviewed, considered as a "representative sample size" of 2.7 million Muslims in UK, according to the 2011 census (Office for National Statistics 2016) and also evoked explicitly in the text: "The survey's findings show a clear majority of the 2.7 million Brits who follow Islam are moderate".

Other examples of aggregation are:

a) Percentage	b) Number/figure	c) Vague amount
1. The number among young Muslims aged 18-34 is even higher at one in four	1. The 2.7 million Brits	1. A clear majority
2. Some 38 per cent of those polled say Muslims should not have to condemn terror acts carried out by IS	2. Some 2.7 million Muslims live in Britain	2. today's alarming figures
3. 19 per cent of UK Muslims do have some sympathy with those like barbaric Jihadi John who flee to Syria	3. 500,000 have some support for jihadis	3. A small majority
4. 28 per cent had some sympathy for young fanatics	4. more than a million people	4. that figure should be higher
5. nine per cent more than now	5. a representative sample size of 1,003	
6. from 61 per cent in March to 71 per cent today		
7. Some 17 per cent in our poll said their religion is more important to them than being British		
8. 38 per cent, which would equate to more than a million people, blame the actions of the West		
9. six per cent say the biggest cause is poverty and discrimination against Muslims		
10. the 38 per cent figure		
11. Only 25 per cent of Muslims say it is IS leaders who exploit vulnerable minds		
12. And just 30 per cent say their leaders need to do more to condemn IS		

Table 1
References to percentage, exact figures or vague amount in the text (Annex 1).

In the "percentage" column, a foregrounded figure can be found in 1a), as shown in the front page's bite-size. Interestingly, the actual figure is not provided, but only the higher rate of informants expressing the alarming view referred to in the title, by mentioning the variable of age (younger interviewed people). Furthermore, in 2a), 3a) and 4a), we are given percentage and also how to interpret them, with specifications that provide a univocal, and negative, key to interpretation (e.g. "barbaric Jihadi John" and "young fanatics").

Observing the "exact numbers" column, 3b) is biased in two ways: 1) it unproblematically assumes that the sample size is representative of the whole British

population of c. 2.7 million referred to throughout the text, when the people expressing this view amount to c. 180 out of the interviewees, and 2) it equates the support with jihadis with the sympathy of those who left UK to fight in Syria evoked in the question. "Support" would have in fact been much more evident than the more vague nuance of "sympathy". On a similar vein, "jihadis" is a group of people immediately recognizable when compared to the blurrier (and longer) definition of "young Muslims who leave the UK to join fighters in Syria".

The intricate use of figures can be also shown in the extract below with my italics:

> ISLAMIC leaders last night said any British Muslims who have sympathy with those who join IS have a "warped understanding" of the situation in Syria.
> But the Muslim Association of Britain admitted any level of support is concerning.
> It spoke out after an exclusive Sun survey found *19 per cent of UK Muslims do have some sympathy with those like barbaric Jihadi John who flee to Syria*. However, our poll shows that despite today's alarming figures, levels of support are falling. *Research for Sky News in March before IS's Paris and Tunisia atrocities found 28 per cent had some sympathy for young fanatics. That is nine per cent more than now. The number who have no sympathy at all for jihadis has also risen from 61 per cent in March to 71 per cent today*. (Annex 1)

After reporting on the exact percentage of UK Muslims who do have some sympathy ("do" is used to reinforce the message by emphasis) with "those like barbaric Jihadi John who flee to Syria", the author admits that levels of support are falling by making reference to another piece of information presented as equally reliable as *The Sun*'s poll, namely an unspecified and not linked "research for Sky News" dating back to March 2015. The Sky News research in fact found that 28% of the interviewees showed some sympathy "for young fanatics", then adding that this figure represents "nine per cent more than now" and that "the number who have no sympathy at all for jihadis has also risen from 61 per cent in March to 71 per cent today", thus recognizing that data on opinions – however alarming and worrying – have improved. The two different polls are equated, even though it is difficult to say if these can be actually compared as no indication whatsoever on how to interpret data is provided. The "young Muslims" have disappeared from the description and substituted by two vivid and scary images: "barbaric Jihadi John", who is also visually shown in the front page, and here recalled, and "young fanatics", whose intentions are overtly articulated as extreme and necessarily negative.

From an analysis of the informants' responses, some of the examples quoted above show the author's stance in orienting the reader in how to interpret percentages: in 11a), the first component in the textual metafunction, that is the adverb "only", suggests that this is a small percentage if compared to what it should really be: many more Muslims should in fact share this opinion, in the author's view. Consistent with this line of thinking, 12a) again foregrounds "just", which is a way to highlight once more that the percentage is too low. Conversely, when the opinions of Muslims are what they should be, the author takes pain to highlight that the majority is "small" and that "that figure should be higher" (4c).

Drawing on the original framework designed by Bell (1991), the news frame is overall and mainly grounded on *negativity*, *proximity*, *consonance*, *unexpectedness* and *facticity*. The piece of news refers to negative findings about the UK Muslims' positive attitude towards young people leaving UK and going to Syria: the people referred to in the text are not distant or irrelevant; it is made clear that "they" are among us (*proximity*). This is likely to produce some surprise in readers (*unexpectedness*), but at the same time this is consonant with the *Sun's* presupposed reader, because they may confirm or feed fears of the "Other" that is able to hide their real and life-threatening intentions (*consonance*). All

this is even more threatening due to the fact that the text is packed with data, statistics, figures (*facticity*) that add up to a sense of trustworthiness and reliability of information.

3.2. Modality, hedging and quoting verbs

Even though a lexical analysis, including the study of classification of social actors, is useful to understand processes of representations, the latter go well beyond lexical use of language. The opinions of the writer are also expressed by means of the interpersonal metafunction that is crucial to the interpretation of the writer's stance and attitude towards what is predicated. In SFL approaches to communication (Halliday, Matthiessen 2004), the key component to evaluate when tackling the interpersonal metafunction is the ensemble of Subject plus Finite that can be a temporal operator (in the case of verb tense), or a modal operator (that is a modal verb), so that the position of the subject can be understood in relation to the utterance, in terms of the degree of truth attached to it (i.e. epistemic stance). Modalizing utterances, or using hedging, is a way to smooth the degrees of truth attached to them, or in other words, to hedge statements.

In the editorial in question, the tense is mainly habitual present, that is used to highlight the permanent quality of the utterance, or simple past to place events in a specific time frame. The use of modality markers is mainly attributed to one Islamic leader, whose comments are reported via direct speech quotations, i.e. Omar Elhamdoon:

- *maybe indirectly* saying;
- They have *probably* become disillusioned;
- That is an *assumption* we make;
- This *could* be radicalised.

Bashir Chaudhry, chairman of the League of British Muslims, also uses the modal operator *should*. The other occurrences are mainly modal operators used to construct conditionals (i.e. *would*). Views expressed in the article are then polarised: the author presents his own opinions as facts via the use of unmodalized verbs, whereas other people who are reported as talking are presented as formulating hypotheses and making assumptions.

Hedging creates a strategic ambiguity in the article (Wood, Kroger 2000), as the author avoids commitment to utterances, although the impression of being detailed and precise with the high frequency of data aggregation. Expressions, such as "the figures emerged in our exclusive poll" and "the survey's findings show a clear majority" give the impression of expertise through evidence-based language, while at the same time a sense of vagueness is pursued about what is exactly said and levels of representativeness are obscured.

Quoting verbs used in the text are likewise mostly neutral; "say/said" (11 occ.) and "tells" (1 occ.). The only transcript verb, marking the development of discourse, is "added" (1 occ.), metapropositional expressives, marking the author's interpretation of the speaker's attitude (Caldas-Coulthard 1994), are "blame", "speaking/speak out", and "admitted". These are either linked to 1) human participants saying something (e.g. Islamic leaders expressing opinions) or 2) non-human participants described using the active voice while saying something (e.g. "polls", "census"), thus effacing the responsibility and identity of those who express the opinions.

3.3. Multimodal representation of social actors

After a fine-grained lexical analysis of how people or groups are represented in the text by use of language, we will now turn our attention to the multimodal representation of the news, with particular reference to social actors and data/figures. The news frame referred to throughout the multimodal artifact shown in Figure 1 and de-assembled in Section 3 clearly builds upon a well-established news frame that equates Muslims with terrorism, thus indirectly suggesting the "necessity" of fear and suspicion.

On the front page, bottom right, a cut of Jihadi John is captioned as "Support.. Brit Jihadi John went to Syria". The picture foregrounds Jihadi John, a UK militant supposedly killed c. 10 days before the publication of the issue (Phipps *et al.* 2015). Without going into details regarding the identity of this London born IS fighter, the picture features a man (not easily recognizable) wearing a black balaclava covering all but his eyes and holding a knife, while looking at it "lovingly", as noticed by some commentators. From a multimodal interpersonal standpoint, Jihadi John is taken in a side-on middle shot that combines closeness (we can see his eyes) and distance, by means of an oblique angle. This visual strategy is used to suggest the possibility of impending danger that can take the form of one of our neighbours, just as Jihadi John was a computer programming university student from a well-to-do London family.

Even though the represented process is apparently non transactional, as only one participant is involved, on closer inspection, a reactional process can be detected, as a vector can be distinguished in the eyeline by the direction of Jihadi John's glance: he (*reacter*) is looking at (*reactional process*) the knife (*phenomenon*). From an interactive standpoint, the relationship established by the participant shown in the picture and the audience is an "offer", using Kress and van Leeuwen's 1996 framework, because Jihadi John does not establish direct contact with viewers, but is instead represented as an item of contemplation, as if placed in a showcase; viewers look at him while he looks at his dagger, so he is caught in the act of creating a visual relationship, through the vectoriality of his gaze, with the item – that in this iconography best represents his threatening anti-social role.

By applying the framework developed by Bednarek and Caple (2012, 2014) specifically for pictures accompanying news, the portrait of Jihadi John draws on the categories of *negativity*, *proximity*, *consonance*, and *unexpectedness*. The visual representation (e.g. black, balaclava, dagger, etc.) draws on the typical iconography of the scary terrorist (*negativity*), the one that we cannot clearly see (only his face is visible), but who lives among us and as the cutline tells us is Jihadi John, a radicalised British Muslim (*proximity*). However, this representation is immediately recognizable as it coheres with ideas and understanding of the news frame of *terrorism*, thus making it *consonant* to the readers' projected fears.

Even if less foregrounded than the cut in the front page, other visual texts are used to support the general agenda of this multimodal artefact. They do not include human participants, but are made up of a series of graphs that visually show the statistics for a better understanding of the poll's findings. In Kress and van Leuween's terms, these graphs represent a dimensional and quantitative topography in that they are drawn to scale, based on the quantity of aggregates of participants: in this case, they show visually and approximately the relationship between participants (i.e. answers) and quantity of aggregates (i.e. percentages).

Figure 2 and 3 reproduce the charts.
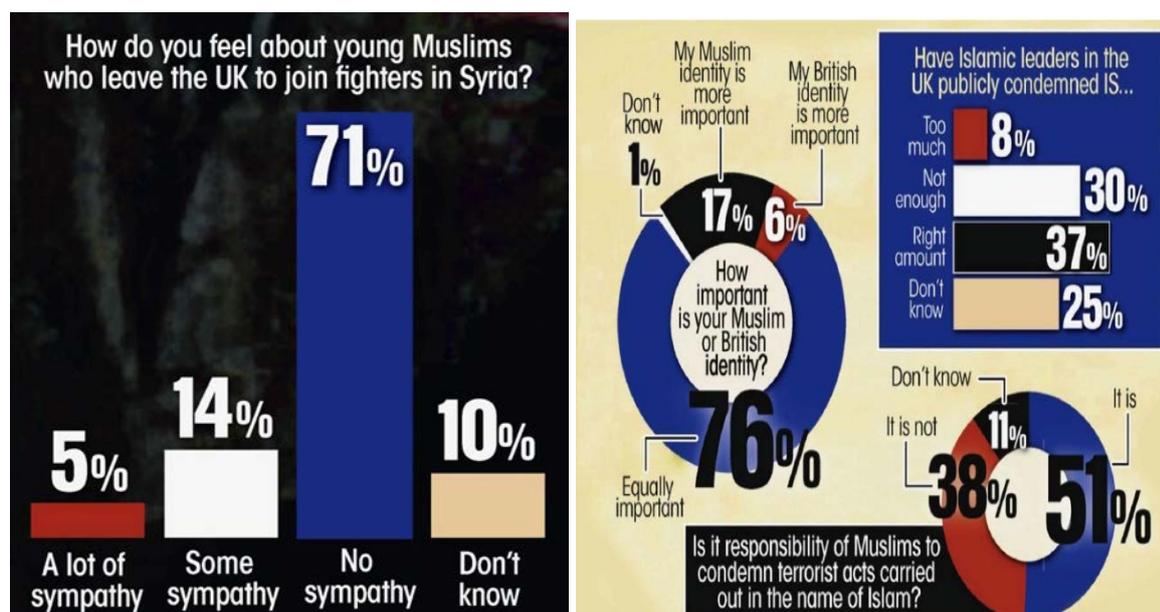
Figures 2 and 3
Charts and graphs published by the *Sun©* (November 23, 2015).

Figure 2 is the first to appear and vividly presents data: even without going into reading, viewers immediately understand the ratio among the different answers, with the stark majority highlighted in blue, thus representing the majority of negative answers (i.e. 70%). However, the positive (and alarming) answers are highlighted in red (5%) and white (14%), the latter even more in contrast with the black background. Even though they do not represent the majority, a left-right reading pathway features the items from a textual organisation of the page in a left-right position. In other words, this means that the items placed on the left are those which are viewed before by a Western reader, who reads from left to right.

In Figure 3, three questions and corresponding answers are provided, giving a decidedly more balanced visual representation of the poll's results: by viewing and interpretation, the reader is able to understand that 1) the majority of UK Muslims do not prioritise their Muslim identity over British identity (an answer that could *suggest* more unbalanced views); 2) the public condemnation from Islamic leaders against IS is considered sufficiently strong by 37% of those interviewed and 30% as insufficient by 30%; and that 3) 51% of those interviewed considered it the responsibility of Muslims to condemn terrorist attacks in the name of Islam.
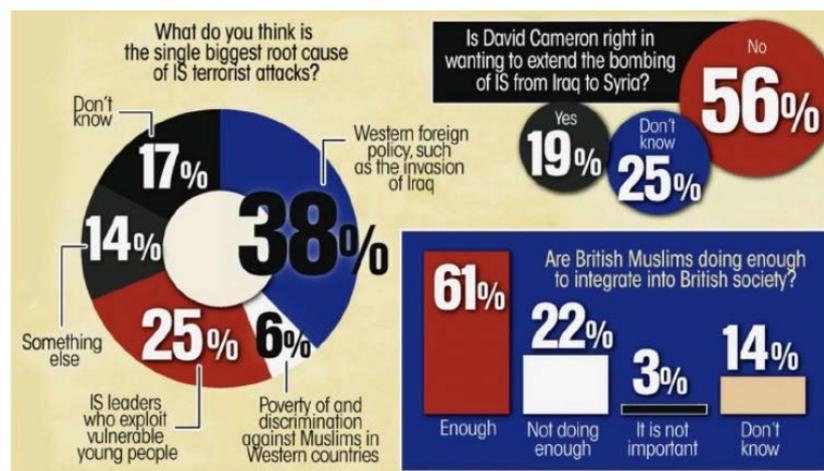
Figure 4
Charts and graphs published by the *Sun©* (November 23, 2015).

Figure 4 presents a different picture though, which can be read from left to right and then right top, right bottom. When probing into the causes of terrorism, most informants blame Western foreign policy, such as the invasion of Iraq. 56% also think that David Cameron is wrong in his intention to go on with bombing Iraq, but we do not know why they do not support Cameron's decision. Is it because they stand for peace? Or is it because they support the Iraqi cause, or the IS cause, against Western powers? Interestingly, the same answer can be interpreted along two opposing lines: pacifism vs. support of extremism. The bottom-right answer consistently presents the same line of thinking, that is de-responsibility on the part of British Muslims to integrate (i.e. 61% claim that they are doing enough) as opposed to another interpretation that involves fully embracing UK society. Another key for the interpretation of visual data is the different size of graphs that has the consequence of differentiating quantitative information in terms of an implied hierarchy: what is graphically bigger – and thus more salient – is implicitly more important.

The visual representation of this multimodal ensemble thus interlaces the display of human participants (i.e. Jihadi John) and graphs that emphasise the facticity of the poll, even though the graphic representation prioritises some information over others.

4. Controversy over the article

As IPSO received more than 3000 complaints over the controversial poll and how it was presented, the *Sun* was forced to admit that the news story was "significantly" misleading. The organisation "Muslim Engagement and Development" (MEND) complained that *The Times* had breached Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code of Practice in the article headlined "One in five British Muslims has sympathy for Isis", published in print and online on 23-24 November 2015. The main criticism involved the ambiguity in the question over the people leaving UK to join fighters in Syria that failed to distinguish between the fighter for the so-called Islamic State and for other factions. The headline was considered by the complainant inaccurate, as the question "had not made explicit reference to IS, and those surveyed could have believed it to refer to individuals fighting in Syria for other groups" (IPSO ruling, February 17, 2016, with a summary reproduced in Annex 2). However, *The Sun* did not accept a breach of the code, by arguing that the presence of British Muslims among IS fighters had been widely reported in contrast to the irrelevant

presence of British Muslims in other groups. However, to clarify its headline, the *Sun* published the following clarification on 26 November (reproduced with my italics below):

> We reported the findings of a Survation poll of 1000 British Muslims (News 24 Nov). Asked "How do you feel about young Muslims who leave the UK to join fighters in Syria?", 14% of respondents expressed "some sympathy" and 5 per cent "a lot of sympathy". The survey did not distinguish between those who go to fight for Islamic State and those who join other factions in Syria, and it did not ask about attitudes towards Isis itself. Our headline, "One in five British Muslims has sympathy for Isis," was *misleading in failing to reflect this*.

This statement was also added to the online article, and the online headline was amended to "One in five British Muslims has sympathy for young Muslims who join fighters in Syria". The complainant considered the publication of this amendment not timely and without the necessary prominence, but the press watchdog ruled that no further action was required than those already taken.

4. Conclusions

This paper has discussed a fine-grained analysis of verbal and visual MCDA of the "One in five British Muslims has sympathy for young Muslims who join fighters in Syria", as was later amended and published both in print and online editions of *The Sun*, an imprint of *The Times*. This analysis is supported by a Section devoted to the different definitions of hate speech. Unlike some definitions and interpretations of this phenomenon that consider it as such only if and when direct and explicit incitement of hate is expressed, this paper has selected a case study to illustrate the dangers of more indirect, nuanced, and intricate forms of hate speech, defined as *fear speech* that are disseminated through the media. Drawing on the framework developed by Benesch (2012), the emotional state of the audience, along with the intrinsic content of the speech act and in combination with the socio-historical context in the wake of the 2015 Paris attacks, made the editorial in question an exemplary case study, useful for analysis.

In line with the arguments made by MCDA approaches to communication, it has been shown that particular language uses, preferential patterns, such as specific classifications of social actors, and visual representations that build upon consonant iconography of terrorism, can be equally dangerous. The verbal and visual presentation and organisation of materials in both print and online media can be ambiguous, misleading, and ultimately inciting hatred and prejudice in readers/viewers.

Further research is needed in the context of media representations of Muslims as equated with terrorism and encouraging feelings of hatred, exclusion and Islamophobia, to counter the effects of mainstream biased representations. The added value of MCD analyses rests in qualitative and fine-grained readings that focus on what is explicit as well as what is implicit in the texts and in the interplay of verbal and visual materials, but in combination with quantitative analyses more observations can be drawn. One drawback consists in the over-selectivity of this analysis that has been based on a multimodal critical discourse approach applied to one specific article (and relevant controversy) and some of the most evident meaning-making processes, overlooking others, equally significant, for example the striking presence of the '1 in 5' ratio in the headline, whereas 20% is, broadly

speaking, more frequent.[4] However, as other studies combining qualitative and quantitative methods have shown, further research in these interlaced fields of analysis is helpful in understanding specific multimodal communicative strategies that are used by the media to manipulate public opinion with the ultimate goal of widening the rift between "us" and "them".

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[4] In English, unlike other languages, the numerical sequence is 1 *in* 5, but subsequently 2, 3, 4 *out of* 5 etc. thus indicating the inherent salience and persuasive/biased effect of "1" in that is usually avoided by the use of percentages (except when they are deliberately made salient through size and colour manipulation in infographics). By way of example, a basic Google search that compares the relative frequency of ratios (e.g. 1 in 5) to percentages (e.g. 20 per cent) in the reporting of this event may be useful to understand that the latter is the option preferred by "quality" UK journalism over *The Sun*'s inflammatory style.

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Annex 1: 'Wake-up call' after Paris blitz, *The Sun*, November 23, 2015

NEARLY one in five British Muslims has some sympathy with those who have fled the UK to fight for IS in Syria. The number among young Muslims aged 18-34 is even higher at one in four.

The figures emerged in our exclusive poll conducted after the Paris atrocities led by French and Belgian jihadis returning from the war zone.

Prominent Muslims said the poll was a wake-up call. Labour London Mayor hopeful Sadiq Khan tells The Sun today: "It is clear that Britain needs to take its head out of the sand and act to tackle extremism and radicalisation at home. Tackling extremism is a challenge for everyone but I believe British Muslims have a special role to play."

The survey's findings show a clear majority of the 2.7million Brits who follow Islam are moderate.

Some 38 per cent of those polled say Muslims should not have to condemn terror acts carried out by IS.

Omar Elhamdoon, of the Muslim Association of Britain, said: "When we do condemn the acts it is maybe indirectly saying we are taking responsibility, and owning the problem when it is nothing to do with us. They are not representing Islam."

Shocked Muslim leaders slam backing for jihadis.

EXCLUSIVE by TOM NEWTON DUNN, Political Editor

ISLAMIC leaders last night said any British Muslims who have sympathy with those who join IS have a "warped understanding" of the situation in Syria.

But the Muslim Association of Britain admitted any level of support is concerning.

It spoke out after an exclusive Sun survey found 19 per cent of UK Muslims do have some sympathy with those like barbaric Jihadi John who flee to Syria. However, our poll shows that despite today's alarming figures, levels of support are falling. Research for Sky News in March before IS's Paris and Tunisia atrocities found 28 per cent had some sympathy for young fanatics.

That is nine per cent more than now. The number who have no sympathy at all for jihadis has also risen from 61 per cent in March to 71 per cent today. Omar Elhamdoon, of the Muslim Association of Britain, said after the figures were revealed: "Those who do have sympathy have a warped understanding of what is happening out there.

"We have heard of people going out to Syria, who have then returned. They have probably become disillusioned with what they have seen and missed the comforts of Britain. That is an assumption we make." Some 2.7 million Muslims live in Britain, the 2011 census says. If the poll reflected views across the country it would mean 500,000 have some support for jihadis. Some 17 per cent in our poll said their religion is more important to them than being British. Our survey also found 38 per cent, which would equate to more than a million people, blame the actions of the West, such as the invasion of Iraq, for IS's attacks.

A further six per cent say the biggest cause is poverty and discrimination against Muslims. Mr Elhamdoon was not surprised by the 38 per cent figure. He said: "There are people who see what happens from Britain in other countries and they will be

angered. Some of those then have a tendency to be radicalised. "This could be radicalised by them going out to do something or just by having those feelings."

Only 25 per cent of Muslims say it is IS leaders who exploit vulnerable minds who are most to blame for its reign of terror. And just 30 per cent say their leaders need to do more to condemn IS. A small majority still say speaking out against bloodbaths such as Paris and the 7/7 attacks is their responsibility.

Bashir Chaudhry, chairman of the League of British Muslims, said that figure should be higher. He added: "This is not in the name of Islam. This violence is killing people. This so called IS are a farce, they are destroying the peace of the world. "In Islamic philosophy you cannot even take your own life, let alone someone else's."

THE poll was a telephone survey carried out by polling company Survation for The Sun, with a representative sample size of 1,003.

Annex 2: Summary of complaint

1. Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) complained to the Independent Press Standards Organisation that The Times breached Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code of Practice in an article headlined "One in five British Muslims has sympathy for Isis", published in print and online on 24 November 2015.

2. The article reported that, according to an opinion poll conducted by The Sun newspaper, one in five Muslims "has sympathy for fighters who choose to leave Britain to wage war in Syria". It included comments from a number of prominent Muslim individuals, criticising the so-called Islamic State (IS). It also noted that some had questioned the reliability of the poll, with critics saying that it did not distinguish between "those who have gone out to fight for Islamic State and the multitude of other factions, including the Shia militants and Kurds fighting in Syria". The article included an image of the poll question, taken from The Sun.

3. The article was also published in the same form online, without the image of the poll question.

4. The complainant said that the headline was inaccurate: the survey question reported had not made explicit reference to IS, and those surveyed could have believed it to refer to individuals fighting in Syria for other groups. The article had later referred to this point. It was inaccurate to report that 1 in 5 British Muslims had sympathy for the ideals of IS.

5. The newspaper did not accept a breach of the Code. It noted that the presence of British Muslims among IS fighters had been widely reported, with the estimated number ranging from 700 to 2000. In contrast, only a handful of cases in which British Muslims had joined other groups had been reported. The newspaper did not consider, therefore, that survey respondents would have been in any doubt as to which fighters the question referred to. Furthermore, the questions preceding that reported had made explicit reference to IS. The context of the question was therefore clear.

6. The newspaper noted that the question of whether there was a meaningful distinction between sympathy for those who fight for IS and sympathy for the ideals of IS was a matter of opinion. To clarify its headline, and following earlier complaints, it published the following clarification on 26 November, in its corrections and clarifications column on its letters page, on page 36:

We reported the findings of a Survation poll of 1000 British Muslims (News 24 Nov). Asked "How do you feel about young Muslims who leave the UK to join fighters in Syria?", 14% of respondents expressed "some sympathy" and 5 per cent "a lot of sympathy". The survey did not distinguish between those who go to fight for Islamic State and those who join other factions in Syria, and it did not ask about attitudes towards Isis itself. Our headline, "One in five British Muslims has sympathy for Isis," was misleading in failing to reflect this.

This was also added to the online article, and the online headline was amended to "One in five British Muslims has sympathy for young Muslims who join fighters in Syria".

7. The complainant did not consider that the correction had been published promptly, or with sufficient prominence.

Relevant Code Provisions

8. Clause 1 (Accuracy)

i) The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information, including pictures.

ii) A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion once recognised must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence.

Findings of the Committee

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9. Respondents had been asked about their levels of sympathy for individuals "who leave Britain to join fighters in Syria". They had not been asked about sympathy for IS itself, or its ideology. It was therefore misleading for the headline to present the survey findings as showing sympathy for IS. This distinction between sympathy for individuals and for the ideology of IS was significant: sympathy for the ideology would not allow for the sort of reasonable alternative explanation which might be given by someone who had expressed sympathy with the individuals involved. The headline misrepresentation of the survey findings represented a failure to take care over the accuracy of the article in breach of Clause 1 (i), and a correction was required to avoid a breach of 1(ii).

10. Following complaints, the newspaper had promptly published a clarification, in print and online, and had amended the online headline. The print clarification had appeared in the newspaper's regular Corrections and Clarifications column, two days after the original article had been published. The Committee recognised the importance of such columns, which provide a consistent position for corrections. The article under complaint had appeared on page 11, and the publication of a clarification in the regular column was sufficiently prominent. The Committee considered that the action taken by the newspaper was sufficient to meet the terms of 1 (ii). There was no further breach of the Code on this point.

11. The text of the article had made clear that the question had referred to "fighters who choose to leave Britain to wage war in Syria". It had not failed to distinguish between individuals and ideals, and the text of the article did not raise a further breach of the Code.

Conclusions

12. The complaint was upheld.

Remedial Action Required

13. The newspaper had promptly published a sufficiently prominent clarification, which corrected the inaccurate impression given by the headline, and had amended the online article and appended a clarification to it. No further action was required.

Date complaint received: 25/11/2015
Date decision issued: 17/02/2016

Taken from: https://www.ipso.co.uk/rulings-and-resolution-statements/ruling/?id=09296-15