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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17271072>**The Securitization of Muslim Refugees: Interpreting US and UK Media Discourse****Dr. Ruqiya Anwar**

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ABSTRACT

The present study provides an overview of the rhetorical strategies that define the securitization of Muslim refugees in German and French media discourses, as well as dominating narratives through which the refugees were interpreted. Moreover, this study employs the theory of securitization to understand how the refugee, a non-security issue was portrayed as a security danger, justifying the use of exceptional measures against refugees. This study used textual analysis to examine media discourses on Muslim refugees. Textual analysis is often regarded as the most effective approach for evaluating sources within media material due to its critical and in-depth examination of cultural and ideological assumptions. A critical textual study of selected news stories from two newspapers provided a close assessment of the discursive methods utilized by media. According to the study's findings, both the Telegraph and the Guardian have said that Muslim refugees pose a threat to Europe's cultural heritage and values. As a result, the western media promotes the idea that Muslim refugees pose security and cultural dangers to civilization.

Keywords: Muslim Refugees, Textual Analysis, Securitization Theory, Security Threat.

Introduction

Global conflicts have prompted more than 122 million people to escape their homes and seek refuge in other nations. In the last five years alone, new or restarted hostilities have contributed to a worldwide refugee crisis, increasing the demand for humanitarian aid throughout the international community (Guterres, 2016; UNHCR, 2025). Refugee and asylum seeker research has recently gained traction, and media coverage of refugees is becoming more common in academic discourse (Gerard, 2014; Vermeulen, 2018; Gitonga, 2018).

The security has emerged as the primary priority in global refugee administration. Over the past decade. Security concerns are important to state policies and procedures regarding refugees (Collet & Bang, 2016). The refugee issue has sparked several arguments across the world, including inside the European Union. One of the most pressing concerns about refugees in Western Europe is their security. According to Valiunienė (2017), the European community faces potential security risks such as refugee crimes, social disputes, country stability, and terrorism.

The view of refugees and migrants as a threat has risen to the forefront, with the securitization process of immigration contributing to the creation of refugees and migration as a national security issue throughout the world. Overall, illegal and unwanted migrants are viewed as a danger to a country's stability. Consequently, national security policies have been linked to anti-immigrant measures. As a result of. In Western discourse, migration has been linked to transnational threats and the battle against terrorism. Furthermore, securitization programs have had a significant influence on media and political discourse around immigration (Tallmeister, 2013; Wohlfeld, 2014). This tension between security imperatives and humanitarian obligations continues to shape refugee governance worldwide, highlighting the dual narrative of threat versus victimhood

Along with security issues, the humanitarian aspect of the refugee situation has received fresh attention. Refugees are represented not just in terms of risk and threat, but also as vulnerable people in need of protection, integration, and access to fundamental rights. Numerous international agencies, like the UNHCR and IOM, have said that excessive security might overshadow humanitarian obligations, resulting in policy responses that fail to meet the fundamental needs of displaced people (UNHCR, 2022; IOM, 2023).

This study presents an overview of the discursive strategies that characterize the securitization of Muslim migrants in US and UK media discourses, as well as prevailing narratives that were used to explain the refugees. Moreover, this study used the Securitization theory to investigate how refugees, a non-security issue, were depicted as a security threat, justifying the use of extraordinary measures against migrants.

Literature Review

According to the Slovenian government, refugees crossing Slovenia were 422.724 from 2015 to 2017. Which comprises of 45% from Syria, 30% Afghani, 17% from Iraq, and 7% from other countries. Moreover, a broader securitization process as a result of governmental response to these refugees leads to increased security measures in Slovenia and Croatia. Furthermore, governmental securitization narratives were adopted by the media, specifically by the public media house - RTV-Slovenia(Vezovnik,2016).

Following similar lines, Beirut Research Centre (2015) identified Syrian refugees are Lebanon's major security problem. Furthermore, further worries about these migrants included being a victim of crime and threatening sectarian equilibrium as a result of their prolonged presence.

Concerning refugees, O'Driscoll (2017) defined securitization as a process of constructing refugees as a societal threat through political and media rhetoric. The main political parties compete with each other in arguing for tough policies for refugees and asylum seekers. The rise in xenophobia has led to a view of refugees as culprits of insecurity, rather than as victims. Additionally, state security has become tied to the protection offered to refugees, and so refugee securitization has violated their freedom (UNHCR, 2006).

Thus far, the literature suggests that a growing perception of refugees as an existential danger to Western nations, their values, and identities may occur, and that the securitization move was followed by securitization language delivered by the political leader and translated into news agenda. Which has resulted in the securitization discourses with the policies and emergency actions adopted towards refugees in different regions of the world.

Theoretical Framework

The Securitization theory provides a theoretical approach for this study. The theory was presented in the 1990s by security studies theorists Ole Waever, Jaap de Wilde, and Barry Buzan (1998) of the Copenhagen School. This theory transformed the conceptual framework of security studies that dealt with the state and military. The theory focuses on how public

concerns emerge, spread, and dissipate (Rychnovska, 2014). It is especially concerned with the securitization of dangers. According to Balzacq (2010), this theory holds that "language is not only concerned with what is 'out there', but it is also constitutive of that very social reality" (Balzacq).

Securitization is the process of turning a non-security issue into a security concern (Messina, 2016). Furthermore, the securitizing actor(s) portrays the security issue as a huge existential danger to a referent object (audience), providing justification for policy (security) actions that go beyond the rules (Buzan, 1998). Similarly, Cesari (2012) states, securitization refers to extreme actions that go beyond the rule of law; emergency situations justify it as a threat to the community's survival. Theorists argue that securitization operates outside of politics by responding to an existential danger. Furthermore, players view refugees as an existential danger to national security, integrity, and political norms, justifying extreme measures to control them (Buzan, 1998).

Based on the above-cited discussion, the theory of securitization is the most relevant theoretical framework approach for this study. Moreover, this theoretical perspective will guide in analyzing how the Muslim refugees have been interpreted in German and French media discourse as a security threat, as in how they are politicized as a threat to these countries and societal security. Furthermore, this theory will also enable us to relate the media discourses with the actual policies adopted and decisions taken to address the refugees.

Research Question

The study provided the following question to explore media coverage of Muslim refugees.

RQ1. What key thematic strategies are applied by the selected Telegraph and Guardian newspapers while reporting?

Research Methodology

This study conducts a textual analysis to investigate whether Muslim refugees have been framed as a security issue in two widely circulated UK newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, from January to September 2019. The population comprises all news stories related to Muslim refugees published in these newspapers during the specified period.

To analyze the media discourse, thematic analysis was employed following Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-phase process: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

Findings and Results

After a comprehensive thematic analysis of news items from *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, it was found that both newspapers employ discursive strategies portraying Muslim refugees predominantly as terrorists and members of savage extremist organizations. The analysis revealed four key thematic strategies used by these newspapers while reporting (i) Muslim refugees as a security concern (ii) Muslim refugees as a cultural threat (iii) discrimination against Muslim refugees, and (iv) Muslim refugees and racial hatred. Both media sources present similar themes in their coverage of Muslim refugees.

I. Muslim Refugees As A Security Threat

Muslim Refugees on various occasions have been portrayed as security or cultural threat by the Western media. *Guardian*, in this regard, has also contributed to affirming the ideology that Muslim refugees are risky addition to any society.

Muslim refugees are frequently associated with criminal acts in Western media coverage. *Guardian* on May 18'2019 published a news story where Muslim refugees were presented as

the culprits behind serious criminal acts in the area of Rochdale. It was presented in a newspaper as;

"In adjacent Rochdale, four miles east along the A58 and home to a sizable Muslim population, nine men were sentenced in 2012 for sexually abusing young girls".

Also, in other instances, coverage of threats and criminal acts are linked with Muslims and are portrayed as a security threat for the United Kingdom by Guardian. In one of the news articles on April 25'2019, the opinion of a traffic police controller was presented, where he claimed that Islamophobia is not surprising, as it is the result of criminal, illegal, and immoral acts of Muslim refugees. This shows extreme hate of the West against Islam, where major illegal activities in the society are associated with Muslim refugees. The news published in its writing as;

"People will stop being afraid of Islam... when Islamic radicals stop beheading Christians, throwing homosexuals from high buildings, beating women for disobeying their husbands, stoning a man's adulterous wife, and generally attempting to kill all non-Muslims and take over Christian countries? Islamophobia is perhaps not unexpected?"

Guardian's coverage regarding Muslim refugees as a security concern for the community does not stop here. On August 22' 2019, it publishes the viewpoints of far-right-wing which claims that Muslim refugees are behind 'Islamization' and ultimately the devastation of Europe. Guardian emphasized that this ideology has not died over years and propagated the point of view of the far-right, thus exaggerating and manipulating the narrative. The news states that;

"The left's anti-racism meant that they were the driving force behind what he regarded as the "Islamization" of Christian Europe, and hence its downfall. This was a particularly brutal incarnation of a recurrent far-right conspiracy idea. While leftwing adolescents died on that Norwegian island, this myth did not".

II. Muslim refugees as a Cultural Threat

Guardian and Telegraph have presented news raising the concerns of western people regarding Muslim refugees being a security threat for the society. Guardian publishes the news on April 5, 2019, in which Muslims' mode of dressing was portrayed as a cultural threat to the community. counter-terrorism chief claimed that media is the main culprit in the radicalizing of Muslim refugees. One of the cartoonists linked Muslim refugees with those of 'vermins' and renowned politician called the 'niqaab' as that of *letterboxes*. These type of remarks by not only politicians but also from journalists and cartoonists has a great impact on the thinking patterns of any community, thus encouraging the narrative that Muslims are a cultural threat to the community. It was published as;

"Mainstream media coverage was radicalizing far-right terrorists; only last week, a cartoonist who depicted migrants as vermin was awarded a fellowship by the Society of Editors for his 50 years of commitment to the business. A top legislator criticized ladies wearing niqabs as appearing like letterboxes"

Guardian also published related news on July 22, 2019, which claimed that Muslim migrants in Australia have to deal with racism and isolation as they are not equally treated because of their color and origin. Again directing towards the cultural threat west has, from these migrants, thus not allowing them to mingle equally in society. As the statement of news was;

"Australia, where Somali and African children encounter incidences of racism and prejudice on an almost daily basis, frequently ending in rebellion against a culture that has basically rejected them because of the color of their skin".

Telegraph has called Muslim refugees as the cultural threat to the western community in news on April 23, 2019. This news published in the newspaper claims that Muslim refugees will ruin

European history, which according to westerners is the only heritage of Christians and should not be integrated with any other religion. The wordings of news are as follows;

"What we do with the legacy of Western Christianity - our embarrassing familial history - is one of our times' most pressing challenges, and it is pulling us in several directions. The basic issue is the increasing influx of Muslims to Europe, which populists argue threatens whatever remains of our Christian history and its liberal fruits".

III. Discrimination against Muslim Refugees

In the light of securitization theory, analysis based on the textual analysis of two newspapers revealed that media is depicting that Muslim refugees are affected differently and are more vulnerable to violence, racism. European countries' immigration policies are restricting, violent, and harsh. Media focused that

As The Guardian (5 August 2019) reported in their news content, Donald Trump has regularly referred to immigration and refugees as an "invasion".

Likewise, The Guardian's (15 March 2019) editorial, "How the Christchurch suspect referred to Muslim immigrants, many of whom were refugees from some of the world's most horrendous crimes, as "invaders," depicts the media narrative of European countries.

According to The Guardian (18 August 2019), when quoting US Congresswoman Ilhan Omar (who has been constantly attacked by Trump and Fox News),

"Trump became president because he was willing to condemn and hate immigrants and refugees. He enthusiastically asserted that we should prevent Muslims from entering our nation"

Notably, in this column by Maya Good fellow, (The Guardian, 27 June 2019) narrated that,

"The Muslim ban, the huge reduction in the number of refugees admitted to the US, canceling DACA, detaining people (including children) in abhorrent conditions - the Trump administration's immigration policies are restrictive, violent and cruel"

Based on news content, The Daily Telegraph (29 May 2019), minority Rohingya Muslim of Burma, is facing human rights violations and new atrocities at the hands of the military.

IV. Muslim Refugees and Racial Hatred

A column retrieved from The Guardian (18 March 2019) reported,

'Hatred of Muslims is a part of white supremacy, but so is hatred of migrants and refugees in general, Jews, black people, and everyone at those intersections'

As The Guardian (5 August 2019) reports that,

"The perpetrators of other recent crimes throughout the world revealed that they, too, thought that white people were under attack and that immigrants, refugees, and other people of color are "invaders" who put the white race at peril"

As The Guardian (1 August 2019) while giving reference to a billboard, where Democratic congresswomen have been portrayed under the phrase "The 4 Horsemen Cometh", and reported,

"From my perspective, they are socialists. I also believe that a number of them, as Muslims, have links to genuine terrorist groups"

Conclusion

Conclusively, it can be remarked as Western media is exploiting the narrative that Muslim refugees are a threat to their security and culture. While few media outlets are more active in this regard such as Guardian as compare to others such as the Telegraph. While it can be observed that there are few publications in the Guardian during the year of 2019, linking Muslims with criminal acts and illegal activities, there are no writings in this regard in the Telegraph. On the other hand, Telegraph and Guardian, both newspapers have stated Muslim

refugees as a threat to the cultural heritage and values of Europe. There are few news articles in both newspapers where Muslim refugees are associated with the narrative of spoiling the original Christian heritage and values of Europe due to their mass induction.

Telegraph and Guardian might have varied approaches in presenting news regarding Muslim refugees, but their contribution towards inducing the narrative that Muslim refugees are a security and cultural threat remains there. Thus, it can be stated that Western media is propagating the ideology of Muslim refugees as security risks and cultural threats to society.

The present study intended to contribute to the understanding of how media is representing Muslim refugees. Media demonstrate that Muslim refugees face demonization, hate, and racial discrimination. The textual analysis depicts that racism is deep-rooted in European history. The mainstream media portrayed Muslim refugees as terrorist groups and invaders.

The overwhelmingly used phrases are “*Muslim have ties actual terrorists groups*” and “*white race at risk because of Muslims*”. Therefore, it is eminent from the results that western media have frequently portrayed Muslim refugees in a negative way that is terrorist, invaders, violent, and the threat for white supremacy. Media while covering Muslim refugees always keep aside the humanitarian issues which the refugees are facing and their challenges of life because of displacement.

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