

# METHODOLOGY

Guidelines for benchmarking  
gender Islamophobia and  
mapping Muslim women voices



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## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Guidelines for benchmarking gender Islamophobia and mapping Muslim women voices**

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## INTRODUCTION\*

Islamophobia is an undeniable fact in Europe and its growth is of great concern, as shown by different research and studies by international institutions, civil society organisations (OSCE, 2018; Pew Research Centre, 2019) and the European Commission itself (ENAR, 2016; FRA, 2017; Eurobarometer, 2019). Surveys published in 2018 indicated that around 37% of the population in European Union countries admitted to having an unfavourable opinion of Muslims and, according to a study carried out by the Research Service of the European Parliament, the perception of the incidence of anti-Muslim hatred among members of Muslim communities had increased from 12% in 2010 to 25% in 2016 (European Commission, 2019). And the data also suggests a normalisation of this form of racism not only in society but also in the field of politics (Human Rights of the Council of Europe, 2020).

Behind this anti-Muslim hatred and its normalisation are the negative prejudices and stereotypes of the Muslim population spread through several channels, including the media. The Observatory of Islamophobia in the Media confirmed in 2017, its first year of quantitative and qualitative analysis of national newspapers in Spain, that 65% of the news pieces about Muslim women or the hijab issue reproduced Islamophobic stereotypes. While coverage of Muslim women improved in 2018 and 2019 with 50% and 58% of articles free of Islamophobia, respectively, today alternative narratives about Muslim women are scarce and the hijab issue remains at the centre of 53% of pieces that contain Islamophobia to some degree, according to 2019 data from the Observatory.

Anti-Muslim hatred has an impact on the life of Muslim communities in Europe, and women in particular. Throughout 2018, 223 incidents against Muslim women were recorded in Great Britain, accounting for 58% of all attacks on the Muslim community in that country (Tell MAMA, 2018). In 2016 in Spain, there were 255 attacks on Islam and Muslims in general, and 113 attacks on women seen as Muslim (PCCI, 2017).

Moving towards the construction and dissemination of narratives that reflect the reality and diversity of Muslim women in Europe is therefore an urgent task to ensure peaceful coexistence in our societies. The MAGIC project seeks to contribute to this through training, awareness-raising and dissemination actions that will start from a prior analysis of the journalistic discourse on Muslim communities in Europe and Muslim women in particular.

To conduct this analysis, the following methodology is proposed, which adopts Critical Discourse Analysis as an analytical framework for a starting corpus of 6 national newspapers (3 from Belgium and 3 from Spain). Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on discursive analysis and studies, mainly the way in which abuse of power and social inequality are portrayed, reproduced, legitimised and persist in text and speech in social and political contexts (Van-Dijk, 2016), and is already used in studies on the portrayal of Islam and Muslim women in the British press (Alkhamash, 2020).

The methodology focuses on three constant aspects in studies on the portrayal of Muslims in the media:

\* This document is the result of the work carried out during the Multi-Actor Benchmarking Lab, organized in June 2021, with the aim to discuss and adopt the basis for the analysis of several media in Spain and Belgium and to discuss and agree on a strategy for the MAGIC coalition, which aims to continue working, beyond the duration of the project and on a European scale, to reduce gender Islamophobia and promote the voice of Muslim women in the media. The meeting was attended by 40 journalists, journalism professors, Muslim women, experts and activists against Islamophobia, representatives of Muslim communities and civil society organizations working on diversity issues.

- Otherness based on the discourse of us vs. them, an us to which only positive characteristics are attributed compared to a them marked by negative attributions, and which only increases ignorance and rejection
- The consensual cultural image based on Western existentialist and ethnocentric interpretations of Eastern societies
- The Orientalist discourse that continues to legitimise long-implemented hegemonic military policies in Muslim majority countries, or migration security policies (Laura Navarro, 2010).

In the process of developing this methodology, we have done everything possible to leave zero or minimal margins for subjectivity, adjusting the questionnaire that will guide the analysis of the selected newspapers as far as possible, despite acknowledging the difficulty of completely closing the door to some subjective interpretations.

We also want to make it clear that we are aware of all those issues related to the news production process on which the journalist

does not decide, such as the selection of the headlines or the images that accompany the piece. We also take into account the difficult conditions in which these professionals carry out their work for different reasons such as job insecurity, lack of time, and so on. These aspects could not be reflected in this methodology for the quantitative analysis of news, but they will be taken into account in qualitative analyses and subsequent reports.

Finally, we want to point out that, although this project aims to contribute with analysis, training, awareness and dissemination actions that will start from a prior analysis of the journalistic discourse on the Muslim communities of Belgium and Spain in general and Muslim women in particular, our work is sensitive to all the other axes of oppression that affect women such as discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, social class, ethnicity, race, and so on. Similarly, it is especially sensitive to the debate about identification with the category of woman by trans and non-binary people, cases that will be taken into special consideration.

## METHODOLOGY

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### Media

The online version of 6 national newspapers (3 Belgians-2 in French and 1 in Flemish- and 3 Spanish - the 3 in Spanish) will be analysed.

The partners from Belgium and Spain will propose newspapers to be analysed in both countries taking into account the following aspects: newspaper circulation, editorial policy, ideology (preferably newspapers that reflect the diversity of the country's political and ideological spectrum should be chosen), well-established, geographical scope.

The search within the newspapers that they decide to analyse will include the sections of national politics, society, economics, culture and sports to achieve an overall view that allows progress towards a European vision of the future.

A detailed file will be created with all the aforementioned information for the selected newspapers.

### Authorship

Only articles written by staff journalists or by the newspaper's editorial staff will be analysed. News from national and international press agencies, as well as articles translated from other international newspapers, will be ignored because the analysis will focus on the performance of journalists from the staff of 6 Belgian and Spanish newspapers.

### Términos para filtrar la búsqueda

A dual search will be undertaken that always includes the term woman plus some of the other terms that we indicate here:

- Woman +
- Islam-
- Islamoph-
- Muslim
- Islamis-
- Islamic-
- veil/burka/burqa/hijab/headscarf/niqāb/niqab
- Jihad

\*Not include articles that are relevant but that are not filtered by the new searching terms.

## Systematised data

- Newspaper name
- Article link (Add url + save as PDF or Word).
- Title
- Subtitle
- Date of publication
- Writer's name
- Type of information:
  - News
  - Opinion and editorials
  - Interview
  - Other
- Section:
  - Politics and government
  - Economics and business
  - Migration
  - Society
  - Wars, conflicts
  - Terrorism
  - Science and technology
  - Sports
  - Religion/Philosophy
  - International
  - Culture
  - Other

\*Not include articles that are not relevant (for example articles about issues such tourism or archaeology).

- Geographical sphere (not political):
  - Belgium

- Spain
- Other European country
  
- Sources:
  - People
  - Official
  - Both
  - Other sources
  - No sources
  
- Does the journalist give Islamophobic opinions or do Islamophobic affirmations in the article?:
  - Yes
  - No
  
- Female voices collected in the news story:
  - Muslim women understood as a whole (Muslim women think / say / believe that...)
  - Women who are identified as Muslim women (direct testimonies)
  - Non-Muslim women
  - Women voices that we cannot define as Muslim or not Muslim
  - No voice
  
- Is Islam the main subject of the news story?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- What is the nature of the image of the Muslim community conveyed by the piece?:
  - Positive
  - Negative
  - Unknown

## Profile of the Muslim female protagonist.

This section tries to answer the question: how does the journalist present the Muslim female protagonist? (This section will only analyse the female protagonist of the news story):

- Age
  - Over 18
  - Under 18
  - Unknown
  
- Profession:
  - TShe has a profession
  - She does not have a profession
  - Unknown
  
- Education level:
  - None
  - Primary education
  - Secondary education
  - University education
  - Unknown
  
- Economically independent:
  - Yes
  - No
  - Unknown
  
- Nivel económico:
  - High
  - Medium
  - Low
  - Unknown
  
- Status:
  - Nationality
  - Immigrant
  - Refugee
  - Unknown



- Veil:
  - She wears some kind of veil
  - She does not wear any kind of veil
  - The veil is not mentioned
  
- If she wears a veil in any of its forms, the journalist refers to it as:
  - Negative
  - Positive
  - Neither option
  
- If she wears a veil in any of its forms, the journalist refers to the veil of the Muslim female protagonist as a symbol of activism:
  - A symbol of activism
  - An item of clothing
  - An obligation imposed on them
  - Neither option

## Analysis of the piece focused on gender

- Is it a story focused on women?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- Does it highlight a problem/issue of inequality?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- Does the piece challenge existing negative stereotypes about Muslim women (see annex)?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- Does the piece reproduce negative stereotypes about Muslim women (see annex)?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- Are the women cited directly as sources of information or opinion?
  - Yes
  - No

- Does the writer of the text adopt a paternalistic tone (understanding paternalism as a tendency to apply the forms of authority and protection typical of the dominant family father to social relations of another type; political, labour, etc.)?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- Does the text deal with any of these issues?
  - Equality
  - Rights
  - Legislation
  - Politics
  - Migration
  - None of these
  
- Does the journalist describe the woman portrayed in the piece as a victim of...? Only one option can be chosen, the one that is most relevant to the part.
  - Her family
  - Her husband
  - Sexism
  - Conflicts
  - Disasters
  - Job discrimination
  - Poverty
  - Structural violence
  
- Discrimination in public spaces (school, public transport, public services, etc)
  - Online/offline racist attacks
  - She is not portrayed as a victim
  - Other

## The picture that accompanies the text

(in case there are more than one, only the featured image is analysed):

- Is there a picture illustrating the text?
  - Yes
  - No

- Is the picture related to the content of the piece?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- Is there a woman or several women who can be identified as Muslim?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Unknown
  
- Does the picture corroborate the existing negative stereotypes of Muslim women?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- Does the picture invade the privacy of Muslim women?
  - Yes
  - No

## Terms used in the article

- Does the article include neologisms or terms usually not used that have an implicit offensive meaning towards Muslim communities or related to Islamophobia?
- Please specify.

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About the project:

**MAGIC** (Muslim women and communities Against Gender Islamophobia in society) is a project which aims to prevent gendered Islamophobia in Spain and in Belgium, in particular in media outlets, and to draw lessons useful for other European countries. It is funded by the European Commission, within the framework of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme.

In the span of two years MAGIC will work to map gender islamophobia in Belgian and Spanish newspapers with a twofold objective: to provide Muslim communities' leaders, Muslim women, and CSOs working on diversity with skills and tools to recognise and stand against stereotypes against Muslim women in public narratives and to promote inclusiveness of Muslim voices in the media.

MAGIC will do so not only through training of journalists & capacity enhancement and promoting awareness campaigns but also by fostering knowledge, dialogue, and mutual cooperation among Muslim communities' representatives, Muslim women, and CSOs and media practitioners.

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