



Research Paper

# Then Came Mohamed Salah: How, if at all, the Muslim Migrant is Contributing to Fighting Islamophobia in England

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Received 18 Oct., 2023; Revised 31 Oct., 2023; Accepted 02 Nov., 2023 © The author(s) 2023.  
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## I. Introduction

In 2018, unconscious Mariam Moustapha lay in a London hospital fighting for her life (Cockroft, 2019). Hooked to machines that were hoped to breathe life into her stiff body, the 18-year-old engineering student fell into a coma when she was mobbed by a group of English girls in Nottingham (Cockroft, 2019). The girls repeatedly punched her in the stomach, kicked her to the head, and dragged her on the street before they fled the scene and left her for dead (Cockroft, 2019). The attack was not ruled a hate crime, yet rumours immediately started swirling that Mariam was targeted because of her Egyptian Muslim origin (Cockroft, 2019). Hashtags immediately started trending demanding justice for the comatose before Mariam eventually succumbed to her injuries and died a few weeks later, but the legacy she left behind was one of controversy over the reception of Muslim migrants in England, especially when Mariam's assault was not an isolated incident (Cockroft, 2019).

England has long been notorious for its anti-Muslim sentiments, ones that have been most pronounced when it came to migrants. In the summer of 2017, Muslims in Beckton had yet to endure another life-altering acid attack (McKee & Siddique, 2017). Mosques--the sacred places of worship for Muslims--were no longer safe, either, after an Englishman deliberately rammed his van into worshippers walking out of a mosque in London. In only one year, attacks on Muslim migrants and mosques doubled (McKee & Siddique, 2017). Muslim migrants suffered verbal and physical abuse simply because of their creed (McKee & Siddique, 2017). In 2018, letters were mailed to Londoners urging them to partake in the "Punish a Muslim Day" initiative that earned them points for every assault targeting Muslims (Dearden, 2019). Even stadiums were not a safe haven for Muslim Premier League soccer players. Anti-Muslim chants often resounded in English stadiums when a Muslim player was spotted on the pitch (Ramdani, 2018).

The common denominator between all the aforementioned incidents is that Muslim migrants were on the receiving end. Sadly, these incidents have become a way of life for some of them in England, a country that has long been troubled by the presence of Muslims on its soil (Kalin, 2011). That was before 2017, however.

In 2017, Egyptian soccer player Mohamed Salah was signed by English club Liverpool from Italian club Roma (Worrall, 2018). In his first 2017-2018 season, the player took England by storm. He won every individual and team award there was in the English Premier League (Worrall, 2018). Mohamed Salah was not just a phenomenal player, however. He was also a migrant, an Arab, and a Muslim who proudly boasted his heritage on and off the pitch. A devout Muslim, Salah prayed five times a day, fasted even during games, gave to charity, and performed the prostration (*sujood*) on the pitch every time he scored a goal (Worrall, 2018).

Instead of alienating the public long known to shun Muslims, his display of faith enamored them, however. Every single newspaper in England celebrated the player, and the public was soon to embrace it. Pictures of him were plastered everywhere (Worrall, 2018). You could not evade his image in the dailies (Worrall, 2018). A shift in the media rhetoric was noticeable as well. The question arises, therefore, as to how, if at all, Mohamed Salah has helped enhance the image of Muslim migrants in England.

## II. Significance of the Present Study and the Research Question it Aims to Answer

In 2020, the United Nations announced that almost two-hundred and eighty-one million migrants left their native lands in pursuit of better opportunities in other countries (United Nations, 2020). Among those 281 million, were migrants from Muslim countries (United Nations, 2020). One of the countries that Muslims started flocking to in recent years is England (United Nations, 2020). In 2020, it was estimated that 2.7 million Muslims

lived in England (European Commission, 2020). In England, they aspired to seek coveted educational and employment opportunities that were not possible in their respective homelands (Alrababa'h et al., 2021). The presence of Muslim migrants, however, did not always resonate well with the English public. As the number of Muslim migrants in England increased, so did the fear of and prejudice against Muslims in what is referred to as Islamophobia (Alrababa'h et al., 2021).

Although there is no shortage of literature on Islamophobia, especially in Europe and the UK, most of the studies focus on delineating the historical context of Islamophobia in the region. Research studies have long been occupied with the origins of the concept and its consequences on Muslims living in England and in European nations at large. Some others have studied the impact of media framing of Islam and Muslims on the perception of Islam and Islamophobia in Europe. Few are the studies that have explored how Islamophobia might be fought. Even fewer are those that examined the impact of Muslim migrants on the perception of Islam and, consequently Islamophobia, hence the significance of the present paper that could potentially bridge the gap in the literature. The present paper will, therefore, aim to answer the following question:

How does Mohamed Salah contribute to fighting Islamophobia in England?

The answer to this question promises to curb a phenomenon that has fostered distrust between Muslim migrants and England and, by extension, the West (Kalin, 2011). It has the potential to restore faith between Muslims who migrate to England and the mainstream society in the country, and thereby, multiculturalism, allowing the former equal and rightful access to all rights and privileges while simultaneously maintaining their own cultural identity (Berry, 2011). As more Muslim migrants continue to seek better opportunities in England, as does the need to address the perception of Muslim migrants in England if Muslims are to be fully integrated into the society.

### **III. Methodology**

To answer the research question, the literature on Islamophobia in the West, with special emphasis on England, and the correlation between migration and Islamophobia was reviewed. Media framing of Muslim migrants before and after Mohamed Salah's migration to England in *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent* newspapers was then examined. The language and content of the stories they ran on Muslim migrants in England were analyzed (in terms of numbers, connotations, images, and perspective) for perception of and bias against Islam and Muslim migrants before the findings were interpreted and conclusions and recommendations were made as to how Islamophobia might be addressed.

#### **3.1 Rationale for the Methodology: Media Framing and Islamophobia in England**

Because Islamophobia can hardly be quantified and it would not have been feasible, cost-effective, or possible to otherwise complete the study in a timely manner if the impact Mohamed Salah had on fighting Islamophobia in England was assessed by analyzing the public attitudes of English citizens towards Muslim migrants in England, media framing of Muslim migrants was assessed instead.

It is sometimes the case that issues are depicted in the media in a way that encourages certain interpretations more than others (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Such strategies are referred to as framing (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Research shows that public attitudes are indeed influenced by the way certain topics are framed in the media (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In 2019, the majority of Muslim migrants living in England confided that they feared for their safety as a result of having experienced religion-based prejudice (Hanif, 2019). Indeed, 20% of UK nationals were convinced that Muslims were migrating to take over their country and become the majority (Hanif, 2019). When asked why they believed so, the majority of the population attributed their fears to how Islam and Muslims were framed in the media (Hanif, 2019). It was, therefore, incumbent upon the present study to examine how Muslim migrants are framed in the English media. However, because the media subsumes radio, television, newspapers, and social media as well which would have been challenging to equally cover and analyze stories from, only stories featured in *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent* newspapers were analyzed. Those newspapers were chosen because they are the most popular and read—and thereby influential—in England and represent both the right and left wing perspectives in the country (Hanif, 2019).

### **IV. What is Islamophobia? Definition and Brief History of Islamophobia**

Islamophobia is the innate fear and/or hatred of Islam or any act, person, and/or behavior associated with it (Iqbal, 2019). It is this distrust that has alienated Muslim minorities in Europe (Kalin, 2011). It is the reason multiculturalism has become elusive in that region (Berry, 2011). Europe fears Islam and those who subscribe to it; it has become synonymous with terrorism, extremism, and fascism (Kalin, 2011). The word Muslim has garnered negative connotations that range from alien, exotic, barbaric, militant, radical, to extremist, prejudiced, and fossilized (Abbas, 2011). Islam stands for everything that the West is against (Kalin, 2011). It stands against the tenets of the secular society the West has fought hard to establish (Kalin, 2011). The West prides itself on such

ideals as the liberation of women and freedom of speech, belief, and practice, and to them, Islam compromises those very values that their culture is premised on (Kalin, 2011).

This is a sentiment that has especially grown after 9/11, leading Muslims to feel that they are neither welcome nor embraced by the mainstream societies in Europe (Kalin, 2011). They regret that they are forced to give up their cultural identity in order to fit into their respective societies (Berry, 2011). While Europe sees Muslims as radicals who refuse to integrate into their respective societies, Muslims believe the diversity they bring to those societies is unappreciated, reaffirming their conviction that the continent is fueled by its colonialist ideology of imposing its secular notions on all minorities (Kalin, 2011).

Alienating nationals in Western societies is not the only concern, however (Hanif, 2019). Islamophobia is disconcerting to Muslims who constantly find themselves in a defensive position where they have to endure segregation and exclusion as well (Hanif, 2019). Muslims, their property, and their places of worship are often the target of verbal or physical abuse and vandalism (Kalin, 2011). They are often: the subjects of ridicule, denied access to services, and discriminated against in the workplace, schools, public, and healthcare and housing facilities (Kalin, 2011). It is not surprising, then, that unemployment and poverty rates are high among Muslims (Kalin, 2011). Moreover, their loyalty to the host country—even when they are legally citizens of it—is often under scrutiny because they are believed to prioritize Islam over their citizenship (Kalin, 2011).

Such a sentiment is common, if not rampant, in Europe, and one country that has almost become synonymous with Islamophobia is England (Abbas, 2011).

### **V. Historical Context of Islamophobia in England**

In 1988, British Indian author Ahmed Salman Rushdie published his fourth novel *The Satanic Verses* that was shortlisted for the Booker Prize (Kalin, 2011). Little did he know that the (Muslim) world as he knew it would end. The novel, that implied—among other offensively received implications—that a few verses of the Quran were inspired by Satan, caused an uproar in the Islamic world (Kalin, 2011). As a result, the book was banned in over a dozen Muslim countries that considered the novel blasphemous (Kalin, 2011). Iran even accused the novelist of apostasy and called for his execution (Kalin, 2011). A failed assassination attempt was made on Rushdie's life a year later followed by multiple other failed attempts (Martin, 2019). This, in turn, led the British police to place Rushdie under protection (Martin, 2019).

Although Islamophobia in England could be traced back to the Salman Rushdie controversy, it was reignited again in 2001 after the 9/11 attacks that brought down the Twin Towers in New York (Abbas, 2011). It further continued to gain momentum in 2005 after the 7/7 subway bomb attacks by Muslims in London and the Muslim protests sparked by the publication of Danish cartoons that they considered offensive to Prophet Muhammad (Abbas, 2011). Combined, these behaviors reinforced preconceived notions about Muslims as terrorists who threatened the safety of English nationals and took to violence whenever their beliefs conflicted with those of the host culture (Abbas, 2011).

But Abbas (2001) fears that this rejection of Muslims dates back to colonialism. He explains that it was always the aim of the White European colonizers to impose their legacy on the non-White European world. To the West, he emphasizes, the Third World—to which Muslims belonged--were always savages that needed to be introduced to the European proper way of life in order to be saved from their inferior selves. The contemporary fear of Muslims was nothing but an extension of this imperialism and is, therefore, dubbed neocolonialism (Abbas, 2011). This justified the othering of Muslims and the consequent war on terror they waged on them (Abbas, 2011). While the legislation in England pledged protection for racial minorities, religious minorities were yet to be named in need of protection by law (Abbas, 2011).

This is obvious in the case of the veil or the niqab—the full veil that covers the hair and face--donned by some Muslim women in England (Abbas, 2011). It is one issue that has never failed to mystify both government and citizens in England (Abbas, 2011). Seen as a sign of oppression, it conjured images of Muslim women confined to harems waiting for their saviors to rescue them (Abbas, 2011). What the mainstream society failed to see, Abbas (2011) argued, was that the veil was, in fact, looked upon as a symbol of liberation for Muslim women (Abbas, 2011). When these women were required by their culture to be confined to their private spheres for their own protection and virtue, they were under no obligation to wear the veil because they did not mingle with men (Abbas, 2011). Now, when they became visible in the public sphere, they wore the veil “to move out of segregated living spaces while still observing the basic moral requirements of separating and protecting women from unrelated men” (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 785). Other than its being a religious practice that speaks to their faith and renders them equal before God, it is worn to rebel against the colonial practices that aim to force them to conform to the colonialist's mainstream culture as their way of defying those norms (Abbas, 2011).

## **VI. Migration and Islamophobia in England: How are they Correlated?**

If there was a lesson learned from the whole Brexit debacle in 2016, it was that fear was the operative sentiment when it came to migration, especially that of Muslims, to England (Habib, 2016). How a referendum would miraculously turn into xenophobic rhetoric still baffles the most seasoned politicians (Habib, 2016). One moment the English citizens were being urged to vote on whether the UK should exit the European Union, and the next thing they knew was that migrants were the enemy they were fighting (Habib, 2016). It was those migrants whom they were urged to vote to retrieve their country from and send back to their countries of origin with their tails between their legs (Habib, 2016).

This is not surprising. Migrants have always had a tendency to antagonize the nationals of the host country (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016). Unlike refugees, migrants are believed to have come to the host country of their own free will to seek better opportunities (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016). While refugees are seen as deserving of support, migrants are undeserving of such support (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016). This is due to the fact that refugees are believed to have been forced to flee their countries of origin to the host country mostly for political reasons; they are not believed to have had a choice in the move (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016). Migrants, on the other hand, came to the host country willingly for economic reasons (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016). They are, therefore, considered a threat to the national economy since they are vying for the same jobs as the locals (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016). This explains why they need to be driven away from the host country as much as the refugees need to be saved (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016).

It is worse when these migrants are Muslims. Abbas (2011) predicts that as the number of Muslim migrants to England goes up, so will the fear that this minority might tarnish the purity of the mainstream culture. Muslims are accused of resisting assimilation into the English mainstream culture (Abbas, 2011). They tenaciously cling to their inferior, barbaric cultural and religious practices and traditions and refuse to become more English (Abbas, 2011). This alarms the English nationals who, as the number of the Muslim migrants continues to spike, worry that they might wake up one day to find that they are outnumbered and have become a minority in their own country that will then boast the beliefs and practices of the Muslim majority (Abbas, 2011). Worse still, their own safety might be compromised by the majority who flaunts suicide attacks targeting anyone who is different (Abbas, 2011).

But does theory hold true for the English media and has Mohamed Salah—the Muslim migrant—helped reduce fear of and prejudice against Muslim migrants in the media?

## **VII. Findings**

### **7.1 Media Framing of Muslim Migrants in England before 2017**

A study by Sian, Law, and Sayyid (2012) analyzed the rhetoric used in framing Muslim migrants in *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent* newspapers over the course of the three months of October, November, and December of 2011. The 68 stories featuring Islam or Muslim migrants in the newspapers were marked for their salience, keywords used to refer to Muslim migrants, visual images attached, story type, bias against Muslims, and the space given to Muslims' perspective.

Sian, Law, and Sayyid (2012) referred to a story *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* ran in December, 2011 about a group of Muslim girls who consumed alcohol, ended up physically assaulting a British woman, and then were set free by the court. The framing of the incident was believed to be highly biased, vilifying the girls and victimizing the British woman. Instead of objectively reporting on the incident, the newspapers employed words that criminalized the girls and provoked public opinion. The stories repeatedly used the words: "Somali gang", "mob", "drunk", "thugs", "attacked", and "screamed" to refer to the girls and what they did, while they used "white lady", "victim", "with a bald patch and other injuries" (p. 252) when they referred to the British woman and the injuries she sustained. They explained that such a choice of words adopted an us-versus-them tone that pitted the Somali Muslim black migrants against the white nationals of the country, the ethnically different outsiders against the racially superior group. To give their religion more salience, before highlighting the court's verdict, the reporters started with framing the Muslim girls as the villains who, because their religion prohibited alcohol, lost control when they had their first taste and attacked the poor victim, thereby implicitly attributing the cause to the strictness of Islamic doctrines.

Moreover, the pictures they attached to the story included one that showed the British national holding hands with her domestic partner and another of her scalp and body injuries. The pictures of the perpetrators, however, were a different story. They featured the girls in seductive and defiant poses for the camera and included one in which they were attacking the British victim. The authors emphasized how the two sets of pictures were meant to create a dichotomy between the two sides, especially when the stories made it a point to quote the girls as saying that they "didn't care" and were "happy" (p. 253) they were set free. While the woman was depicted as a serene, unsuspecting victim, the girls were unapologetic, unregretful culprits who had gotten away with their crime.



Sian, Law, and Sayyid (2012) also analyzed the language used in 35 stories in the same newspapers to report on the war on terror, which was ignited by the 9/11 attacks in New York to defend the West against the threat of Islam. Eleven years later, the researchers noticed that the topic was still the most salient in the papers. In particular, they analyzed two stories in *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* that warned of imminent terror attacks by Muslims at the London Olympics and Christmas. *The Sun* noticeably emphasized how the threat that compromised the freedom afforded to the citizens of England was by outsiders living in the midst of British nationals. They were described as highly trained and dangerous in order to galvanize the public. The perpetrators were numerous alluded to as Taliban-affiliated “fanatics”, “threat”, “terrorists”, “dangerous”, and “suicide bombers” who promised to leave behind a “carnage” (p. 238) of bodies for Christmas presents.

The authors lamented that the implications made by *The Daily Mail* when it reported on the same story were even more alarming. Not only did it employ the same choice of words when referring to the attacks, it proposed that terrorism had reached more sophisticated heights. No longer did the suspects fit the profile of your average poor, uneducated, loner terrorist, they cautioned; they could easily be middle-class, educated, and sociable. In other words, any Muslim migrant in England could qualify as a terrorist, thereby implying that the threat was right next door to all nationals. They could neither protect themselves nor predict who the enemy was. *The Daily Mail* further implored the government to revisit its immigration policies that allowed such terrorists to set foot in their countries.

The researchers explained that instead of hurling Islamophobic slurs at the readers, *The Guardian* chose to report on terror attacks objectively. The newspaper refrained from using the stereotypical language that was normally associated with Muslim migrants. Instead, they employed neutral words that did not condemn nor racially profile them. Moreover, the newspaper used verifiable statistics to support their claims that proved the recent decline in the number of terror attacks and the release of many suspect terrorists for lack of implicating evidence. Whatever news item the paper shared with its readers, they supported with credible evidence and unbiased language. Their only concern was informing the public and not swaying their attitudes. *The Independent*, on the other hand, was less impartial when reporting on terror-related stories. Although it did not employ derogatory terms to refer to Muslim migrants, it jumped to conclusions that incriminated them in terror-related offenses. When running a story on a bookshop owner who sold extremist books, for example, it claimed that he had done so in order to recruit more terrorists although the government never revealed why he had chosen to do so.

## **7.2 Then Came the Muslim Migrant Mohamed Salah**

Egyptian national team and Liverpool soccer player Mohamed Salah migrated to England in 2017 (Worrall, 2018). Signed over from the Roma soccer team, he made the move in pursuit of his life-long dream of playing in the English Premier League (Worrall, 2018). In only one season, he won the following awards: Premier League Golden Boot, Arab Footballer of the Year, Liverpool’s Player of the Season, numerous Premier League Best Player of the Month awards, CAF African Footballer of the Year, Premier League Player of the Season, and helped Liverpool qualify for the Champions League and his national team of Egypt for the 2018 World Cup (Worrall, 2018). In his second season (2018-2019), Salah continued to garner attention by winning yet more accolades and, eventually, the Champions League (Egypt Independent, 2020). And in the Premier League season of 2019-2020, his goals were one of the reasons his team won the Premier League (Egypt Independent, 2020).

But Salah was not simply a migrant who left his country of origin in pursuit of better employment prospects abroad (Worrall, 2018). He was an Egyptian, an Arab, and a Muslim migrant who prided himself on his roots (Worrall, 2018). He never shied away from praying before setting foot on the pitch, reciting verses from the Quran before every game, performing the Islamic prayer position of prostration when he scored, and inviting his daughter Makka—who was named after the holiest city of Mecca to which Muslims flock for pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia—and hijabi wife to the stands to cheer him on during games (Whiting, 2019). He also involved the public in his private life. He periodically reached out to his fans on social media, often taking to Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to address queries and concerns as well as post pictures of himself training, teasing friends, shooting commercials, observing Muslim celebrations, decorating a Christmas tree, and playing with his daughters (Whiting, 2019).

Immediately, the English media started to take notice. Words like “sensation”, “phenomenon”, “the Egyptian King”, and “Liverpool legend” became synonymous with his name—a far cry from the words “criminal” and “terrorist” previously used to refer to his Muslim migrant counterparts (Worrall, 2018). Fans were heard chanting, “If he’s good enough for you, he’s good enough for me. If he scores another few, then I’ll be Muslim too. If he’s good enough for you, he’s good enough for me. If he’s sitting in the mosque, that’s where I wanna be” (Arababa’h et al., 2021, p. 1). Between the summer of 2017 and April of 2018, hate crimes in England also declined by almost 19% after Salah’s arrival, more so in Merseyside which houses the Liverpool club than in any other part of England (Arababa’h et al., 2021). The prejudice against Muslims that had almost become synonymous with tweets posted by soccer fans in England was reduced as well (Arababa’h et al., 2021). The anti-Muslim rhetoric that had once been prominent in them decreased by almost 50% in that same period after Salah

signed for Liverpool club (Alrababa'h et al., 2021). This begs the following question: Was this change in attitudes towards Muslim migrants reflected in the English media?

### **7.3 Media Framing of Muslim Migrants in England after 2017**

Hanif (2019) evaluated 217 articles from *The Sun*, 96 from *The Daily Mail*, 227 from *The Guardian*, and 208 from *The Independent*, among others, for bias—or lack thereof—when reporting on Muslim stories. He examined the stories run from October to December of the year 2018 to decide whether Islam, its practices, and/or Muslims were associated with negative behavior, misrepresented, or given a voice by reporters.

Upon assessing said articles, Hanif (2019) further concluded that *The Sun* tended to sensationalize 16% of the headlines of the stories it ran on Muslims. He cited an example of a misleading headline on a “Islamist” cleric who was claimed to have “threatened to target” (p. 16) Muslim women who wear nail polish. The story beneath the headline, however, carried no threats, targeting, or warning on the part of the cleric who did not object to Muslim women wearing nail polish but advised that it prevented the water from cleansing their nails when they washed for their daily prayers, rendering the headline inaccurate. Hanif also believed that choosing to refer to the cleric, not as a Muslim, but as an Islamist also merited further highlighting for the negative connotations it conjured since the term was normally used to refer to extremists, not moderate Muslim Imams.

Hanif (2019) referred to another story ran by *The Sun* that was of an English woman who divorced her husband, converted to Islam, and married a Muslim migrant. The headline that accompanied the story was “‘BRAINWASHED’ Mum of nine Heidi Hepworth, 45, converts to Islam so that she can marry her 31-year-old Gambian toyboy” (p. 17). Hanif stressed the irrelevance and misrepresentation of the real events in the headline by describing the woman as “brainwashed” when nowhere in the actual story was there mention of her being coerced or manipulated into converting to Islam, implying that Islam is not a religion that would be voluntarily followed by a white national if he or she had agency. The word “brainwashed” was also written in all caps to draw attention to the alleged reason for which the woman became a Muslim.

Even when the headline was later updated, it still read “‘IT’S A MIDLIFE CRISIS’ Mum of nine Heidi Hepworth, 45, dumps husband and converts to Islam so that she can marry her 31-year-old Gambian toyboy” (p. 17). The updated headline still made irrelevant suggestions as to the reason for which the woman married the Muslim migrant. It assumed that she was experiencing a midlife crisis, being 45 and infatuated with someone fourteen years her junior who was merely her “toyboy”. Including their respective ages, that she had nine children, and that her future husband was only a “toyboy” was not only out of place but also meant to insinuate that she was reckless and irresponsible enough to convert to such a primitive, uncivilized religion as Islam.

When it came to observing Christmas, he explained that *The Sun* published articles that emphasized how Muslims disrespected the Christian faith and insulted Jesus by refusing to celebrate Christmas and condemning those who extended Christmas wishes to Christians, which were featured prominently in the headlines, thereby driving a wedge between Muslims and Christians and reinforcing the us-versus-them dichotomy between the 2 groups. *The Guardian*, on the other hand, seized the occasion to bridge the gap between both groups. It featured articles that brought Muslims and the mainstream society together celebrating Christmas headlined “Church Welcomes its Special Muslim Visitors on Christmas Eve” (p. 22).

The difference between both newspapers was further underscored when they both covered the same story of a Muslim cricketer’s brother who was arrested for violating his parole. While *The Sun* used the headline “TERROR PROBE Muslim Cricket Star Usman Khawaja’s Brother is Arrested over ‘ISIS terror hit list’”, *The Guardian* wrote “Cricketer Usman Khawaja’s Brother Arsalan Arrested Again” (p. 22). It is clear that the former opted for sensationalizing the story by unnecessarily flashing words, such as “Terror probe”, “ISIS”, and “Muslim” (p. 22) that would antagonize the mainstream English society despite the fact that the brother’s religious identity was irrelevant in that context. The latter, however, did not include any reference to his religious identity. It remained impartial in reporting only the information crucial to the story, namely the name of the brother, his affiliation with the Cricket star, and the reason for his arrest. This went to show how biased *The Sun* was when it was reporting on stories that featured Muslims.

## **VIII. Discussion of Findings**

As evident by the framing of Muslim migrants in *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent* before and after the migration of Mohamed Salah to England in 2017, the four newspapers continued to depict Muslim migrants the same way they had before his migration to England. *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* continued to sensationalize content related to Muslim migrants and depict them as a threat to the English nationals. No reports that might help enhance their image were featured. Only the stories that emphasized the threat they posed to the public were selected. The headlines, words, and images they ran with stories published on Muslim migrants in England were exaggerated to frame those migrants as menaces that threatened the very existence of the peaceful English nationals.

The way they reported it was that Muslim migrants moved to England and imported with them all practices that were inferior, primitive, and barbaric to their own. Although they had crossed borders, they refused to cross over to the more civilized culture. They were unable to assimilate. What was worse was that they tenaciously clung to those practices and used them to harm the nationals. They came to plant bombs, terrorize the locals, and kill anyone who was different. Even their Imams were extremists who targeted their own followers if they did not comply. Their young men lured English women into abandoning their families. Even those who attempted to modernize ended up assaulting the nationals. The policies that allowed them into England, therefore, needed to be revisited if England were to remain safe. Such were the stories that were disseminated by those papers. Most of the time the content was not relevant nor nearly true; no evidence to back up the stories was presented, yet the stories dominated the papers. Rarely were the Muslim migrants given space to respond to such allegations or even to tell their side of the story. The only perspective that the readers were given was that of the respective newspapers. Indeed, Sian, Law, and Sayyid (2012) stressed that 70% of the Muslim-related news in those papers used a hostile tone against Muslims and 80% of them excluded the Muslim perspective on the story.

Contrarily, *The Guardian* continued to be more objective when covering stories about Muslim migrants. The language they used was bias-free. It was neutral, carrying no negative connotations that would offend or incriminate Muslim migrants. They steered clear of perpetuating stereotypes about Muslim migrants that could reinforce negative preconceived notions the public might hold about them. Muslim migrants were not judged as good or bad people. They were simply people whose choices qualified them to be featured in the paper. Stories about their moral hits and misses were equally highlighted, but their Muslim identity was only alluded to when it was relevant to the story. Any conclusions made about them were also fact-driven; they were based on credible, verifiable evidence. *The Independent* ranked somewhere in the middle between the two groups of newspapers—although it leaned more towards *The Guardian* than the other two. It adopted the same unbiased language when depicting Muslim migrants, but it often jumped to unfounded conclusions about them that contributed to reaffirming negative perceptions of them as a threat to the nationals of the country. But this might be more the consequence of unprofessional, biased reporting than bias against Muslim migrants since the language used in the same paper does not criminalize them.

Hanif (2019) emphasized that the results were in line with the antagonistic bias held against Muslims by reporters in *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* which was featured in 38% and 31% of their articles, respectively, but in only 12% of the articles about Islam and Muslims in *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. Hanif (2019) further denoted that 28% and 20% of the articles published about Islam and Muslims in *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* respectively were on terrorism and extremism, while *The Guardian* and *The Independent* included political themes in 18% and 17% of their articles on Islam and Muslims, respectively.

It is also argued that this prejudice is deliberate in the right-wing media (Kalin, 2011). Even when Muslims are role models, this was completely ignored by the media who always chose to feature examples that helped perpetuate negative stereotypes about Muslims (Kalin, 2011). When Muslim banker Muhammad Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize for loaning single women funds to set up their own businesses and refused to be paid back the loan with profits, for example, his initiative was not highlighted enough in the media (Kalin, 2011). Ironically, this is one initiative that is informed by Islamic texts that prohibit usury and only permit lending money on the condition that the money is paid back with no profit at all (Kalin, 2011). But still no media outlet would highlight this story.

## **IX. Conclusion**

The present study set out to investigate how the Muslim migrant Mohamed Salah might help reduce Islamophobia in England and has concluded that Mohamed Salah did not contribute to reducing Islamophobia in England as evident by the lack of change in the framing of Muslims in *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent* before and after his migration to England. To firmly state that the results confirm the theory that as the number of migrants to a country increases, so does Islamophobia would be jumping the gun, nevertheless. The results barely prove that Islamophobia in England has increased after 2017 despite evidence that some Muslim migrants—like Mohamed Salah—might not be terrorists as often feared. The newspapers that exhibited Islamophobic perceptions of Muslim migrants did not start this tradition only recently when the number of Muslim migrants and/or refugees to England increased. This has been a longstanding tradition of sensationalizing content to make more profit; in fact, it is difficult to determine whether this negative framing is only exclusive to Muslim migrants without tracing how other stories—about non-Muslim English celebrities, for example—are covered. Until that is studied, it is safe to assume that both groups of newspapers have maintained their attitudes towards Muslim migrants throughout the years.

One interpretation of this result is the nature and affiliation of the papers. Both *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* represent the right wing in England whose conservative leaders are ordained with preserving the pure ideals of the nationalists against alien threats and are also categorized as tabloids whose prime concern is to propagate sensational stories for the purpose of selling more copies. The consequence of this combination is not necessarily

in favor of neutral reporting. Proliferation was the goal, and fearmongering was how they guaranteed proliferation. They chose to publish stories that aimed to unite the whole country in choosing them over any other paper, and nothing promises to bring citizens and governments together like a common enemy; in this case, it happened to be a national security threat posed by the enemy in the midst of the English public: Muslim migrants.

*The Guardian* and *The Independent*, on the other hand, embrace a more liberal outlook—more so *The Guardian* than *The Independent*--on migration and migrants who choose England to settle in. Being left-wing newspapers who prioritized the truth over the profit they could make resulted in their objective representation of Muslim migrants.

If the findings of this study seem to contradict the celebration of Mohamed Salah in the English media, there might be a logical explanation: It is highly likely that the media does not generalize; perhaps the media thinks highly only of Mohamed Salah but is still fearful and judgmental of other Muslim migrants. Just like transfer of learning—or lack thereof—in education, might it not be the case that Islamophobia is treated on a case-by-case basis? Transfer of learning is defined as applying the knowledge and/or skills learned to new contexts and settings (Odlin, 1989). It is still an ability that eludes most students who continue to confine the skills they learned to the contexts in which they were taught (Odlin, 1989). They do not understand, for example, that the essay-writing skills they are taught in a writing classroom need to be used when they are writing an essay in a physics class as well. They simply draw on these skills only in the writing classroom. Such might be the case with Mohamed Salah. The media who perceive Mohamed Salah positively might believe that not all Muslims are as open-minded and civilized as Salah.

On the other hand, even if the framing of Muslim migrants in the English newspapers had been enhanced after the migration of Mohamed Salah to England, this would not have necessarily meant that the soccer player was the reason for the positive image of Muslim migrants in the media. Correlation does not necessarily mean causation. The reason why Islamophobia may have been reduced might not be Mohamed Salah. Other factors may have been at play, but may have just coincided with Mohamed Salah's presence in England. Perhaps the reason why the English public became less fearful of and prejudiced towards Muslims was irrelevant to the international soccer player but coincided with his arrival to England. And even if the media attitudes towards Muslim migrants had indeed become more tolerant because of Mohamed Salah, what would happen if Mohamed Salah leaves England or stops scoring for Liverpool? Will this tolerance last or will it revert to fear and hatred? What Islamophobic countries like England need is a long-lasting solution that addresses the underlying roots of the issue, as opposed to a quick-fix solution.

On another note, perhaps we might never understand the reasons for which the First World fears Islam and might try to save Muslims from it. It might be out of guilt, obligation, to deflect attention from their own cultural practice (Song, 2007), or to emphasize the inferiority of the exotic Third World and attempt to democratize it (Abu-Lughod, 2002). What we might understand, however, is when this rhetoric is most recurrent. At least recently, it has become associated with the war rhetoric—going to war to “save” the men and women of the Middle East or the Third World from their oppressive culture and extremist practices of Islam (Abu-Lughod, 2002). One might think that the West has more pressing debts than Islam in the Middle East when illegal rendition, police brutality, and violence in prison (Marks, 2004), for instance, are still rampant there, but apparently this is hardly the case.

It could be argued, therefore, that the real reason behind Islamophobia might be for the West to realize their political aspirations and justify their military intervention in the Middle East. This is obvious when we pay attention to when this kind of rhetoric and interest in improving the conditions of the Third World often comes up. Both in the past and more recently, it is often repeated before colonizing or invading a country in the Middle East (Abu-Lughod, 2002). In 2001, Laura Bush named the veil—seen as a sign of oppression—as one of the major reasons for which Afghani women had to be saved from the Taliban regime in their country before the US and coalition forces launched their raid on Afghanistan (Abu-Lughod, 2002). Although the same Afghani women suffered illiteracy and were denied their right to education under the same regime, none of these reasons compelled the US to come to the Afghani women's rescue (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

This political stance is evident in the association of Islam with terrorism. This is one of the most certain strategies to keep migrants and refugees at bay (Muller & Leszkowicz-Baczyński, 2017). As long as Muslims—who comprise the majority of the migrants and refugees seeking a better future in England and Europe at large—are a threat to the host cultures, then the public will be sure to join forces with the governments to stop their flow (Muller & Leszkowicz-Baczyński, 2017). This, in turn, will be a huge relief to the latter's economy when they are not required to provide education, employment, housing, and services to the former (Muller & Leszkowicz-Baczyński, 2017).

### **Limitations of the Present Study**

Only one media outlet was analysed for content in the present study. This may have narrowed the focus of the results seeing as only 4 newspapers were selected to investigate media framing of Muslim migrants in England. Analysing different media—newspapers, TV shows, and social media—would have provided more



comprehensive results on how the English media frame Muslim migrants and produced more accurate results as to the impact of that framing on Islamophobia. For time and space restrictions, however, that was beyond the scope of the present study.

Also ideally, tracing how the same story about Muslim migrants was covered by the 4 different newspapers would have been more enlightening when it came to evaluating the bias held against Muslim migrants. Following the same story in different papers would have had the potential to control for the extraneous variables that might end up skewing the results. This, however, was not feasible in the present study, especially when different newspapers had their own preferences as to which stories to cover and which to ignore. More comprehensive results would have been yielded had the present study attempted to interview and/or survey English participants in order to conclude how the media depiction of Mohamed Salah and other Muslim migrants has helped impact their perception of Islam and Muslim migrants as well. However, the tight timeframe and lack of access to participants prevented that. Also, obtaining an IRB prior to the study would have posed another challenge.

## **X. Recommendations for Future Studies**

Perhaps in the future, the limitations of the present study could be addressed by sampling English participants and investigating how the media framing of Mohamed Salah and/or Muslim migrants in general has helped reduce their fear or hatred of Islam and Muslims, and consequently, Islamophobia. A study that adopts an experimental design could be the optimum methodology to explore the effect of the media on public attitudes towards Muslim migrants. An experimental group that is exposed only to media outlets that frame Muslim migrants positively and a control group that exposes participants to media outlets that feature both positive and negative examples of Muslim migrants could take part in the study to investigate how the experimental group might be influenced by the positive examples of Muslims. Both groups would be comprised of participants with Muslim-neutral attitudes towards Islam and Muslim migrants. Although challenging to implement, the study would yield results that could be generalized to other contexts and/or countries afflicted with Islamophobia. Different countries in Europe where Islamophobia is rampant might also attempt to replicate that study.

A country where Islamophobia was reduced merits further scrutiny as well. How the country managed to reduce the phenomenon and whether this might serve the same purpose in a different country warrants replicating in other contexts. Moreover, the consequences of removing one or more of the variables that contribute to curbing Islamophobia warrants investigation. In other words, if a certain figure is the reason why Islamophobia is reduced in a community and that figure was no longer part of the community, how would that affect public attitudes towards Islam? That is, is the impact of variables counteracting Islamophobia premised upon their presence in a community? The answer to this question could be best yielded by a comparative, longitudinal study of countries that eradicated Islamophobia and comparing those whose Islamophobia-reducing variables remained present to those whose variables were not in order to determine how Islamophobia in each country was impacted.

Studying how Arab but non-Muslim migrants might contribute to fighting Islamophobia could potentially yield significant results as well. Egyptian surgeon Magdi Yacoub, for example, is a Christian Arab migrant who was knighted by the Queen of England for his philanthropy and contributions to the field of medicine (Ezzat, 2014). Could the public become less fearful of Muslims because of him or is that only achieved if that migrant is a Muslim? That is, does the English public associate only Muslim migrants with terrorism or does it apply to all Arab migrants regardless of their religion?

### **Recommendations for Media Framing**

There is no clear-cut answer when it comes to how Islamophobia might be fought, but this does not mean that there is nothing to be done. The media has a part to play in featuring success stories of Muslim migrants that could overturn the negative public perception of them. Whether or not this will curb the phenomenon remains to be seen. It might take years to undo the damage years of negative media framing have done, but it is a start. Parallel to the media, perhaps the school system might also contribute to enhancing the image of Islam and Muslim migrants.

The impact of media framing on public attitudes is not to be contested, either. Media does, indeed, have the potential to ameliorate or magnify a phenomenon (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). It is, therefore, incumbent upon the media to observe how they frame Islam and Muslim migrants to combat Islamophobia. Mohamed Salah need not be a one-off phenomenon. In England alone, Mohamed El-Fayed is an example of a Muslim migrant who has thrived abroad in the field of business (McRae, 2010). Not only did he buy (and run until recently) the world-renowned Harrods—the world's leading luxury department store, but he also owned the Fulham soccer club at one point (McRae, 2010). If the media were to grant him--and others like him--some salience and frame him as the successful Egyptian Muslim migrant that he is, perhaps the word Muslim migrant would become more associated with success than with terrorism.

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