

Subcultures and New Religious Movements in Russia and East-Central Europe

George McKay, Christopher Williams,
Michael Goddard, Neil Foxlee
and Egidija Ramanauskaitė (eds)

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A Content Analysis of the Representation of Islam and Islamic Culture in the Slovak Media

SILVIA LETAVAJOVÁ

Post-9/11, Islam and Muslims have become a frequent focus of Western political and media debates and consequently broader public discourse. Perceptions of Islam as a religion and lifestyle, and the interpretation of its principles and rules, differ greatly from country to country and from one culture to another. Academic studies of Islam, for instance, carefully distinguish between doctrinal, popular, political and cultural Islam; public understanding of these notions, however, is often simplified and generalized, as people tend to forget the broad-spectrum nature of their meanings and forms. The public, in Slovakia as elsewhere, has a tendency to generalize and is prone to creating stereotypes: earlier surveys have revealed, for instance, that most Slovaks tend to view terms such as 'Islamic' and 'Arabic' as interchangeable, while individual as well as public attitudes towards Islam and Islamic culture may generally be viewed as unfavourable and even negative. Our aim in this chapter is to examine the role of the Slovak media in this situation, to explore the way they influence and shape the opinions, attitudes and perceptions of the majority population, as well as the means they use to achieve this, and to establish their way of presenting Islam and Muslims, thus influencing the creation of stereotypes with respect to these issues.

The Perception of Muslims by the Majority Population

In the most recent Slovakian population census, carried out in May 2001, 1,212 respondents described themselves as Muslims (Čikeš 2005: 15). According to statements by representatives of Muslim organizations, however, the number of Muslims in Slovakia is several times higher and may be as high as 5,000. This figure includes primarily foreign students at Slovak universities as well as entrepreneurs and businessmen, many of whom have a university education. In terms of ethnic origin and/or affiliation, they form a very diverse community, consisting of Albanians, Arabs, Bosnians, Slovaks and others.

As no doubt in many other countries, public attention in Slovakia was drawn to the Muslim community by the events of September 2001 and subsequent terrorist attacks on European cities. More recently, the community attracted further attention through efforts to obtain the status of a 'registered church' and to develop a Muslim cultural centre, including a mosque. Up until now, however, these attempts have met with constant resistance on the part of government and municipal authorities as well as the majority population. A combination of draft legislative amendments, negative statements by political leaders and media coverage of problems which aroused public opinion halted these activities.

Judging from available statistics, the view of Muslims held by the majority population in Slovakia may be described as ranging from unfavourable to negative. Many Slovaks have never met any Muslims, and Islamic culture and religion remain an unknown quantity to them. Their reactions are largely shaped by existing attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes, and frequently show a tendency to generalize. Our previous research in this area, based on 189 interviews in four Slovak cities in 2000–2001 (Letavajová 2001, 2006), confirms the existence of a broad scale of individual reactions which are predominantly negative or at best neutral. Respondents had a variety of stereotypes of Islam and Muslims, most of them carrying negative connotations. This applied especially to the following images and/or notions: women's way of dressing, particularly wearing headscarves; the

social status of women; circumcision; the influx of Muslims and migrants in general onto the labour market; mosques; and polygamy. Most respondents associated the notions of 'Islam' and 'Muslim' with terms such as 'orthodox', 'fanatic' and 'fundamentalist'.

The Slovaks often confuse ethnic groups of the Islamic faith, stereotypically referring to any Muslim as 'Arab' and attributing to them qualities stereotypically associated with Arabs. Various surveys (e.g. Lukšíková 1999: 78–79, Knapová 2007: 113) testify to the existence of the following negative stereotypes with respect to Arabs: *fundamentalism*, *impulsiveness*, *noisiness* and *laziness*. Positive connotations, on the other hand, include *vivacity*, *cordiality* and *business spirit*. Although most respondents advocate tolerance of Muslim culture, many of them consider this culture *inferior* or *backward*.

Islam is generally considered to be the strongest manifestation of the 'otherness' of Muslim culture. Respondents tended to emphasize mostly its negative aspects, such as *fanaticism*, *jihad as the concept of sacred war*, *murdering in the name of Allah*, *fundamentalism*, *radicalism*, *aggressiveness* or *hindrance to education*. Their views are affected by negative stereotypes stemming from ignorance or disinformation. One response given by a 70-year-old female respondent from Bratislava was symptomatic in this respect: 'I don't know, I disapprove of it.' (Letavajová 2001: 57).

Similar prejudices affect respondents' views of Muslim women, their family and social status, their way of dressing and polygamy. The prevailing opinion is that Muslim women are oppressed, have no rights and are not allowed to appear in public unless veiled from head to toe. The influence of the media was clearly apparent here, as many respondents made direct references to the book *Bez dcéry neodidem* [Not Without My Daughter] by the American author Betty Mahmoody, which described her real-life escape with her daughter from her husband in Iran. Here is a sample of views presented by respondents: 'Nothing good can ever come of it, she will end up in a harem'; 'Their rights are being violated and they don't even know it'; 'They are poor creatures'; 'I wouldn't want to be in their shoes'. Regarding headscarves, respondents gave the following answers: 'The headscarf is a cultural archaism and a display of subordination'; 'It

is restrictive'; 'They must feel hot under those scarves'; 'I would see it as a handicap' (Letavajová 2001).

The nature of relations between members of the majority population and members of subcultures or minorities depends mainly on contact and knowledge. Most Slovaks, however, have not had the opportunity to form opinions of or attitudes towards Muslim culture that are based on personal experience, since the main direct historical experience of Muslim culture in Slovakia took the form of Ottoman raids in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Slovakian folklore has preserved numerous references to this period up until the present day; needless to say, the dominant images are of looting, plundering, abducting, Islamic symbols and harems.

In modern times, Slovaks' indirect experience of Muslim culture has been affected by interactions with other European countries which have a long history of coexistence with Muslim communities, particularly France, Great Britain, Germany and Austria. A number of surveys carried out in these countries testify to the majority population's negative attitudes towards inhabitants or migrants of the Islamic faith,¹ which may have shaped Slovaks' views to a certain degree.

For most Slovaks, direct contact with the Muslim civilization continues to be substituted by mediated or indirect contact. This was acknowledged by many respondents in our earlier surveys (see Letavajová 2001, 2006), who admitted that their knowledge of Muslim culture was mainly derived from the media. The most frequently cited sources of information on the issue included television, press and radio. This type of experience has been described by Križková (2006) as 'media experience'.

1 According to opinion polls carried out in France, the French public believes that only European and Asian immigrants can be assimilated: Africans or Turks are generally viewed as more difficult to integrate, while Algerians represent a burden and even a danger to them (Lapeyronnie 1993: 70–71). Turks, very much like members of other Muslim cultures, are considered culturally inadapted. They are seen as violent, incapable of being educated (except religiously) and taking advantage of welfare benefits. The French especially dislike migrants from Muslim countries (Manco 2000: 83).

Methodology

A content analysis of the Slovak press was the principal research method applied in the process of gathering and processing data for the present study. The main aim was to identify the context and ways of presenting the chosen media content.

Content analysis is a standard method that is commonly used in social science and humanities disciplines. This method allows the researcher to process large quantities of text information (concepts and other words in texts or text files) and identify, quantify and analyse the presence and meaning of these words and concepts and the relationship between them (Holsti 1969: 2). The smallest units of the analysis are so-called key or most frequently used words (key words in context – KWIC) and phrases. They are subsequently processed and analysed based on their placing in content categories (that is, clusters of words with similar meanings or connotations) which are defined by explicit rules of coding (Stemler 2001). This method is able to analyse any kind of recorded media content (speeches, written texts, interviews, pictures and so on). If it is important from the research viewpoint, textual analysis can distinguish not only the communicated content but also its source and its target group, as well as the method, motive and effect of communication (Surynek, Komárková and Kašparová 2001: 132).

From a methodological viewpoint, the data acquired in the first phase was processed in quantitative form (strictly speaking, the term 'content analysis' refers to a quantitative analysis). Within this analysis, our goal was to construct criteria for identifying individual features (identifying key words in the articles), identifying categories (titles, text of articles, pictorial illustration) and subcategories (e.g. similar and repeated themes or connotations and meanings of key words). Special attention was paid to the frequency of occurrence of individual features, which were evaluated numerically and proportionally, and then processed in graphic form. The quantitative data was then given an interpretative (qualitative) analysis.

The subject of the content analysis was texts published by a selection of Slovak periodicals. Their selection from the database had been determined by KWIC, that is, words that were the most relevant to our research: 'Islam', 'Muslim', 'Koran', 'mosque' and their grammatical variants. We analysed the overall content and form of selected articles, focusing on the occurrence and frequency of key words, their attributes, synonyms, collocations, meanings and connotations. We examined the headlines of the placement, their content and accompanying pictures. The sample examined consisted of national Slovak daily and weekly publications; the basic criteria for selecting them were circulation figures and on-line availability. The following periodicals were selected:

- *Nový čas* (New Time) tabloid, the best-selling daily newspaper in Slovakia;²
- *Pravda* (Truth), broadsheet, the second best-selling daily newspaper in Slovakia;
- *Hospodárske noviny* (The Economic Newspaper), broadsheet, the seventh best-selling daily newspaper in Slovakia;
- *Plus 7 dní* (Plus 7 Days), semi-tabloid, the best-selling weekly newspaper in Slovakia, and
- *Markíza* (The Marquise), tabloid, the fourth best-selling weekly newspaper in Slovakia.

A total of 124 articles which matched the set criteria over a three-month period from January to March 2007 were selected: sixty-eight from *Hospodárske noviny*; thirteen from *Pravda*; twenty-seven from *Nový čas*; twelve from *Plus 7 dní* and four from *Markíza*. From a formal viewpoint, the final sample was very diverse, as it included news, commentary, interviews, discussions, occasional features and so on.

² Circulation figures for Slovakia in 2007. Source: *Stratégie on-line*, a news portal on marketing communication and media (MML-TGI), available at <http://www.strategie.sk/showdoc.do?docid=40>

The Role of the Media in Shaping Perceptions and Attitudes

In the following, we will concentrate on the role played by the media in shaping public attitudes and perceptions. We will also discuss the media's way of processing and presenting news. The role of the media and the way it operates are the subject of the theory of mass-media communication and, partly, applied social psychology; experts from these areas have provided valuable information. The main purpose of the mass media is to appeal to the broadest possible mass audience. This is a direct consequence of the need for economic profitability, which is achieved by securing income from the audience and mediating its attention to advertisers. The media strive primarily to preserve the audience's attention, which is viewed as their immediate goal and is often understood as the measure of success (McQuail 1999: 74).

The perception, attention and memory of the potential recipients of media information are among the most important psychological processes in the operation of media logic.³ The basic attribute of media perception is selection and significance. It means that recipients (readers, listeners or TV viewers) naturally concentrate only on some media presentations and select what are the more important ones for them. The information offered becomes the object of recipients' intentional or conscious attention. Also important for the media is the recipients' unintentional or unconscious attention, or their ability to perceive certain phenomena even without consciously focusing on them. Consequently, the role of the media is to keep recipients' attention focused on the content offered or to redirect it to another object.

From our perspective, it is important to examine the *modus operandi* of visual or semantic memory, which helps to preserve abstract and general

³ 'Media logic' refers to the perception of social developments and their interpretation by the media, the method of organizing media material, the way it is presented and the rules of media communication (McQuail 1999: 134).

facts based on their meaning. Needless to say, the shorter and clearer the fact, the easier it is for the fact to enter memory. Information enters memory based on coding. Visual coding allows the recipients of information to preserve certain kinds of visual image. Coding information on the basis of meaning allows recipients to remember the message, even if they are unable to remember the information verbatim (Atkinson 2003: 270). It is common knowledge that repetition helps to preserve the topicality of information.

Experiments with retrieving information from memory show that the most easily retrievable information is presented at the start and the end of a sequence (Hill 2004: 126). This means that the order of items, and particularly relevance and newsworthiness, are important factors for the potential consumers of media content. It also means that they are more likely to remember and retrieve information presented at the beginning of the text (i.e. headlines, opening phrases and sentences) and toward the end (i.e. conclusions and summaries). Apart from the factor of succession, emotional factors also proved to be of relevance, as people have a general tendency to be more receptive to emotionally positive or negative situations than neutral ones (Atkinson 2003: 287).

In the process of creating media content, knowledge of the *modus operandi* of memory and attention makes the media apply the principles of attractiveness, exoticism, topicality, emotionality, conciseness and cogency. Moreover, it allows creators of media content to appeal to passive recipients, for instance readers who read superficially or even flick through pages or pictures. In the field of print media, readers' attention may be attracted by the placing of the text and the expressiveness of the typeface (e.g. size or font). Readers' sensory attention can be caught by 'highlighters', that is colour or pictures. And since recipients are generally more likely to remember the overall meaning than the verbatim text, creators of media content take pains to emphasize elements which carry meaning, namely phrases, attributes and words positioned immediately next to key terms.

Arousing the interest of the broad public is subject to a special set of rules which affect the selection, processing and presentation of media messages. The information to be presented is carefully and purposefully selected during the process of creating media content. Special attention is

attracted by certain groups of people who are preferred from this viewpoint, particularly well-known public figures or famous personalities (such as celebrities, VIPs, politicians, sportsmen, officials of various organizations), who are often more important than the actual event or development.

The same principle applies to the selection and communication of time in media messages: here one can observe a direct connection with the application of principles of topicality, relevance and newsworthiness. The ambition to be the first to report on particular events has led to the development of specific types of information such as hard news, spot news or developing news. But news programmes and/or sections are not only determined by the theme and time but also by the territory. Generally speaking, the closer the locale of any event, the greater the chance it will be covered by the media (McQuail 1999: 243–248).

A logical consequence of this approach is the tendency of media content creators to adapt the coverage of events to the target group's perspective. A good example of this tendency is the practice of informing the audience of the impact of foreign events or developments on the internal situation or the domestic population. The media tend to have a preference for certain facts in the hope of increasing the audience's attention and satisfaction; consequently, any bias in their selection may lead to a distorted reflection of reality (McQuail 1999: 260). The media have become used to so-called agenda-setting, that is drawing attention to something that is important only to some people and, consequently, forming the public's perception of which figures, events and developments are important and why (McQuail 1999: 388).

Another aspect of processing information is the emphasis on the dramatic character of presented information, which may be enhanced by dramatic images, fast pace or short persuasive formulations. The effect of circulating information also depends on the ratio of rational and emotional elements. Psychological surveys indicate that emotional elements influence mostly recipients with lower education, while more educated recipients are more receptive to rational elements (Výrost and Slaměník 1998: 148–149).

The media have a broad spectrum of ways of influencing people's attitudes and public opinion in general. They have the power to catalyze

intentional or unintentional change of varied intensity, facilitate the change, cement the status quo (so-called zero change) or prevent change. Media messages may have a short-term cognitive effect on recipients, but may also induce collective reactions in a greater number of people who share their views of a particular situation. Media messages may provoke a broad scale of reactions, ranging from group or mass action to panic or civil unrest caused by the strongest motivators, such as fear, anxiety or anger. On the other hand, the media may systematically support the established status quo or behavioural patterns in order to achieve social control and cement the existing authority via ideology (McQuail 1999: 366–371).

Recipients react to the media content either passively or actively, by accepting, rejecting or processing the communicated media message and accepting the media content, subscribing to it, allowing it to influence them or subjecting it to criticism. Whether recipients let the media content draw them into the issue or are able to remain impartial and keep their distance depends on them as individuals, but also the extent to which they are overwhelmed by constant exposure to media content (McQuail 1999: 366–371).

Analysis of Media Representations

In this section we will give the results of our quantitative and qualitative analysis of media messages in specific selected articles from the Slovak press. We will study their headlines, text and accompanying photographs.

In headlines, the key words 'Islam', 'Muslim', 'Koran', 'mosque' and their grammatical variants appeared twenty-four times. The key words were used in the following collocations:

Čistý islam ['Pure' Islam]; *Stop moslimským šatkám* [Stop to Muslim Headscarves]; *Za kritiku islamu odsúdili blogera* [Blogger Sentenced for Criticizing Islam]; *Zatkli členov moslimského bratstva* [Members of Muslim Brotherhood Arrested]; *Žid vypočul moslima* [Jew Questioned a Muslim]; *Slovenské moslimky* [Slovak Muslim Wives];

Islam na slovenský spôsob [Islam à la Slovak]; *Najdlhšiu pláž zväzujú pravidlá islamu* [Longest Beach Tied Down by Islamic Rules]; *Nemci nechápu: súd rozhodol podľa Koránu* [Germans Baffled: Court Ruled in Line with Koran]; *Blogera uväznili za urážku islamu* [Blogger Arrested for Slandering Islam]; *Výroky moslimského duchovného šokovali* [Shocking Statements by Muslim Clergyman]; *Islamského lídra zatkli* [Islamic Leader Detained]; *Islamský sobáš? u nás to nejde* [Islamic Wedding? Impossible Here]; *Zastavenie prác pri mešite Al-Aksá* [Stoppage of Works near Al-Aksá Mosque]; *Korán nemožno reformovať* [Koran Cannot be Reformed]; *Michael Jackson možno konvertuje na islam* [Michael Jackson May Convert to Islam]; *Moslimovia chcú mať cirkev* [The Muslims Want a Church]; *Moslimovia, prispôbte sa!* [Muslims, Adapt!]; *Slovenský bič na moslimov* [Slovak Whip on the Muslims]; *Moslimský fanatik* [Muslim Fanatic]; *Kanada diskutuje, či sú na futbale povolené moslimské šatky* [Canada Discusses Allowing Muslim Headscarves at Football Games]; *Moslimský duchovný tvrdí: oslavy Valentína sú protiprávne* [Muslim Clergyman Claims Celebrating Valentine's Day Is Illegal].

Most of the quoted collocations feature obviously negative connotations created by negative wording and the meaning of words placed next to key words (for example, *criticism, fanatic, sentenced, arrested, slandering, stop, detained, shocking, impossible, whip, illegal*). Another noticeable pattern is the creation of oppositions along the lines of Islam ↔ non-Islamic states, non-Islamic traditions or Slovakia (for example, *Koran* ↔ *Germans*; *Islam* ↔ *à la Slovak*; *Islamic wedding* ↔ *impossible here*; *Muslim headscarves* ↔ *football games in Canada*; *Muslim clergyman claims* ↔ *celebrating Valentine's Day illegal*; *Muslims* ↔ *adapt!*).

As already mentioned, the titles of articles are typical examples of 'highlighting' media references, which in many cases function as visual signposts for the message. Many readers, who content themselves with reading just the title of articles, are thus only offered relatively distant (in relation to Slovak culture) images of Islam and Muslim culture. The linguist M. Nekula has used the term 'title xenophobia' in this connection. This refers to a recurrent feature in news stories about crime, where the ethnicity or religious affiliation of the offender is shown in the title even though this information is unimportant. Thus the given fact (crime) is then seen through the prism of the offender's ethnic or religious identity (Nekula 1995: 269–270).

The first criterion used to categorize the examined articles was their content and/or issues they dealt with. Although many issues overlapped with one another in terms of content, the most frequent and dominant issues were the following:

Table 18. Most frequent issues in Slovak press coverage of Islam and Islamic Culture.

Conflict	75 articles	60%
Cultural differences (i.e. Islam vs. non-Islamic world and culture)	22 articles	18%
Muslims in Slovakia	11 articles	9%
Travel stories and reportage	6 articles	5%
Celebrities' contacts with Islam	4 articles	3%
Other issues	6 articles	5%

In articles reporting on the issue of conflict, three main problems were highlighted:

Terrorist attacks and threats. These articles mostly provided information on terrorist attacks and their possible scenarios, massacres, abductions and training camps for terrorists. Most of them featured hard facts on the exact location of events, property damage and the number of wounded and killed, with a special emphasis on victims among women, children, students, European and American citizens. Most of these articles obviously strove to identify the guilty party; some of them spoke of 'settling the score with evil'. The most frequent issue was terrorist attacks on Great Britain; other countries mentioned in connection with terrorism included especially the United States, Spain, Australia and China. Good examples of this are articles bearing the following headlines: *Troch Francúzov dnes zastrelili v Saudskej Arábii* (Three Frenchmen Shot Dead in Saudi Arabia); *Británia sa bojí teroru. Ohrození sú aj Slováci* (Britain Fears Terror, Slovaks Threatened Too); *Najmenej 80 mŕtvych, 200 zranených pri útoku v Bagdade* (At Least

80 Dead, 200 Injured in a Baghdad Attack); *Na univerzitu zaútočila žena v šatke* (University Attacked by Woman in Headscarf).

Military conflict. These articles focused primarily on ongoing wars or prospects of military conflict. Like articles from the previous category, they featured hard facts on the exact location of events and the number of wounded and killed. Most references were made to countries on whose territory the conflict took place or which were involved in the conflicts, namely Iraq, USA, Serbia, Kosovo, Palestine and Israel (for instance, *Bosnianski Srbi sa ospravedlnili za vojnové zločiny* (Bosnian Serbs Apologize for War Crimes)).

Trials, their verdicts and implications. These articles dealt specifically with trials of terrorists and war criminals. The most frequent issue was the case of Bulgarian nurses in Libya who were first convicted and then released; other issues to receive extensive coverage included descriptions of conditions in the Guantánamo Bay detention camp, Cuba, and the sentencing to death of Saddam Hussein and subsequent reactions to this (such as *Zbabraná poprava* (Bungled Execution)).

The authors of articles discussing cultural differences focused mostly on the following ten issues:

Muslim headscarves. Most of these articles discussed the custom of wearing Muslim headscarves and the right of Muslim women to wear them in European and American schools and public places, for example, *Kanada diskutuje, či sú na futbale povolené moslimské šatky* (Canada Discusses Allowing Muslim Headscarves at Football Games), *Stop moslimským šatkám* (Stop to Muslim Headscarves).

Sharia law. These articles discussed the issue of Islamic religious law, which was portrayed as contradicting national law, for instance, *Šaria možno nahradí časť kašmírkej legislatívy* (Sharia May Replace Parts of Kashmiri Law).

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80 Dead, 200 Injured in a Baghdad Attack); *Na univerzitu zaútočila žena v šatke* (University Attacked by Woman in Headscarf).

Military conflict. These articles focused primarily on ongoing wars or prospects of military conflict. Like articles from the previous category, they featured hard facts on the exact location of events and the number of wounded and killed. Most references were made to countries on whose territory the conflict took place or which were involved in the conflicts, namely Iraq, USA, Serbia, Kosovo, Palestine and Israel (for instance, *Bosnianski Srbi sa ospravedlnili za vojnové zločiny* (Bosnian Serbs Apologize for War Crimes)).

Trials, their verdicts and implications. These articles dealt specifically with trials of terrorists and war criminals. The most frequent issue was the case of Bulgarian nurses in Libya who were first convicted and then released; other issues to receive extensive coverage included descriptions of conditions in the Guantánamo Bay detention camp, Cuba, and the sentencing to death of Saddam Hussein and subsequent reactions to this (such as *Zbabraná poprava* (Bungled Execution)).

The authors of articles discussing cultural differences focused mostly on the following ten issues:

Muslim headscarves. Most of these articles discussed the custom of wearing Muslim headscarves and the right of Muslim women to wear them in European and American schools and public places, for example, *Kanada diskutuje, či sú na futbale povolené moslimské šatky* (Canada Discusses Allowing Muslim Headscarves at Football Games), *Stop moslimským šatkám* (Stop to Muslim Headscarves).

Sharia law. These articles discussed the issue of Islamic religious law, which was portrayed as contradicting national law, for instance, *Šaria možno nahradí časť kašmírskej legislatívy* (Sharia May Replace Parts of Kashmiri Law).

Cartoons of Mohammed. The subject of these articles was a lawsuit involving a Paris-based magazine which had published cartoons of Mohammed, and reactions to this. The entire case was covered from the viewpoint of Western-style democracy and the freedom of speech, such as *Sloboda slova vyhrala: karikatúry Mohameda nie sú trestné* (Freedom of Speech Prevailed: Cartoons of Mohammed Not Punishable).

Family life, weddings, status of women. These articles discussed the issues of the separation of women, divorce, way of dressing, ban on pre-marital sex and punishment for it, so-called 'honour-killings' and restrictions imposed on women by the Koran, such as *Iránske ženy budú mať ostrov, kam muži nesmú* (Iranian Women to Have an Island Forbidden to Men); *Nemci nechápu: súd rozhodol podľa Koránu* (Germans Baffled: Court Ruled in Line with Koran); *Zabíjajte ju!* (Let's Kill Her!).

Statements by Islamic leaders. These articles featured comments and reactions to statements by Islamic clergymen which encouraged attacks on unbelievers in exchange for martyrdom and promoted a strict Islamic education for children, for instance, *Austráliu šokovali výroky islamského duchovného* (Australia Shocked by Islamic Clergyman's Statements).

Imprisonment for criticism of Islam. Again, the main emphasis was on the cultural conflict between Muslim traditions and Western democratic values such as the freedom of speech, for instance, *Za kritiku islamu a prezidenta odsúdili blogera na 4 roky* (Blogger Sentenced to 4-Year Term for Criticism of Islam and President).

Prayers, pilgrimages and Muslim holidays. Here, the main focus was on describing Muslim holidays and emphasizing their mass character, such as, *Tisíce sunnitov mieria do Tikritu* (Thousands of Sunnis Headed for Tikrit). One article discussed a ban on Western holidays and their condemnation by Muslim clergymen: *Muslimský duchovný tvrdí: oslavy Valentína sú protiprávne* (Muslim Clergyman Claims Celebrating Valentine's Day Is Illegal).

Islamic revival, conversion, increase in the Muslim population. These articles described the positive relationship to Islam of individuals from European countries, the increasing popularity of Islam among young people and potential threats to the domestic population, for example, *Slovák – ohrozený druh* (Slovak – Endangered Species); *Čistý islam sa páči viac mladým* ('Pure' Islam Found Attractive Especially by Young People).

Christianity vs. Islam. These articles compared and juxtaposed both religious traditions and dogmas and discussed the Pope's statements regarding Islam, for instance, *Katolícky štát* (Catholic State); *Súd vyniesol rozsudok nad vrahom kresťanských dievčat* (Court Sentences a Murderer of Christian Girls). Some of them advocated interfaith dialogue.

Lifestyle. The theme of these articles was differences between the two cultures, for instance in eating habits or hospitality. They typically described customs, but some of them drew comparisons and advocated acceptance or condemnation of Muslim customs, for example, *Čínska televízia zakázala prasatá vo vysielaní* (Chinese Television Bans Pigs in Broadcasting); *Muslimovia, prispôbajte sa!* (Muslims, Adapt!).

All the articles examined featured obvious references to the 'otherness' of Islamic culture: at times, the authors of the articles seemed to be deliberately searching for differences and even presented them as oddities. In some texts, we can find not only clearly expressed contrasts with Western culture, but also implicitly expressed derision or irony accompanying the depiction of life in a Muslim country. There is evidence of this in the article *Iránske ženy budú mať ostrov, kam muži nesmú* (Iranian Woman Will Have An Island Where Men Can't Come) or the article that describes beaches in Muslim countries (*Najdlhšiu pláž sveta zväzujú pravidlá islamu* (The Longest Beach In The World Tied Down By The Rules Of Islam) where we find the following passage describing a form of beachwear very different from that found in the West, but common in Muslim culture: 'we would expect people sunbathing, the women dressed in saris or burkas, the men going in to the sea in jackets'. There were also frequent reports of acts of mental and physical violence committed against women in the name of

tradition, mostly by husbands or relatives. The most frequent reasons for such violence were adultery and pre-marital affairs (for example, *Zabime ju!* (Kill Her!)).

Most articles discussing the issue of Muslims and Islam in Slovakia described and commented on the state of affairs, featuring interviews with official representatives of Islamic organizations in Slovakia and members of the country's Muslim community, and presenting statements by experts and politicians. The most frequently featured issues included the following three:

Application to obtain the status of registered church. These articles described the conditions for registering churches in Slovakia and the problems Muslim organizations face in this respect; some of them featured references to the Christian religious tradition in Slovakia.

Islam as a religion. Most frequently, these articles focused on Islamic principles, describing the differences between Islam and Christianity, discussing the possibility of practising Islam in Slovakia and the issue of converting to Islam, and pointing out the absence of mosques, for example.

Family life and lifestyle of Muslims in Slovakia. This type of article described Muslim family life in detail, discussing issues such as partnership, raising children, circumcision, eating habits and other traditions, presenting readers with examples of the life-stories of individual Muslims.

As regards political statements on Islam, most coverage was given to parties in the government, especially the Slovak National Party, which expresses dislike of all types of immigration into Slovakia, as well as the presence of foreigners and 'unconventional' religion. Here we can see the way in which Muslims and Islam become the object of political debate and the exploitation of this topic to gain political advantage. Statements by political leaders featured in the articles clearly emphasized the benefits the Muslim community would gain from registration, including state subsidies to support Islamic education and other benefits the government would be obliged to provide. Many of them questioned Slovakia's readiness for contact with

Islamic culture and religion and compared Islam to other so-called minority churches; some pointed out the need to control Muslims and embrace the Christian tradition of the Slovaks; yet others emphasized the otherness of Islamic culture and portrayed Islam and the Muslims as a heterogeneous element in Slovakia. Representatives of the country's Muslim community, for their part, adopted a defensive position. In their statements, they highlighted the democratic principles to which Slovakia subscribed, complaining about strict conditions for registration and advocating acceptance and possibilities of mutual coexistence. This is documented by articles bearing, for example, the following headlines: *Slovenské moslimky* (Slovak Muslim Wives); *Islam na slovenský spôsob* (Islam à la Slovak); *Abdulwahab Al-Sbenaty: Chceme oficiálny kontakt s majoritou* (Abdulwahab Al-Sbenaty: We Want Official Contact with the Majority); *Slovenský bič na moslimov* (Slovak Whip on the Muslims) or *Vládna koalícia je proti malým cirkvám* (Ruling Coalition against Minority Churches).

Another category of articles was travel stories and reportage. The authors were primarily travellers, photographers and journalists, but also included a doctor who had spent some time in Muslim countries. The texts featured accounts of travel conditions, but mostly descriptions of countries and their inhabitants, their lifestyles and conditions. They were full of references to 'peculiar' cultural elements and characteristics which were generally portrayed as different, interesting, curious, baffling or inspiring, for instance bans on taking pictures or shaking hands with Muslim women, poor hygiene, toilets without toilet paper, cheap fuel, cultural monuments or hospitality. Examples of this kind of article include: *Zlatá Barma* (Good Old Burma); *Všadeprítomný sultán* (The Omnipresent Sultan); *Ženatý s fotografiou* (Married to a Photograph); *Keď sa bojuje s maláriou* (Struggling with Malaria).

Four articles gave information on Islam and Muslims through the perspective of celebrities' contacts with Islam. Here, the image of Islam was communicated to the reader through the experience of well-known figures, for instance a television news presenter, an international pop star or British royalty. The articles had headlines such as: *Zuzana Hajdu: v Egypte má milenca* (Zuzana Hajdu: A Lover in Egypt); *Zuzana Hajdu: ako som skončila s Rockym...* (Zuzana Hajdu: How I Finished with Rocky...);

Michael Jackson možno konvertuje na islam (Michael Jackson May Convert to Islam); and *Pôjde o život* (A Matter of Life and Death).

The first article was an interview run by a tabloid paper which discussed a recent love story between a well-known television news presenter and a Muslim man. The negative and ironic position on Islam was apparent from the questions posed to the news presenter, as well as from the journalist's expressions and comments which were presented as recommendations or even warnings, for instance: 'doesn't the fact that he is a Muslim discourage you?'; 'she fell for a Muslim souvenir seller'; 'however, he is of the Islamic faith'; 'she must be prepared for anything'; 'difficult situations may occur that she certainly did not foresee'.

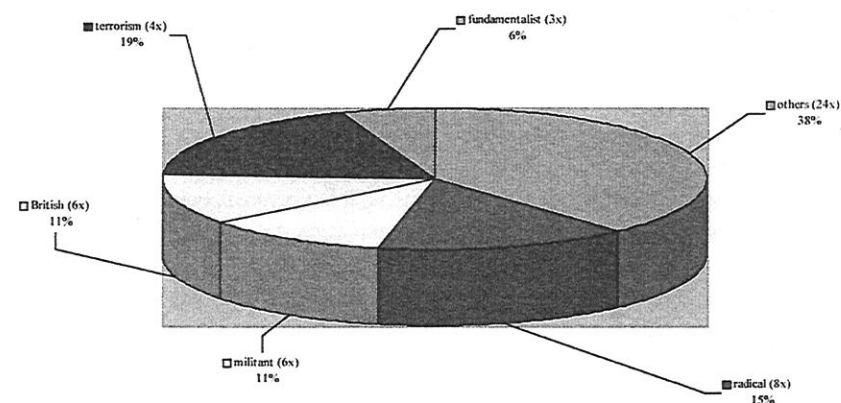
The second article, on Prince Harry's potential enlistment for the war in Iraq, presented speculation that he might be abducted or even killed by Islamic militants. The author used collocations such as 'Harry a captive', 'the threat of abduction is imminent', or 'threats are already circulating on the Internet', evoking feelings of threat and danger.

The last article from this category was a brief story on Michael Jackson's possible conversion to Islam. The journalist argued that by converting to Islam and possibly moving to an Islamic country, the pop star was seeking to avoid the charges of sexual abuse that he was facing. In all three cases, the issue's attractiveness and newsworthiness was enhanced by the involvement of publicly known figures. In the former two cases, the story's emotional charge was boosted by outlining potential threats from Islam the celebrities allegedly faced.

Muslims described and shown in media news are mainly unidentified individuals, anonymous groups or even masses. They tend to be represented as groups and not as individuals, identified not by profession or age, for example, but only by their religion. The only exceptions to this rule are representatives of Muslim organizations in Slovakia, who are named or pictured following the text.

In the following section, we take a closer look at the occurrence, frequency, connotations and meanings of the key words 'Islam', 'Muslim', 'Koran' and 'mosque' in the texts examined. We will focus on analysing their synonyms, accompanying attributes and collocations. The texts featured a great number of attributes that were either related to the key words or

Table 19. The most frequent attributes of 'Islam' and 'Muslim' in the Slovak press.



placed next to them. Of the total of fifty-one attributes that were placed in the immediate vicinity of the words 'Islam' and 'Muslim', the following were the most frequent: *radical* (which appeared eight times), *militant* (six times), *British* (six times), *terrorism* (four times) and *fundamentalist* (three times). The articles also used other attributes such as *orthodox*, *extreme*, *conservative*, *fanatic*, *liberal*, *moderate*, *Dutch*, *Kashmiri* and *Shia*.

As far as the word 'mosque' is concerned, our research identified a total of twenty-five connotations, collocations and grammatical variations of this word, the most frequent in the following connection: *mosque of mud*, *gunshot*, *gunfire*, *attack*, *evidence*, *ambush*, *bombing*, *prayer*. Our research also identified a number of references to the location of mosques, for instance *Grand Mosque*, *Milan mosque*, *Paris mosque*, *Tikrit mosque* or *Jerusalem mosque*. The word 'Koran' appeared eighteen times, mostly in connection with and as a reference to the following: *sacred book*, *verbatim interpretation*, *study*, *oath*, *teaching*, *verses*, *impossible to reform*, *evaluation*, *tear half of Koran out*, *allows battering wives* and so on.

The connotations mentioned may be loosely divided into categories, five of which we found particularly distinct:

Describing the opposition of Islamic culture and religion to the 'non-Islamic' world. While this category of connotations includes a large quantity of diverse concepts, three subgroups may be easily identified:

- negative experience, such as *attack, struggle, death, protests, storm, massacre, impossible to integrate, problems, criticism, anxiety*.
- division of space into Islamic and non-Islamic, such as *house of Islam, world of Islam, image of Islam, Europe before Islam, sacred places of Islam*.
- number and organization of Muslims, such as *movement, mass, group, minority, population, association, million Muslims, Islamic state*.

Relating to practising Islam. Here, the most frequent words included *conversion, Islamic clergyman, believers and practice*. We also found collocations that showed the authors' efforts to identify persons based on their religious affiliation, particularly: *subscribes to Islam, he is of the Islamic faith, practises Islam*.

Relating to family life and lifestyle, such as wedding in compliance with Islamic law, battering is a reason to divorce, kind of Muslim headscarf, dressing of women, hijab, lunar calendar.

Relating to Slovakia's life and customs, such as registration, registered church, presence of Muslims, official, against acclimatization of Muslims, Islam – Baha'i – Scientologists, danger, connection of terrorism groups, hostile to Muslims, number of Muslims increases, wedding, mosque, differences, schools, number, rules of Islam, Islamic woman, risk, 5000 Muslims.

Defending Islam and Muslims and communicating positive experiences, such as do not portray the Muslims as a spectre, they do not mock Islam, 'normal' Muslim, was not aimed against Islam, I defend Islam, France respects Islamic law.

As previously noted, the precise localization of news is also very important from the viewpoint of media logic. Therefore, it is relevant to take a closer look at the countries and/or regions that were most frequently mentioned in the texts as the location of events or had any impact on the events taking

place, as well as the context in which these countries were mentioned. The countries are listed according to the frequency of occurrence in the texts examined (events or issues most frequently associated with listed countries are in brackets):

Iraq (military conflict); *Slovakia* (Muslims in Slovakia, statements by politicians and experts regarding the situation in Serbia); *USA* (Iraqi intervention, relations with Muslim countries, campaign against terrorism); *Great Britain* (terrorist attacks, Muslim minority); *Serbia/Kosovo* (military conflict, trials of war criminals); *Egypt* (terrorist attacks); *Israel; Iran; Cuba* (Guantánamo Bay detention camp); *Australia* (terrorist attacks); *France* (cartoons of Mohammed); *Palestine; Afghanistan* (terrorist attacks, Al-Qaeda); *China; Libya* (trial of Bulgarian nurses); *the Vatican* (statements by the Pope regarding Islam); *Indonesia; India; Germany* (Muslim minority); *Spain* (trials of people responsible for terrorist attacks); *Bangladesh; Saudi Arabia; Morocco*.

Some of the articles examined placed the events in unspecified countries or used the following collocations to describe the location: *Islamic countries, Islamic world, Europe, European countries, democratic countries*. Most events were located in 'Islamic' countries which were either directly involved in the conflicts or were related to them in some way. As far as 'non-Islamic' countries were concerned, the texts referred mostly to countries which were involved in the conflicts or encountered problems, and conflicts involving Muslims or Muslim communities.

The texts clearly tended to categorize, generalize and simplify readers' perception of the location into 'Islamic' and 'non-Islamic'. In doing so, they often overlooked the actual ethnic, religious or political situation in specific countries and/or regions, for instance million-strong Muslim minorities in European countries, or, on the other hand, the presence of non-Muslims in so-called 'Islamic' countries. This manner of presentation creates an artificial division of countries and their cultures into two worlds based on religious differences as the sole criterion. From the large number of cases, we can again note the effort to create contrasts in which meaning is highlighted by verbs with a negative meaning, for instance, *Frenchmen /shoot/ Saudi Arabia, Britain /fear/terror*, and others.

A composite image of Islam and Islamic culture as presented by the Slovak media can be constructed by identifying the media content from the

viewpoint of its overall meaning or wording on the continuum of positive – neutral – negative. Evaluating the content of media messages from this viewpoint is strictly individual and subjective, as it is problematic to define generally accepted categories. Our evaluation was further complicated by the content of some articles which simultaneously described positive and negative situations, events and actions, as well as by a great number of political issues and contributions to discussions which are difficult to evaluate. Nevertheless, we tried to establish categories of our own which would at least partially define the positive, neutral and negative connotations and meanings of the media messages examined:

negative connotations – describing and reporting on wars, attacks, conflicts, problems, death, trials and other events along these lines, as well as articles featuring negative evaluative statements;

neutral connotations – describing the situation without presenting evaluations or judgments, providing hard facts on conflict-free and problem-free situations; and

positive connotations – describing the situation with a favourable evaluation or judgement, emphasizing compromise, cooperation, conciliation, coexistence, acceptance, joyful and peaceful situations.

Of the total number of 124 texts evaluated on this continuum, 23 articles carried neutral or positive contents while the remaining 101 can be evaluated as negative.

Our analysis shows that the representation of Islam and Islamic culture in the texts examined as well as the overall position of the media content on the positive-negative continuum is largely determined by the author of the article. Authors, co-authors and interviewees substantially influence the form and content of media messages. Particularly important in this respect are individuals who speak from personal experience: here, one can talk of 'internal' and 'external' perspectives on the issues examined.

The 'external' perspective was typical of authors who were not familiar with the issue or simply re-ran articles from other sources (108 articles, 87 per cent). The 'internal' perspective, on the other hand, was typical of individuals who had their own experience of Islamic culture and/or religion. They were mostly Muslims (quoted in seven articles, 5 per cent), experts specializing in religion and Islam and partly also authors who can

be described as 'travellers', that is, those who have had long-term direct experience of Islamic culture (nine articles, 7 per cent). The most frequently quoted Muslims from Slovakia were representatives of Muslim organizations, especially Mohammad Safwan Hasna, Chairman of the Islamic Foundation, and Abdulwahab Al-Sbenaty, former chairman of the Association of Friends of Islamic Literature. The category of experts was represented by a historian and an Arabist, while the category of 'travellers' was represented by reporters, photographers and a doctor with the international organization *Médecins sans Frontières*. Unsurprisingly, texts authored or co-authored by Muslims, experts in the field of Islamic culture or individuals who had a direct experience of it formed the majority of articles with a neutral or positive content.

The analysis of pictures also allowed us to draw certain conclusions. Almost half of all the articles (60 out of 124) were accompanied by pictorial material. The photographs were taken either on location and directly documented the situation described in the article or were taken from other sources and were merely illustrative. According to the subject portrayed, the published photographs could be divided into the following categories:

Table 20. The subjects of photographs in Slovak press coverage of Islam and Islamic culture.

1.	Pictures of war conflicts, terrorism attacks, soldiers or prisons	16
2.	Pictures of persons who spoke or commented on the issue or were mentioned in the text, e.g. politicians, experts, celebrities, travellers and representatives of Muslim organizations	14
3.	Pictures of Muslims, usually wearing traditional clothes or during prayers	7
4.	Pictures of countries, mostly historical monuments or mosques	6
5.	Pictures of veiled women	5
6.	Other, mostly generic or illustrative pictures such as the U.S. flag, a battered woman, a cartoon of Mohammed, crowded airports, a picture of a man who murdered his wife, a Muslim family living in Slovakia, a Muslim table laid for a meal, the Palestinian government and so on.	12

The overview indicates that the published pictorial material portrayed Islam-related events and developments largely through emphasizing conflicts and cultural differences. The settings for many of them are prisons, military intervention, courtrooms or streets full of policemen. Another important theme is cultural differences, made visible mainly through anonymous praying Muslims or the faces of veiled women.

Conclusion

Our conclusions regarding the representation of Islam and Islamic culture in the Slovak media concur with the findings of many studies that have appeared in recent years, whether in Central Europe, Western Europe or the English-speaking world. Examples would include the studies by Moore, Mason and Lewis (2008) and in the Czech Republic, Krížková (2006) and Karhanová and Kaderka (2001).

The analysis of media messages in the newspapers examined shows that the image of Islam they present is predominantly negative: Islam is portrayed as the source of conflicts, problems, radicalism and danger. The messages encourage this perception of Islam through negative connotations, collocations and phrases which are related to Islam as such, Muslim headscarves, the status of women, Muslim clergymen, the issue of conversion, and so on. Most of the messages underline the otherness of Islam. The Islamic and non-Islamic worlds are portrayed as opposite to each other, as most media messages highlight their geographical, social, societal and cultural differences. This leads to the creation of binary oppositions based on contrasts: ours ↔ strange, non-Muslim ↔ Muslim, democratic ↔ fundamentalist, Christian ↔ Muslim, positive ↔ negative and others. The negative slant of media coverage of Muslims in Slovakia has to do mostly with their efforts to register their church. More positive connotations may be found in texts written by or featuring Muslims, experts in the field of Islamic culture or people who have personal experience of Islam. Although

the general media-message presentation of the broadsheets, tabloids and semi-tabloids we studied varied (as one would expect) according to their format, they presented Islam and Islamic culture in a similar way, revealing the same stereotypical picture of the subject.

Our survey suggests that the image of Islam presented by the Slovak media is similar or identical to the attitudes, views and general perception of this issue among much of the Slovak population more widely. Media texts create and reinforce stereotypes of Muslims and Islam, whether explicitly by the direct expression of attitudes or implicitly by means of hints, sentence-construction, emphasis and the placing of key words, or by the repetition of certain connotations. The media have the capacity to influence and cement public opinion, to change it or to prevent it from changing. In this particular case, it is plain to see that the Slovak media encourage passive and suggestible readers to embrace certain stereotypes and adopt negative positions on Islamic culture, religion and Muslims in general.

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