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“Securitization” Discourse

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## Abstract

There is a plethora of research conducted in the UK, US, and in few other European countries that has revealed a prominent discourse of securitization in the news coverage of Islam and Muslims. Researchers have evidenced that the media have portrayed Islam and Muslims as a security threat to the West. This paper sets out to explore whether the editorial coverage of Islam and Muslims in the Australian press reflects the securitization discourse from August 1, 2016 to October 31, 2016. Employing Van Dijk's ideological square and lexicalisation approaches within the CDA paradigm, this study examined editorials from two leading Australian newspapers. The findings validate the existence of the securitization discourse in the editorial contents of the selected newspapers during the period under study. *The Australian* portrayed Islam and Muslims as a security threat to Australia, Europe, and to the West more explicitly than *The Age*. This study confirms that there is a clear transformation in the Muslims' construction in the Australian press from an exotic presence to the bearers of values, culture, and political inclination considered violent, radical, and threatening to the Australian values and life style.

Key Terms: Islam, Muslims, securitization, security threat, ideological square, lexicalisation

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### Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Press: Exploring the “Securitization” Discourse

#### **Introduction**

The rapid expansion of Islam across the world led it to become a target of racial and religious discrimination (Iqbal 2010). This swift growth of Islam posed a challenge to the Western political, cultural and religious ideologies. The era of crusades further cemented hostilities and widened the racially-prejudiced view of “us” and “them” (Iqbal 2010). Islam and Muslims gained prominent visibility in media and public discourse, and in academic research since 1990s with predominantly negative connotation though (Mertens and Smaele 2016, p. ix). The visibility enhanced to an unprecedented level after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America. 7/7 London bombings (2005), Bali attacks (2005), Madrid bombings (2004), Mumbai attacks (2008), Brussels shootings (2016), Charlie Hebdo shootings (2015) etc. brought debates about Islam and Muslims under limelight and gave unprecedented negative and unwelcoming visibility to Islam and Muslims in Europe (Tsagarousianou 2016).

The Muslim community in Australia has been enjoying religious freedom by practicing their religion and by having their own schools and association for long. But recently, especially since 9/11, 7/7, Bali attacks, Madrid bombings, Brussels shootings etc, many studies have proved that Muslim communities have taken a negative place in media representations and that they have become vulnerable to racial attacks, discrimination, harassment, and prejudice (Akberzadeh and Smith 2005; Alharbi 2017; Munro 2006; Quayle and Sonn 2009; Rane 2008 & 2000; Safi and Evershed 2015; Susskind 2002; Yasmeen 2007).

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Similarly, Muhammad Junaid Ghauri (2019; 2018a; 2018b) explored the impact of the right-left ideological lines of the Australian newspapers in the editorial coverage regarding Islam and Muslims in Australia. In these studies the author found out the impact of political leanings of the newspapers on the representation of Islam and Muslims during the time period under study. He argued that there was a clear evidence of the “political parallelism” discourse in the Australian press wherein the left-wing newspaper *The Age* portrayed Islam and Muslims in a positive way while the right-wing newspaper *The Australian* constructed a negative image of Islam and Muslims in Australia. His studies evidenced that the leftist newspaper criticized the rightist political parties and their conservative policies towards Muslims. *The Age* stressed the need of “harmony”, “understanding”, and “cohesion”. However, the right-wing newspaper, *The Australian*-which is a widely circulated and read newspaper- opposed the leftist approach, appreciated conservative political stance towards Muslims, advocated anti-Muslim and anti-immigration policies, highlighted violence in the Muslim majority states, and portrayed a “collectivized” image of Islam and Muslims (Ghauri 2019; 2018a and 2018b).

Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007) employing van Dijk’s ideological square and Said’s *Orientalism* analyzed the US press editorial treatment of Iran in the context of its nuclear program and pointed out how the selected newspapers constructed *in-group* and *out-group* identities. The researchers analyzed the “argumentative structures” and lexical choices of the editorials and determined 6 different orientalist discourses constructing the West as *us* and Iran as *them*. The themes consisted of, “Islam as threat”, “oriental inferiority”, “oriental submissiveness”, “oriental irrationality”, “oriental untrustworthiness” and “Jews versus Muslims” (Izadi and Saghaye-Biria, 2007). Similarly, comparing British and Iranian newspapers’ coverage of Iran’s nuclear program, Behnam and Moshtaghi (2008) pointed out that

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the British newspapers portrayed Iran in the context of nuclear program in a negative and biased way. Using “transitivity system”, the researchers determined an underlying dichotomy of EU as *us* and Iran as *them* (Behnam and Moshtaghi Zenouz 2008).

In a study entitled, “A Critical Study of News Discourse: Iran’s Nuclear Issue in the British Newspapers”, in 2005, Koosha and Shamas investigated how the UK press transmitted particular ideologies through their headlines during coverage of the Iran’s nuclear program. They pointed out a prominent discursive dichotomy in news texts constructing EU as a savior i.e. *us* versus Iran i.e. *them*. Koosha and Shamas (2005) concluded that dominant themes found in news texts regarding Iran were; “crisis”, “danger”, and “defiance”, while “crisis-solving”, “power” and “world-protector” were the themes associated with the EU (Koosha and Shamas 2005).

Roza Tsagarousianou (2016) elaborates the “securitization” of Islam as; the gradual transformation of discourse from an “exotic Islam” to a “threatening Islam” that endangers European values and safety (Tsagarousianou 2016 in Mertens and Smaele 2016, p.ix). She argues that the incidents of political violence and terrorism have indiscriminately attached Islam and Muslims, both in and outside Europe, with irrational and uncompromising “terrorist violence”. The political and terrorist violence, along with the concerns of “public safety”, has paved the way of “securitization” of anything associated to Islam. Islam as a religion, its followers, Islamic communities, culture, and values are not only seen as a mere “irritating anomaly” in Europe but as a significant “societal threat”. Consequently; terrorism, fundamentalism, Islamic militancy, and jihad have become a “staple vocabulary” when Islam and Muslims are discussed in Europe by politicians, policymakers, commentators, and public (Tsagarousianou 2016 in Mertens and Smaele 2016, p.10).

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Jocelyne Cesari (2010) calls the securitization of Islam as a process of fearing and fostering radicalization due to the “paradoxical policy of European governments” established under the “trite depictions of Islam in professional debates” (p.9). Cesari highlights conditions that lead to securitization of Islam, such as; “viewing Muslims as threat to the European survival”, and Islam as an “existential threat to European political and secular norms” (p.9).

Roza Tsagarousianou (2016) in her study; “Muslims in Public and Media Discourse in Western Europe” scrutinizes the dominant media and public discourses regarding Islam and Muslims in the UK, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, and Spain. She explains that there is a gradual change in the discourse regarding Islam from the “exotic Islam” to a “threatening Islam” which threatens the European way of life and the safety. She refers to this transformation as “securitization of Islam” discourse (Tsagarousianou 2016, p. ix, 3). She illustrates that the murder of the Charlie Hebdo editorial team in 2015 is the last incident among a list of such incidents where the representation of Islam and Muslims appears to be problematic in Europe. Subsequent reporting of the incident portrayed Charlie Hebdo as a symbol of freedom and Islam as religion and the Muslims, who follow it, as an increasing threat to the value (p. 3).

Tsagarousianou (2016) maintains that this invocation of the threat is “instrumental in the construction of Europe itself”. As Said (1993) implied that associating Islam with fundamentalism is an implicit effort to position Europe central to the “vaguely designated Western ethos”. This construction of Europe is predominantly defined through the “antagonistic relationship” to its Muslims “other” (Tsagarousianou 2016 p. 15). She (2016) claims that the contemporary discourse on European Muslims and Islam is not just a means of talking and representing them but a way of “constructing” them, “treating” their presence and making a

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sense of them (Tsagarousianou, 2016 p. 11). Through this contemporary discourse Muslims in Europe are constructed not only as “culturally different” but also as a significant “security threat” that is required to be “administered” and “monitored” and whose presence needs to be “questioned”, “conditioned” and “regulated” (p.11). Cesari (2010) asserts that the securitization discourse on Islam and Muslims in Europe permeates such policy making, and has an impact on variety of fields ranging from minority laws, immigration rules, their schooling, security measures, health policies, and on broader process of inclusion.

A careful review of the available relevant literature suggests that the construction and portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the media of the U.S., the UK, Australian, and in other European countries is problematic. Islam and Muslims are being represented stereotypically and as “exotic other”. However, it is interesting to dig out if there is any change in the discourse regarding Islam and Muslims in the Australian press from an “exotic Islam” to a “threatening Islam”. As evidenced by earlier research in other countries, it is worth knowing if the “securitization of Islam” does exist in the Australian press? So, this paper is an attempt to dig out and identify the “securitization of Islam and Muslims” discourse in the Australian newspapers from August 1, 2016 to October 31, 2016.

*The Age* is a daily national newspaper in compact format published from Melbourne, Australia. The newspaper is owned by Fairfax Media and has been in circulation since 1854. *The Age* is ranked 6th in the list of largest published newspapers in the country with a maximum circulation of 115,256 copies on weekends and an average 83,229 on weekdays (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2017).

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In contrast, *The Australian* is a daily national newspaper in broadsheet format published from Sydney, Australia and available throughout Australia. The newspaper is owned by News Corporation, also known as News Corp or News Limited, and has been in publication since 1964. *The Australian*, ranked the biggest selling national newspaper in the country, has a maximum circulation of 219,242 copies on weekends and an average 94,448 on weekdays (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2017). According to the numbers available on LexisNexis, *The Australian* has a weekend readership of 952,000 and on weekdays, almost 441,000 people read this newspaper daily. *The Australian* is one of the leading national dailies in the country with journalists, photographers, and one permanent bureau in every state and territory capital (The Australian, 2017).

This study considers *The Age* and *The Australian* as the representative sample of the Australian media for the desired objective. These newspapers were selected because both of them are very candid, outspoken and clear in their ideological lines whereby the former represents the left-wing political ideology and the latter advocates the right-wing explicitly.

### **Securitization of Islam and Muslims**

“Securitization of Islam and Muslims” is the discourse that contains portrayal of Islam as “violent”, “dangerous”, and “threatening” to the European values and safety. Perceptions about Muslims as the followers of “an intransigent and increasingly aggressive Islam” and as the bearers of “political tendency”, “cultural traits”, and “values” that are considered as “violent”, “radical”, and “threatening” to the European safety, culture and values.



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The editorial contents that portray Islam and Muslims as violent, dangerous, radical and threatening to *The Australian* safety, culture, and values is considered as the “Securitization of Islam and Muslims” discourse. Using the lenses of “lexicalization” and “ideological square” the editorial contents will be analyzed to identify the discourse.

### **Methodology**

#### **Data Collection and Sampling**

For this paper, the researcher selected all the editorials from the selected newspapers using census sampling for the purpose of exploring the securitization discourse in the editorial coverage of *The Age* and *The Australian* regarding Islam and Muslims. During the period under study *The Age* published only one and *The Australian* published two editorials regarding Islam and Muslims.

#### **Data Analysis**

The researcher employed van Dijk’s (1998b) ideological square and lexicalisation approaches within the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) paradigm as data analysis tools.

There are various approaches and offshoots of CDA developed by major proponents based on different theoretical aspects, for example, Scollon described CDA from the micro-sociological perspective, while Jager, Fairclough and Wodak developed their standpoint from the theories on society and power closely premised in the Faucauldian school of thought (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). The present study however is based on the paradigm of social cognitive perspective as developed and advocated by van Dijk (1993, 1995b, 2000a). This approach

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assumes that power is exercised by manipulating and influencing minds. In other words, dominance and discourses have a direct social cognitive connection which deems it imperative to critically analyse the (re)production of texts and also the way they are perceived and interpreted (van Dijk, 1993).

### **Ideological Square**

The notion of ideology is fundamentally centred in the debates of critical discourse analysis. Ideology can be understood as ideas or belief systems that members of a society share collectively to create social representation of groups (van Dijk, 2000b). As these ideologies are a function of socio-cognitive structures, they can be acquired and abandoned gradually by members of a society through everyday discursive process. An important aspect that ideology represents is the social identity or self-image of a group or individual which reflects the political phenomenon of in-group and out-group polarisation (van Dijk, 2006). This simply means that ideologies sometimes have polarised nature when they belong to opposing groups, for example, the discourses of racial prejudice related to immigrants (van Dijk, 1998a). This usually creates the “us’ versus “them” dichotomy where an individual or group members of the in-group portray the group in good light by mentioning the positive elements or in other words, they deploy positive self-presentation. In contrast, they apply negative “other” presentation when discussing the members of an out-group. With the same concurrence, they de-emphasise or downplay the negative aspects of their own group but exaggerate or overplay the negative aspects of their opponents (van Dijk, 2006). van Dijk calls this the ideological square model. It basically has four moves which are as follows:

- Emphasize our good things

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- Emphasize their bad things
- De-emphasize our bad things
- De-emphasize their good things (van Dijk, 1998a, 1998b).

The ideological square is a theoretical and methodological approach that incorporates positive in-group and negative out-group strategies. Both these strategies of taking binary positions are manifested through lexical choices and various other linguistic facets in a discourse (van Dijk, 1998b). van Dijk claimed that many group ideologies seem to be polarised in representing “self” and “other”, that is, “us” and “them” in terms of “we are good and they are bad” (Shojaei, Youssefi & Hosseini, 2013). The ideological square operates to present a polarised image of the in-group and out-group by portraying “us” in a favourable way and “them” in an unfavourable way (Kuo & Nakamura, 2005).

### **Lexicalisation**

The ideological polarisation is manifested in a discourse through various forms such as in terms of lexical choices wherein positive and negative evaluations are employed (Shojaei et al., 2013). The strategy of employing binary opposition in a discourse is manifested through “lexical items” to portray in-group (“us”) positively and out-group (“them or other”) negatively. The strategy is one of many categories of ideological square analysis and is referred to as lexicalisation. van Dijk (1998b) contended that in ideological and linguistic studies, the best known method is the analysis of lexical items. He maintained that words, generally or contextually, are used in terms of “value judgments”, “opinion”, “factually” or “evaluative”.

So, considering the relevance and appropriate nature of the ideological square and lexicalisation, this study employed these two approaches within the premise of the CDA

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paradigm to analyse the editorial contents of *The Age* and *The Australian* from August 1, 2016 to October 31, 2016 to determine if the “securitization” discourse does exist in the representation of Islam and Muslims.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

#### **Analysis on *The Age***

Main objective that was set at the outset of this study was to determine if there was any transformation of Muslims’ construction, in the Australian press during the period under study, from an “exotic presence” to the bearers of values, culture, and political inclination considered “violent”, “radical”, and “threatening” to the Australian security, values, and life style.

During the period under study *The Age* published only one editorial regarding Islam and Muslims on September 22, 2016. It was entitled as; “Syrian conflict a damned dilemma”. However, the editorial did not contain any themes that could be considered as “securitization” discourse regarding Islam and Muslims. The researcher has found not a single word, phrase, and/or sentence that could be coded as “securitization” discourse. So, a careful and detailed analysis of the editorial contents of *The Age* suggests that the newspaper did not portray Islam and Muslims as a “security threat” to “us” i.e. the Australia and the Australians.

Overall, the “securitization” discourse is unseen in the editorial contents of *The Age* regarding Islam and Muslims.

#### **Analysis on *The Australian***

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The analyzed editorial contents of *The Australian* overwhelmingly prove the transformation in the discourse regarding Islam and Muslims from “exotic” to “threatening”. The findings validate that the newspaper portrayed and constructed a violent, radical and threatening image of Islam and Muslims. Wearing the lenses of “lexicalization” and “ideological square”, the researcher has found out following relevant dominant themes in the editorial contents of *The Australian*;

First editorial in the selected sample of *The Australian* was published on August 30, 2016, titled; “Burkini ban a step too far”. The lexical choice in the headline *a step too far* opted by the newspaper for the ‘burkini ban’ shows newspaper’s policy and ideology about the issue. The ‘burkini ban’, which is otherwise considered as a violation of ‘Westerner/European values’ of ‘liberty’, ‘equality’, and ‘fraternity’, has been supported by the newspaper as ‘a step or stage beyond what is safe, sensible, and desirable’. Ideologically, the binary position taken by *The Australian* against ‘burkini’ expresses newspaper’s ‘rightist’ ideological line. Although the newspaper has mentioned, in the text below, that Paris’s tribunal has marked burkini ban as an insult to French ‘fundamental freedoms’ i.e. ‘liberty’, ‘equality’, and ‘fraternity’, but still throughout the text the newspaper has emphasized on the ‘security’ and ‘social threat’ attached to the burkini.

Following ‘securitization’ themes were prominent in the editorial contents;

*After multiple Islamist terrorist attacks in France it is perhaps not surprising that overt displays of fundamentalist Islamic practices can prompt insecurity and even outrage... The sight of Muslim women wearing the full-body burkini on French beaches has done just that... there is an explicit connection between the burkini and terrorism... (The Australian, August 30, 2016).*

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Lexical choices such as; *Islamist terrorist attacks, not surprising, overt displays, fundamentalist Islamic practices, insecurity, even outrage, explicit connection, burkini and terrorism*, opted by the newspaper to comment on the issue show negative opinion of the newspaper about the burkini. The ban has been justified and burkini has been attached with ‘terrorism’ and ‘insecurity’. The burkini and ‘Islamic practices’, in a collectivism and stereotypical style, have been labeled as ‘fundamentalist’ and have been associated with ‘insecurity’ and ‘outrage’.

Lexical items such as; *overwhelmed, fear, Islamic terrorism, ire, triggering global outrage*, represent a ‘securitized’ image of Islam and Muslims.

In terms of polarization strategy, this comment associates Islam and Muslims with ‘security threat’ thus producing a *securitization* discourse.

Overall, this editorial contains ‘securitization’ as a predominant discourse wherein Islam and Muslims have been portrayed as a security threat. The ‘securitization’ discourse does appear in the form of portrayal of Islam and Muslims associated with terrorism, insecurity, outrage, fundamentalism, and ire.

The editorial entitled; ‘Hammer blow to Islamic State’, published on October 18, 2016, was the second one in the selected sample to be studied. The editorial contained following ‘securitization’ themes;

*...who, as the battle unfolds and their delusions become clear even to them, will realize defeat is staring Islamic State in the face and seek to return home. This prospect demands increased vigilance from border control authorities to ensure they are apprehended... (The Australian, October 18, 2016).*

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The lexical items such as; *significant fallout, jihadist recruits, their delusions, defeat, Islamic State*, the newspaper portrays a negative image of ‘them’. The ‘securitization’ discourse emerges here in the form of the comments like; *...seek to return home. This prospect demands increased vigilance from border control authorities to ensure they are apprehended.*

In another paragraph, the lexical items and referential terms such as; *Jihadists, intolerable, massive blow, Islamic terrorists, the bogus caliphate*, portray a negative image of Muslims. This paragraph contains a ‘securitization’ discourse regarding Islam and Muslims wherein Muslims in Australia are represented as suspicious.

Throughout the editorial, ‘Islamic state’ has been used as alternative name for the terrorists, militants and even for the ISIS/ISIL. This is an intentional stereotypical and prejudiced approach by the newspaper to dehumanize Islam and Muslims (them/other). In terms of ‘division and rejection’ process of representing Islam and Muslims, ‘they’ have been placed in an inferior space and portrayed as ‘radicals’, ‘violent’, ‘jihadists’ and ‘mindless people’.

Overall, this editorial contains ‘securitization’ as a predominant discourse wherein ‘they’ are portrayed as ‘potential threat’ in ‘our’ country.

Overall both the editorials published in *The Australian* demonstrate a clear existence of the “securitization” discourse regarding Islam and Muslims. Wherein, the transformation from “an exotic Islam to a threatening Islam” discourse is evident.

### Conclusion

The present study was set out to explore the existence of the discourse of “securitization” regarding Islam and Muslims in the Australian press during the period under study. The findings have shown that *The Age* published only one editorial from August 1, 2016 to October 31, 2016 regarding Islam and Muslims. However, the editorial did not contain any themes that could be considered as “securitization” discourse regarding Islam and Muslims. The researcher has found not a single word, phrase, and/or sentence that could be coded as “securitization” discourse. So, a careful and detailed analysis of the editorial contents of *The Age* suggests that the newspaper did not portray Islam and Muslims as a “security threat” to “us” i.e. the Australia and the Australians. However, there is a clear distinction between the coverage of *The Age* and *The Australian* wherein the latter one has produced the “securitization” discourse regarding Islam and Muslims more explicitly as compared to the former one. The findings have validated the existence of the “securitization” discourse in the editorial contents of *The Australian* during the period under study. *The Australian* portrayed Islam and Muslims as a “security threat” to Australia, Europe, and to the West very explicitly. This study confirms that there is a clear transformation in the Muslims’ construction in the Australian press from an “exotic presence to the bearers of values, culture, and political inclination considered violent, radical, and threatening to the Australian values and life style”.

Drawing on the “securitization of Islam” discourse referred by Tsagarousianou (2016), Cesari (2010) and Richardson (2004), this study has found out that the editorial contents of *The Age* did not contain the “securitization” discourse regarding Islam and Muslims. However, *The Australian* portrayed Islam and Muslims as security threat to Australia, Europe and to the West.



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The findings reveal that the editorial contents of *The Australian* contained an overtly and unambiguously “securitized” image of Islam and Muslims during the period under study. The newspaper produced “securitization” discourse containing prominent themes such as; “security”, “social threat”, “there is an explicit connection between the burkini and terrorism”, “fear”, “Islamic terrorism”, “jihadist recruits”, and “Islamic terrorists”.

Comparing both the newspapers, it can be concluded that *The Australian* portrayed Islam and Muslims overwhelmingly and explicitly as violent, radical and security threat. On the other hand, the “securitization” discourse is unseen in editorial contents of *The Age* during the period under study. So, the study confirms that there is a clear transformation in Muslims’ construction in *The Australian* press during the period under study, from an “exotic presence” to the bearers of values, culture, and political inclination considered “violent”, “radical”, and “threatening” to *The Australian* values and life style. Hence, the presence of the “securitization” discourse, the type of discourse referred by Tsagarousianou (2016) in a latest book on the topic; “Representations of Islam in the News: A cross-cultural analysis” (Mertens & Smaele, 2016), in the Australian press regarding Islam and Muslims is confirmed.

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