
THE STRANGER NEXT DOOR: THE THREAT OF HOME-GROWN TERRORISM

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Abstract: It is indubitable that globalization has led to exchange of people, falling of boundaries and a greater variety of people on the territories of countries all over the world. At the same time globalization, apart from being a purely positive phenomenon has contributed to the increase in the shades of Otherness which in itself has led to the need of re-mapping and re-assessing the image of the cultural Other.

Islam, which is the second largest as well as the fastest growing religion covering about a quarter of the population, is getting more and more visible in Europe, mostly due to the world-wide media presentation of various Muslim terrorist attacks starting with the Twin Towers in New York and going through attacks by groups such as the Taliban, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, and most recently ISIS/ ISIL, but also through the influx of immigrants and refugees (African, Syrian, Iraqi) of Muslim background to Europe and reported cases of new converts.

These processes have affected the religious mapping of the world and religious adherence, which used to be more or less a characteristic of a specific group, is no longer a constant. We are witnesses of second or third generation immigrants who identify with a specific ethnic group, while at the same time showing allegiance with the confessional group of their ancestors, which justifies the use of definitions like French Muslim, British Muslim, etc.

The study aims at comparing the way British and Bulgarian media present the problem of home-grown terrorism, paying attention to the descriptors used in the development of the image of the terrorist, the references used to denote the perpetrator, his/ her profile and characteristics that can show the terrorist as part of Us or as part of Them. Analysing media language in both discourses will provide useful feedback on the similarities and differences in the thinking patterns of the two peoples as well as be indicative of the comprehensive character of the new threat posed by home-grown terrorism.

The paper is part of a bigger study on the multifarious image of Muslims in the Bulgarian and British printed media. While the articles comprising the main corpus of the study have been collected based on a key word Muslim, the corpus of this paper comprises articles featuring key words Muslim, home-grown, and convert published over the span of a year, i.e. June 2014 – July 2015.

The general approach used in the analysis of the media texts is CDA. However, some elements of quantitative Content Analysis have also been applied in order to assess the frequency of occurrence of certain descriptors, references, and characteristics.

Keywords: home-grown terrorism, media discourse, Muslims.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. General background

It is indubitable that globalization has led to exchange of people, falling of boundaries and a greater variety of people on the territories of countries all over the world. At the same time globalization, apart from being a purely positive phenomenon has contributed to the increase in the shades of Otherness which in itself has led to the need of re-mapping and re-assessing the image of the cultural Other.

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Such processes blur the boundaries between Self and Other. We can no longer talk about the traditional dichotomy Us vs. Them where the left part of the dichotomy remains more or less unchanged and homogeneous (referring mainly to the dominant, usually white majority), while the right part subsumes the various ethnic Others that the majority does not usually include. Nowadays it is the right part which remains more or less unchanged: radical Muslims, terrorists, jihadists – generally all those who can hurt and pose a threat to the dominant group,

while the left part of the dichotomy is the one that undergoes changes: non-Muslims, moderate Muslims, British Muslims, French-born Muslims. This shift speaks of an extended dichotomy established between Us (comprised of non-Muslims and moderate Muslims) vs. the Other (radicals or those intent on hurting Us)¹⁷⁷. However, even in this extended dichotomy the right part could be further analysed as subsuming both the religious Other (radicalized home-grown Muslims) as well as the Foreign (Muslim terrorists and jihadists coming from outside). The perception of the religious Others, defined as home-grown radicalized Muslims and a part of Them, is an interesting one as they are somewhat familiar to us, they are culturally somewhat similar to Us but not quite. In some cases, the threat posed by home-grown Muslims is considered even greater as they are “invisible” among the general population because of their western schooling, westernized looks and manners¹⁷⁸. The understanding of the analysts is that the inability of European societies to integrate and educate Muslims leads to phenomena such as radicalization. Compared to the USA, Europe is behind in terms of integrating Muslims and this has led to bigger number of converts coming mostly from the ghettos of the big cities.

At the same time, there are claims that this “problem” is artificially created and that the real number of deaths caused by terrorist attacks is comparatively lower than the one reported: “out of more than 140,000 murders in the United States since 9/11 – more than 15,000 each year, down from 24,000 in the early 1990s – Islamist terrorists accounted for fewer than three dozen deaths by the end of 2010”¹⁷⁹.

The new slant in the image of Muslims, i.e. the home-grown westernized terrorist, actually heightens the existing conflict between the West and Islam. Alatas¹⁸⁰ states that the conflict between Islam and the West could be traced back to 8th century but that it is today that Islam undergoes the most extensive process of demonization conducted by the western media mostly due to western media’s economic strength and power compared to eastern media, for example. This, together with the inherent link between Muslims and terrorism¹⁸¹ pique both public and governments’ interest to the problem of home-grown terrorism. Therefore, an analysis on the linguistic devices used in the presentation of the perpetrators of acts of terrorism is needed to assess the feelings towards Muslims in general and home-grown jihadi in particular.

1.2. Aims and objectives. Corpus of study. Methodology.

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The newspapers analyzed are the Bulgarian Dnevnik (Dn) – 15, Standart (St) – 50, 24Chasa (24ch) – 36, Trud (T) – 56, or a total of 157 articles and the British The Independent (In) – 77, The Guardian (G) – 60, and The Daily Mail (DM) – 88, or a total of 225 articles. As some of the Bulgarian articles were actually translations of the information provided by international information agencies, we have decided not to analyse them as comparison in translated versions of information on home-grown jihadists is not an objective of the study. Thus the number of analysed Bulgarian articles was substantially reduced to almost a half, to 75 articles. The number of articles from the

¹⁷⁷ Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, D. “Je Suis Muslim: The Image of Muslims in a Bulgarian and a British Newspaper”. In *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*. 11.1, (2015). pp. 105–126.

¹⁷⁸ Gartenstein-Ross, D., Grossman, L. *Homegrown Terrorists in the U.S. and U.K. An Empirical Examination of the Radicalization Process*. Washington: FDD Press, (2009).

¹⁷⁹ Kurzman, Ch. *The Missing Martyrs: Why There are so Few Muslim Terrorists*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, (2011).

¹⁸⁰ Alatas, S. F. “Is Objective Reporting on Islam Possible? Contextualizing the “Demon”. In Alatas, S. F. (Ed.). *Covering Islam: Challenges & Opportunities for Media in the Global Village*. Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs (RIMA) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAF). TimeEdge Publishing Pte Ltd, (2005). pp. 41-52.

¹⁸¹ Said, E. W. *Covering Islam*. London: Vintage Books, (1997).; Richardson, J. E. *(Mis)Representing Islam: The Racism and Rhetoric of British Broadsheet Newspapers*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, (2004).

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British printed media was also reduced (to 125 in total) as some articles presented identical information which did not add anything new to the analysis at hand. The total number of analysed articles came down to 200 articles.

The general approach used in the analysis of the media texts is CDA. However, some elements of quantitative Content Analysis have also been applied in order to assess the frequency of occurrence of certain descriptors, references, and characteristics.

2. ANALYSIS

The corpus of articles on home-grown terrorists involved in Charlie Hebdo attack or such that provide analysis on the phenomenon in general, in most of the cases discuss the profile of the terrorist, the reasons for the radicalization and in cases of converts who have subsequently decided to undergo de-radicalization, the difficulties they face in their home countries.

While the general stereotype of a terrorist suggested by Said¹⁸² implies the involvement of a person who comes from the Orient, who is savage and illiterate, therefore opposed to most of the things which identify Us, the modifier “home-grown” attaches to the whole concept a kind of dualism which increases the fear provoked by such images. On the one hand, the home-grown terrorists are viewed as alien because of their religion and culture, while on the other, due to their schooling and life, they have been domesticated and introduced into the culture of the majority. This dualism has been observed in the analysis of the representations of home-grown terrorists in the British media and has been commented on in the Bulgarian media as well.

Thus, most of the articles present the home-grown terrorists as poor, second or third generation Muslims, born and raised in a European country, unemployed, marginalized, living in the ghettos: “Young British Muslims whose families have lived in the UK for generations are more at risk of radicalisation than recent migrants to Britain, according to new research which reveals the common characteristics of those *most vulnerable to recruitment* by terrorists¹⁸³. (In/ 24.09.2014); Three of the killers are orphans – *the easiest recruitment target* for the jihadists [...]” (24ch/ 16.01.2015). As the examples clearly state there is a mixture of factors and interpretations of the reasons which have led to radicalization. But the dualism mentioned above is evident not only from the fact that the attackers are described as being born and raised in Paris but one of the catch phrases which began circulating the media after the attack on the offices of Charlie Hebdo: “They spoke perfect French”. This description changes in a way the profile of the terrorist who is expected to be endowed with more features characteristic of the ethnic/religious Other than to people who are perceived as Us. This trend in the presentation of the home-grown terrorist is further supported by accounts of just how French or British the terrorists were before they underwent radicalization: “‘I think she started to see me as what was wrong with Western life. I have had boyfriends, *I am just like a normal girl in Britain* but maybe that is why she felt like she couldn’t stay here, because she is so different and devout.’ (DM/ 31.07.2015); The executioner Jihadi John had a happy childhood /h/ Classmates and neighbours in London cannot believe Mohammed has turned into an executioner. He used to be a quiet and well-behaved boy who took *more interest in football* than Islam” /sh/ (St/ 27.02.15)

The examples clearly show the mixture of insider/ outsider characteristics defining the image of the home-grown terrorists. The key notion here is of being “normal” prior to being radicalized. Thus, normality is obviously a feature attributed to insider cultural codes, where normality is understood as preferring Western pop culture idols like the Kardashians, driving western cars, drifting, hanging out with friends, having fun, showing preference to Western sport than to religion. All these characteristics can be taken as a proof of successful integration and fitting in the society. Another proof of the latter are the statements made by friends (as above) or family members of converts who show their resentment at and embarrassment of the decision of their sons, daughters, or wives: He said: ‘Our family’s position is one of *shame and embarrassment*. We believe in peace. ‘We are a *hardworking and loving family*, one who has exactly the same views as everyone else about peace, love, life and death. ’ (DM/ 18.07.2015)

The example spells out the values associated with and attributed mostly to Western culture, thus once again we witness a case of re-mapping of religious identities. Muslims being able to adapt to and acquire Western values and standards. Such explicit statements of integration and outward exhibition of general personal and moral values support the statement that people should not tar all Muslims with the same brush just because their religion is associated with terrorism.

At the same time, the recurrent reports of European converts, especially the cases of young girls, trying to leave their countries of origin to join terrorist groups make us on the one hand, question the appeal and truthfulness

¹⁸² Said, E. W. *Covering Islam*. London: Vintage Books, (1997).

¹⁸³ All Italics in the analysed examples are done by the author.

Twelfth International Scientific Conference
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of these European values, while on the other, make us think about the extent of the radicalization process. Either of these two interpretations actually stir panic as they both lead to an increase in the number of terrorists who pose a threat for Us, for everything considered “normal”, righteous, and worthy. The threat is presented as even more dire as the female converts are said to leave their European homes in order to become jihadi brides and jihadi mothers. The fact that many publications quote women-converts saying that they want and seek such kind of a role is even more disconcerting. Headlines like: “Why have you taken our grandchildren to a warzone? ‘Devastated’ parents of Bradford sisters who fled to Syria *criticise* their daughters’ actions” /h/ (DM/ 18.06.2015); “The mothers who took their children to hell and the haunting question: How did nobody realise what they were planning?” /h/ (DM/ 24.06.2015).

A trend which is very common for the British articles dealing with converts is the inclination to use ethnonyms or traditional British toponyms when talking about the converts for the first time. The impression created by the first of the two examples is of British subjects who have undergone radicalization. If one reads only the headline the information that the radicalized women are Muslim remains hidden as the descriptors which have been used point only to British realia which are usually associated with the dominant group. Clarification comes only in the body of the article and is explicitly stated in the headlines of subsequent articles mostly through the use of personal names and religious adherence. While this can be viewed as an exhibition of tolerance and an act of acceptance and inclusion as the use of such more generic modifiers presents all different ethnic and confessional groups in the UK as part of one nation, it also creates panic as the general reader is left with the impression that anyone can become a terrorist given the conducive social and psychological conditions. Which is actually not far from the truth and the reports of non-Muslim converts support that observation.

Additionally, the cases of non-Muslims converting to Islam broaden the paradigm of the so-called “home-grown terrorists” subsuming under the term not only second or third generation Muslims who have managed to integrate into various western societies but have become radicalized for various reasons, but also western, originally Christian, in most cases predominantly female Europeans who turn to Islam in its most radical form. All this has led to the conclusion published in the Bulgarian Dnevnik: “[...] we can no longer talk about ‘normal Muslim’ because we see people without any *Maghreb roots* converting to Islam [...] One doesn’t really know *what exactly to be afraid of*: of those who hold on to their French identity or of Muslims” (Dn/ 08.01.15). This constant fear and insecurity keeps the population in a state of panic fueled further by scholars like Korteweg et al.¹⁸⁴ who state that “These so-called ‘*born-again Muslims*’ are generally *more fanatical* in their beliefs than ‘*regular*’ Muslims”, a conclusion which is confirmed by cases like Jihadi John, quoted above.

Very frequently media texts employ the direct or indirect reference to the number of converts and thus create additional fear: “According to the authorities there are *nearly 1000 French citizens* fighting for Al Qaeda, Al Nusra and ISIS in Syria and Iraq (St/ 10.01.2015); It is estimated that *up to 1,500 Britons* could be fighting abroad for Islamist groups. (In/ 05.09.2014); etc. The numbers are not that big but they are in hundreds and thousands and in addition to the fact that the recruits come from various countries in Europe they are suggestive of a comprehensive phenomenon which has affected the bigger part of the continent. Despite the fact that there are some discrepancies in the numbers quoted, the fact that the estimates are based on authoritative reports credits them some truth-value. At the same time the contrast between the number of people joining terrorists and those willing to return is striking and suggesting the idea of an army being gathered for a massive attack.

Looking at the examples from Bulgarian media though, most of the analyses presented in various media publications, focus on the idea that the threat of home-grown terrorists for Bulgaria is not so significant mostly due to the social and political characteristics of the ethno-religious groups on its territory. The majority of the population – the ethnic Bulgarians are predominantly Christian, though not so devoted practitioners of their faith. In addition, the biggest Muslim group, the Bulgarian Turkish, are mostly encapsulated within their group and organized by their own party – DPS (Movement for Rights and Liberties) and most recently by DOST (Democrats for Responsibility, Liberty and Tolerance). Thus, they have representation in society, they feel protected both politically and culturally. This fact is also acknowledged by Antonina Zhelyazkova – a Bulgarian historian, social anthropologist and the head of The International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR) in an interview for the Bulgarian Standart: “The imams who were on trial together with Ahmed Moussa Ahmed are not only very well *educated and erudite* but they preach in communities who are *very difficult to manipulate or lead astray* from their spiritual and moral needs. They are *very clear about and very proud of their religious and cultural identity*” (St/ 27.11.14)

¹⁸⁴ Korteweg, R., Gohel, S., Heisbourg, F., Ranstorp, M., de Wijk, R. “Background contributing factors to terrorism Radicalization and recruitment” In Ranstorp, M. (Ed.). *Understanding Violent Radicalization: Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe*. London, New York: Routledge, (2010). pp. 21-49.

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Interesting enough, the threat of home-grown terrorism comes from another ethnic group, which actually jives with the profile of terrorists-to-be, i.e. the ethnic group of Roma.

If we look back at the profile presented by both Bulgarian and foreign scholars on the topic of home-grown terrorism above and agree that radical ideas find fertile soil for their development in individuals or groups of individuals who feel dispossessed, rejected, outcast and socially or politically excluded, Bulgarian Roma fit this aspect of the profile as their group is sought for and wooed by political parties only at the time of elections. Otherwise most of the official authorities do not care about the group. In addition, the bigger part of the group is illiterate, low in their standard of life, non-defined in their religious adherence (some members of the group define themselves as Christian, others as Evangelists, still others as Muslim).

The first time media rang the bell of a possible radicalization going on in Roma ghettos was back in the year 2000. The name of the person who was mentioned at that time was Ahmed Moussa Ahmed, however, the story did not receive wide publicity. Periodically there were some reports on Ahmed Moussa in the press about some charges for preaching radical Islam. The public eye was drawn again to that person in 2014 when he and thirteen other followers were accused of being in possession of literature preaching radical Islam, of possessing ISIS flag and promoting their ideas. The spread of ISIS in a way boosted the attack on Moussa and his followers who with the advent of time have become more visible as a result of their Arabic clothes, the appearance of women with burkas, and men with Muslim beards. All these developments drew public attention to that group and increased the number of publications on the trial that followed and on its outcomes. The terrorist attacks internationally served as eye openers to the threat that Roma ghettos pose. And if authorities were somewhat oblivious to this kind of problem probably due to Bulgaria's lack of experience with terrorist attacks (there has been only one significant terrorist threat on the territory of Bulgaria at Sarafovo airport), the events in France, Belgium, Egypt and in many other places together with the new profile of the perpetrators of the attacks there prompted discussions on the phenomenon on home-grown terrorism in Bulgaria as well: Clockwork orange /h/ The country should not leave Roma ghettos in the hands of suspicious sects (St/ 26.11.14); Bozhidar Dimitrov: The War of the Civilizations has started /h/ (T/ 01.12.2014).

The examples unanimously present Roma ghettos as the cradle of problems and in this case radicalization. The language chosen is also interesting as there are intertextual references to Anthony Burgess' *Clockwork Orange* and to H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* with the implications that Roma pose a threat to the general society because of their criminal inclination, their severity comparing them on the one hand, with a sociopath and his gang while in the other with aliens. It can be stated that both suggestions point to Roma's unpredictability. The latter is suggested in the interviews with some other Bulgarian scholars as well: "The Roma from Pazardzhik have no idea what Islam is. Olya al Ahmed added: 'They are very dangerous. They are a weapon in someone else's hands. In whose hands exactly is a different matter'." (T/ 01.12.2014) and "Ahmed Moussa praised Islamic State and had appealed to his congregation to pray for the victims from ISIS, he had stirred people into jihad as becomes evident from the account of the witnesses. He moved in a group of 10 people who obeyed him" (Dn/ 04.12.14). The examples clearly show how interest driven the poor part of Roma community is and it is a well-known fact that poor people are the easiest to manipulate and stir into action provided the right stimulus. In this case the stimulus is clear – recognition, allegiance with a powerful and scary organization, money as there have been many reports that Islamist organisations have been pouring money into the poorest Roma ghettos in Bulgaria in order to get followers and Roma have been notorious for their readiness to sell themselves to those who pay or promise to pay the most. At the same time, we see explicit reference to ISIS coming from witnesses and although testimonies' veracity can be questioned the use of references to number one international threat nowadays is enough to put people on the alert and stir panic.

Converting to or choosing Islam over other religions gives Roma prestige in addition to financial benefits and that is the main reason for this choice. There are also various cases of nymbism in the neighbourhoods populated by Roma. Usually Muslim-Roma inhabit different parts of the neighbourhood and they usually form separate communities which are better-off than their Christian counterparts. Being Muslim earns Roma the respect not only of the other members of the group but of the members of the dominant group as well. Islam is also presented as the better religion as it makes people abandon their bad habits and criminal life, all trends that are assessed positively by the other members of society and which in their turn help increase the number of people enchanted with this religion.

The last example as well as the words of Antonina Zhelyazkova explicitly state the contrast between Roma who have converted to Islam and Bulgarian Turkish and thus justify the reasons why in Bulgaria home-grown terrorist cannot be expected to spawn out of the groups whose religion is inherently Islam but only from the midst of converts. And this is one of the culture specific aspects of the phenomenon home-grown terrorism observed in

Bulgaria. The description of the ardency of the newly converted Muslims, together with modifiers like “dangerous” used by Olya Al Ahmed and the intertextual references only support the observation made by Korteweg et al. commented on above that they are to be feared more than regular Muslims as the new converts are willing to prove themselves. And this is a similarity in the presentation of converts in the Bulgarian and the British media.

3. CONCLUSION

The analysis conducted on a corpus of articles from the Bulgarian and the British printed media on the subject of home-grown terrorism shows that there are some similarities as well as differences in the presentation of said phenomenon which are in most cases driven by the differences in the situation and experience with Islam in the two countries.

Due to the fact that Western Europe in general, and Britain and France in particular have been exposed to more terrorist attacks and have given more casualties than Bulgaria, the talk about the general topic of terrorism and the topic of home-grown terrorism which stemmed from it, is on a more personal note. Western societies feel an imminent threat not only from outside but from inside as well. This notion of threat verging with panic is presented through the use of numerals for the people who have left the country as converts joining ISIS, by phrases indicating the similarity of converts to the general Christian population and stressing on their normality and Western values, as well as through the presentation of various accounts of women converts leaving their home countries sometimes even with their children in order to join ISIS, mother jihadist children and serve their cause. Thus, publications in the British media appear much more personal and specific as they deal with real cases of home-grown terrorists – men, women and children. The number of these cases is also bigger and therefore creates panic.

The analysed Bulgarian articles show fewer accounts of domestic experience with the phenomenon of home-grown terrorism. The accounts provided at times seem even reluctant to acknowledge the possibility of such a threat as on the one hand, they feature analysis on the reasons Bulgarian Roma can be possible targets of radicalization, while on the other, they somehow attempt to belittle the problem stressing on the interest driven behaviour and inconsistency in the religious allegiance of the group in general.

The phenomenon of home-grown terrorism finds its epitome on Bulgarian soil in the image of Ahmed Moussa – a Roma convert from Pazardzhik who is claimed to be preaching radical Islam and allegiance to ISIS and who is tried and charged with preaching radical ideology. Regardless of the fact that the reported cases of home-grown terrorists in Bulgaria come down to only one so far, the thematic arrangement of the articles in Bulgarian media is similar to those in the British media in that they feature possible reasons for the conversion, signs of the process of radicalization expressed verbally and non-verbally through references to special attire, Salafi beard, Arabic literature, appeals to fight for the terrorist cause, and possible preventive measures. The articles on the topic published in Bulgaria and the UK are similar in the fact that they feature the resentment and disapproval “regular” Muslims feel and show at discussing cases of radicalized converts and terrorist attacks.

The topic of terrorism in general and home-grown terrorism in particular is quite broad and this study is far from being exhaustive in analyzing the phenomenon. However, it is a start-up for future comparative analysis on media presentations on the topic as there are many other aspects as well as culture specific differences which can be explored in terms of reporting in other languages.

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Twelfth International Scientific Conference
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