

# “GET OFF YOUR KNEES”

## Print media public intellectuals and Muslims in Britain<sup>1</sup>

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*This article examines perceptions of British-Muslims deployed by “print media public intellectuals” (PMPI). It argues that PMPI embody a particular type of “mediatized intellectual” whose public discourse on Muslims is crucial in determining how issues emerging from the politics of multiculturalism are understood. Adopting a “theory of argumentation” (Richardson, 2001) derived from a critical discourse analysis methodology (CDA), it investigates the political content of messages disseminated by (1) conservative nationalist and (2) secular liberal PMPI through their newspaper opinion columns. The findings suggest that PMPI argumentation ranges from an overt hostility to a qualified discrimination (the former through exclusive accounts of belonging and the latter through a combative/civilising liberalism), and that—moreover—there is a convergence between these two positions in their anti-Muslim sentiment and desire to regulate the lives of ethnic Others (Hage, 1998). There are four parts to this article: the first part outlines what a public intellectual is and where PMPI stand in relation to this; the second part discusses some Muslim attempts to elicit forms of recognition from the state under a rubric of multiculturalism; the third part outlines the chosen CDA schema of analyses and PMPI output; and the fourth part concludes by encouraging us to recognise and examine further the importance of PMPI argumentation in public discourse.*

**KEYWORDS** Discourse analysis; Foucault; journalists; multiculturalism; Muslims; print-media; public intellectuals

### Introduction

The pious counterposition of good or unavoidable ethnocentrism against regrettable but exceptional racism, is an empty charade favoured by those who evade and mystify the moral and political responsibilities that fall to critical commentators in this most difficult of areas. (Gilroy, 2000)

At bottom, the intellectual in my sense of the word, is . . . someone whose whole being is staked on a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready made clichés, or the smooth ever-so-accommodating conformations of what the powerful or conventional have to say and what they do. (Said, 1994)

Through a series of newspaper articles challenging the idea of “Islamophobia”, the *Guardian* columnist Polly Toynbee echoes a chorus of print media journalists who share her protest that “these days criticising any aspect of Islam risks landing you down among the racists” (Toynbee, 2004d). This is particularly worrying because British Muslims “still too rarely speak out against terror” and “excuse, rather than refute, the many ferocious verses calling for the blood of infidels in their holy book—verses that justify terror”

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(Toynbee, 2004d). Her standpoint locates her amongst some illustrious company. The former *Observer* editor, current columnist and eminent political economist Will Hutton, for example, is eager to condemn a pervasive “Islamic sexism—whether it be arranged marriages, headscarves, limiting career options” or “female circumcision” to which we “cannot give ground in the name of multiculturalism” (Hutton, 2004a). Along with other prominent print media journalists, both Toynbee and Hutton fear that Muslims are currently at odds with something integral to life in Britain, if not with modernity itself.

Two immediate points of concern emerge from these comments and are worth addressing at the outset. The first is that anti-Muslim racism or “Islamophobia” should not be characterised as fictional charges designed to obstruct critical engagement with interpretations of Islam. Islamophobia incorporates a documented interaction of traditional and cultural racisms with a historical dimension that is often drawn upon in popular discussion (Runnymede Trust, 1997). The second is that each writer has mischaracterised both Islam and multiculturalism, respectively (these points are developed below).

As a result of the first two concerns, however, there emerges a third and equally pressing issue: if the absolute worst side of an already racialised minority is continually exhorted under a banner of free speech the outcome—rather than aiding its cessation—will be to intensify processes of racialisation through sanctioning such discourse as credible. This, naturally, will make the minority group more defensive and less willing to accept legitimate criticism where it exists, they will effectively “be hemmed in on all sides” (Du Bois, 1978, p. 222). These concerns help frame the focus of the proceeding analysis upon print media journalists who are, as the opening lines from Paul Gilroy might imply, important commentators integral to this process.

### **Who and What are Print Media Public Intellectuals?**

This article is focused explicitly on the print media as the source of a vast array of public information available to local, national and international audiences, and is consumed within and between a host of social cleavages marked by class, gender and ethnicity differentials amongst others (Husband, 2000). From such an understanding, it is reasonable to suggest that an analysis of print media content might reveal something valuable about common beliefs and underlying value systems, and represent one means of studying a society itself (McQuail, 1994).

As producers of content in this medium, there exist a number of influential print media journalists with an authority that stems from both their ability to reflect certain aspects or segments of society, whilst simultaneously raising public awareness of particular issues and events; setting agendas for public discussion and influencing (directly or indirectly) public opinion. As a result, we might begin to characterise some of these journalists as public intellectuals, as print media public intellectuals (PMPI), particularly those with an acknowledged expertise across a diverse range of topics upon which they choose to comment, an expertise that is drawn upon to frame discussions or messages.<sup>2</sup>

### *PMPI and Public Intellectuals*

Paradoxically there is at present a wealth of literature lamenting the “decline” of the public intellectual (Molnar, 1994; Posner, 2001), anti-intellectualism (Hofstadter, 1973; Johnson, 1989) and philistinism (Furedi, 2004). As a cause for anxiety amongst academics and sections of the intelligentsia, particularly when coupled with fears of “dumbing down” (Jacoby, 2000) and cultural populism (Eagleton, 1996), these concerns rarely, if ever, take into account a continuing feature of intellectualism that is signalled in the work of print media journalists, even where there is room for such an analysis amongst established accounts. For example, in describing the emergence of modern intellectuals, Zygmunt Bauman (1987) has sought to contrast “intellectuals as legislators”, people usually in the service of state institutions, with “intellectuals as interpreters” who interpret texts, public events or other artefacts by deploying their specialised knowledge to interpret and explain things on behalf of the public. The conception of a print media journalist as an interpreter of—and commentator upon—public events certainly accords with the latter of Bauman’s distinctions, and also feeds quite well into Antonio Gramsci’s (1973) seminal description of what a “traditional intellectual” looks like, i.e. somebody who occupies an established and structured space or occupation.

### *Print Journalists as “Committed” Intellectuals?*

Making a distinction between “critical” and “functional” public intellectuals, Jean-Paul Sartre (1974, p. 285) argues “the duty of the intellectual is to denounce injustice wherever it occurs”, as opposed to merely doing so according to party interests. The implication being that public intellectuals should extrapolate outwards from a universal ethical standard on some issues, whilst conserving their independence by—paradoxically—being publicly “committed” intellectuals in order to comment freely without known constraints.

It is open to debate as to whether PMPI have the autonomy to transcend the party line of their newspaper or its particular editorial.<sup>3</sup> One can certainly think of examples where this has been the case, and although I have already argued that part of the strength of PMPI actually stems from their ability to reflect certain aspects or segments of society, this is simultaneously dependent upon a perception of independence, which inevitably involves some deviation from the norm.

Simultaneously, PMPI can never entirely shake off the responsibilities and restrictions conferred upon them by their employment on a newspaper. Yet it is unclear whether non-print media public intellectuals would gain the necessary exposure through a particular media outlet did they not already suit a particular editorial line, whether they were aware of it or not. Hence we should not dismiss the degrees of autonomy or room for manoeuvre available to PMPI, since it is arguably no less than that afforded to other public intellectuals or “independent” commentators. This observation then adds weight to the significance of PMPI, since *established journalists*—who are the focus of this paper—are afforded legal contracts and a degree of notoriety that arguably reassures them of their occupational position, as well as a regular space in which to articulate their messages.

*Print Journalists as “Intervening” Intellectuals?*

Complaining that Sartre’s notion of a “committed” intellectual represents a fictitious ideal of universality—fighting for universal truths and freedoms, and assuming the task of speaking for humanity as a whole—Michel Foucault (1977) advances the idea of a more specific intellectual who can intervene on the side of the oppressed over particular issues, whilst never claiming to “speak” on the behalf of anybody. Foucault’s general concern here is that an adoption of universal positions that necessitate speaking on the behalf of others might actually function to rob them of their already limited agency, i.e. power is exercised over those who are known through discourse, so that those who produce discourse exercise the power to enforce its validity.

To conceive of the intellectual solely in Foucauldian terms, however, is no more helpful than Sartre’s conception for our analysis of PMPI. This is because the intellectual “interventions” conceived of by Foucault can surely not stand outside of broader ethical/political conceptions of what is acceptable and what is not; what is good and what is not. There is, however, a Foucauldian position derived from his account of power that can, it will later be argued, be of significant help in this respect.

*Print Journalists as “Mediating” Intellectuals?*

In a more recent contribution, and one which tries to address the broader task of how we should approach thinking about “the norms of intellectual practice”, Thomas Osborne (2004, p. 445) describes the emergence of “the intellectual as *mediator*”. This is a type of intellectual who, in addition to Bauman’s *legislator* and *interpreter*, contributes ideas that are “meant to get us from one place to another, to move things along” in a “mediatized” performance, such that:

Perhaps such images of “where we’re at” or “the state we’re in” are just the necessary correlates of the fact that all of us have to orientate ourselves in a mediatized society; one which is traversed by mediations and mediators of a multitude of kinds. It is not simply that we are all necessarily mediators now but that the world itself is imaged through various media, and not least by mediator intellectuals . . . (Osborne, 2004, p. 445)

This is an eminently more helpful contribution to any effort to pin down the currency of PMPI argumentation, since it is not a concern with absolutes or dichotomies of roles adopted by intellectuals, but points instead to the possibility that PMPI could be important “mediators” in the diffusion of ideas to a broader public.

It follows that the idea of a PMPI can accord with the definition of a public intellectual when messages serve to cultivate public notions on events, and contribute to the formation of a particular collective consciousness. *The intellectual should then question and scrutinise existing ideas as well as introducing or facilitating newer ones in a public fashion*. It is therefore reasonable to expect PMPI to offer *informed* comment, and—at the very least—an understanding aimed at avoiding stereotypes and unscrutinised conjecture. This is doubly important given their training and ethos as journalists, as well as the fact that they occupy a particularly privileged position as intellectuals, since the dissemination of their messages takes place through an established conduit of influential mass newspaper circulations (including the electronic media).<sup>4</sup>

### **PMPI Conservatism, Liberalism and Racism**

The presence of Muslims in what we might think of as comprising the “public sphere”<sup>5</sup> in Britain has recently become increasingly conspicuous. Not simply that Muslims have become more “visible” as a minority because of problematising episodes such as September 11, although this inevitably informs part of a broader picture, but rather a growth of what Tariq Modood (1992, 2005) has described as an “ethnic assertiveness” amongst Muslims themselves.

#### *Muslims and the Politics of Identity*

Under a rubric of multiculturalism, this is signalled in the very real attempts to secure forms of “recognition” (Taylor, 1994) from the state. Through collective petitioning or lobbying these include, amongst others, the state funding of religious schools, legislation preventing the incitement to religious hatred, and a greater public recognition of certain faith-related “requirements” so that specific issues can be mediated when they develop, i.e. allowing amendments to uniforms, whether in school or employment, as a reflection of personal modesty derived from religious instruction. At the same time, such an increased emphasis upon what some perceive to be a strategic deployment of religious affiliation by organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB),<sup>6</sup> or the notion of a “core” Muslim identity in particular, has proven problematic for both anti-racist (cf. Alexander, 2000; Sivanandan, 1991, 2000) and secular liberal rights-based discourses (cf. Barry, 2001; Chambers, 2002), in addition to objections from conservatives (cf. Scruton, 2004).

Clearly observed during the Rushdie affair, when some Muslims petitioned the state with a request to broaden the remit of its legislation on blasphemy to cover Islam as it does Christianity, they have simultaneously sought to contest assimilatory narratives of “Britishness” by engaging in a debate over a national identity that is invariably symbolised by a Christian mainstream orthodoxy/established Church of England (Modood, 1997).

#### *Liberal and Conservative Responses*

To this the liberal response translates into an antipathy for accommodating beliefs or practices that might be seen to legitimise or perpetuate ethical standards that compromise a number of fundamental rights. These normally include (1) freedom of speech and freedom of expression; (2) the right of group exit (so that group membership should not coerce individual autonomy); (3) the freedom from violence or threat of violence; (4) the equal status of women, including (a) the prohibition of “forced” marriages and (b) an objection to female circumcision<sup>7</sup> amongst others. From a conservative perspective, it involves prioritising the continuity of historically grounded or imagined national ideals and customs. This typically includes (1) recognising and consolidating the monarchical-constitutional link evident in the established church; (2) identifying a core “majority” national identity to which minorities are required to assimilate; (3) contesting allocations of public provisions for minority cultural practices; (4) minimising governmental or legislative interventions recognising the diversity of minority populations.

The PMPI examined in this article (identified in Table 1) are chosen for being broadly representative of these secular liberal and conservative nationalist camps, and within this they were selected because of the saliency of their notoriety in the public imagination.

**TABLE 1**  
Print media public intellectuals

Newspaper	Strong conservative nationalist	Weaker conservative nationalist	Strong secular liberal	Weaker secular liberal
<i>The Telegraph</i>	Charles Moore Kevin Myers			
<i>The Daily Mail</i>	Melanie Phillips Simon Heffer			
<i>The Times</i>	Anthony Browne Michael Buleigh	Michael Grove	Matthew Parris	
<i>The Observer</i>			Will Hutton	
<i>The Guardian</i>			Polly Toynbee Nick Cohen	David Aranovitch

This is obviously impossible to measure in any scientific sense, but since this is a discursive rather than quantitative exploration, the chosen sample was deemed satisfactory.

*“White Fantasies” of Ethnic Others*

It is my contention that the above PMPI engage in a discussion about Muslims by deriving a “bottom line” approach. This is an understanding that goes something like this. Since both camps are too often deterred from encroaching upon issues of “difference” in fear of the charge of cultural intolerance, what must be preserved—in the name of the Enlightenment, modernity and occidental progress of the last 200 years—are certain thresholds or touchstones of political liberalism and political conservatism. These must neither be crossed nor compromised in fear of encouraging the thin end of a culturally relativist wedge.

This assertion becomes progressively more contentious because I would like to argue that secular liberal PMPI share with conservative nationalist PMPI a series of assumptions that underpin their commentary on Muslims in Britain. These assumptions are based upon what Paul Gilroy (1987) once called “ethnic absolutism”, and what we might think of as an exclusive national space. That is that the platform of Britishness to which they subscribe is both exclusionary and intransigent. By this I refer to what Hage has described as:

... practises which assume, first an image of a national space; secondly, an image of the nationalist himself or herself as master of this national space and, thirdly, an image of the ethnic/racial “other” as a mere object within this space. (Hage, 1998, p. 28)

This is important because (1) it helps inform and sustain “the white fantasy” (Hage, 1998) that PMPI have the right to intervene and regulate the lives of ethnic Others, whilst (2) cementing the myth that it is *the presence* of these ethnic Others—rather than broader societal discourses—that perpetuates racism.

It would be easy here to suggest that this closed national space allows Muslims to become a target by proxy in the way that, in his most recent book, Gilroy (2004) has argued that members of the black diaspora become the floating signifiers of a post-colonial melancholia in Britain (and by that a constant reminder of its status as a defeated empire). There is, however, more to PMPI responses than this, specifically in the way that ideas of political liberalism and conservative nationalism are deployed as a resolute

defence against unacceptable conventions, epitomised by the way that Brian Barry (2001) has recently expounded secular liberalism as an “uncompromising fighting creed” and Roger Scruton (2004) has sought to “retrieve” accounts of British national identity before placing them beyond renewal.

### *Topoi Under Analysis*

It is in this context that the argumentation of PMPI forms, in itself, a subject important to the “challenges” posed by Muslims in Britain because journalistic output “is simultaneously constitutive of [the] social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief” (Wodak, 1995, cited in Richardson, 2001) of the more empowered sections of society. I cannot overstate how important this last point is to ensuing debates surrounding Muslims and multiculturalism. This is because, as Favell and Modood (2003, p. 493) have argued, academics and policy makers too often “rely on the unchallenged reproduction of anecdotal facts usually taken from newspapers” which fail to do justice to the complexity of “hard cases”, and encourage a conflation between fact and fiction.<sup>8</sup> For these reasons the analysis presented in the results focuses explicitly upon how Muslims, multiculturalism and accounts of nationhood are presented both in general terms, through rhetoric, and how they are presented in specific terms, through example. This ranges from how multiculturalism is conceptualised by PMPI in general terms, to more specific details informing assumptions about funding for faith schools and proposed legislation preventing incitement to religious hatred.

### **Methods and Methodology**

With this in mind, discourse analysis was used to examine the systems of knowledge and beliefs reproduced in PMPI commentary. As a research method, discourse analysis can mean a range of things that emphasise an examination of the ways that text and “talk” contribute to particular modes of understanding our social world (Silverman, 2000).

### *Foucauldian Knowledge/Power*

Influenced by Foucault’s concern to signpost shifts in moral, ethical and, ultimately, historical notions of legitimising power or authority (keenly observed by Foucault as being exercised in conceptions of “madness”, “sexuality”, “punishment” etc.), discourse analysis is useful in highlighting the degree to which the conditions behind a specific “problem” lie in its textual assumptions. Hence, it might provide an awareness of less obvious motivations by making us ask ontological and epistemological questions.

This emerges in reading Foucault’s (1979, p. 93) understanding of power, an understanding which urges us to focus an examination of power relations at the level of everyday life, rather than upon an analysis of role of the state or the power of one “class” over another alone. This is outlined in, amongst other places, *The History of Sexuality* where he argues that power emanates from every point in the social field, since it is not a monolithic force, “an institution, and nor a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a given society”. *The implication being that power is exercised unseen amongst dominant discourses or modes of knowledge, which reinforce particular perceptions and understandings, inform*

*norms, and re-assure values.* This is the overriding understanding that I would like to extract from Foucault's account during our analysis of PMPI. Although one might not agree with this interpretation and, amongst other things, the patent denial of structure in Foucault's account of power (Fraser, 1989; Harstock, 1990), particularly as a coercive force (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 1993), it is important to recognise the value of his insight not as a teleological theory, but as a sort of "toolkit" (as Foucault, 1980, p. 145, himself stressed).

### *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Argumentation Strategies*

Using this toolkit to focus upon what we can think of as the argumentation strategies evident in the print media, it is argued, can help illuminate the political content and implications of PMPI argumentation in an informative and comparable manner. Drawing upon his extensive analysis of argumentative discourse on "race" in reader's letters, John Richardson has argued that unpacking argumentation reveals

... the structured and directed manner in which texts achieve their persuasive goal(s)—in essence, their dialectic and pragmatic aspects—are of central importance in evaluating the power of argumentative dialogue, made all the more so when we acknowledge the *discursive* potential of texts to modify power relations in other fields. (Richardson, 2001, pp. 144–5)

A feat achieved through three broad and interdependent strategies of public argumentation:

- Firstly, there's the "topical potential" where "speakers or writers choose the material they find easiest to handle" (Richardson, 2001) and, often in doing so, mischaracterise and present a selective or preferred readings of an argument, corresponding to established or dominant discourse. This, naturally, also refers to what is omitted from the discussion.
- Secondly, there's the strategy of adapting to "audience demand" by adopting "a perspective most agreeable to the audience" (Richardson, 2001) because, after all, argumentation aims at "securing the adherence of those to whom it is addressed" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, cited in Richardson, 2001). One example of this is the recourse to the "common sense" of an audience, either through implicit or explicit assumptions, since common sense "is founded upon the unquestioned and unquestionable truths" (Richardson, 2001), and can be linked to assumptions made through tacit knowledge which may, in turn, depend upon (silent) references to particular theoretical paradigms (cf. Kuhn, 1962).
- Thirdly, there are "presentational devices" which "frame their contribution in the most effective wordings" (Van Emerson and Houtlosser, 1999, p. 484). Loaded figures of speech, suggestive definitions or visual images and rhetorical questions are examples of such devices.

### **Findings**

The main strategies drawn of PMPI (identified in Table 1) argumentation became apparent in the following themes or *topoi*. Where they are numbered this is for ease of reference and—unless otherwise noted—they retain the structure and form of how such arguments were presented when published.

*Muslims and Islam are Anti-modern and Antipathetic to Democratic and Human Rights*

This is a broad but recurring theme, and is epitomised by Will Hutton who, writing in *The Observer*, argues that

1. Islam is predominantly sexist and pre-Enlightenment—
2. and that is the core of the problem
3. both within the Islamic world and in its relationship with the West.
4. Thus, the West has to object to Islamic sexism—
5. whether arranged marriage, headscarves, limiting career options
6. or the more extreme manifestations, female circumcision and stoning women for adultery.
7. We cannot give ground in the name of multiculturalism. [. . .]
8. We should certainly respect diversity, but we cannot abandon or qualify our own beliefs in the process . . .
9. we cannot and should not respond with an unrigorous, soft multiculturalism that pleads such values are equivalent to our own and legitimate within their own cultural context. (Hutton, 2004a)

Hutton's argumentation strategy opens in line 1 with a sentence which functions to simultaneously assume *and* conclude that Islam and "Islamic practices" are predominantly "pre-Enlightenment". The result of this understanding becomes apparent in lines 2, 3 and 4 when seeking to explain "Islam's relationship with the West". The latter is counterpoised as a corrective to pre-Enlightenment exemplars of "Islamic sexism"; practices deemed to cause the problematic nature of Islam's incapacity to relate to a non-sexist, egalitarian West. So for "West" read "Modern". With this in mind, Muslim contributions to a multicultural public sphere in line 7 should be restricted because what Muslim men do to Muslim women is both symptomatic of broader "Islamic practices" and is antipathetic to "our" beliefs in line 8. A combative response is, then, required (line 8) since "their own cultural context" is evidently unable to renew itself without a civilising hand. Such a process necessarily begins by shoring up "our" own values and returns us to the idea of a "bottom line" thinking discussed earlier, which mistakenly positions *all* Muslim practices under a rubric of multiculturalism as necessarily conflicting with liberal freedoms (cf. Barry, 2001).

This is repeated by David Aranovitch, writing in *The Guardian*, over Muslim requests for the granting of public money to Muslim faith schools:

1. What is going on here . . . is an attempt to protect the young from modernity.
2. Parents believe their kids are threatened by the materialism and immorality of other peoples' kids. [. . .]
3. My fear is that this emphasis on faith schooling is an attempt, albeit unconscious—to return us to the days before feminism,
4. an attempt which affects all of us. (Aranovitch, 2004)

In addition to the anti-Enlightenment possibilities outlined by Hutton, Aranovitch draws our attention to a potentially separatist philosophy informing Muslim parents' intentions to send their children to Muslim faith schools in lines 1 and 2. The fact that this is "an unconscious" attempt, suggests (line 3) that there is something pathologically

dysfunctional in the cultural framework and mode of discourse adopted by Muslim parents themselves.

Heralding an argument about Muslim faith schools in general, Aranovitch ignores the more obvious motivations for Muslim parents in choosing to send their children to Muslim faith schools. These might include the educational merits of sending children to schools that, on the basis of examination results, outperform their counterparts in the non-faith sector (Association of Muslim Social Scientists, 2004, p. 33). Although examination results should certainly not be used as the sole yardstick for evaluating education, the academic record of Muslim schools combined with the significantly cheaper tuition fees in comparison to other independent schooling (Association of Muslim Social Scientists, 2004) makes them very appealing to parents who wish to encourage their children to explore their religious heritage. The fact that such concerns are omitted from his reading indicates that the strength of Aranovitch's argument is based more upon assumptions made through implied knowledge, than the empirical reality at hand.

Asking religious peoples to "get off your knees", a similar perception is reiterated by Polly Toynbee of *The Guardian* who, although objecting to faith schools of all religions, argues that Muslims in particular

1. want to keep their children separate,
2. while most parents who choose Christian faith schools do it to help their children get ahead. (Toynbee, 2004c)

Her statement in line 1 is of course a substantive assertion, and one that requires some empirical inquiry in the form of an attitudinal survey of some sort. Since such evidence is neither referred to in her subsequent article, nor known to be available to the author, it would not be unfair to suggest that such speculation on the part of Toynbee serves to mischaracterise and present a selective or preferred reading of an argument, corresponding to established discourses which understand Muslims as "separatist" (cf. Cattle Report, 2002).

### *Conceptualising Multiculturalism*

Islam's anti-Enlightenment implications herald broader consequences for PMPI discussion of multiculturalism in Britain. As a subject topic, multiculturalism is repeatedly framed as heralding a clear "choice" between "integration" and "separatism". Whilst the former is largely understood as "assimilation", so that the terrain of "Britishness" might remain unchanged, the latter is frequently typified by the rhetorical example of "self-segregating communities" in Bradford and elsewhere. This feeds directly into PMPI discussion of a visible Muslim presence in the public sphere, specifically in the way that it challenges cultural hegemonies. For example, Hutton argues that

1. as Westerners respect Islamic mores when in Islam,
2. so the Islamic community has to respect Western mores when in the West. (Hutton, 2004a)

Coupling geography and religion in line 1 (Islam as a place outside of the West), this sentence is based upon the assumption that since "the Islamic community" in the West is largely foreign, it should take to following the good example set by Christians who willingly adapt to the ways of "Islamic mores". This is of course premised upon the

understanding that since Muslims are likely to be inalienably foreign, they should not be thought of as contributing to, let alone comprising, the make-up of “Western mores”. This binary “East/West” distinction then, seems essentialist, outmoded and empirically unsustainable given the number of Muslims currently residing in Britain who were born and brought up in the United Kingdom.<sup>9</sup>

Focusing explicitly upon an understanding of cultural difference within multiculturalism, Toynbee makes a distinction between outwardly moving, “humorous” and “inviting” cultural manifestations, on the one hand, and “dangerous”, divisive and insular communities emerging under the guise of an ill-fated multiculturalism, on the other:

1. When a generation of Lenny Henry and Meera Syals made it possible
2. to invite others to laugh with them about their own communities, those communities entered into the canon of Britishness. [. . .]
3. . . . the most dangerous divide now is in culture—and that means Muslim.
4. British Muslims arrested last week as terror suspects had families as British as Meera Syal’s—yet culturally they inhabit another universe. (Toynbee, 2004b)

The implication being that assimilation (and the disappearance of distinct communities) facilitates an entrance “into the canon of Britishness”, whilst maintaining a more distinct Muslim identity is “dangerous” and encourages British-Muslims to “inhabit another universe”. This is evidenced by the arrest of “terror suspects”. Their subsequent release, however, would do little to facilitate their re-insertion into Toynbee’s more acceptable paradigm, since the concern here is more with the perception of a general threat. So great is the perceived threat posed by Muslims in Britain that it “leads” Michael Burleigh of *The Telegraph* to encourage a policy of racial profiling

1. The British people need to be told exactly where that threat comes from,
2. however politically incorrect the answer may be, what concrete measures are being taken to deal with it, and how they themselves can help.
3. [. . .] our educators should think hard about their failure to inculcate our values, be they religious or secular or a combination of the two in the minds of Britain’s very own generation of terrorists. (Burleigh, 2004)

Line 1 reinforces the certainty of a “threat”, before political correctness is portrayed in lines 2 and 3 as hampering “the British people” in response to this threat, since it has failed to “inculcate our values” to “Britain’s very own generation of terrorists” (line 5). It is interesting that line 4 encourages the inculcation of religious values. Since they are “ours”, however, they are unlikely to deviate from those derived from the established church. This passage is helpful in exemplifying the standard conservative nationalist position outlined earlier, as well as the “white fantasy” the PMPI have the right to regulate the lives of ethnic Others.

This enemy within/fifth column has been cultivated under a policy of multiculturalism, which relegates what *The Times* columnist Anthony Browne sees as a historically grounded national identity

1. by stripping Britain of its culture and traditions . . .
2. a dangerous rising tide of anger is being caused.
3. This prevents social cohesion and integration . . .
4. who could want to integrate into a culture that is committing suicide? (Browne, 2004)

There are two main issues in this apocalyptic vision of an unravelling of the social fabric of Britain. The first is rehearsed in suggestive phrases in lines 1 and 2 reminiscent of Powellite predictions that the continuing presence of ethnic Others will succeed in generating conflict, and the second is that a broader idea of "Britain" will fall away as a result (line 4).

This alarm is shared by Melanie Phillips of *The Daily Mail*, who cites what she describes as a loss of national history as a catalyst for national decline. This history is implicitly tied in line 2 to the continuity of a Christian hegemony where religion is recognised in public life

1. ... it's a desire to create an entirely new kind of society by destroying the old one.
2. That means, among other things, repudiating the Christian basis of British culture.
3. If there simply aren't enough people who can identify with the country's history, then it cannot be taught.
4. And since a nation is rooted in history, its identity then unravels ...
5. there is no longer any sense that there's a 'we' to have a past at all. (Phillips, 2004)

Seeing the rubric of multiculturalism in terms of immigration politics meanwhile, Toynbee offers the example of French responses to the presence of visible Muslims in the public sphere as a necessary task:

1. Yesterday the French banned Islamic schoolgirls from wearing headscarves in a provocative assertion of Frenchness
2. against the perceived threat of alien beliefs. The Belgians are considering following suit.
3. This is an expression of the political pressure over immigration that most European governments feel:
4. if even the tolerant Netherlands can be rocked to its foundation by migration-panic, then no nation is safe.
5. Immigrants may not all be Islamic, but Islam is the most visible and alarming threat from foreigners
6. to hard-won secularism, tolerance, feminism or social democracy. (Toynbee, 2004a)

Conferring the title of "tolerant Netherlands" upon the Dutch in line 4 serves to emphasise the exceptional nature of a Muslim presence to which these "tolerant" governments must necessarily respond. In lines 5 and 6 Islam is described as heralding "the most visible and alarming threat" to ideas of "feminism", "tolerance", "social democracy" and "secularism" which Toynbee believes are interchangeably alien to Islam. The fact that she considers "visibility" an important criteria suggests that there is a racialised element to such a criteria since it is not clear whether a less-visible white Muslim member of the national community presents such a threat. Moreover, lines 1, 2 and 3 mirror the conservative nationalist position concerned with regulating the lives of ethnic Others discussed earlier.

This way of conceiving of Muslims as "foreign" takes us back to Will Hutton's earlier discussion, and is consolidated by the *Daily Mail* columnist Simon Heffer, who argues that:

1. to a few non-Christians,
2. who have chosen to live in this Christian country with its Christian head of state and Christian established church,
3. the display of our majority culture is deemed very offensive indeed. (Heffer, 2004a)

Once more, the sum of “our majority culture” is made up of “Britishness” as “Christian” and *vice versa*. The solution? According to Heffer

1. simply disowning multiculturalism isn't enough.
2. We, as a people, and the Government, must make strenuous efforts to promote and defend our culture,
3. and especially the place of Christianity in it and the rights to self-expression by Christians. (Heffer, 2004a)

In line 2, Heffer's “strenuous efforts” integrate “we, as a people” with the “government” in the defence of “our culture”. This conflation of a common people with a common culture, represented and enshrined in government, is staple conservative thinking. But this determination to “disown” (line 1) multiculturalism is also encouraged by liberal PMPI argumentation, specifically in seeking to catalogue a perceived litany of current failures manifested from misconceived policy in the past.

### *Historic Failures and Current Threats Posed by Multiculturalism*

According to Toynbee, greater “honesty” in these matters is to be commended, as is evidenced in her congratulatory words to the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)<sup>10</sup> chair Trevor Phillips, who

1. breaks with unthinking platitudes about the richness of all diversity in a multicultural society,
2. as if any difference was a self-evident asset.
3. On the day a 17-year old Muslim is charged with conspiracy to cause explosions, it doesn't feel so.
4. Phillips says it was an error to let alien communities stay in their silos. (Toynbee, 2004b)

Multiculturalism is “unthinking” (line 1) according to Toynbee because it encourages “alien communities to stay in their silos” (line 4). This is an important admission because

1. Atrocity will be done in the name of a rogue crazed creed,
2. destroying the infidel for heavenly virgins . . .
3. we are looking into the face of an insane and unassuagable cult.
4. No kind of multiculturalism “understands” this. (Toynbee, 2004b)

So not only are we facing an obvious and immediate threat from a “rogue crazed creed” (line 1), which departs from all recourse to rationality in its masculine insanity—since Islam encourages the “destroying of the infidel for heavenly virgins” (assumedly female, line 2), but we are also threatened by the systemic perversity that

1. Islamic ideas that find the very notion of democracy incompatible with faith
2. are beginning to be taken seriously
3. by those who should defend liberal democracy. (Toynbee, 2004d)

This thin end of the wedge returns to haunt us in the shape of the fears held by *The Telegraph* columnist Charles Moore:

1. Once there are Islamic financial institutions,

2. how long will it be before Muslims insist that the state and business direct all their monetary dealings with Muslims through these institutions (boycotting businesses with Jewish connections en route)?
3. How long before Muslims, extending the logic of their concentration in places like Bradford and Leicester,
4. seek to establish their own law within these areas,
5. the germ of a state within a state? And how diverse would such a state be? (Moore, 2004)

Moore bases his concerns upon two implicit assumptions. Firstly, he perceives Muslims as being intrinsically anti-Semitic so that they will, given the chance, inevitably boycott Jewish businesses (line 2). Secondly, he assumes that there exists a strategic “logic” to the concentration of Muslims in Bradford and Leicester; a separatist logic held by Muslims themselves (lines 3 and 4). The former point is speculative and involves a tacit assumption—since he cites no available evidence upon which he is basing this view—and the latter does not accord with what is known about the pattern of migration and settlement amongst immigrant and post-immigrant groups (cf. Ratcliffe, 1996; Ratcliffe et al., 2001). In addition, Moore invokes the descriptive metaphor of a “germ” (line 5) to mean inception when referring to Muslim intentions. Such terms of reference are historically tied to explicitly racist discourses in the discussion on minority ethnic groups in Britain (cf. Gilroy, 1987)—something inevitably resurrected here in the shape of a virulent multiplication of “Muslim concentrations”.

Adopting a different tact from which to critique the idea of multiculturalism, Simon Heffer makes recourse to an image of the most vulnerable being neglected by the appeasement of minority groups, which inevitably necessitates the redeployment of scarce resources to “politically correct jobs”

1. it is scandalous that, in a society that wastes tax payers’ money by the billion
2. on useless,
3. politically correct jobs and
4. nonessential bureaucrats,
5. money cannot be found to provide dignified and stable
6. care for our elderly. (Heffer, 2004b)

In the space of five lines, Heffer manages to lament multiculturalism as “scandalous”, “useless”, “nonessential” and “wastes tax payers’ money”, whilst a “dignified”, “stable” “care” for “our” elderly is sacrificed. The “billions” lost in this process are not meanwhile accounted for in the rest of his article.

Bizarrely, one of the current threats posed by multiculturalism, according to Melanie Phillips, is evident in the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

... a remarkable report by Greenwich Council produced in response to the murders of Stephen Lawrence and two other local black boys. One of the principal reasons for the murderous rage of white youths, it said, was that they had no national identity to be proud of and to give their lives meaning. White children, it said, “seem like cultural ghosts, haunting as mere absences the richly decorated corridors of multicultural society”. (Phillips, 2004)

Rather than focusing upon a litany of systemic and institutional negligence on the part of the authorities (MacPherson Report, 1999), Phillips draws our attention to one of

the “principal reasons” for “murderous rage” amongst white boys, reasons squarely located at the door of multicultural society.

### *Islam Gets Special Treatment*

Another theme emerging in PMPI discourse is the idea that Islam and Muslims are afforded special treatment at the expense of other beliefs and groups. It is a useful argumentation strategy that sits well with an established complaint that, post-Rushdie, Muslims are incapable of accepting criticism or understanding the appropriate dimensions of satire to which all areas of British social life are subject from time to time. It is invariably encompassed in the assertion that, according to Matthew Parris

... you can get away with verbal aggression towards Christianity which would be considered unacceptable if directed towards Islam. (Parris, 2004)

and is exemplified in Anthony Browne’s understanding that

... the BBC’s editorial policy bans criticism of the Koran, but not the Bible. (Browne, 2004)

Even though this is *not* an acknowledged BBC policy, it would be perfectly understandable to Toynbee, since

... officialdom is easily frightened of Islam, with good reason. (Toynbee, 2004c)

In similar vein, and complaining that an editorial line in a leading conservative journal was insulting to Christians, Kevin Myers asks

1. can you imagine Britain’s Islamic communities—
2. which have provided 1,200 volunteers for training in Taliban camps in Afghanistan—
3. being jeered at in such nasty adolescent tones? (Myers, 2004)

Quite how this figure has been ascertained is not sourced or referred to in the ensuing discussion, but it seems extraordinary. What is less so, however, is the pattern that emerges from the above argumentation. Although Toynbee, as a strong secular liberal, would seek to critique Christianity in a way unacceptable to Kevin Myers, a strong conservative nationalist, both argumentation strategies seek, rhetorically, to position Islam and Muslims as beyond the pale of legitimate critique in fear of conflict or uproar.

The content of this theme feeds seamlessly into PMPI contestation regarding proposed legislation to prevent the incitement to religious hatred, likely to be introduced in the 2005–2006 parliamentary session.<sup>11</sup> What is particularly interesting in PMPI argumentation is that it indicates most clearly upon what issues both political liberalism and conservative nationalism converge when discussing Muslims in Britain.

### *New Legislation Preventing that Incitement to Religious Hatred Will Be Used by Proxy to Defend “Ideas” (Religion) Rather than its Followers*

Simon Heffer argues

1. Muslims are already protected against hatred by the laws that protect us all.
2. All Mr Blunkett would achieve by passing his ridiculous law would be to make certain minorities feel they are special cases.

3. . . . the majority in this country who subscribe to a broadly Christian culture
4. would continue to bear the insults from non-Christians and Leftists
5. who hate the nation's traditional values. (Heffer, 2004b)

Reverting to the previous theme whilst re-coupling the link between "Christian culture" and "the nation's traditional values" (line 3), Heffer seeks to assimilate those of no religion to Christianity whilst, ironically, his concerns are endorsed by some of those "Leftists" he seeks to lament. For example, Toynbee argues that

The law will protect the believers, not their beliefs. That difference appears to escape most Muslims. Ministers keep reassuring critics that "only four or five people a year" are likely to be prosecuted in rare cases. If so, then the Muslims who lobbied hard for this law are destined for deep disappointment—and much anger. (Toynbee, 2004e)

The potential insurgency suggested in Toynbee's concerns over "Muslim anger" aside, her anxiety is shared by Simon Heffer. Although located in very different camps, there is some convergence amongst PMPI on this issue, particularly in PMPI conceptions of Muslim motivations for asking for such legislation. Where Muslim lobbyists make the recourse to legislation by citing the lack of publicly responsible discourse, PMPI argumentation interprets this as further indication of Muslim separatism and intolerance of historically British values.

*Not Enough Self-criticism by Muslims Themselves, External Criticism Leads to Charges of Islamaphobia*

Fearing that such legislation will consolidate the conceptual understanding of anti-Muslim racism sometimes understood as "Islamaphobia", Toynbee suggests that

1. The occasional note of reason from moderate Islamic groups is so weak it hardly makes itself heard.
2. I had challenged the legitimacy of the idea of Islamaphobia
3. and warned of the danger to free speech of trying to make criticism of a religion a crime akin to racism.
4. I pointed out yet again that theocracy is lethal.
5. Wherever religion controls politics it drives out tolerance and basic human rights. (Toynbee, 2004d)

There are at least four implicit points in this passage. The first point is that only those deemed as "moderate Muslims" can offer anything resembling "reason", which is why so little in Islam is reasonable given how so few moderates there are to speak out (line 1). This carries the related implication that each Muslim bears the burden of responsibility in representing Islam, so that the failure to speak out confers upon all Muslims the "guilty" actions of a few. This could simultaneously be a weaker statement however, in asking "moderate" Muslims to contest the ground occupied/seized by extremists.

The second point serves to relegate the charge of "Islamaphobia" as bogus and illegitimate through a strategy of denial (line 2). This is a consistent position adopted by all PMPI who perceive proposed protections as serving to place religion beyond the point of scrutiny. This is important because PMPI argumentation ignores the complexity of anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain as comprising not a theological objection to Islam, but

heralding a composition of colour and cultural racism embodied by the ethnic signifier of being “Muslim” which comprises and objectifies the explicit projection of both (Runnymede Trust, 1997).

The third point depicts religion as waiting to prey upon free speech, so that considering the sensibilities of Muslims will set us down the road to a theocracy (lines 3 and 4). The fourth point draws upon previous themes is resurrecting the image of one’s customary values being “driven out” by an accommodation of religion (line 5).

In the following passage, Toynbee is keen to stress a discourse of urgency in that we are increasingly deterred by Islam and the presence of Muslims from speaking out. The content of the complaint, meanwhile, returns us to the first theme to emerge in the analysis: Islam as anti-modern and pre-Enlightenment.

1. Fear of offending the religious is gathering ground on all sides.
2. It is getting harder to argue against the hijab and the Koran’s edict that a woman’s place is one step behind.
3. It is beginning to be racist for teachers or social workers
4. to object to autocratic patriarchy and submission of women within many Muslim communities. (Toynbee, 2004d)

This discourse works in three stages. The first stage involves making a general secularist point in line 1. The second stage uses a version of Islam in line 2 that invokes examples of misogyny as indicative of the treatment of Muslim women in Islam. Islam is the only example. In stage three, the apparently “neutral” secular position discursively switches into an anti-Muslim argument. It is helpful in highlighting how by a process of constant association, people and issues come to thematically define one another. At the same time, it points to one of the most interesting themes to emerge from an analysis of PMPI argumentation strategies. This is an anxiety to maintain the “right” to publicly affront religious beliefs.

### *Need to Maintain the Right to Affront Religious Peoples*

Toynbee views it as a case of

Standing against religious apartheid, atheists come into their own here. Those who are as anti-Christian as they are anti-Islamic can oppose state promotion of any religion without discrimination. (Toynbee, 2004c)

This returns us to the earlier discussions surrounding proposed legislation preventing the incitement to religious hatred, as is described by Matthew Parris of *The Times* as thus:

1. It follows that the less tolerant any religious group is of criticism or mockery,
2. the greater the protection the proposed new law will offer them.
3. But these may be the very faiths or sects which ought to be confronted—
4. confronted and attacked for the very intolerance and self-righteousness which, if this measure becomes law, will be adduced as evidence of their “sensitivity”. (Parris, 2004)

This is all the more worrying for Will Hutton, who believes that there is a dialectic at work in acts of anti-Muslim racism which somehow entails a moral equivalence of

Islamicism and racism against Muslims, so that the latter cancels our sympathy for the former.

1. Racist acts against Muslims are growing explosively,
2. reciprocated by Muslim death threats against prominent politicians. (Hutton, 2004b)

*Muslim Political Alliances are a Coalition of "Bad" Projects*

Conceptualisations of the political alliances to have emerged between the anti-war coalition and British-Muslims, in objecting to the war in Iraq, are largely negative amongst PMPI. They fairly consistently see such alliances as being forged from a common "hate" of America. For example, Toynbee argues that

1. the liberal dilemma over Islam is not unlike the prevarications of some over communism in the cold war.
2. To attack the atrocities of the reds put you in bed with the anti-socialist Thatcher/Reagan red-baiters.
3. It is bizarre ... how the left has espoused the extreme Islamicist cause: as "my enemy's enemy",
4. Muslims are the best America-haters around. (Toynbee, 2004d)

This passage immediately denies any possibility that "the Left", as she conceives the anti-war coalition, might already comprise activists who are simultaneously Muslim. Moreover, in excluding any possibility that "the Left" might find a legitimate cause in Muslim opposition to the war in Iraq on humanist grounds, she relies upon a rehearsed stereotype evident in line 4 that "Muslims are the best America-haters around". Additionally, Toynbee explicitly objects to these alliances on the grounds that they are anti-rational

1. the natural allies of the rationalists have decamped.
2. The left embraces Islam for its anti-Americanism. (Toynbee, 2004e)

She is not alone in her view. Nick Cohen, for example, laments "many of the Left" who

1. to their shame ... have broken with the Enlightenment to perform this manoeuvre.
2. They have ridden the Islamic wave ... (Cohen, 2004b)

whilst George Galloway, according to Michael Grove of *The Times*,

... enjoys the support of both the Socialist Workers' Party of Britain and the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB). Bringing Britain's leading Trotskyist organisation into alliance with the group which recently invited the homophobic and pro-suicide-bombing Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi to London is quite a feat. (Grove, 2004)

As a final comment on this section, it is interesting to note that in opposing legislation preventing the incitement to religious hatred, Toynbee argues that "campaigners against this bad law should not be deterred by some of the bad company they join" (Toynbee, 2004d), whilst arguing that a traditionally secularist Left should be deterred by its association with Muslim groups.

## Conclusions

This article sought to examine the idea that particular print media journalists assume the role of public intellectuals. Having first reviewed some influential accounts of intellectualism, it attempted to survey the relationship of PMPI to representations of Muslims in Britain, and to identify how PMPI cultivate public notions and contribute to the formation of a particular consciousness.

Through an analysis of argumentation strategies, the discussion highlights a convergence between commentators adopting a secular liberal and conservative nationalist position. This convergence is evidenced in how the reproduction of rehearsed stereotypes exercise the power to reinforce particular perceptions and understandings of Muslims in Britain. These stereotypes simultaneously serve to inform dominant norms and reassure exclusive accounts of belonging, and are perhaps best exemplified in PMPI argumentation on multiculturalism. Here, having adopted a combative attitude to the recognition of difference, PMPI argumentation problematises Muslims in Britain by rehearsing the view that it is their very presence which invites the racism they might face, whilst simultaneously assuming the right to intervene and regulate their presence.

By encouraging us to focus upon the production of knowledge through language, a Foucaudian-inspired discourse analysis of PMPI argumentation strategies allows us to conceptualise how the production of discourses exercise the power to enforce their own validity, to the extent that established accounts of the public intellectual may actually fail to appreciate the degree to which *they themselves* are shaped by discursive currents. By this I point to Bauman and Sartre's failure to be more self-reflexive in their analysis of the role of the public intellectual as mere "interpreter" or lionised "committed" intellectual, extrapolating outwards from a universal ethical standard, particularly in comparison to Osborne's idea of the intellectual as a "mediator". With this in mind it falls to social scientists in this area to examine and scrutinise further the currency PMPI argumentation as it moves beyond the confines of newspaper journalism to inform and create public knowledge.

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## NOTES

1. This article was researched, composed and submitted prior to the events of 7/7. In the aftermath to these terrible events, PMPI discourse has demonstrably served to provide a salient narrative in conceptualising the fallout—both material and discursive—and its impact upon Muslims in Britain. It is for this reason and those made in the main body of this discussion that social scientists should engage with the content of PMPI discourse with a greater urgency and substance than we have thus far demonstrated a willingness to do.

2. Examples of what I mean by this include, amongst many others, (1) columns addressing fiscal matters by Will Hutton who, having authored several influential books including *The State We're In* (1996), *The State to Come* (1997), *The Revolution That Never Was: an assessment of Keynesian economics* (2001) and *The World We're In* (2002), obviously has an acknowledged expertise in political economy; (2) articles covering aspects of social welfare ranging from the implications of the minimum wage to private finance initiatives in the NHS by Polly Toynbee who, having published contributions including *A Working Life* (1973), *Hospital* (1977), *The Future of Care for Older People* (1996) and *Hard Work: life in low-pay in Britain* (2003), carries significant weight in her commentary on social issues; (3) the *Times* contributor Anthony Browne with *The Euro—Should Britain Join: yes or no?* (2001); (4) and *Telegraph* columnist Mark Steyn with *The Face of the Tiger and Other Tales from the New War* (2002) and *America Alone: our country's future as a lone warrior* (2005); (5) along with Kevin Myers' *An Irishman's Diary* (2000); (6) Charles Moore's *The Life of Margaret Thatcher* (2005) and *How to Be British (Policy Choice 5.)* (1995); (7) *Daily Mail* columnist Simon Heffer's biography of Enoch Powell *Like the Roman* (1989), *Nor Shall My Sword: reinvention of England* (1999) and *What Tories Want* (2000); (8) Melanie Phillip's *All Must Have Prizes* (1998); (9) Peter Hitchens' *The Abolition of Britain* (2000); (10) Andrew Marr—who is also a high-profile broadcast journalist—often pens columns of national identity and British political culture, and has published *The Battle for Scotland* (1995), *Ruling Britannia: failure and future of British democracy* (1996) and *The Day Britain Died* (2000); (11) Nick Cohen is another print journalist who has published several texts on current political culture with contributions including *Cruel Britannia: reports on the sinister and the preposterous* (2000) and *Pretty Straight Guys* (2004a); (12) Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's *No Place Like Home* (1995), *Imagining the New Britain* (2001a), *Mixed Feelings: the complex lives of mixed race Britons* (2001b) and *Some of My Best Friends Are...* (2004), amongst many others offer an indicative sample in making this point.
3. Two examples can help illustrate this point. During the 1999 NATO-led intervention in Kosovo, Julie Burchill of *The Guardian* was openly and consistently hostile to the pro-intervention stance advanced by her paper. Four years later as her paper adopted a broadly anti-war stance on the US-led invasion of Iraq, she deployed an aggressively pro-war argument (see Burchill, 1999a, 1999b, 2003a, 2003b). Sam Kiley of *The Times*, however, resigned in protest at what he described as being forced to adhere to the newspaper line on Israeli–Palestinian relations, stating that “the *Times* foreign editor and other middle managers flew into hysterical terror every time a pro-Israel lobbying group wrote in with a quibble or complaint and then usually took their side against their writers. I was told I should not refer to ‘assassinations’ of Israel’s opponents, nor to ‘extra-judicial killings or executions’. No pro-Israel lobbyist ever dreamed of having such power over a national newspaper and its key writers” (see *Evening Standard*, 2001).
4. An understanding that leads the *Independent* columnist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown to argue that “print media journalists set the agenda. What appears in the newspapers is picked up by the broadcasters who frequently recycle in more subtle and acceptable forms” (see Alibhai-Brown, 1998, p. 118).
5. Literature on the idea of the public sphere is lengthy and complex. For the purposes of our discussion we should understand it as involving the two interdependent possibilities of a “communicative” and “institutional” space (cf. Habermas, 1989; Dahlgren, 1991) where democracy can be practised and citizenship rights expressed somewhere between government and society. This is achieved formally through the election of governments

and informally through the pressure of public opinion. Secondly, the mass media are increasingly central to this process since they distribute information to citizens and, at least in theory, facilitate “independent” forums for public debate (cf. Curran, 1991).

6. Inaugurated in 1997, the MCB is an umbrella organisation of over 250 local, regional and national organisations. Its aims include the promotion of consensus and unity on Muslim affairs in the UK; giving voice to issues of common concern; addressing discriminations and disadvantages faced by Muslims in Britain; encouraging “a more enlightened appreciation” of Islam and Muslims in the wider society; and working for “the good of society as a whole”. With a view to representing British Muslims, it lobbies government and holds discussions with various public bodies. See [www.mcb.org.uk](http://www.mcb.org.uk).
7. Without attempting to make *any* argument in favour of, *or* excuse, the prevalence of practices of female circumcision, it is worth recognising how often it is depicted as a routine problem amongst Muslims in Britain, particularly for South Asians, by PMPI such as Will Hutton (referred to at the beginning) when there is no evidence known to the author which would support such an assumption. This should instead be read, it will be argued in the main text, as an indicator of the extent to which the standard PMPI reading of minority practices function to reify a range of different issues.
8. In making a broader point about the currency of media discourse, Van Dijk argues that “speakers routinely refer to . . . newspapers as their source (and authority) of knowledge or opinions about ethnic minorities”. Hence, “social theories are (re)produced in the social worlds by the news media, influencing audience attitudes, values and beliefs, principally through their reinforcement” (Van Dijk, 1999, cited in Richardson, 2001, p. 148).
9. According to the Office for National Statistics there are approximately 1.85 million British citizens (forming 2.9 per cent of the national population) who describe themselves as “Muslim”. Of this figure, roughly 50 per cent—just under one million—were born in Britain.
10. The CRE is a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation created after the implementation of Britain’s first race-relations legislation in 1976. It has no legislative powers but acts as a public watch-dog “to tackle racial discrimination and promote racial equality”. In recent years its current Chair, Trevor Phillips, has spoken candidly in demanding a greater degree of assimilation from Muslims in Britain. See [www.cre.gov.uk](http://www.cre.gov.uk).
11. This follows the government’s unsuccessful bid to introduce the legislation alongside the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (2001)—brought in with the assurance that the clause would prevent the Act from adding to the anti-Muslim backlash after September 11. Leaving Muslims in Britain otherwise susceptible to overt public discrimination, i.e. the propagation of anti-Muslim literature for political propaganda, as witnessed in recent electoral materials circulated by the British National Party. Organisations such as the MCB and Islamic Human Rights Commission have made no secret of their lobbying government for the introduction of this legislation.

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