Taking Back the News?
A Study of Muslim Media in North America as Alternative Media

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral
Affairs in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Journalism,
School of Journalism and Communication,
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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of Muslim media in providing unique discourses in the media landscape that differ from the mainstream media. Two print Muslim newspapers, *The Muslim Link* (United States) and *Muslim Link* (Canada), are used as a case study to explore how the journalism, goals and practices of the Muslim media differ from the mainstream media. A mixed method approach, comprising comparative content analysis, discourse and text analysis and interviews, is used in the study. The content of both Muslim newspapers is compared to the mainstream newspapers of their respective regions. Drawing from theoretical perspectives on alternative media, the findings show, in varying ways, that these Muslim newspapers are able to provide an alternative in terms of their coverage, representations and discourses. The newspapers are also able to foster social and political engagement in their communities and in many ways attempt to write the Muslim community's own narrative about itself.

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the help of a number of people to whom I would like to extend my thanks.

Sincere and grateful thanks to my supervisor, Professor Karim H. Karim for patiently reading all the drafts of my thesis and guiding me through the process and for the continuous support and encouragement. Thanks to the School of Journalism and Communication, particularly Professor Susan Harada, Professor Christopher Waddell and Frida Anna Choueiri, for their help and guidance. Thanks to Professor Kirsten Kozolanka, who was earlier my second reader but was unable to be on the committee when I defended, for providing comments and suggestions on one chapter.

Thanks to all the interviewees who were kind enough to make time for me and shared their stories. Thanks to all those who helped me get in touch with the interviewees.

Thanks to all my family and friends for the encouragement they offered, specifically to my parents Ahmed Aqueel and Tasnim Aqueel, and in-laws Dr. Muhammad Abid Ali and Shaheen Abid Ali for their support, encouragement and prayers.

My deepest thanks goes to my husband, Muhammad Osama Ali, for believing in me and supporting, helping and encouraging me throughout this work and for cheering on me and telling me I could do it whenever I would start losing hope. Thank you for your love and support and thank you for listening to all my worries and thoughts about my thesis. I would also like to thank my five-month-old son, Muhammad Abdurrahman Ali who came into our lives during the course of this research. Thank you for allowing me the time to work on this thesis. Thanks for being mumma's little helper!

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Chapter 1

Stepping into the Mediascape: Muslims Telling Their Own Stories

Alternative journalism suggests that authority does not need to be located institutionally or professionally; that credibility and trustworthiness can be derived from accounts of lived experience, not only from objectively detached reporting; and that there need be no imperative to separate facts from values. (Atton, 2009, p. 284)

Muslims and Islam have been prominent in mainstream media discourse for many years now. These portrayals have ranged from suspicious and negative depictions as the “other” and representations of the “barbaric” and “violent” nature of this group to the almost immediate assigning of blame to Muslims for any terrorist attack in the world. Over the years, however, representations of Islam and Muslims have improved and some journalists and newsmen have realized that Muslims are not a monolithic community and that the actions of some Muslims do not represent the religion of 1.6 billion followers throughout the world.

While this is a positive development, the situation is not ideal by any means. Negative portrayals and stereotypes are still rife in mainstream discourse as some recent news events demonstrate. One recent example is the Ottawa shootings on Parliament Hill in which initial reports speculated that the attacker “looked Muslim” and terms like “Islamist extremism” were used in later coverage. Another example is the Boston Marathon bombing media reporting which often jumped to conclusions, assigning blame to Muslims from the outset, pinpointing the wrong suspects and triggering debates about “Islamism” and a “clash of civilizations”. Similar debates were triggered in the case of

the Via Rail terrorist plot in Canada that came to the media's attention at about the same time as the Boston Marathon bombing. Debates and depictions like these have been rampant in the media and have increased ever since the events of September 11, 2001 and the "War on Terror" (see Echchaibi, 2013a; Martin and Phelan, 2002; and Zemni, 2011).

One effect of these negative portrayals and the backlash that Muslims have faced as a result of them is the increase in the number of Muslim media initiatives aiming to take the narrative of the community into their own hands. Having seen the effects of letting someone else report on their community and their religion, many Muslims have turned to the internet, blogging websites, television programs, and print media to take back the news, respond to misrepresentation and to write their own narrative. The result has been a variety of media forms discussing important political and global issues but also telling the community's everyday stories – stories that are no different from any other community in the world. While there are debates about minorities participating in Western democracy, and discussions about global and domestic terrorism incidents wrongfully performed in the name of Islam, there are also stories on the achievements of high school students at a science fair, anecdotes of young mothers and their daily struggles in parenthood and reports of community-led projects to raise funds for those in need around the world.

Independent media attempts by Muslims in Western countries where they form a minority have increased over the years. As more and more Muslims have become increasingly media savvy and as new media technologies make independent media startups easier, there has been a rise in the number of websites, blogs, digital media platforms, magazines, newspapers and television and radio initiatives run by Muslims.

Not all of these attempts have been consistent and very few of them have survived the financial and workforce challenges that come with the field, but all of them in some way have contributed to forming and populating an alternative public sphere where news, discussions, debates and representations are run by members of the community themselves and where there has often been a conscious attempt to provide representations, discussions and ideas that are different from those present in the mainstream discourse. The internet and the ease with which views can be expressed on it has allowed Muslims to have new and rival spaces to “reinforce, cultivate, and act on a variety of ideological views, positions and projects” (Echchaibi, 2013b).

Despite the increase in the number of independent media startups by Muslims in recent years, very little research exists on the subject. Due to the inconsistent nature of many Muslim media initiatives, it is also difficult to find any proper documentation of the different media that have existed over the years which makes tracing the history of the Muslim media in North America a challenge.

Studying these forms of Muslim media provides a way to understand not only a different way of looking at the Muslim community¹ and its news but also how a community tells its own stories, produces its own narrative and writes its own history. Research into this area also allows us to move beyond the research into misrepresentation and bias and offers a positive lens of looking at the possibilities for responding to media misrepresentation and bias and the way a community speaks back to the mainstream news media. Studying the content of these media also offers an insight into the different

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¹ Reference to “the Muslim community” or “the community” in this thesis acknowledges that the Muslim community is not monolithic and is made up of a number of different groups, ethnicities and schools of thought. When “the Muslim community” or “the community” is referred to it means all the different groups in a given region or the world.

ways a community views itself, the issues and debates it considers important and how it fosters activism and involvement.

Having their own media gives different Muslim communities in the West some control over determining how their communities are represented. It also provides a forum for the communities to respond to or address any misrepresentations in the mainstream media as well as to discuss and debate issues that are important to them. Over the years, a number of different Muslim media initiatives have mushroomed in societies where Muslims have felt marginalized or improperly represented in the mainstream media. As can be seen in the numerous examples of Muslim media forms discussed in Chapter 3 and the two case studies in this thesis, many Muslim media have started out of a desire to address representations in the mainstream media; take the narrative about the community into their own hands; positively represent the community; report on issues and news of importance to Muslim communities that would not necessarily be covered by the mainstream media; foster discussions and debate in the community; negotiate Muslim identities; and encourage social and political engagement. Many media forms also seek to bond communities and inform them about Islam and various aspects about the religious identity. Media like these tend to focus on theological, lifestyle and family issues. Some media also focus on challenging popular conceptions in the community and fostering debate on various issues like Muslim women, Muslim men, dress, family, social life, marriage etc. In many ways, a number of these media serve as alternative media simply in their role of providing an alternative space where these discussions can take place and in providing discussions and representations that are different from those present in the mainstream media. Although many of these media may not openly call themselves

“alternative media” or position themselves as such, a number of their activities effectively fulfill that role.

The fact that they are specifically for the Muslim community plays a major role in making these media alternative media. But branching off from that very role is the fact that they report on stories that are of interest to this specific community and therefore different from what one would find in the mainstream media which usually has a wider audience. These media often have very different news values from those in the mainstream media (Atton and Hamilton, 2008) and therefore their choice of a “newsworthy story” (Galtung and Ruge, 1965) or a story considered important enough to be reported differ from the traditional media. Furthermore, many of these media position themselves as reporting on stories and issues from a perspective that is different from the mainstream media. In this way, they come to serve as an alternative not just in existence but also in the content they provide.

Many Muslim media also tend to provide more than just a platform for discussion among community members. At times, they also serve as a platform to voice these messages to an outside audience and often tend to feel the obligation to speak for the community. Even though editors and publishers would like to argue otherwise and emphasize on their role of representing the diversity of the community, certain occasions make this role of speaking for the community ever more important. For example, in cases where Muslims and Islam are in the spotlight as a result of terrorism incidents, these media have often published statements or columns from opinion leaders speaking for the community by voicing their stance on the issue. That stance is often represented as the

position of the wider Muslim community and all the different groups that make up the community.

Moreover, alternative media sources like these often move away from traditional media practices of straight and impartial news reporting often touted as the principle of “objectivity” in traditional journalism and instead use styles and practices that inject opinion, subjective viewpoints, slants and advocacy. In their own way, all of these aspects and practices of diverse media forms add value to the mediascape² and to society as a whole. As James Curran (2007) writes:

Media pluralism is best secured when the objectivity tradition is accompanied by advocacy and interpretive and subjective styles of journalism. These alternative traditions of journalism enable divergent social groups to define and constitute themselves, facilitate internal strategic debate, and further the forceful transmission of their concerns and viewpoints to a wider public. The engaged media of working-class groups; the feminist movement; sexual minorities; ethnic minorities; peace, environmentalist and anti-global poverty groups; and others, have all extended the diversity of the media system, and enabled grassroots voices to be better heard. Journalism has several legitimate registers, which contribute in different ways to the functioning of democracy.

(p.xvi)

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² The term mediascape was coined by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai. It was used to refer to the production and dissemination of information through traditional and electronic means to form political and ideological understandings of the world (Aw and Willnat, 2009).

All of the things discussed above – namely a specific readership, differing news values, the tendency to speak for the community and the use of alternative practices – set these media apart from the conventional mainstream media. In this thesis, I consider such media forms alternative media. In Chapter 2, I outline a comprehensive definition of alternative media relevant to this study that includes critical, progressive and distinctive content as a minimum, but also at times includes alternative practices of production. Although many community media forms may fall under such a definition and some of them are discussed in Chapter 3, this thesis will focus more on media that focus on news and current affairs rather than lifestyle and theology.

Since Muslims in the United States and Canada come from different ethnicities and nationalities, a question arises as to whether media by any of these ethnic or national groupings meant for their specific group would be considered part of Muslim media. For this thesis, I consider media that aim to cater to Muslims beyond boundaries of territory and ethnicity and have a special focus on issues of Muslim communities as falling under the ambit of “Muslim media”. A community newspaper for Pakistanis or Arabs, for example, that deals mainly with secular issues or issues relevant only to their communities will not be considered part of “Muslim media”, because their aim is usually to cater to a specific community, provide news from the homeland and not to discuss issues of relevance to the large yet diverse Muslim community as a whole. A point worth noting here, however, is that some ethnic media may have specialized sections in a newspaper or programs on a channel dedicated to addressing issues of significance to wider Muslim communities. Those sections may, therefore, be considered part of the

Muslim media, but since it is difficult to identify such sections among a plethora of ethnic media, their mention and analysis in this thesis will be limited.

The readership of the Muslim newspapers in this study, *The Muslim Link* (TML) of the DC-Virginia and Baltimore Metropolitan Areas, and *Muslim Link* (ML)³ of Ottawa-Gatineau is diverse and includes a number of different groups, ethnicities and schools of thought within the larger community of Muslims in the areas. The number of Muslims in Ottawa in 2011 was 58,590 (Statistics Canada National Household Survey, 2011). Statistics on Muslims in the DC-Virginia-Baltimore Metropolitan areas are more difficult to find since the U.S. Census does not collect information about religions (Johnson, 2011), but an estimate in 2000 found the number of Muslims in the Washington Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA) including the District of Columbia (DC), Maryland (MD), Virginia (VA), West Virginia (WV), to be 113,987 (Total Muslim Population, 2000). Within both these populations of Muslims in Ottawa and Washington and surrounding areas, there are a number of groups of ethnicities and schools of thought.

Both newspapers in this study claim to serve all these different groups in the wider community. *TML* claims to follow one school of thought which has interpretations of Islam that differ from other groups of Muslims. The editor of the newspaper says that affects only the theology section of the paper, but as the interview in Chapter 5 shows sometimes it also affects which stories the newspaper decides to cover and which it decides not to cover. Each form of Muslim media in the mediascape has a different

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³ The names of these publications will be abbreviated in this thesis to avoid confusion because of the titles being similar.

understanding of Muslim identities and Muslim principles and beliefs and that gets reflected in the content of the media in a variety of ways.

Although the Muslim newspapers in this study claim that they cater to all groups in the community, their audience may be more limited than they think. Depending on the school of thought and understanding of Muslim identities and beliefs that they subscribe to, they may inadvertently limit their readership. The readership also gets limited by the places the newspaper is distributed to like the specific mosques, community centers, restaurants and grocery stores the newspaper is placed in. Both papers claim to be representing all the different communities in their area and at times they may also end up speaking for the community in their role of being the only Muslim newspaper in the region that presents the community's perspectives and positions not just to Muslims but to other non-Muslims who would like to understand the Muslim community. Since the newspaper teams consist of only a small number of people who report and write for the paper, the ideas may also unintentionally represent only the views and ideas of these "elites" in the community, a concept I will touch on further in Chapter 3. In this way, the newspapers end up not just representing the community as they argue, but also at times speaking for its members.

Also, worth mentioning here is the fact that this thesis acknowledges that mainstream media are not monolithic and include a range of media that have different practices and ideologies. Mainstream media in this thesis refers to those media that have corporate ownership; often serve as the main media of a particular country or region and therefore have a much larger readership than community media; and that subscribe to dominant discourses for a majority of their content. This is not to say though that the

content in mainstream media can be boxed into being of only one kind. Mainstream media often also serve as a platform for alternative discourses and also at times go against what one would consider stereotypical ways of reporting. Columns in many mainstream newspapers sometimes provide a voice to a number of different people that provide discussions often considered alternative to the dominant discourse. The mainstream media often also have writers from within the Muslim community presenting their perspective on issue in columns and features. As the discussions in the study of the two Muslim newspapers in this thesis show, the content in the mainstream media, whether written by members from within or outside the Muslim community, can at times also go against dominant stereotypes and be reported and written like in the alternative media. Nevertheless, there still remain differences in the content, reporting and goals of the mainstream media and alternative media which will be demonstrated in this thesis.

The research questions in this study aim to understand how the journalism of the Muslim newspapers being studied differs from the journalism of the mainstream media; whether or not they are providing the alternative discourse; what kind of stories they cover and the ownership and goals that drive them. This study will take a look at the theoretical and existing research literature on alternative and community media, the Muslim media in particular and will try to trace some of the history and current status of the Muslim media in North America. It will focus on the case of two local Muslim newspapers in North America – *The Muslim Link* (TML) in the Washington-DC and Baltimore Metropolitan areas of the United States and *Muslim Link* (ML) in Ottawa, Canada to answer the research questions. The goal is to add to the little research that exists on the Muslim media in North America, attempt to trace some of the history and

current status of these media and add to the debate about Muslims in the media by exploring the media that Muslims are controlling themselves. I hope the study will provide an analysis of these forms of media and whether or not they are really providing the alternative voice – a perspective that is different from the mainstream, and foster debate on how much of an alternative they are expected to provide. I also hope this study will spur debate on whether such initiatives are an effective solution to misrepresentation and whether they are effective in bringing forth a Muslim perspective on different issues.

Some of the potential limitations of this thesis include the fact that although this thesis attempts to fill a gap in the research, it does not attempt to be a comprehensive survey of all sorts of media produced by Muslims, nor does it aim to provide a comprehensive history of the Muslim media in North America, although one chapter does attempt to give a brief overview of the different Muslim media. This study focuses on examining two newspapers existing in the mediated landscape which claim to represent American and Canadian Muslims in their respective regions as opposed to South Asian Muslims, Arab Muslims etc., and to examine how they differ from the mainstream media in their relative regions, contributing to the role of “taking back the news”.

Furthermore, also worth mentioning here is the fact that the author of this thesis comes from within the Muslim community currently in Ottawa. While this position provided invaluable access to and insight into the various Muslim media that are discussed in this thesis and helped in the understanding of various issues discussed in the content analysis, it is important to consider concerns about the potential of bias. There is a possibility that the author’s biases could have influenced the interpretation of the news stories in the qualitative analysis and the responses of the interviewees. In order to

address concerns about interpretations affecting the qualitative analysis, the methodology was informed by works of earlier scholars of text and discourse analysis and the texts were compared to texts in the mainstream media in order to avoid stand-alone judgments. Additionally, interviewees signed a consent form detailing the purpose of the interview and the study and agreed to have the interviews recorded.

The two newspapers selected for the case study were chosen with the consideration of having media in the study that are somewhat standardized in format, medium and frequency. Although these papers are not linked to each other, the Ottawa newspaper was inspired by the Washington one. The other Muslim media I came across during my initial research were either websites or magazines and therefore were difficult to sample and compare. Another limitation was to have the media examined in this thesis available in archival form – a condition that was met in the case of the two newspapers that are examined. The newspapers also provided for rich comparative analysis as they focus more on current affairs than on lifestyle and theological issues. The comparative analysis undertaken in this study focuses on the current affairs sections of these newspapers and excluded the theology and lifestyle sections. Although both newspapers were monthly print newspapers, during the course of this research, *ML* ran into financial problems and stopped publishing its print edition starting November 2014.

This thesis will draw on existing theoretical and research literature on the alternative media and the many forms these media can take. It will explore existing literature on Muslim media and trace some of the history of Muslim media in North America and it will provide a case study of two Muslim media to examine how they differ from the mainstream media and whether or not they are providing an alternative.

Chapter 2

When Consumers Become Producers: Understanding Democratic and Alternative Media Forms

Perhaps by moving outside the ideology of objectivity, these alternative news sources may help to put the facts into a more complete context and perspective. Perhaps society collectively will then be able to triangulate on the truth in a way that traditional journalism cannot, because of its objectivity ideology. (Pavlik, 2001, p. 93)

Although ethnic, diasporic and minority media have existed for a long time, recent years have seen a spurt in the number and forms of democratic and participatory media. While a lot of it can be attributed to the spread of democracy, freer media systems and technological innovations, I will focus here on examining the reasons for the growth in media of ethnic or diasporic groups in societies where they form a minority and the forms these media can take.

To be able to understand these media forms, we need to understand the goals and motivations behind their growth. In addition to examining these goals, this chapter will also look at the various terms and definitions for different media forms that are separate from the mainstream media. It will explore the different ways theorists have defined alternative media and will also examine some studies of alternative media forms that look at how the content of these media differs from the mainstream media. I will then conclude with a definition of alternative media that is relevant to my study.

Finding Their Own Voice: The Growth of Minority Media

The growth of minority media can be related to migration patterns in Western societies (Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2008). As a result of migrations, people who come to settle in Western countries like the United States and Canada, form a community or collection of people connected by a sense of identity that goes beyond mere ties of ethnicity or territory, but also extends to those of faith and interest as in “communalities of interest” (Keith Popple as cited in Bailey et al., 2008). Since they form a minority in their countries of residence, scholars have used the term “minority media” to refer to media produced by these groups of ethnic or religious minorities.

A look at the motivations and goals of these media can help understand the reasons for their growth and their essential nature. Bailey et al. (2008) discuss two levels to understand this phenomenon: one is to see it as a political response of minority groups to their marginalization and exclusion from equal participation in society and mainstream media industries, and another is to see it as a space for identity negotiation. Bailey et al. (2008) give another understanding to the reason for the increase in minority media by attributing it to wider social and political trends worldwide where communities and groups have now emerged that are willing to engage in the “politics of difference” (p.94).

When a group feels that its issues are not properly represented in the media and in society or not represented at all, it steps up to take that responsibility into its own hands. Such situations serve as fertile ground for the production of grassroots ethnic or minority media aimed at addressing the concerns of underrepresented groups in society. Sometimes the motive may not be driven by a desire for political representation, instead

it may be to foster, protect or shape the group's identity in an alien society where that identity may be under threat from various social, cultural and political influences. Hirji (2006) points to how diasporic media play an important role in connecting disparate peoples, and maintaining networks around nationality, culture, or religion, and fostering a sense of identity or community. These media can also provide dialogue between the different realities of home and receiving culture and therefore provide engagement with other cultures while reshaping identities (Bailey et al., 2008). Bailey et al (2008) write: "The expansion of ethnic-religious minority media is an indication that these communities and their younger members, rather than fully integrating or 'assimilating', have found new identities that combine the best of their own cultures and heritage." (p. 86)

The media of ethnic minorities also play the role of fulfilling a group's need for access to information in their own languages, reception of that material in a culturally familiar manner, and remaining in touch with news about members of the group, homeland or diaspora (Karim, 2012). In this role, these ethnic media act as "community cultural resources" by being a "communal voice" on issues of importance to their audience or readership (Ojo, 2006, p. 344). Another role that Ojo (2006) cites for these media is that of helping ethnic groups (re)construct their identity in contrast to how their identities are already framed in the mainstream media.

While the terms ethnic media and diasporic media are often used interchangeably, some differences can be noted between the two. The term ethnic media is used to define media of particular ethnic groups, often minorities in their countries of settlement, and while ethnic media may be a part of diasporic media, not all diasporic media can be

called ethnic media. Diasporic media are often produced by and serve a particular diaspora – a group of people from a national, regional, ethnic or religious group settled in a country and other countries across the world where “they or their ancestors may have arrived as immigrants” (Karim, 1998, p. 2). So, some groups that are seen as diasporas can be multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural in themselves, for example Muslim communities in North America, Jewish communities or even South Asian communities that comprise a mix of ethnicities and nationalities. Hirji (2006), for example, points to how diasporic media are a representation of maintaining “a complex multifaceted identity framed by any number of factors, including – but not necessarily limited to – religion, ethnicity, and nationality” (p.131).

Ties That Bind: Serving Communities

Another term often used in discussions of ethnic or diasporic media is “community media”. Community media are understood to include media that are meant to serve specific communities that may be either geographical or communities of interest (Bailey et al., 2008); are driven by social objectives rather than the private, profit motive; empower people rather than treat them as passive consumers; and nurture local knowledge (*Media Development* as cited in Fuller, 2007). Community media serve to “facilitate the process of community organization”, and encourage dialogue between diverse publics (Forde, Foxwell, & Meadows, 2003, p. 318). Forde et al. (2003) explain that this community organization is facilitated by journalists using the community media to produce and maintain the community’s culture which helps “‘make sense’ of the world and our place in it” (p. 318). They propose the term “community public sphere” to describe a space developed out of a unique position that is “the product of contestation

with the mainstream public sphere” and point out that community media are part of a “*process* of cultural empowerment” and that content production is not “*necessarily* their prime purpose” (p. 317, emphasis in original).

Community media are one of the many forms of participatory journalism that are often considered to be providing an alternative to the mainstream media in their existence and their practices. Forde et al. (2003) identify elements like intent, focus, size etc that distinguish community media from mainstream media and allow them to facilitate cultural citizenship in ways that contribute to this differentiation. They point to how these media provide “alternative frameworks” for making sense of the world through the lens of local communities. Forde et al. (2003) extend Habermas’ popular notion of the public sphere to include more than just a single public sphere but instead a series of “parallel and overlapping” spaces “where participants with similar cultural backgrounds or communities of interest engage in activities concerning issues and interests of importance to them” (p. 317).

Another term found in these discussions is “citizens media”, which Clemencia Rodriguez (2001) describes as community media that is a result of “a complex interaction between people’s attempts to democratize the mediascape and their contextual circumstances”, while recognizing that the nature of community and citizens’ media is polymorphic and rejects tight definition (as cited in Forde et al., 2003, p.316).

A Different Voice: Providing an “Alternative”

Alternative media is another term used to describe these forms of participatory or democratic media, which Atton (2002) pertinently describes as media that are “crucially

about offering the means of democratic communication to people who are normally excluded from media production” (p. 4). This term is often used to refer to media forms that supplement traditional media by means of information production and dissemination that challenge conventional norms of ownership and production as well as provide content that is different from the traditional or mainstream media. The supplementary role of alternative media is what Bailey et al. (2008) refer to as these media supplementing mainstream media on an organizational and content level. They can “offer ideologies, representations and discourses that vary from those originating in the mainstream” (p. 18) and provide more diverse content representing the diverse societal voices by their role of giving voice to various social movements, minorities and subcultures (Bailey et al., 2008). In multicultural societies, these media forms can then not only challenge media monopolies and contest the concentration of institutional media power (Atton and Hamilton, 2008), but also challenge mainstream representations of groups and communities (Bailey et al., 2008). They provide information about the world which cannot be found elsewhere and are more interested in the free flow of ideas than in profit (Atton, 2002).

These “counter-cultural productions” are often referred to as “alternative media” and include forms as diverse as literacy campaigns, street theatre, alternative newspapers, video and film production, cartooning, public access television, alternative computer networks, video and radio piracy, computer hacking and others –each of these differ in how they challenge established forms of media (Fenton, 2006).

In many instances, these media come into existence in order to provide the counter-narrative to what is being reported in the mainstream. Atton and Hamilton (2008)

put forward that alternative journalism is primarily informed by a critique of existing ways. They write:

Alternative journalism proceeds from dissatisfaction not only with the mainstream coverage of certain issues and topics, but also with the epistemology of news. Its critique emphasizes alternatives to, *inter alia*, conventions of news sources and representation; the inverted pyramid of news text; the hierarchical and capitalized economy of commercial journalism; the professional, elite basis of journalism as a practice, the professional norm of objectivity; and the subordinate role of audience as a receiver. (p.1)

Atton and Hamilton (2008) discuss how, in its ideal form, alternative journalism is produced outside of mainstream institutions and networks and “can include the media of protest groups, dissidents, fringe political organizations, even fans and hobbyists” (Atton as cited in Atton & Hamilton, 2008, p. 1). They stipulate that most of it is produced by “amateurs” and “not by professionals” in the positions of citizens, members of communities, activists or fans. When they are produced by “amateurs”, alternative media are able to “reimagine journalism” (p. 124) and use forms that are different from the dominant ways of practicing journalism. This allows for new definitions for things like what is considered newsworthy, how a story is organized, written and framed; and how subjects are represented within those stories. Subjective styles of journalism, as opposed to the “objectivity” tradition of the mainstream media discussed earlier, and advocacy, therefore, also become alternative traditions for these forms of media to follow. These advocacy, interpretive and subjective styles of journalism are favored in

alternative media and support a culture of media pluralism (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Curran, 2007).

Bailey et al. (2008) also discuss how the rejection of mainstream media production values often lead to a diversity of formats and genres and experimentation in content and form in the alternative media, and in this way serve as a “breeding ground for innovation” which is often later adopted by the mainstream (p. 20). This is primarily why we can see a number of alternative media or community newspapers adopting styles of journalism and news reporting that are different from the styles we are accustomed to in the mainstream. Many times the topics that are reported on and considered “news” are different from the conventional idea of news; at other times, the sources used to report a story are different – with more emphasis on ordinary people as sources in place of “officials”. Furthermore, many news reports are often editorialized and inject a lot of opinion and advocacy – blurring the line between news reports and columns – compared to the formats we are used to seeing in mainstream news.

Atton and Hamilton (2008), however, acknowledge that not all alternative media use these alternative practices in producing the media. Some of them are set up solely with the aim of challenging the mainstream and in order to achieve this, they utilize professional organizational structures and professional journalists and professional journalistic practices and as such they follow the vision of alternative media proposed by Comedia⁴ of media that competes with the mainstream following the strategies of the mainstream (as cited in Atton & Hamilton, 2008).

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⁴ Comedia was a research group preceded by the Minority Press Group that published research on the alternative and minority media.

Atton and Hamilton (2008) point to how the goal of many alternative media is mostly to represent the interests, views and needs of underrepresented groups in society. “Practitioners of alternative journalism also seek to redress what they consider an imbalance of media power in mainstream media, which results in the marginalization (at worst, the demonization) of certain social groups and movements” (p. 2). Alternative news also functions to “fill the gaps” left by the mainstream news (p. 79). The content is also usually focused on social responsibility and/or creative expression (*Alternatives in Print* as cited in Atton, 2002).

Hackett (2000) defines media that give voice to the marginalized, convey counter-hegemonic information and that offer models of communication and organization that are at least more democratic than the conventional commercial media, as alternative media. Similarly, Hackett and Carroll (2006) discuss three primary features which define media as alternative: they are relatively autonomous from corporate capital and the state, they are progressive in political orientation and content, and they transform the top-to-bottom paradigm of hegemonic media and promote horizontal dialogue.

In line with the idea of these media transforming traditional ways of organization that lead to the media power notion that is popular in discussions, Couldry and Curran (2003) define alternative media as “media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power, whatever forms those concentrations may take in different locations” (p. 7), and they talk about “media power” as the “power to represent the reality of others” (p. 6). Also touching on this conception of alternative media challenging media power, Atkinson (2006) writes about alternative media being used in

the emergence of a worldwide movement against corporate globalization that provides a space for resistance through alternative narratives.

Harcup (2003) touches on this idea of space for resistance with alternative narratives when he argues that alternative media are not only able to contest “physical space” but also “ideological space”. He argues this is done by media performing the role of providing “alternative public spheres” where fluid populations of citizens who may at various times serve as producers, sources and readers, help subvert the dominant discourse by “providing access to alternative voices, alternative arguments, alternative sets of ‘facts’, and alternative ways of seeing,” allowing citizens to engage critically with the output of mainstream media (p.371). In this way the different relationships between producers and sources may also become blurred in the alternative media leading to the alternative media differing from the mainstream not just in terms of the “cast of sources” used but also in the different relationship that exists between producers and sources (Harcup, 2003). Downing (1990) also uses the term “alternative public forum” to describe the role these media play in disseminating information and fostering discussions that are left out by the mainstream. Many people often turn to the alternative media available in a community to get a specific community’s perspective on an issue or a perspective that is different from that offered in the mainstream. Fenton (2007), for example, writes about how sometimes even the mainstream media turn to the alternative media to provide oppositional views or personal witnesses in certain events.

Alternative media also play a democratic role in influencing public debate and “fostering democratic inclusion and participation and countering social exclusion and political engagement” (Harcup 2011, p.23). In this role, alternative media may serve to

foster political engagement and participation in communities that otherwise would not find a voice in the mainstream media. Harcup (2011) refers to this role as the alternative media serving as a platform for “active citizenship” which he defines as agency and participation.

Downing, Ford, Gil and Stein (2001) use the term “radical alternative media”, and “radical media” more frequently, to describe media that offer a clear alternative to the mainstream. They define the term as including generally small scale and different forms of media that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities and perspectives. They also note a number of other features of radical media including that they come in a number of forms; differ in their depth of radicalism; break somebody’s rules; and that they are generally small-scale and underfunded and sometimes short-lived.

Downing et al. (2001) also talk about the democratic role played by radical alternative media terming them as “developmental power agents” (p.44). This role is accomplished when these media expand the range of information, reflection, and exchange; are more responsive to voices of groups that are excluded, by being linked to ongoing social movements; do not censor themselves under pressure from media moguls, the state or religious authority; and have democratic internal organization. Elsewhere, however, Downing et al. (2001) acknowledge that sometimes some forms of organized leadership may be essential to challenging the hegemony of the mainstream media, and to be able to “put forward credible alternative programs and perspectives” (p.15), and therefore being democratic or participatory is not an essential feature of radical alternative media. Another theorist who discusses the relationship between alternative

media and social movements is Dagon (2004) who talks about how alternative media are often tied to social struggle and social movements.

The “alternative”, however, does not necessarily always have to be in the form of radical political ideas or community or social conflict. In fact, as Atton and Hamilton (2008) point out alternative journalism can be about explorations of individual enthusiasm and subcultural identity just as much as it can be about radical visions of society and the polity.

Bailey et al. (2008) combine many of these ideas into their explanation of the alternative media and their roles. In giving a voice to various social movements, minorities and subcultures, they argue, the alternative media are able to add to the multiplicity of voices in society and offer ideologies, representations, and discourses that differ from those offered in the mainstream. They write that this is at the same time combined with innovative practices in production and organization.

How “Alternative” is Alternative: Studying Alternative Content

The study of alternative or participatory forms of media is an area that has been “little discussed” within much of journalism studies (Harcup, 2011). Although a lot of studies have focused on the issue of bias and misrepresentation in the mainstream media, fewer studies have focused on the attempts being made to address that bias or misrepresentation. Keeble (2001) writes: “Despite the vast economic power of the mainstream press, a lively alternative print industry (ethnic minority/left-wing/peace movement/feminist/ single-issue campaigning) survives against the odds – yet it tends to be ignored by both Fleet Street and academe.” (p.11)

Dreher (2010) draws attention in her paper on community media interventions to how media research has generally focused more attention on analyzing the “problems” of media racism as opposed to exploring the possibilities for “solutions” or change. Although Dreher differentiates between alternative media and “community media interventions” which she defines as “activities and projects developed by people working with communities subjected to media racism in order to alter or speak back to mainstream news media” (p. 86), she places community media interventions within the framework of the broad definition of alternative media as “practices of symbolic production that contest media power”. Dreher argues that research into this field is “a productive way to expand the media and multiculturalism agenda beyond the critique of representation” as it “highlights the agency of communities subject to media racialization, adding complexity to our understandings of media racism and foregrounding the question of media change.” (p. 96)

More research is therefore needed into community and alternative forms of media, specifically those aimed at responding to or speaking back to the mainstream media. Such research can help expand the agenda beyond the critical media research that currently dominates the field. Most discussions on the alternative media have focused on defining and theorizing them and fewer studies have focused on examining the content of these media and how they differ from the mainstream.

Harcup’s (2003) study of the alternative local newspaper *Leeds Other Paper* and its mainstream rival the *Yorkshire Evening Post* looked at how the journalism of the alternative media differs from mainstream journalism and found that the alternative media “may indeed be able to subvert the dominant discourse, albeit to a limited

audience” (p. 367). Harcup found that both papers thematized the event under study in different ways and were able to say the ‘unspoken’” (p.371).

Similar examples of the alternative media differing from the mainstream media can be seen in a study by Ojo (2006). In a case study of the ethnic newspaper of the black community in Montreal, the *Montreal Community Contact*, Ojo notes that the paper provided critical voices to the issues presented in the mainstream. Ojo writes: “They critiqued news and perspectives in the mainstream media that they found unfair to their community. Essentially, the paper presents an alternative discourse to the communication agenda set by the dominant, socio-political and cultural order.” (p. 356). This was done in addition to providing news and information about issues of importance to the community.

Cissel’s (2012) comparative content analysis of the mainstream and alternative news media coverage of the Occupy Wall Street movement is another study that tried to compare coverage in the mainstream media with the alternative media. The study demonstrated how greatly the portrayal of the movement differed in coverage by the different media forms. Mainstream media portrayed the movement as lackluster and confusing. On the other hand, the alternative media emphasized the strength and diversity of its protestors and demonstrations, and focused on how the police, government, corporations and mass media were preventing the protestors from having a voice. Cissel speculates that the cause of the difference in how the news is presented could be “due to the financial backing behind different media sources and the motives that drive them” (p. 75). Sajahan et al. (2010) also conducted a content analysis to compare coverage of Malaysian by-elections in the conservative and alternative media. They found that there were obvious differences in terms of the agenda and framing of the elections by the

conservative and alternative media. The conservative media were found to be pro-government, while the alternative media demonstrated more freedom of speech and covered aspects of the by-elections that were not covered by the mainstream media.

Atton and Wickenden's (2005) study of sourcing routines and representation in the alternative UK activist newspaper *SchNEWS* also found that the content of the alternative media differed from the mainstream in terms of the sources used in reporting. However, the researchers argue that the sources are not "ordinary" sources as expected from previous literature on the subject, but instead constituted a "counter-elite. The researchers found that the alternative newspaper favoured activists and protestors as sources, and in that way the sourcing practices were similar to the mainstream "at least to the degree that it limits the opportunities of other voices to be heard" (p. 357).

The studies summarized above show that, although limited in number, previous studies that have focused on comparing and analyzing the content of the alternative media with the mainstream media have found marked differences in the coverage, framing, reporting and agendas of the alternative media when compared to the mainstream media. More studies in this area are needed to examine how the content, goals, agendas and practices of the alternative media differ from the mainstream media.

Alternative at Other Levels: Participation and Organization

Not all theorists, however, see alternative media as always providing an alternative to the mainstream media in terms of their content. For example, in their book on the alternative media in Canada, Kozolanka et al. (2012) move away from the traditional perception of alternative media as carrying content that is not mainstream

discourse towards understanding alternative media in terms of their relations of production and social relations. They argue that alternative media occupy “contested and shifting terrain” and that “the views and ideas they contain are not marginal in any larger social sense, but indicate sustained efforts for more democratic media and society as one and the same” (p.2). However, they do recognize that dominant corporate media hinder attempts at reform or social change by systematically distorting, marginalizing, or under-representing specific issues, individuals or groups, and that the fact that these challenges take multiple forms makes the question of what is alternative, “one of negotiation and contest” (p.2). They also recognize that the social relations, issues and experiences of marginalized groups are the focus of and impetus for alternative media. They view alternative media as performing a key role in public debate, community construction and social justice struggles. They propose looking at structure (the administrative and economic organization of the media and their place in the larger media environment), participation (how democratic they are in internal organization and discursive practices), and activism (how these media work to transform established ways of seeing and operating and empower their communities) as the three central characteristics that distinguish alternative media from other media (Kozolanka et al., 2012). Rodriguez refers to the role of alternative media in disrupting power relationships at multiple levels when it concerns itself with more than just alternative content but also alternative ways of producing that content (as cited in Harcup, 2011).

Albert (1997) points to how being alternative as an institution is more than just about being different in editorial content, and that it has to do with how the institution is organized and how it functions. Couldry also puts forward that the most important task

for alternative media is to contest the highly concentrated media system and capitalist mass media (as cited in Sandoval, 2009). Dowmunt (2007) also notes that the mere act of production is a presentation of the political nature of the alternative media, irrespective of whether or not its content is political.

Another theorist who uses this approach is Dagron (2004). According to him, participatory communication is central to alternative communication, and for the alternative spirit to remain alive, the participatory component must not be minimized or excluded. He writes: “Alternative communication is about software, not hardware. Institutions, technology, and messages are less important than *the participatory process, the capacity building within the community, and the ownership by a social movement*” (p. 48, emphasis in original). In Dagron’s view only media that are participatory are able to achieve objectives of social change and giving a voice to common people.

It appears then that there are two major camps in the debate about the definition of alternative media – one that sees the main aim of alternative media as providing critical content, and the other that sees its main aim as opening up access to production and thus empowering the communities it serves. Sandoval (2009) describes these as the objective and subjective approaches respectively.

Putting it Together: What is “Alternative Media”?

The definition of alternative media can then at best be described as elusive. Harcup (2011) in his study which sampled a group of alternative media practitioners and asked them about their alternative media practice found differing concepts even among those who worked in the alternative media themselves. Definitions ranged from non-

commercial, non-consensual, challenging the status quo, and espousing participatory ethos to allowing an outlet for dissent, providing a questioning voice, and offering minority groups an “independent method for disseminating non-mainstream, alternative and unmediated information” (p. 22).

Many times the criterion for considering certain media as alternative is self-definition (Albert, 1997; *Alternatives in Print* as cited in Atton, 2002). Forde et al.’s (2003) study into Australia’s community broadcasting sector found that many stations identified as “alternative” and that for them alternative was the norm, which led to them speaking from that philosophical position.

Bailey et al. (2008) argue that existing distinctions between commercial and non-commercial and radical and non-radical alternative media are unsustainable and the identity of alternative media “should be articulated as relational and contingent on the particularities of the contexts of production, distribution and consumption” (p. xii). They argue that media may be alternative not only in their relation to the mainstream but in their potential to voice ideas which are important and distinctive in their own right, that are not necessarily counter-hegemonic, but are still of significance for different communities (p. xii). They propose a panoptic perspective that “facilitates an appreciation of the diversity and multiplicity of alternative media initiatives, acknowledging their connections to communities, their distinctiveness from mainstream media embedded in and the fluidity of the boundaries that we construct between alternative and mainstream, between civil society, the state and the market” (p. xv). They point to the hybrid practices of many minority media which rely on advertising and/or subscriptions but still offer news and views that are ignored by the mainstream,

encourage democratic debate and active political involvement – they say such media call for the need to have a wider and less traditional and less dichotomous definition of alternative media.

Although each of these forms of media – namely ethnic media, diasporic media, community media, alternative media and radical media – are at times defined and theorized as separate forms of media, they fall largely under the category of democratic and participatory forms of communication and can intersect with each other. Other terms often used in discussions of alternative media are “independent media”, “autonomous media” and “activist media”. Different ways of theorizing “community cultural production” revolve around ideas of public sphere and democracy (Forde et al., 2003). It is worth noting here that although many of these forms of media are democratic in terms of giving a voice and opening up access to media production to various ethnic groups or communities, the ideals they espouse and therefore communicate may not always be democratic or progressive in nature. It is therefore imperative that for any media to be considered democratic or alternative, they must promote progressive ideals (Sandoval, 2009; Karim 2012).

Karim (2012) discusses how some forms of ethnic and diasporic media may be alternative and others might not. He discusses how some ethnic media engage with progressive causes like promoting social justice and human rights, and therefore, are alternative in that role, but how others promote racism and ethnocentrism and compromise that role.

Alternative media can include any of the forms of media discussed so far as they provide an alternative to the mainstream either in terms of the content they produce, providing a counter-narrative to what is reported in the mainstream media (Atton & Hamilton, 2008); or in terms of providing engagement to and opening up access for groups that are marginalized and excluded in corporate media (Kozolanka, et al., 2012); or any hybrid form in between these that provides an alternative in their potential to voice ideas that are distinctive and important in their own right (Bailey et al., 2008).

Forde et al. (2003) in their study of community broadcasting stations in Australia point to how not all community stations “see themselves as *necessarily* resisting the mainstream” (p. 317, emphasis in original), and that some of them “aspire to mainstream status in terms of both programming and philosophy – but they work within the discursive arena of the local community” (p. 317). Similarly, Karim (2012) points to how some ethnic and diasporic media are becoming increasingly allied to the mainstream media, but that as long as these media enable marginalized communities to participate in the media, they serve the role of providing an alternative to the mainstream.

Harcup (2005) found in his study that rather than being in “binary opposition” alternative and mainstream media can be seen as part of a continuum “with people, ideas and practices moving along the continuum, in both directions” (p.370). He found that many journalists had worked in both the alternative and the mainstream and said that their work in the mainstream was informed by the perspectives they held while working in the alternative media.

According to Sandoval (2009), focusing on media content for defining media as alternative is a more useful criterion than just looking at participatory production processes. She writes that since participatory media can be used for both progressive and repressive ends, focusing on critical content provides a more objective criterion for determining whether or not the media are alternative. She describes critical media content as “content that criticizes all forms of oppression and domination, and keeps up the vision of a reasonable and self-determined society that can be achieved through social struggles” (p. 12). Therefore, media that are commercial and non-participatory can also be considered alternative as long as they produce critical content, since some practices like relying on advertising, can help the media in advancing progressive political aims and avoiding marginality (Sandoval, 2009).

The constraints of operating within a capitalist system often mean that alternative media are unable to maintain financial stability and public visibility without making use of commercial mechanisms like advertising, organized leadership and hierarchical structures (Sandoval, 2009). As noted previously, Downing et al. (2001) also drew attention to how some radical alternative media made use of organized leadership and were not really participatory.

The idea that commercialism does not undermine critical journalism is also demonstrated in Bailey et al.’s (2008) case study of *Q-News*, an alternative Muslim magazine in Britain that provided a voice for the struggles of the Muslim minority community there and challenged one-sided representations. Bailey et al. call this magazine an alternative medium and argue that it represents “a new example of hybrid formats and practices” (p. 95). Sandoval (2009) recognizes that although relying on

commercial measures or working under established institutions for financial survival poses difficulties for alternative media to maintain independence at the content level, it is often the only way for such media to avoid marginality and to become politically effective.

For the purpose of this study, I use Sandoval's (2009) objective approach of using critical content as the minimum criterion for defining alternative media and Bailey et al.'s (2008) approach of alternative media including many hybrid forms and practices. Those media may or may not rely on commercial measures and may or may not be entirely participatory in their production processes, but provide an alternative in their potential to voice ideas that are distinctive and important in their own right, even if they may not be necessarily aiming to counter the mainstream.

This approach avoids excluding media that rely on advertising or may even be funded and supported by established institutions or big organizations, as long as they provide some sort of distinctive or critical content. By distinctive or critical content, I refer to content that is progressive and supports a group's struggle for inclusion, understanding, representation and participation and opposes oppression. This would exclude content that is regressive, racist or promotes hatred and intolerance. In terms of my study of the Muslim media, this definition would broaden to include content that aims to reclaim and represent Muslim identities, driven by the desire to counter the misrepresentations in the mainstream media, but not limited by it. This content could also only be focused on trying to represent the issues of the community that are distinctive on their own.

Chapter 3

Studying Media and Muslims: From Mainstream Media Power to Taking Back the News

A number of Muslim media outlets that currently exist were founded in recognition of the power of media, a knowledge that stemmed from years of reading, watching or listening to reports that painted Muslims as extremists, terrorists, oppressors, or, in the case of women, victims. (Hirji, 2012, p. 575)

There is a plethora of research on media and misrepresentation and how various groups are portrayed or misrepresented in the mainstream media. Most of the research on Muslims and the media in the field of media studies has also focused on issues of bias and misrepresentation as well. As noted earlier, there are fewer studies of alternative media or of media that marginalized or misrepresented groups control themselves. This chapter will take a look at some of the critical media studies on misrepresentation in the context of Muslims and then examine the little research that exists on media that Muslims are controlling themselves and then overview some Muslim media in North America.

Bias and Misrepresentation in the Media: Perpetuating Stereotypes

Representations in the media are often reflective of the internal divisions that exist within societies and many times these debates focus on issues of how certain groups are excluded from the media as well as how they are poorly represented (Sreberny, 2004). A common explanation given for this has been that major media generally reflect the perspectives and interests of established power in society (Chomsky, 2007).

Van Dijk (1996) also notes how news media can often be involved in the reproduction of racism by managing ethnic consensus on various issues and manufacturing public consent. He notes that this results mainly from mainstream news media being inherently part of a power structure of elite groups, adding that minority leaders, antiracists or other critical scholars who are able to provide alternative definitions will not only have limited access but may also be explicitly marginalized and attacked when viewed as a threat to the dominant hegemony.

Media representations “provide a diffuse confirmation of one’s world view, promote acceptance of current social arrangements, and reassure people that things are the way they ought to be” (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000, p. 364). Stereotyped images in the media are a resource that can automatically be drawn upon, especially when interacting with someone of a different race, ethnicity, or gender and media imagery can play a role in the construction of newer and more subtle forms of prejudice. Various studies have shown that media often perpetuate stereotypes of ethnic, racial or religious groups or cover them only minimally (Collins, 2014; Gilchrist, 2010; Karim, 2000; Mousa, 1987).

Media perpetuate stereotypes by repeatedly representing members of certain groups in a particular light, by the importance they give to certain issues and by framing stories in a certain way. Framing occurs when the media organize stories in a way that highlight certain interpretations and de-emphasize others (Papacharissi & Oliveria, 2008). It is in these ways that certain angles to a story and certain representations of issues and groups become the common understanding held in a society.

Muslims and Islam in the Media: Stereotyping and Negative Portrayals

Muslims have long been prominent in media discourse, but the group has been covered a lot more in the media since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in which the terrorists involved were identified as Muslims. Portrayals have often been negative with many associating the group to terrorism, violence and extremism. The events of September 11 and the “War on Terror” have “reinforced an almost static portrait of an imagined Islam that is hostile and antimodern” (Echchaibi, 2013a, p. 121).

Evidence for this sort of representation can be found in a number of studies. Martin and Phelan (2002) in a study of US television and CNN Online message board discourses in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks found a strong cross-media collocation of the term “Islamic” with a number of unfavorable definers like “terrorist(s)”, “militant(s)”, “radical(s)”, “extremist(s)”, “fundamentalists” etc. The researchers note that although there were also favorable word associations with the word Islamic in these media affirming the official U.S. stance that there was no war against Islam, “the traces of such a ‘clash’ were nonetheless apparent” (p. 268).

After the events of September 11, 2001, the Orientalist tradition and the old idea of the conflict between Westerners and Orientals returned as the go-to narrative to explain the attacks as a reflexive response of the human mind to make sense of the news in familiar experiences (Richardson, 2011). Kumar (2010) in her study on the framing of Islam and the resurgence of Orientalism during the Bush II era writes that Orientalist modes of defining Muslims became dominant after the events of 9/11 and that the “clash of civilizations” thesis was promoted by the Bush Jr. administration. She states that this

ideological shift acquired “commonsense” status because it was articulated by the “primary definers of news” in a climate of fear and intimidation (p.254).

Zemni (2011) in a study about the shaping of Islamophobia in Belgium writes:

Islam suddenly became part of a media frenzy. Television, radio, press and internet forums became deluged with things Islamic, from well-meant special editions trying to prevent stories that were circulating about, say, an Imam⁵ who did not want to shake hands with a city councillor, or a man who wanted his wife treated by a female doctor, turning into questions of national policy, to full-scale attacks on Islam and Muslims. Thus, these issues took hold in popular culture. The more sensational the news on Islam, the better it sold. (p. 36)

As mentioned, such negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims have existed well before the events of September 11 when they tend to have increased. Said in the 1997 edition of his popular book *Covering Islam* also noted the hostility towards and negative portrayals of Islam that existed in the mainstream American media when he wrote his book in 1981. Karim (2000) notes similar problems in the coverage of Islam even in the late 80s and 90s. He writes of a consistent theme of what he terms an “Islamic peril” and a theme of “Islam versus the West” in dominant Northern discourses and the phenomenon of “Islamic terrorism.” He argues that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the image of the typical terrorist in the media was that of those who have an adherence to Islam. He writes: “In the aftermath of the Cold War, “the Islamic peril” has

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⁵ Imam is used to refer to a leader or head of a mosque or Islamic center.

become a convenient common enemy of the West and Eastern Europe since it can be presented as a fundamental threat to civilization.” (p. 12)

These negative portrayals often have consequences on the way Muslims are treated in society. There have been numerous examples of a sudden rise in the number of hate crimes and attacks against Muslims and Muslim institutions following news events that depicted Muslims and Islam in a negative light. Steuter and Wills (2009) in their study on Canadian media framing of the war on terror found the use of dehumanizing language including animal imagery applied in the framing of enemy leaders as well as Arab and Muslim citizens in general. The authors argue that the use of such language has serious consequences as it abets racist backlash, prisoner abuse and even genocide.

There is a plethora of similar research that has found evidence of stereotyping and misrepresentation of Muslims and Islam in the mainstream media. Such research serves as a relevant backdrop to understand the existence of media that are launched, produced and controlled by Muslims themselves.

Studying Muslim Media: Moving Beyond the Victimization Narrative

With the kind of attention that Islam and Muslims have attracted in the mainstream media and consequently academic research, one would assume there are a lot of studies on the media Muslims are producing themselves, especially those aimed at addressing the misrepresentation in the mainstream media. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Writing a paper on the Muslim media in the early 90s, Siddiqi (1991) drew attention to the dearth of any records compiled on the history, role and functions of the Muslim media. The situation appears to have improved very little today.

This is not to say, however, that there are very few media to report about. In fact, there have been many over the years. Echchaibi (2013a) argues that the narrative of the Muslim as a victim of media bias has begun to slowly fragment as Muslims are taking over the role of media production and competing for the “right to author their own stories and gain access to American audiences” (p. 121). He calls this a turning point that questions many of the stereotypes that exist about Islam but also negotiates American Muslim identities and experiences in a hostile political and cultural environment. He argues that Muslims have now begun to understand the importance of media production as an effective mechanism to fight against marginalization in public discourse.

When one looks for studies on the Muslim media, only a few studies come up. Siddiqi (1991) distinguishes between Muslim media and Muslim-world media: “The Muslim world media are on and about Muslims but produced from a secular, socialist or even communist viewpoint while the Muslim media are on and about Muslims in particular and the world in general written from an Islamic perspective” (p. 20).

Siddiqi’s study set out to collect information about Muslim media across the world by sending out questionnaires to some 500 Islamic centers in most Muslim and non-Muslim countries like the UK, USA, Japan and Europe. The response received was poor, making it difficult to collect adequate information on the Muslim media but the researcher was able to collect some information on 15 daily newspapers, 57 bi-weekly papers or news magazines, 200 monthly newsletters, 25 monthly magazines, and 15 bi-monthly or quarterly news and views magazines. The study found a general aim among the various media for a system based on Islam that would “favour a free but responsible flow of information by setting up the right priorities in the right context” (p. 29).

Among the studies that can be found on the Muslim media, there are more studies on the media in Britain than those in the United States or Canada. Ahmed (2005) studied the Muslim press in Britain and found that although a small number of publications had been in existence for a number of years, most publications had a shorter history. She notes that Muslim media grew out of a desire for alternatives to the mainstream media as Muslim communities developed a more distinctly religious identity and these media served as platforms where this identity was expressed and fostered. Of the aims held by the publications surveyed, Ahmed found that some were common among a number of editors and those were “the gap seen in mainstream media in reporting on Muslim issues and the need for a perspective more aware of and sympathetic to Muslims” (p. 111).

Ahmed (2005) also found that editors of the publications were conscious of their limited niche which the paper described as “providing news from different sources, and on topics which mainstream media would not necessarily cover, for a clearly defined audience” (p. 113). The study found that much of the information and analysis in these media presented an alternative discourse to that “circulating in the popular domain” (p. 115). Young Muslims interviewed also voiced how they utilized the Muslim media as an alternative to the mainstream media and as a source of forming their own identity and developing a sense of belonging among others purposes.

Moll (2007) also studied two British Muslim magazines, *Q-news* and *emel*, and how they construct British Muslim identities. Moll found that there were diverse community newspapers and magazines and they showed that there was not one homogeneous British Muslim identity and that these media are “consciously and deliberately “selective” when it comes to what to report and how to report it,” (p. 3). Moll

argues that the Muslim minority media are alternative by Couldry and Curran's (2003) definition of the alternative media of "challenging, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power". She says these media simultaneously deconstruct mainstream discourse "through a construction of their own discursive alternative, in an almost defiant act of 'auto-interpretation' or 'talking back'" (p. 5). The British Muslim magazine *Q-news* was also studied by Bailey et al. (2008) in their case study of alternative media that they claim provide a hybrid between mainstream and alternative media practices in that it used commercial measures to sustain itself but also provided alternative content. An analysis of the magazine found that it constructs an image of Muslims that goes against the stereotypes existing in the mainstream media. The researchers write: "By presenting an alternative Muslim perspective on national and international issues and events, the magazine can potentially become a change agent and a platform for marginalized Muslims to voice their concerns" (p. 92).

Among the hybrid practices Bailey et al. (2008) mention that *Q-news* adopted was the absence of a "horizontal culture of communication between writers and readers" (p. 93). The authors argue that the magazine ended up speaking for the Muslim community and its readers instead of involving them in the conversation and that it included more of a dialogue between Muslim elites, and thus was less participatory but still alternative. By Muslim elites, the authors meant that the writers and readers of the magazine included some intellectuals who were not representative of the entire Muslim population.

Another study examining Muslim media and interviewing Muslim media producers in Britain was the "Muslims in the European mediascape UK country report" (Holohan, Poole, Schlosberg, & Redden, 2011). The authors of this study found that the

Muslim media producers interviewed saw their organizations as serving as a critical resource for mainstream news outlets by critiquing their representations and portrayals. Those interviewed also found the growth of Muslim media to be “a positive development in providing an outlet for under-represented voices in the mainstream, catering for specialist interests and important in identity and community building” (p. 15).

Some Muslim media focus on constructing and fostering a sense of identity for the communities they serve and even in that role provide alternative content that cannot be found in the mainstream, while at the same time giving voice to people who are otherwise marginalized. Lewis (2010) conducted a study of Muslim lifestyle magazines and how they represent fashion and style issues while at the same time balancing the Islamic needs of modesty in the context of Muslim women’s dress. The study included five lifestyle magazines: the British magazine *emel*, the British magazine *Alef*, the North American *Muslim Girl*, the American magazine *Azizah*, and the British magazine *Sisters*. Lewis argues that these magazines provide a forum for the “creation, expression and contestation of Muslim identities” (p. 87). The role of Muslim media in self-expression and identity construction was also highlighted in Hirji’s (2006) study of the Canadian web-based service named *Montreal Muslim News*. She also noted that these media provided an alternative message to that which was reported in the mainstream.

In a chapter that traces the history of the Muslim press in America, Hirji (2012) notes how the story of the Muslim press is a story of “the struggle for justice, identity and the ability to be heard” (p. 565). The paper mentions a number of Muslim media from the first *Moslem World* to the current *The Muslim Link*, *Azizah*, *Illume* and others, noting how many publications aim to address issues of importance to Muslim communities,

project a positive image of Islam, foster a sense of identity and community and provide a voice to American Muslims among other objectives. Mandaville (2003), in his book chapter on communication and diasporic Islam also examines some Muslim media in the form of websites, television programs, CD-ROMs, magazines and online discussion forums that have the capacity to develop “new strains of reformist discourse”, new conversations and new ways of understanding Islam (p. 147).

Recently, Echchaibi (2013a) wrote a chapter looking at two Muslim media websites as well as examining Muslims in the entertainment media in America. The two websites he studies are *AltMuslim*, a blogging site that brings together Muslim opinion pieces on various faith and cultural issues and whose founder wanted it to produce “alternative discourses that resonate with American audiences more effectively” (p. 127), and *Muslimah Media Watch*, another blogging site whose aim is to counteract the simplistic depiction of Muslim women, critique the established narrative about them and present new images. Echchaibi argues that the examples he examines “represent some of the most prominent noninstitutional post 9/11 media productions that seek to interrupt the linear and uncritical understanding of the place and role of Muslims in American society” (p. 126). The researcher found that the editors of *AltMuslim* believed their website did not “simply follow and react to the news agenda set by mainstream coverage of Islam” (p. 127), but that they also included news and reviews about things of importance to the Muslim community and Muslim cultural production that would have received little attention elsewhere. Echchaibi argues that these alternative Muslim media are important to understand how Muslims respond to their marginalization.

Baksh (2010) writing an essay proposing a new strategy for engagement of Muslims in the newsroom discusses how the dominant mode of Muslim engagement with the mass media in the United States, Canada and Western Europe has been the “flak attack”, a term used to describe an outburst of strong criticism directed towards the media in the form of letters to the editor and other feedback whenever there were incorrect or negative portrayals of Muslims. He writes how the realization that flak simply was not proving effective in influencing media coverage of Muslims led the way to a growth in Muslim-owned and controlled print media in the 1980s. However, Baksh notes, even these Muslim media did not prove effective as they were unable to survive. He proposes the strategy of establishing a Muslim equivalent of the Institute for Public Accuracy (IPA) which makes it possible for numerous policy analysts, scholars and independent researchers to have their views included in the mainstream by making them available whenever there is breaking news. Baksh proposes this is an effective strategy to get alternative perspectives into the mainstream and to move beyond the “flak attack”.

While some researches have limited themselves to case studies of particular Muslim media, few have tried to compare coverage in the Muslim media with that in the mainstream media. Amari (2012) conducted a textual and discourse analysis of two news events (the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the 2009 Fort Hood shootings) in the U.S. mainstream media and Muslim produced media. The researcher found that while the Muslim media were contesting the images of a violent Muslim terrorist and tried to undo the association between violence and terrorism with Islam, they were at the same invoking and relying on the mainstream media’s images aiming to conform to Western liberal secular norms in order to “enter mainstream discursive places” (p. 14). Karim

(2000) also studied the representation of the hijacking of an American airliner by a Muslim group in 1985 in two alternative magazines (*The Middle East and Arabia magazines*) as a comparison of *Maclean's* representation of the same event. He found a significant ideological difference in the way the story was presented and framed in the alternative magazines as compared to how it was reported in the mainstream media.

So while a few studies have touched upon the area of Muslim media by focusing on specific media examples or trying to account for the history of these media, the need for detailed research on the Muslim media is strongly felt. Siddiqi (1991), writing two decades ago, drew attention to the need for detailed single-country studies on the Muslim media. Echchaibi (2013b) writes of the importance of studying emerging Muslim media cultures “as significant loci for the construction of contemporary Muslim subjectivities beyond the deterministic binaries of traditional religious and modern secular identities” (p. 193). Similarly, studies of the Muslim media and specifically those comparing the content of the Muslim media with the mainstream media are also very few. This project aims to fill that void by not only adding to research on the Muslim media but also examining how the content of these media differ from the mainstream media, what roles they are playing and what kind of debates and discussions they are fostering.

The Muslim Mediascape in North America: Tracing an Elusive Tradition

Many of the different motives and roles of alternative media forms discussed in Chapter 2 can be found in the numerous examples of Muslim media present in North America today, in diverse forms and varying degrees. The Muslim press in North America was born out of the struggle for justice, identity and the ability to be heard

(Hirji, 2012). Hirji points to how it started out of a desire to promote a positive image of Islam and to fight inequity. Throughout the years, different publications run by Muslims served “as a vehicle for bonding communities, creating identity, offering imprisoned populations redemption and purpose and countering negative portrayals of Islam in the mainstream media” (p. 566). Hirji writes that today, many of these media serve the role of educating the Muslim communities and campaigning for acceptance.

The first form of Muslim media in North America was the first Muslim newspaper the *Moslem World*, which was founded by a white convert to Islam Alexander Russell Webb, who was formerly US consul to the Phillipines. Webb launched this newspaper in 1893 with the hope of projecting positive perceptions of Islam and of building connections between Muslims and the country’s intellectual elite (Hirji, 2012).

In the introductory statement Webb wrote in the first edition of the *Moslem World*, he said the purpose of the paper was to spread “a knowledge of the character and teachings of Muhammad, and to correct those errors into which the masses have fallen, through the false history and misconceptions published by prejudiced and ignorant followers of other systems, who have written about Islam and its inspired founder” (Singleton, 2007, p. 298-299). Singleton writes how the *Moslem World* used the highest printing quality available and for that it was lauded by mainstream newspapers like *The New York Times* and the *Boston Globe*. He describes how the newspaper carried general articles about Islam written by prominent Western or Muslim thinkers of the time; news items from across the Islamic world which were usually reprinted, but also included some stories from foreign correspondents; reprints from American newspapers about the

Muslim mission that they dubbed the “American Islamic Propaganda” (p 300); works of general religious poetry; and correspondence from Americans studying Islam.

The *Moslem World* was able to attract some advertising, despite concerns that businesses might have had associating with Webb and the *Moslem World*. The newspaper soon ran into funding problems and ceased publication within a few months of its founding and was later succeeded by *The Voice of Islam* and *The Moslem World and Voice of Islam*, which although also short lived, provided an outlet for Islamic expression in America (Singleton, 2007).

Echchaibi (2013a) identifies the *Moslem Sunrise* as the longest running Muslim publication in the United States. The *Moslem Sunrise* was started in 1921 by Mohammad Sadiq, a prominent scholar and missionary of the Ahmadiyya religious movement of Islam who came to America from India in the 1920s. A look at the magazine’s website reveals that the quarterly magazine that is still published today as the *Muslim Sunrise*, started off by publishing missionary articles about concepts of Islam and religious practices, about Ahmadiyya missionary work, and news from across the world about the Ahmadiyya community as well as general news items, some of which were reprints and others written by their own staff. Today, the magazine contains theological articles on concepts of Islam and Ahmadiyya beliefs, commentaries and articles aiming to defend Islam and Muslims against misrepresentation, discussions on issues facing the Muslim and Ahmadiyya community specifically in the world today and news and commentary on happenings from across the world.

Among other prominent Muslim media initiatives in the history of the United States was the newspaper the *Final Call to Islam*, which was started by the Nation of Islam in the 1930s, a new religious movement that began in the United States catering to mostly African American Muslims. The *Final Call to Islam* in the 1960s evolved into *Muhammad Speaks* (Hirji, 2012). *Muhammad Speaks* was started in 1961 by Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad and it carried articles about Islam in the world and about the African American Muslim experience (Turner as cited in Echchaibi, 2013a). Elijah Muhammad also started *Salaam* which was a magazine modelling on the popular African American publication *Jet* (Hirji, 2012).

Another magazine, is *Crescent International* which was founded in 1972 and based in Markham, Ontario and is simultaneously published in South Africa, London and Pakistan, claiming a circulation of 30,000 (Nimer, 2002). Although the magazine does have a website, it does not appear to be fully functioning and regularly updated. Nimer (2002) describes this magazine by noting that this newspaper is not grounded in today's reality and usually puts the Muslim masses and opposition movements against Muslim-world governments and their Western government allies.

As difficult as it is to trace the history of the Muslim press, the history and current status of other forms of Muslim media like television channels and radio stations is even more difficult to find since there seem to be very few, if any, records maintained on the channels and radio stations aired in different regions or cities of North America.

While discussing Middle Eastern diaspora television in Los Angeles, Naficy (2003) mentions a program on Islam that has been in existence since 1985. It is broadcast

on an independent station aired by cable carries which allow television producers to lease time from the station to air their programs. Naficy points out that the program called *Islam* is produced by the Islamic Information Service in Southern California and that it features lessons and testimonials about various tenets of Islam, as well as interviews and discussions with religious scholars and historians about various theological, jurisprudential and political questions. Naficy says the program appears to have three main aims: “to counteract the negative stereotype of Islam and of Muslims in the USA, to help non-Muslims learn more about Islam, and to help Muslim children in the USA feel better about their faith” (p. 58). Naficy mentions how the program is financially supported by contributions the producer collects from the community and sales of tapes of past programs.

Although the first Muslim newspaper and some of its successors had a short life, it set the beginning for what was to be a varied tradition of Muslim media in America and Canada. Today, the Muslim media in these countries include community newsletters, newspapers, magazines, online forums, websites, blogs, television programs, radio programs, podcasts and films. Some of these media are focused solely on theology and identity construction for their diverse audiences, while others include a focus on lifestyle, women, fashion, politics and current affairs.

The Muslim media like other ethnic, religious and community media have had their history of struggles with sustainability and continuation. Many media have come and gone over the years – some have begun with much enthusiasm and have contributed to significant engagement, representation and debate within their communities, but have slowly or suddenly, disappeared due to a lack of finances or dedicated staff. According to

Minhaj Hasan, the editor of *TML*, the history of the Muslim media in North America is very spotty primarily because in summary it has been a history of “start and stop” with many media initiatives starting up and dying in a few months or years (M. Hasan, personal communication December 16, 2013). The fact that many forms of Muslim media have been short-lived, coupled with the lack of proper documentation about all the media that have appeared, makes tracing the history of the Muslim media in North America quite a challenge.

It is difficult to determine when the history of the Muslim media began in Canada, but the histories have been intertwined between the United States and Canada because of the similarities in the issues facing the Muslim communities in both of these regions. According to Chelby Daigle, the editor of *ML*, there is not much of a history of Muslim media in Canada because there have just been “drips and drops” of things and very few initiatives have been consistent (C. Daigle, personal communication, December 21, 2013). Today, many American Muslim media are accessed by Canadians and vice versa because of similar issues and experiences facing the Muslim communities across these borders.

Muslim organizations in the United States and Canada have had a role to play in various media start-ups. Organizations like the Muslim Students Union (MSU), the Muslim American Society (MAS), the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), and many other professional and educational organizations have published their own newspapers, newsletters, magazines and other periodicals (Echchaibi, 2013). Some also maintain their own websites, podcasts, blogs, television and radio programs or even YouTube channels. According to Muneeb Nasir,

the editor of Iqra.ca, one of the early Muslim media in Canada was the magazine *Islam Canada* which was published by an organization called the Canadian Council of Muslim Communities in the 1960s but does not exist today (M. Nasir, personal communication, May 8, 2014).

Another such publication is the *Islamic Horizons*, a magazine published by the Islamic Society of North America that is considered the most widely read Muslim magazine in America (Echchaibi, 2013a). The *Islamic Horizons* started in 1963 as a newsletter under the Muslim Students Association (MSA) and later turned into an important Muslim publication. The magazine has had its periods of ups and downs and also those of going out of publication, but it has been relatively stable since 1995 according to its current editor (O.B., Abdullah, personal communication, February 25, 2013). The magazine includes comment and debate about important issues facing Muslim communities in the United States and Canada (as ISNA has its Canadian wing as well), and carries news about the North American Muslim community. It covers topics from politics, social issues and international affairs to family life, education, culture, book and film reviews. A study of its content from the early 1980s and 1990s showed that it encouraged political engagement and encouraged readers to think of themselves as full-fledged Americans, and to invest on both a personal and political level in their adopted country (Nadia Malinovich as cited in GhaneaBassiri, 2010).

Another similar publication linked to a regional Muslim organization Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), is the *Message International* which has been publishing since 1989, with the aim of creating a successful publication that represents “all North American Muslims” (Hirji, 2012, p. 571). The magazine’s website, however, is not

regularly updated. According to Waqas Syed, the ICNA Deputy Secretary General for IT, the *Message International* goes out to about 30,000 subscribers and is one of the oldest American Muslim journals that has been publishing consistently since it started (personal communication, May 8, 2014). The magazine started out with the aim of providing Muslims with the “right perspective of world events – the Islamic perspective on events” (W. Syed, personal communication, May 8, 2014). It has articles on topics like education, family issues, marriage etc and also has a section on ICNA news and events happening in different Muslim communities in the United States. According to Syed, the magazine is financed by advertising and is supported by the parent organization and involves a lot of volunteer work by the team.

The Minaret was another popular publication that left its mark on the Muslim media landscape of the United States. It was started by the Southern California Islamic Center in 1978, the same year the center opened, as a one-page newsletter for center members and quickly expanded to four pages (Campo, 1996). An analysis of its content by Campo revealed that it started off by printing excerpts of talks at the mosque – for example on the challenges facing Muslims in the West, listings of recent marriages, deaths and conversions in the community, and reports on events at the center. In 1984, *The Minaret* adopted a longer, magazine style format, and in 1989, the editorial board decided to make it a subscription based magazine with a national readership, instead of the earlier strictly Southern Californian focus (Campo, 1996).

The Minaret followed a newsmagazine format with cover stories, feature articles, black and white photos and artwork (Campo, 1996). Campo also points out that there were sections for editorials, letters to the editor, national and world news, women and

society, business and finance, book reviews, personal reflections, political cartoons, human rights, Muslim communities in the United States, youth, education and the media. The magazine also relied on advertising for its funding (Campo, 1996). *The Minaret* too ran into problems and stopped publishing in the 2000s.

Islamica Magazine was another magazine that in its short life left a mark on the North American Muslim mediascape. It was produced in Amman, Jordan, but had offices in and drew its writers from countries like the United States and United Kingdom (Camacho, 2005). According to its website, it was started in 1992, but ceased publication in 2009. During the course of its publication, it won awards like the DeRose-Hinkhouse Memorial Awards⁶ of Excellence for overall periodical and three Best of Class Awards honored by the Religion Communicators Council and was also nominated as best magazine for spiritual coverage by the UTNE Independent Press Awards. It covered issues of importance to Muslim communities like the war on terror, media representations of Muslims, the situation in Gaza, and democracy and the Muslim world. The website, which still has the archive of past issues, states that those involved in the operation and publication of the magazine saw it as “trust of the community, a sincere effort to present ideas, debates and issues in a manner reflective of the rigorous and wide-ranging discussions actually taking place amongst Muslims and the wider community” (“What’s next”, n.d.). At its height, the magazine had tens of thousands of readers globally with a growing readership. However, the magazine suddenly ceased publication and among other things there were disputes over its ownership (“TIM The Magazine”, n.d.). Another magazine *The Islamic Monthly* started soon after it in 2011, aspiring to follow the

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⁶ The DeRose-Hinkhouse Memorial Awards are given annually to active members of the Religion Communicators Council (RCC) for excellence in religious communications and public relations.

footsteps of *Islamica Magazine*. The magazine's website states that it was launched following the legacy of its successful predecessor *Islamica Magazine* "in an effort to create a forum for the free exchange of ideas, perspectives and opinions." The website describes the magazine as "an independent, nonreligious, U.S. based publication that fosters discussion on a broad range of issues and concerns related to Muslims in the modern world" ("TIM The Magazine", n.d.). The description on the website also states that the magazine focuses on long-form journalism and "provides useful insight from Muslim communities on important policies, politics and social issues in America and around the world". It is run by the Global Engagement Group which is an independent nonprofit based in Boston, Massachusetts. The vision outlined on the website states:

The Islamic Monthly, does not seek to be the sole voice of Islam or the Muslim community. Rather, the magazine is part of an ongoing experiment of a free Muslim press eager to build on the rich tradition of public discourse found in Islamic and Western history.

According to the magazine's website, it is currently being published as a bi-annual print publication and aims to be a quarterly print publication with a monthly online edition ("TIM The Magazine", n.d.). The magazine thus aims to be a hybrid print and online media with audio and video content. Taking its lesson from the problems *Islamica Magazine* ran into, *The Islamic Monthly* states that it will do whatever it can to maintain its independent media source status and that it will never take money from "a government nor from any individual or organization looking to advance their own agenda" ("TIM The Magazine", n.d.) and that it intends to maintain transparency of where the funding comes from. The website features high quality content on wide-

ranging topics like honor killings in America, immigrant entrepreneurs, racism in America, Muslims in Hollywood not playing terrorists, celebrity scholars, and Muslim diplomats in Washington etc. In 2013, the magazine also won the New Media Awards Web Award for Best in Industry.

Another Muslim media platform still in existence today that prides itself for its award-winning quality is *Illume* magazine, which started out as a magazine in 2006, but later turned itself into an internet publication with multi-media content due to the financial problems it faced in print (O.B., Abdullah, February 25, 2013). *Illume* uses the latest technology and social media to publish news and information about American Muslims touching on issues ranging from politics and pop culture and lifestyle to issues of assimilation. It uses podcast, cross-postings from other websites and videos which according to its website aim to “share the American Muslim perspective on everyday life” and “tell stories the mainstream media do not have the ability to” (“About us 2”, n.d.). The website also states that the magazine tries to incorporate investigative journalism, expert analysis and in-depth coverage of critical issues, and accesses experts who can comment on the news, life and culture of American Muslims.

Q-News, mentioned earlier, was another high quality magazine that was published out of Britain but later expanded into the North American market in 2002 targeting young diaspora Muslims in the West (Ahmed, 2005). The magazine which launched in 1992 and was published up till 2007 garnered a lot of mainstream attention as an independent Muslim current affairs magazine that became a hub of ideas and engagement for the Muslim community it catered to. Some writers of the magazine were also drawn from the North American Muslim community. The magazine tackled subjects like domestic

violence, HIV/AIDS, mental health, inner city decline and religious extremism (Fuad Nahdi, n.d.) and was able to fuel important debates in the Muslim community as well as foster engagement (Bailey et al., 2008).

The Muslim Observer is another America-based newspaper that began in 1999 as a monthly newspaper aiming to provide an alternative to the corporate media on issues relating to Muslims and Islam. It also established the Muslim Media Network (MMN) which its website said would offer a wide range of media channels throughout the U.S., including such services as internet broadcast, radio broadcast, television broadcast, print publications, and research and alternative news services. However, *The Muslim Observer* turned itself into an online publication and many of its articles today include cross-postings from other websites and even mainstream news agencies like Reuters etc.

Another popular high quality Muslim magazine is *Al-Jum'ah* magazine which began in 1991 and today, is said to have a circulation of approximately 100,000 readers (Hirji, 2012). The magazine identifies itself as a Muslim lifestyle magazine addressing “the religious concerns of Muslim families across the world” (“About 1”, n.d.). There are sections on Islamic *fatwas* (legal opinions issued by Muslim scholars), character, youth, science and faith, nutrition and spirituality, family life, theology, and women. Other similar magazines like these include the Muslim women’s magazine *Azizah*, which focuses on the challenges Muslim women face as minorities in American society (Hirji, 2012).

Other forms of Muslim media include activist websites like the platforms of the Canadian Islamic Congress and the Council on American-Islamic Relations-Canada now

called the National Council of Canadian Muslims. These organizations have media sections that respond to misrepresentation in the media about Muslims and in many instances have provided an alternative discourse from the mainstream (Karim, 2012). There are also different types of organizations and media initiatives that reflect the diversity of the community showing that not only is there no monolithic community but that opinions, views and struggles are also different within the Muslim community. An example is the now-defunct *Muslim WakeUp!* website which was in existence from 2003 to 2009 and was edited by supporters in the United States and Canada. The website highlighted tensions “between Muslims who consider themselves to be traditional and those who classify themselves as progressive” and advocated for a more prominent role for women in addition to reaching out to marginalized groups like homosexuals (Hirji, 2012, p. 570).

AltMuslim, mentioned earlier, is another online platform that was developed after the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States, as a blogging site aiming to provide “an introspective voice to help Muslims critically address various faith and cultural issues and as a window to introduce non-Muslims to a new generation of well-trained Muslim commentators who do not fear or despise the media” (Echchaibi, 2013b, p. 193). Echchaibi’s case study of *AltMuslim* found that its articles, opinions, media reviews, podcasts and video commentaries seek to project an alternative view of Muslims as intellectuals, politicians and artists.

Another online outlet which was revived after the events of September 11, 2001 is *The American Muslim*. The journal which started as a quarterly in 1989 and ceased publication in 1995 was brought back as an online publication under its editor Sheila

Musaji. Musaji says she revived it because she was concerned with the lack of a moderate Muslim voice in the public sphere (Hirji, 2012).

While many of the forms of the media discussed above are media aimed for national or regional audiences, another form Muslim media take are local publications that cater to specific cities and localities and that community's news and information needs. An example of this is *The Muslim Link*, a newspaper that caters to Muslim communities of the greater Washington area. *TML*, which is part of the case study in this thesis, has been publishing since 1998 and aims to provide original content of interest and relevance to Muslim communities in that region. It started out as a high school project but expanded into a full-fledged community project.

Muslim student magazines are also another form of Muslim media directed to specific communities and they have been in existence for a long time. The first Muslim student newsmagazine in the United States was *Al-Talib (The Student)* which was launched by UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) students in 1990. According to its website, the magazine printed 40,000 issues four times a year which were distributed in 40 states of the U.S. at the height of its publication. The magazine has now moved towards online-based publishing. The mission outlined on its website says:

Al-Talib provides an independent perspective on issues important to Muslim communities. Targeting a college-age audience, we seek to create an outlet for activism on and off campus, a platform for representation of all facets of the Muslim-American communities and a safe space for sensitive topics.. ("About Us 1", n.d.)

Another local publication was *Southern California In Focus*, which was run under the Council of American and Islamic Relations (CAIR) but remained independent of it editorially. It began publishing as a tabloid of about 20 pages in February 2005 and included news, obituaries, short profiles of Muslim artists and investment advice for Muslims. The magazine also aimed to focus on issues of importance to Muslims including civil rights and discrimination which the editor Asma Ahmad said were largely ignored by the mainstream media in the post 9/11 world (Reza, 2005).

Muslim Link, also part of the case study in this thesis, is another similar community newspaper based in Ottawa and serving the Ottawa-Gatineau Muslim communities. This paper was launched in 2002 and aims to provide a forum for people of all ages to write about issues concerning Islam and Muslims. Another similar local publication is the *London Link* in London, Ontario that also deals with current happenings in the communities in that city and lifestyle issues.

Iqra.ca is another local online magazine based in Toronto, Ontario with a Muslim focus on current events and contemporary issues. It started in 2004 more as a blog but slowly evolved into a news magazine carrying not so much news but perspectives on current events (M. Nasir, personal communication, May 8, 2014). Nasir says the predecessor to this online news magazine was a print publication called *Imprint* which was launched about a week or so after the September 11 attacks in New York out of the need to have a Muslim medium in the community that would represent the issues and interests of the Muslim community. Although the paper was not launched with the aim of responding to the 9/11 coverage, it coincided with them and garnered a lot of attention even in the mainstream media which turned to it to monitor Muslim reactions and

conversations after the attacks. The launch of the paper was also covered in the *Globe and Mail* and the *CBC* (M. Nasir, personal communication, May 8, 2014).

According to Nasir, *Imprint* which depended on advertisements and sponsorship from Muslims soon ran into financial problems and ceased publication in 2004 and the website was born from there. The paper had a circulation of about 20,000 copies and was placed in public places in various areas of the Greater Toronto Area. After the paper ceased publication, *Iqra.ca* came up in its place which aims to give a window into the Muslim community in Canada and present perspectives on various issues (M. Nasir, personal communication, May 8, 2014).

Another long running print publication in the Toronto area of Canada has been the magazine called *The Ambition* which calls itself “the first journal of young Muslims in Canada”. The publication was founded as a children’s magazine in 1987, but has since evolved into a “respected and leading news source for Canadian Muslims” (Kutty, 2001). The magazine does not have an online presence.

In addition to community-focused Muslim media, there are also a number of lifestyle media that focus on specialty interests. For example, there are magazines that aimed specifically at Muslim women. An example is *Azizah*, mentioned previously, which was founded by two Muslim women in 2002 and covers a topics like politics and financial planning and gender specific issues like finding religious identity as a Muslim woman and interviews of inspirational female figures (Hirji, 2012). *Muslimette Magazine* is another publication focusing on the female market. Founded in 2009, the magazine covers issues of fashion, relationships and beauty (Hirji, 2012).

Another unique magazine is *Muslim Quarterly* or *MQ* which focuses on Muslim men. Based in Chicago, the magazine covers issues specifically for Muslim men like sexual appetite, budget spending on the other half and easy cooking for the laid back bachelor (Zaufishan, 2011). The editor, Omar Haq, wished to assist men in managing everyday issues in accordance with the teachings of the Quran and the example of the Prophet Muhammad and provide an alternative voice different from the mainstream media's tendency to portray Muslim men as terrorists and violent oppressors (Hirji, 2012).

There are also a number of websites and blogs that focus on religious, theological, spiritual and lifestyle issues for Muslims living in the West. One such website is Muslimmatters.org which is a blogging website that was launched in 2007 as a collaboration between bloggers and Islamic scholars to cover a number of issues of importance to Muslims living in the West. The website has covered issues like sex education, marriage, politics, civil rights, prayer, fasting, and family etc and has been able to foster significant debate in the community. Content on the website takes the form of articles, comments, video and online seminars ("About 2", n.d.) . Another such website is Suhaibwebb.com which brings together articles on religious and lifestyle issues that are of importance to Muslims in the West. According to its mission statement, it is dedicated to enhancing the spiritual and religious development of Muslims and seeks to "bridge orthodox and contemporary Islamic knowledge, bringing to light issues of cultural, social and political relevance to Muslims in the West" ("About us", n.d.).

Although very little has been documented about the electronic Muslim media in the form of television and radio programs, there is some information about a few

channels like *Islam channel* which is broadcast from the United Kingdom but is available in North America as well and focuses on current affairs, entertainment, community activities, women's issues and Islamic education. *Guide US TV* is another faith-based channel that was launched in 1998. The channel which is based in the U.S. digitally streams videos across various countries including Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Turkey, Africa, the Gulf, the Netherlands, the U.K., Canada and the U.S. Programming on this channel is mostly theology based about Islam and religious issues (Estes, n.d.). Another recently launched initiative is the *Muslim News Magazine TV* that according to its website seeks to provide positive-images of Muslim-American culture through movies, documentaries, short films, news, sports, comedy and inspirational programs. The network is currently internet-based and aims to bank on Smart TVs that use streaming sources like Netflix, YouTube and Hulu.

Islamic Broadcasting Network is another broadcasting organization which launched the first American Islamic radio network called IBN radio on January 1, 2001 broadcasting from Washington DC. According to its website, the network also produces video content that “demonstrates commitment to Islam while upholding core American values which are inherently Islamic” (“About IBN”, n.d.). The mission outlined on the website mentions among other things that the aims of the network are “to create a strong voice in the media for American Muslims”, “to provide a healthy alternative to the negative media directed towards American Muslims”, “to build bridges among different communities both within the American Muslim community and the American public” and “to help promote a new popular culture in American that is rooted in goodness and

positivity” (“About IBN”, n.d.). There are also programs on Islam that are aired on Vision TV Canada that airs multifaith and multicultural programs.

There are a number of similar media initiatives by Muslims some of which have ceased their existence, and others which still run today. Many new initiatives are making use of the new media and technology. The new generation of Muslim editors and writers are also more media savvy and aware of what is happening around them. They have seen the consequences of allowing others to tell their stories and therefore are now seeking out a platform for themselves (Hirji, 2012).

As these Muslim media examples show, most initiatives began out of a desire to correctly represent Muslim communities in a positive light and to provide an alternative to mainstream coverage. While it may be debated whether all forms of Muslim community media can be categorized as alternative media, there is no question that some of these media are actively engaged in challenging mainstream representations of their community and identity, as well as in a struggle to participate in the democratic societies of which they form a part. In this role, these media can be seen as providing a viable alternative to mainstream media in content and practices.

Chapter 4

Methodology

In order to study the two Muslim community newspapers, *The Muslim Link* (TML) of the Washington DC Baltimore Metropolitan areas of the United States and *Muslim Link* (ML) of Ottawa, Canada, and explore how their content differs from the mainstream media of that region, I used a mixed method approach which comprised a combination of content analysis, discourse and text analysis and interviews. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were carried out for both Muslim newspapers separately in comparison with the mainstream newspaper of the region. *TML* was compared with the *Washington Post* and *ML* was compared with the *Ottawa Citizen*. And informational interviews were carried out to understand the goals and functioning of the two Muslim newspapers. The mainstream newspapers were not interviewed because the aim of the research was to study the Muslim media, and the content of the mainstream media was only used to compare and analyze the differences in the content and journalism between the community newspapers and the mainstream media, and in order to understand how and whether or not these Muslim newspapers serve as an alternative to the mainstream. This project received clearance from the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. The clearance form is attached in the Appendices.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study were informed by the literature reviews in Chapters 2 and 3. These are the questions addressed:

Q1. How, and in what ways, does the journalism of these Muslim media differ from the journalism of the mainstream media?

Q2. Do these media provide the counter-narrative or alternative discourse?

Q3. Who owns these media? What are the owner's interests in having the publication and what aims and goals do they have?

Q4. What kind of stories do they cover?

Quantitative Analysis Sampling

The quantitative content analysis compared eight editions of the Muslim newspaper with the mainstream newspaper of the region. Both Muslim newspapers are monthly newspapers. The eight editions were selected randomly from within the year September 2012 to September 2013. September 2013 was retained because *TML* missed its August 2013 issue. The reason for selecting September 2012 to September 2013 as the sampling universe was because prior to September 2012, *TML* had been publishing on a bi-weekly basis and it became a monthly newspaper following September 2012. Selecting a recent time period in which it has been publishing as a monthly newspaper allows for standardization in terms of frequency for both newspapers that are analyzed in this study.

The randomly selected eight issues from within those 13 editions were the editions of September, October, November and December 2012 and January, February, May and June 2013. Each article in the sampled eight editions of the newspaper was scanned, and the mainstream newspaper was searched for corresponding coverage on the same topic/issue using a database. The Lexis-Nexis database was used to search the *Washington Post* and the Factiva database was used to search the *Ottawa Citizen*. Since the Muslim newspaper is a monthly and the mainstream newspaper is a daily newspaper, coverage in the mainstream was monitored for the month preceding the date of

publication of the Muslim newspaper. For example, the October 2012 issue of *TML* came out on October 19, 2012 and the issue before that was published on September 21, 2012. So, the October 2012 issue of *TML* was compared with the *Washington Post* editions between this period that is, September 21 to October 19, 2012. *ML* does not have a date of publication printed on it, but is published at the beginning of the month according to its editor, Chelby Daigle (C. Daigle, personal communication, December 21, 2013) . Some articles though were of events that happened in the middle of the month of publication and therefore in order to include all potential articles and to take account of the timing of the event, I searched the *Ottawa Citizen* on the Factiva database for a month and a half. For example, for the September 2012 issue, I searched the *Ottawa Citizen* from August 1, 2012 to September 15, 2012. In the case, where the date of the event was apparent, I would search around those dates.

The comparative analysis did not take into account articles printed in the Islam and lifestyle section of *TML* and the Heart & Soul section, the Muslim parenting section and the food and restaurant reviews sections of the *ML*. In order to search the database, I would plug in relevant search terms for the relevant time periods. For example, if the event was the Boston Marathon bombing, I would search for “Boston marathon” in the database for the month preceding the Muslim newspaper’s date of publication and scan the articles that show up to determine relevance of whether they are referring to the same event. The quantitative analysis only lists the topics/issues covered in each of the eight editions of the newspapers and compares whether or not that topic/issue is covered in the mainstream paper for that month. A final count of how many issues/topics covered in the

Muslim media were covered in the mainstream newspaper is given. The articles, listing and coding are presented in Tables 1 and 2 in the appendix.

Qualitative Analysis Sampling

The qualitative analysis goes deeper into the differences in the coverage of certain issues or topics by the Muslim media by conducting a discourse and text analysis of the articles in the Muslim media and comparable articles in the mainstream. The qualitative analysis is conducted on a smaller sample of articles from the original larger sample of eight editions of each Muslim newspaper. This is done by drawing a random sample of 15 articles from each Muslim newspaper from the list of articles that had corresponding coverage in the mainstream newspaper (this is the list made in the quantitative analysis from the eight editions of both newspapers – Table 1 and 2). In case the article in the Muslim newspaper is an editorial or a column or op-ed, editorials, columns and op-eds in the mainstream newspaper on the same topic are considered for analysis. If the article in the Muslim newspaper is a news report, it is compared with news reports in the mainstream. However, if the article in the Muslim newspaper is an op-ed and there is no op-ed on the topic in the mainstream, it will be compared to what is available even if it is a news report.

In order to maintain a manageable sample of articles for analysis, a limit is placed on the number of articles used for analysis from the mainstream newspaper. Since the mainstream newspapers have daily editions, it is inevitable that they will have a large amount of articles on major news events like for instance, the Boston Marathon bombing. Therefore, to avoid having a huge number of articles from the mainstream media for

comparative analysis, only one article was selected from the mainstream newspaper for each alternative media article. Purposive sampling was used to draw out the article from all the relevant articles that turn up after searching for the topic in the Factiva or Lexis-Nexis database.

The criteria used for selection was to pick the article that had the greatest relevance to the Muslim newspaper article and the article with the longest length in order to allow for richer analysis. These were the markers of relevance I used: time (since the mainstream newspaper is published every day and the Muslim newspaper is published only once a month, the Muslim newspaper usually focuses on one time period of an event, for example sometimes the Muslim newspaper takes into account all that happened after the event and in that case the article picked from the mainstream newspaper is the one from the later coverage, for instance in the case of the Boston Marathon bombing), and angle of the issue (for example, in the case of a story on an immigration bill, *TML* focused on the debate in the senate and how immigrant families were concerned, while articles in the *Washington Post* focused on the debate as well as other issues about the bill that were not covered in *TML*. In that case, I picked the article about the debate that at least mentioned the issue of immigration). This method is only used if the number of comparable articles showing up in the mainstream is more than one.

The total number of articles from the Muslim media in the qualitative analysis equal 30 (15 articles from *ML* and 15 articles from *TML*) and the number of comparable articles in the mainstream used in the analysis are also 30 (15 from the *Ottawa Citizen* and 15 from the *Washington Post*). The articles from the Muslim media and those from

the mainstream are listed in tables in the appendix and numbered references are used to refer to them in the qualitative analysis.

It is worth mentioning here that although an attempt is made to distinguish between news reports, editorials and opinion pieces based on the newspaper's own categorization, the Muslim media in this study, and the alternative media generally, have a strong tendency to editorialize news reports and that is something over which the researcher does not have control. Consequently, some mainstream newspaper hard news stories may end up being compared to news stories that the Muslim newspaper categorize as news but that do contain some interpretation and opinion.

A few issues that came up in the comparative qualitative analysis of *TML* and the *Washington Post* merit mention here. *TML* also reprints articles from the mainstream media in its editions. An article is occasionally reprinted as it is from the *Washington Post*, and others are reprinted from other mainstream sources including wire agencies and newspapers. Many of those articles that were reprinted from the mainstream media showed up in the quantitative analysis of *TML* articles that did have coverage in the *Washington Post*. Since the articles that were reprinted from the *Washington Post* would not allow anything for comparative analysis, I excluded those when drawing the sample for the qualitative analysis. There were two such articles: Table 1, number 94 and Table 1, number 110. Similarly, there were six other articles that were reprinted from other mainstream sources like the Associated Press, *New York Times*, *Al-Jazeera* etc which were also excluded from the pool of articles used to draw the random sample. These were excluded because they would not allow for much comparative analysis of alternative content and practices used by the Muslim newspaper.

Another issue was that *TML* had a number of stories on the U.S. presidential elections and that would have been compared to the same pool of general election stories in the *Washington Post*. So, in order to avoid too many election stories being repeated in the sample for qualitative analysis, I used the stratified random sampling technique to isolate the seven general election stories that were in the 28 stories that had corresponding coverage in the *Washington Post* and picked two stories randomly from those seven to be a part of the sample for qualitative analysis. The election stories that were separated were general election stories and did not include election coverage that focused on a specific event of the elections like the Democratic National convention. After excluding the articles reprinted from the mainstream media and isolating and picking two election stories the number of articles left summed up to 15 articles and that was the number I had set out to study for the qualitative analysis from *TML*.

Discourse and Text Analysis

The qualitative analysis draws from the works of scholars who have conducted similar analyses. I draw from the methodology used by Harcup (2003) in his comparative analysis of how a major news story was covered by the mainstream *Yorkshire Evening Post* and the alternative *Leeds Other Paper*. Harcup's methodology is informed by Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts' study (as cited in Harcup, 2003) of the "moral panic" around mugging in the 1970s. In addition to this, I use discourse analysis techniques from the works of van Dijk (1985) and Carvalho's (2010) model of discourse analysis of media texts. Both these methods are compatible with each other and therefore are employed in the analysis. Although I draw from Harcup and Van Dijk's methodologies, I only use parts of the methodologies relevant to my study to conduct the

analysis that would help answer my research questions. I do not aim to conduct an in-depth discourse analysis using all of the techniques from these scholars' works.

Harcup (2003) outlines the methodology used by Hall et al. in their analysis which involved comparing the ways in which the newspapers framed the story, examining the elements chosen as primary news angles in headlines, examining which "primary definers"/sources were used to place the case in context, exploring how a story was thematized around particular concerns, examining the explanatory paradigms expressed in editorials and examining the language and typifying labels used in feature material.

Van Dijk (1985) emphasizes that relations between "text" and "context" are crucial to the study of media. In order to analyse media discourse, van Dijk's method draws attention to all levels and dimensions of analysis "from 'surface' properties of presentation, lay-out, graphical display in printed discourse, or intonation, paraverbal and nonverbal features in spoken media discourse," and "an analysis of syntactic structures, lexical style or rhetorical devices, to the 'underlying' meanings, connotations or associations, or the pragmatics of speech acts performed." (p. 5)

Carvalho (2010) builds on the approach of discourse analysis and proposes reinforced attention to the role of actors in media discourse. He identifies a set of dimensions of the text that matter the most in the construction of its overall meaning and that should be analysed. These include surface descriptors and structural organization; objects which Carvalho equates with topics or themes; actors; language and rhetoric; discursive strategies and processes, including the framing of reality by an actor,

positioning, legitimation etc; and ideological standpoints. He also includes contextual analysis as part of his model.

The categories for evaluation for the qualitative analysis in this study were constructed from theory and similar studies like that of Harcup (2003) and examples of alternative content depicted within the text. These criteria are based on Atkinson's (2010) method of constructing themes in his analysis of the alternative media texts.

Informing my methodology from the work of the scholars mentioned above but not following them precisely, I constructed a list of aspects to consider in the comparative analysis of the articles. These aspects include a comparison of the way the newspapers framed the story and how themes were used to centre it around particular concerns; the headlines and elements chosen as primary news angles within them; the actors used in the story, both as sources and those at the receiving end of an event, speech etc; the quotations used from the sources or those interviewed; which "primary definers"/sources were used to place the case in context; issues of positioning and legitimation; the use of language and rhetoric in the story; whether it was critical of the mainstream media in any way; and the overall tone of the article. Although I considered all these aspects for each pair of articles, I have presented the qualitative analysis by dividing it into the major themes and understandings that emerged from the analysis in terms of how the Muslim media coverage differed from the mainstream.

Interviews

A part of this study also includes interviews with the editors and teams of the Muslim newspapers. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions.

The basic questionnaire used is included in Appendix II. The interviews were conducted over the phone and Skype. Both interviews were recorded and transcribed and were presented in the findings chapters (Chapters 6 and 7) and were used to build a profile and answer questions about the Muslim newspapers included in the study. The teams of the newspapers were approached with an invitation to participate in the study. Upon agreement to participate, the newspaper was given the liberty to decide who they wanted to make available for the in-depth interview about the history, goals and practices of the newspaper. In the case of the interview with *TML* the editor of the newspaper Minhaj Hasan was interviewed over a Skype call. In the case of the interview with *ML*, the editor-in-chief Chelby Daigle and the editorial advisor and former editor Amira Elghawaby were interviewed on a group Skype call for a part of the interview and the rest of the interview was completed with Chelby Daigle over the phone.

A few interviews were also used to collect additional information about the background and current situation of the Muslim media in North America. The selection of candidates for this interview was purposive and also used the snowballing technique to get in touch with relevant people. These interviews were flexible in terms of the number of people to be interviewed, the questions asked and the time spent on them. The intention in conducting these interviews was only to obtain additional information about the Muslim media scenario in North America to supplement the information already available from secondary sources. Interviews were used for this because there is limited information documented about the Muslim media in North America.

Chapter 5

Linking and Serving Communities in America's Capital: Comparative Analysis of *The Muslim Link* and *Washington Post*

This chapter will focus on the case of the Muslim newspaper *The Muslim Link* (TML) that serves as an example of a medium with many of the goals, aims and practices of alternative media forms discussed in Chapter 2. It will draw on an in-depth interview with the editor of *TML*, the newspaper's website as well as an analysis of the content of the paper to make these observations. The quantitative and qualitative analysis will compare coverage in this newspaper with the mainstream newspaper of the region the *Washington Post* to measure how the content and journalism of this paper differs from the content and journalism in the mainstream.

Ownership, Goals, Readership and Functioning

TML is a monthly print and online community newspaper that focuses on, and is distributed throughout, the greater Washington DC, Virginia and Baltimore metropolitan areas of the United States. It was founded in December 1998 by a group of high school girls at the Al-Huda School, an Islamic school in College Park, Maryland, who started it as a school project. When they graduated, the project was taken on by other management teams of the governing Islamic center, Dar-us-Salaam, that runs the school. After an initial period of instability and management changes, the newspaper was able to stabilize itself under its current editor Minhaj Hasan who came on board in the year 2000.

Although it published as a bi-weekly newspaper at first, the paper later became a monthly newspaper since September 2012. It started off as a black and white paper covering 16

pages, according to Hasan, but has now grown to a fully colored tabloid-sized publication with sometimes over 50 and sometimes close to 80 pages (a number of them devoted to advertisements and a classified section). The newspaper carries news about the Muslim communities in DC, Virginia and Maryland, as well as news of interest and relevance to these communities, some reprints and columns on world issues of interest to their audience, and some articles relating to Islamic principles and practices and lifestyle issues.

Hasan says the fact that the newspaper is owned by a non-profit organization and Islamic center, Dar-us-Salaam, has allowed it to survive over the past 16 years. Although the paper went through periods of instability, there was always someone to bring it back up because it was being run by a larger parent organization that has a team of volunteers as well as funding to cover the cost of its projects (M. Hasan, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

The newspaper was established with the aim of linking and creating unity among the different Muslim communities in the region. According to Hasan, despite being owned by one particular Islamic center, the goal of the paper is to cover all Muslim communities and centres in the region and to bring them closer together. Hasan says the goals of the newspaper have now been expanded to include news not only of and about Muslim communities, but also that which is of interest to Muslim communities and its readers. That means mainstream news events that may not be about Muslims, but are of interest to Muslims also find their way into the newspaper.

TML mostly carries original content about community news and events, as well as original commentary at times. Sometimes the paper also reprints articles and commentary from the mainstream media like the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Guardian*, *Daily Telegraph* or wire services like the Associated Press and Reuters etc. Occasionally, articles from other alternative and community media platforms like *Democracy Now*, *CounterPunch.org*, *The Electronic Intifada*, *John Hopkins University Gazette* etc are also included. According to Hasan, a major feature that differentiates *TML* from other Muslim media in the U.S. is that most other Muslim media rely largely on wire reports of global events that are of interest to their readership, whereas *TML* does not cover much global news, but focuses more on community news that is original content reported and written by its staff. “So our paper is very relevant to our readers” (M. Hasan, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

The editor of *TML*, Hasan, does not have formal training in journalism and worked as a software developer before joining the newspaper full-time as the editor. However, Hasan says he has always been inclined towards writing and has been a voracious consumer of newspapers and other mass media. His grandfather and uncle have also been life-long journalists, which he thinks is the source of his passion. Hasan is also on the board of governors of Dar-us-Salaam which is headed by the president of the board who is also the Imam of the mosque run by Dar-us-Salaam. Although the Imam technically has the final say over what is printed in the newspaper, Hasan says he does not get involved because, as a member of the board himself, he has the trust of the board and the president of the board. Hasan says he checks with the board and involves the president when he thinks there is something that may fall into the “grey area”. The only

times that the board has been involved in determining what is published in the newspaper is when there is a controversial issue or story that may bring harm to the Muslim community in general. Hasan gives two examples of what he calls “self-censorship” by the newspaper itself and those that involved the board. The first one was when the paper decided not to cover an internal dispute in a mosque in the community following what Hasan describes as “Islamic principles” in that the team felt covering it would be adding fuel to the fire and would not benefit the Muslim community in any way. The second issue involved the federal agency, the FBI, which had pressured a member of the Muslim community to be an informant for the agency. Hasan says that although *TML* had interviewed this man and had the story, they decided not to run it because Dar-us-Salaam, the parent organization felt it would invite the anger of the FBI and hurt their organization. Hasan says although cases like these have happened, “they are just a few and far between” (M. Hasan, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

The newspaper has a fully functioning workplace in an office suite that it shares with the parent organization. The full-time team, however, only consists of three employees. One is the editor himself, the other is the office manager who manages most of the phone calls and advertising, and the third is the full-time staff reporter who is usually on the go. Besides the full-time reporter, the newspaper also has a number of freelance reporters, most of whom are not trained journalists and are paid a minimal fee of about \$50 to \$100 per story. Hasan says the newspaper had the greatest number of employees in 2007 and 2008 with a staff of seven full-time and one part time employee. At that time these included the editor, the reporter, the office manager, the advertising manager, the distribution manager, a graphic artist and a website programmer. According

to Hasan after 2008 and the financial crisis in the U.S., with advertising dollars and donations going down, the newspaper had to cut its staff and since then it operates with three full-time employees including the editor, the reporter and the office and advertising manager as one. Graphic design has been outsourced and the newspaper has a part time distributor, but the staff members also do a lot of distribution on a voluntary basis, carrying and distributing the newspapers to various places within their own areas.

The newspaper's current full-time reporter has a background in journalism and has worked as a TV journalist in Pakistan previously. The editor makes all the story decisions about what the newspaper is going to cover, what is going to go on the front page and which stories the full-time reporter is going to pursue. The editor occasionally also reports and writes a few stories for the newspaper. "We do have a need to do more investigative journalism, more data driven journalism." (M. Hasan, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

Readers of the newspaper are spread around the greater Washington D.C. and Baltimore metropolitan areas and includes mostly the Muslim communities in this region. Its readers include Muslims who come from diverse backgrounds – some may be converts, some may have been born and bred in the United States, others may be newly arrived immigrants – all of them come from various classes, ethnic backgrounds like Arabs, South Asians, African-Americans, Somalis, as well different religious schools of thought. The newspaper does not link itself to any particular Islamic group or sect, according to Hasan, but articles in the Islam section which deal with Islamic beliefs follow the Quran and the Sunnah (traditions of the Prophet) and the early generations of

Muslims. However, Hasan says, even in that section the newspaper does not deal with controversial issues or issues that different schools of thought are divided over.

Hasan says even reporters from the *Washington Post* and other community newspapers in the region read *TML* for story ideas and there have been cases when a reporter from the *Washington Post* has pursued a story covered in *TML*. The newspaper is distributed for free and copies are placed at various Islamic centers, mosques, grocery stores and restaurants in the region. The monthly print run comprises about 7,000 copies and sometimes it can go up to 8,000 or 9,000. Hasan estimates that an average copy is probably read by two people and therefore readership can be between 14,000 to 16,000. Because all issues of the newspaper are also available online, the reach of the newspaper is widened to include readers from other regions of the United States as well. According to feedback received by the newspaper, it is also read in faraway states like Connecticut, California and Texas.

The newspaper meets its expenses of publication by advertising and donations. According to Hasan, about 50 to 60 per cent of the newspaper's revenue comes from advertising and the rest comes from donations that are directed to the newspaper. Advertisements come from local businesses, restaurants and Muslim organizations, centres, schools, charity organizations, bookstores, clothing stores, grocery stores, Islamic finance companies, lawyers, realtors and doctors. The newspaper does not publish advertisements from alcohol or tobacco companies or anything that goes against Islamic teachings. The newspaper meets the rest of its expenses through donations from its readers and any shortfall, which Hasan says usually occurs, is covered by the parent organization. *TML* also holds an annual fund raising dinner that attracts about 600-700

people every year. Funds from that event are also used to meet the newspaper's expenses. Events in the past have had high profile speakers like Yvonne Ridley and George Galloway from the UK come in to speak.

Since the newspaper has only one reporter managing most of the reporting and one editor, Hasan says the production process operates a little differently from other newspapers. As the editor, he makes decisions about headlines, captions, pull-quotes and placement, etc. of the stories that come from the reporter and sends the material to the graphic designer after which it comes back to him and he proofreads it and makes any necessary fixes and sends it off to press. Once the copies have come in the next day, the team begins distribution.

TML has also won awards for its reporting and journalism. In 2009, it won an award for its reporting on immigration and international affairs from New America Media⁷ and in 2011, it won first place awards for best local news coverage and best coverage from New America Media. In 2013, the Maryland chapter of CAIR⁸ gave it the "Excellence in Media" award.

Perspectives, Identity, Positioning and Discourses

The content of the newspaper is directed towards the Muslim communities of the region it serves. Most stories are about local community events, projects and happenings. The newspaper also frequently profiles members of the community that are involved in

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⁷ New America Media is a collaboration and advocate of 3,000 ethnic news organizations in the United States.

⁸ The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is a Washington-based Islamic advocacy group dedicated to providing an Islamic perspective on issues of importance to the American public and to challenging stereotypes about Islam and Muslims.

community uplift projects or organizations that are contributing to a good cause. Mainstream events or happenings that are of interest to the Muslim communities are also covered, often from a Muslim perspective. For example, leading up to the 2012 U.S. Presidential elections, there were a number of stories in *TML* about the elections, but most of them were very different from the kind of stories that appeared in the mainstream. The newspaper did not cover the day to day happenings in the election campaigns or the mainstream angle to it. Most of the elections stories always had a Muslim angle to them – some were about campaigns encouraging Muslims to vote and get involved, others profiled Muslims who were working as election judges and problem solvers and still others talked about Muslims running for senate seats. Stories and opinion pieces critical of U.S. foreign policy, for example, those against drone killings and the Guantanamo Bay prison are also printed in the newspaper. Regular community news on issues like moon sighting disputes at the beginning of the month of Ramadan, new mosques being built in different communities, debates about Islamic finance, lectures and events about world events like the situation in Egypt, drone attacks in Pakistan etc. and other seminars, conferences, celebrations, petitions and campaigns within the community are also covered.

The newspaper also makes sure it covers different communities and Islamic centres in the area and therefore one can see many stories about small, internal community events. Hasan says the point behind covering such events is to reinforce the newspaper's relationship with the different Islamic centers, communities and its own readers. Sometimes missing out on covering small events in the community invites negative feedback from the relevant centre or organization and may even mean the

newspaper loses readers, says Hasan. Since the staff of the newspaper lives within the community it serves, Hasan says they keep receiving feedback from their readers which includes praise, criticism and suggestions. They also receive suggestions from leaders of different communities like Imams and different organizations and they include those suggestions as long as they do not go against their policies.

The content of *TML* shows a commitment to progressive causes and a desire to represent the Muslim community correctly including efforts directed at political representation and identity negotiation. The goals of the paper show the desire to serve as a platform linking various communities around a shared identity as well as providing them an alternative perspective on various issues not just within their community, but also those in the mainstream discourse. When asked whether he sees his paper as providing an alternative perspective, Hasan states that although they occasionally reprint articles from alternative media platforms like *Democracy Now*, the aim of the paper is not to counter the mainstream media explicitly. He says:

I can't say that we are offering America another perspective of that issue. I can say that I'm exposing Muslims to other perspectives of larger issues.

But I can't really say that I am countering the mass media but you know as far as the Muslim community goes, yes we are an alternative to what the mainstream media is printing about Muslims, as an indirect statement. (M.

Hasan, personal communication, December 16, 2013)

Hasan says he does not consciously monitor the mainstream media in order to respond to it in his newspaper, but that he reads the mainstream media regularly and if he

sees something he thinks *TML* should be covering, they cover it. According to Hasan, the newspaper does not directly respond to negative stories or opinion pieces about Muslims in the mainstream. Hasan says the newspaper's aim is not to counter propaganda and that there are other organizations like the Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) that respond to such stuff and if he considers it to be a big enough issue, *TML* prints CAIR's response. However, the paper goes beyond just presenting a positive image of Muslims. The aim according to the editor is to present a realistic image of the Muslim community and to adhere to what he calls "Islamic principles".

Hasan says adhering to "Islamic principles" means that the paper does not spread news that causes harm to Muslim communities or to individuals in the communities. If, for example, a mosque or Islamic centre is involved in a scandal, the paper does not cover the issue as a story, but would instead address the issue in an editorial without naming the centre in order to make a statement or advice to correct the problem, says Hasan. The newspaper, however, does not hesitate to cover topics that are considered taboo in the community if they are seen to go in line with the newspaper's aims and goals. For example, *TML* has frequently covered the issue of homeless women who have been victims of domestic abuse and end up in homeless shelters. The paper also covered topics like HIV positive Muslims and things like a forum about homosexuality among Muslims in one of its editions ("Provocative discussion on homosexuality and Islam draws hundreds," January 2012).

The content of the newspaper also differs from the mainstream in terms of the principles of objectivity followed in mainstream journalism, combining hard news, objective reporting, interpretation, opinion and advocacy. In this way, the newspaper

contributes to what Atton and Hamilton (2008) have called the reimagining of journalism and the use of alternative practices in producing media. Hasan throws light on this concept of alternative practices when he says:

I've been toying with the idea of radically changing the way we write at the paper...I was actually thinking to make the entire paper first person and have our reporters actually use their own voice and use the personal pronoun I and be able to even insert their opinionated observations about the news in to their articles. (M. Hasan, personal communication, December 16, 2013)

Hasan says every media has a bias and the idea of unbiased media is unachievable, adding that he was considering printing a statement in the paper detailing the newspaper's biases.

TML is an interesting example of a medium that serves many different functions of community and alternative forms of media that were discussed in Chapter 2. The goals of the newspaper as well as its content show evidence of a medium committed to make its place, however small, in a mediascape dominated by practices and goals that differ from its own. The following pages will take a look at how the content of this newspaper differs from the mainstream newspaper of the region.

Comparative Quantitative Analysis: Differing News Values

The quantitative content analysis showed that from the 152 news and opinion articles that were part of the analysis, 28 topics or issues covered by *TML* were also covered in the *Washington Post* (18.4%). While it is expected that the mainstream

newspaper would not be covering small community news events in the Muslim communities, this content analysis just measures how many topics and issues covered in *TML* were covered in the mainstream newspaper and lists those articles that were and were not covered (See Table 1 in Appendix). The results provide an interesting understanding of how definitions of news and newsworthiness differ between the mainstream media and this community newspaper.

The fact that only 28 of the 152 topics covered by *TML* in its eight editions were covered by the mainstream *Washington Post* points to how significantly news values diverge between the mainstream media and a newspaper geared to a specific community like *TML*. The mainstream media and the alternative press most often have very different ideas of what constitutes a story and different news agendas (Harcup, 2003). For a small community newspaper like *TML*, news of, for example, the opening of a new mosque in its region is big news, while the same would not even be considered as news important or relevant enough to be reported by the mainstream media which caters to a wider audience. Similarly, *TML* covered a number of small community events like fundraisers, seminars and conferences at Islamic centres and mosques. Reporting of events like those are also not found in the mainstream media. A look at the headlines as in Table 1 provide a good understanding of these differences in news values.

Many of the topics that were similar between the Muslim newspaper and the mainstream were topics of mainstream interest. For example, as expected, the 2012 U.S. elections were covered at length in the *Washington Post*. *TML* also covered the elections in a number of stories throughout the September, October and November 2012 issues. However, the angle through which the Muslim newspaper covered the event differed

significantly from the mainstream coverage. The Muslim newspaper focused on the Muslim angle of the elections, so there were stories about how involved Muslims are in the elections, profiles of different people working in different capacities in election campaigns, advocacy efforts to get Muslims more involved and politically engaged, and analysis pieces explaining different concepts about the elections.

The Muslim newspaper focused on aspects of mainstream events that were relevant to the community and profiled members of the community that were involved in these events. For example, Imad ad Dean Ahmad, a U.S. senate candidate was interviewed specifically in *TML* because he was a Muslim. Ahmad was only briefly mentioned in a U.S. senate listing in the *Washington Post* where other senate candidates had also answered a list of standardized brief questions. The interview in *TML* titled “Libertarian US Senate Candidate Offers Post-Election Thoughts” (article 46 in Table 1) was however focused on his responses and thoughts after the elections and his loss.

However, there were a few stories covered in *TML* that one would expect to find in the mainstream newspaper of the region but they were not covered by the *Washington Post*. For example, there were two crime stories in *TML* about store owners in Richmond, Virginia who were shot and killed “Richmond Father Murdered In His Store” (article 55, Table1) and “Second Muslim Store Owner Murdered In Richmond” (article 95, Table 1) that were not covered in the *Washington Post*. Another example is the protests held by interfaith groups for the closure of Guantanamo Bay “On 11th Anniversary, Inter-Faith Groups Call for Closing of Guantanamo” (article 80, Table 1) that were not covered in the *Washington Post* as a separate story, although two lines about the protest were mentioned in the “Happening today” section of the *Washington Post* for that day.

Another article in the *Washington Post* did not mention these protests but mentioned that activists like those at Human Rights Watch were calling for the end of illegal detention at Guantanamo (Activists blast Obama for signing defense bill, Jan 4, 2013, *Washington Post*).⁹ Similarly, it was also surprising to not find a story in the *Washington Post* about senate hearings on hate crimes (Article 27, Table 1). Conversely, there were some topics that were interestingly not covered in *TML* even though one would expect to find them. For example, in the world press section in November 2012, *TML* covered golden jubilee celebrations in Kuwait (Article 51, Table 1) which was not covered by the *Washington Post*. However, the *Washington Post* did cover protests going on in Kuwait at that time (“Kuwaiti police confront thousands of protestors”, October 22, 2012), while *TML* had no mention about them. Similarly, another issue was that of a gay Imam, Imam Daayiee Abdullah, speaking at the screening of a documentary “I am Gay and I am Muslim” that was covered by the *Washington Post* (“An all-embracing imam”, April 18, 2013), but not by *TML*.

As the editor of *TML* mentioned (M. Hasan, personal communication, December 16, 2013), there also appeared to be cases of the *Washington Post* covering something as a follow-up after *TML*. One example of this appeared to be the story “Praying By the Rules” in *TML* (article 79, Table 1) about Muslim students in Parkdale High School using their First Amendment rights to get permission to pray in congregation during school hours. Although the story was not covered by the *Washington Post* in that month, it was covered the following month, after *TML* edition that ran it came out. The *Washington Post* story was titled “Principal allows break for Muslim prayers” (Jan 28, 2013).

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⁹ These *Washington Post* articles were not part of the list of articles for comparative qualitative analysis in Table 3. They are mentioned here for discussion.

Comparative Qualitative Analysis: Differing Coverage

TML differed from the mainstream *Washington Post* not just in terms of the choice of topics it covered for the news, but also in terms of how it covered those issues. An analysis of the content of the stories or topics that were covered in both newspapers revealed vast differences in directions, focus, positioning, and reporting and writing techniques. In some cases, the issues were approached with the same angle, but in others there were significant differences in the positioning and techniques used. Below follows a discussion of the different themes and understandings that emerged from an analysis of the content of the alternative newspaper and the mainstream newspaper on the same issues or events. The stories that are used for this comparative analysis are listed in the Table 3 of the appendix and numbered references are used to refer to them in the analysis.

Making it relevant: Emphasizing the Muslim or community angle

Since *TML* is a community newspaper aimed at the Muslim community of the greater DC area, its coverage of news always focused on the angle that made it relevant to the Muslim community and its readership. Even when the event or issue covered was a mainstream event, the Muslim or community aspect to it was always emphasized in the story and a conscious effort could be noted in terms of the coverage and writing that aimed to make it relevant to the community. For example, during the period of analysis, a major news event that was covered in both the Muslim newspaper and the mainstream newspaper were the 2012 U.S. Presidential elections.

As noted earlier, *TML* ran a number of stories on the elections during this period. All the election stories always had a unique Muslim angle to them that one would not find in a mainstream newspaper. Among the election stories that were used in the qualitative analysis, both 1A and 2A emphasized the Muslim aspect and made the reporting relevant to the newspaper's readership. 1A entitled "Downfall of Islamophobes delights U.S. Muslims" was compared with the *Washington Post* article "GOP: What went wrong?". The story published in *TML* looked at how Islamophobes lost the elections and gave relevant examples of candidates who had used hate speech and stereotyping of Muslims during their campaigns. The *Washington Post*, as expected, took a more general and in-depth look at the election results throughout its coverage, focusing on specific happenings, statements and speeches on a daily basis. Even though the story focused on the reasons for the Republican defeat, it did not talk about Islamophobia or hate speech. It did, however, mention among other reasons, the Republicans tough talk about immigration as one of the reasons for their loss. So, while the Muslim newspaper centred the story about the defeat of the Republicans around Islamophobia, the mainstream centred it around much wider concerns like its tough stance on immigration and not being able to speak to all Americans etc. Similarly, the headlines also emphasized these different aspects as primary angles – the emphasis on Islamophobia in the Muslim newspaper and a more general emphasis on what went wrong for the GOP in the mainstream newspaper.

The sources used in the stories also differed to align with the framing used by each newspaper. The Muslim newspaper, for example, used a statement from the National Executive Director of the Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) as

representing the sentiments of American Muslims and used quotations from various speeches that depicted the hate speech that was referred to in the story. The mainstream newspaper on the other hand used quotations from various Republican party officials about issues like what they thought went wrong and how they would address it.

The other election story in the sample (2A) also focused on the Muslim angle by discussing a specific Muslim organization's voter outreach efforts, while the comparable *Washington Post* article (2B) focused on voter outreach efforts of various organizations particularly those linked to the Republican party. Similarly, article 4A brought out the Muslim angle to the Democratic National Convention while the *Washington Post* article (4B) reported on the convention in a general manner. *TML* article focused on how many Muslim democrats attended the convention and focused on issues discussed at the convention that were of interest to a Muslim audience, for example killings by drone attacks and the Israel-Palestine conflict. The mainstream article reported on the convention from a more general angle focusing on the successes and celebrations and people's reactions.

Article 7A also emphasized the angle about the Maryland ballot that would be of interest to the Muslim communities. So, for example, it mentioned Muslim leaders who were forming a coalition with Orthodox Jews to oppose the same sex marriage act and it tried to explain the questions to the Muslim communities by stating what Muslim leaders and "most Muslims" believe about the questions and how they relate to Islam.

Another article that focuses on the community aspect different from the mainstream focus was 13A which reported on the issue of a debate on an immigration bill

in the senate. While the mainstream article (13B) reported in a straightforward and descriptive manner on the debate and focused on the debate concerning illegal immigrants, the Muslim newspaper focused on the issue of split families that the provisions could result in and started with a case of Muslim family that was split. By focusing on this aspect of the debate, *TML* made it relevant to the community it serves. Other articles like 9A and 14A also reported on mainstream issues in a way that made them relevant to the Muslim communities of that region. The mainstream newspaper and *TML*, therefore, differed in terms of the primary angles used or the themes emphasized in the stories, how they were framed and the position from which they were reported.

Mobilizing the community: Fostering political engagement and calling for action.

One of the roles alternative and community media perform is to mobilize the community for certain shared goals. Many times they foster a collective group identity as well as encourage social and political engagement, or call for other forms of action. By doing so, these media serve as an alternative to the mainstream because they include an activist element within this role.

A number of articles included in this analysis came under this theme of mobilizing the community in different ways, by either fostering engagement or calling for some type of action. Article 2A which was about a specific Muslim organization's efforts to push voter registration in the community took this activist stance and encouraged Muslims to vote in the elections. Article 3A which was about a vandalism incident at a mosque called for the need to work together as a community to deal with such incidents in the quotations it used. Interestingly, the mainstream news story on the

same incident 3B also emphasized the angle of Muslim leaders calling for calm in response to the attacks. Article 4A, for example, also used quotations to put across a message of the importance of political engagement among Muslims.

Similarly, in article 5A and its comparable 5B, while the mainstream media focused on the “Muslim fury” and the spread of the violence following the offensive film “Innocence of Muslims,” the Muslim newspaper published a number of statements from various mosques and Islamic centres condemning the attacks and the movie and calling for calm and restraint. For example, one statement said: “ADAMS¹⁰ therefore urges all global faith communities to come together in condemning the denigrating of any religion or its practitioners, in a true spirit of mutual respect and compassion.”

In article 15A on the Oklahoma tornado there are various messages of mobilizing the community and calling for action. The *TML* article focused on one Muslim relief worker’s efforts in this case and served as a platform for that one worker to promote his organization, while the mainstream newspaper in the comparable article 15B focused on the relief effort and campaign started by one non-Muslim student in connection to the Oklahoma tornado. The interview published in the Muslim newspaper was published as a Q&A and included various messages from the interviewee aimed at mobilizing the community. For example, the interviewee Murat Kose is quoted as saying: “Every Muslim should be ready to help in case of disaster in their locality.”

Community newspapers can often in this way serve as a platform to voice activists messages and various calls for action to get the community involved in different

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¹⁰ ADAMS is the All Dulles Area Muslim Society based in Virginia.

social and political activities. This role of mobilizing a specific community for different causes is one of the features of alternative media that differentiates it from the mainstream.

Creating awareness: Playing the explanatory role

In addition to mobilizing the community, a number of articles in the community media are directed at creating awareness among its readership. While the mainstream media often also create awareness about various issues, the difference one can find in the alternative and community media is the explicit stance taken in some of the articles, and thus the attempt to explain things from a particular perspective. For example, article 7A explains the questions on the Maryland ballot in deliberate effort to educate its readership. However, some of the questions are explained clearly from a Muslim angle with the views of Muslim leaders mentioned on the issue. For example, in explaining the question about same sex marriage in the Maryland ballot, the article discusses how community leaders believe it could lead to censorship in scriptures:

In fact, despite the verbiage used on the ballot, church and mosque leaderships believe that it will lead to censorship of what the Bible and Qur'an preach about homosexuality.

The focus of the comparable mainstream article on the Maryland ballot (7B) was more to simply report on the resistance to various aspects of the ballot rather than to explain to readers the meaning of its various questions.

Article 5A also had various statements that served to inform readers about Islam's teachings on violence and how Muslims should respond to provocation. The article was a

compilation of statements issued by various Muslim organizations condemning the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi, Libya and the violence in the film protests, in addition to calling for restraint. Statements quoted verses from the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Prophet (pbuh) to explain how the violent reactions went against the religion of Islam. “According to the teachings of Quran and teachings of our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) killing of any innocent person is ‘as if one has killed all human kind,’” said one statement by the Islamic Society of Baltimore. By quoting from and referring to scriptures, these statements legitimized the discourse as well as played the role of explaining Islamic scriptures and perspectives. The fact that the newspaper served as a platform whereby all these organizations could broadcast their statements and reactions also highlights one of the important roles the newspaper plays in its community.

A similar case was that of a statement published clarifying the position of the faith coalition that buried one of the Boston Marathon bombing suspects in Virginia. It was published alongside a story from the Associated Press (12A). The statement was published with a separate title with the article “A statement from a Muslim within the faith coalition that buried Tamerlan Tsarnaev in a Muslim cemetery”. This statement also used quotes from the traditions of the Prophet (pbuh) to explain the stance of the organization according to their interpretation of Islamic texts and explained how every dead body deserves to be buried no matter whose it is. In this way, it was also explaining and interpreting the scriptures and Islamic teachings on a certain issue. *TML* also has an entire section dedicated to Islam and articles relating to various Islamic issues like prayer, fasting, manners etc. Articles in the Muslim newspaper also often serve to raise awareness among the community not just about Islamic teachings but also about various

programs and services they can access. One example of such an article is 14A titled “Faith groups raise voice to protect neighbourhoods affected by foreclosure.” This article emphasized the need for Muslims to come forward to seek help if they were caught up in housing and mortgage troubles.

Addressing misrepresentations: Countering versus promoting stereotypes

One of the roles many community and minority newspapers play is to counter stereotypes about a group and respond to misrepresentation by portraying their communities in a positive, and –what they refer to as – more realistic way. Many articles from *TML* included in the analysis appeared to aim to consciously counter stereotypes about Muslims and the religion Islam. Many times these stereotypes are perpetuated by the mainstream media, but that is not always the case. Sometimes the mainstream media may also be using the same position of countering stereotypes. For example, article 3A and 3B both countered stereotypes in their reporting and representation of the issue of the vandalism attack at mosques in Virginia and the response from the community. The article in *TML* reported on how people from various backgrounds and religions showed unity with the Muslim community after the attack and emphasized the need to “forge relationships in the community” and the receiving of “a lot of support” from the church in the region. The mainstream article (3B) also used similar themes in its reporting.

However, in the case of article 5A and 5B which were about the killing of the U.S. ambassador in Libya and the protests against the film “Innocence of Muslims”, the article in the Muslim newspaper countered stereotypes while the mainstream media article tended to promote them. For example, the Muslim newspaper emphasized that the

Muslim community and Islam as a religion condemned acts of violence and unjust killings and urged unity with all communities. The mainstream media article, on the other hand, in using terms like “Muslim fury”, “wave of fury”, “vehemence”, “chanting religious slogans” and “Islamic extremists” perpetuated stereotypes of Islam as a violent religion and promoted the “clash of civilizations” narrative which is all too common in reporting about Islam and the Muslim world (Kumar, 2010). The same “clash of civilizations” narrative and stereotype of Islamic extremists was used in article 6B. The writer Fouad Ajami makes sweeping generalizations when he argues that Muslims cannot deal with modernity which he equates with free speech. Ajami uses the “clash of civilizations” narrative while discussing the Salman Rushdie controversy:

The floodgates had opened. The clashes that followed defined the new terms of encounters between a politicized version of Islam - awakened to both power and vulnerability - and the West's culture of protecting and nurturing free speech.

One article that countered stereotypes of a different kind was 6A from *TML* which was an opinion piece on the free speech debate following the provocative film “Innocence of Muslims”. The article spoke about how the American Muslim community often felt alienated which often led to “the crude stereotype of America being the enemy of Islam.” The op-ed which was taken from another alternative media platform Counterpunch.org talked about how misunderstandings between Muslims and the United States existed because of a lack of dialogue and mistrust. It talked about how the lack of meaningful dialogue between American policy makers and Muslims and other issues made it “extremely difficult to explain to the Muslims around the world that the U.S

government not only has nothing to do with the production and promotion of this movie, but such incidents also run contrary to its principles and interests.”

Article 10A, also countered stereotypes perpetuated in mainstream discourse in the case of the Boston Marathon bombing and emphasized “the other” angle. The article included the stories of many Muslims who were runners, doctors or aid workers in the Boston Marathon to highlight the other angle to the story that was being reported in the mainstream. The reporter Hena Zuberi writes: “As the story of the Boston bombings is written, America must make sure not to focus on the Muslim names in the headlines, only to miss the many Muslim names scattered throughout its pages.” The comparable article I had picked from the *Washington Post* also mentioned the internet sleuthing that falsely implicated a number of innocent people in the attacks on online discussions forums, but it did not show a conscious effort to counter stereotypes as *TML* article did.

Providing another perspective: Critiquing the mainstream media

Not only did the articles counter stereotypes, they also at times critiqued the mainstream media or responded to things published in the mainstream media. In this way, they served to provide the alternative perspective to what one could find in the mainstream. For example, article 10A discussed above with its title “Running Muslim: The other Boston story” from the outset set out to give the alternative or “other” perspective. The article talked about “the vicious face of tabloid journalism” that had reared its head in the aftermath of the Boston marathon bombing and how in most stories being told the spotlight was on Islam’s relationship to the suspected terrorists. “But on(e)

story which must also be told is Islam's relationships to others involved - runners, volunteers, and first responders,” said the article.

Article 5A which was a compilation of statements issued by various mosques and Islamic centres about the protests against the film “Innocence of Muslims” and the killing of the U.S. ambassador, also addressed the free speech debate being discussed in the mainstream media and called such free speech that is intended to provoke no different from the violence itself. Article 6A spoke about how “Islamophobes and Muslim haters have taken over the public space and the media”.

Article 11A entitled “Cabbie exposes ugliness of anti-Muslim hate with cellphone video” while discussing how there was extensive media coverage of this particular hate crime incident, includes quotes that discuss how very rarely the public gets to hear the ugliness of anti-Muslim hatred. The writer also discusses how anti-Muslim rhetoric from powerful sources such as politicians eventually leads to such acts of violence. Article 12A, which included a statement from a member of the faith coalition that buried the Boston Marathon bombing suspect also included a response to statements published in the mainstream media. The article mentions how another Imam is quoted in the mainstream media as saying the whole Muslim community was furious about the burial, and argues that that specific Imam does not speak for the whole Muslim community. “Some discretion was needed due to the media-incited controversy swirling around this matter from the beginning. Further controversy and incitement was not needed,” writes Bilal Yasin El-Amin explaining his organization’s position on the controversial issue of the burial. While the comparable mainstream article (12B) also reported on the

controversy about the burial, it quoted various people involved but did not really serve as a platform for the voice and views of one organization to explain its position as did *TML*.

Providing “Muslim” perspectives and voices: Speaking for the community

In its role as a community newspaper, *TML* articles often aimed to provide not just another perspective on an issue that was also covered in the mainstream, but also a “Muslim” perspective on it. Some of the articles also spoke for the community instead of just speaking to it.

For example, articles that took a clear explanatory position and included statements or reactions about various events like 5A, 6A, 7A and 12A gave an Islamic position or interpretation about an issue, either in the writer’s perspective or by including quotes and explanations from Muslim leaders in the community. Article 6A while discussing that the U.S was not responsible for the provocative film that had fueled protests around the world, also drew attention to how some Muslims were angered by the double standards they saw in the Western treatment of free speech when it came to Muslim sensibilities. The writer gave examples of how Holocaust denial videos were taken down by Google and Palestinian activists’ accounts were shut down on Facebook but how the video that had infuriated Muslims around the world was not treated the same way. The article in this way also spoke for the Muslim community.

Article 9A titled on calls for the closing of Guantanamo quotes an Islamic organization director who gave an Islamic perspective on the issue of torture at the interfaith prayer service. The quote is the kind of quote and perspective one would only

find in a Muslim community newspaper. ISNA National Director Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed was quoted as saying:

Our Prophet Muhammad tells us that a woman who, despite whatever piety she may have had, entered the hellfire because she kept a cat confined for so long without food or water that it died. If we as Muslims must give this much priority to a cat, imagine the extent to which we must prioritize providing basic rights to human beings. Torture is something which could never be permissible in Islam.

Article 14A which was about faith group efforts to protect neighbourhoods affected by foreclosures talked about how Muslims faced the additional burden of the stigma of taking interest, which according to some scholars is not permissible in Islam, and therefore they are more hesitant to come forward to seek help in case of trouble.

In article 8A which was about an Eid holiday staying off the Montgomery county public school calendar, a bit of advocacy and attempt to speak for the community is noticeable in the way the issue is framed and the quotes and sources used to explain the issue. The article, for example, included quotes from the Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) highlighting the need for this holiday, and claiming that Muslim students and staff were not treated the same way as their classmates and colleagues, and by emphasizing that Muslims must make Eid a priority.

This angle of speaking for the community is also apparent in article 11A when it highlighted how the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombing had caused a spike in the rhetoric about profiling and surveillance of Muslim communities, and article 10A when it

highlights the need to look at the stories of Muslims that are part of the story as runners, doctors and volunteers in the Boston Marathon bombing case.

Using alternative practices: Advocacy and opinion

As mentioned earlier, the alternative media differ from the mainstream not just in terms of content but also the practices they use for reporting and writing. These alternative practices also show how the journalism of the alternative media differs from the mainstream. While the mainstream media largely try to use what is referred to as objective reporting practices for hard news stories, the alternative media often inject opinion and advocacy into their stories and the articles often take an explicit stance.

An example is the first election story (1A) in the sample titled “Downfall of Islamophobes delights US Muslims.” This story was positioned with an explicit Muslim stance and it constructed discourses of legitimacy in terms of justifying the defeat of the Republican candidates by drawing attention to how they used hate speech and Islamophobia in their campaigns. By using this theme and positioning and using words and phrases like “anti-Islam”, “Islamophobes”, “hostile tone” and “hostile rhetoric against Muslims,” the article itself hails the loss of the Republican candidates and therefore uses a subjective approach in reporting. The comparable *Washington Post* article was more of a general story exploring the reasons for the loss of the GOP. It used more of a descriptive approach to reporting and writing in line with journalistic rules of “objectivity” and did not use words or phrases that seemed to suggest a particular stance.

The second article on the elections (2A) also had opinion and advocacy in its writing and reporting. The writer is the president of Prince George’s County Muslim

Council and was writing on the campaign his organization was running to increase voter registration among Muslims in the community. In that way, he was the primary definer himself writing about the efforts of his own organization. In addition to that, the article was positioned as an “Islamic” piece on encouraging voting among Muslims because the writer used discourses of legitimacy by including quotes from Muslim scholars justifying the efforts of his organization and encouraging Muslims to get involved and to vote. As opposed to this, article 2B in the mainstream media used more of a general and detached approach and used quotations from different organizers running voter outreach programs to explain different positions and to predict whether the left or right would lead.

We can see an example of the writer injecting her own voice and subjective opinion into a story which is otherwise reported in a descriptive and detached manner in article 14A. The writer Hena Zuberi writes while discussing the problems Muslims are facing from foreclosures: “Across the board there are people who got into hard deals, some through predatory practices by banks, while others made choices that they clearly should not have made.” In the story about the incident in which a Muslim cabdriver was attacked by a passenger, the *Washington Post* article (11B) takes a more detached stance and in its headline uses the word “alleges” for the assault (“Muslim cabdriver alleges assault by passenger who cited Boston marathon bombing”). *TML* (11A), on the other hand, takes the cabdriver’s story as given and writes from his perspective. The Muslim newspaper’s headline also emphasizes the anti-Muslim hate angle and positions it from the Muslim perspective in saying that the cabdriver “exposes the ugliness of anti-Muslim hate.” Article 15A which served as a platform for one particular Muslim charity organization to talk about and promote its work also had a bit of advocacy in how the

interviewee called Muslims to contribute in the relief effort and drew attention to his organization's work.

Sourcing routines: Drawing sources from within the community

Sourcing routines also differed between the mainstream and the Muslim newspaper. The Muslim newspaper which usually focused on making the story – even if it was a mainstream story – relevant to its community, used sources from within the community. It was therefore common to find more Muslim sources used in the Muslim newspaper stories even when the events were mainstream events. For example, stories on the elections (1A and 2A), the immigration bill (13A), the faith groups making efforts to deal with foreclosures (14A) and the protests for the closure of Guantanamo (9A) all had sources from within the Muslim community used in the reporting and many times they were the primary definers.

However, although studies have earlier found that the alternative media use ordinary or non-elite sources as opposed to the elite or official sources used in the mainstream media (Harcup, 2003), most articles in *TML* did not really focus on ordinary or non-elite sources. Even when the voice included was from a member of the Muslim community, it was often an elite source within the community, for example, the leader at some Muslim organization, a Muslim activist, democrat etc. There were some cases of ordinary people being used as sources too though, just like there were some cases of that in the mainstream media. In that way, some sourcing practices were similar for the mainstream and the Muslim newspaper, although there was an emphasis on having sources from within the community in the case of *TML*. It could be argued that this was

similar to what Atton and Wickenden's (2005) study found about the deployment of a "counter-elite" in the alternative media which included some sort of expert or authority.

Conclusion

Although *TML* does not consciously aim to counter the mainstream media, it does provide an alternative in its ability to provide a different and more comprehensive representation of Muslims, supporting progressive causes and providing a platform for fostering community identity and identity negotiation.

The definitions of what constitutes news differed significantly between the mainstream newspaper and the Muslim newspaper. In the comparable qualitative analysis of issues that were covered by both newspapers, although some stories had similar positioning, most of the times positioning, framing and angles differed between the two newspapers. By providing alternative ways of seeing and different discussions these community media are able provide an alternative public sphere (Harcup, 2003).

TML also plays a positive role by fostering political inclusion and engagement in the community by encouraging its readers to participate in the political process and in actively representing Muslims. Although this newspaper relies on commercial means of financing, is owned by an Islamic organization, and may not really represent horizontal practices in production in terms of actively engaging readers in the production process, it does make an effort to involve readers and represent different communities in the region and serves as an alternative not only in its relation to the mainstream media but also in terms of voicing opinions and ideas that are distinctive in their own right and significant to different communities (Bailey et al, 2008).

Chapter 6

Linking and Serving Communities in Canada's Capital: Comparative Analysis of *Muslim Link* and *Ottawa Citizen*

This chapter will focus on the case of the Ottawa based Muslim newspaper *Muslim Link* (ML) that serves as an example of a medium with many of the features of alternative media forms discussed in Chapter 2. It will draw on in-depth interviews with members of the editorial team of *ML*, the newspaper's website as well as an analysis of the content of the paper. The quantitative and qualitative analysis will compare coverage in this newspaper with the mainstream newspaper of the city the *Ottawa Citizen*, to measure how its content and journalism differs the mainstream media.

Ownership, Goals, Readership and Functioning

The Ottawa based *ML* published as a monthly print and online community newspaper, describing itself as "Ottawa's community newspaper" till October 2014. During the course of this research, the newspaper ran into financial problems and stopped publishing its print edition. It now exists only as an online community news source. It serves the Ottawa-Gatineau Muslim community and according to its website its aim is to "inform, connect, inspire and celebrate" Muslims living in the Ottawa-Gatineau region, aspiring to "build community through story telling" ("Vision", n.d.).

According to its website, the newspaper has a strong emphasis on reflecting and representing the diversity of the Ottawa-Gatineau Muslim community within its pages.

The *ML* has recently published its “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion” policy on its website which emphasizes on reflecting the diversity in religious orientation, ethnicity and culture, socio-economic status, age and political orientation of Muslim communities in the Ottawa-Gatineau region. The policy aim is to reflect this diversity in its coverage, story assignment, recruitment of contributors and submissions.

The policy also outlines that *ML* “will not publish any material that is considered hateful to any group or individual protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.” The mandate on the website also outlines that the paper aims to “build bridges between Ottawa’s Muslim and non-Muslim communities” (“Muslim Link Diversity”, 2014). Daigle says:

The vision of the paper is community building and our paper isn’t about teaching people Islam, it’s about showcasing the Muslim community of Ottawa, so you shouldn’t have things like that in it. It should be like you read the paper, you make those decisions for yourself. (C. Daigle, personal communication, December 21, 2013)

ML began as a small two page flyer in September 2002 by a young entrepreneur named Ali Bokhari. The first issue only had basic information about what Muslim organizations were out there in the city and a basic article on an Islamic issue (A. Elghawaby, personal communication, December 21, 2013). The current publisher of the newspaper Muhammad Dourou was also involved in publishing the first few issues. According to the current Editor-in-chief, Chelby Daigle, Bokhari was inspired by *TML* in the Washington and Baltimore region to start Ottawa’s own Muslim community

newspaper. The other motivation Bokhari had for starting the newspaper was the post 9/11 environment and the spreading stereotypes and misinformation about Muslims in Canada. He felt the need for a forum for “Muslim Canadians to connect, share information, discuss their common concerns, and see their lives reflected in a positive light” (Daigle, 2013). *ML* gradually expanded and in the first year the small team was able to publish seven issues, each of which had a distribution of 4,000 copies. Speaking at the 10 year anniversary of *ML*, former editor Amira Elghawaby said:

In the very beginning it was primarily not a newspaper but more of a views paper, you know, how to think about Islamic issues, it was almost like a cheerleading paper like here’s ways to keep up your belief, here’s ways to stay a strong believer and it wasn’t so much about our news. But over the years it started to evolve. So it captured our struggles (Muslim Link, 2013).

Elghawaby notes that the turning point for *ML* was the story of Maher Arar, a Syrian born Ottawa resident who was unjustly arrested and detained in the United States without charges and then deported to Syria where he was detained and tortured. Arar’s struggle was a huge story in the community and it became a major issue for the newspaper to cover, promoting awareness and advocating for justice. Elghawaby says, “That’s exactly when we started to go from a little newsletter to a newspaper” (Muslim Link, 2013).

Dourou joined Bokhari as co-owner of the paper in 2007. When Bokhari had to leave, Dourou was left as the sole proprietor (Daigle, 2013). Dourou has ensured that the

paper remains independent and is not affiliated with a Muslim organization or group. The publisher, who works a full time job as a computer engineer, besides providing some of the finances for the paper, is not very involved in the content of the paper. According to Elghawaby who has formerly worked as the editor and is now the editorial advisor, there have only been a few occasions where the publisher has been involved with the content that runs in the paper and those have been when a certain business has shown concern about its coverage in the paper. But most of the time, the publisher does not interfere and has a lot of trust in the people who are working at the paper (A. Elghawaby, personal communication, December 21, 2013).

ML published as a tabloid-sized paper with some colored pages and some black and white pages ranging between the count of sometimes 12 and sometimes 20. The pages consist of news, views and advertisements. Most of the content is original and written by its own writers. In addition to the news, there are sections on Life, Heart and Soul, restaurant, film and book reviews, parenting and youth. The paper does not cover much global news. Most of the content is focused on the local Muslim communities in Ottawa and Gatineau and is relevant to and of interest to the community of the region to which it caters.

The newspaper was distributed for free across the Ottawa-Gatineau region and copies were placed in grocery stores, restaurants, mosques and Islamic centers, universities and schools. The monthly print run was 4000 copies. All issues of the newspaper have also been available online in PDF format. By being available online, the reach of the newspaper is widened to include more than just the Ottawa community.

The expenses of publication are met by advertisements and by the publisher who pitches in from his own pocket. The newspaper does not have a fully functioning office and team members all work from their own homes. According to Daigle, none of the team members are full time because the newspaper does not have the money to maintain a full time team. Only the editor works full time, but she also manages two other jobs alongside. Other team members also have jobs that they manage along with their jobs at *ML*. Paid positions include an editor-in-chief, an editorial advisor, a content editor, sales people, and layout and graphic design is outsourced to people based overseas. Advertisements usually come from local businesses, restaurants, grocery stores, charity organizations, mosques and Islamic centers, consultants, lawyers, brokers and realtors and local political parties.

The editorial team makes most of the decisions about the content. Former editors of the newspaper like Amira Elghawaby and Zenab Bagha have been journalism graduates and worked in different media organizations. The current editor, Chelby Daigle who joined as coordinator of the paper in 2012, has been an active blogger, public speaker and community organizer on issues of mental health and civic engagement in Ottawa's Muslim community. Daigle now serves both roles of coordinator and editor-in-chief. The newspaper has also served and continues to serve as a training ground for young reporters who have gone on to write for the mainstream media as well. One of *ML*'s former reporters, Hadeel Al-Shalchi, who wrote the first few stories on Maher Arar went on to later work as a foreign correspondent for Reuters (Muslim Link, 2013). The newspaper has been involved in a lot of community outreach events in the recent past and receives feedback through that route.

Perspectives, Identity, Positioning and Discourses

The content of the newspaper is geared towards the Muslims of the Ottawa-Gatineau region. Most stories published in the newspaper are about local events, conferences, workshops and individual and group initiatives. Charity, youth and sports activities in the Muslim communities are also frequently covered. The newspaper also frequently profiles community members who have been involved in different projects in the community or have had certain achievements. Mainstream events that are of interest to the Muslim communities are also covered, for example local elections, new provisions or laws affecting immigrants etc. Mainstream books and films are also reviewed in the newspaper in addition to restaurant reviews. The newspaper also has regular sections for parenting and experiences of new Muslim converts.

According to Daigle, the newspaper is definitely supportive of Muslim communities, but it is about Muslims and not about Islam. Daigle says in the past the paper focused more on the larger Muslim community but recently, the team is making a conscious effort to reflect all different ethnic and religious groups of the Muslim community in the region. The paper has also recently started dedicating more space to community news and the community section of the newspaper. Daigle says she also makes sure she keeps an eye on the mainstream media because sometimes members of the Muslim community are celebrated in the mainstream media. However, the paper also tries to provide content that is different from what is already published in other media. Daigle says the paper does not aim to speak on behalf of the community, but merely to represent the community by reporting on its issues and happenings. “(We) really want to

get away from the tendency of some people to speak on behalf of our community, we can't do that.” (C. Daigle, personal communication, December 21, 2013).

When asked whether she sees the newspaper as serving as an alternative to the mainstream, Daigle states that the paper is alternative in the sense that it is for Muslims and by Muslims and therefore it has stories that one is not necessarily going to find in the mainstream media, so the fact that it is really specific to the Muslim community makes it alternative. Another way that Daigle sees *ML* as being an alternative to the mainstream is the fact that it focuses on positive stories as opposed to negative ones. The newspaper, does, however cover controversial issues that trigger debate in the community about matters that the team considers important.

The newspaper also aims to foster debate and promote political engagement. The policy of the paper states that the newspaper takes the position that it is important to vote and be actively engaged in Canada's democracy all year round, not just during the elections. The policy further states:

Muslim Link strives to be a non-partisan publication. We publish ads from any major political party but this does not equal endorsement of these parties. *Muslim Link* will seek out interviews or cover stories involving members of all major political parties and their supporters in order to support our readership in making informed decisions when they vote, however we will not endorse or support any one political party. (“Muslim Link diversity”, 2014)

According to the policy stated on its website, *ML* encourages its writers to remain objective in their reporting and says it holds writers to “high journalistic principles”. In this way, the paper appears to be in line with Forde et al.’s (2003) example of media that aspire to mainstream status in terms of their practices while working within the arena of the local community. However, as the goals of the paper regarding content show, the desire for mainstream status is only in terms of practices as there appear to be clear differences in terms of the vision for the newspaper’s content. Speaking at the 10 year anniversary celebration event of *ML*, former editor Elghawaby said:

This is our newspaper. This is where our stories are going to remain for future generations, how people are going to remember us. And one thing that has kept me and others committed to this paper is that we need to start having our own narrative. You know, if we allow the mainstream media to tell us what Muslims think about, care about, worry about, fight about, then we are not going to have perhaps the most accurate image of who we are to pass down to our children and our neighbours. (Muslim Link, 2013).

ML is another interesting example of a community newspaper representing many of the goals and practices of democratic and alternative forms of media discussed in Chapter 2. The goals and content of the newspaper show a commitment to progressive causes and an aim to take back the community’s narrative into its own hands, away from the discourse being promoted by the mainstream media. The chapter will now study how the content of this community newspaper differs from the mainstream newspaper of the region.

Comparative Quantitative Analysis: Differing News Values

The quantitative content analysis showed that from the 100 news and opinion pieces that were part of the analysis, only 27 of the issues or topics covered by *ML* had corresponding coverage in the *Ottawa Citizen*. The quantitative content analysis just compares how many topics or issues covered in the *ML* were also covered in the mainstream newspaper of the region, the *Ottawa Citizen*. Table 2 lists all the articles that were compared and shows which had corresponding coverage and which did not.

Among the issues that *ML* chose to cover, only a few (27%) were considered topics worthy of being covered by the major mainstream newspaper of the region. This points, again, to how news values differ between the mainstream media and the alternative media belonging to a specific community. As expected, small community happenings like a fundraising event, a local health and fitness program for Muslims, achievements of an Islamic school or its students etc. would not be covered by the mainstream media, but would be considered big news by the community newspaper. The topics that were covered in both papers were usually those of mainstream interest for example those about new anti-terror provisions, a new databank to track visitors to Canada, and even a speech by Nobel Peace Laureate. Some books and films reviewed in the newspaper were also reviewed in the mainstream media. Certain issues covered in the Muslim newspaper, for example, were linked to international days or awareness weeks like the day of the girl child or breast cancer awareness week and therefore, there were articles in the mainstream media on the same issue as well. There were also some mainstream events that one would expect to be covered in the mainstream media but that were not covered. For example, the international day for the elimination of violence

against women and white ribbon days to celebrate it were not covered in the *Ottawa Citizen* but they were covered in *ML*. Covering events like these shows a commitment on the part of the community newspaper to support progressive causes and take an activist stance on a number of issues.

Comparative Qualitative Analysis: Differing Coverage

ML differed from the *Ottawa Citizen* not just in terms of the topics it chose to cover as discussed above, but in how those topics that were covered by both papers were addressed. Most of these issues or topics were those that were of mainstream interest and therefore explain why they appeared in the mainstream newspaper, but when they were covered in *ML* they were addressed with a unique Muslim or community angle to them that one would not find in the mainstream media. Often, there appeared to be an attempt to make the issue relevant to its readership in the way the report was presented and the angles that were focused on. Differences in positioning, angles, framing, voice and techniques were also noted. In the discussion below, I present the analysis by focusing on the different themes and understandings that emerged from reading and comparing the articles in *ML* and the *Ottawa Citizen*. Many of these themes are similar to those discussed in the previous chapter in the case of *TML* and *Washington Post*. The stories that are used for this comparative analysis are listed in the Table 3 of the appendix and numbered references are used to refer to them in the analysis.

Making it relevant: Emphasizing the Muslim or community angle

As noted, *ML*'s coverage almost always showed an attempt to make the topic relevant to the Muslim community or the paper's readership. This was apparent in terms

of the angle of the issue that was focused on, how the story was positioned, examples or actors used in the story and even the sources that were interviewed.

Article 17A, for instance, which was about the victory of the Parti Québécois in the 2012 Quebec election reported on the election results from a Muslim angle. The story collected and presented reactions to and expectations from the victory from Montreal's Muslim community. The story highlighted the concern about religious rights and what was then referred to as the "Charter of Secularism" and later called the "Quebec Charter of Values". The headline also focused on the concern about religious rights and economy as the primary angle "PQ victory raises concerns about religious rights, economy." The continuation headline also emphasized the angle that PQ Premier Pauline Marois faced the task of "healing wounds" of minority groups. Both positive and negative reactions from the Muslim community were presented. The story also included statements issued by Muslim organizations about the election results that served as messages to the government:

Opposed to this, the story about the PQ victory that was published in the *Ottawa Citizen* (17B) emphasized the angle of national unity and separatism which was also touched on in the *ML* article. The *Ottawa Citizen* article looked at the political and national implications of the victory. Quotes were included by political experts about what the win meant for Canada. For *ML*, the angle taken was that which was relevant to its readership and that included what the victory meant for the Muslim community.

Similarly, when *ML* reported on the speech of the Nobel Peace Laureate Tawakkol Karman (28A), it also focused on the community angle and the aspects that

were relevant to the community in her speech. In the continuation headline this aspect was highlighted and presented as a primary angle: “Care about your communities and make a difference: Tawakkol.” Although the *ML* and the *Ottawa Citizen* reported on two separate events and speeches by Karman during her Ottawa visit and therefore the information was different, the themes and issues that were highlighted were also very different. *ML* focused on the community angle of the speech, highlighted parts of the speech about the role of citizens in political processes, those urging Canadians to care for their communities and the global community, mentioning the activist angle of the Arab Spring, and drawing attention to the role of women and youth in the protests despite the fatwas (legal opinions issued by Muslim scholars) against Muslim women participating in the protests. The *ML* article also mentioned in the story other Muslim community members who hosted the panel. The *Ottawa Citizen* article, on the other hand, took on a wider angle to it by focusing on the national implications in the speech for example the fact that Karman urged Canada to support the transitions in the Arab world etc. It did not mention other community members in the story.

Similarly, article 27A which was about the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee medals, also just focused on the awards that were given to Muslim community members in particular. The mainstream media reporting of the same incident focused on the decision about giving the medals and the specific *Ottawa Citizen* story (27B) which was picked for the qualitative analysis focused on the story of one non-Muslim Ottawa recipient of the medal and the work that led her to receive the award.

There were other articles that also showed a conscious effort to report the story in a way that would make it relevant to the Muslim community. For example, article 24A

collected views from various Muslim community members about what black history month meant to them. Article 22A also brought in this angle of making the story relevant to the Muslim readership when it quoted one of the Muslim panelists about Muslim attitudes towards low income communities and what they should do: “Muslims should be even more sensitive to other communities who are also being subjected to a very confining narrative by media.”

The *Ottawa Citizen* reported on the same forum in a more general way without focusing on this angle about the Muslim community. Although some of the issues highlighted were the same like those about discrimination, poverty and stigmatization, the mainstream press reported on the event from a general angle while the Muslim newspaper tried to focus on what made it relevant to its community. Another case is that of article 19A which was apparently on a very mainstream event, that of eating disorders awareness week. The article in *ML* in addition to interviewing and quoting a Muslim dietician as the primary definer for the story, also started the article by refuting the common misperception that Muslim women, especially those who wear hijab are liberated from media-driven standards of beauty and drew attention to how many Muslim women and teenagers were just as susceptible to negative body as others.

Mobilizing the community: Activism and encouraging involvement

Community media often play the role of linking the community and mobilizing it towards shared goals. In this role they differ from the mainstream media which often takes more of an objective and detached approach to reporting the news and even calling for action when it does. Articles in *ML* often had this focus of mobilizing the community

towards shared goals and even of negotiating identity around these goals. Not all of those articles were included in the qualitative analysis because those in the qualitative analysis were of topics that were also covered in the mainstream press. However, even in that coverage, one could note a more activist stance taken in covering certain issues.

An example is article 26A which was a report on a specific campaign for aid to Syria. *ML* chose to report on the Syrian aid issue in a positive way by encouraging involvement in a campaign that was recycling unwanted electronic gadgets and using the proceeds from their sale as aid for Syrian relief. The article encouraged readers to participate and help Syrian refugees. As opposed to this, the way the mainstream media reported on the issue of aid to Syria (26B) was from a more national and policy-related angle reporting on the government's decision to disburse aid to Syria and the controversy surrounding the issue of selecting an organization through which to channel that aid. Article 22A on the forum about a shooting incident in Ottawa also emphasized the need for the community to get rid of negative attitudes about social housing.

Article 28A which was about the Nobel Peace Laureate Tawakkol Karman speaking in Ottawa also had several messages for mobilizing the Muslim community to care about their communities and the global community as well. This article also emphasized the activist aspect of the Arab Spring encouraging women to participate in the social and political process in their communities. Opposed to this, the mainstream press article (28B) focused more on the policy messages in the speech and discussions.

The activist stance taken by *ML* and its role in supporting progressive causes was also apparent in how it reported some of the stories. For example, the Tawakkol Karman

story (28A) highlighted the role of women in the protest and the need for women to participate, the review of the film *Girl Rising* (29A) also supported the cause of women's rights and women's education, article 30A supported the cause for justice in Palestine, and the writer in article 16A wrote about his "legal and activism experience" and the role played by individuals and institutions in organizing anti-radicalization events.

Creating awareness: Playing the explanatory role

A number of articles included in the qualitative analysis also focused on creating awareness about different issues in the community. In the Muslim media, this sometimes takes the form of articles aiming to inform readers about certain aspects of the religion Islam. *ML* has a regular "Heart & Soul" section which often carries articles on spirituality and Islam. Besides that, sometimes certain messages are included in regular news stories or op-eds. Article 16A, for example, in discussing the role the government must play in working with Muslims and not alienating them in the war on terror, also at various points includes messages that serve to not just dispel misperceptions but also explain Islam's stance on terrorism and violence. At various points in the article discourses of legitimization are used to discredit any forms of terrorism and violence by Muslims. Scripture, including the Quran and traditions of the Prophet, are quoted to legitimize the argument that violence and indiscriminate killing is forbidden in Islam.

Article 19A is another example of an article that mainly aimed to raise awareness among the community about eating disorders. The article was published as a special piece relevant to eating disorders awareness week. The mainstream article on the same issue (19B) however, did not mention eating disorder awareness week, but it also took the

angle of raising awareness about eating disorders – in men, in this particular article. But while the mainstream article focused a lot more on reporting about the issue of eating disorders in men, the article in *ML* focused a lot of attention on also including nutrition advice and ways parents can deal with these disorders in their children.

Another article that focused on raising awareness was 24A. The article was a compilation of the views of various local Muslims, both those who were black and those who were not, about what black history month meant to them. The mainstream story in this case (24B) also emphasized the need for Canadians to be informed and it quoted a specific activist who was speaking at an event to commemorate the month. The mainstream story reported the event while quoting the activist on the need for black Canadians to learn about their history and to get involved in pushing for change. In this way, the mainstream article also served as a platform for this activist to voice his views.

Article 26A was also another article that used the raising awareness frame as it informed the community about one particular campaign to raise funds for Syria. Other articles that had similar frames were 25A, 29A and 30A.

Addressing misrepresentations: Countering versus promoting stereotypes

As mentioned earlier, *ML* was founded with the aim of addressing stereotypes and misinformation about Muslims in the post 9/11 era. As a community newspaper, many articles in *ML* are presented with this frame of countering stereotypes about the community often in the mainstream media and in mainstream discourse.

A classic example of this type of article in the qualitative analysis sample was article 16A entitled “Muslims, the war on terror and what the government must do” and

the mainstream article it was compared to 16B entitled “Why we must focus on Islamism, not Islam; Those who make all Islam their enemy not only succumb to a simplistic and essentialist illusion, they lack any mechanism to defeat it.” Both articles were op-ed pieces. In this case, while the mainstream article perpetuated stereotypes and used generalizations and typifying labels, the article in the Muslim newspaper consciously addressed stereotypes and misinformation in addition to including suggestions about what the government must do. Article 16A focused on addressing the “Muslims are terrorists” narrative in mainstream discourse following the arrests in the alleged VIA Rail terror plot. The article also addresses the problematic terminology that was used in the debate following the VIA Rail terror plot. For example, it uses these problematic terms in double quotes like “radicalization” and “homegrown” terrorists addressing the allegations by some “Islamophobes” that “pin collective blame on the Muslims, by citing the “‘radicalization’ of the community”, and alleging that mosques “serve as incubators of ‘homegrown’ terrorists.”

The writer Faisal Kutty, who has previously served as legal counsel to the activist Muslim organization CAIR-CAN¹¹, addressing these misperceptions writes: “The vast majority of Muslims condemn terrorism because even classical Islamic law explicitly classifies hirabah (terrorism) as a serious sin. In fact indiscriminate killing and attacks are prohibited. Kutty counters widespread misperceptions about Muslims when he writes: “Finally, it must be understood that the majority of Muslims, who are neither secular nor ultraorthodox, hold the key to any serious and productive bridge-building.”

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¹¹ CAIR-CAN (Council of American Islamic Relation – Canada) was the former name of the activist Muslim organization now known as the National Council of Canadian Muslims.

Opposed to this, the article from the *Ottawa Citizen* (16B) perpetuated stereotypes in its use of language and terminology. Although the author of the article Daniel Pipes made it clear that he did not assign blame to all Islam or all Muslims for the violent actions of a few, the use of terminology and generalizations in the article was still troublesome. The article uses terms like “Islamist” and “violent jihadists” to describe violent terrorists who claim to follow Islam. Pipes divides and typifies Muslims into three main groups according to how they dealt with the dissonance resulting from what he describes as “premodern accomplishment and modern failure”: secularists, apologists and “Islamists”. This typifying and generalization is another form of stereotyping and labelling that presents a narrow vision of Muslims. Although the writer distinguishes between “radical Islam” and “moderate Islam,” the use of generalizations and labels acts to perpetuate some misperceptions and stereotypes and the use of terms like “Islamists/Islamism” and “jihadist” is problematic on its own since it still links Islam to violence and terrorism. So in this case, while the mainstream article perpetuates stereotypes, the *ML* article counters them. However, although the mainstream media often perpetuates stereotypes, this may not always be the case. In many cases, the Muslim newspaper addresses stereotypes that exist in the general mainstream discourse.

Another article that uses similar language and terminology that label, generalize and perpetuate stereotypes is article 20B. This article in the *Ottawa Citizen* also used terms like “Islamist”, “Islamic extremists” and used labels like “Salafis” to describe a crowd of protestors, describing them as “followers of the purist strain of Islam particularly intolerant of heresy.” The *ML* article in this case (20A) chose to cover the story of the Benghazi attack on the U.S consulate in Libya and the killing of U.S.

ambassador Chris Stevens in a positive way which helped counter stereotypes present in the mainstream discourse. *ML* did not report on the protests and the killing of the U.S. ambassador like the mainstream media did. Instead, it reported on a campaign that was started after the incident to lend support and send condolences to Stevens' family. The article in the very way it covered the incident countered stereotypes of Muslims circulating in the mainstream discourse. The article highlighted that the goal of the effort was to show that "what happened does not represent the majority of Muslims."

Providing another perspective: Critiquing the mainstream media

Some articles were also critical of the mainstream media or explicitly offered another or "alternative" perspective to that present in mainstream discourse. Article 16A, for example, although it does not directly mention reporting in the mainstream media, it indirectly refutes many arguments in mainstream discourse about Muslim "radicalization" and mosques serving as breeding grounds for "homegrown terrorists."

In article 20A, the writer Steven Zhou writes:

The anti-film violence was the top international story for weeks, and drew much debate on the subjects of freedom of expression, and the supposed "inherent" volatility in the Middle East. Magazines like Newsweek featured prominent articles on "Muslim rage," which referred to Islam in essentialist and highly negative ways.

The Celebrate Mercy mailing campaign, in practice, offset such assumptions.

The comparative article 20B in this case had some of the very stereotypes and negative portrayals that were criticized in the *ML* article. Article 22A on the forum on a shooting incident in Ottawa in addition to talking about misunderstandings and discrimination against low income communities also mentioned the negative stereotypes that are perpetuated about Muslims in the mainstream media. The story addressed some of the stereotypes and negative attitudes against those living in social housing that were perpetuated in the media and then circulated in society and the effect these could have.

Article 25A also tries to provide a different perspective from the mainstream on the issue of the rights of the girl child. Although the article mentions the issue of child marriages in the developing world, dowry, gender and sexual violence, it also provides another perspective and critiques the mainstream media when it addresses the issue of the media and entertainment industry in the developed world sexualizing girls from a young age. Opposed to this, the mainstream article 25B covers the topic in the conventional way by focusing on one woman's story, addressing the issue of child marriages. Article 29A which is a film review of *Girl Rising* also emphasizes the alternative aspect when it discusses how the film being reviewed is a "different breed of documentary". So, while many writers of *ML* do not consciously set out to counter the mainstream media, the critique of the mainstream media or mainstream discourse and an attempt to provide a different perspective can often be seen in a number of articles.

Providing "Muslim" perspectives and voices: Representing the community.

More than just giving another or "alternative" perspective on mainstream issues, articles in *ML* included in this analysis also gave perspectives from the Muslim

community on the issue, whatever that perspective was from the eyes of the writer. As a newspaper for the Muslim communities of the Ottawa-Gatineau region, it is expected that the paper would position many mainstream stories from the angle of Muslim communities. Sometimes this framing of the story from a specific angle also takes the form of voicing the perspectives of the different Muslim communities on an issue.

Some articles in *ML* take the position of voicing the community's perspective on an issue through the eyes of one writer. For example, article 16A talked about how unfair targeting of Muslim charities, harassment by security agencies etc. lead to a sense of victimization and marginalization among community members. The comparable mainstream article in this case 16B was clearly written from the opposing perspective and the contrast in terms of how the issue was dealt with was apparent in this difference of perspectives.

Article 18A which was about the Supreme Court ruling about allowing a woman who brought charges of sexual abuse to testify with her niqab (face veil) on was framed from a human rights angle while the mainstream article 18B took a more law and justice frame to it. The *ML* writer Matthew Behrens writes from a Muslim perspective, voicing the community's concerns when he mentions that the discussion sparked as a result of this debate "reflected the ongoing tension of a Canadian society where misperceptions and mistrust of anything related to Islam remain a constant" and that "part of those tensions reflect an Islamophobic lens." The article was supportive of the right of niqab-wearing women to choose to wear the niqab when testifying in court. The mainstream article in this case that took on more of an outsider's angle to the debate, however, was also supportive of the right of these women and was critical of the ruling.

Article 20A which was about the Mercy Mail campaign in response to the killing of the U.S. ambassador in anti-film protests, was also presented from a Muslim perspective and highlighted how the campaign responded to violence with “Prophetic grace” and how the violence did not represent the majority of Muslims. Another example of similar positioning is article 23A which was about a speech by a controversial speaker Gavin Boby who called himself a “mosque-buster.” This story was explicitly reported from a Muslim perspective as the headline openly called him an “Islamophobe” and the continuation headline also took a clear position in stating “Talk offered no benefit.” The *ML* headline also mentioned that he was “allowed to speak” and the lead mentioned that the talk went ahead as planned “despite protests from residents.” The article also quoted the Muslim organization then known as CAIR-CAN and members of other faith groups that legitimized this position that allowing the speech to go on was wrong. The overall tone of the article was critical of the speech. Opposed to this, the mainstream article 20B took a bit more of a detached outsider’s position mentioning that the speaker was “controversial”, headlining the story as “Muslim group wants lawyer’s speech nixed.”

Using alternative practices: Advocacy and opinion

Many of these articles also show how the alternative media uses alternative practices in reporting and writing. Although *ML*’s online policy statement said writers should remain “objective” in their reporting, articles included in the analysis do contain some advocacy and opinion and writing that reflects an explicit stance, unlike what one would find in the mainstream media.

Some of these articles were published in the op-ed section and therefore were expected to include opinion. However, unlike the mainstream media op-eds these op-eds were written from a Muslim angle and took an explicit stance from this perspective. Examples of these include article 16A which openly criticized the government's approach of dealing with the war on terror and even did so in the continuation headline which read "Government should rethink its approach"; and article 18A. Article 30A was also an opinion piece which used explicit language like "baby step" for the Church urging Israel to dismantle its illegal settlements and referred to the "ethnic cleansing of Palestinians" by Israel, mentioning that "blind supporters of Israel are outraged."

Even some of the news articles had examples of advocacy and opinion. For example, article 23A titled "Islamophobe allowed to speak" openly used the term "Islamophobe" to describe the speaker who was speaking against the building of mosques in various areas. The mainstream newspaper used the term "Islamophobic" only in quote marks attributing it to one of the organizations demonstrating against the speech. There were also other articles included in the sample that served as a platform for one organization to voice its message and in this way differed from the mainstream media. For example, article 26A was about one particular campaign for Syrian aid relief and it mobilized support for that campaign and organization. Article 29A was written by an "MCC-NCR writer" and represented the position of the organization called the Muslim Coordinating Council Council of the National Capital Region. The article included sentences like the MCC-NCR "is grateful that nine Muslims in the region are receiving the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Award on the recommendation of the council." In this way, the article served as a platform for this community organization to voice its message and

it was published in the local news section. The mainstream newspaper on the other hand reported on this story in a very different way by focusing on the story of one recipient of the award and reported from an outsider's perspective. Similarly, article 21A on the Connecticut shooting also served as a platform for one Imam to voice his views.

Sourcing routines: Drawing sources from within the community

Even when the issue covered was a topic of mainstream interest, the sources used in those stories were mostly drawn from within the Muslim communities. This also helped make the story relevant to the readership. For example article 17A about the PQ victory in the Quebec elections quoted different community members about their reactions and expectations. Similarly, even article 19A which was on eating disorders awareness week used a Muslim dietician as the source and primary definer. Article 24A about black history month also interviewed local Muslims about their views on the issue.

In terms of the kinds of sources used, *ML* used both elite and non-elite sources in its articles. Sometimes ordinary community members were quoted in stories and sometimes the sources were drawn from officials in Muslim organizations. In this way sourcing routines were somewhat similar to the mainstream which also combined both elite and non-elite sources. So unlike earlier studies about sourcing routines in the alternative media focusing on non-elite sources (Harcup, 2003), sourcing routines in those terms appeared to be similar to the mainstream media.

Conclusion

The interview and analysis of *ML* shows that the newspaper serves as an effective community medium and an alternative to the mainstream in terms of representing a

diversity of Muslim voices, serving as a platform for Muslims to voice their opinions on a variety of issues, fostering community identity, focusing on positive stories and supporting progressive causes. The goals of the paper show a commitment to take the task of telling the community's story into its own hands and a desire to represent the community's own narrative. The newspaper also promotes political and social engagement in the Muslim communities it serves by encouraging readers to participate in the political process and by mobilizing action for a number of social causes.

The definition of what constitutes news also differed significantly between the Muslim newspaper and the mainstream. *ML* covered a number of small community stories that were of interest to the Muslim communities but that would not really be considered news by the mainstream media of the region. With its goal of covering topics in a way that is different from the mainstream media and with the different positioning, angles, frames and sources that its stories offer, *ML* is able to provide alternative voices, arguments and perspectives which serve as an "alternative public sphere" (Harcup, 2003).

Although *ML* relies on commercial methods of financing like advertising and may not be entirely participatory in its production processes, the paper does make an attempt to represent and involve a variety of diverse communities and identities within Ottawa's larger Muslim community. Like *TML*, it therefore serves as an alternative in terms of adding to the multiplicity of voices in society, offering ideologies, discourses and representations that differ from the mainstream and also just in its potential to voice different ideas that are important on their own (Bailey et al., 2008).

Chapter 7

Making Their Place in the Mediascape: Muslims Writing Their Own Narrative

Mainstream media cannot address all the issues for all communities equally. Therefore, each one has to have its own vehicle to make sure that those issues and those ideals that are important to them are always presented in this proper context. It's no less the case for Muslims. (Ayesha K. Mustafaa as quoted in "Islam, Muslims and the media", n.d.)

The goal of this thesis was to contribute to filling the gap in research on the Muslim media in North America and to understand how these media differ from the mainstream media and if they effectively serve as alternative media in the larger media landscape. The research questions in this study aimed to understand how the goals, practices and journalism of the Muslim newspapers under investigation differed from a selected mainstream newspaper in their respective regions and the role these newspapers play in providing an alternative to the conventional media. Drawing from many theoretical perspectives on alternative media, community and multicultural media, the findings have demonstrated that Muslim media can serve as effective alternatives to mainstream media. The study found there are significant differences in the goals, practices and content of the Muslim newspapers when compared with the mainstream newspapers. These differences exist both in the stories selected for coverage and in the way the issues were covered. Based on these two cases of the Muslim newspapers and the two mainstream newspapers they were compared to, the findings show that Muslim media initiatives like these can serve as an effective solution to mainstream media misrepresentation. They may not always provide a counter-narrative, which is something

the newspapers can focus on more, but they were able to tell the community's stories, help the community write its own narrative and provide distinctive content.

Although the number of mainstream articles used for comparison were limited, and therefore did not provide a thorough enough analysis of the framing and angles used by the mainstream newspaper for a given topic or issue, making extensive generalization unfitting, the comparison of each of the Muslim media articles with another mainstream newspaper article helped demonstrate some of the differences in how a particular story was covered by both newspapers and the different frames, angles, sources, terminologies and techniques used in reporting it. However, since the mainstream media often have a number of stories on a particular issue, there are often a wide number of themes and angles used in reporting the story and different writers tend to focus on different angles and themes, therefore generalizing extensively on the basis of one story may not be correct. As demonstrated in the qualitative analysis, some of the mainstream media articles did have themes that countered stereotypes like the Muslim media, while others perpetuated them. Many times, the mainstream media had both types of articles on the same topic or issue, but only one of them ended up in the analysis. Nonetheless, a number of themes were consistent across different articles in the comparative analysis, which demonstrated that differences exist in the goals, journalism and practices of the Muslim newspapers and mainstream media. The interviews further confirmed this difference.

One of the main ways the Muslim media were found to differ from the mainstream media was the difference in news values. The definition of a newsworthy story differed greatly between the Muslim newspapers and the mainstream media. This was demonstrated in the very small percentage of articles of the Muslim newspaper that

had corresponding coverage in the mainstream media. The different stories that make it to the pages of the Muslim newspapers demonstrate the media's commitment to report on issues of importance to the community even though they may not be considered as news by the mainstream media. Atton (2002) calls this the alternative press's "own construction of news, based on alternative values and frameworks of news-gathering and access" and writes that they proceed from a desire to present other interpretations of stories or "stories that are not normally considered as news" (p. 10-11). This is what Moll (2007) describes as the deconstruction of mainstream discourse by the alternative media through the construction of their own discursive alternative in an act of what she refers to as "talking back".

Furthermore, these media are able to serve as platforms to broadcast the voices and issues of groups that are otherwise excluded from the mainstream media. Stories that get no traction in the mainstream media, often find their place in community and alternative media like those studied in this thesis. Muslims who have often been targeted and misrepresented in mainstream media discourse find value in such forms of media since they are able to control the narrative about the community and find a platform to tell their own stories in their own voice. These stories are not always critiques of representations in the dominant discourse. In fact, many a time these stories are simply everyday stories about events in the community, celebrations, projects and achievements.

As Atton and Hamilton (2008) point out, to provide an "alternative", media do not necessarily have to project radical political ideas, they can simply be providing a platform for explorations of individual enthusiasm and subcultural identity. *TML* and *ML* provide a platform to their communities to construct and negotiate their identities and explore

issues of interest to the respective communities, even if they do not always give radical political ideas. Both papers also serve progressive causes by encouraging political engagement and represent a political statement in terms of Muslim striving for visibility and participation in society (Bailey et al., 2008) and mobilizing the community for political and social causes. Although *TML* did at certain occasions present radical political ideas in its coverage of activists speeches like those by George Galloway and Yvonne Ridley, all of their content may not be about presenting such ideas, rather it focuses a lot on day to day happenings in the community. Similarly, *ML* also does not present such radical political ideas most of the time. But as Dowmunt (2007) pointed out, the mere act of production points to these media's political nature even if their content may not always be political.

The Muslim media were also found to use practices that differ from the dominant styles of journalism. Injecting opinion, interpretation and advocacy and serving as a platform for activist messages therefore not only provides for more diverse and strong views to be presented, adding to the "multiplicity of societal voices" (Bailey et al., 2008 p. 20), but also serve as alternative practices adding to the distinctiveness of these media from the mainstream media. Often times, these media also use different sources as the case of both newspapers demonstrated. The different sources that often become the primary definers of a story are usually drawn from within the community lending a unique perspective that is different from what the sources used in the mainstream media would offer. Sometimes, certain events are covered not as hard news stories, but as opinion and interpretation from one writer's perspective, at other times, events were viewed from an Islamic lens by interpreting them through religious scriptures.

Although the editorial teams of both Muslim newspapers said that they did not consciously aim to counter the mainstream media and that they did not respond to individual stories in mainstream newspapers, they both spoke about goals of countering stereotypes and misrepresentations of Muslims in the mainstream media. By both responding to the mainstream media discourses and representations of Muslims at times and by publishing stories that provide positive and realistic representations of Muslims, these media are able to “implicitly and explicitly” rebut stereotypes (Hirji, 2012, p. 575). This meets Sandoval’s (2009) definition of using critical content as a criterion for considering media alternative as well as Bailey et al.’s (2008) idea of alternative media voicing ideas and perspectives that are distinctive even if they may not be aiming to counter the mainstream media. While both Muslim newspapers in this study had critical content, a majority of their content consisted of community stories that may not really be aiming to counter mainstream discourse, but implicitly ended up doing so. So, while these media may not always be presenting an alternative to the agenda and discourse of the mainstream media, they serve as an alternative in their role of providing distinctive representations and perspectives that cannot be found in the mainstream media.

It is worth discussing here, however, whether or not these media as Muslim media serving as an alternative, should be focusing more consciously on countering the representations and ideas in the mainstream media? Do readers, and society in general, expect media produced by certain ethnic or religious groups to respond to mainstream media portrayals of their communities and their issues? As one of the prominent and readily available voices of Muslims in their communities, it would be valuable for these media to respond more actively to discussions in the mainstream media about Muslims

and Islam. Monitoring the mainstream media for this purpose would help these media cover and respond to all issues affecting their communities. Although advocacy groups like CAIR, for instance, take on this role of responding to mainstream media representations, focusing more actively on this role would help these Muslim newspapers to serve as a more effective alternative platform. This, in addition to the everyday stories about the community, would allow the newspapers to effectively perform the role of representing the communities as well as serving as their voice on issues where their communities may not be correctly represented in the mainstream media.

The newspapers could also focus on offering more commentary and opinion by experts in the community on issues of mainstream interest. Another thing found lacking in both newspapers was a regular editorial section that would present the stance of the newspaper on a number of important issues happening within the community or even issues of mainstream interest. More editorials and opinion pieces would add value to the newspapers and provide a forum for debate and discussion within the community. The newspapers also lacked a strong critical voice about Muslims themselves. Although the editors mentioned they try to represent the Muslim communities realistically and sometimes they did include discussions that were critical of practices or happenings in the community, a strong critical eye for the community was found to be missing, and some articles came out to appear more promotional. Given the fact that the newspapers have limited staff and fewer with journalism training, it may be difficult to have more articles with that kind of critical perspective, but adding that perspective to the mix of articles in the newspapers would help strengthen the journalism these media put forward and may help foster more debate and change within the communities.

By their existence, alternative media like those examined in this thesis are able to challenge “actual concentrations of media power” (Couldry and Curran, 2003, p. 7). Although the two Muslim newspapers do not really have what scholars have called horizontal practices of production or practices that would be considered participatory and they both rely on commercial means of financing, they do fall under Bailey et al.’s (2008) definition of alternative media with “hybrid formats and practices” (p. 95).

TML is also owned by a larger organization i.e. an Islamic centre and therefore may not be as independent as one would ideally consider alternative media forms to be. But as Sandoval (2009) argues, practices like working under established institutions and relying on advertising are often the only way alternative media are able to sustain themselves and function effectively. Moreover, in terms of the media being about Muslim communities, relying on commercial measures does not really compromise the media’s independence as it would for other alternative media forms whose purpose is to expose the capitalist system, for example. The two Muslim newspapers may not be perfect examples of alternative media, and they may have their weaknesses, but both newspapers do represent an attempt to champion the struggle of Muslims in multicultural societies for better representation and inclusion. It is worth noting here that both Muslim newspapers examined in this study also differed amongst themselves further lending credence to Bailey et al.’s (2008) claim that alternative media should be seen as a colorful “myriad of media initiatives as diversified as society itself” (p. 153). While *TML* works under an Islamic centre which also aligns itself with a particular school of thought, *ML* claims independence from any such organization or school of thought. Furthermore, although linked to an Islamic organization, *TML* appeared to be more political in nature and more

daring in its content of criticizing government and mainstream media, while *ML* which does not link itself to any Islamic organization or centre focused more on representing the community and reporting its day to day stories. Also, while *TML*'s editor spoke about "Islamic principles" guiding their selection of news and many articles in the Islam section seemed to impart religious teachings from a particular school of thought, the editor of the *ML* repeatedly mentioned that the aim of their newspaper was not to teach people about Islam but merely to represent Muslim communities.

However, regardless of how the newspapers seem to be structured internally and ideologically, both of them showed a commitment to represent and link the different Muslim communities in their region and champion the Muslim cause, whichever way it may be defined within their community. The way the teams of both newspapers work also point to the alternative and activist nature of these mediums in a unique way. Both newspapers are severely understaffed, often depending on just three or four major team members. Although some of the positions are paid positions in both newspapers, they require a lot of volunteer work which is only possible with a passion and commitment that is difficult to find in any mainstream media. Staff at these Muslim newspapers often have an activist ambition and the vision of contributing to a greater cause.

Although these newspapers have some features which one may not equate with alternative media in an ideal environment like commercial financing and ownership by an established institution, many of their features, goals and practices do conform with the definition of alternative media operating in multicultural societies. Taking into account these diverse features and characteristics, Bailey et al.'s (2008) panoptic perspective of alternative media applies best to these media. Bailey et al. argue that such a perspective

facilitates an appreciation of the diversity of alternative media initiatives and acknowledges the fluidity of their boundaries in terms of their hybrid forms and practices.

The value of such media lies perhaps not only in challenging one-sided representations of religious groups, but also in the “challenges they present to the communicative political ethos of mainstream public communication as the main legitimized providers of information” (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 94). In a world where Muslim identities have been misrepresented, the value of media produced by and for Muslims is more pronounced. In the face of mainstream media misrepresentation, media run by Muslims themselves helps provide “alternative, discursively connected public spheres, potentially working to minimize mainstream media hegemonic power over meaning” (Bailey et al., 2008, p. xiv). In this role, these media function as alternative media, challenging representations in the mainstream media as well as strengthening the participation of their communities in multicultural and democratic societies.

Echchaibi (2013a) calls the growth of Muslim media like these marking a turning point in the way Islam is perceived in Western societies. Bailey et al. (2008) call such alternative Muslim media initiatives a “significant journalistic development” in the role they play in challenging mainstream representations of Muslims and fostering discussions within the community. Media like these play a role in fostering new conversations and “new strains of reformist discourse” (Mandaville, 2003, p. 147) in Muslim communities and “demystifying” Muslim societies (Karim, 2000, p. 180). Although these alternative media may not have as wide a reach as mainstream media, they do represent a move towards Muslims taking back their news and writing their own narratives. As the interview with *TML* showed, the mainstream media are beginning to pay attention to

alternative media even if it is just for story ideas. Even though these Muslim newspapers target the Muslim communities in their respective regions as their readership, their presence in the mediascape means that reporters from the mainstream media as well as anyone outside the community has easy access to a different perspective and a perspective from within the Muslim community itself, in addition to an insight into the issues and happenings in the community. Studying such media forms allows for a positive way of moving beyond the critique of representation (Dreher, 2010) and the victimization narrative, and gives the opportunity to explore the “transformative dynamics of Muslim media production” (Echchaibi, 2013a, p. 121).

Future studies could focus on the Muslim media in specific countries, examining their goals and practices alone or comparing them with the mainstream media of those countries and regions. Comparison between the Muslim media and mainstream media would prove more effective if a particular event or issue was selected and all coverage in the Muslim media on that event or issue was compared with all coverage of it in a mainstream medium. This would allow for all the coverage in the mainstream medium on an issue to be examined, allowing for more generalization and preventing the problem of only one mainstream media perspective being examined even when multiple perspectives were covered. A better understanding of the Muslim media could hold important lessons for the mainstream media and the practice of journalism as a whole.

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Appendix I

Table of newspaper articles included in the study

Table 1: *The Muslim Link* (TML) articles that had coverage in the *Washington Post*

	<i>The Muslim Link</i> article	Covered in the <i>Washington Post</i>
	September 2012 issue	
1.	Dar Al-Hijrah Community Attacked by Vandals	✓
2.	Weather, Improved Logistics Bring Over 5,000 out for Muslim Family Day	✗
3.	Al Sharpton, Dennis Kucinich To Headline CAIR Banquet	✗
4.	Muslim Democrats Grow in Number at National Convention, Political Power Remains Limited	✓
5.	Prince George's County Muslim Council Pushes Voter Registration In Run-Up to November	✓
6.	MD Muslim Hopes Invention Eases Travel Woes	✗
7.	Al-Rahmah Sunday School Adds Class for Hearing Impaired	✗
8.	"If I Should Speak" Novelist Attends DC Book Signing	✗
9.	Annapolis Muslims Welcome A New Member: Their Imam	✗
10.	New Imam Aims to Target Youth At Masjid Ibn Taymiyyah	✗
11.	Area Masajid and Organizations Issue Statements On Killing of US Ambassador, Film Protests	✓
12.	Somali Community Holds Action Day on the Humanitarian and Political Situations in Somalia	✗
13.	Jamal's Story	✗
14.	Home of the Heart Campaign Begins	✗
15.	Chicago Youth Arrested In Fake FBI Terror Plot	✓
16.	US Media Angrily Marvels At The Lack Of Muslim Gratitude	✗
17.	America and the Muslims: The Reality Behind the "Free Speech" Argument	✓
	October 2012 issue	
18.	American Muslims and the 2012 Election	✓
19.	Dar-us-Salaam Applies for Zoning, Launches \$10M Fundraising Campaign for New Campus	✗
20.	Adventure Seekers Plummet to Earth	✗
21.	ICM's Food Festival Draws Diverse Crowd	✗
22.	Area Children Learn Meaning of 'Orphan' At Islamic Relief Event	✗

	<i>The Muslim Link article</i>	<i>Covered in the Washington Post</i>
23.	Community Activist Launches Marriage, Pre-Marriage Counseling Service	✕
24.	Maryland Muslimah Wins Religious Discrimination Lawsuit	✕
25.	Complicated Women's Fiqh Issues Simplified at Seminar	✕
26.	Understanding the 2012 Elections	✓
27.	Senate Holds Hearings On Hate Crimes In Wake of Sikh Temple Massacre	✕
28.	MD Muslim Vies for US Senate Seat On Libertarian Party Ticket	✕
29.	Advocacy Groups to Mobilize Voter Protection Units	✕
30.	Understanding the Questions on the Maryland Ballot	✓
31.	A Conversation with a Muslimah Novelist	✕
32.	Intelligence Effort Named Citizens, Not Terrorists	✓
33.	Reclaiming Principles from a Mobocracy	✓
	November 2012 issue	
34.	Here to Vote? Please See the Lady In the Blue Hijab	✓
35.	Eid Holiday to Stay Off Montgomery County Public Schools Calendar	✓
36.	Virginia Scout Leader Also Election Problem Solver	✓
37.	Shariah Demystified, Destigmatized At Georgetown Event	✕
38.	Montgomery County High School Students Host Unified Eid Celebration	✕
39.	Returning Hujjaaj Share Their Experiences with The Muslim Link	✕
40.	Silat School Expands, Stays Competitive	✕
41.	Seniors Convene at MCC to Empower, Support One Another	✕
42.	Dar Al-Hijrah Adds Expert Reciter to Its Knowledge Team	✕
43.	Dear Mr. President ...	✕
44.	Gaza Solidarity 5K Run Announced	✕
45.	Prince George's Muslims Clean Up, Adopt A Road	✕
46.	Libertarian US Senate Candidate Offers Post-Election Thoughts	✕
47.	Weeknight School to Start At Dar Al Noor	✕
48.	Indian Americans Welcome Congressman Walsh's Defeat As Victory for Pluralism	✕
49.	Downfall of Islamophobes Delights US Muslims	✓
50.	Street Sweeper's Life Transforms In Makkah	✕
51.	Celebrating a Golden Jubilee Kuwait Style: Gulf State Spends £10million To Put On Biggest Firework Display Of All Time	✕

	<i>The Muslim Link article</i>	<i>Covered in the Washington Post</i>
52.	Born Jewish in New York, Outspoken Defender of Islam Passes In Pakistan	x
	December 2012 issue	
53.	Area Ethiopian Muslims Encouraged by Symbolic Victory	x
54.	Dar-us-Salaam Gears Up for First Major Event for New Campus	x
55.	Richmond Father Murdered In His Store	x
56.	Young Muslim Conference Packs Crowd, Inspiration In Baltimore	x
57.	The Indonesian Muslim Association of America in Rockville, MD (Community profile)	x
58.	Interfaith Trip Helps Us Discover Our Own Faith	x
59.	ICM Youth Make Fundraising Mobile-Friendly	x
60.	ISB Golden Age Committee Hopes for More Community Involvement	x
61.	Coalition Presses State Dept to Continue Travel Ban on Indian Government Official	x
62.	Somali Diaspora Youth Convene In Virginia	x
63.	Think Tank Seeks to Give Muslims a Chair at the Policy Making Table	x
64.	Race to College Event Seeks To Help Students Overcome Tuition Hurdles	x
65.	Muslim Students Look To Shed Light On Religion, Culture In First Muslim Monologues Event	x
66.	ICM Trustee Juggles IT Firm, Community Service, and MD State Board of Education Work	x
67.	Anne Arundel Muslims Show Support for Republican County Executive Candidate	x
68.	College Park Student Inducted Into Honor Society	x
69.	PGMA Hosts Disaster Preparedness Workshop	x
70.	Annual Essay Competition Focuses On Ummah, Unity	x
71.	MCC Hopes to Break Ground On Expansion In January	x
72.	Severe Weather Events Sending A Message: Be Prepared	x
	January 2013 issue	
73.	New Masjid A Testament To Interfaith Cooperation	x
74.	Latina Immigrants: The New Ambassadors of Islam	x
75.	MCC Hosts Seminar On Surah Yaseen	x

	<i>The Muslim Link article</i>	<i>Covered in the Washington Post</i>
76.	Lectures, Seminars, and Halaqas: What's the Point	✗
77.	Women's Health Focus at Anne Arundel Seminar	✗
78.	Germantown Masjid Construction Expected to Start this Summer	✗
79.	Praying By the Rules	✗
80.	On 11th Anniversary, Inter-Faith Groups Call for Closing of Guantanamo	✓
81.	Preemptive Prosecution Is Legal Persecution, Say Rights Advocates	✗
82.	NoVA Scouts to Play Important Role At Inauguration	✗
83.	ADAMS Youth Usher In Winter With Sugar and Spice	✗
84.	Palm National: Shade for Small Businesses As Credit Wells Dry	✗
85.	Effort Begins to Establish Masjid In Hunt Valley MD	✗
86.	Governor's Commission on Middle Eastern American Affairs Hosts Film, Food Drive	✗
87.	Tarbiyah Academy Says Opening May Be Delayed	✗
88.	Inquisitive High School Girls Visit PGMA	✗
89.	Banquet Success Shows Community Support for New Campus, Says Dar-us-Salaam	✗
90.	Anti-Muslim Violence Spiraling Out Of Control In America	✓
	February 2013 issue	
91.	South East DC Experiencing Surge In Teens, Youth Entering Into Islam	✗
92.	With Doors Open for All, MCC Clinic Celebrates Expansion	✗
93.	Area Islamic Organizations Unprepared to Assist Congregation, Neighbors In Case of Disaster	✗
94.	Talk Opposing Hijab Draws Objection	✓
95.	Second Muslim Store Owner Murdered In Richmond	✗
96.	Muslim American Inaugural Gala Celebrates Obama's Re-election	✗
97.	A Voice for Low-Income Residents of Gaithersburg	✗
98.	Tracing Roots: African American Muslim Who Settled in DC	✗
99.	MoCo Muslims Volunteer On Day of Service	✗
100.	MCC Trains Ambassadors to Senior Community	✗
101.	Annual Essay Panel Contest A Brotherly, Sisterly Event	✗
102.	Support Group Announced for Often Shunned HIV Positive Muslims	✗

	<i>The Muslim Link article</i>	<i>Covered in the Washington Post</i>
103.	MyJihad Campaign Comes to Area Metro Stations	✕
104.	New Masjid Planned for Prince George's County	✕
105.	Al-Huda Students Say No to Bullying	✕
106.	The Engaged Muslim Citizen: Getting to Know D.C.'s Political Representatives	✕
107.	Naming the Dead: Bureau of Investigative Journalism Announces New Drones Project	✕
108.	Apple Rejects 'Questionable' US Drone Strike Tracker App	✕
109.	U.S. Drone Base In Africa Approved By Niger	✓
110.	President Obama, Did or Did You Not Kill Anwar al-Awlaki?	✓
111.	Twitter Reveals US Government Makes 80% Of Info Requests	✕
	May 2013 issue	
112.	'A symbol of friendship': Turkish prime minister breaks ground for \$100m masjid complex in Maryland	✕
113.	Al-Rahmah school marks 25 years	✕
114.	Running Muslim: The Other Boston Story	✓
115.	VA Anti-Hijab Event Results In Formation of Muslim Women's Group	✕
116.	Getting Shot to Get the Shot - The Story of Palestinian Journalists	✕
117.	Stories of Those Left Behind: The Wife of Farooque Ahmed	✕
118.	Cabbie Exposes Ugliness of Anti-Muslim Hate With Cell Phone Video	✓
119.	Anger Over Burial Of Boston Bomb Suspect	✓
120.	Effort to Put Eids On MoCo School Calendar Now Formal Campaign	✕
121.	For Dar Al Hijrah, Having the Biggest Ramadan In Town Means A Lot of Hiring	✕
122.	ILIA Rekindles Love of Learning with Book Fair	✕
123.	Former Pakistani Pop Star Helps Raise Funds for School	✕
124.	Regional Debate Tournament Promotes Confidence, Quick Thinking	✕
125.	ISWA Keeps Up Drive for Parking Lot	✕
126.	CAIR MD Inaugural Banquet Sold Out	✕
127.	Imam Appointed to State Board	✕
128.	All Aboard for Home of the Heart Lunch Cruise	✕
129.	DMV Youth Groups Form Unity Council	✕

	<i>The Muslim Link article</i>	<i>Covered in the Washington Post</i>
130.	Immigrants Fear Split Families As Debate Underway in Senate	✓
131.	Will Pakistan Finally Stand Up Against Illegal US Drone Attacks?	✗
132.	With Bags of Cash, C.I.A. Seeks Influence in Afghanistan	✓
133.	Getting to Know America's Favorite Muslims	✗
134.	CAIR-MD Criticizes Senator Ben Cardin for Discriminatory Bill	✗
	June 2013 issue	
135.	Faith Groups Raise Voice To Protect Neighborhoods Affected By Foreclosure	✓
136.	Out of Place at Area Masajid, NoVA Youth Create Their Own Space	✗
137.	Howard Muslims Help Community Live Well	✗
138.	Aiming to Revive A Forgotten Sunnah	✗
139.	Reaching Out With Mercy to HIV+ Muslims	✗
140.	Qur'an Programs Highlighted At First Maryum Islamic Center Fundraiser	✗
141.	Silat Martial Arts Schools Win at Regional Tournaments	✗
142.	Prince George's County Muslim Council Hosts First Annual Cookout	✗
143.	Masjid Muhammad Partners with Office of Aging to Become First Halal Nutrition Site for Seniors	✗
144.	Introducing the new Imam of ICNA VA Masjid: Imam Abdool Rahman Khan	✗
145.	Despite Funding Challenges, WIA Expects Growth Next Year	✗
146.	Selling Guantanamo: Exploring the Propaganda Surrounding America's Most Notorious Military Prison	✗
147.	Saudi Government: Postpone Haj If You Can	✗
148.	PRISM Just Part of Much Larger, Scarier Government Surveillance Program	✓
149.	Iowa Town Named for Muslim Hero Extols Tolerance	✗
150.	No Way! Cisse Will Refuse To Wear Newcastle Shirt With Wonga Sponsorship	✗
151.	Saudi Prince Spends \$19-million On Three-Day Disneyland Party To Celebrate Graduation	✗
152.	A Relief Worker's Take: On the Ground After the Oklahoma Tornado	✓
	Total number of topics covered in TML that did have coverage in the Washington Post	28

Table 2: *Muslim Link* (ML) articles that had coverage in the *Ottawa Citizen*

	<i>Muslim Link</i> article	Covered in the <i>Ottawa Citizen</i>
	September 2012 issue	
1.	PQ victory raises concerns about religious rights, economy	✓
2.	Massive survey of world's Muslims released	✗
3.	Sadaqa Food Bank launches charity drive for needy kids	✗
4.	Recycling for Syria	✓
5.	Two major surveys on hate to gauge Islamophobia	✗
6.	Bosnia & Herzegovina –The journey 2012	✗
7.	The sky is <i>not</i> falling: Analysing the Quebec election results (Op-ed)	✓
8.	United Church's baby step for justice in Middle East (Op-ed)	✓
9.	Local health & fitness programme for Muslim families	✗
10.	Dismantling the "Muslim tide" myths (Book review)	✗
	October 2012 issue	
11.	Former ML writer talks about covering the Arab Spring	✓
12.	HCI to sue media for defamation	✗
13.	Dinner unites for positive change	✗
14.	Food festival celebrates diversity, puts spotlight on Yemen crisis	✗
15.	Mercy Mission launches hotline for Muslim women	✗
16.	Chaplain cuts an "unfair move against all faiths": CIC	✓
17.	Eid gift drive gives needy kids a reason to smile	✗
18.	Campaign responds to violence with Prophetic grace	✓
19.	Remembering the girl child (Op-ed)	✓
20.	Women, violence and human rights	✗
21.	Early detection key in fighting breast cancer	✓
22.	Frontier Justice: The global refugee crisis and what to do about it (Book review)	✗
23.	The outlook for Islamic finance in Africa	✗
	November 2012 issue	
24.	Algonquin College opens worship facility and spiritual centre	✗
25.	Pro-Palestinian protestors call for peace	✗
26.	Tragedy in Syria hits Ottawa family	✗
27.	Muslim groups speak out against desecration of war memorial	✓

	<i>Muslim Link article</i>	<i>Covered in the Ottawa Citizen</i>
28.	Abraar continues to shine provincially	✕
29.	Clarity amidst distortion: Renowned scholar to visit Ottawa	✕
30.	“Roses for the Prophet” spreads message of peace	✕
31.	Five years after Charkaoui v. Canada: Panel assesses impact of security certificates	✕
32.	Community leader to receive inaugural Order of Ottawa award	✓
33.	Another 9 community members to get Diamond Jubilee medals	✓
34.	The Canadian in “Little Gitmo”	✕
35.	Let Afghans chart their own way forward: Panel	✕
36.	Islam gains strong following in Haiti	✕
37.	What happens when you’re arrested?	✕
38.	From grieving mother to prisoner advocate	✕
39.	Work for freedom? You may be inadmissible to Canada	✕
40.	Make use of your unwanted car	✕
41.	GirlSpeak event lets girls have their say	✕
42.	Our Way to Fight by Michael Riordon (Book review)	✕
	December 2012 issue	
43.	Nobel Peace Laureate Tawakkol Karman charms Ottawa	✓
44.	Local youth launch ambitious project to nurture growth of Arab Spring	✕
45.	Study seeks to give voice to women wearing niqab	✕
46.	Younger generation more sensitive to needs of disabled	✕
47.	Study of women’s experiences with maternal health care underway	✕
48.	Strengthening relations with the Ottawa Police	✕
49.	Islam’s holiest sites at risk of erasure	✕
50.	Badr: Preserved... for those who can find it	✕
51.	Massive new databank to track visitors to Canada	✓
52.	For the love of hockey: Montreal Muslim Ball Hockey celebrates 20 years	✕
53.	Calling on men who care: Wear a white ribbon	✕
54.	Celebration of art, music and Muslim sisterhood returns for fifth year	✕
55.	Understanding respectful vs. disrespectful behavior	✕

	<i>Muslim Link article</i>	<i>Covered in the Ottawa Citizen</i>
	January 2013 issue	
56.	First Muslim-only cemetery opens in Ottawa	✕
57.	Dr. Farook Tareen: consummate gentleman, community leader, and thinker	✕
58.	Tolerance, compassion and unity key themes at RIS 2012	✓
59.	Innovative youth mentorship program in full gear	✕
60.	Harkat optimistic about appeal	✓
61.	Understanding Islamic law, adoption and guardianship	✕
62.	What changes for Indian, Pakistani women after Malala and Damini?	✓
63.	NS case leaves rights of niqab-wearing women in doubt	✓
64.	Legally blind but looking ahead and moving forward	✕
65.	Go Halal or Go Home: An example of a successful youth-led initiative	✕
66.	Stories and images from an Afghan war zone	✕
67.	Ottawa start-up creates app for new drivers	✕
68.	Scholar shortage threatens Islamic financing industry	✕
69.	Berak Hussain: Why I became a counsellor	✕
70.	An imam's reflection on the Connecticut shooting	✓
	February 2013 issue	
71.	Festive ceremony honours Ottawa Muslims	✕
72.	Ad campaign raises awareness about the life of Prophet's grandson	✕
73.	Islamophobe allowed to speak	✓
74.	CAIR-CAN holds successful leadership boot camps	✕
75.	ILEAD promises to lead the way on youth empowerment	✕
76.	Eating disorders being swept under the carpet	✓
77.	Fate of community rests with innovators and entrepreneurs	✕
78.	What does Black History Month mean to you?	✓
79.	Girls throw a punch in Afghanistan	✕
80.	Meat-ing the challenge: Grocer offers organic zabiha	✕
81.	The wisdom of Islam for non-Muslims	✕
	May 2013 issue	
83.	Aboriginals help raise funds for Islam Care Centre	✕
84.	US Ambassador Visits Ottawa Main Mosque	✕

	<i>Muslim Link article</i>	<i>Covered in the Ottawa Citizen</i>
85.	Ottawa conference rejuvenates health care chaplains	x
86.	Troubling new anti-terror provisions pass into law	✓
87.	Infertility: The struggle and stigma of trying to conceive	x
88.	Terror cases: Time for us to take control of our own narrative (Editorial)	✓
89.	Girl Rising by Richard Robbins (Film review)	✓
90.	Muslim league offers faith and basketball	x
	June 2013 issue	
91.	Dr. Tareen's legacy lives on with successful Tulipathon	x
92.	Forum on shooting reveals misunderstanding of low income communities	✓
93.	Local Quran school celebrates 10 years at annual contest	x
94.	Theology camp inspires and motivates youth	x
95.	Youth-to-youth programme hits the stage	x
96.	Afghan students build community on Mother's Day	x
97.	Muslims, the war on terror, and what government must do (Op-ed)	✓
98.	Psychiatry slowly gaining place it deserves	x
99.	Spoken word lets hijabi artist have her say	x
100.	Strong showing by Ottawa-Gatineau at Muslim ball hockey tourney	x
	Total number of topics covered in <i>ML</i> that did have coverage in the <i>Ottawa Citizen</i>	27

Table 3: Articles used for comparative qualitative analysis from both Muslim newspapers and their mainstream counterparts

	<i>The Muslim Link</i> article		<i>Washington Post</i> article
1A	Sabry, M. (2012, November). Downfall of Islamophobes delights US Muslims. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 30.	1B	Wallsten, P. (2012, November, 9). GOP: What went wrong. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. A01.
2A	Alim-Johnson, J. (2012, September). Prince George's County Muslim County Pushes Voter Registration In Run-Up to November. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 5.	2B	Wallsten, P., & Hamburger, T. (2012, September, 21). On right, voter outreach ups the ante. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. A04.
3A	Zuberi, H. (2012, September). Dar Al-Hijrah Community Attacked By Vandals. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 1.	3B	Constable P., & Bahrampour T. (2012, September, 16). After mosque vandalism, Muslim leaders seek calm. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. C07.
4A	Karim, T. (2012, September). Muslim Democrats Grow in Number at National Convention, Political Power Remains Limited. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 5.	4B	Gardner, A., & O'Keefe, E. (2012, September, 7). Precipitation, participation, perspiration. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. A14.
5A	Contributing Writers. (2012, September). Area Masajid and Organizations Issue Statements On Killing of US Ambassador, Film Protests. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 10.	5B	Birnbaum, M., & DeYoung, K. (2012, September, 15). Muslim fury at U.S. spreads. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. A01.
6A	Al-Amin, E. (2012, September). America and the Muslims: The Reality Behind the "Free Speech" Argument. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 31.	6B	Ajami, F. (2012, September, 16). The offensive. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. B01.
7A	Muslim Link Staff, (2012, October). Understanding the Questions on the Maryland Ballot. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 15.	7B	Bahrampour, T. (2012, October, 16). Ballot initiative alliance meets resistance. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. B01.
8A	Zuberi, H. (2012, November). Eid Holiday to Stay Off Montgomery County Public Schools Calendar. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 1.	8B	St. George, D. (2012, November, 14). In Montgomery, no Islamic school holiday. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. B01.

	<i>The Muslim Link</i> article		<i>Washington Post</i> article
9A	Muslim Link Staff. (2013, January). On 11th Anniversary, Inter-Faith Groups Call for Closing of Guantanamo. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 7.	9B	Finn, P. (2013, January, 4). Activists blast Obama for signing defense bill. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. A02.
10A	Zuberi, H. (2013, May). Running Muslim: The Other Boston Story. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 4.	10B	Fahrenthold, D., & Dewey, C. (2013, April, 19). 'Backpack Brothers' show the limitations of Internet sleuthing. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. A10.
11A	Zuberi, H. (2013, May). Cabbie Exposes Ugliness of Anti-Muslim Hate With Cell Phone Video. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 6	11B	Stephens, J., & Jouvenal, J. (2013, May, 1). Muslim cabdriver alleges assault by passenger who cited Boston Marathon bombing. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. B01.
12A	Associated Press. (2013, May). Anger Over Burial Of Boston Bomb Suspect. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 9.	12B	Vozzella, L., & Kunkle F. (2013, May, 11). Boston Marathon bombing suspect buried in rural Virginia. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. A12.
13A	Waseem, F. (2013, May). Immigrants Fear Split Families As Debate Underway in Senate. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 33.	13B	Nakamura, D., & O'Keefe, E. (2013, May, 10). Immigration bill faces Senate blitz. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. A01.
14A	Zuberi, H. (2013, June). Faith Groups Raise Voice To Protect Neighborhoods Affected By Foreclosure. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 1.	14B	Borden, J. (2013, June, 6). Group begins pilot program for affordable housing. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. T27.
15A	Muslim Link staff. (2013, June). A Relief Worker's Take: On the Ground After the Oklahoma Tornado. <i>The Muslim Link</i> . p. 35.	15B	Barnes, J. (2013, May, 26). 'We can make a difference'. <i>Washington Post</i> . p. T01.

	<i>Muslim Link</i> article		<i>Ottawa Citizen</i> Article
16A	Kutty, F. (2013, June). Muslims, the war on terror, and what government must do. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p. 5.	16B	Pipes, D. (2013, May, 4). Why we must focus on Islamism, not Islam; Those who make all Islam their enemy not only succumb to a simplistic and essentialist illusion, they lack any mechanism to defeat it. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. B7.
17A	Virk, S. (2012, September). PQ victory raises concerns about religious rights, economy. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p. 1.	17B	Butler, D. (2012, September, 5). PQ returns to power. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. A1.
18A	Behrens, M. (2013, January). NS case leaves rights of niqab-wearing women in doubt. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p. 6.	18B	Editorial. (2012, December, 21). Justice and the niqab. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. A12.
19A	Virk, S. (2013, February). Eating disorders being swept under the carpet. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p. 4.	19B	Kirkey, S. (2013, January, 21). Body image afflicts men; Anorexia and bulimia were once the tragic preserve of women. No longer. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. A3.
20A	Zhou, S. (2012, October). Campaign responds to violence with Prophetic grace. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p. 7.	20B	Spencer, R., & Saeed A. (2013, September, 13). Chased to his death by a mob in the country he helped save; Islamist gunmen routed security. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. A9
21A	Delic, Z. (2013, January). An imam's reflection on the Connecticut shooting. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p. 15.	21B	Editorial. (2012, December, 15). A nation in horror. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. B6.
22A	Daigle, C. (2013, June). Forum on shooting reveals misunderstanding of low income communities. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p. 1.	22B	Yogaretnam, S. (2013, May, 28). West-side neighbourhoods sound off on gang violence; Some urge more policing, others voice frustration with discrimination. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. C2.
23A	Bajwa, N. (2013, February). Islamophobe allowed to speak. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p. 1.	23B	McGregor, G. (2013, February, 4). Muslim group wants lawyer's speech nixed; Controversial British 'mosquebuster' slated to talk at library. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. B1.

	<i>Muslim Link</i> article		<i>Ottawa Citizen</i> Article
24A	Daigle, C. (2013, February). What does Black History Month mean to you?. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p. 8.	24B	Smith, T. (2013, February, 23). Get informed, students told; Black Canadians need to learn their history if change is to happen, activist says. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. E4.
25A	Faruqui, F. (2012, October). Remembering the girl child. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p. 10.	25B	Krause-Jackson, F. (2012, October, 12). Ending child marriage is goal of UN agencies; Girls in many nations face lives of violence and illiteracy. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p.A7.
26A	Staff Writer. (2012, September). Recycling for Syria. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p. 1.	26B	Berthiaume, L. (2012, August, 24). Aid for Syria remains in limbo; Canada pledged \$2M in medical supplies. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. A4.
27A	MCC-NCR writer. (2012, November). Another 9 community members to get Diamond Jubilee medals. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p.5.	27B	Yogaretnam, S. (2012, November, 10). So that no one went hungry; Dedicated charity baker honoured with Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. E12.
28A	Staff writer. (2012, December). Nobel Peace Laureate Tawakkol Karman charms Ottawa. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p.1.	28B	Yogaretnam, S. (2012, November, 22). Canada urged to support Arab Spring movements; Peace prize winner says work not over. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. C8.
29A	Faruqui, F. (2013, May). Girl Rising by Richard Robbins. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p.5.	29B	Stone, Jay. (2013, April, 26). Educated girls can run the world; Girl Rising draws on big-name talent to stress the importance of schooling for girls. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. F2.
30A	Khan, M, (2012, September). United Church's baby step for justice in Middle East. <i>Muslim Link</i> . p.8.	30B	Berthiaume, L. (2012, August, 18). United Church OKs Israeli product boycott; National body hopes to push Conservative government to denounce settlements. <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> . p. A3.

Appendix II

Questionnaire

Interviews with the two Muslim newspapers

Muslim Link and The Muslim Link

The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. The interviews were conducted over Skype calls with both newspaper teams. The following are the questions that were part of the original questionnaire. Since the interviews were semi-structured, some questions followed from the answers.

- Q1. Who owns the publication? Who are the editors?
- Q2. How much say does the publisher/owner have in terms of what is covered, the angle and tone of a story?
- Q3. How does the newspaper meet the expenses of publication and distribution for free? Who are the major sponsors/donors?
- Q4. What are the interests in having the publication and what aims and goals do you have?
- Q5. How are decisions made about content?
- Q6. What stories do you decide to cover and why? Possibly describe the process of decision making behind a selected edition.
- Q7. What processes does a typical story/report undergo?
- Q8. What kinds of positioning and tones do your stories normally have? Do you ever deal with subjects that may be considered taboo within the community? Please give examples.
- Q9. Do you monitor the mainstream? And do you consciously aim to respond to some mainstream reporting and coverage?
- Q10. Do you see your newspaper as providing the alternative perspective? How do you see it as different from the mainstream?
- Q11. How is the content of the newspaper structured towards meeting the needs of the community it is aimed for? How does it reflect the local and larger community?
- Q12. How are you interacting with the community you are serving?
- Q13. How are community members responding to the content? Can you describe the kinds of feedback? Do you get letters to the editor and which letters do you choose to publish?

Q14. How would the editorial team respond to feedback or an attempt by a community leader such as an Imam to influence content?

Q15. What challenges has the publication faced in the past and what challenges does it face in the future?

Q16. Who makes up the staff of the publication? How many people are there? What do they do? Are they paid? Is there a fully functioning office?

Q17. How do you recruit writers, reporters, columnists and op-ed writers? Do you approach people or can they approach you? How do you decide who to approach/who should be allowed to write?

Q18. What is the process of selecting a topic for an editorial/opinion piece and writing it? Who writes it? What factors are considered in selecting someone to write the editorial/opinion piece?

Appendix III

Ethics Clearance Form

Ethics Clearance was renewed on May 12, 2014 with clearance lasting up until May 31, 2015

Carleton University Research Office
 Research Ethics Board
 1325 Duntton Tower
 1125 Colonel By Drive
 Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6 Canada
 Tel: 613-520-2517
ethics@carleton.ca

Ethics Clearance Form

This is to certify that the Carleton University Research Ethics Board has examined the application for ethical clearance. The REB found the research project to meet appropriate ethical standards as outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, 2nd edition and, the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research*.

X New clearance

☐ Renewal of original clearance

Original date of clearance:

Date of clearance	17 September 2013
Researcher	Naureen Aqueel, Master's student
Department	School of Journalism and Communication
Supervisor	Prof. Karim Karim, School of Journalism and Communication
Title of project	Taking back the news: A study of alternative Muslim media in North America

Clearance expires: **31 May 2014**

All researchers are governed by the following conditions:

Annual Status Report: You are required to submit an Annual Status Report to either renew clearance or close the file. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the immediate suspension of the project. Funded projects will have accounts suspended until the report is submitted and approved.

Changes to the project: Any changes to the project must be submitted to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board for approval. All changes must be approved prior to the continuance of the research.

Adverse events: Should any participant suffer adversely from their participation in the project you are required to report the matter to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. You must submit a written record of the event and indicate what steps you have taken to resolve the situation.

Suspension or termination of clearance: Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, 2nd edition and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

Andy Adler, Chair
 Carleton University Research Ethics Board

Louise Heslop, Vice-Chair
 Carleton University Research Ethics Board