

ISLAM AND THE WEST:
HOW DOES BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE INFLUENCE
HOW PHOTOJOURNALISTS COVER MUSLIMS?

Elisa Day

Jackie Bell, Project Chair

ABSTRACT

This project seeks to answer the question of whether background and experience influence the ways that photojournalists cover Muslims and whether September 11, 2001, had any influence on their perceptions or approach. Scholarly research has found that personal bias can influence the type of news published and it posits that Western media typically approaches this minority group in a very Orientalist way, categorizing them in negative terms. Using textual analysis, I compared the interviews of three photojournalists who cover international events in Brussels, Belgium, to discover whether their publication process allowed for this bias; whether it influenced the type of images they created/submitted for publication and whether 9/11 had any impact. Although the three saw negative bias in media coverage, it did not influence their image production or publication. Because they acted as the primary editor for their wire services, the photojournalists had a large amount of control over image publication. While they had differing explanations for the media's negative portrayal, it did not influence a dedication to portraying events as honestly and objectively as possible. The events of 9/11, nor the 2011 upheavals in the Middle East, did not sway them from their commitment to objective truth. This objectivity was illustrated as well in my internship, where the types of assignments and images selected for publication had nothing to do with any aspect of religion, but instead focused on events and political situations.