Institution: SOAS

Unit of Assessment: 27 Area Studies

Title of case study: Influencing Public Perceptions of Muslim Communities and Islam (Amina Yaqin)

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Yaqin's research on Muslim women's stereotyping and self-image has heavily informed on-going discussions regarding the representation of Muslims in the media and how it shapes public perception of the Muslim community and Islam more broadly. Through active engagement with the media and the public, her research findings have impacted on a wide audience, increasing awareness and understanding of how negative portrayals of Muslims are created and, more importantly, how they can be countered.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Dr Amina Yaqin has been a Lecturer in Postcolonial Studies and Urdu at SOAS since 2000, where she is a founding member of the Centre for Gender Studies and the Centre for the Study of Pakistan. Her interdisciplinary research discusses issues relating to gender, Muslim Women's writing, Urdu and South Asian literature, regionally centred on Pakistan and its comparison with India and the diaspora. She has published numerous articles on gender and sexuality in Urdu poetry, Pakistani culture and Indian literature in English.

Yaqin's interest in gender motivated her to write the 2001 article "Muslims in a Media Ghetto", commissioned by the Commission for Racial Equality in Britain. Appearing immediately after 9/11, the article examined the representation of women in Afghanistan in the UK media. The portrayal of Muslim women was further explored in her 2007 article, "Islamic Barbie: the Politics of Gender and Performativity", in which she explores how a Muslim lifestyle doll marketed to Muslim girls in the West reinforces a normative visual stereotype of the Muslim, which has emerged out of Western stereotypes of Muslims and self-stereotyping in the Muslim diaspora.

Yaqin's work on the depiction of Muslim women heavily informed her subsequent role as Project Partner on the AHRC-funded "Framing Muslims International Research Network" between 2007 and 2010. This interdisciplinary project explored the persistent and habitual stereotyping of Muslims since 9/11 in a range of political, social and cultural texts in the UK and US, examining the convergences between the discourses of politics and the media. The network brought together experts from multiple fields to investigate how Muslims have been depicted (and depict themselves), and how cultural, artistic, social and legal structures 'frame' current debates concerning Muslims in the West.

With the project's Principal Investigator, Professor Peter Morey of the University of East London, Yaqin co-edited a special issue of *Interventions* entitled *Muslims in the Frame*, adopting a transhistorical and international perspective on the stereotyping of Muslims. Their most significant output, however, was the 2011 co-authored book *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11.* This original study investigates how biased, misleading and overwhelmingly negative images of Muslims are produced and disseminated in the public imagination, creating a lacuna between representation and reality. The book applies insights from communications theory, semiotics and discourse analysis to reveal how images of Muslims are constructed and circulated. Yaqin's expertise in gender and performativity, and her innovative approach (drawing on sociology, cultural studies and literary theory), add a unique perspective, demonstrated most clearly in the final chapter, which focuses on gender, comedy and subversion.

Framing Muslims contributes substantially to the study of the representation of Muslims by presenting a more holistic approach to understanding the issue of Muslim representation in the media, developing a context-sensitive critical framework which recognises the subtlety and power

of images. Moreover, it offers recommendations for reflexive, self-critical practices in politics and the media to improve the representation of Muslims in these two spheres.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

a. "Muslims in a Media Ghetto". *Connections*, Commission for Racial Equality, UK. Autumn 2001.

b. "Islamic Barbie: The Politics of Gender and Performativity." *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress Body & Culture* 11/2 (2007): 173-88.

c. and Peter Morey, eds. *Muslims in the Frame. Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 12/2 (2010).

d. "Inside the Harem, Outside the Nation: Framing Muslims in Radio Journalism." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 12/2 (2010): 226-38.

e. and Peter Morey. "Introduction: Muslims in the Frame." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 12/2 (2010): 145-56.

f. and Peter Morey. *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation After 9/11.* Cambridge (MA), London (UK): Harvard University Press, 2011.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Framing Muslims has greatly informed the work of individuals and organisations who actively challenge negative perceptions of Muslims and Muslim communities in the UK (1, below). Specifically, the book has been used to inform the work of ENGAGE, a not-for-profit company founded in 2008 with the aim of challenging Islamophobia in the UK and improving Muslim participation in media and politics. In November 2012, ENGAGE launched a national touring exhibition, *Media Portrayals of Islam and Muslims*, at the House of Commons to generate awareness and understanding of Islamophobia and its impact on the lives and security of British Muslims. The findings of *Framing Muslims* formed part of the exhibition and its accompanying guide, providing in-depth analysis of what constitutes 'newsworthy' articles when selecting stories about Muslims or Islam and how pre-determined patterns of selection reinforce negative stereotypes. The exhibition was mounted in multiple locations in the UK, including the Muslim Council for Britain's community dinners in Birmingham and Leicester (200 attendees per event); Social Workers Action Network conference, South Bank University (500+); the Unite Against Fascism Conference, London (500+); Communications Workers Union headquarters, London (200); Manchester Museum (2000+); and London Muslim Centre and East London Mosque (200+).

Framing Muslims also heavily informed ENGAGE's media masterclass, a free one-day course held in London (2012) and Bolton (2013), which encouraged delegates to think critically about the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media and how this might be challenged in the quest for a more cohesive and inclusive society. Shenaz Bunglawala, ENGAGE's Head of Research, confirms the contribution to both the masterclass and the exhibition (2, 3 and 4):

"The book's analysis of the representation of Muslims in film and literature is used to illustrate the stereotypes that pervade in this medium. Framing Muslims *is uniquely relevant for its inclusion of 'soft' media approaches, that is, the prevalence of anti-Muslim stereotypes in literature and film. This analysis contributes to assessment on the representation of Islam and Muslims in 'hard' media (newspapers and television) and aids in the appreciation of how multi-platform messaging informs the construction of Muslims and Islam in the public discourse. Our media masterclass presentation and Islamophobia Awareness Exhibition would not be complete without inclusion of the analysis contained in* Framing Muslims *and its significance to challenging anti-Muslim prejudice*

in public discourse".

Framing Muslims has also informed the thinking of those within the media involved in debates and discussions surrounding the representation of Muslims. Samira Ahmed, freelance journalist, writer and broadcaster at the BBC, cites the text as having shaped her ideas on this issue (5):

"I found Dr Yaqin's book interesting and I've recommended it or brought ideas from it up in meetings and discussions with producers and guests in at Radio 3, the World Service and BBC1. For example, we did a programme item at Night Waves *on Radio 3 a few months ago about the concept of Muslim comedy in North America, which drew on some similar ideas* (6)*. It includes an interview with the creator of* Little Mosque on the Prairie*, a programme I had specifically mentioned to my producer, after reading about her in* Framing Muslims*. My producer read the book on my recommendation, so it played a specific part in the preparation of ideas and scope of the programme. In that sense, the impact has been notable."*

Yaqin (with Peter Morey) has actively disseminated her research through media engagement and participation in public events. In 2011, she appeared on the Islam Channel's *Politics and Media* show hosted by Salma Yaqoob (former leader of the Respect Party) to discuss the book's findings in relation the rise of the English Defence League and the lack of redress for Islamophobia in sections of the press (7). She also discussed the book's ideas at City Circle London, the Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK at Cardiff and the Muslim Institute Winter Gathering in Sarum College, Salisbury (8, 9). The book was well received by critics internationally, receiving positive reviews in *Dawn,* Pakistan's oldest English-language newspaper, the *Saudi Gazette* and the Indian magazine *Frontline* (10, 11, 12).

Through a series of recorded and archived events, freely available on itunes, the "Framing Muslims" project has been communicated to the wider public, involving participants from community bodies, broadcasting and the arts, including broadcasters Sarfraz Mansoor and Samira Ahmed; the artist Ali Zaidi; novelists such as Booker Prize shortlisted Mohsin Hamid, award winners Daniyal Mueenudin and Farahad Zama and Hollywood screenwriter-turned-novelist Kamran Pasha. In 2010, the British Library included the website in its Web Archive, preserving the material for future use.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Framing Muslims website: http://framingmuslims.org/ [Most recently accessed 18.11.13].

2. Shenaz Bunglawala, Head of Research, ENGAGE: http://iengage.org.uk/ [Most recently accessed 18.11.13].

3. ENGAGE Masterclass: http://www.getoutandvote.info/media-master-class-30th-june-2012/ [Most recently accessed 18.11.13].

4. Article on ENGAGE exhibition: http://www.cwu.org/news/archive/raising-awareness-of-islamophobia.html

5. Samira Ahmed, journalist and broadcaster at the BBC

6. BBC Radio 3 programme on Muslim comedy: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p015rhwv [Most recently accessed 18.11.13].

7. Yaqin on the Islam Channel's *Politics and Media* programme: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qIF45G9J8s&feature=relmfu [Most recently accessed 18.11.13

8. Muslim Institute Winter Gathering, 2011: http://www.musliminstitute.org/events/muslim-institute-winter-gathering [Most recently accessed 18.11.13].

9. Yaqin Public Lecture, Cardiff:
   http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/share/research/centres/csi/newsandevents/events/Islam-UK%20Centre%20Public%20Lecture%20Series%20Brochure.pdf [Most recently accessed 18.11.13].

10. *Dawn* review of *Framing Muslims*: http://www.dawn.com/news/674430/non-fiction-the-burden-of-perception [Most recently accessed 18.11.13].

11. *Saudi Gazette* review of *Framing Muslims*:
    http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=20110508100189 [Most recently accessed 18.11.13].

12. *Frontline* review of Framing Muslims:
    http://www.frontline.in/navigation/?type=static&page=flonnet&rdurl=fl2813/stories/20110701281307800.htm [Most recently accessed 18.11.13].