



LINGUISTIC GUIDE AGAINST ISLAMOPHOBIA

Rhetorical Devices
used in anti-Muslim
Speech

WRITTEN BY:

Dr. Anna Szilágyi

ADVISED BY:

Hajar El Jahidi

ILLUSTRATED BY:

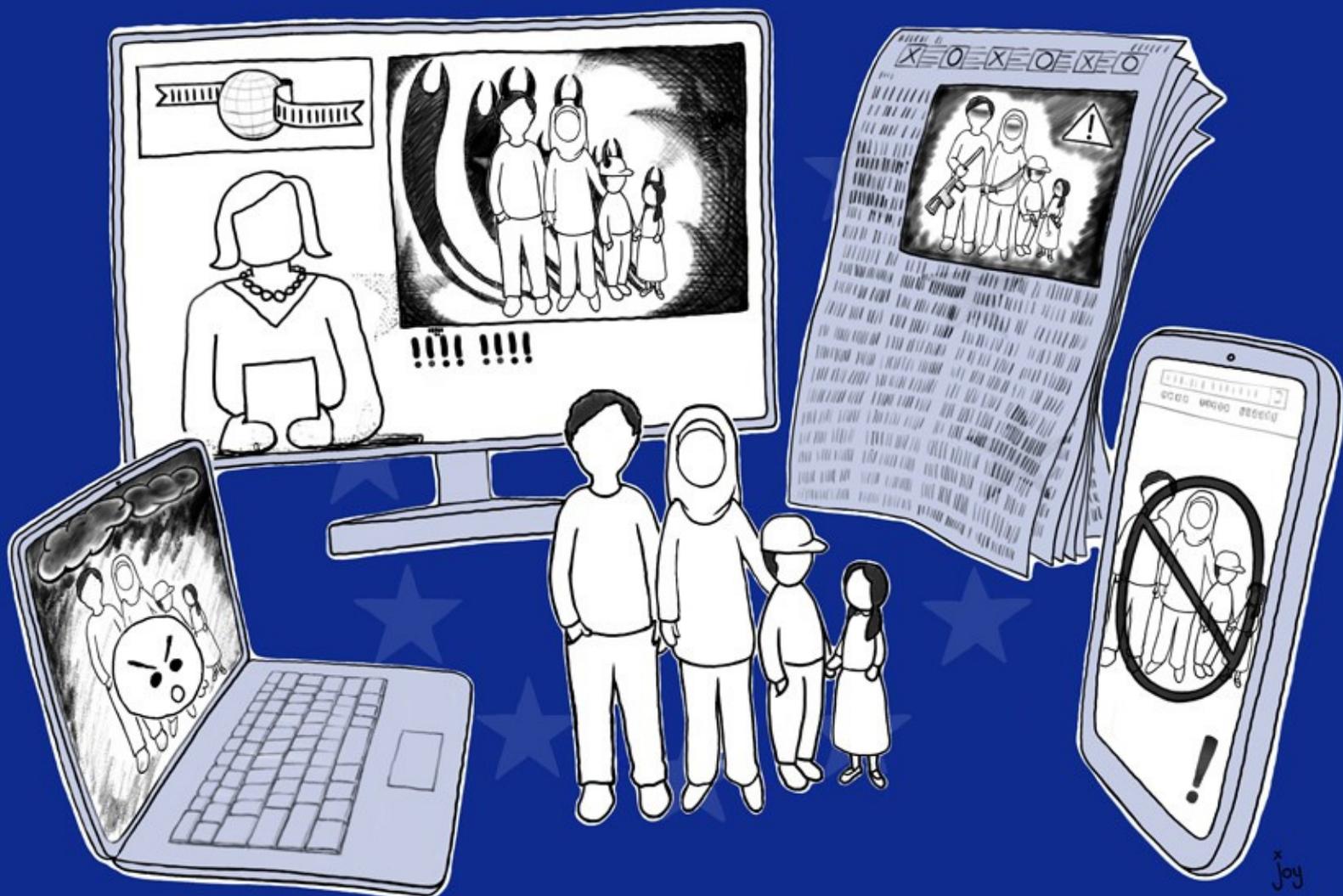
Joy Lau

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FRAMING AND PREJUDICE:

How Negative Frames Lay the Groundwork to Islamophobia



The language that politicians and the media use in relation to a group of people, fundamentally shapes how the public sees that particular community. One of the most crucial strategies that determines the public perception of a group of people is framing. However, media consumers know very little about this phenomenon and that leaves them vulnerable to manipulation.

So, what is framing and how can we identify it to make sure that it does not manipulate readers, or create prejudice against others?

Cognitive linguist George Lakoff defines* frames as mental structures that are activated by words. When we hear terms, they automatically evoke a certain set of frames in our mind. The word “freedom”, for instance, naturally activates the frames of liberation, autonomy, and independence in human thinking. This is largely an automatic process: it is very difficult — if not impossible —to resist frames.

Exactly because of this, politicians, communication experts, journalists, and activists can influence people through framing very effectively. A bank can advertise a loan under the catchy slogan: “your access to freedom.” On this occasion, the pleasant frames that are activated by the word “freedom” can stick to the bank loan itself. So much so, that the frames in question can even influence whether customers apply for the loan or not.

*Lakoff, George. 2004. Don't Think of an Elephant! Know your Values and Frame the Debate: the Essential Guide for Progressives. White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green.

Despite their powerful impact on our thinking and behaviour, most instances of framing may easily go unnoticed. This is dangerous: while sometimes framing is used to sway voters or customers, it can also be used to spread prejudice, discrimination, and hate.

One example is when public speakers use certain terms consistently to describe a community, group, or religion. As we see in the example above, words evoke a set of frames which readers, listeners and viewers then attach to those groups. In the case of Islam, many of the most commonly used terms in the West activate predominantly negative or hostile frames, colouring the perception and shaping the treatment of Muslim communities by societies and states.

The media monitoring activity of the 'Get the Trolls Out!' campaign shows that in recent years, politicians and media personalities have consistently used terms like *"crime", criminality", "no-go areas", "gangs", "rape", "the rape of children", "parallel society", "hate", "violence", "honor violence", "danger", "threat", and "terrorism"* to describe Muslim communities or neighborhoods. Obviously, these words activate extremely negative frames. Moreover, when used repetitively and routinely in connection with Muslim people, these frames eventually stick to the term "Muslim" and have the power to stigmatise an entire community. As a result, the term "Muslim" can automatically activate the same hostile frames as the words listed above.

Importantly, framing can influence not only how people think of a group, but also how they do not. If one regularly encounters speech without terms that activate positive frames — for example, the frames of humanity or family — in connection with Muslim people, that person might see Muslim communities as devoid of normal human needs and experiences and his or her perception of the Muslim community might be reduced to a distorted, negative image. Therefore, besides paying attention to the words that are present in a speech, it is also important to think of the terms that are missing.

Framing determines how we relate to other human beings. Public speakers, including the media, often frame communities in an irresponsible way either because of the lack of knowledge and professionalism, or as a tactic to gain profit through sensationalism and/or to drum up negative sentiment and discriminate against others. As citizens, it is our duty to train ourselves not to be misled by words and identify and resist frames that intentionally or unintentionally generate hate and prejudice.

THE MIGRANT METONYMY



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Over the past few years, more than one million refugees and migrants have arrived on European shores, making the “refugee crisis” or the “great migration” one of the most talked-about stories of our time. As a result, the term “migrant” has also become one of the most commonly-used words in the media today—popping up in the news, on social media or in daily life. Being used routinely today, “migrant” may appear to be a straightforward and objective reference. However, this is not necessarily the case.

It is true that the term “migrant” can be used as a neutral moniker, referring to someone who has left their country, and made their home in another. However, in the current European political landscape, the term “migrant” has often been politicised, morphing into a label to identify certain groups of people, most commonly refugees and immigrants from Muslim-majority, or African countries. As such, the expression has transformed into a catch-all term, or, metonymy for these groups of people.

Metonymy is a rhetorical device that enables speakers to refer to one thing by the name of another that is connected with it. For instance, one can say “the White House” for the US president, “Silicon Valley” for the tech industry, or “dish” for a plate of food. On these occasions, listeners understand perfectly what the speakers mean, even if they do not voice it explicitly. Similarly, in today’s Europe, politicians and media outlets have worked to make “migrants” synonymous with refugees and immigrants with Muslim and African backgrounds, even though by definition it encompasses a much wider group of people.

For instance, the monitors of Get the Trolls Out! [detected](#) an article in the UK that reported on an exchange between the Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham and the Home Secretary Sajid Javid on the government pledge to reduce the number of asylum seekers being sent to Greater Manchester. In the text — which was published under the inflammatory headline “Send Em’ South” — references were made to only “migrants” and “asylum seekers”, without specifying their backgrounds. However, the images that accompanied the article made it clear that these terms were used as metonymy. The photos showed a British street filled with men who are exclusively Muslim and a woman wearing a niqab. Metonymic replacements are not always significant, or harmful. However, the “migrant metonymy” has some crucial implications.

First, being used as a metonymy, the term “migrant” reduces diverse groups to one particular status. Migrants come from a range of different backgrounds. Some are escaping war-torn zones, chaos, conflict, and persecution. Others are aiming to build a new life or study in a new environment. Some have been living in Europe for generations. Others are newcomers. However, the “migrant metonymy” ignores these peoples’ histories, humanities, and diversities, creating the false impression that they can and should be grouped together, and flattened into “migrants.” Importantly, through defining them by an immigration status, the metonymy also constructs “migrants” as perpetual outsiders.

Second, the “migrant metonymy” indicates that the people in question are all the same. Therefore, anyone who is identified by the media as “a migrant” will be used to represent “all migrants.” In other words, this rhetorical device enables speakers to use one negative example of a migrant to spread hatred and prejudice against the entire group. While an article about a European who commits a crime will examine the crime in question, an article about a migrant who commits a crime can put a community on trial.

Third, though the “migrant metonymy” concerns primarily refugees and immigrants, as it actually identifies them in religious and racial terms, the expression has the capacity to discriminate against Muslim and African people in general as well.

Fourth, when speakers employ the word “migrant” as a metonymy, they can foster religious or racial discrimination against their targets in subtle ways. Though it is crystal clear for the listeners that the metonymy concerns Muslim and African people, speakers are able to claim that they are talking about “migrants” in general and do not discriminate against others based on religion or race.

Of course, the term “migrant” can still be used as a neutral term, specifically referring to someone who has moved, and nothing more. However, it is important for the public to understand how the word is manipulated to unintentionally or intentionally discriminate against Muslim and African people, who may or may not also be migrants. As metonymy can function as a deceptive figure of speech, listeners must be able to identify and avoid instances when it is used in a misleading way.

MIND THE METAPHOR!



Most people do not pay attention to the metaphors that they encounter in political speech and text. This does not mean, however, that they are not affected by them. Metaphors play a crucial role in political communication, influencing human thinking in powerful ways. Accordingly, these rhetorical devices can also deceive us. Simply by being exposed to particular metaphors, we can develop, for example, hostile feelings towards specific groups of people.

Metaphors help us to describe one kind of experience in terms of another. When speakers characterise a political situation as “turbulent,” they are identifying it in terms of irregular, shaky air movements. When speakers claim that a party’s electoral victory is a “revolution,” they are referring to it in terms of the riots and revolts of political change.

Importantly, metaphors are not merely linguistic or literary devices. As scholars Mark Johnson and George Lakoff have highlighted, our entire psychology is metaphorical in nature*. This means that when we come across a metaphor, it has the power to shape our ideas. We may automatically start to think and feel in terms of that specific metaphor about something or someone, especially if we are not aware of how a metaphor can influence our thinking. For instance, if politicians and media outlets consistently use particular metaphors in the context of a group of people, it is very likely that their listeners will perceive the community in question through the prisms of those metaphors. The implications of this should not be underestimated.

*Johnson, Mark and George Lakoff. 2003. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Today politicians routinely employ military metaphors in relation to migration, with a particular emphasis on Muslim immigrants. In 2015, Dutch far-right politician Geert Wilders [described](#) the ongoing refugee and migration crisis as an “Islamic invasion”. So-called “alternative” and far-right outlets also regularly utilise the expression. In 2019, a Belgian blog [accused](#) the chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, of “opening the border in 2015 for an invasion of more than 1 million Muslims”.

“Invasion” is not the only military metaphor that emerges in European anti-Muslim speech and text today. In 2018, the Hungarian pro-government propaganda outlet, Origo claimed that Christian pupils in Belgium were taken to a mosque and “forced to pray in the way Muslims do.” The outlet presented this (unsourced) allegation as a metaphorical submission to colonial oppression: “We can therefore safely say that Belgians are already preparing for full surrender.” That is not all. In 2019, French far-right commentator Eric Zemmour gave a speech in which he compared traditional Muslim garments to “uniforms of an occupying army” and argued that France is subjected to “invasion, colonization, occupation” by Muslims. His talk was broadcast in full by a local free-to-air news channel.

The metaphor of “invasion” urges the listeners to imagine Muslim refugees and immigrants being a monolith in general, and as soldiers of a powerful foreign army that aims to violently seize control of their countries and communities in particular.

The term is particularly connected to Islam, and evokes ideas of the crusades, and other ancient religious warfare. The metaphors of “*surrender*”, “*colonization*” and “*occupation*” pushes readers to believe that the local populations will not be able to resist this “invasion.” In the cases mentioned above, the terms “*surrender*”, “*colonization*” and “*occupation*” falsely implied that Muslims have already taken control of European territories, even forcing an entire country to submit to their colonial aggression.

The previous metaphorical representations can trigger animosity towards Muslims in contemporary Europe. Though most people understand that war has not, in fact, broken out, such metaphors can still encourage them to define how they relate to Muslim people in military terms. The vocabulary of war assigns the role of the ruthless foreign aggressor/oppressor/coloniser to the Muslim community, while presenting Europeans as defenseless and oppressed targets. In this regard, the metaphors in question can not only activate hostile feelings, but may also encourage people to think of and act towards Muslims in a hostile manner.

The metaphors that politicians and the media use determine how we perceive and process the outside world. People who do not pay attention to these metaphors can be misled and manipulated by these rhetorical devices. In order to avoid this, it is important to critically interpret and analyse all metaphors, and be aware of how they impact our psychology, and resist those that foster the spread of prejudice and hatred.

“US”, “THEM”, AND “OUR”



“I”, “you”, “he”, “she”, “we”, “us”, “you”, “they” and “them” — these words enable us to refer to ourselves and others in a straightforward way, without continuously repeating names. They are called personal pronouns and we use them almost every time we speak. In languages in which their meaning can also be expressed through conjugation, personal pronouns may remain rather implicit in speech and text. If so, besides or instead of using the pronouns directly, speakers alter the endings of their verbs to indicate the grammatical person — like in English when verbs that follow “he” or “she” end in -s.

Being so tiny and common in language, one can easily overlook the significant — and in some cases deceptive —, role that personal pronouns can play in private interactions and public communication. Such plural personal pronouns as “us” and “them”, for example, reduce diverse communities to homogenous, monolithic groups in which everyone is the same. The references to “they” and “them” can also distinguish minorities as “others” and exclude them from the national community. In other words, speakers may set groups of people against each other through personal pronouns.

Indeed, it is enough to describe a group we identify with as “we” and “us” and use the pronouns “they” and “them” as a reference to any other group, to create a division within or between communities. Ethnic and religious groups, including Muslim people, are often targeted and stigmatized this way.

In a 2018 radio interview, a French philosopher [declared](#) that “Before being an asset”, migrants “are a cultural threat because we are not used to living that way.” In this case, the pronoun “we” highlighted the alienness of Muslim immigrants, distinguishing “them” from the local population. Additionally, it also enabled the speaker to construct French people without an immigrant or Muslim background as culturally superior to people, including French citizens, with an immigrant or Muslim background and to imply that anyone who does not adhere to a certain set of values and cultural practices can be considered a “bad” migrant and/or citizen.

In July 2019, a British newspaper, *The Telegraph* [posted](#) a video on their Twitter account showing two players walking away from the team celebrations after the England men’s team had won the Cricket World Cup to avoid being sprayed by the celebratory champagne popping. The two players happen to be Muslims who have been playing for the England team for many years. The Telegraph presented the case this way: “Two of England’s Cricket champions were forced to walk away from the champagne celebrations because they are Muslim and therefore choose not to drink. But in a multicultural Britain should this be happening? And are champagne celebrations outdated in multicultural Britain?”

As we can see, the outlet constructed the cricket player’s act as a threat to a local custom. Accordingly, hostile messages came in response to the outlet’s post, with one user saying: “Then they should learn to fit in with us. Why is it we always have to change to accommodate them? Enough is enough. Time they learned to integrate and adopt our traditions.”

By referring to “they” and “us”, the tweet rhetorically excluded the cricket players from the national community because of their Muslim background. Importantly, the speaker also constructed the “British” as the victims of Muslim cultural imperialism, though in reality he or she expected and demanded them to deny their religion. Such victim-victimizer reversals are common in discriminatory speech.

As the previous excerpt shows, the pronouns “we” and “they” are also often accompanied by the possessive forms “our” and “their”, words that sharpen and dramatize the “us” versus “them” division. The tweet above, for example, referred to “our traditions”, stressing that the cricket players have different traditions and, therefore, do not belong to the national community.

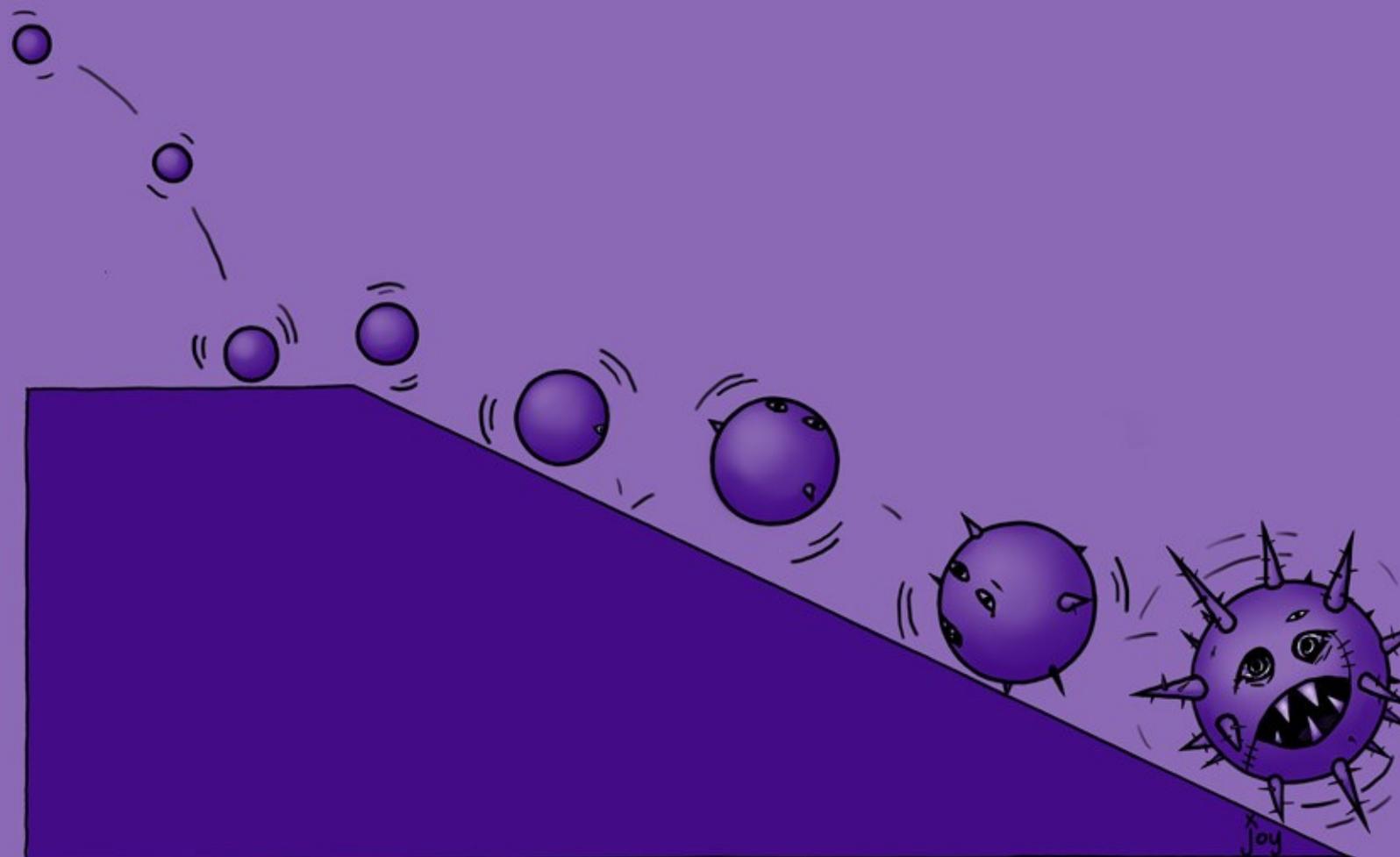
In a similar fashion, the Dutch far-right politician Geert Wilders [repeated](#) the term “our” three times to invoke hostility against Muslim refugees during the so-called European migration crisis: “It’s an invasion that threatens our prosperity, our security, our culture and identity.” This statement metaphorically presented Muslim asylum seekers as an invader army, and, therefore, could evoke enmity towards them in the listeners. The possessive form “our” reinforced the negative feelings activated by the military vocabulary through invoking the sense of loss and dispossession.

Another example comes from Greece, where the far-right newspaper *Eleftheri Ora* [presented](#) an alleged government plan to demolish a Greek Orthodox Christian Church in Athens – “the holy temple of Panagia Eleftherotria” – to build, instead, a mosque as the beginning of the “Islamisation of our Homeland!”

In all these cases, through the personal proud “they” and the possessive form “our” the speakers presented Muslim people as intruders, colonizers, and victimizers who dispossess European populations of the cornerstones of their lives, legacies, and histories, ignoring the fact that many Muslim Europeans have been citizens of their countries for generations and have greatly contributed to their societies. Such inflammatory rhetoric can trigger deep resentment in the audience.

We all tend to process speech and text automatically. However, this tendency makes us vulnerable to deception. Personal pronouns may seem to be insignificant and throwaway words, yet, they shape our thinking and emotions in powerful ways. Therefore, next time you come across a speaker who talks about “us” and “them”, and/or claims something that is “our” has been taken away, stop for a second and consider carefully whether that person aims to evoke hatred and anger in you or not.

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE FALLACY



All of us can benefit from hearing public and private communication in which we experience people building their arguments in a logical, ethical, and constructive way. However, unfortunately, this is not always the case. Many arguments we come across in our daily life or in the media contain errors or defects in reasoning. In rhetoric, these incidents are called fallacies. It is easy to fall for fallacies as they often seem to be sound and compelling. Yet, in reality, through these devices speakers can, intentionally or unintentionally, mislead and manipulate others.

Rhetoricians and communication experts identified a large number of fallacies. Of these, we will focus on the so-called 'slippery slope fallacy'. This flawed way of arguing suggests that one action, development, or trend should be rejected as it will trigger a series of undesirable or even devastating events.

In everyday interactions, people use slippery slope fallacies quite often: "If I let my son stay out until late on his birthday, he will always come home late afterwards." "My neighbours put a plant on the staircase. Great, soon the whole building will look like a botanical garden." Slippery slope fallacies are also widely used in public debates: "Limit public healthcare costs today, tomorrow people will demand communism."

Importantly, slippery slope fallacies can also generate resentment and prejudice against groups of people. In today's Europe, the slippery slope fallacy is frequently used, for instance, to evoke fear of Muslims, allowing claims and arguments to be taken at face value instead of being evaluated calmly and carefully. Oftentimes, the fallacy forms the basis of claims about the so-called "Islamisation" of the continent, also known as the "great replacement theory". Through exaggerating and distorting the consequences of immigration in Europe, this fabricated narrative argues that Christian Europeans will be replaced by Muslim immigrants in the future.

[An article](#) published by a far-right news website in Germany, for example, quoted statistics that indicated that the birth rate of people with a migrant or Muslim background is increasing while the birth rates and marriages of Germans without a migrant or Muslim background are decreasing in some German cities. The piece described this statistical trend as "nightmarish" and used it to provide the following dystopian account of what Germany will look like in 2021: "Turkish language courses are well attended by former Germans [...] Tanja is now called Birgül, Stefanie Cidgem and Beatrice-Jacqueline is called Züleyha. In the streets, heaps of trash are piling up, so that germs can spread [...]. Democracy has long given way to sharia-communism. There is no blossoming sense of community anymore, and personal freedoms are gone anyway [...] standards have gone down in every respect. [...] Every small village has a mosque [...]"

The website stressed that although this description may sound like science fiction, it is actually realistic to expect this outcome, in light of the statistics it provided. In other words, it was suggested that growth of the birth rates of people with a migrant or Muslim background makes the political, social, cultural, and even hygienic collapse of Germany unavoidable. This arbitrary reasoning is a textbook example of a slippery slope fallacy that enables speakers to depict Muslim people in derogatory and dehumanizing terms and generate automatic fear and hatred of them amongst the public.

Instead of directly using the slippery slope fallacy, politicians and media outlets can also implicitly encourage their audiences to think in this way about groups of people. On such occasions, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to hold the speakers to account for what they have said as it is subtle. The case of the *Daily Mail* in the UK is an example.

The tabloid published [an article](#) which quoted statistics to argue that “Mohammed was the most popular first name for boys born in Berlin in 2018”. In response, the Media Diversity Institute (MDI) submitted an official complaint to the newspaper, highlighting that the statistics were not accurately used in the piece. MDI also stressed that the article could fuel Islamophobia. Yet, the Daily Mail’s Senior Editorial Compliance Officer failed to acknowledge any misrepresentation in the data reported in the article and refused accusations of an Islamophobic stance by the newspaper.

The paper could deny the discriminatory character of the piece relatively easily as it focused on the interpretation of the statistics themselves, without explicitly discussing why the editor considered them “newsworthy”. Yet, as narratives about Europe’s “Islamisation” are widespread today, the article could still set the readers’ thinking on a slippery slope, pushing them to reason in one particular way (i.e., “the popularity of the name Mohammed indicates that Muslims will replace non-Muslims in Germany”).

The previous case also demonstrates that slippery slope fallacies can influence people’s thinking even if the basic premises used are false or inaccurate. We live in complex and complicated cultural, social, economical, and political realities. In this situation, fallacies may appear to be appealing to many people as they offer an easy and simplistic way to make sense of the world around us. However, these constructs actually prevent us from gaining a more in-depth understanding of the lives of societies and can evoke fear and hatred in us of other people. Therefore, whether you are a listener or a speaker, make sure to resist such flawed argumentative techniques as the slippery slope fallacy.

SIMILES AND METAPHORS OF DEHUMANIZATION, MOCKERY AND INSULT



Similes and metaphors are figures of speech that we use to make comparisons. While similes point to similarities, metaphors suggest that two things have the same qualities. For example, the simile “as clear as crystal” compares something to a mineral and the metaphor of “broken heart” identifies sadness and despair in terms of physical damage. There is nothing extraordinary about using similes and metaphors. Both public speakers and ordinary people employ these devices widely as they can help them to better express how they think and feel. However, being based on comparisons, similes and metaphors can also become tools of insult and offence. We often see this tendency in discriminatory speech.

To decide whether a simile or a metaphor offends groups of people, two issues should be considered. First: to whom or to what is a particular group compared? It has very dangerous implications when members of a group are described as non-humans. Dehumanization “encourages” and “entitles” people who don’t belong to a group to think of and act towards its members inhumanely. This language use deprives the targeted people of their agency. It presents them as objects instead of subjects, imprinting their inferior status on the listeners’ mind. Second, it is always important to think about the intention of the speaker. Why was a particular simile or metaphor used? Sometimes comparisons are made to mock, ridicule, and, therefore, belittle groups of people.

Such rhetoric has been used across time and space to harm the dignity of different communities. In today’s Europe, women who wear traditional Muslim garments, for example, are frequently targeted this way by different speakers, including prominent and powerful figures.

In August 2018, shortly before becoming the prime of minister of the UK, Boris Johnson wrote [an article](#) for *The Telegraph* about Denmark's burka ban, considering whether his country should adopt a similar law. In the piece, Johnson notoriously used two dehumanizing similes, comparing women who wear the burka or the niqab to "letter boxes" and "bank robbers". As many have highlighted, Johnson's words degraded and dehumanized women who wear these Muslim garments. It is equally important, however, to consider why did the politician utilize these demeaning terms. Johnson's aim was mockery: to entertain his readers by presenting Muslim women who wear some form of head cover as laughable and ludicrous.

A few days after Johnson's article was published, the *Daily Mail Online* came out with [a piece](#) which used similar rhetorics. The author, a white non-Muslim female journalist, aimed to prove that Islamophobia is virtually unknown in the UK, though in the year before her article came out a record number of Islamophobic attacks and abusive incidents were [reported](#) in the country, particularly against Muslim women. The journalist recalled how she walked around London in a burka for a week, summarizing her experiences in the very first sentence of the article this way: "No one tried to post a letter in me." This direct reference to Johnson's simile set the tone for the rest of the piece. The author's rhetoric relied heavily on mockery, such as when she identified Muslim women who wear the burka as "a slow-moving shuttlecock" and used the metaphor of "black crow" to refer to them.

A month later, in September 2018, the *Daily Mail* [published](#) another controversial piece. The article discussed the case of a local Scout master, Brian Walker, who was permanently excluded after comparing a fellow Scout leader to the Star War's character "Darth Vader" because she was wearing a niqab. The outlet portrayed the man in a quite favorable light. The term "Darth Vader" appeared six times in the article. Again, we should ask, why would one make such a comparison other than dehumanizing, objectifying, and ridiculing women who wear the niqab?

In the Western public sphere, the burka, the niqab, and the hijab have transformed into catch-all terms, or, *metonymy* for Islam, stigmatizing Muslim people in general as backward, threatening, and inhumane. Meanwhile, the very people who wear these garments are often not only left out of the conversation about their own lives, but also presented in non-human terms and as laughable. We also see that in many cases speakers who aim to criticize the customs and practices of wearing these Muslim garments in the name of liberalism, democracy, and human rights, are no exception. They readily make their audiences laugh at the expense of the women who wear them. They appear not to realize that the use of dehumanizing language use and ridicule undermines the basis of any meaningful discussion of the issues they raise.

DOWNPLAYING AND DENYING ISLAMOPHOBIA



As human beings we all experience pain, rejection, loss, and trauma. In such states of vulnerability, we look for understanding and empathy. Wounds can heal and we can regain our strength, if our suffering is acknowledged and treated with respect. And while most of us are well aware of this, when it comes to our private lives and interactions, we tend to forget about the significance of compassion in public contexts. Individuals who belong to groups that are targeted and discriminated against can often feel, for example, that their experiences are downplayed and denied by institutions, media, policy-makers and political actors.

Among other groups, Muslim people frequently go through this painful experience. Though Islamophobia is clearly present in many countries today and its implications can be severe and tragic, public speakers still belittle and dismiss the very existence of the verbal and physical aggression and systemic discrimination against Muslims. This article introduces five speech strategies that are commonly used to downplay and deny Islamophobia.

First, discrimination against Muslims is often discussed in inappropriate or belittling terms. In June 2019, British political advisor Nick Timothy published an article in *The Telegraph* [arguing](#) that a proposed independent inquiry into Islamophobia in UK's Conservative Party should be rejected. As he put it: "they must not play the Islamophobia game". Timothy also claimed that "The Islamophobia game is a sinister attempt to limit free speech, marginalise moderate Muslims, and boost Islamism." In this case, the metaphor of "game" implied that Islamophobia is an invention that merely serves strategic and harmful interests and, therefore, victimizes others rather than being an existing public sentiment of hostility and fear and practice of discrimination that should be taken seriously.

Second, as the previous example also demonstrates, today, Islamophobia is widely framed as "censorship". In her writings, the columnist of *The Times*, Melanie Philips, for instance, also [characterised](#) Islamophobia as "the term used to silence all criticism of the Muslim world, including Islamic extremism" and warned not to "fall for bogus claims of 'Islamophobia'." Such representations of Islamophobia not only deny the experiences of those who are discriminated against for being Muslims, but also present them as victimizers who undermine other people's right to free speech.

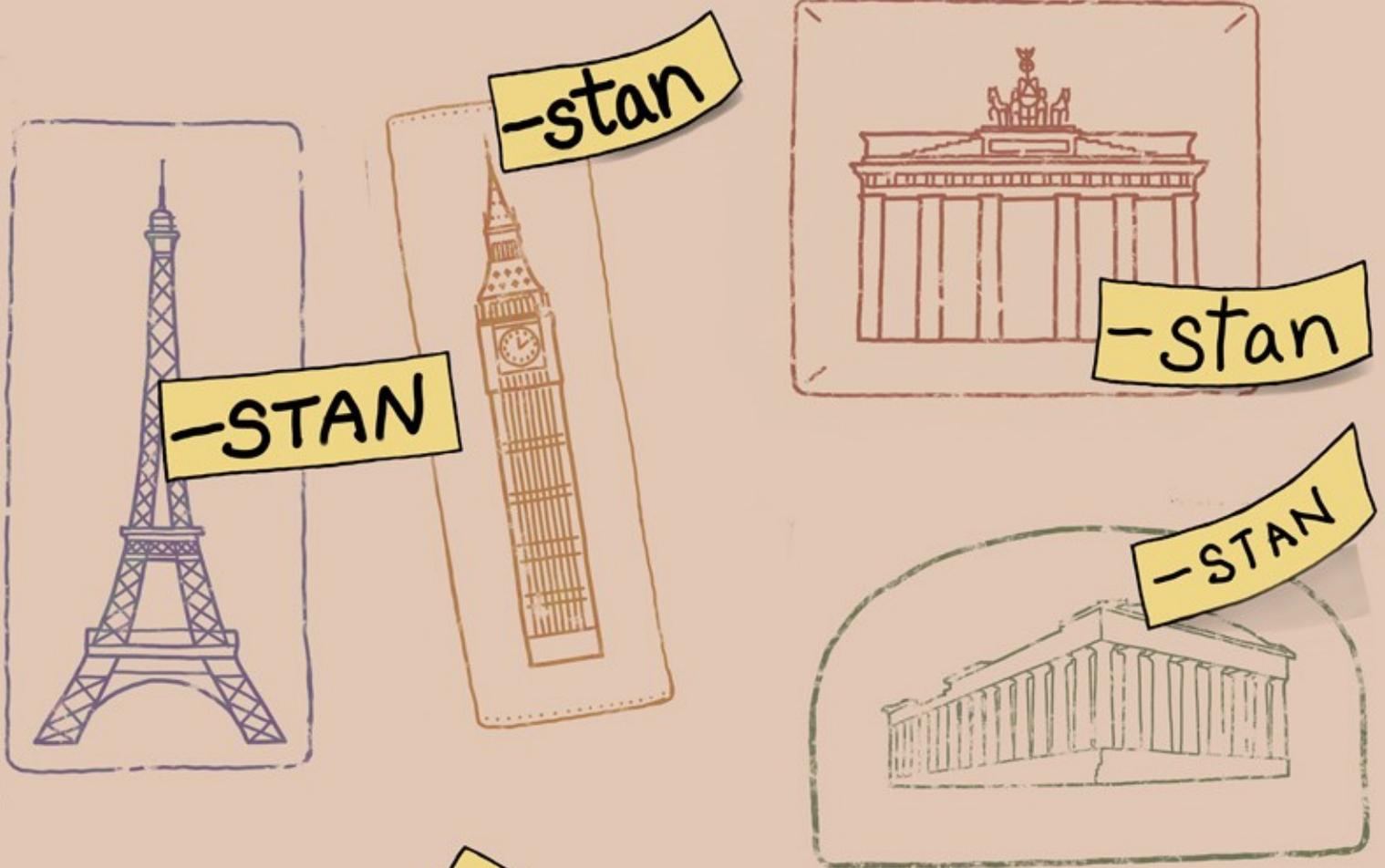
Third, the previous article also blurred the line between Muslims and terrorists. Unfortunately, this is a recurring speech strategy in contemporary public discourses on Muslim people. By associating terrorism with Muslim people in general, speakers represent Muslims as perpetual victimizers. On the one hand, this rhetoric activates and reinforces hatred and fear of Muslim people. On the other hand, it severely undermines the efforts of Muslims and non-Muslims to vocalize the discrimination that ordinary Muslim people are frequently subjected to, largely, as a result of the very same rhetoric. Indeed, by blurring the line between Muslims and terrorists, this rhetoric implicitly justifies Islamophobia.

Fourth, words that activate the frames of bias and privilege are commonly used in the context of Islamophobia. The Hungarian pro-government propaganda website *Origo* [claimed](#), for example, that Western media outlets underreport hatred against Christians, while “giving a huge amount of exposure to Islamophobia.” Such rhetoric constructs Muslims who face discrimination as a privileged group instead of victims. The accusation that the discrimination against Muslim people gets special attention from the media, creates the impression that the press victimizes other groups, among them Christians, in favour of Muslims. Importantly, statements like this, that are used in the context of other groups as well, can pit different communities against Muslim people.

Fifth, Islamophobia is downplayed and denied by speakers who claim that they are discriminated against for not being Muslims. In February 2020, the Greek newspaper Kathimerini [published](#) an opinion piece in which the author, a white woman, described how seeing a Muslim man taking out a prayer mat in order to perform prayer on the London tube left her scared and angry. She argued that, being white, she was unable to vocalize her feelings: “If I was more courageous I would say to him “Take your carpet and go home”” and he would have responded ‘You are one to talk, with your white privilege. You are a racist’ and I would respond ‘You are the racist.’” The author also stated that her problem is that she “is a white woman” who does not belong to any minority group, including Muslim people. As we can see, she suggested that in the UK, different minorities, including Muslims are privileged groups, while white people are targets of discrimination both in general and by Muslims in particular.

All the previous speech strategies can be considered subtypes of a fallacy that is known in rhetoric as the victim-victimizer reversal. To put it simply, this age-old rhetorical device represents those who are victimized as victimizers. The victim-victimizer reversal enables speakers to belittle and deny the discrimination that Muslim people face in daily life though representing them as victimizers. The significance of this rhetorical device should not be underestimated. Victim-victimizer reversals simultaneously deepen the pain of those who already feel vulnerable and the hostility against them. Only respectful and compassionate speech and dialogue can break this cycle. Without acknowledgement, the problems that targets of discrimination face cannot be effectively addressed by institutions, policy makers, and the society at large.

COUNTRIES, CITIES, AND ISLAMOPHOBIA



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Joy

In texts and speeches that fuel anti-Muslim sentiment in European societies today, geographical locations play a key role. Countries, cities or sites of urban life in Europe are often identified by speakers in ways that portray Muslim people as colonizers, oppressors, and invaders. A key trope that is often used by far-right figures is that of 'Islamisation', which refers to the idea that Islam is 'taking over' Europe through elements like Sharia law and public prayer. Such references aim to evoke the sense of loss in the listeners through implying that the core of their national and cultural identities that are represented by the places in question are under attack or were taken away from them by force.

First, the alleged territorial loss is portrayed as an ongoing process through comparisons. In February 2019, the Greek politician Thanos Tzimeros published an [article](#) in which he claimed that Athens' Kotzia Square "is constantly becoming more like Islamabad." Being the capital of Pakistan, the reference to Islamabad brings the Muslim-majority country into people's mind. Importantly, the city's name also contains the word "Islam." Thus, in this context, the reference to Islamabad helps the speaker to emphasize that the people who endanger Athens are Muslims. By referring to other cities of Pakistan, for example Karachi, Tzimeros could not activate the frame of Muslim colonization so profoundly.

Second, speakers use military metaphors or words that activate frames of occupation to arbitrarily represent European countries and cities as places that were already colonized or invaded by Muslims. In the same article, Tzimeros also talked about “Islamic-dominated areas of Europe.” In this case, the word “domination” evoked frames of occupation and oppression in the listeners’ mind. Frames and metaphors influence human thinking in subtle ways and it’s very difficult to resist their impact. In cases like this, for instance, though most people understand that war has not, in fact, broken out, and areas of Europe were not actually occupied, the framing can still encourage them to define how they relate to Muslim people in military terms. This further enhances the perception of Muslim people as enemies and hostile “Others”.

Third, references to European countries and cities can indicate that they were already subjected to colonization, occupation, or invasion. The Greek website Vima Orthodoxias (‘Orthodox Tribune’), [referred](#), for instance, to the “The Islamic State of Sweden” in a headline. Besides implying that Sweden has lost its independence and character, the reference to “The Islamic State” also activates the frames of terrorism and brutality in the context of the Nordic country.

Fourth, names of geographical locations can be altered and distorted in order to activate hate and fear of Muslim people. In recent times, the suffix -stan has been added by numerous public speakers to the name of the British capital, London. A local media personality, known for her harsh anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim stance, [identified](#), for example, the current Labour Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan as the “Muslim mayor of Londonistan”. On such occasions, the suffix -stan activates in the public’s mind the name of Muslim-majority countries in which the same suffix appears, including Pakistan and Afghanistan. The reference to “Londonistan” suggests therefore that the British capital has transformed or is transforming into a Muslim-majority state. It is important to mention that the same implication is also reinforced by references to Sadiq Khan. The Hungarian pro-government propaganda website, Origo, for example, repeatedly [identified](#) the politician as a “mayor of Pakistan’s migrant background.”

References that identify and characterize European regions, countries, and cities as colonized, occupied or invaded territories can fuel anti-Muslim hate. Such rhetoric not only assigns the role of victimizers to Muslims, but also constructs non-Muslim Europeans as oppressed subordinates. Evoking this sense of victimhood, the frames of conquer, trigger hostility and anger even if they obviously distort and falsify the reality.

A lot of people underestimate the impact of language on human thinking. Yet, we have no reason to belittle the power of words. Sometimes we come across speeches or read texts that make us angry at a group of people. In such cases, it would be crucial to take a step back and try to first deconstruct the underlying rhetorical mechanisms that evoked the feeling hostility in us.

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Led by the Media Diversity Institute (MDI) with the support of 6 partners spread throughout Europe, the campaign harnesses the power of social media to disseminate innovative media outputs and generates dialogue in order to deliver a powerful counter-narrative against diverse forms of hate speech, including antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-Christian sentiment.



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The Center for Independent Journalism (CIJ) is a non-profit and non-political organization aiming to promote ethical, fact-based journalism and independent media in Hungary. CIJ focuses its activities on journalism training, with a special emphasis on training professional journalists to contribute to ethical and high-quality journalism.



The International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA) — established in 1927, is one of the oldest non-governmental organization fighting against racism and anti-Semitism. It fights against the growing political and social acceptance of xenophobia and discriminations and offers a free legal assistance to victims of racism and anti-Semitism.



Karpos, is a Greek organisation which develops local and European projects encouraging expression and the exchange of views and creative ideas through the use of media. They specialise in how media, image and sound can develop narratives and how they can be introduced in educational environments.



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The European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS) is a pluralistic, inclusive and non-partisan umbrella organisation. EUJS supports Jewish student unions throughout Europe and represent its members in international institutions and organisations.



ENORB strives to provide a civil society platform of different religions and beliefs to facilitate dialogue and promote the rights and freedoms and in other international human rights conventions. It's core mission is to combat discrimination and promote mutual understanding among R&B groups across Europe, focusing on minorities subject to exclusion