



HAL
open science

Islamophobia in the Portuguese opinion press

Abdelwahed Mekki-Berrada, Camila Arêas, Colin Robineau, Alfredo Brant,
Ana Flora, Helena Cruz

► **To cite this version:**

Abdelwahed Mekki-Berrada, Camila Arêas, Colin Robineau, Alfredo Brant, Ana Flora, et al.. Islamophobia in the Portuguese opinion press. Leen D'HAENENS, Abdelwahed MEKKI-BERRADA. Islamophobia as a form of radicalisation. Perspectives on Media, Academia and socio-political scapes from Europe and Canada, Leuven University Press, pp.144-160, 2023, 978 94 6270 369 8. 10.11116/9789461665096 . hal-04458455

HAL Id: hal-04458455

<https://hal.science/hal-04458455>

Submitted on 16 Feb 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0
International License

9

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE PORTUGUESE OPINION PRESS

CAMILA ARÉAS, ALFREDO BRANT, ANA FLORA MACHADO, COLIN ROBINEAU,
HELENA CRUZ VENTURA & ABDELWAHED MEKKI-BERRADA

Abstract

In the Portuguese opinion press from 2010 to 2020, the question of Islamophobia appears in two forms: in discourses containing a discriminatory content against Muslims, and in discourses discussing the political uses of the term. While the first form is present in different degrees in all newspapers under study, the second form is mostly visible in the right-wing newspaper *Observador*, which criticises the political function, especially the intimidation (self-censorship) that the notion of Islamophobia fulfils. Following these findings, this chapter intend to observe how the term 'Islamophobia' is mobilised by *Observador's* columnists in order to legitimise what they call a 'rational critic' of Islam, with no restraints regarding 'political correctness'. Our main goal is to show how those columnists denounce the European political left and intellectuals of 'sociologising' the issue of Islamic fundamentalism and shaping a 'political correctness' that would compensate for their colonial guilt. To overcome this discursive impasse and liberate the violent speech on Islam, these journalists demand, on the one hand, the end of the 'guilt-tripping' of Europeans and, on the other, the end of Muslims' 'victimisation'.

Keywords: Islamophobia, opinion, press, Portugal, discourse analysis, right-wing press, left-wing parties

Introduction

This chapter analyses the journalistic coverage of Islam in the Portuguese opinion press over the last ten years (2010–2020). The study undertakes a quantitative and qualitative analysis of discourses, either focused on Islamophobia, or containing Islamophobic content, published by columnists

and editorialists in all online traditional Portuguese newspapers (OTPN) during this period. The article aims to highlight that what we refer to as *mediated Islamophobia* is both discernible and analysable in the materiality of opinion-press journalists' discourses. Put differently, the goal is to observe how *Islamophobia*, often portrayed in the mediatised public space as a general and diffuse phenomenon, is instead constructed and reconstructed *in* and *by* the discourses employed by press columnists.

Without ignoring the controversial nature of the concept of Islamophobia (see the introduction to this book) in the context of present-day European public debate our specific goal is to observe the central role it plays in ongoing discursive disputes between various actors seeking to define it according to their respective positions, ideas and interests. By taking into account the capacity of the Islamophobia notion to signify relationships to Islam and/or Muslims centred on aversion, hatred and/or fear, thereby referencing a social reality that is both locally and globally relevant, this study seeks to show the ways in which exclusion-, violence- and discrimination-based relationships can be discerned in the materiality of media discourses. The notion must therefore be viewed as an 'object of discourse' (i.e., a product and producer of social realities) rooted in argumentative, declarative and pragmatic strategies worthy of detailed analysis.

By employing a critical semiotic approach to discourse analysis, we seek to highlight the principal themes, representations and arguments utilised by journalists and columnists in online traditional Portuguese newspapers (OTPN). We use a news media corpus that includes all Portuguese daily press publications: *Público*, *Diário de Notícias*, *Jornal de Notícias*, *Correio da Manhã*, and *Observador*. In total, we analysed 1,553 articles taken from newspaper websites based on keywords.¹ In keeping with the French school of discourse analysis (Charaudeau, 1992; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2009), we combined lexical and semantic linguistic analysis, as well as corpus-assisted discourse analysis (CADA), using the Sketch Engine software² (see also chapter 5 in this book). This methodological framework allows for the identification, via an initial quantitative step, of the most recurrent terms and concepts found in the news media corpus. This is followed by a qualitative analysis of how these lexical fields are joined to key arguments and theses espoused by OTPN columnists, journalists and editorialists (Venkatesh et al., 2016).

In debates around Islam in the Portuguese opinion press from 2010 to 2020, the Islamophobia issue appears in two main forms: (1) in discriminatory discourses aimed at Islam or Muslims, and (2) in discourses concerning the issue of political usage of the Islamophobia notion. While the former appears in all newspapers to varying degrees based on their editorial position, the latter

is most visible in the right-wing *Observador* newspaper, whose editorialists criticise the political function supposedly served by the Islamophobia notion, particularly in terms of intimidation (self-censorship).

Based on these observations, this chapter is structured in two parts. First, we undertake an analysis of journalistic discourses containing Islamophobic (xenophobic or racist) content. Second, we explore journalistic usages and discussions related to the Islamophobia term. Our objective is to emphasise specific aspects of these two discursive levels, from which *mediated Islamophobia*, that is, Islamophobia conveyed both *in* and *by* the materiality of journalistic language, is deployed. In line with the view held by Mekki-Berrada and d'Haenens (Introduction to this book) that the Islamophobia concept is characterised by complexity and 'semantic immaturity', the aim here is to rehabilitate the notion, while putting forth provisional and operative definitions based on conclusions from this empirical linguistic study of how Islamophobia is expressed and translated within the situated context of the discursivity of the Portuguese opinion press.

This case study of Portugal is conceived as a contribution to the contemplation and questioning of mediated Islamophobia. As a result of Portugal's specific sociohistorical and political traits, areas of both convergence and dissonance with the mediated debate around Islam³ in the French-speaking world are present. While in Portugal Islamophobia is not considered a 'public issue', nor a national phenomenon, the notion is nonetheless frequently invoked in opinion pieces regarding Islam, Muslims and/or the veil, especially in the context of the terrorist attacks that occurred in Europe over the course of the decade under study.

Islamophobic Content in Journalistic Discourse

This first part of the study describes and discusses results from the discursive analysis that was conducted regarding discriminatory discourses employed by journalists who authored opinion pieces in OTPN. The study of this news media corpus, based on four lexical-discursive fields – 'islão, islâmico, islamita, islamista, mulçulmano'; 'véu, hijab, niqab, nikab, burca, burqa'; 'jihad, djihad, jihadismo, terrorismo, terrorista'; 'islamofobia' – enables us to analyse the linguistic and discursive features specific to each of these keywords. In addition, their associations with other words (co-occurrences) within semantic networks can also be analysed. Structured as such, the study enables us to outline a brief archaeology of the ideas, arguments and representations shaping the debate around Islam in the Portuguese opinion press.

Islamophobia and Racialisation: A Question of Domination

The discursive analysis for the first lexical field ('islão, islâmico, islamita, islamista, mulçulmano') uncovered a dominant representation of Islam and Muslims rooted in the dual process of essentialisation and dichotomisation. The former entails conceiving Muslims as an imagined and homogeneous community, while the latter consists of calling upon Manichean representations of Islam and Muslims in either evaluative (good/bad) or axiological (true/false) terms. In this regard, it is worth noting the use of paired oppositional terms such as 'Europe and Islam'; 'Muslims and Christians'; 'Muslims and Western Europe'; 'the West and the East'; 'Us and the Others'; 'the international community and the Muslim community'; 'the State and the Stateless'; and 'the civilised and the 15th-century savages'.

In each of the surveyed OTPN, we observed that journalists referenced Islam or its followers in a homogeneous manner, not making any distinction as to geographical, social, political, cultural or ethnic origins, and thereby approaching the idea of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991). This paradigm is criticised in a *Público* article, in which Álvaro Vasconcelos decries 'the attribution to Muslims of a unique identity associated with fanaticism, violence, and disrespect for rights, especially those of women' (Vasconcelos, 2017, our translation). Indeed, the religious group is often invoked based on the discursive strategy of collective-identity assignment, which is consistent with a process of Muslim 'racialisation' shaped in Europe by specific national sociopolitical features (colonialism, immigration, secularism or Catholicism).

From this perspective, particularly in articles addressing the terrorism issue, the employed interpretive framework for Muslims living in European countries takes the form of a dichotomous opposition between 'Muslim' and 'non-Muslim', as well as between the 'good Muslim' (moderate) and the 'bad Muslim' (extremist), always in accordance with their degree of adherence to European values. For example, *Correio da Manhã* columnists speak of a 'European community of Judeo-Christian tradition' or of a 'Western civilisation', in opposition to the 'new enemy' or 'murderers' from the Muslim community. While the former is characterised by the values of freedom and human rights, the latter is defined in terms of religious fundamentalism and extremism.

Such opinion pieces tend to present the West as in decline and/or threatened by a conquering cultural, religious or even demographic force, whose values are in opposition to both the West and its (especially Catholic) history. We therefore observe the emergence of the 'Islamist' culturalist rhetorical paradigm, which, in employing a logic similar to that of Samuel Huntington, operates against the backdrop of a 'clash of civilisations'. The founder of

the *Observador* newspaper goes as far as to suggest that ‘we should reread the much-vilified Samuel Huntington and his *Clash of Civilizations* to be reminded that, if in Western Christianity there is a tradition of separating what belongs to Caesar from what belongs to God, in Islam, God is Caesar ... The Islamic tradition incorporates elements that contradict our way of life ... which attracts so many immigrants and which the doctrines of sharia and the apostles of jihad seek to oppose’ (Fernandes, 2015, our translation).

The discursive analysis for the second lexical field (‘hijab, veil, niqab, burqa’) serves to reinforce this ‘Islamist’ perception, insofar as its primary identification is rooted in its visible and tangible dimension, i.e., based on physical appearance and religious markers. The various veil types in question are frequently invoked by columnists in a way that groups them together in the form of a list. This hinders both appreciation of their respective features, as well as any consideration of their associated contextual components (material and symbolic), which could help signify how and why they are worn. In this way, the veil is signified in OTPN as a sign of ‘oppression’, ‘submission’, ‘subordination’ and ‘abuse’. In the *Observador*, columnist Maria João Marques likens fully veiled women to ‘dementors’, phantasmagoric creatures who appear in the Harry Potter series.

While the qualitative nature of this depiction of Muslim women certainly varies depending on the newspapers’ respective editorial stances, the issues addressed by the writers often overlap (gender equality vs. subjugation of women, or freedom of religious expression vs. public safety). Though the articles display a considerable divergence of opinions between columnists, they nonetheless present the issue in similar manners, based on three key arguments: the segregation of women, the incompatibility of the veil with European values and the public order issue. The news media coverage draws a denigrating portrait of Muslim women, as needing to be liberated from ‘servitude’ by European values.

The journalistic framing of the debate thus provides a culture- and security-based reading of the issue that reflects a gendered form of *stigmatisation* or *Islamophobia* directed against Muslim women, whose ‘false consciousness’ supposedly pushes them to ‘reproduce the instruments of their own domination’ (Mekki-Berrada, 2018, p. 15). By ‘stigmatising’, we refer to any discourse that seeks, through the violence of language, to denigrate, discredit, discriminate, inferiorise, marginalise, dehumanise, animalise, exclude and render ‘invisible’ the Muslim Other (Arêas, 2012, 2015). Whether directed against the religion or its followers, *Islamophobia* thus represents a linguistic expression of the domination- and power-based social relationships present in the Luso-European reality, which Islamophobic discourses in turn help reinforce and normalise.

Islamophobia and Power: A Question of Governmentality

The terms comprising the third lexical field of the study – ‘jihad, jihadism, jihadist, terrorism, terrorist’ – relate to politico-religious actions and forms of radical struggle carried out in the name of Islam. As to linguistic materiality, the ‘ism’ suffix is indicative of the connotative meaning attributed to these terms, associated to religious, ideological and political radicalism. Across the OTPN, these terms quantitatively and qualitatively represent the most significant lexical field, as reflected in both the articles’ length and the number of pages comprising this section of the analysis. For the decade under study, the Portuguese news media coverage was marked, following 9/11, by the occurrence of terrorist attacks in Europe (Germany, England, Belgium, Spain, France). According to the press columnists, these events signal the arrival of a new form of terrorism – Islamist – which confronts European states with major (geo)political, cultural and security-related issues. This context is therefore the one shaping the debate around Islam in the opinion press from 2010 to 2020.

The analysis of this lexical field is in line with the previous one, insofar as jihad as a Koranic principle (like the veil, possibly) is presented as proof of the ontologically violent nature of Islam, and as the key to explaining global terrorism. The articles addressing the jihadist issue emphasise the incompatibility of Christian and Muslim civilisations. The Crusades are provided as historical evidence, with the ‘clash of civilisations’ theory providing the requisite intellectual basis. We note that Portuguese press columnists do not tend to make reference to the idea of a secular Europe, but rather to that of a Christian Europe defined by its relationship of otherness to the Muslim religion, or even to the Muslim civilisation. We also note the emergence of a journalistic line of argument employed by the columnists, which, based on the idea of ‘civilisational superiority’, degrades Muslim societies back to their supposed natural state, alternately described as ‘primitive’, ‘animalistic’, ‘medieval’, ‘barbaric’, ‘tribal’ or ‘obscure’. The inability of Islamic societies to dissociate the religious, the social and political, the temporal and the spiritual from one another is thus affirmed.

Next, the traits and features of a Europe that is at war with Islam are outlined in numerous terrorism-focused articles, which employ a security-based interpretive framework. The portrait of a Europe adrift, torn between freedom and security, transformed by the 2015 migrant ‘crisis’, and disoriented by its growing Muslim population is presented. Numerous journalists list European neighbourhoods or cities they now deem to be ‘ghettoised’ or ‘communalised’ under the auspices of Islam. The titles of the *Observador*

columns metonymically convey these representations: 'Jihadi Lord, may I have Britain back? Thank you', 'London and unreality', 'To die standing in Paris', 'I am, I no longer know what', 'This Europe can finish in Nice' and 'Europe as Israel'. Note the use of personal pronouns (I, we, the others), which strengthens the degree of personification of the imagined communities.

Interpreting terrorism as a diffuse and intangible phenomenon gives rise to an alarmist journalistic line of argument designed to feed into a sense of fear or 'moral panic', in turn calling for (geo)political firmness and vigilance in regard to security. European political and diplomatic bodies, as well as national immigration, security, prevention and intelligence services are the primary targets of this journalistic criticism. The integration-based models of French-speaking countries are presented as the example to follow in the struggle against fundamentalism, while Anglo-Saxon multi-culturalism is alleged to have provided the evidence of its own failure. As Mekki-Berrada (2018, p. 24) emphasises, 'Islamophobia is first and foremost a question of power and of the governmentality of Muslim Otherness.'

More broadly, analysis of the articles associated with this lexical field allows us to highlight the following: (1) discursive representations of a Europe defined by its values and its history with regard to Islam; (2) an explicit defense of the 'clash of civilisations' theory that pits Europe against Islam and advocates for the Westernisation of the 'barbarian/primitive' Muslim; (3) the portrayal of a Europe transformed and disoriented by both its growing population of Muslims and its lapsed sovereignty over certain 'lost territories'; and (4) recognition of French-speaking countries as the avant-garde in the fight against terrorism, with the French model widely presented as the example to follow.

It must be noted that the shape the debate ends up taking in the Portuguese opinion press does not result in a space for either discussion or representation of a domestic form of Islam. In general, columnists always refer to 'Islam in Portugal' and not to 'Portuguese Islam'. In the first lexical field, what notably emerges from the articles is the representation of a European Islam, as well as a community of Muslims at the European level. In the second lexical field, analysing the French public debate over laws banning the veil enables Portuguese columnists to position themselves politically and ideologically in a European debate, one with no domestic equivalent. In the third lexical field, the analogy between the jihadist phenomenon and the Iberian history of Al-Andalus and the Crusades is recurrent.

In the overall corpus, there is only a single mention of terrorism on domestic soil: the construction of the Martim Moniz mosque was the subject of controversy regarding possible risks of radicalisation. The Immigration

and Borders Service is also strongly criticised. The absence of a Portuguese Islam in the opinion press can be understood as part of a currently dominant political-media discourse emphasising the uniqueness of Portugal's colonial history, especially in regard to its relationship with Islam.

Journalistic Uses of the Islamophobia Term

Islamist cannibalism is back on the offensive ... We know well what comes next: the ritual display of generic piety and warnings of the threat of 'Islamophobic drift' ... These responses reveal much about the curious relationship we share with language today ... The new policy of words has the effect of overshadowing the ideas challenging us. This new policy of words, which abuses the unintelligence of language, cuts across political parties ... It is perhaps useful to remember that 'phobia' comes from the Greek word for 'fear' and that in this case, fear isn't exactly an absurd emotion. (Tunhas, 2017, our translation)

In this second part, the analysis focuses on the journalistic uses of and debates around the Islamophobia term. As such, it is not a lexical field, but instead a single keyword – Islamophobia – that is the focus of this part of the study. Via linguistic and discursive analysis, we analyse the way in which the term is invoked by Portuguese press columnists. How is the concept used by these journalists? With which enunciative, rhetorical, argumentative and pragmatic objectives is the *Islamophobia* term employed within the corpus? To answer these questions, the following analysis takes the form of a meta-discursive study focused on the processes of signification (reappropriation, misappropriation) guiding the usage of the *Islamophobia* keyword in the co-text of the sentences and the context of the article.

During a first reading of the articles containing the term in the Sketch Engine software⁴ we were challenged by how frequently three variations of Islamophobia appeared: 'Islamophobe(s)', 'Islamophobic(s)' and 'Islamophobia' (in quotation marks). The quantitative analysis of the absolute frequency (log) of these terms in the overall corpus shows the term Islamophobia appeared 67 times, Islamophobe 7 times, Islamophobic 6 times and 'Islamophobia' (in quotation marks) 21 times. From the perspective of significance (logDice), these terms are associated with verbs⁶ and nouns⁷, among which we note a very high significance (logDice from 11 to 13) for the 'xenophobia', 'racism' and 'intolerance' terms, which appear in all the analysed newspapers, often being employed as synonyms to help define Islamophobia. The term refers,

on the one hand, to a widespread and diffuse phenomenon ('Islamophobic atmosphere', 'Islamophobic temptation') and, on the other hand, to actors, behaviours or discursive practices ('Islamophobic accusation', 'Islamophobic argument'). In both instances, Islamophobia is consistently presented as a 'growing' phenomenon. By framing Islamophobia as an issue on the basis of other notions, including 'immigration', 'multi-culturalism', 'machismo' and 'neofascism', these articles advance the argument that Islamophobia results from issues associated with Muslim integration in Europe.

This lexical mapping informs us that, across the entire press corpus under study, the notion of Islamophobia is often presented as being synonymous with *racism* and xenophobia, with these terms at times appearing between quotation marks.⁸ From the quantitative analysis, we also learn that the right-wing conservative newspaper *Observador* is the publication where the Islamophobia term and its variants most frequently appear (23 articles out of a total of 47), accounting for half of the newspaper's overall output during the period under analysis. By comparison, the term appeared in *Correio da Manhã* 34 times out of 1,264 articles, in *Publico* 24 times out of 129 articles, and in *Diário de Notícias* and *Jornal de Notícias* 20 times out of 113 articles.

In the analysed corpus, *Observador* journalists were the ones who most often denounced the political usage of the Islamophobia notion, given its supposed goal of preventing or disarming any critique of Islam. The Islamophobia concept is systematically invoked by the columnists to condemn it, while legitimising what they describe as a 'rational criticism' of Islam, free from 'political correctness'. Although journalistic condemnation targeting the political function of the Islamophobia term is present across the entire corpus, only in the *Observador* does the systematic resumption of this argumentative strategy elevate it to a predominant rhetorical paradigm.

By focusing our analysis onto the journalistic uses of the Islamophobia term in the *Observador*, we seek to highlight how its columnists: (1) criticise the political function of the Islamophobia semantic class, which is supposedly invoked for the purpose of intimidation and censorship; (2) denounce the political left, as well as European intellectuals, for having both 'sociologised' the Islamic fundamentalism issue, as well as fashioned a form of 'political correctness' to make up for their colonial guilt; (3) call for an end to both Europeans' 'self-imposed guilt trip', as well as the 'victimisation' of radical Muslims; and (4) assume a first-person ('I') critique of Islam that subjectively involves both the columnist and the reader. These elements structure the subsequent analysis into two parts: the first devoted to developing the two initial points, the second bringing together the two latter points.

Critiquing *Islamophobia's* Political Function: A Denunciation of Intellectuals, the Political Left and Television News Media

Discursive analysis of the 23 *Observador* articles containing the Islamophobia term reveals an argumentative, even rhetorical paradigm whereby political usage of the Islamophobia semantic class is denounced and equated to 'liberticide' (Mekki-Berrada, 2018). This paradigm argues that the norms surrounding 'political correctness' (aimed at preventing Islamophobic, racist or xenophobic discourse in the public space) ultimately prevent even the most legitimate and reasoned critiques of Islam from occurring. This rhetorical strategy then assumes the form of a denunciation of the political function – of labelling (anti-Muslim racism) and intimidation (self-censorship) – which, according to these columnists, is the true motivation behind usage of the Islamophobia notion. As journalist Maria João Marques illustrates: 'Criticising Islam is no longer possible. It is no longer accepted in cosmopolitan salons. It's bad form' (Marques, 2016, *Observador*, our translation).

This journalistic argument is part of a broader critique against both 'humanist and relativist ideology', as well as the 'culture of apology' supposedly promoted by intellectuals, the political left and certain European news outlets. *Observador's* columnists accuse these actors, whom they often refer to as 'petty sociologists' (*sociólogo de pacotilha*), of having remained paralysed and silent in the face of the advance of Muslim extremism out of fear that the issue would easily be appropriated by the political far right. They also accuse them of 'sociologising' the issue of Islamic fundamentalism via either 'social media jargon'

('jargão socio-mediático') or a 'mediated sociologism booklet' (*cartilha do sociolês mediático*) and, by doing so, shaping the discursive norms of 'political correctness', which seeks to mitigate the European left's (colonial) sense of guilt. This is illustrated in the following passage by Helena Matos in the *Observador*: 'The academic left's tactical silence has been complicit in the extremism that holds Muslims hostage and failed to prevent the French far right from indulging in the Islamic stew. Let's learn the lesson: avoid ghettos and reject the identity politics that render minorities hostage to fascists' (Matos, 2017).

The first pillar of this journalistic denunciation consists in legitimising criticism of Islam on the basis of a critique of terrorism. As illustrated by Rui Ramos in *Observador*, 'It would be unwise to continue invoking "racism" and "Islamophobia" so as to prevent any debate of jihadism' (Ramos, 2016). Not only is this an amalgamation linking Islam to the terrorism issue; it is also and above all else a rhetorical device that asserts the possibility of criticising

terrorism only to legitimise, via a shift in meaning, a (broader) critique of Islam. The *Observador's* editor-in-chief, José Manuel Fernandes, conveys this shift in meaning in the following passage:

This brings us to a second key point: the role of Islam. In the days following the attacks, I suddenly saw that there were more people concerned about Islamophobia than about fundamentalist extremism, which was surprising. It's one thing to separate the Muslim majority from the fanatical minority, which makes perfect sense. It's another thing to pretend that no aspects of the culture, habits and political customs of Islam can be associated to these radical deviations. It would be nice if people began recognising this. (Fernandes, 2015, our translation)

It is also in this paradigm of accusing intellectuals and the left that the criticism of European media, particularly the 24-hour news channels, takes shape. Recurrent among all the studied newspapers, this indictment relies on a dual argumentative strategy: the media is criticised either for the increased visibility it provides to terrorist events, or for euphemising the Islamist nature of the attacks. In this regard, the *Observador* decries the 'double standard' in news media coverage that crimes committed based on religious motivations benefit from: 'When a Muslim is murdered, it's stated that he was killed by a white Catholic. When a Muslim kills, social or psychological, rather than religious explanations are sought' (Gonçalves, 2019). The columnist Gonçalo Portocarrero de Almada takes up this idea, pointing out that while the murder of Muslims is criticised, those of Christians are trivialised: 'What should not happen is that acts of aggression against Christians be reduced to mere "outbursts" or "accidents," while acts against members of other religions, or racial or sexual minority groups are viewed as "attacks against humanity"' (Almada, 2019). In another article, Rui Ramos criticises television news media's tendency to condemn populist or far-right parties' political appropriation of the terrorism issue: 'As if the problem were the demagogic exploitation of the attacks, not the attacks themselves, their frequency and violence ... The effort put into deflecting the conversation away from the politically incorrect issue of the jihadist campaign against the West is remarkable' (Ramos, 2016).

A second argumentative technique associated with this form of journalistic denunciation consists of turning the accusation of racism against the actors, particularly those on the left, who invoke Islamophobia: 'Believing they are defending the dominated on their behalf, those who cry "racism" and "Islamophobia" appear to suffer from an ethnic or cultural superiority bias' (Ramos, 2016). In this way, the *Observador* editorialists point to a discursive

impasse (created by the left) that prevents any criticism of racial, ethnic or religious minorities, which in turn ends up confining the Muslim topic to its belonging group. For example, in an article titled ‘The White and Activist Left’s Moral Disability’, Gabriel Mithá Ribeiro criticises the identity assignment game whereby Arabs and Muslims are included in the list of ‘minority groups who, according to the left, must love each other while hating the white man’. He also defends the need to ‘liberate individuals from their belonging group so as to offer them the possibility of criticising others, as well as their own group’ (Ribeiro, 2019).

Maria João Marques also points to the left – which she has a tendency of ‘psychiatrising’ by referring to the ‘hysterical’ left – as bearing primary responsibility for the excesses of the right:

The primary blame lies with the hysterical progressive left that canonised political correctness as the yardstick for measuring a person’s decency... Well, it was inevitable that something similar would happen on the right... On the one hand, as a reaction and, on the other, because (much to my regret) the human tendency towards stupidity is not limited to the ideological side opposed to mine... Those who warned that this Islamic stew would be calamitous were labeled Islamophobes and intolerant. And he who remains silent, consents, right? (Marques, 2014, our translation)

Note that the question posed at the end challenges the reader and accomplishes its pragmatic or performative goal (Ducrot, 1984, p. 183): the reader must respond. One must note that journalistic denunciation aimed at the political function of the Islamophobia semantic class is often based on rhetorical questions of this kind, as is the case with ‘polemical negation’. This argumentative process consists in anticipating opposing discourse in order to counter it, before reaffirming the original thesis (Ducrot, 1984, p. 185). For example, at the time of the London bombings, *Observador* columnist Paulo Tunhas drew a degrading portrait of a ‘ghettoised England’, to then challenge the reader:

Am I ‘racist’? Of course not. If I can be permitted to express the extent of my good intentions, racism is for me the pre-eminent human sin. I am simply pointing out a fact (Ghettoised England) that should be taken into account. (Tunhas, 2017, our translation)

This passage demonstrates the extent to which the assertion of a legitimate critique of Islamic religious radicalism subjectively implicates the columnist in his own discourse, via the use of the personal pronoun ‘I’ (Kerbrat-Orecchioni,

2009). Relying on this assumption of ‘enunciative responsibility’ (Charaudeau, 1992), Paulo Tunhas invites this right-wing newspaper’s target audience to do the same, i.e., to assume responsibility for uttering a critique of Islam viewed as being ‘politically incorrect’.

Towards an Exit from the Discursive Impasse: The Liberalisation of Violent Speech

Formulated like that, this denunciation by Portuguese press columnists, especially in the *Observador*, presents the portrait of a Europe ensnared in the trap of ‘political correctness’. To overcome this discursive impasse, the journalists in question call for an end, on the one hand, to Europeans’ ‘self-imposed guilt trip’ and, on the other, to the ‘victimisation’ of radical Muslims. In short, they call both for ‘violent speech’ (Arêas, 2012) to be liberated, as well as for the assumption of the ‘enunciative responsibility’ (Rabatel & Chauvin-Vileno, 2006) of an uninhibited criticism of Islam and Muslims. From a discursive standpoint, we note that the subjective register, i.e., the use of the first person (I, we), functions as the main tool for this kind of argumentative strategy.

To this end, by narrating via a personal and almost intimate approach, columnist Maria João Marques offers an account of the historical transformation related to the establishment of ‘political correctness’ discursive norms:

I must admit that I cannot stand the mantra that, paradoxically, has taken hold since 2001 saying that Islam is a religion of peace, that it has nothing to do with the terrorist attacks... You would imagine being in a theatre, watching a film where Islamists’ terrible treatment of women is presented as being a complete fabrication concocted by ill-intentioned, xenophobic individuals ... I confess that I miss being able to discuss these matters as I did in the days when tolerant spirits did not unleash such ferocity against individuals pointing out the obvious problems posed by Islam... To suggest that disrespect for women is the norm for the average Muslim today is considered foolishness akin to KKK racism... But this exculpation of Islam comes at a price: we are now letting Islam off the hook so that the worst can occur. (Marques, 2016, our translation)

By employing a tone of sarcastic humour, the columnist thus shares with readers the essence of a line of thought that is no longer acceptable to express in public, but does so using a subjective register of discourse wherein her

enunciative responsibility is implied. She seeks to convince the reader of the falsity of current, seemingly dominant discursive norms, and why they ought to be rejected.

This argumentative exculpatory strategy is at the core of an article in the *Observador* written by Helena Matos, the title of which makes explicit – in an ironic way – the question of enunciative responsibility: ‘The others aren’t the problem. We are.’ The columnist criticises the linguistic precautions taken by media and left-wing political operators by asking them to accept responsibility for them: ‘Our problem when it comes to terrorism is not the terrorists, it is the relativism with which we analyse their actions. The more these actions are explained using the manual of mediated sociology (a type of Marxism gilded with abundant Christian guilt), the more we tolerate them.’ According to the columnist, sociological explanations for terrorism only serve to place the blame on European countries: ‘There is always some action or decision that we or our ancestors took in the present, or five hundred years ago, which explains, justifies and excuses terrorism and terrorists in our eyes’ (Matos, 2015).

This same argument is reiterated in unison by the *Observador*’s various columnists. The newspaper’s editor-in-chief, José Manuel Fernandes, sets the tone by reminding us that the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and the Bataclan ‘were not our fault’ and, moreover, ‘the barbarians who committed them are not our people’. The writer is here alluding to the comments the intellectual Boaventura de Sousa Santos, the most famous postcolonial studies sociologist in Portugal, made in the wake of these attacks in France, where he rejected the ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis, referring instead to a ‘clash of fanaticisms’. However, according to José Manuel Fernandes,

What our preacher [de Sousa Santos] has done is simply ... to say, as he always does, that we are the barbarians. The time has come to end this idea that the fault is always ours – ours today, ours in the era of colonisation and decolonisation, ours since the time of the Conquest of Ceuta, or the Crusades, or Julius Caesar. (Fernandes, 2015, our translation)

The issue of guilt is also addressed by the columnist Maria João Marques, who portrays Europe as immobilised by the discursive norms of ‘political correctness’, the fear of being accused of Islamophobia and the ‘culture of apology’. Her argument is that terrorism is encouraged via the ‘complicity’ of those who justify it for social reasons and who tend to

‘victimise’ and ‘excuse’ the terrorists: ‘European solidarity and tolerance are synonymous with impunity and therefore with the growth of terrorism.’

She thus claims to put the culprits and the victims in their place: ‘The fault lies with the individuals who choose to kill and rape, and with the religion and ideology that inspires them. But they have accomplices who treat them as if they were children who are not to be punished but only taught moral lessons’ (Marques, 2016).

We can thus see how the assertion of enunciative responsibility and of ‘violent speech’ against Islam assumes the form of a meta-discursive reflection with regard to the linguistic component and, more precisely, with regard to the discursive impasses caused by the fear of Islamophobia. In this respect, Helena Matos, in one of her columns, criticises the usage of the term ‘excision’ rather than ‘genital mutilation’: ‘We’re now living through a period of veritable word-purging. In fact, it makes as much sense not to employ the term “genital mutilation” to avoid offending populations originating in Africa, as it does to not use the term “homicide,” but instead “crossed with a knife”’ (Matos, 2017).

In summary, these analyses highlight the ways in which *Observador* columnists frame the ethical norms of ‘political correctness’ as a form of discursive censorship that sustains the culpability of European actors. To exit this seeming discursive impasse, they defend the liberation of violent speech and criticism as a means to overturn hegemonic discursive norms. We take from this that this journalistic denunciation is an attempt to redraw the boundaries of the ‘speaking’ and the ‘unspeakable’ (Foucault, 1969), that is, the norms of legitimate discursivity and thus the ‘conditions of possibility’ for critical discourse regarding Muslims.

It is important to note that, apart from the Portuguese academic Boaventura de Sousa Santos, the leftists or the intellectuals who have supposedly succumbed to a ‘culture of apology’ are never named and never linked to the specifically Portuguese context. Instead, the writers who support the denunciation of the political function of the *Islamophobia* semantic class appear to be making reference to a European scale, as well as to a shapeless mass of left-wing actors whose features are never made explicit. By and large, the issue of Islamophobia as a social and political reality in the Portuguese context is never addressed in the corpus under study.

Conclusion

Our study of Portuguese press opinion pieces regarding Islam over the last ten years (2010–2020) sheds light on both the lexical fields, as well as the argumentative-rhetorical strategies through which we can grasp, via the materiality of the language, words, ideas and representations conveyed

by columnists, what is referred to as mediated Islamophobia. Through linguistic and discursive analysis of their columns, we conclude that the Islamophobia issue is deployed on two levels: (1) that of discourses that embody Islamophobic statements in various forms (ethnocentric, xenophobic, racist, culturalist) and to varying degrees based on the newspapers' editorial stance (right-left; progressive-conservative); and (2) that of discourses that utilise the Islamophobia term in a meta-analytical manner and in turn seek to denounce the term's political usages.

At this second level of analysis, columnists play the role of both prosecutor and lawyer when they present an indictment of 'political correctness' and a plea for a critique of Islam. These various argumentative processes create a form of journalistic rhetoric that addresses Islamophobia based on its political and discursive effects, while at the same time disregarding the 'experiential Islamophobia' lived out in everyday life situations. The *Observador's* columnists are then mostly operating in the meta-discourse, in the sense that they above all else denounce the *Islamophobia* concept for being a political weapon that intimidates and prevents any critique of Islam; in other words, for being a liberticidal instrument.

However, as seen in the first part of the study, many Portuguese opinion press writers, from *Correio da Manhã* to the *Observador*, *Público*, *Diário de Notícias* and *Jornal de Notícias*, were unafraid to portray Islam as a religion historically opposed to Europe's 'roots' and 'values', or as a religion that supposedly has, if not an essentially violent character, then at least an intrinsically violent one. A curious paradox thus arises: the *Observador* columnists denouncing the impossibility of criticising Islam are contradicted by their own articles, as well as those of their colleagues.

Notes

1. The study's keywords are: Islam, Islamic, Islamist, Islamite, Muslim; hijab, veil, scarf, niqab, niqab, burka, burqa; jihad, djihad, jihadism, terrorism, terrorist; islamophobia. (In Portuguese: *islão, islâmico, islamita, islamista, muçulmano; véu, hijab, niqab, nikab, burca, burqa; jihad, djihad, jihadismo, terrorismo, terrorista, islamofobia.*)
2. Using algorithms, this software allowed us to quantify the frequency and significance (log-Dice) of the project's keywords, as well as their associations with other words (co-occurrences), within semantic lexical networks. Then, based on our reading of the sentences and paragraphs in which these statistically significant term pairings appeared, we identified the main arguments and meaning processes that were invoked in a recurrent, even systematic, manner by the journalists and columnists from the OTPN under study.
3. In the literature review, we note that the only previously undertaken social science study regarding Islamophobia in Portugal – titled 'Islamophobia and its narratives in Portugal:

- Knowledge, politics, media and cyberspace' (Araújo, 2019) – undertakes a general analysis of the phenomenon, while only very briefly addressing the media aspect.
4. <https://www.sketchengine.eu>
 5. In Portuguese: *islamofóbo(s)*, *islamofóbico(s)*, *islamofobia*.
 6. 'claim, suggest, label, consider'.
 7. 'xenophobia, racism, growth, trivialisation, ambiance, accusation, argument, negotiation, temptation, extremism, populism, terrorism, violence, habit, fear, war, anti-Semitism'.
 8. On this point, it would be interesting to examine the use of *Islamophobia* in quotation marks by these columnists. We note that, while certain columnists consistently use quotation marks to either distance themselves from the term or deemphasise its connotative power, other authors view the use of quotation marks by intellectuals, the media and politicians as a red herring indicative of 'political correctness'.

References

- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of Nationalism*. Verso.
- Arêas, C. (2012). Stigmatization as an argument: Between denunciation and legitimization of the burqa ban. *Signes, Discours et Sociétés* n° 9, July 2012.
- Arêas, C. (2015). The mediatization of the « burqa affair » in France: Visibility strategies and iconic crisis. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 40(1), 30–50.
- Bayrakli, E., & Hafez, F. (2017). *European Islamophobia Report*. SETA Foundation, Leopold Weiss Institute.
- Charaudeau, P. (1992). *Grammar of meaning and expression*. Hachette.
- Cohen, S. (1972). *Folk devils and moral panics*. Mac Gibbon and Kee.
- Ducrot, Oswald (1984). *Le dire et le dit*. Minuit.
- Foucault, Michel (1969). *The archaeology of knowledge*. Gallimard.
- Kerbrat-Orecchioni, C. (2009). *The enunciation of subjectivity language*. Armand Colin.
- Mekki-Berrada, A. (Ed.) (2018). Femmes et subjectivations musulmanes [Muslim women and subjectivation]. *Anthropologie et sociétés*, 42(1), 14–33.
- Rabatel, A., & Chauvin-Vileno, A. (2006). La question de la responsabilité dans l'écriture de presse [The question of responsibility in press writing]. *Semen*, 22, 5–24.
- Venkatesh V., Nelson B. J., Thomas T., Wallin J. J., Podoshen J. S., Thompson C., Jezer-Morton K., Rabah J., Urbaniak K., & St. Laurent M. (2016). Exploring the language and spectacle of online hate speech in the black metal scene: Developing theoretical and methodological intersections between the social sciences and humanities. In N. Varas-Diaz & N. Scott (Eds.). *Heavy metalmusic and the communal experience* (pp. 127–150). Lexington Books.

News media corpus (cited columns and articles)

- Almada, P. G. P. (2019, April 27). Cristianophobia: A new holocaust? *Observador*.
- Fernandes, J. M. (2015, January 16). The difficult days of Professor Boaventura. *Observador*.
- Gonçalves, A. (2019, March 23). Another 5 useless days. *Observador*.
- Marques, M. J. (2014, August 27). Mr. jihadist, can I have Britain back? Thank you. *Observador*.

- Marques, M. J. (2016, March 23). Je suis I don't even know what. *Observador*.
- Marques, M. J. (2016, July 20). But do we really want this in Europe? *Observador*.
- Marques, M. J. (2016, August 31). Europe of gender equality. *Observador*.
- Matos, H. (2015, January 11). The problem is not the others. It's us. *Observador*.
- Matos, H. (2017, May 1). Bullshit talk. *Observador*.
- Ramos, R. (2016, July 15). This Europe could end in Nice. *Observador*.
- Ribeiro, G. M. (2019, July 10). The moral deficiency of the white, activist left. *Observador*.
- Tunhas, P. (2017, March 23). London and unreality. *Observador*.
- Vasconcelos, A. (2017, July 12). Europe: The acquis of the ethical revolt. *Público*.