**JRP Canada Podcast Transcript — Episode 4 with Nadia Haq**

*[Upbeat intro music begins. It plays into the background of the voiceover]*

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 00:04

Hi everyone, I'm Anna Maria Moubayed from the JRP Canada team. Welcome to another episode of our Meet the Researchers podcast. This is a series of interviews in preparation for our upcoming event Between Ideals and Practices: Journalistic Role Performance in Transformative Times. This is a one-day pre-conference to ICA taking place at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) on May 24. You can visit [jrpcanada.ca](https://jrpcanada.ca/) to register now. Joining me today is Nadia Haq. Nadia will be presenting at the Between Ideals and Practices conference in May. Welcome Nadia.

**Nadia Haq** 00:39

Hi, thank you for inviting me.

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 00:42

Thank you for joining us. In May, you will be presenting some of your original research at the conference. Can you give us a sneak peek of what you'll be talking about?

**Nadia Haq** 00:51

Sure, I'd love to. So research going back decades has shown that Muslims are portrayed in disproportionately negative ways in the British media, although similar biases can be found across the Western media in general. And my research looks at the tensions and dilemmas that journalists themselves face between their journalistic roles and the reproduction of this anti-Muslim bias in the British press.

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And in particular, I draw on this concept of professional retreatism, which I have taken from a little known paper by the cultural theorists Stuart Hall, to examine how journalism's own codes and conventions can lead journalists to distance themselves from the stories they report on involving Muslims. And this can even take place when those stories themselves are problematic and even when journalists themselves recognize that they might be actually contributing to this anti Muslim bias in the press.

01:57

This is really important because codes and conventions like objectivity and balance, are there to mitigate any bias in media coverage. So in the presentation, I asked what happens when this professional retreatism, which relies on these codes and conventions of journalism, actually ends up reproducing rather than challenging an existing bias within the media — a bias that is contributing to the wider polarization and marginalization of a minority group.

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 02:30

That's very interesting. Going over your abstract for your research paper, I see you interviewed 25 journalists as part of your research. In the second episode of our podcast, one of our other presenters, Angela Misry, talked about how finding journalists to interview was quite difficult. Did you have a similar experience?

**Nadia Haq** 02:51

It is, I did hear that interview and I thought, yeah, it is really difficult to recruit journalists. Because one, there is this kind of difficult relationship between journalist or journalism and media, and academia, because in general, academics tend to be quite critical of the media. And so there is this kind of reluctance to take part in academic research, or for some journalists anyway. For me, it was even more difficult because I wanted to interview journalists who themselves had written what I considered to be anti-Muslim media coverage. So the way they framed the stories, were kind of very sensationalist and also, for me, I felt they were very biased against Muslims. So I wanted to kind of, I wanted to recruit those journalists as well. So I had this view these kind of major barriers.

03:53

But what helped me was doing a lot of research on exactly who the journalists were that I wanted to interview. And through that research, I almost kind of got to know them a little bit and that helped me in tailoring the way I approached them. So that they knew they weren't just some random journalist that I was approaching, you know, I was approaching them for a certain reason. And it was based on their work. I cited the work that they were doing to try to get them on board. So yeah, I think it's really difficult and you have to put in a lot of legwork. But it also helped that I was a journalist in a former life. So before I came to academia, I worked 10 years as a journalist, and I think that kind of helped as well. So that kind of inside a role inside a positionality that you know, they saw me as one of them in that respect.

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 04:50

I see. And you did say that journalists need to be aware of the inequalities of society in their reporting. What are some steps they can take to do this?

**Nadia Haq** 05:00

It's very difficult because media structures themselves are kind of geared up in a way that reproduces the biases that are already there. And as part of this presentation, I talk about one aspect of that, which is in terms of some of the codes and conventions of journalism, that reproduce this institutional bias. And also journalists themselves, actually have very little agency, I would argue, to change things. So for example, if a news publication has a particular audience, and they believe that their audiences want to hear these kinds of fear mongering, sensationalist stories about Muslims, it will be very difficult for the journalists themselves to kind of say “No, I'm not going to write like that,” because obviously, they will just then lose their job. So it's very difficult and to try to change the way this is done.

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But what I found in my research were that journalists would try to find innovative ways to kind of do different things that would challenge or try to counterbalance the way the media represented Muslims. And I found this was particularly in the case of local journalists, who had a very kind of different social imaginary of their audiences compared to national journalists. And this is kind of found across research that looks at the different role of local journalism versus national journalism, because local journalism tend to have more of a sense of community because their audiences are obviously much smaller.

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So I found that one of the things that really helped was that local journalists and in in the cities that I have — in the cities, where my sample was drawn from, tended to represent Muslims in much more inclusive ways, because Muslims were seen as part of the communities that they served. Whereas with national journalism, Muslims, we're very much seen as the “Other” kind of outside of British society. And that side of what it means to be British,

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 07:15

As an aspiring journalist and a journalism student, it's very interesting to hear that side of journalism as well. And why do you think it's important to study journalistic roles,

**Nadia Haq** 07:26

I think that the close relationship between journalism and society means that journalism absolutely has to adapt and evolve to changing social, political, and cultural landscapes. And, from my perspective, the perspective of my research, this means taking into account the roles and responsibilities of journalists in a society with rising levels of hate speech and polarization against minority groups. And especially with the advent of increasing digitalization of journalism, and the potential to amplify sort of negative representations of Muslims and other minority groups, it becomes even more important for journalists to kind of re visit and reimagine their roles, and how they are going to be different from what we're seeing, for example, on social media. So my research is kind of like a reviewing of these core tenets of journalism, and see well what's going wrong, and how we can look at these really important sort of values but readjust them, for the society that we're living in today.

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 08:39

And what's another presentation that really sparked your interest?

**Nadia Haq** 08:43

To be honest, there are so many that it's really difficult to just pick one, obviously, I'm looking forward to the plenaries. But what I really love about international conferences of this nature is the chance to hear about research outside of the Western canon. So I can see on the agenda, there's research from Egypt, from Mexico, from Uganda, from Ethiopia, from South Korea, and I just really, really love learning about the debates that are impacting upon journalism in these places, and sort of comparing them to the debates that we're facing. I find that really interesting. I'm also looking forward to the papers on AI, and its impact on journalism. Certainly, I can tell our department and sort of how we're preparing our students to be journalists up for the future that this is going to be sort of obviously one of probably the most important upcoming issue for the profession.

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 09:46

 *[Outro music fades in]* Thank you once again for joining us today, Nadia, and thank you to our listeners for tuning in for this episode of Meet the Researchers.

*[End music. End of podcast episode]*