

The National Post Experience

Noor Javed¹

I admit I kind of like the reaction I get from people when I tell them I worked at *The National Post*. It's a kind of wide-eyed disbelief, a drop of the jaw, and a shake of their head as if they can't believe their ears, "*The Post? The National Post? The anti-Muslim National Post?*"

To which I usually respond in the affirmative.

Then they usually proceed to ask me, "How was it? How were they? Did you feel any discrimination?"

The truth is, I loved it. Working at *The National Post* was a great experience. One that taught me a lot about the cutthroat business of media, the white-man's club that it still is, and that as an aspiring journalist and visible Muslim woman, I have an up-hill battle ahead of me.

I just finished my MA in journalism at the University of Western Ontario. As a requirement for the degree, I had to do a 6-week internship at a media outlet. I listed the *Globe and Mail*, the *CBC*, and *the Post* as my top 3 choices; although I never thought that the *National Post* would be where I ended up.

When I got to the *Post*, it was a two-way shock. I didn't expect the newsroom of a national paper to be so ... white. Likewise, I don't think they expected a *hijabi* to walk in the door. But I soon learned that the *National Post* newsroom is a lot like any other newsroom in Canada. Despite the impression of diversity and multiculturalism, there are actually very few visible minorities in a newsroom. I was one of five visible minorities in a newsroom of over 100 and I was the only Muslim.

Despite my own concerns about the *Post* and their editorial stance on Muslims, their conservatism, and their pro-Israeli editorial policy, the reporters and editors

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were very warm and receptive. I had decided early on that I would question my editors about the policies of the paper in a non-confrontational way – by joking about it. I would tell my editor to let me know when I was going to be published, as that would be the only day Muslims would buy the paper. In response, my editor began to joke back. I was assigned to cover a speech by Toronto mayor David Miller, and shared the question session with reporters from the *CBC*, *CP24* and *CTV*. When I got back to the newsroom, my editor asked, “What did the other reporters say when you told them you’re from the *Post*? To think the one girl in a scarf is from the *Post*? They must have been shocked!”

I felt like a valuable addition to the newsroom. Reporters would ask me for clarification about an Islamic issue, or tips on how to be more politically correct in their work. One of the reporters found me a room where I could pray. Others told me it was great to have a Muslim in the newsroom.

I was also able to bring some diversity and a bit of controversy to the paper. According to my editor, I wrote the first article the *Post* had ever published on *Eid*. I also wrote a feature about Islamic speed dating, which was read by almost all the senior editors, and was made into a segment for *Global*. In a piece I wrote about an Israeli-Palestinian peace journal, I engaged in a long discussion with my editor about why I didn’t want to use the words “Palestinian suicide bomber” in the article. I felt the context already implied who the suicide bomber was, and that it was unnecessary to make that association more obvious. He changed it. I felt it was a ripple in an ocean of assumptions and biases against Arabs and Muslims, but for me, it was a tiny victory.

My experience at the *Post* was exactly what I wanted it to be – exciting, entertaining and a little bit controversial. As my editor said to me, it’s easy being a liberal in a liberal society, but it’s much harder being a liberal in a conservative environment. The same idea can be applied to us as Muslims in the media. It’s easy being a practicing Muslim where you face no challenges or resistance. The real test is maintaining your beliefs and identity when you are in an environment which challenges everything you value and forces you to defend those values. As a community, I think it’s about time we tread such environments.

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