

2020-36: Qureshi vs Toronto Sun

June 22, 2020

The NewsMedia Council has dismissed a complaint about the accuracy of a term in an opinion article in the November 21, 2019 edition of the Toronto Sun.

Saqib Qureshi, the complainant, stated the use of the term *Ghazwa-e-Hind* is “unfair, unethical and misrepresentative,” and stated that he twice chronicled these arguments in letters to the editor of the Toronto Sun. Copies of those letters, dated December 1, 2019 and March 2, 2020, were provided to the NNC and forwarded by the NNC to the Toronto Sun with the complaint and a request for the Sun’s response.

The NewsMedia Council normally considers complaints about news and opinion pieces within one month of publication.

Given that the complainant promptly communicated with the Toronto Sun following publication of the article and followed up on that correspondence, the NewsMedia Council followed standard procedure in requesting a response from the news media organization.

The news organization responded to the complaint by stating that the column is the writer’s opinion on an issue. It also said that it is open to receiving letters from those with differing perspective, and suggested a letter be submitted for consideration.

The complainant rejected the offer to submit a letter, saying it was not adequate considering the “seriousness and gravity of the original opinion column”. The complainant, instead, requested a full-page apology from the news organization.

The NewsMedia Council supports the wide latitude of opinion and editorial writers to express strong or unpopular points of view. It also upholds the prerogative of a journalist to select credible sources and for an opinion writer to focus on one aspect of an issue. The NNC recognizes that the job of an opinion writer is to engage, or even provoke the reader, and to present material that is controversial, challenging, or new. At the same time, the NNC upholds the standard that opinions must be based on facts.

The complaint centres on accurate meaning of *Ghazwa-e-Hind*. In his submission, the complainant stated that “the majority of scholars” agree the term’s understanding as a broad call to action is fabricated, misapplied or inauthentic. The readily understood implication of the complainant’s statement is that likewise, some scholars do not agree with that view.

It is not unlikely or unreasonable that a reader may find other sources that dispute an article or definition. Likewise, a reader may disagree with the writer’s argument and read arguments or statements through a different lens.

It is also recognized that differing points of view around religion and politics are highly contentious. The NNC notes that caution should be employed when using controversial terms to describe identifiable or at-risk groups, particularly given the current polarized political and social environment.

That said, it is not the NNC's task to make a definitive judgment on a term that is subject to debate and appears to be under shifting understanding. The NNC is responsible, however, for making a judgment on potential breaches of journalistic standards.

In this case, the NNC is of the view that the news organization's offer to publish a letter to the editor provides an adequate opportunity to address controversy around the term. Letters to the editor are a valuable way to provide differing perspectives within the community, or points of view that differ from those reflected in news or opinion columns.

To that end, the NNC finds the offer of a letter to the editor is a reasonable means of corrective action to address the concerns raised.

The NNC does not demand apologies on the part of its members. Moreover, it finds the request for a full-page apology to be unreasonable.

For the above reasons, we find the complaint resolved due to corrective action and will consider the file closed.