

## Media, Translation and the Construction of the Muslim Image: A Narrative Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

The role played by translators for the media is particularly crucial in the construction, promotion and survival of media narratives, since a narrative cannot travel across linguistic and cultural boundaries without the help of translators. This article aims to identify how the Qur'an, and, in turn, Islam and Muslims, are "narrated" in and by the British press. I use LexisNexis newspaper archives to identify the Qur'anic verses repeatedly used by UK national newspapers between 11/9/2001 and 1/9/2016. I then closely examine the newspaper articles featuring the most repeated verse to establish how narrative strategies (selective appropriation, temporality, causal emplotment and relationality) are used to frame the readers' understanding. By shedding more light on the active role of translation for the media, I hope to raise awareness of the dangers posed by misrepresenting the world's second largest religion and by accepting what is presented to us as news unquestioningly.

### INTRODUCTION

The media undoubtedly play a key role in our globalised world as news now travels around the world faster, and in more accessible formats, than ever before. The power exercised by the media in creating specific images of cultures and peoples is undeniable (e.g. Pew 2004; Pintak 2006; Poole and Richardson 2006). The events reported by the media can be manipulated to create, feed into and/or circulate certain stories about given peoples, in this case, Muslims, and therefore direct or change the way in which readers/receivers think about them. Therefore, this study aims, first of all, to identify how Islam and Muslims are portrayed in the British press and the reasons behind this portrayal, based on reviewing the relevant literature. The second aim is to identify which Qur'anic verses are quoted by the British press in order to create a public narrative linking some of the violence the world has seen recently to the Qur'an, rather than attributing it to other factors, including political grievances. To fulfil this aim, a thorough search of LexisNexis archives of UK national newspapers (www.nexis.com) between 11/9/2001 and 1/9/2016 will be carried out to identify the Qur'anic verses most repeatedly quoted in the context of violence. This will be followed by a qualitative analysis of the newspaper articles featuring these verses in order to establish how the verses are presented to the readers. The analysis will be carried out in the context of narrative theory as elaborated by Baker (2006).

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Some elements of the British media appear not to believe in the distinction between fact and opinion when it comes to the representation of Muslims. Petley (2006, 59) argues that "across most of the British press the distinction between news and editorial has entirely collapsed" and this conflation of news and views misleads viewers about the "news" presented to them as facts. Richardson (2006, 103) further stresses that Muslims "have been subject to a high level of suspicion, inequality and outright discrimination for a considerable period of time", adding that "a great number of publications have illustrated that the news media continue to be culpable for the creation and maintenance of racist sentiment and social practices, and for the maintenance of anti-Muslim racisms specifically" (ibid., 104). In the same vein, Brown, Brown and Richards (2015, 51) argue that the image of Islam suffers from continual associations in the news with violent extremism (see table 1). Worryingly, this public narrative has also reached school curricula. For example, Revell (2012) explains how misconceptions about Islam are too often perpetuated, rather than being challenged or corrected, in education through the textbooks of religion in British schools.

Juxtaposing British media coverage of Islam and Muslims before and after 9/11, Pool emphasises the increased volume

of post 9/11 media coverage of Islam (2011, 54-8). Qualitatively, she produces a list of the topics that are covered in relation to Islam, which include: terrorism, categorization and othering. These conclusions seem hardly surprising and are in line with other relevant studies of the topic. For example, a more recent and comprehensive study by Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013, 254) reach similar conclusions about explicit Islamophobic representations of Muslims in the British press. Other alarming conclusions include the fact that individual journalists make “clearly negative and offensive” statements about Muslims and draw a “subtle and ambivalent picture, which indirectly contributes to negative stereotypes” (ibid., 255). They elaborate the point by saying that “Muslim women [tend] to be represented as victims... wearing the veil was represented as either a form of oppression or a (fairly unreasonable) demand, as opposed to a right or a choice” while “Muslim men [are] consistently written about in the context of radicalization” (ibid., 257).

This kind of representation has also found its way to the language used by government officials. Moosavi (2015, 652) confirms that “Islamophobia based on generalizations, assumptions and stereotypes of Islam and Muslims were present” in 111 speeches given by Labour ministers between 2001 and 2007. He (2015, 669) explains that “[t]he ministers often spoke about Muslims rather than to them, reflecting a tendency to treat Muslims as outsiders”. Implying that Islamophobia has already reached the levels of institutions, Moosavi (2015, 670) concludes that

Islamophobia was common in the New Labour ministers’ speeches. The seminal report that introduced the severity of Islamophobia in Britain explained that ‘[t]he UK Government’s official stance [towards Muslims] is one of welcome and inclusion [...] It is a fine aspiration. The reality, however, frequently falls short’ (The Runnymede Trust, 1997: 1).

Similarly, Flood et al. (2011, 230) concur that the vast majority of events relating to Muslims in Britain are covered under what they call “the Terrorism category” of news coverage and that there is “very little reference to aspects of Muslim cultures and societies outside the realms of conflicts.” They elaborate that the BBC news at ten o’clock “attached an inadvertently negative set of associations to (nominally) Muslim societies and groups” (ibid., 231). The two-year-long study concludes that the BBC’s overall coverage of Islam shows “an overwhelming concentration on ‘bad’ [Islam-related] news about events abroad or in Britain” and that the “cumulative effect of endless reporting of a particular range of Islam-related topics is conducive to the reinforcement of stereotypes” (ibid.). Finally, other recent studies on the media’s presentation of Islam have corroborated the same results. For example, Bleich et al. argue that UK newspaper headlines portray Muslims as “outsiders” (2015, 942) and conclude that “the net tone of headlines about Muslims is consistently more negative than it is for comparable identity groups (2015, 955).”

Having established the negative image that the British press portrays of Muslims, it is important now to establish the reasons behind this attitude. Said (1997, 5) admits that “Islam has never been welcome in Europe” and this rejection

was largely on Christian grounds, and provides several reasons for this negative portrayal of Muslims. He explains that the origins of the negative view of Islam, seen as a formidable competitor and a late-coming challenge to Christianity, goes as far back as the middle ages when “Islam was believed to be a demonic religion of apostasy, blasphemy, and obscurity”. Along the same lines, Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013, 259) explain that:

Views of Muslims as holding extreme beliefs and being involved in violence and conflict were found to be prevalent in nineteenth-century articles about the behaviour of Muslims in distant countries, suggesting that some modern-day representations have been drawing on much older discourses.

Another reason for this negative depiction of Islam, according to Said (1997, 5), is that whilst great civilizations of the East have been defeated, “[o]nly Islam seemed never to have submitted completely to the West”. For example, anti-colonial movements in most colonized Muslim countries were met with a wave of Western racism and aggression directed at the Muslim world (ibid, 14).

The centuries old negative feelings seem to have been accentuated by the oil price issue of the 1970’s, the American hostages in Iran in 1979 and, more recently, by the 9/11 and 7/7 events, and the war in Iraq, which are all linked without exception to Islam as a main causative factor (see Said 1997, 40 and Powell 2011, 92). In the same vein, Poole and Richardson (2006, 5) argue that “[r]eligion is often given as an explanatory factor for behaviour” of Muslims. Therefore, Western reactions to 9/11 and 7/7 events “did not occur in a vacuum” because in “the public’s subliminal cultural consciousness, there was the longstanding attitude to Islam, the Arabs, the Orient in general” (Said 1997, 6). The same old narrative of difference, of Otherness, was rekindled.

A further reason for the current Western negative attitude towards Islam, according to Said (1997, 6), is that academics have treated Islam within an ideological framework filled with passion, prejudice and revulsion. The implication is that Western academia attempts to superimpose an outsider’s understanding of Islam rather than basing research on the very subject being studied. In other words, the academic disciplinary narratives, which are already characterised by negativity towards Islam, shape the context in which the study of Islam, and the translation of Islam-related news, takes place. In fact, Poole (2006, 95) emphasises that “the association of Muslims with terrorism has concretised”. As a result, surveys show that substantial numbers of respondents mistrusted Muslims and consider that Islam encourages violence (Bleich, Nisar and Abdelhamid 2016, 1124).

Furthermore, the “experts on Islam”, who usually appear on TV and other media, are more often than not security people (see Said 1997, 17) who do little more than just help to disseminate the same negative narratives about Islam. Two points are in order here. First, the high level of credibility accorded to newsreaders and presenters and news sources extends to the material they present as news (see Baker 2006, 110 and Goffman 1981, 240). Secondly, dubious intelligence is fed to the media and is reported as the authoritative views of experts and “in an ‘almost absurdly circular’ fashion”

ion, these same reports have been used as evidence in the deportation of Muslims” (Poole and Richardson 2006, 3). This circularity, key to “the success of the ‘terror threat’ propaganda campaign” (ibid), is also a typical characteristic of narrativity: the society and its members are embedded in an anti-Islamic narrative, a narrative that the society itself has helped to create and disseminate.

Whether (translation/translators for) the media do this unconsciously, being embedded in an “anti-Islamic” narrative, or consciously, in order to create, disseminate and/or feed into an existing “anti-Islamic” narrative, is of little relevance, since the result is the same, namely the construction of a negative image of the Muslim character in and by the British media.

## RATIONALE

Firstly, the data illustrates that the media’s focus on Islam continues to be global (Poole 2006, 90) and that, since the events of 9/11, the bestselling book has been the various translations of the Qur’an (Rigoni 2006, 77)<sup>4</sup>. Focusing on the media’s presentation of the Qur’an is important because “research has shown how (Muslim) belief is used as a key to understanding all Muslim behaviour” (Poole 2006, 101). Therefore, this study aims to demonstrate how press coverage is constituted and how media narratives shape the way in which the Qur’an is reported and how, in turn, the general public view Islam and Muslims.

Secondly, there is an academic and ethical obligation to counteract the distorted reporting of Islam and Muslims by western media. The reason is that narrating Muslims as “outsiders” (Bleich et al. 2015, 942) has led to acts of racism at an individual level and to discriminatory governmental policies (e.g. racial profiling and the detention of Muslims without trial) at an institutional level. Thirdly, in this context, the role played by translators is particularly crucial in the construction, promotion and survival of media narratives, since a narrative cannot travel across linguistic and cultural boundaries without the help of translators (or journalists acting as translators) who render it into the various languages of the world. The role of the translator as an honest mediator who helps peoples and nations cross linguistic, and therefore cultural, divides cannot be taken for granted. Translators are visible agents whose beliefs and value systems are likely to filter through their translations (e.g. Venuti 1995). In fact, translators sometimes use their work to propagate their own ideologies (see Elimam 2014).

Finally, the role played by the media in constructing negative stereotypes of specific cultures is a topic that should be addressed urgently at a time when we are witnessing a growing wave of violence in the world in general and the Muslim world in particular, for example in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, in the context of the so-called “war on terror”. By examining the role of (translation for) the media as a co-creator of the prevalent negative image of the Qur’an, I hope to raise awareness of the dangers posed by misrepresenting Islam and Muslims, and of the dangers posed by accepting news as facts.

## NARRATIVE THEORY

The investigation will be carried out within the framework of narrative theory as elaborated by Mona Baker (2006, 2017) in relation to translation studies. The use of narrative theory is based on the data itself: the focus of narrative theory is not on establishing the degree of match between a source text and a target text but on “what dimensions of negativity are deployed and how they impact the new context of narration” (Baker 2017). Narrative theory allows me to look beyond the micro level and lexical issues of translation to identify how and which macro translation strategies are used to create a specific image of the source text. This is an important issue given the fact that the corpus of articles selected for examination, surprisingly, rarely reproduces a translation of verses to substantiate their public narrative about the relationship between the Qur’an and violence. Baker (2010, 349) explains that “narrative theory assumes that the unit of analysis is ultimately an entire narrative”, whether elaborated in an individual text or across several texts.

According to Baker (2006), there are four types of narrative: personal narratives, public narratives, conceptual narratives and meta-narratives. Personal narratives are “personal stories we tell ourselves about our place in the world and our own history. These stories both constitute and make sense of our lives” (ibid., 28). Baker elaborates that “even the most personal of narratives rely on and invoke collective narratives... without which the personal would remain unintelligible and uninterpretable” (ibid., 29). She explains that “the interdependence between the personal and the collective means that the retelling is inevitably constrained by the shared linguistic and narrative resources available in the new setting” (ibid). Society as a whole has a considerable interest in personal narratives because they can “enhance or undermine the narratives that underpin the social order and hence interfere with the smooth functioning of society” (ibid). The stories we tell ourselves guide the way we think and the way we act, and, in turn, impacts on those around us (ibid., 31). The data analysed below shows an example of a personal narrative of a kidnapping experience which reiterates and feeds into the current public narratives about Islam.

Drawing on Somers (1997) and Somers and Gibson (1994), Baker (2006, 33) defines public narratives as “stories elaborated by and circulating among social and institutional formations larger than the individual, such as the family, religious or educational institution, the media and the nation.” Baker adds to these categories literature as “one of the most powerful institutions for disseminating public narratives in any society”. She elaborates that “public narratives promoted by powerful institutions such as the state or media not only highlight those elements they selectively appropriate, but also force them on our consciousness through repeated exposure” (ibid., 102).

Translators play a significant role in circulating public narratives since the media employ translation as one of their resources. According to Bassnett (1996, 23), there is increased “recognition of the power invested in the translator to change texts and so change the world”, hence the media’s ability to do the same. Translators are part of the society they live in, and as such, they are as embedded in the same nar-

ratives as everyone else in that society. The implication is that the issue of neutrality is very much at stake since media translators contribute to the dissemination and/or creation of certain public narratives, either consciously or unconsciously: consciously since they sometimes attempt to reconcile their translations to the public narratives circulating in their communities, e.g. the Palestinian narratives of resistance are presented in some American and European media as narratives of violence, and unconsciously because they themselves are inevitably embedded in specific narratives.

The audiences form their view or judgement of a story depending on both its internal coherence as well as the trustworthiness of its source. Media institutions, as well as translators, endeavour to maintain a public narrative of being nonbiased and neutral parties, mirroring, as it were, reality, without involvement on their part, leaving the responsibility of passing judgements to the audience. Their success in establishing this image of themselves is key to their ability to pose as a trustworthy source of information, and this is where the real danger of the role of the media lies.<sup>1</sup>

Conceptual/disciplinary narratives are “the stories and explanations that scholars in any field elaborate for themselves and others about their object of inquiry” (Baker 2010, 351). Baker argues that “[t]he boundaries between disciplinary and public narratives, like those between personal and public narratives, are porous” (ibid). Disciplinary narratives can influence society and society can inform disciplinary narratives. According to Said (1997, 19), the Western academic frame used to study Islam is formed, not according to notions set in the Islamic context or by the Muslims being studied, but according to standards, conventions and expectations shaped by “Western academic peers”. This disciplinary narrative can then potentially constrain the study of Islam within its boundaries, making it very difficult for a fair and informed examination of the topic to take place.

Finally, meta-narratives are those public narratives which gain wide circularity; they are more persistent and enduring over a long period of time, having an influence on very large numbers of people, and more difficult to escape from than public narratives (Baker 2006, 45). Somers and Gibson’s (1994, 61 in Baker 2006, 44) define meta- (or master) narratives as narratives “in which we are embedded as contemporary actors in history... Progress, Decadence, Industrialization, Enlightenment, etc”. Baker considers the “war on terror” as a meta-narrative which feeds on other established public narratives, including the relationship between the Muslim East and the Christian West and attendant narratives such as those relating to the “crusades” and “Islamophobia”. When an idea or a story travels from the concrete world to the realm of abstraction, its meanings and connotations are bound to gain wider currency. What happened in the case of “the war on terror” narrative, which is disseminated via different media is that it gradually changed from being perceived as a response to 9/11 events into a response to an attack on freedom and civilization, which are highly valued by western audiences who are the direct consumers of these narratives (Baker 2006, 45).

Public narratives and meta-narrative are closely related to each other, and the difference between them can indeed

be difficult to establish; it is a matter of quantity rather than quality as they both involve stories circulating at a much higher level than personal narratives and because widely circulating public narratives transform into meta-narratives. Finally, as Bruner (1990, 5-6 in Baker 2006, 20) puts it, “[t]he central concern [in these stories] is not how narrative as text is constructed but rather how it operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality”.

## HOW NARRATIVES WORK

Baker (2006) identifies a number of devices used by translators to create and disseminate narratives: selective appropriation, temporality, causal emplotment and relationality. The notion of selective appropriation is one of the strategies used by translators and interpreters, and in turn by the media, to present texts to readers. The way news is presented involves highlighting some aspects of events and downplaying others. Narratives that depict instances of behaviour which are considered unacceptable from a Western perspective and falsely attributing them to Islam, for example, forced marriages, are selected and foregrounded, repeated and disseminated, helping to construct a particular image of the Muslim character - a negative one. As the data below show, only a handful of verses from the Qur’an, which consists of more than 6,000 verses, are selected by the media to evoke a narrative attaching violence to the Qur’an. Selective appropriation, therefore, involves omission and addition of material in order to “suppress, accentuate or elaborate particular aspects of a narrative encoded in the source text or utterance, or aspects of the larger narratives(s) in which it is embedded” (ibid., 114).

Baker (ibid., 75) argues that “[s]electing, and in some cases ‘inventing’, texts that help elaborate a particular narrative of an ‘enemy’ culture, then, is a well-documented practice that often relies heavily on the services of translators and interpreters.” As the final example in the data section shows, a text presented as a Qur’anic verse was not identified in any of the published translations of the Qur’an. Furthermore, Baker (2010, 352) explains that selective appropriation also “covers ways of identifying protagonists rather than just the foregrounding of events or parts of events”. In their respective study of British media, Poole (2011, 54) and Moore, Mason and Lewis (2008, 4) reach an independent conclusion that the “Muslimness” of suspects is often foregrounded in the media whilst non-Muslim suspects are often identified in terms of their job or profession or left unnamed or unidentified.

The second device of narratives is temporality, “meaning that they are embedded in time and space and derive much of their meaning from the temporal moment and physical site of the narration” (Baker 2010, 352). As the data below show, the publication of the selected verses in or around the anniversary of 9/11 or 7/7 events in New York and London, respectively, taps into the meta-narrative of the “war on terror” and emphasises the role attributed by the media to the Qur’an in these events. The spatial ordering of the elements that constitute the narrative is equally important. The media rarely recounts events in the order in which they took place,

and the way in which time, sequence and spatial setting are used to construct a narrative is therefore meaningful in its own right.

The third device that narratives are characterised by is causal emplotment, “which gives significance to independent instances; it is only when events are emplotted that they take on narrative meaning” (Baker 2010, 352). Emplotment “allows us to *weight* and *explain* events rather than just list them, to turn a set of propositions into an intelligible sequence about which we can form an opinion” (emphasis in original, Baker 2006, 67). Finally, relationality “means that individual events (and elements within an event) cannot make sense on their own but only insofar as they constitute elements of an overall narrative” (Baker 2010, 353). Elo-mar’s story discussed below is presented as an episode of the public narrative about young Muslims joining ISIS, which in turn feeds into the meta-narrative of the “war on terror”.

Of relevance to the concept of narrative is framing which involves actively influencing an audience’s understanding of events and mobilizing them to act accordingly by using specific devices to guide and constrain the way they interpret a text. Therefore, the way people understand events and actions depends largely on the way these events and actions are framed, i.e. constructed and presented by the media. Goffman (1974, 21) defines frames as “schemata of interpretation” that help people understand different situations in specific ways. Baker asserts that framing is “an active strategy that implies agency and by means of which we consciously participate in the construction of reality” (2006, 106). Along the same lines, Bauman (2001, 168 in Baker 2006, 107) lists translation as an interpretive frame in which “the words spoken are to be interpreted as equivalent of words originally spoken in another language”. This is a significant issue since the average readers do not know how translation inevitably involves textual manipulation, including selection and interpreting. Viewing the source of information or news, for example, the BBC, as well as the presenters themselves, as authoritative sources or figures will lead to interpreting what they present along similar lines (see Baker 2006, 110 and Goffman 1981, 230).

According to Entman (1993, 52), framing “is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text”. Frames “highlight some bits of information” thus “elevating them in salience” (ibid., 53). When constructing news stories, the way journalists “locate, perceive and thus present the information is affected by their perceptions and biases” (Powel 2011, 94). For example, some articles (see below) use the expression “the Verse of the Sword” to refer to Qur’an (9:5), thereby framing the readers into creating a relationship between the verse and violence, tapping into other public narratives about the Qur’an, namely that it spread by the sword.

## DATA ANALYSIS

In order to identify the most commonly used Qur’anic verses, I used LexisNexis to search the UK national newspaper archives between 11/9/2001 and 1/9/2016. The start date marks the 9/11 events which, according to the literature, saw

a surge in the media coverage of the Qur’an. Several search terms were used in order to explore the corpus and identify which verses are quoted in the context of violence. The table below shows the search words used, and the results found:

**Table 1.** Search results for combinations of Qur’an/Quran/Koran and violence/jihad/verse

Search words	UK National Newspapers
Qur’an + violence	644
Quran + violence	236
Koran + violence	260
Qur’an + jihad	275
Qura + jihad	85
Koran + jihad	49
Quran + Verse	50
Qur’an + Verse	11
Koran + Verse	39
Violence + Verse	29
jihad + Verse	7

As can be seen from Table 1, searching for “Qur’an”, which was also spelt as “Quran” and “Koran”, being the other two common variations of the word, in combination with “violence” produces a significant number of articles. This was also the case when “violence” was replaced by “jihad”, another keyword usually used in the media in association with the Qur’an. However, the word “verse” with the same variant spellings of Qur’an did not appear as often as one would expect in the corpus. Searching for the word “verse” in combination with “violence” then with “jihad” retrieved fewer results too. This is a significant result, implying that the Qur’an is presented as a “violent book” in its entirety rather than being discussed in terms of which verses are considered “violent”.

The second step was to closely examine the results to establish which articles contained an actual translation of verses and which did not, and which verses were mentioned. A preliminary list of the twelve commonly quoted verses was created. Focusing on the verses which were presented in relation to “violence”, rather than, for example “women” and “veil”, a shorter list of five verses was created: Qur’an (9:5), (2:191), (8:60), (47:4), (9:29). Qur’an (9:5) was found to be the most commonly quoted, or rather misquoted, verse, occasionally introduced with the title “Verse of the Sword”, originally a term used by some commentators to classify verses semantically. To make sure all mentions of this particular verse were captured, LexisNexis was searched again as follows in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Search results for Qur’an/Quran/Koran (9:5)

Search words	UK National Newspapers
The verse of the sword	11
9: 5 + Koran	10
9: 5 + Quran	11
9: 5 + Qur’an	3
Total	35

A closer examination of all 35 UK newspaper articles was carried out to identify how this verse was presented, in which context and which English translation was used. Republication and blog entries excluded<sup>2</sup>, the result was 6 unique articles, only 4 of which provide a “translation” of the verse and these will be examined below in descending chronological order.

The *MailOnline* published two articles featuring a translation of Qur’an (9:5). The first article, “‘We will win or we will die’: Australian jihadist taunts the West on Facebook as spy chief prepares to boost our terrorism threat level to high”, was published on September 10, 2014, by Sarah Michael. She relates the story of a suspected IS fighter, Elomar, who reportedly references the verse in question on his Facebook page. Michael writes of “Chapter 9 of the Quran which contains the ‘Verse of the Sword’ passage terrorists often cite to justify jihad”, framing the readers’ understanding of the direct relationship between suspected “terrorists” and the Qur’an. She then provides the following quote: “And when the forbidden months have passed, kill the idolaters wherever you find them and take them prisoners, and beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent and observe Prayer and pay the Zakat, then leave their way free. Surely, Allah is Most Forgiving, Merciful”.

This “translation” of Qur’an (9:5) is provided without mentioning that it is a translation and without an acknowledgement of its source, and I have not been able to establish which published translation was drawn upon by Michael. The use of quotes and the lack of reference to the source of the translation give a false impression that this is a direct quote from the Qur’an. Lack of information about the context of the translation, and indeed the verse itself, the translator and the purpose of the translation makes it difficult to appreciate why this translation, in particular, was chosen and what ideological motivations are involved in its production and selection. In addition, the verse is given a decontextualized exegetical title, namely the “Verse of the Sword”. The use of uppercase, a powerful typographical device, sets up an interpretive context for the reader (Baker 2010, 360). This title conjures up the other public narrative that Islam spread by the sword, which further consolidates the public narrative that the story is disseminating: the Qur’an calls for violence. It also frames the readers’ understanding of the translation by linking the “terrorism threat” to Islam, clearly attaching a religious reason for “terrorism”, and tapping into the medieval, but hitherto surviving, at least in the media, narrative of the crusades, which is considered by Said (1997, 5) as one of the main reasons for the negative view of Islam.

The article seems set to rekindle the readers’ fears that Elomar’s narrative is an episode of the much larger meta-narrative of terrorism associated with the 9/11 events. The details provided, namely, the verse’s decontextualized title, together with its number and translation, imply authenticity. Michael then directly relates this threat to the readers’ lives by drawing on the Australian Government’s decision to “strengthen anti-terrorism laws” because the country is facing “a persistent threat.” In terms of causal emplotment, Elomar’s narrative is presented as an episode in a public

narrative about ISIS extremists, which feeds into the meta-narrative of “terrorism”. The temporal aspect of the narrative is also significant. The publication of the article on the eve of the anniversary of 9/11 frames the verse, and subsequently the Qur’an and Muslims, as a persistent security threat years after the events.<sup>3</sup> Elomar and people like him are portrayed as protagonists while the rest are on the receiving end of their aggression, with no reason or context provided for “their acts”. Spatially, the publication of the article in the news section presents it as a fact rather than an opinion.

The second article, published by *The MailOnline*, was entitled “Al Qaeda terrorists actually ‘just want to defend themselves’ claims controversial new study”, by Rob Waugh on July 10, 2012. Waugh reports on research involving Al Qaeda materials. The researchers identified more than 1,500 quotes from the Qur’an that Al Qaeda used to support their arguments but the “‘Verse of the Sword’ (9:5) that says ‘fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them’ was used only three times”. The researchers are reported to have been surprised because: “[t]hese findings challenge the idea of a clash of civilizations”. Waugh attempts to dismiss these results, arguing that other studies have shown that Al Qaeda’s militants are “38 times more likely to kill a Muslim than a member of another group”.

As in the case of the article by Michael, the quotation marks imply that this is a direct quote from the Qur’an and again the source of the translation is not provided. However, the closest published translation of the Qur’an to this verse is A.Y. Ali’s (1934-37). Whether this was the translation the author drew on cannot be confirmed. Here too the use of the uppercase is meant to attract the readers’ attention to the verse. Although the overall picture portrayed by this article is not clear, the frame in which the study is reported, presenting a partial translation of a verse by selective appropriation, frames the readers into interpreting this research as confirming that the Qur’an calls for violence, whether against Muslims or non-Muslims. This frame is further substantiated by the title of the verse. The causal emplotment is also clear: Muslims are the perpetrators of violence, according to both the author of the article and the study he reports, although the antagonists may also include Muslims as well as non-Muslims. The presentation of Muslims within this conflictual framework associates them with the more dominant global image. The temporal aspect is significant since the article was published around the anniversary of the 7/7 London bombings, tapping into the media coverage of the topic and confirming that the Qur’an calls for violence. Finally, spatially, the publication of the article in the science section packages the story as a disciplinary narrative: the violence perpetrated by these “Islamic groups” is worth studying.

The third article was published by *The Daily Telegraph* (London), entitled: “Sacred mysteries; Koranic verses on the duty to kill” by Christopher Howse on July 12, 2008. Howse reviews a programme aired on Channel 4, *The Qur’an*, arguing that it is likely to anger Muslims, because, amongst other things, it claims that Iranian Shia and Saudis have “a priestly caste, contrary to the spirit of the Koran”, which the author argues against, saying that “[t]here are no priests in Islam”. Howse maintains that only the scholars of “Koranic” law are

qualified to interpret the Qur'an. He goes on to say that the problem for the West comes when violent Islamists interpret some "Koranic verses" themselves: "[t]his one (9:5), has proved particularly dangerous: 'Kill the polytheists wherever you find them, and take them and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush.'" Howse follows this by his own "interpretation": "To Islamist extremists, Christians, because they associate creatures (such as Jesus) with God, count as polytheists." The title itself predisposes the reader to link the Qur'an with violence. The use of "Koran" adds a sense of archaism and evokes an orientalist discourse, especially because the title of the programme the article reviews uses the more common spelling "Qur'an". The author criticises those who give themselves the liberty of interpreting the Qur'an, but does exactly the same thing himself and interprets 'polytheists' to mean Christians without drawing on any of the "scholars of 'Koranic' law", that he mentions. This particular interpretation reminds the readers of and builds on the narrative about the crusades, reinforcing the current meta-narrative of the "war on terror". It is worth mentioning that in Islam Christians and Jews are considered to be the "People of the Book", meaning believers in the Gospels and the Torah. The verse number and "translation" are provided but, here too, there is no mention of the fact that this is a translation, nor is the source of the translation mentioned, and again, I was not able to locate the source myself in any of the published translations of the Qur'an. Spatially, placing the "translation" of the verse and its "interpretation" right at the end of the article seems to serve as the conclusion that potential readers will take away from this article. Spatially also, publishing the article in the News section gives readers the impression that the information it contains is fact. Temporally, the publication of the article also marks the anniversary of the 7/7 bombings and therefore bolsters the same negative public and meta-narratives about the Qur'an and Islam.

Finally, on March 10, 2006, the *Morning Star* published "Inspired by love but guided by knowledge; Geoff Simons argues that the use of religious texts as a life guide is fundamentally flawed". Arguing that all religion is irrational, Simons writes that according to the Qur'an, "Unbelievers should be driven from their houses and slain (Sura 9:5)". Simons singles out Christians and Muslims for further criticism stating that they "want to adopt a 'pick and mix' approach to religious texts, only advertising the bits they like", although he himself does exactly the same thing and does not even reproduce the co-text or the context of the verse above, or any of the others that he quotes in a similar manner. Despite the fact that the verse reference itself is inaccurate, and the correct reference should read (Qur'an 9:5), by providing it he intends to confirm the verse's authenticity. Here too there is no mention of the fact that this is a "translation" of the verse in question, nor any indication of which translation. I have, however, examined all the available translations of the Qur'an into English but have not found any that corresponds to this one. Similar to the previous articles, the use of quotes can confuse readers into believing they are reading the Qur'an itself. Finally, this text helps to substantiate the narrative that the author is creating against religion by tying

it to an atheist narrative that views religion as the cause of all wars and implies that were it not for religion peace would prevail.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The analysis of the data has revealed some significant results. Firstly, a lack of acknowledgment of the fact that what is provided in the articles selected for examination is a "translation", rather than the original text of the verse, gives the discussion a spurious authenticity, and circumvents the suspicion that some readers might have about translations, which in the public perception lack the level of authenticity of the originals. The unsuspecting reader will consider the English to be a direct quote from the Qur'an, in other words, an authentic source text, when in fact it is a translation which is well known to be shaped by the context in which it is produced. Furthermore, the use of quotation marks to present the verse in question helps give the impression that this is a direct quote from the Qur'an in order to accord it more authenticity. The lack of information about the source of the translation further consolidates the illusion that the quotation marks produce. In this respect, Baker (2014, 173) argues that the quotations are there simply to report and reproduce what the Muslims, the Other, are saying "behind our back" despite the fact that this is actually a translation by an unacknowledged translator. This is a serious issue, since some readers may not know that the Qur'an and its translation are not the same thing (see Elimam 2009, 2013).

Secondly, the lack of details about the verse in question, its context, the Qur'an and the source of the translation, creates a level of abstraction which is essential to strengthen the public narrative being created and sustained by the media, since details can potentially detract from the overall narrative rather than strengthening it. In addition, abstraction is necessary for transforming this particular public narrative relating the Qur'an to violence to a meta-narrative about the relationship between Islam and terror. Providing details could potentially open doors to questioning the quality of the translation at a micro-linguistic level and thereby challenge its authenticity or accuracy. Translations could be challenged further if the translator's or publisher's ideological viewpoint were to be questioned or evaluated.

Thirdly, the decontextualization of Qur'an (9:5), including the lack of historicity of the verse, implies that this is an all-time order for all Muslims, reiterating the public narrative of considering Muslims the enemy within. The holy book contains well over 6,000 verses but is being framed in light of a handful of verses, including this one, which has been chosen via selective appropriation to create and bolster this public narrative. The implication is that aggression is intrinsically persistent and existent in Islam. Furthermore, the implication of "cherry-picking" this verse in particular potentially implies that regardless of its content or context, those who believe in it pose a potential danger, creating a non-negotiable "us" and "them" binary. Believers, emplotted as aggressors, need to be monitored. Further, the omission of any Islamic voice explaining the verse, the decontextualization, the framing, are all a form of "obscured patterns

of domination and oppression” to silence one fifth of the world’s population, who are prevented by and in the media from speaking about their own religion (Van Rooyen 2011, 26 in Baker 2017).

Fourthly, the temporal dimension of most of the articles above, being published in July or September, dates of the attacks in London and New York, is also significant. This timing serves to remind the readers of the suspects and the reasons behind the attacks, namely the Qur’an. Recirculating this public narrative on the anniversary of the attacks capitalises on the usually intensified media campaigns around these two dates, and ties it directly to the meta-narrative of the “war on terror”. The spatial dimension of most articles is equally significant. The presentation of the articles in the news section frames them as “fact”. The extra-linguistic elements, including the uppercase in the media title of the verse and the article titles themselves, strengthen the effect of the narratives being evoked in these articles.

Finally, although searching for “Qur’an”, with its variant spellings, and “violence” and “jihad” (see table 1 above) retrieved a large number of results, searching for the verses repeated in the context of narrating the Qur’an as a “violent” book, retrieved far fewer results. This implies that the public narrative about the Qur’an is produced and disseminated without much knowledge about the book itself. The scarce references to Qur’anic verses also confirm the proposition that the media, instead of informing the readers about the Qur’an, are responsible for the creation and dissemination of a negative public narrative about the holy book.

In conclusion, a narrative creates an imaginary space for the receiver to hear, see and feel. A narrative has a make-believe nature, similar to films, communicating a whole experience. Some readers are not aware that news is created: “News” does not just happen then are reported the way they happen, but the media institutions and personnel, including translators, have their own rules and conventions to convey news from a certain perspective. In other words, a narrative communicates a set of feelings and seeks to instil a specific attitude in the receivers. The above discussion has attempted to show some ways in which the media are involved not only in disseminating a negative image of Islam and Muslims but also, and more significantly, in creating it.

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#### ENDNOTES

1 Although the BBC upholds the image that it is an impartial media source, there have been many complaints about the manner in which the BBC covers news of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 2004 the BBC decided to file the Balen report, which examined its coverage of the conflict, and would not publish it, fighting a 3-year long legal battle in courts in order not to have to publish the report. In 2006 the BBC commissioned another

investigation according to which the BBC’s coverage of the conflict has been found to be “not always providing a complete picture”, “misleading”, and implicitly favoured the Israeli side. [http://www.thefullwiki.org/Criticism\\_of\\_the\\_BBC](http://www.thefullwiki.org/Criticism_of_the_BBC)

- 2 6 blog entries and letters to the editor, 3 of which were published by the *Daily Telegraph*, and 1 by each of the *Telegraph*, the *Independent* and the *Express*
- 3 A large section of this article containing the verse translation and media title was reproduced by the *Daily Mail Australia* on September 20, 2014, as part of another article on the same topic: “Sister of notorious Australian terrorist Mohamed Elomar stopped and questioned at Sydney Airport [...] where she was due to fly out to Dubai” by Mellisa Hills. Here too the manner in which the verse was presented without contextualization, emphasising eminent attacks, and elaborating on the government’s response, all help disseminate the narratives of terror even further.
4. <https://www.stylist.co.uk/books/the-all-time-most-popular-books-in-the-world-revealed/127306> (accessed 10/5/2019)

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