

# Islam and Muslims in U.S. Think Tank Electronic Media: Framing, Narrative, and Ethics

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***Abstract:***

This paper draws on framing theory and narrative theory as two influential theoretical approaches to the analysis of discourse and communication. It looks into the discourse processes and ethics of framing particular media stories and constructing particular narratives about Islam and Muslims in the official website of the Middle East Forum (MEF), a well-established neoconservative American think tank which specializes in the Middle East. The study examines a representative sample of articles from the website and proposes a model of editorial media discourse analysis based on a problem-solution framing paradigm and a narrative ethical evaluation platform. Findings uncover that the problem-solution frame, which is built on a problem-culprit-cause-solution base and which represents the frame's cognitive structure is systematically utilized. Four types of framing (religious, political, cultural, and military), two forms (verbal and semiotic), and two functions (persecution and isolation) have been detected, constructing persecutive narratives of Muslims as the villains and of Islam as anti-Western, anti-Semitic, and incompatible with modernity. The ethical evaluation shows that these belligerent narratives violate basic standards of ethics and dialogue.

***Keywords:*** Dialogue; Ethics; Framing; Islam; Media; Middle East Forum; Muslim; Narrative; Persecution; Representation; Think Tank

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**Résumé:**

Cet article s'appuie sur les théories narrative et du recadrage comme deux approches théoriques influentes pour l'analyse du discours et de la communication. Il examine les processus discursifs et l'éthique du recadrage des histoires de médias particuliers et de construire des récits particuliers sur l'Islam et les musulmans sur le site officiel du Middle East Forum (MEF), un think tank néoconservateur américain bien établi spécialiste du Moyen-Orient. L'étude examine un échantillon représentatif d'articles tirés du site Web et propose un modèle d'analyse du discours médiatique rédactionnel fondé sur un paradigme de recadrage problème-solution et une plateforme d'évaluation éthique narrative. Les résultats montrent que le cadre problème-solution, qui repose sur une base problème-coupable-cause-solution et qui représente la structure cognitive du cadre, est systématiquement utilisé. Quatre types d'encadrement (religieux, politique, culturel, et militaire), deux formes (verbale et sémiotique) et deux fonctions (persécution et isolement) ont été détectés. Ces recadrages ont pour vocation de construire des récits de "persécution" contre les musulmans présentés comme "méchants" et contre l'Islam comme "anti-occidental", voire "antisémite" et incompatible avec la modernité. Les résultats de l'évaluation éthique de ce compte-rendu de recherche très méticuleux montre que ces récits belliqueux violent les normes de base de l'éthique des médias et du dialogue des civilisations.

**Mots-clés:** Dialogue; Éthique; Forum du Moyen-Orient; Islam; Médias; Musulman; Persécution; Recadrage; Récit; Représentation; Think Tank

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**Introduction**

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and particularly since the events of 9/11, a new Iron Curtain has been erected that isolates the vast geographical region extending from Morocco to Afghanistan and separates it from the rest of the world. This huge exotic but oil-rich geostrategic space in constant turmoil has provided a particular type of Western media machine with sensational cultural, political, and military raw material that has produced a narrative of Islam and Muslims as being incompatible with modernity, human rights, and democracy, as a home for backwardness and violence, and as the battlefield for the "war on terror".

While Western armies have interfered directly on the ground to change regimes and topple no-more-desired Arab leaders, resulting in totally devastating "collateral damage" in the populations and infrastructures, this type of Western media's mission has been to craft and flood its audiences before, during, and after military interventions with representations of Muslims as "terrorists" and Islam as anti-democratic, anti-Semitic, and regressive. The "war on terror" seems therefore to have grown two wings: the military and some type of belligerent Western media.

The latter's mission is to narrate stories that create the problem to smear and stereotype this different Other, justify the conflict, and pave the way for discrimination and direct action.

Inevitably, therefore, legitimate questions spring up to the surface: Why has this type of Western media since long forsaken their professional ethics and have turned into a hate- and fear-producing machine instead of living up to their declared mission of objectively reporting reality? Why have they taken up another role not much different from that of mercenaries largely based on misinformation and manipulation? Most importantly: How do these media go about constructing these Islamophobia narratives that have proved fatal for whole cultures and nations inside this huge iron-curtain fenced enclave?

This study does not examine print and broadcast media that have been quite abundantly investigated. Instead, it focuses on electronic media, which seem to require much more attention in the literature given that a) they enjoy widespread and easy access by the elites as well as the masses and b) their methods of persuasion and reporting seem to be rather unconventional relative to the more traditional mainstream Western media. We have selected a well-established electronic media outlet based in the U.S. and owned and operated by the Middle East Forum (MEF), a foreign policy conservative and independent American think tank organization whose mission is to "promote American interests in the Middle East and protect Western values from Middle Eastern threats", as defined in its website's *About the Middle East Forum*.

This paper analyzes what may incorrectly pass for objective and balanced discourse in the eyes of Western audiences in order to 1) ponder about the nature of "dialogue" adopted by MEF writers, 2) propose a framing analysis and narrative evaluation model of MEF editorial media discourse, and 3) measure the gap between actual discourse practices in the real world and the ethical and dialogic principles as theorized in the literature, particularly by the Moroccan philosopher Taha Abderrahman.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper draws on both framing theory and narrative theory in order to uncover 1) authors' unspoken processes of shaping or *framing*, as it were, readers' perception of the events/story contained in individual articles (framing theory) and 2) authors' strategies to draw on and consolidate prevailing narrative patterns of reality construction (narrative theory). Given the highly selective and often manipulative nature of media discourse in general and MEF in particular, these two methods potentially provide the necessary tools to unveil the MEF authors' silent ways to further their framing communicative purposes and to promote the ideological agendas that they are commissioned to serve.

It should be signalled here that the present paper is the first of two papers describing a larger project which, in addition to the two theories above, also draws on genre theory (Swales, 1990) to explain what I call authors' *framing rhetorical moves*. Because this theory is not used for the purposes of this paper, the following discussion is limited to framing and narrative theories. Also, this discussion by no means aspires for an exhaustive literature review; it rather focuses on how the two paradigms are used to treat the corpus at hand.

### ***Framing Theory***

Media effects research has developed three interrelated but distinct paradigms to explain how the media shape audience perception of reality. These theoretical explanations include agenda-

setting, priming, and framing effects. Scheufele and Tewksbury distinguish among the three models as follows:

By making some issues more salient in people's mind [e.g., based on relative placement or amount of coverage; agenda-setting], mass media can also shape the considerations that people take into account when making judgments about political candidates or issues [priming]. Framing differs significantly from these accessibility-based models. It is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences.

(Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007: 11)

Agenda-setting and priming are also different from framing in that the former are two empirically-oriented approaches to media communication within the Administrative School of Thought, while the latter is more theory-oriented and belongs to the opposing school of thought called the Critical School (Eid, 2004). However, as Rosengren argues, the two schools of thought are "similar in that both are instrumental; administrative research is carried out in the interest of those in power; critical research is carried out in the interest of those without power" (cited in Eid, 2004: 221).

The present study focuses exclusively on framing theory. For one thing, there seems to be no agreement in the literature as to the conceptual definitions and clear-cut functions of each of the three notions. McCombs and Shaw (1993), for example, contrary to Scheufele (2000), suggest that framing and priming should be part of agenda setting. For another, for purposes of the present study, focus is more on the processes of highlighting, or *framing* as it were, the communicators' perspective when relating a story or event in an attempt to shape audience perception and eventually influence its attitude. In other words, focus is more on the media processes of telling people *what* to think, as the "frame of a news story gives *meaning* to the individual events reported" (framing), rather than "what to think *about*" (agenda-setting) (Dreier & Martin, 2010: 763).

In political communication, therefore, framing is viewed as a process of how the elite and the media shape public opinion and researchers accordingly use the concept as a tool to explain shifts in political beliefs and attitudes (Scheufele 1999). In the more general field of communication research, framing studies fall broadly under two approaches: *frame building* and *frame setting* where framing is treated as the dependent and independent variable respectively (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). The goal of the former approach is to research how framing creates public discourse whereas the latter focuses more on how it affects an audience.

The great interest in framing over the past three decades or so can be attributed to its focus not on *what* is being communicated, but rather on *how* a piece of information or story is being related, presented, or contextualized (i.e., framed) by the media and the elite. While framing was originally developed by Goffman (1974) in the field of sociology, the present study adopts one of the subsequent definitions of framing developed in the field of political communication that seems valid even today:

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

(Entman, 1993: 52)

This seminal definition of framing fits our own understanding of the concept since it captures the essence of the processes involved in how the media and the elite contextualize some perceived reality in order to highlight a particular worldview and serve some ideological functions including by manipulative or deceptive means. Framing therefore concerns not the objective content being presented, but rather the media effects resulting from a given mode of presentation, which is necessarily in competition with other possible modes reflecting other possible worldviews of the same issue or event.

Due to the sociological (Goffman, 1974) and psychological (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; 1984) foundations of the concept of framing, Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) claim that framing is “both a macrolevel and a microlevel construct”:

As a macro construct, the term “framing” refers to modes of presentation that journalists and other communicators use to present information in a way that resonates with existing underlying schemas among their audience. . . . As a micro construct, framing describes how people use information and presentation features regarding issues as they form impressions.

(Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007: 12)

Now, while the distinction among the intersecting concepts of agenda setting, priming, and framing as well as the interplay between the different effects they produce on audience already poses real conceptual challenges for theoreticians, as admitted by Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) themselves, by further suggesting a “macro” and “micro” cleavage of framing, they seem to have added to the conceptual confusion reigning in this important area of media effects communication research. Indeed, framing has been defined quite loosely in the literature, Entman (1993) has called it “a fractured paradigm” that is “often defined casually, with much left to an assumed tacit understanding of the reader”.

It is clear that Scheufele and Tewksbury’s (2007) “microlevel” definition of framing closely corresponds to Entman’s (1993) definition as well as the elaboration of it above. However, it is what they have called “macrolevel” framing that seems to cause the potential conceptual blur across converging notions especially in relation to the neighbouring and equally important concept of *narrative*. Curiously enough, despite the obvious interaction between framing and narrative and the potential explanatory power derived from using both concepts as tools to approach media effects in the real world of communication, little, if any, has been done in this direction. In the following section and in the analytical methods section, the paper offers to contribute a discussion along these lines.

### *Narrative Theory*

Narrative theory is—by far—one of the theories that has captured the most attention by scholars in many disciplines over the last 20 years or so. This predominance is not limited to the disciplines of the human and social sciences like philosophy, history, discourse analysis, literary theory, psychology, and anthropology, for example, as we might have expected. The “narrative turn” has indeed extended to reach such far disciplinary fields as medicine, artificial intelligence, and even computer science, thus “endowing narrative theory the status of a new paradigm for knowledge theory” (Patron, 2005: 479). The ubiquity of narrative theory can be explained by the very nature of the human mind cognitive processes: “[a] growing number of neuroscientists, biologists, cognitive psychologists, and philosophers have stressed that the human mind/brain is less a computer than a storyteller” (Mancing, 2005: 44).

Let us consider the following relatively detailed characterization of narrative to see how a narrative functions:

Whether told as fiction or as fact, a narrative is a recognizable story, and a “good story” is one evaluated as believable and important. . . . This means that narrative is distinctly social because stories are constructed, told, heard, and evaluated within particular historical, institutional, and interactional contexts, which include the background assumptions of storytellers and story hearers as well as the prevailing norms of storytelling. . . . These contexts influence what stories and characters likely will be evaluated as believable and important and what moral evaluations likely will be attached to those stories and characters.

(Loseke, 2007: 663)

It is these cultural and institutional contexts, underpinning the story background assumptions, therefore, which serve to explain why a narrative is read differently depending on the cultural and political positioning of those exposed to it. A narrative is defined as “recognizable” because it acquires values of truth and importance that are imposed by its very prevalence in a given cultural environment. Behind the high circulation of narratives stand storytellers, politicians, the media, social and political activists, and so on, who create and promote stories about national identity, modernity, women rights, minorities, and the enemy (to name a few). Some such stories may gain international currency as facilitated by globalized means of communication and fuelled by the agenda-setting efforts invested in them.

Narratives are created at some point in time and space; they serve the cultural or sociopolitical goals of their creators and sustainers, but may not last forever. Because the historical, institutional, and geopolitical contexts harbouring these public stories may change, so do the narratives, as evidenced, for instance, by the evaporation of the now old global 20<sup>th</sup> century narrative of communism and communists and its replacement by 21<sup>st</sup> century equally infamous, “number one threat to world security”, so-called Islamism and Islamists.

Also, as signalled above, because narratives are context-sensitive, they inevitably co-exist with other competing narratives relative to the same social or political phenomena even within the same cultural context; conservative/religious versus liberal/secular stances regarding the issue of national identity or modernity among the intellectual elites of conservative societies in the Muslim world, for instance. At a larger scale, a perfect example may be the longstanding religious narratives of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These narratives, which have co-existed

narratively and even geographically for very long centuries spanning the most part of human religious and intellectual existence, are, for better or for worse, in a constant state of tight tangency affirming their independent identities, negotiating their intersections, and even, at times, for some, reinventing themselves, in endless efforts for survival or supremacy.

Finally, four approaches to the definition of narrative have been used in the literature: 1) the *temporal*, which defines narrative in terms of “the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence”; 2) the *causal*, which focuses on “some causal connection, however oblique, between the events”; 3) the *minimal*, which stipulates that “any statement of an action or event is ipso facto a narrative”; and 4) the *transactional*, which suggests that “narrative is simply a way of reading a text, rather than a feature or essence found in a text” (Richardson, 2000: 169). As these definitions indicate, despite the recognized theoretical importance of narrative, there seems to be no consensus as to its defining features. More disturbing is the confusion between the concept of narrative and the concept of frame, as clearly shown in so-called “minimal” approach to narrative. Surprisingly, very few studies, if any, discuss this lack of distinctness between the two concepts.

## Methodology

The collected corpus consists of the “ten most widely read articles of 2015” as selected by the MEF website itself that “logged over 2.3 million unique visits in 2015”, according to meforum.org. This sample is representative for a qualitative investigation of this type since the selection is done by the website itself comprising the ten most read articles in a period spanning a whole year. The selection procedure is therefore objective and leaves no room for a potential pick-and-choose method.

The MEF is a foreign policy conservative and independent American think tank whose mission, as defined in its website’s *About the Middle East Forum*, is:

- The Middle East Forum promotes American interests in the Middle East and protects Western values from Middle Eastern threats.
- The Forum sees the region—with its profusion of dictatorships, radical ideologies, existential conflicts, border disagreements, corruption, political violence, and weapons of mass destruction—as a major source of problems for the United States. Accordingly, we urge bold measures to protect Americans and their allies.
- In the Middle East, we focus on ways to defeat radical Islam; work for Palestinian acceptance of Israel; develop strategies to contain Iran; and deal with the great advances of anarchy.
- At home, the Forum emphasizes the danger of lawful Islamism; protects the freedoms of anti-Islamist authors, activists, and publishers; and works to improve Middle East studies.

The Middle East Forum realizes its goals through three main mechanisms:

- **Intellectual:** The Forum provides context, insights, and policy recommendations through the *Middle East Quarterly* staff writings, public lectures, radio and television appearances, and conference calls.

- **Operational:** The Forum exerts an active influence through its projects, including Campus Watch, Islamist Watch, Legal Project, Washington Project, Apartheid Monitor, and Shillman/Ginsburg Writing Fellowship Program.
- **Philanthropic:** The Forum annually distributes US\$1.5 million in earmarked donations through its Education Fund, helping researchers, writers, investigators, and activists around the world.

The *Middle East Quarterly* is described as “the only scholarly journal on the Middle East consistent with mainstream American views . . . Delivering timely analyses, cutting-edge information, and sound policy initiatives, it serves as a valuable resource for policymakers and opinion-shapers”.

Regarding their public outreach policy, we learn that “Television and radio rely on Forum specialists, who appear on virtually all the major American over-the-air and cable news programs, plus stations around the globe. MEF staff also brief ranking officials of the U.S. government, testify before Congress, and conduct studies for executive branch agencies”.

As to their research and publication, “Forum scholars produce a bi-weekly newspaper column which runs in the *Jerusalem Post*, write articles in magazines and journals, and publish books . . . Newspapers include the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post*. Websites range from HuffingtonPost.com to NationalReview.com”.

The following are the research questions of this study:

- RQ1: How can this kind of editorial media discourse be analyzed and evaluated?  
 RQ2: What “realities” are framed by individual authors to construct and promote what narratives about Islam and Muslims?  
 RQ3: To what extent are such narratives based on ethically balanced representations?

The concept of frame overlaps with that of narrative; like a narrative, a frame selects a particular angle from which we experience reality. However, although there seems to be some agreement in the literature that the notion of frame is subsidiary to that of narrative (Baker, 2010), the relationship between them is hardly discussed and remains a little fuzzy. We believe that it may be conceptually and methodologically useful to adopt a narrow approach to framing by restricting its scope to the treatment of particular events or stories by individual communicators in order to analyze the implicit processes of shaping audience opinion and attitude. To reflect upon the broader, large-scale media effects that are produced by communicators and organizations sharing the same worldview and which can gain national and global currency, we prefer to adopt the concept of narrative.

The concept of frame is therefore used here to refer to individual authors’ processes of constructing a perceived reality relative to the events or phenomena portrayed in the article by means of “the little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin, 1980: 6). Narrative is used to function as a broader concept of reality construction, which transcends individual articles because it is elaborated collectively and is shared by a community or a culture at large and may operate at national or global scales. This approach to narrative quite closely reflects Loseke’s (2007) definition of it as a recognizable story believed to be true and important in a given community and to which certain moral evaluations are attached. In this

framework of analysis, therefore, the relationship between the two concepts of frame and narrative is interactive; the relatively smaller-scale concept of frame relative to a particular act of communication feeds into an existing recognizable narrative that, together with other narratives, represents a culture's vision of the world.

With respect to media frames as dependent variables, researchers, according to Scheufele should address these kinds of questions: "1. What factors influence the way journalists or other societal groups frame certain issues? 2. How do these processes work and, as a result, what are the frames that journalists use?" (1999: 108). The present study belongs in this category of media framing research, that is, frame *building*, as it attempts to address the question of how media frames are created and what types of frames result from this process; it comes as a response to "the key question of what kinds of organizational or structural factors of the media system, or which individual characteristics of journalists, can impact the framing of news content" (Ibid: 115). This empirical study is meant as a contribution to frame building as a major component of framing as a theory of media effects.

Finally, narrative research is of two types: focusing on "what they represent . . . [and/or] how they represent it" (Currie, 2006: 309). Here, we are concerned with the *what* rather than the *how* aspect of narrative representation; the latter, despite its explanatory power, falls outside the scope of the present study. Also, of the different types of narrative circulating in the literature—for instance Baker's, (2006; 2010) *ontological, public, disciplinary, and meta-narrative*—we will be content with one type to which we will consistently refer to as *narrative* or *public narrative* as defined above.

## Findings and Discussion

In order to answer the three questions motivating the present research, mentioned above, a preliminary framing move analysis and evaluation model is proposed. The authors' rhetorical movements in each text were traced, following a genre analysis method (Swales, 1990), in order to reveal the tacit framing processes used. This characterization resulted in the extraction of a rhetorical structure for each article comprising the set of *framing moves* used by each author to achieve their communicative purpose. The model thus built is, therefore, based on a synthesis of the most recurrent framing moves found in the present corpus. The order of the framing moves reflects the frequency of occurrence of the moves from highest to lowest across the ten articles.

The model rests on a tripartite structure comprising three major categories and their accompanying elements. The major categories include:

- 1) the problem-solution frame, the article's main frame;
- 2) the framing move structure, the set of framing moves that support the main frame; and
- 3) a narrative ethical evaluation.

As mentioned above, the present paper is part of a larger research project that, in addition to framing theory and narrative theory, draws also on genre theory to account for the full model sketched in *Table 1*. The scope of the present paper is, therefore, limited to the first and third components of the proposed model, namely the *problem-solution frame* and *narrative ethical evaluation*. The second component, the *framing move structure* representing the set of framing moves supporting the main frame, can be the object of a separate paper due to space restrictions.

**Table 1: A Framing Move Analysis and Evaluation Model of a Persecutive Media Narrative of Islam and Muslims**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Problem-Solution Frame:</b> <i>problem-culprit-cause-solution</i></li> <li>2. <b>Framing Move Structure</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1. <b>Opponent move</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Opponent Isolation move</li> <li>b) Opponent Stigmatizing move</li> </ol> </li> <li>2.2. <b>Manipulative tactics move</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) De-contextualization</li> <li>b) Overgeneralization and exaggeration</li> <li>c) Selective citation</li> <li>d) Mistranslation</li> <li>e) Misinformation</li> </ol> </li> <li>2.3. <b>Normalizing move</b></li> <li>2.4. <b>Picture furnishing move</b></li> <li>2.5. <b>Proponent move</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Proponent Solidarity move</li> <li>b) Proponent Glorifying move</li> </ol> </li> </ol> </li> <li>3. <b>Narrative Ethical Evaluation</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The principle of difference as innate to dialogue</li> <li>b) The principle of equal otherness</li> <li>c) The principle of dialogue as a necessity and ethical responsibility</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
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### ***Framing Cognitive Structure: The Problem-Solution Paradigm***

This is the article's main frame. It was found out that authors systematically framed their selected issues in the form of a problem-solution paradigm that comprises four elements: a problem, a culprit, an explanation, and a solution. To the target Western audiences for whom most of the issues raised are rather exotic and about which the information provided is very selective, the framing moves within the main frame would certainly represent a coherent rhetorical structure leaving no room for suspicion or questioning. So, what aspects of a perceived reality are selected to frame Islam and Muslims by MEF authors and what kind of narrative(s) do they promote?

To answer these questions, let us first have a look at *Table 2* that shows article titles and the corresponding problem-solution frames:

Table 2: A Problem-Solution Frame Analysis of Data

No	Article	Problem	Solution Frame
1	What France Can Learn from Israel in Confronting Islamist Terror by Gregg Roman (2015, Nov 15)	“Islamic terror”, which struck Paris on November 13, 2015.	The French authorities should strike back ruthlessly following the <i>successful example of Israel</i> even at the expense of breaking moral or political rules.
2	UK Islamists Hold Rally to “Struggle” for Islamic State by Raheem and Deacon (2015, November 14)	Islamists hold “racist, hateful, anti-Semitism, and anti-Western rhetoric” public gathering with British Muslims in Bedford.	Suggested prohibition of such gatherings of “hate preachers”.
3	Europe’s Muslim Migrants Bring Sex Pathologies in Tow by David Goldman (2015, October 14)	Heavy “Muslim migrants” presence in Sweden and Germany will cause “the social fabric” of these countries to “unravel” due to “Muslim world social disintegration”.	Implicit call for “Sweden’s political leaders” to take “anti-immigration action” together with an indirect instigation for “protests” by “nationalist parties”.
4	Obama Throws Christian Refugees to the Lions by Raymond Ibrahim (2015, September 24)	Denouncing Obama administration immigration policy bias: In defense of secular, anti-Islamist Iraqi Christian asylum seekers in the US, against pro-ISIS Muslim immigrants.	Suggestion to allow in “Christian minorities” because Muslim Americans support the Islamic State and Muslim clerics call for “jihad by emigration . . . to conquer Western nations”.
5	Who is to Blame for the Drowning of Alan Kurdi? by Tarek Fatah (2015, September 3)	The author refers to the sad drowning of the Syrian child only to defend conservative Canadian Citizenship Minister against rival parties who appeal to “pro-Islamist voters”.	“Refugees fleeing war zones in the Arab World could easily be accommodated in Turkey and Saudi Arabia”.
6	Obama Alters U.S. Oath of Allegiance to Comply with Islamic Law by Raymond Ibrahim (2015, August 6)	American Muslims’ loyalty goes to Islam, not America because of the “Islamic doctrine of Loyalty and Enmity”.	Suggestion that Muslims are not qualified to be citizens of the U.S. because of the numerous cases of Muslim American soldiers “deceit” and “disloyalty”.
7	Iran Nuclear Deal Makes War More Likely by Efraim Inbar (2015, July 15)	Iran-US nuclear deal is a “strategic nightmare” for the West and the region. “The Iranian capacity for subversion and for exporting terror will be greatly magnified”.	An “Israeli military strike on Iran has become more likely . . . before the US puts the brakes on military supplies to the Israeli army”.
8	Sex Slavery and the Islamic State by Mark Durie (2015, July 3)	“Islamic State atrocities” of “sex slavery” and terrorism are based on Islam religious teaching.	Breaking the “taboo attached to making any link between Islamic State atrocities and the religion of Islam”. “non-Muslim opinion-makers should show more backbone”.
9	Why Can’t Muslims Laugh at Mohammed? by David P. Goldman (2015, May 5)	Questioning the very existence of the Prophet, equating Islam with atheism, author argues that Islam does not tolerate laughing at the Prophet because that would “inspire social chaos” of a social system based on “wife-beating, slavery, punishment by amputation”.	“To placate Muslims in their resistance to modernity would require the West to give up being the West. Today’s resurgence of Muslim fundamentalism is . . . a grand flourish of existential despair”.
10	Egypt’s Sisi: Islamic “Thinking” Is “Antagonizing the Entire World” by Raymond Ibrahim (2015, January 1)	Author: “The majority of the terrorism plaguing the world today is related to the holy texts of Islam themselves”.	“Al-Sissi, the hero of Egypt’s anti-Muslim Brotherhood revolution . . . need for a religious revolution”.

As shown in *Table 2*, the problem-solution framing paradigm is systematically at work. The four components of each article’s main frame would seem to represent the frame’s cognitive structure. Authors start by framing a *problem*, foregrounded in the title and at the onset of the article in the form of a provocative or sensational question or claim as illustrated by the titles in *Table 2*. Then, of course, a *culprit* has to be identified and, as *Table 3* shows, the culprits are systematically of three kinds: Islamic teaching, Muslims, and Muslim states. The third component, *cause*, provides an explanation of the religious, political, or cultural “drivers” of the problem at hand (e.g., terrorism, sex slavery, and immigration). The fourth element of this cognitive structure is a *solution* offered by the author to contain the source of the problems. *Table 3* shows the four elements of the main frame for each article as well as the framing category at play:

**Table 3: Main Frame Components and Its Corresponding Framing Categories**

<i>No</i>	<i>Problem</i>	<i>Culprit</i>	<i>Cause</i>	<i>Solution</i>	<i>Framing</i>
1	Paris “Islamic terror”	“Muslim terrorists” “Jihadists”	France’s “faint-hearted” methods	Israel’s hard and “swift justice”	Military persecution frame
2	British Muslim gathering	“Islamists”	“hateful rhetoric”	Such gatherings to be prohibited	Political persecution frame
3	Muslim migrants in Sweden and Germany	“Muslim migrants”	Risque of contamination by “sex pathologies”	Nationalist parties “anti-immigration action”	Political and cultural persecution
4	“Muslim immigrants” in the U.S.	Muslims, Obama, Islam	“Jihad by emigration” and terrorism	“Iraqi Christian” are to be granted asylum instead.	Polit./ Relg. persecution/isolation frame
5	Syrian refugees in Canada	Tangent Muslim states	Muslim states cultural ties	Refugees to Turkey etc., not Canada	Cultural and political persecution
6	American Muslims’ loyalty	American Muslims, Islam	“Islamic doctrine of Loyalty and Enmity”	Muslims do not qualify for U.S. citizenship	Religious persecution/isolation frame
7	Iran-US nuclear deal	Iran, “America the week”	A “strategic nightmare” for the West	If Iran is not contained, Israel will take action.	Political isolation frame
8	The “taboos” of Islam”	Islam	Islam justifies ISIS terrorism and abuse	Firmly denouncing Islamic ideology	Religious Isolation frame
9	Muslims do not laugh at the prophet	Islam	Muslims “social chaos”	Muslims’ “resistance to modernity”	Religious isolation frame
10	“Islamic terrorism”	Islam	“the holy texts of Islam”	The need for “a renewed vision of Islam”	Religious isolation frame

The main frame’s four constituents may appear to serve as some *coherent* cognitive structure for the authors’ Western audiences. However, as the proposed framing move analysis and evaluation model (*Table 1*) shows, the various framing moves used are based on some suspicious practices including *de-contextualization*, *exaggeration*, *overgeneralization*, *selective citation*, *mistranslation*, and *misinformation*. Given that the details of the model’s Framing Move

Structure fall outside the scope of this paper, I am nonetheless content with one example to illustrate such manoeuvrings here.

In his efforts to prove that according to the “Islamic doctrine of Loyalty and Enmity . . . Muslims must always be loyal to Islam and Muslims while having enmity for all non-Islamic things or persons” in article 6 above, verse 3:28 of the Qur’an is translated as:

**The author:** “Let believers not take for *friends and allies* infidels rather than believers”

**Sahih International:** “Let not believers take disbelievers as *allies* rather than believers”

**Muhsin Khan:** “Let not the believers take the disbelievers as *Auliya (supporters, helpers, etc.)* instead of the believers”

**Dr. Ghali:** “The believers should not take to themselves the disbelievers for *constant patrons*, apart from the believers”

The Arabic word *awliyyaa*’ (أولياء) means “allies” as shown in the translations, including, partly, the author’s. But the author’s interference in the translation is very clear as he deliberately added the word “friends” along with “allies” in an attempt to extend the verse targeted category of “military and political allies” from among disbelievers to the general public of non-Muslims, suggesting that Islam categorically forbids its followers from dealing with non-Muslims even as “friends” and that the only form of such dealing would be on the battle field, thus indicting Islamic teaching and holding the religion responsible for “Islamic terror”. As a matter of fact, even the appellation of what he calls doctrine of loyalty and “enmity” is subject to manipulation and distortion because the second word, *albaraa*’ (البراء) in Arabic, means disavowal, certainly not enmity, but *enmity* suits him better for obvious reasons. Such manipulative translation methods raise serious ethical concerns in translation studies and represent a flagrant violation of translation norms of ethics (Pym, 2012) and the translator’s ethical responsibility in translating/representing otherness (Basalamah, 2014).

The selective and highly deceptive character of the author’s maneuvering can also be seen in the fact that he deliberately avoids presenting the big picture to his Western audience, decontextualizing selected verses and discounting those that explicitly run counter to his narrative about Islam. One such verse, among many others, is verse 8 of Al-Mumtaḥanah chapter, translated as:

**Muhsin Khan:**

“Allah does not forbid you to *deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes*. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity”.

**Sahih International:**

“Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes—from *being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them*. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly”.

As can be seen from the translations, this verse categorically refutes the author’s main claim in this article, namely that “God has forbidden believers from being friendly or on intimate terms with the infidels”. All in all, regardless of the truth value of the claims advanced by the authors

in this corpus relative to the *teachings* of Islam, which are subject to severe distortions, the fact remains that Islam and Muslims are indeed object to a systematic persecution and isolation campaign in this MEF sample.

### *Framing Goals and Narratives*

As we have seen in the previous section, the main frame's cognitive structure consists of four omnipresent constituents, namely *problem-culprit-cause-solution*. The four elements of the structure function as necessary framing tools used by the author to impact audience information processing and shape its perception of the main issue of the article's story. The framing structure works particularly well for an uninformed Western audience deprived of all the contextual clues—religious, political, cultural, etc.—that are vital for the evaluation of the claims advanced. As a result, Western lay as well as professional readers are (mis)led from a state of an uninformed to a state of misinformed audience with all the devastating consequences that may follow from this manipulation.

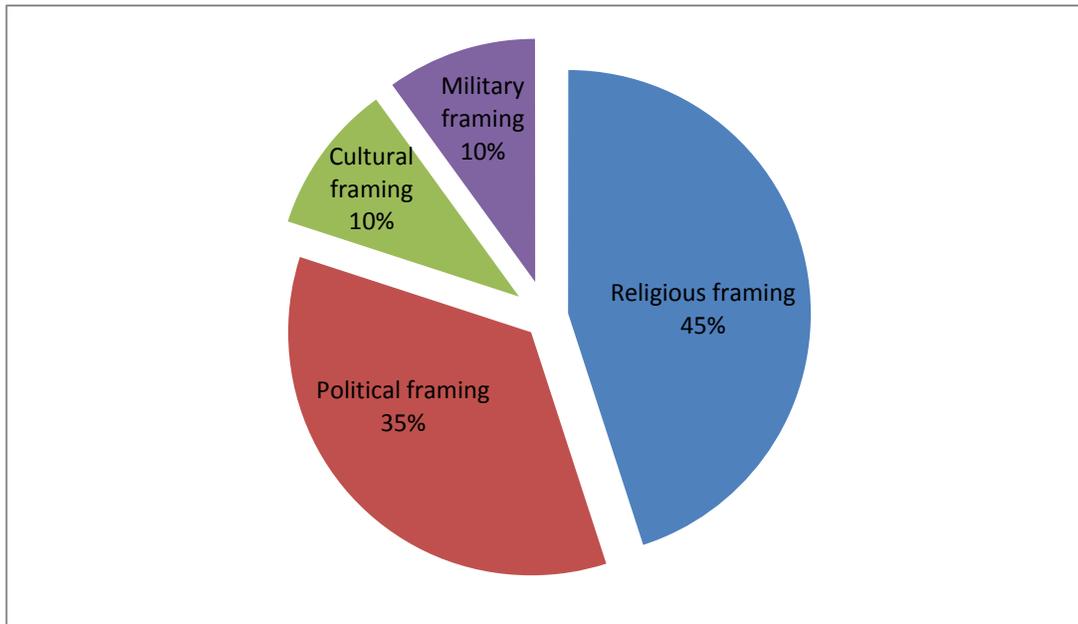
Indeed, as *Table 3* shows, two main framing functions have been identified, namely:

- *Persecution* framing
- *Isolation* framing

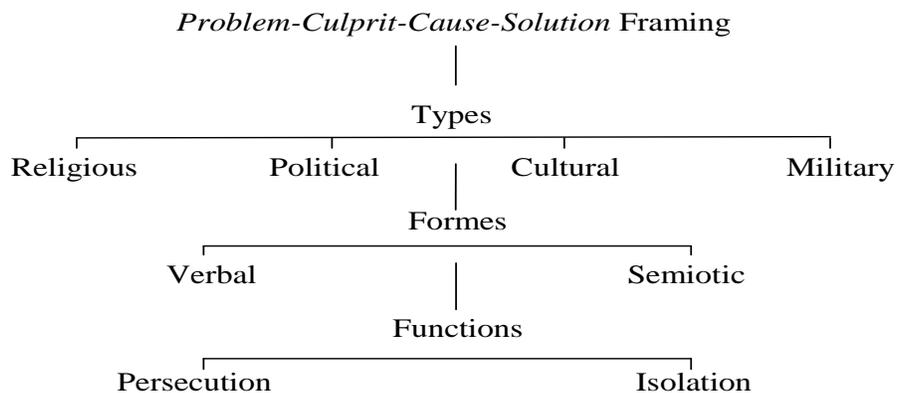
The framing function reveals the author's framing intent or communicative purpose relative to the framed subjects. The two framing functions were found to be equally distributed across the ten articles. They were realized by means of four framing types:

- Religious framing
- Political framing
- Cultural framing
- Military framing

*Figure 1* shows the relative distribution of each framing type. Of the four types, religious framing is the most heavily used, revealing the priority given to this tool used as we have seen to undermine the very foundational texts of Islam and to hold this *religion* responsible for the unacceptable conduct of some of its followers. When this is the case, that is, the culprit is Islam itself, the actual teaching texts, as in articles 8, 9, and 10 above, which were exclusively devoted to this kind of framing, I have called it *religious isolation framing*. *Political isolation framing* occurs when the culprit is a Muslim state, e.g., Iran, or a group of Muslim states, e.g., Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. When the *culprits* are the Muslims, the persecution machine takes over by chasing them across the globe, in France, Sweden, Germany, Britain, Canada, and America, even if these countries happen to be their birth places, producing *religious* and *political persecution framing*. The other two types of framing, cultural and military, were used to a much lesser degree.

**Figure 1: Framing Types Distribution**

As can be seen, therefore, the authors' framing efforts in the present corpus serve two main functions, namely isolating Islam and Muslim states and persecuting Muslims largely by means of religious and political frames. *Figure 2* shows a diagram of the problem-solution paradigm, representing all three of its components, namely its types, forms, and functions. The semiotic part of the "forms" category falls outside the scope of the present paper.

**Figure 2: A Problem-Solution Framing Paradigm of a Belligerent Media Narrative of Islam and Muslims**

The framing *big picture* emerging therefore from the individually framed stories which have collectively contributed to its construction and consolidation is a systematic persecutive narrative of Muslims as the villains and Islam as anti-Western, anti-Semitic, and incompatible with modernity who/which should be globally fought and contained by all means possible. Inevitably, therefore, this exclusionary narrative results in the resurgence of a new Berlin Wall, a new Iron

Curtain; the creation, in the collective mind of Western audiences, of a binary world consisting of two diametrically opposed entities: a demonized Muslim world and the *Wrest*, the West-dominated *rest* of the world.

To fulfill its declared goal to *protect* “Western values” from the “Islamic threat”, the MEF takes up a full-time mission to lead a global media campaign for the isolation and persecution of Islam and Muslims. Given this mission, the MEF depiction of Islam and Muslims is largely biased and highly stereotypical, boiling down to sheer propaganda. Indeed, the MEF’s persecutive mission and dubious and demonizing methods seem to substantiate Huntington’s thesis of the clash of civilizations, except that MEF’s narrative restricts the clash to the *Wrest* against Islam.

### *Evaluation of Narrative Ethics*

In the context of ideological conflicts, military tensions, and an international political scene openly motivated by a policy of protecting and promoting “interests”, can we envisage to study media discourse without considering fundamentally related questions and general principles such as the values justice, moral responsibility and fairness of attitude to the other? Is it not the case that it is these very values and principles which political and media discourse producers preach on the media on a daily basis? Is it not the case that it is these very moral principles, which govern our institutions and social life in general? Can we dispense with ethics when engaging in acts of communication? Indeed, as Jones (2007) contends:

To engage communicatively with someone is a form of conduct towards them, a way of treating them, and is, therefore, as is any form of human behavior, an irreducibly *moral* act in the broad sense of the word. . . . Consequently, communicative practices are as vulnerable to ethical scrutiny as any other human practice.

(Jones, 2007: 342-343)

Communication acts, therefore, translate moral considerations and attitudes to the other. It is, therefore, a moral obligation for the analyst that public discourse, particularly if it is ideologically motivated and politically committed such as that of the MEF, be evaluated on ethical grounds, among other parameters. The goal of the ethical evaluation is to test the veracity of the claims advanced and fairness of attitudes adopted. More specifically, the aim is to determine whether authors seek genuine dialogue to constructively negotiate difference with the Other or use dialogue as a means to feed into a narrative of clash and exclusion. Unfortunately, in flat violation of well documented media’s responsible conduct and code of ethics (Eid, 2008; Perigoe & Eid, 2014), the framing manoeuvrings and narrative adopted by all ten authors in the present sample systematically reflect an arrogant attitude of categorical denial of the Other which precludes all possibilities of constructive dialogue and reveals a belligerent, rather than an ethical, relationship to difference.

One of the objectives of this study is, therefore, to ponder about the *nature* of such “dialogue” by focusing on their attitude to difference and their treatment of the Other. In order to measure the gap between MEF communication practices and the ethical and dialogic principles as theorized in the literature, our proposed model of media framing and narrative includes an ethical evaluation component inspired from Abderrahman’s (2013) theory of rationality and

ethics. For him, contrary to a number of philosophers, man's humanity is primarily determined by morality, not by abstract rationality. He considers that all human actions, including the functions of the mind, are moral actions and that reason should be part of ethics.

The reason for adopting Abderrahman's views is that, contrary to other philosophers' rather fragmented approaches—see for example Habermas' (1986) principle of transparent communication and Maxim's (2014) principles of privileged otherness and tolerance—his theories of ethics and dialogue as outlined in a number of his books (2009; 2010; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2016) provide an ethical and epistemic framework to understand the processes of human communication based on a comprehensive philosophical vision of the reality of human interaction and ontology.

Abderrahman's theory of ethics and dialogue represents a basis for constructive dialogue with the Other. It is built on three major principles:

- The principle of difference as innate to dialogue
- The principle of equal otherness
- The principle of dialogue as a necessity and ethical responsibility

Contrary to the equation of difference with animosity and exclusion, translated in a narrative of isolation and persecution as we have seen in the analysis of the present MEF sample of articles, Abderrahman believes that difference is innate to dialogue, that is, "speech essentially involves dialogue" and "dialogue essentially involves difference" (2009: 27). Dialogue, for him, takes place only between opposed parties, the Self and the Other, because agreement in dialogue is not the rule, but a consequence of such dialogue. In an apparent paradox, therefore, Abderrahman not only acknowledges difference in dialogue, but also makes it an essential component of it, motivating it and fuelling it.

Drawing on verse 49: 13 of the Qur'an:

O mankind! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know each other. Lo! The noblest of you, in the Sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware.

(Pickthal translation)

Abderrahman (2009) contends that difference among the peoples of the world requires opening up to the Other and getting to know them. This ethical principle of *atta3aruf* (getting to know the Other) is closely related to, and etymologically derived from, the concept of *alma3ruf*, an Islamic value meaning justice and righteousness. Consequently, the reality of *atta3aruf* essentially involves cooperation for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice (Ibid). It follows that difference requires the practice of *atta3aruf* and that the bigger the difference, the more pressing the need to know the Other.

The principle of equal otherness follows from the principle of difference in Abderrahman's philosophy so that acknowledging (*al'i3tiraf*) the Other's right to be becomes an ethical obligation that engages the Self to negotiate difference in a quest for agreement or understanding across individual, local, national, and international boundaries. For him, the principle of acknowledging otherness from an Islamic perspective goes beyond the mere openness to the thinking of other nations; it makes it equal in value to its own thinking. Accepting the Other as equal does not mean, however, yielding to the Other's possible

authoritarianism and transgressions. The absence of the principle of acknowledging otherness simply means the absence or end of dialogue, with all the potentially provocative or fatal consequences to the parties engaged in, or disengaged from, such (absence of) dialogue. Abderrahman's (2009) moral paradigm of "equal otherness" is somewhat echoed in Maxim's (2014) "principle of privileged otherness" and the "principle of tolerance", but the latter's approach seems less realistic (*privileged* otherness) and somehow less fair, and therefore fragile, because it assumes inequality; one supposedly *superior* party *tolerating* an unequal Other.

In the third principle, dialogue is conceived of as an ethical obligation and a communicative tool to reach understanding of, if not agreement about, difference between the two parties, rather than an arena for manipulation and deception and an instrument for exclusion and persecution as is the case with the MEF objectives and practices. The resolution or understanding of difference within Abderrahman's (2009) framework should not be motivated by conflict or pragmatic exchange, but by an ethical duty to acknowledge the necessity to collaborate with the Other on common grounds, using common demonstration and persuasion tools to settle misunderstanding or understand and accept difference.

To further ensure that difference does not lead to *violence*, *dispute*, or *division*, Abderrahman (2009) suggests a set of ethical and epistemic constraints on dialogue which derive from the principle of dialogue as an ethical responsibility:

1. **Violence prevention constraints:** Convincing arguments should be used instead of violence by resorting to common knowledge and values to advance or to refute claims. These include:
  - The maxim of freedom of opinion and belief
  - The maxim of common facts and values
  - The maxim of the common rules of evidence
2. **Dispute prevention constraints:** These constraints serve to prevent claims rejection based on intolerance or bias
  - The maxim of the duty to provide proof
  - The maxim of providing the most appropriate proof
  - The maxim of providing the most appropriate objection
3. **Division prevention constraints:** To prevent that difference escalates into division, the following constraints need to apply:
  - The maxim of precision and expression control to avoid misunderstanding
  - The maxim of good conduct in speech and action to avoid abusing the Other
  - The maxim of sincerity to accept what is right

(Abderrahman, 2009: 37-44)

According to Abderrahman (2014a), because nothing in man's nature and deeds is absolute, freedom of speech and the right to difference cannot be absolute either. The restrictions on these rights have to be explicitly ethical in nature because it is ethical values that determine the humanity of man. It follows that if man chooses to do without them, then he would have chosen to renounce his human nature. It follows also that the call for absolute freedom of speech or absolute right to difference are calls to forsake ethical restrictions, which allows the slandering and stigmatization of the Other. Paradoxically, Abderrahman argues, the law sanctions the legal and political violations of rights and freedoms but spares their ethical violations despite the fact that the legal and political restrictions are in essence ethical restrictions.

In a world that focuses more on rights than duties and freedom than responsibility despite the fact that there are no rights without duties and no freedom without responsibility, Abderrahman prefers to use the concept of “discipline” rather than “restriction” because although the two terms essentially mean the same thing, the new concept disposes of the less desirable connotations of restriction (2014a: 174). So, we can now speak of “disciplining freedom of speech” and “disciplining the right to difference” instead of “restricting” them.

## Conclusion

In response to the questions of what “realities” are framed by individual MEF authors to construct and promote what narratives about Islam and Muslims and the extent to which such narratives are based on ethically balanced representations, the present study has proposed a model of analysis based on a *Problem-Culprit-Cause-Solution* Framing paradigm, which represents the frame’s cognitive structure, and a narrative ethical evaluation platform. As the results have indicated, using exclusionary and unethical methods, shrouded in a clearly belligerent tone, the MEF authors have systematically adopted a *persecution* narrative of Muslims as the villains and an *isolation* narrative of Islam, the actual teachings, as anti-Western, anti-Semitic, and incompatible with modernity who/which should be globally fought and contained, in full concordance with Samuel Huntington’s (1997) theory of the clash of civilizations.

Contrary to Ferguson’s (2011) division of the world into the West versus the rest, the MEF seems to construct and nourish a narrative of the *Wrest* (the West-dominated rest of the world) versus Islam, irrespective of other possible competing non-Western entities, such as China and Russia, both former communist countries, because such competition is more economic and geopolitical than ideological in nature. The one and only old crusades and 21<sup>st</sup> century newly constructed ideological enemy is therefore Islam, as evidenced, surprisingly enough, by Donald Trump’s presidential election campaign’s very much MEF-like flat anti-Islam rhetoric and Muslims persecution narrative that have propelled him to the White House Oval Office. Incidentally, this dramatic shift in U.S. presidential elections leaning may indicate the extent to which MEF-like rhetoric and attitudes are surfacing and gaining ground in America.

The MEF persecutive and demonizing media framing and narrative has been ethically evaluated by drawing on Abderrahman’s (2009) theory of dialogue and ethics. The analysis shows that MEF mission and discourse practices violate practically all the principles and maxims underlying Abderrahman’s model of ethics and dialogue. Indeed, the MEF frames its Western audience by means of fear, interfaith mistrust, hatred, and intolerance, a type of terrorism in Abderrahman’s (2014b) taxonomy of the concept of terrorism. His contention that “where there is no proof, there is only power and where there is no dialogue, there is only siege” (Abderrahman, 2009: 34) is corroborated by the MEF systematic narrative of isolation and persecution that would inevitably pave the way for Maxim’s apocalyptic scenario, namely that “in a globalized world, to accept the escalation and generalization of intolerance is the same as to enable the globalization of totalitarianism” (Abderrahman, 2014b: 557).

Contrary to MEF anti-Islam/Muslim narrative of intolerance and antagonism, and in harmony with the *clash of ignorance* thesis (Eid & Karim, 2014; Karim & Eid, 2012), Abderrahman’s theory of dialogue, which is essentially founded on ethics, the awareness of *difference* as an ontological constituent and a dialogic necessity, the ethical principles of *atta3aruf* (the obligation to know the Other), built on the related concept of *alma3ruf* (Islamic

value of justice and righteousness), and the principle of *al'i3tiraf* (acknowledging the Other's right to be or equal otherness), seems to lay the foundations for what may be called the *ethics of globalization* or the *globalization of ethics* for a relatively more peaceful and just world. Indeed, Abderrahman's "trusteeship paradigm" represents an "ethical revolution" combining "revelation, reason, ethics and doing [i.e., deeds]" that can contribute to the establishment of a global "pluralist civilization of ethos", which transcends "dichotomies like religion vs. politics, divine vs. secular, physical vs. metaphysical" (Hashas, 2015: 67).

Abderrahman (2014b; 2016) contends that by restricting the field of action of the ethical act, freezing it to the inter-personal level, and disdaining it as prescriptive, unscientific, outdated, and the resort of the weak, modern civilization has incurred a great injustice onto humanity since the reality of human beings can only be defined in ethical terms. It is indispensable, therefore, that we work against this injustice until humanity has regained its ethical identity. Modern human beings, according to him, are without an orientation, which would guide them in a process of self-discipline. This is why he proposes that a treatment course be adopted in order to diagnose their whims, to raise their awareness of their damages that extend to the Others, and to show the world, by means of the media and civil society, how these whims represent global ethical challenges and threats which humanity at large should stand up against.

As we have seen in the present case study, the methods of persuasion and reporting used by this neo-conservative think tank are unconventionally provocative and manipulative compared with the more traditional mainstream Western media. Driven by common ideological and political agendas based on their declared mission to "protect Western values from Middle Eastern threats", the MEF authors systematically draw on the same *problem-culprit-cause-solution* framing paradigm to feed into the same narratives of *isolation* and *persecution* of the Other. They, therefore, seem to constitute an emerging discourse community, including established authors, political studies university professors, priests, journalists, etc., which produces a distinct genre type which may be called the *belligerent editorial*.

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