

***Weaponising Religion:
Media Framing and Its Role in Shaping Public Discourse***

A Master's Thesis Submitted to

The Faculty of Religion, Culture, and Society
The University of Groningen in the Netherlands (UG)

and

Faculdade de Letras
Universidade de Coimbra Portugal (UC)

In partial fulfilment of the requirements of

Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programme: Religious Diversity in a Globalised World (ReD
Global)

Authored by
Hend Eltaher

Student number UG

S5730139

Student number UC

2023268489

1 June, 2025

Supervised by

Dr. Abdulrahman Elsamni

Assistant Professor of Marketing Communications, Faculty of Mass Communication, Ain Shams University in Egypt

Professor Dr. Andrea Paula De Vita

Facultad de Filosofía, Historia, Letras y Estudios, Orientales, Universidad del Salvador (USAL)

Examination Committee

Dr. Kimberley A. Fowler

Assistant Professor of New Testament, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Origins Department, The University of Groningen (UG)

José Luís Lopes Brandão

Associate Professor at the Institute of Classical Studies at the Faculty of Letters Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal and a researcher at the Centre for Classical and Humanistic Studies

Dr. Martinho Soares,

Researcher at the Centre for Classical and Humanistic Studies
Universidade de Coimbra

Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	2
<i>Preface</i>	3
<i>I. Introduction</i>	3
<i>II. Media Framing in Theory and Practice</i>	6
A. Framing Theory	7
B. Framing Research and Practice	10
C. Identifying and Measuring Frames	11
D. Is Framing Culture Bound?	13
E. Conclusion	13
<i>III. Religion</i>	14
A. Exploring the Interplay of Religion and Culture	14
B. Exploring Religion and Cultural Dynamics	16
C. Religion, Media, and Culture in 20th-century Practice	19
D. Conclusion	22
<i>IV. Framing Wars in Contemporary Context</i>	22
A. The Ukraine-Russia War in February 2022	24
B. The Gaza-Israel War in October 2023	26
C. Conclusion	29
<i>V. Methodology, Results, and Discussion</i>	29
A. Method	31
B. Unit of Analysis	31
C. Coding sheet and quantification	32
D. Results and Analysis	32
E. Discussion	36
F. Limitations	37
<i>VI. Conclusions and Recommendations</i>	38
A. Conclusions	38
B. Recommendations for Future Studies	40
<i>Bibliography</i>	41
<i>Appendix</i>	44

Abstract

This research examines the relationship between media and religion in wartime contexts. It explores how the media shape narratives, influencing public perception. During war periods,

news coverage not only disseminates information but also frames its content, both explicitly and implicitly, which can exacerbate tensions among various groups and spread a distorted perception of religion. Using religion as a frame can alter the moral dimensions of conflicts in the public discourse, affecting how communities perceive violence, associating it with religious persuasions. For instance, portraying right or wrong in religiously framed narratives can contribute to polarised cultures, often aligning religious identities with nationalistic sentiments. Therefore, this research underscores the use of religion as a frame to cover war news through a qualitative content analysis of the Hamas-Gaza and Ukraine-Russia wars. The results reveal that religion was prominently used as a reason and motivation for the conflict between Hamas and Israel. At the same time, the Ukraine-Russia war is framed as a geopolitical and humanitarian crisis. Comparing the coverage during the first month of the two wars by the France24 news channel, the study concludes that the media weaponise religion to shape public perception, covering other political and economic ends.

Preface

My research journey began in 2011 with a BA graduation project on *Religious Conflicts in Nag Hammadi* for the Media department at the American University in Cairo (AUC). The project investigated the religious strife between Muslims and Christians after the 2010 incident and its implications on social cohesion. In my MA thesis (2018), *Spiritual and Religious Music in Egypt*, I analysed how Egyptians use spiritual and religious music to gratify social and emotional needs, applying a quantitative method to the gathered data. Using surveys revealed the impact of exposure to this music genre and the extent to which it motivates individuals to participate in social activities related to religion and spirituality. Applying a quantitative method allowed for establishing external validity and generalising the results of the surveys to the sample of the tested population. These experiences have shaped my academic trajectory and deepened my interest in the interdisciplinary field of media and religion.

Building on this foundation, my current MA thesis at the University of Groningen (RUG), *“Weaponising Religion,”* continues this exploration. It aims to critically analyse how the media uses religion to frame its messages and how such framing influences the public discourse. This topic aligns closely with my academic and professional interests, combining media studies, religious studies, and public communication.

I aim to move beyond descriptive analyses of media framing of religion to more empirical approaches that measure the effects of such framing on audiences and its potential impact on public discourse by applying mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative analysis for my PhD. This progression reflects my ambition to contribute more measurably and practically to the academic study of media and religion. It will also help me understand an intensively emerging phenomenon in the media and greatly influence the perception of religion and culture.

I. Introduction

Religion has become an increasingly hot topic in the media and public discourse, often associated with issues like discrimination, stereotypes, hate speech, and major conflicts. Some scholars and politicians argue that religion is a primary source of conflict and division. In their articles *“Is Religion the Cause of Most Wars”* by Alan Lurie and *“Doesn't religion cause most of the Conflict in the World?”* by Rachel Wodlock et al., the writers contend that religion is

cited and blamed as the root cause of wars. Religion can be a powerful motivation for violence, power struggle, identity, and socio-political grievances. Nonetheless, such a view of religion is oversimplifying a highly complex historical and contemporary issue that often uses religion to cover other factors and causes of the conflicts. This perspective is evident in contemporary wars fought in the name of religion. Throughout history, religion has played a significant role in creating internal and external divisions.¹

Media and Religion

However, upon closer examination, the real problem lies in the instrumental use of religion to fuel and amplify such issues, or even mobilise people to adopt certain stances. The way religion and culture are interconnected, through the shared communal values, makes religion a category that goes beyond the individual or private experience. Through shared values, communities construct a complex structure that motivates them to act collectively and strive towards something constructive for the greater good. Therefore, religion serves as a tool to persuade, motivate, and mobilise individuals and groups.

Media, as a primary source of information and a key societal authority, plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions, understandings, and engagement with these issues, which are intertwined with the religious factor. In the contemporary world, the media have surpassed their function of mediating messages and have become enormously empowered by technological means, converging different types of communication that offer speedy access to information in a detailed manner. Such characteristics are perceived as an eye on the global and local events, with a perception that the media presents nothing further than the truth. However, even if they strive for it, objectivity is an ideal that is not always easy to achieve. What is worse, in the case of our subject, the media of all sorts weaponise religion, both explicitly and implicitly, to serve political, social, or economic ends.

As could be expected, religion remains ubiquitous in news coverage of wartime conflicts nowadays. Many phrases provide direct references to religious issues or specific religious groups. One famous example is the so-called “war on terror”, used in the context of the American invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, which associated Islam with terrorism. Or similarly, the war between India and Pakistan is conducted in the name of religion but also arose as a response to a terrorist attack. Looking back in history, one finds plenty of similar examples, the most notorious being the infamous Crusades, which were also fought in the name of religion.

To understand the possible dynamics between media, religion, and culture, this research analyses the use of religion in media, how it is manifested in the media message, or implied, and why the media messages are framed in such a way. It also questions the role of culture intermediating between media and religion, especially during times of war.

Research Questions

With this purpose in mind, the thesis intends to answer three main questions:

¹ Rabbi Alan Lurie. *Is Religion the Cause of Most Wars?* (HuffPost, 2012). https://www.huffpost.com/entry/is-religion-the-cause-of_b_1400766

Rachel Woodlock, Antony Loewenstein, Jane Caro, and Simon Smart. *Doesn't Religion Cause Most Of The Conflict In The World?* (The Guardian, February 2019). <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jul/02/religion-wars-conflict>

1. Is religion a factor in media coverage of wars?
2. And if this is the case, how does it manifest itself?
3. Is it possible to apply a method of analysis that exposes how this takes place?

In order to answer these questions, I propose a comparative analysis of two cases, the Ukraine-Russia war and the Gaza war, and a set of subquestions:

- 2.1. Does religion play a role in either or both?
- 2.2. Are there differences in the coverage of both wars?
- 2.2. And if so, what role does media framing play in shaping the public perception in the two cases?

Media Framing

In addressing these questions, literature has primarily focused on three themes: media, religion, and culture. The literature review has provided a theoretical and conceptual framework for the study, which is grounded on Media Framing theory, as well as paradigms and concepts in the study of religion and culture. Diversifying the sources has proved to be a key characteristic and a strength of this thesis. It also presents a multidisciplinary approach to studying religion, presenting key arguments and paradigms from both media, religion, and culture. Given that the topic touches on a contentious issue in the Middle East and Europe, the study consulted both Arabic and English bibliographies.

Objectivity

While working on this study, a constant concern was pursuing an objective approach as far as possible, considering human biases and the challenges of achieving objectivity. My study attempted to balance sources and present different arguments in an academically sound manner. Discussing neutrality while providing a historical context of the Ukraine-Russia war and the Gaza-Israel war, the study aimed to include sources representing each side of the conflict. For instance, pro-Israeli sources have been cited alongside supporters of Hamas or Gaza. One challenge was how to name the war in Palestine. Almost all Western news outlets label it as a conflict between Hamas and Israel, whereas in Arabic-speaking channels, it is referred to as the Palestine-Israel war. Such issues reinforce our general claim regarding the importance of how the media frames conflicts. The same considerations have been applied when exploring the context of the war between Ukraine and Russia. Both sides were represented in the coverage and academic argumentation.

Method

Studying two distinct fields equally elusive as media and religion has proved to be a challenge, and this for several reasons. First, the concepts the study deals with, namely framing and religion, are normally fluid and disputable in the conceptual framework. Second, the process of data collection is challenging due to the highly interpretive nature of the findings. Third, presenting the results in an intelligible and scientifically sound way can also be problematic.

To address these challenges, this thesis applies a qualitative method of analysis. Qualitative method attempts to understand the way individuals and communities perceive and give meaning to content messages. It prioritises depth over breadth, focusing on the context, emotions, and cultural subtleties that influence media engagement. Differently, quantitative

research demands that the variables being examined are measured in a systematic way, using numerical data to achieve greater precision and generalisability of the findings.² As a result, Wimmer and Dominick argue that in qualitative research, data are collected in relation to a specific topic and then grouped into meaningful categories; explanations are derived from the data itself.³

Therefore, the qualitative research method constitutes a good starting point for investigating the research questions at this stage. A qualitative content analysis has been conducted on a selected sample to test the hypothesis that the media weaponises religion and uses it as a frame during wartime to shape public perception. To limit the scope of this research, the analysis considered a purposive sample from one of the most-watched news channels in Europe, France 24, which broadcasts in multiple languages.⁴ The channel broadcasts 24/7 to 521.7 million households worldwide with 101.7 million TV viewers and over 213 million video viewers on the digital platforms.⁵

Overview of contents

Having said that, the thesis is structured to provide an overview of media, both in theory and in practice. The second chapter, “*Media Framing*,” presents the framing theory and its development from cross-disciplinary fields, including political science, psychology, and sociology. This chapter delves into the most renowned work by scholars such as Erving Goffman and Robert Entman, who explained the media selection and presentation of information. The third chapter, “*Religion*,” discusses how the definition of the term has sparked scholarly debate, especially when examined as a secular discipline compared to other social sciences. Moreover, it presents the main arguments and paradigms of Durkheim, Richard Geertz, Talal Asad, and Edward Said, examining religion in relation to culture, meaning-making, and its use as a tool in wars.

Connecting the previous chapters, chapter four provides examples of contemporary conflicts in which religion plays a significant role. This chapter offers a brief historical context of the Hamas-Israel and Ukraine-Russia wars, drawing on various media outlets and academic journals. Following the secondary source and literature review, the primary data collected through qualitative content analysis of news coverage of the two wars is presented in chapter five: “*Methodology, Results, and Discussion*”. The method employs a deductive, qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, presenting numerical statistics and charts to clarify and support the tested hypothesis. Finally, the thesis draws to a close with chapter six, “*Conclusions and Recommendations*”, which sets the grounds for an extended doctoral research that expands the population sampling, analysis time frame, news channels, the broadcasting languages, and the methodologies applied.

II. Media Framing in Theory and Practice

Background

² Bonnie. S. Brennen. *Qualitative Research Methods For Media Studies*. (Routledge, 2021), p.5.

³ Roger Wimmer and Joseph Dominick. *Mass Media Research: An Introduction* (9th ed.). (Cengage Learning, 2011), p.119.

⁴ A type of sample that is selected to match the purpose and the theme of analysis.

⁵ France 24. *Who Are We?* Retrieved June 1, 2025, from <https://www.france24.com/en/about-us>

Media is an essential source of information, especially in the age of globalisation, which has empowered news with technological means that facilitate accessibility and dissemination of information to a mass audience. Such characteristics give people the impression that the media is the only source of information for the issues that concern the public.⁶ In his cognitive mapping theory, Edward Tolman suggests that individuals need orientation to navigate the external environment. In other words, when people are unsure about what they see, they need someone to inform and orient them. Relevance and uncertainty play a role in people's orientation needs. There is a moderate need for orientation when the relevance level is high and the uncertainty is low. However, orientation is needed when the relevance and uncertainty are high.⁷

The need for orientation proves the correlation between the media agenda and the public agenda. The original Chapel Hill study, conducted in the 1960s by Maxwell MacCombs and Donald Shaw, tested their hypothesis that mass media influence people's opinions on salient affairs. To achieve this, they conducted a content analysis of the news. They selected undecided voters during the 1968 United States presidential election and asked them to rank the topics from most to least important. Their study revealed that people's ranking of issues aligned with the media's selection and salience of topics. Therefore, the media may not tell people what to think, but rather how to think about it.⁸

Bryant and Zillmann in their book *Media Effects*, investigated several issues related to media as a source of information such as: the function of media in societies, the level of trust people attribute to it as a source of information or more specifically, as the only source of information, and how the media influences the public-opinion formation and interpretation of issues. Such research was further elaborated through the framing theories, which emerged in the twentieth century in the field of communication, relating to power structures and politics.⁹ Todd Gitlin's work is a prominent example, as he applied framing to his study of political movements among students in the U.S. opposing the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Gitlin's study investigated the journalism dynamics that played a role in this event. However, the most remarkable work on framing was done by Robert Entman, who demonstrated how framing influences the media content and the audience's interpretation of the content message.¹⁰

A. Framing Theory

Framing has evolved from early research on media effects intersecting with other disciplines such as political science, psychology, and sociology. The framing theory proposes that news frames – specific presentation of the content information – can direct the audience to a particular interpretation of information, issues, and courses of action.¹¹ Victoria Fielding mentions in her book on *News Frames and Media Inequality* that the media adopted the idea

⁶ Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillmann (Eds). *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (4th edition). (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates New Jersey, 2020), p. 8.

⁷ Bryant et al. *Media Effects*, p. 172.

⁸ Maxwell MacCombs and Amy Reynolds. "News Influence on our Picture of the World" in Bryant et al. *Media Effects*, p. 2.

⁹ Bryant et al. *Media Effects*, p.173 and 219.

¹⁰ Todd Gitlin. *The whole world is watching: Mass media and the making and unmaking of the New Left*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), p. 46.

¹¹ Victoria Fielding. *Media Inequality. News Framing and Media Power* (1st edition). (Routledge London, 2024), p.19.

of the “fourth estate” to justify its power and to position itself as the watchdog of governments, the gatekeepers of democracy and objectivity, and the defenders of the public interest.¹²

Political Science

The nature and characteristics of media power have garnered considerable attention from media scholars, who have investigated the extent to which this power can influence individuals and shape public perceptions of issues, particularly during times of conflict. For instance, media researchers analyze how the power of media enables it to practice control over society’s representational resources. Due to the power of journalists and their selective use of sources, some perspectives and voices are privileged, while others are marginalized. Other scholars like Couldry offered a similar definition of framing, stating that it is “the media role in sustaining the frame in which our experiences of the social occur”.¹³

Psychology and Cognition

One of the earliest sociological attempts to understand framing effects was conducted by the sociologist Erving Goffman, who developed a framework known as framing analysis. Goffman tried to understand how individuals organize their experiences. In his study on thematic framing in global news, Elsamni notes that the core idea of framing centers on the impact of how an issue is presented by news in a way that enables individuals to understand, perceive, and interpret it. In the communication process, various actors participate in shaping the media message and its framing, including the sponsor, journalist, photographer, editor, and producer. All these actors make journalistic selections that structure a framework for the information that reaches audiences and ultimately affects them. As mentioned, such effects are rooted in psychology and sociology and require a cross-disciplinary research approach.¹⁴

Moreover, “individuals create a manufactured reality, or an aggregate corpus of all they have heard, learnt, experimented, or even imagined. According to which, they tend to adopt a frame-relevant view of the world, inspired by their human instinct that fits to confirm their understandings and analysis”. By doing so, humans adopt a frame-related interpretation of complex issues. They create a reality that helps them simplify the world around them.¹⁵

Goffman explained this process by analyzing the so-called “schemata of interpretation,” namely, frames that help people make sense of events by providing a structured way to interpret them. In this sense, framing functions as a cognitive structure that individuals use daily to understand and give meaning to events. Goffman’s work laid the groundwork for understanding how individuals organize their experiences through interpretive frames. His concept of framing as a “schemata of interpretation” was further elaborated by media scholars such as Entman, who expands on this idea, arguing that framing involves selecting certain aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient than others. This process promotes

¹² Victoria Fielding. *Media Inequality*, p.19.

¹³ Victoria Fielding. *Media Inequality. News Framing and Media Power*, p. 19-20.

¹⁴ Abdulrahman Elsamni. *Framing Arab refugees in global news [Master’s Thesis, the American University in Cairo]*. (AUC Knowledge Fountain, 2016), p. 40.

¹⁵ Abdulrahman Elsamni. *Framing Arab refugees in global news*, p. 40.

moral evaluations, treatment recommendations, causal interpretations, and problem definitions.¹⁶

Mass Communication and Sociology

Entman's work on framing theory is widely recognized and cited, especially in mass communication, as he clearly emphasizes the role of salience and selection in news content to guide the public perception of events. The shift from individual cognitive processes to a public perception and attitude revolutionized studies on framing, positioning it within the power dynamics of the social and political arena. For instance, Entman further explains that a schema consists of interconnected interpretive processes within the human mind. In other words, a schema is a network of related ideas and emotions stored in memory. The effectiveness of a frame depends on how well it aligns with existing schemas, meaning that a frame is most influential when it resonates with memories and associations already present in the human mind.¹⁷

In addition to Goffman, MacCombs and Shaw contributed to the development of research on framing theory, particularly during the 1968 American Presidential elections, through their study on agenda-setting. They categorized agenda-setting research into five fields: basic agenda-setting effects, attribute agenda-setting effects, the psychology of impact, sources of the media agenda, and consequences of the media agenda.¹⁸ Attribute agenda-setting research highlighted that framing an issue on the agenda can impact behaviors and direct people's attitudes. In this sense, agenda-setting effects extend beyond the basic effect of *what* people think about and *how* they feel about issues. That happens by selecting the problems and frames.¹⁹

Therefore, agenda-setting and framing theory share common grounds, such as the analysis of media content, how communicators present their message and select approaches, and the impact of these on the audience. They both study attributes of frames that shape the media narratives. Although many researchers see commonalities between agenda-setting and framing, other scholars argue that disparities exist. For example, Weaver argues that framing includes broader cognitive processes than agenda-setting, which relies almost solely on the selection of "salient" issues in the news. Framing, on the other hand, encompasses moral judgment, causal responsibility, and problem treatment.²⁰

The communication process is not simply informing the public; the media message must be persuasive and relevant to get people's attention. Once people direct their attention to these objects, issues, or their particular attributes (characteristics and properties of these issues), they form an opinion and attitude towards them. This is defined as a second-level effect of agenda setting, which suggests that the media tells people *what* to think about and *how to* think about issues. Media use different means to present a persuasive message, such as a first-person rather than a third-person pronoun. Another way is to frame the message in a way that complies with

¹⁶ Victoria Fielding. *Media Inequality*.

¹⁷ Robert Entman. *Projections of power: Framing news, public opinion, and US foreign policy*. (University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 6-7.

¹⁸ Abdulrahman Elsamni. *Framing Arab refugees in global news*, p. 41.

¹⁹ Abdulrahman Elsamni. *Framing Arab refugees in global news*, p. 41.

²⁰ Abdulrahman Elsamni. *Framing Arab refugees in global news*, p. 42.

people's values and relevance. For example, adding an image to the message enhances the message's processing.²¹

B. Framing Research and Practice

Media Framing research gained special attention from scholars who investigate the media content and its role in shaping public opinion by selecting and presenting issues in a particular way. In his article, De Vreese (2005) focuses on the different types of frames and the framing process in content, production, and media use perspectives. A dynamic communication process is vital for framing, which involves a staged process of frame-building, frame-setting, and the individual and societal consequences of framing.²²

Frames

News frames shape how audiences interpret events based on the content they see in the media. These frames have a significant influence on people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Tewksbury and Scheufele argue that there is no "raw" information; instead, elites and the media construct and present issues through carefully tailored "packages" of information and frames. These packages contain arguments, symbols, metaphors, images, and other elements shaping public perception. A frame, in particular, serves as a unifying structure that integrates linguistic and visual elements into a coherent narrative capable of influencing audiences.²³ At the core of these informational packages is a frame—a central organising idea or storyline that gives meaning to a sequence of events. Similarly, Valkenburg and Oliver highlight that these embedded frames shape people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours, influencing how they respond to various issues. In other words, framing does not merely affect public perception; it actively guides reactions and attitudes.²⁴

Media research, particularly Entman's model, explains how frames bias news content through the way information is conveyed and by providing different representations of reality. Framing relies on psychological and cultural appeals to Entman's model shows thereby enhancing the salience of an interpretation and evaluation of that reality. Media research, particularly Entman's model, explains how frames bias news content by shaping the way information is conveyed and offering different representations of reality.²⁵ Framing relies on psychological and cultural appeals; Entman's model shows how this enhances the salience of an interpretation and evaluation of that reality.²⁶

Moral and intellectual arguments hold greater weight than misleading ones, resulting in a more potent impact on public opinion. However, this is not always the case in the realm of media framing. Media frames can be constructed on a foundation of falsehoods or exaggerated claims,

²¹ Jennings Bryant and Mary Beth Oliver. *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (3rd ed.) (Routledge, 2020), p. 172).

²² Claes H. De Vreese. *News framing: Theory and typology. Information design journal document design*, 13(1). (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005), p. 51.

²³ David Tewksbury, Dietram A. Scheufele. *Media Effects: News Framing Theory and Research* (4th ed). (Routledge, 2019), p. 53.

Fred Vultee. *A media framing approach to securitization: Storytelling in conflict, crisis and threat*. (Routledge, 2022), p. 51.

²⁴ Mary Beth Oliver, Arthur A. Raney, and Jennings Bryant (eds). *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (4th ed.). (Routledge New York, 2020), p. 53.

²⁵ Victoria Fielding. *Media Inequality. News Framing and Media Power* (1st edition). (Routledge London, 2024), p. 22.

²⁶ Victoria Fielding. *Media Inequality. News Framing and Media Power* (1st edition), p. 22.

deliberately tapping into the emotions of fear and prejudice to exert a more decisive influence over the audience. These frames often rest on powerful symbols, carefully chosen language, and validations that resonate with existing beliefs and connections to partisanship and ideology. As a result, they frequently shape public opinion by engaging cognitive shortcuts—known as heuristics—rather than providing direct, thorough information about specific policy positions. This reliance on emotional appeal and cognitive bias can significantly sway perceptions and attitudes in ways that more rational arguments may not achieve.²⁷

Tewksbury and Scheufele argue that a very effective frame can be influential without an explicit supporting argument. Culture-based meanings, norms, and values affect the frame. For example, two journalistic writings on abortion procedures in America were compared to measure the impact on the readers. The information in the written piece were the same, but one article used the word *baby* about abortion procedures while the other used *fetus*. The results showed that readers of the article that used the word *baby* were more supportive of regulating the abortion procedures.²⁸

In addition to the culture-based meaning, framing effect depends on many other factors such as strength, repetition of a frame, the competitive environment, and individual motivations. Equally important, as scholars note, is the level of knowledge of the one exposed to a frame. Scholars suggest that individuals with limited knowledge or unaware of opposing and prior frames are more receptive to the frame. Furthermore, if media sources are perceived as reputable, their frames are considered to hold cultural value. Therefore, the availability and level of knowledge constitute a challenge to the impact of the frame.²⁹

C. Identifying and Measuring Frames

In a news story, the words and pictures within a frame are distinguished from the rest of the information. Those words and pictures stimulate support or opposition to one side of a conflict. However, how can a frame be detected in words and images? According to Entman, frames can be detected and measured by cultural resonance and magnitude. In addition to pinpointing the frames in the media message, there is another level of measuring the effect of these frames.³⁰

Alternative Frames

Understanding and analyzing the framing effect is a complex task for researchers who study how frames in the communication of political groups and media influence citizens' frames and their attitudes. This complexity is evident in the scholarly debate over the most effective method for measuring the magnitude of the framing effect. One way is to measure the difference in preference produced by alternative frames on an issue. To clarify, to measure the impact of framing news coverage of a demonstration as a *free speech* frame or as a *public safety* frame, scholars evaluate the tolerance of demonstrating groups based on which type of frame (free speech or public safety) they were exposed to. Another way to measure the effect of the frame is to evaluate the variation in the correlation between alternative frame preference and

²⁷ Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman. *Framing Theory*. (Annual Reviews, 2007), p. 111.

²⁸ Robert Entman. *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and US Foreign Policy*. (University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 6.

²⁹ Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman. *Framing Theory*. (Annual Reviews, 2007), p. 111.

³⁰ Robert Entman. *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and US Foreign Policy*. (University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 6.

personal values relevant to an issue in the media. For example, a person who values freedom highly may perceive a demonstration group more positively when the frame is ‘a practice of freedom’ than when the frame is ‘breaking the law’. It is a clear example of how personal values can influence the perception of a frame.³¹

Psychological Dimension

Over the past decade, scholars have sought to understand how framing works by examining its psychological aspects. One of their conclusions is that a particular consideration must be stored in memory for a framing effect. When the news media covers demonstrations using a ‘free speech’ frame, the audience must understand what free speech entails; otherwise, the frame will not resonate with them. This process is referred to as the availability of consideration.³² Although scholars maintain that a frame has a more substantial effect when it establishes links between the prior or available knowledge the audiences have and their existing beliefs, it is hard to estimate the impact of the frame based on this linkage. One reason is that journalists do not always know the audience’s existing knowledge, values, and beliefs, they maintain to align it with a frame.³³

Accessibility and Applicability

Besides availability, accessibility is also crucial for the framing effect, meaning a frame must be stored in long-term memory to be effective. Accessibility happens when audiences are recently exposed to a media message that frequently holds a specific frame. This consideration becomes apparent through unconscious or passive effort on the audience’s part.³⁴ Beyond availability and accessibility, applicability plays a vital role in framing. Individuals often find themselves influenced by spontaneous thoughts that shape their perceptions of various frames. In competitive scenarios, they may feel a strong urge to critically evaluate a frame, particularly when confronted with opposing viewpoints. This dynamic underscores the importance of understanding how frames impact our judgments and decisions.³⁵

The constructionist framing approach explains how frames move from an individual narrative to a public and more familiar narrative. Under this approach, it is suggested that there is a cognitive aspect in which journalists and political spokespersons are influenced by their cultural background, which in turn shapes their interpretation of issues within that framework. Gamson & Modigliani’s constructionist paradigm suggests that framing both reflects and influences culture. News frames reflect a dominant ideology and culture, and they become dominant by replicating these frames. Reese’s study suggests that people in a culture share a perception of the world through a socially shared structure. Societal values, language, symbols, and shared ideologies shape how people interpret events and news, and how journalists and politicians utilize these elements to construct narratives that align with common societal themes.³⁶

³¹ Chong, Dennis, and James N. Druckman. *Framing theory*. (*Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.* 10, no. 1, 2007), p. 109.

³² Chong, Dennis, and James N. Druckman. *Framing theory*, p. 110.

³³ David Tewksbury and Dietram A. Scheufele. *News framing theory and research In Media effects*. (Routledge, 2019), p. 53.

³⁴ Chong, Dennis, and James N. Druckman. *Framing theory*, p. 110.

³⁵ Chong, Dennis, and James N. Druckman. *Framing Theory*, p. 110.

³⁶ Dennis et al. p. 111.

D. Is Framing Culture Bound?

For the cultural contexts, scholars contest that a frame has an implicit root in a given culture. It refers to something resident in the surrounding culture and invites audiences to apply information and meaning to a culture that loads a frame. This process is referred to as “cultural resonance” or “narrative fidelity.” From the journalist’s side, they work by default with a culture and thus present a frame in the news that aligns with this culture. However, players in the policy arena attempt to manoeuvre this and use the culture as a background to tailor their message and build a successful frame.³⁷

Therefore, frames that appeal to culturally resonant concepts are potent tools for journalists and issue advocates. They use figurative language, such as metaphors, analogies, and similes, to sustain their frames’ linguistic and conceptual elements. Thus, these elements create realities for audiences and perhaps guide future action.³⁸

Frame building is a complex process that happens through and is shaped by journalistic norms, political actors, and cultural context. It is a competitive process of an issue to a dominant public debate. Pressure groups, societal norms and values, the professional routines, constraints, and the ideological preferences of journalists affect how journalists frame their news. On the other hand, politicians and pressure groups categorize beliefs in a way that mobilizes people to support or oppose ideologies based on the politician’s interest. Tewksbury and Scheufele even argue that politicians put resources in campaigns to control how messages are framed by media.³⁹

If people already have a frame available to them, then the effect of the frame is more substantial. Sometimes, cultural meanings, values, and norms strengthen the impact of the frame without a need for a text or argument. For example, Simon and Jerit conducted an experiment in America, where two news articles about abortion described the abortion procedure as a *baby* or a *fetus*. Audiences who read the articles that expressed *babies* were more supportive of regulating abortion procedures than those who read articles that used *fetus*. Therefore, scholars suggest a word can influence audience cognition and attitude about an issue. In other words, a framing effect happens when a statement, text, or image is linked to a meaning that carries an interpretation, implication, or treatment for a problem.⁴⁰

E. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the role of media in the age of globalization, highlighting its perceived objectivity as a primary source of information. Even though media is considered a neutral source of information, providing the public with raw information without biases, the framing theory challenges this perception. Framing proposes that selecting a specific topic to be presented in news makes it more salient than others. Media also influences how people think about this topic by using elements such as semiotics, images, or specific sources to build a narrative that aligns with a particular cultural value.

³⁷ David Tewksbury and Dietram A. Scheufele. *News framing theory and research In Media effects*. (Routledge, 2019), p. 57.

³⁸ Tewksbury et al. *News framing theory and research*, p. 57.

³⁹ Tewksbury et al. *News framing theory and research*, p. 56.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 56.

The evolution of framing as a cross-disciplinary concept underscores its significance in political science, sociology, and psychology, illustrating its powerful impact on individual cognition and public perception. Tracing the roots of framing theory from Erving Goffman's foundational work to Entman's more structured and influential contributions, this chapter has established framing as a pivotal mechanism in media analysis of news. Ultimately, framing theory reveals that media is a powerful tool that shapes reality, influencing individual cognition, collective social understanding, and perhaps action. This connection between framing and culture is crucial in assessing how narratives evolve over time and across different societies. As media continues to be the dominant information channel in the globalised world, understanding the framing dynamics is essential for critically engaging with news and its broader societal implications.

III. Religion

A. Exploring the Interplay of Religion and Culture

Analysing religion within its various contexts offers valuable insights into its definition, societal functions, and its influence on individuals' perceptions and behaviours. When scholars analyse religion in a context, they study it as "something" in relation to something else. Defining what religion is, is an essential step toward a contextual study. In *Religion as Relation: Studying Religion in Context*, Peter Berger, Kim Knibbe, and Marjo Buitelaar present a multidisciplinary approach to understanding religion and its relation to other categories in cultures.⁴¹

But what is religion, and could scholars agree on a definition? One of the proposed definitions, which closely aligns with the Western "common sense idea of religion," is: "Religion is something very special, something that transcends the mundane, something beyond science, and something outside the visible world that somehow provides meaning to it." Examining modern and postmodern scholarship on religion reveals that, in the nineteenth century, religion was viewed as a universal category across all cultures worldwide. The term '*Sui Generis*' characterises religion as a unique and universal phenomenon. Scholars such as J.Z. Smith, Russell McCutcheon, Tomoko Masuzawa, and David Chidester have contested this definition of religion and analysed the political implications of such scholarship.⁴²

In previous discussions of religion, two pivotal ideas have emerged: a) religion as an experience that imbues the world with meaning, and b) religion as a framework composed of beliefs, practices, and institutions that rise above the ordinary. These concepts are significantly influenced by French sociologist Emile Durkheim, who derived his insights primarily from his study of Totemism in Australia, reflecting how society understands and values the role of religion. He articulated that "Religion is a society worshipping itself," or more accurately, that "members of a community worship the force of society transfigured into sacred symbols."⁴³

In Durkheim's framework, he observed a rapidly evolving French society facing significant challenges to established religious structures. This period witnessed the emergence of secular ideologies, including socialism and liberalism, which further complicated the societal

⁴¹ Peter Berger, Kim Knibbe, and Marjo Buitelaar (Eds.). *Religion as Relation: Studying Religion in Context* (De Gruyter, 2021), p. 1.

⁴² Berger et al. *Religion as Relation*, p. 3-4.

⁴³ Berger et al. *Religion as Relation*, p. 6-7.

landscape. Durkheim posited that introducing new symbols was essential for maintaining societal cohesion amid this transformation. He highlighted the increasing sacredness of the individual, a characteristic of modern society, and argued that any idea, object, or practice deemed sacred assumes a religious character. Thus, he suggested that religion should be defined by its function rather than its specific substance. In this context, religion should be viewed in terms of its character rather than simply as a sacred entity.

Bellah introduced the concept of “civil religion,” which further examines the role of the sacred in society. He raised crucial questions that call for deeper reflection: What is considered sacred in society? What are the symbols of unity? What regulations or rules govern these symbols? Finally, what kinds of emotions and responses arise from the destruction of certain symbols? These inquiries highlight the intricate relationship between the sacred and societal cohesion in a rapidly evolving world.

Based on an anthropological understanding, Clifford Geertz defines religion as a system of symbols that creates profound motivations, establishes a general order of existence, and provides a sense of factuality or reality. He argues that distinguishing religion from culture is often challenging. Geertz sees religion as closely intertwined with culture, describing it as “patterns of meaning embodied in symbols that influence how individuals navigate life.” Although his definition is rooted in the meaning-making processes within society, inspired by sociologist Max Weber, it has faced serious critique from scholars such as Talal Asad.⁴⁴

For numerous reasons, it is nearly impossible to establish a universally accepted definition of religion. Religion, as a set of practices and ideas, cannot be seen as separate from politics. That is why Asad criticised Geertz for establishing his definition based on Christian views of religion. Moreover, religion cannot be detached from the historical development of every faith. For instance, to be studied and understood, Islam cannot be detached from power issues. The concepts of religion that Asad challenged and the ideas he introduced were remarkable in the anthropology of religion, particularly in their impact on culture and other disciplines. Asad shifts the conversation from what religion is and does to how religion is distinguished from cultures and societies. How is religion regulated? And how does religion inform the secular?

Having said that, despite scholars’ agreement that understanding and studying religion require a contextual and cultural definition, the effort to define religion reveals problematic research issues. First, religion cannot be conceptually inclusive. Second, it is often associated with a functionalist perspective on psychology and society. A clear example is Durkheim’s definition of religion based on his analysis of Totemism in Australia. Third, the definition of religion cannot be universally generalised. Ultimately, religion is deeply embedded in various semantic fields and histories of knowledge formation, encompassing both dominance and resistance. Therefore, it makes sense to study religion within the context and cultures in which it is lived.

Exploring Religion: Theories and Processes of Meaning-Making

“Students may not think of themselves as theorists, an honorary title usually reserved for the deep thinkers in the discipline. However, in the general sense, theorising is something all of us do all of the time”. Berger et al., *Religion as Relation*, p. 15.

⁴⁴ Berger et al. *Religion as Relation*, p. 7-10.

In their study of religion, scholars distinguish between theory and method, or methodology. The former refers to the framework, while the latter pertains to scholarly practice. According to Tim Ingold's argument, theory is not merely a ready-made structure that can be adopted and utilized in a way that suits analysis. Instead, theory is an ongoing, active process of argumentation and practice. In this regard, the editors of the book *Religion as Relation* contend that theory is not abstract or remote. When researchers study religion, they engage in theorizing, which highlights a dichotomy between thought/mind (theory) and action/body (method). In social science, theorising and data collection are interconnected, whereas in philosophy, theorising represents a high-level systematisation of grounded understanding of concepts.⁴⁵

Therefore, the Academic Study of Religion (ASR) and theorising have led to various paradigms. It has been previously noted that the *sui generis* perspective regards religion as something unique that cannot be reduced to its constituent parts. It views religion as a category that emerged from a particular historical experience, with boundaries that may shift. Other paradigms have been presented in psychology, sociology, and anthropology. For instance, the evolution paradigm suggests that religion is a unilineal development of humankind, evolving from simple to more complex forms of culture.⁴⁶

Another example of a religious paradigm is the functional one, which emerged in the 1920s, replacing the evolutionary one. The function (what religion or religious belief does) of an idea, thought, or action relates to other social institutions. For instance, scholars transitioned from studying magic to examining the role of magic within society and among its members. Psychology also contributed to the study of religion and its paradigms. Freud, who held a negative view of religion, argued that it acts as a barrier and hinders health, practices of well-being, and progression. Conversely, Erikson perceived religion as a positive force for socio-emotional development, facilitating social support, norms, and values.⁴⁷

B. Exploring Religion and Cultural Dynamics

Clifford Geertz argues that culture has acquired an aura of "ill repute" due to social anthropology's vagueness and multiplicity of references. In his definition, Geertz views culture as "historically transmitted patterns of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms through which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge and attitudes toward life." As meaning is an integral aspect of the definition of culture, the sacred symbols combine people's ethos and, most significantly, their view of the world. Through the holy symbols, they convey comprehensive ideas about their lifestyle's order, tone, and character.⁴⁸ Group ethos is intellectually reasonable because their lifestyle and ideas align with and describe reality. Their worldview is also emotionally reasonable and convincing because it is structured or presented in a way that aligns with the way of life they maintain and the truth from their perspective. Humans can adapt themselves to anything they can imagine and cope with, but their biggest challenge is chaos that they cannot deal with. Because conception is the highest human asset, the biggest fear is dealing

⁴⁵ Berger et al. *Religion as Relation*, p. 10-20.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Berger et al. *Religion as Relation*, p. 20.

⁴⁸ Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Culture*. (Basic Books Inc., 1973), p. 89.

with things that they cannot conceive. Therefore, symbols are crucial for humans to orient and familiarise themselves with chaotic things.⁴⁹

Geertz maintains that problems such as suffering and evil generate immense pain, lack moral coherence, and provoke thoughts on the world's injustice and human life. Religious symbols, in particular, help individuals endure emotionally stressful situations by providing an escape, not necessarily through empirical means, but through beliefs and rituals. In his proposition, religious symbols celebrate ambiguity, puzzles, and the paradoxes of the human experience. He adds,

*"But meanings can only be "stored" in symbols: a cross, a crescent, or a feathered serpent. Such religious symbols, dramatized in rituals or related in myths, are felt somehow to sum up, for those for whom they are resonant, what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it."*⁵⁰ Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Culture*, p.127.

Thus, the power of sacred symbols lies in their ability to identify facts and imbue them with a comprehensive and normative significance. Furthermore, the need for metaphysical grounding of moral values and worldviews may vary from individual to individual and from culture to culture. However, the tendency to desire some explanation of events that gives basis, factuality, and order is particularly universal in Geertz's view.⁵¹ Therefore, Geertz argues that the study of religion as a cultural system, from an anthropological approach, leads to a two-stage operation: first, an analysis of the system of meaning embedded in the symbols. Second, the relation of these systems of meaning to the social structure and psychological processes.⁵²

Religion and Media

Having established the difficulty of finding a consensual definition of religion and presenting the most important attempts to do so during the twentieth century, this section explores how this interacts with media. In *Religion and Media in the Construction of Culture*, Robert A. White raised questions about the public role of religion, particularly in media broadcasting, and how this role reflects social certainties. To address these questions, he argues that the paradigms and theories of religion, media, and culture must be carefully assessed and moved beyond interpreting religion's role solely as a factor in social progress.⁵³ The analyses of religion by Durkheim, Weber, and Troeltsch consider it a positive ethical foundation for integrating a modernising society, a catalyst for industrial progress, and a moral framework. In this context, White believes religious discourse has been reduced to a function of industrial progress in society. In contrast to the positive outlook on religion, Max Weber's tradition views it as a barrier that should be substituted by a "secularized" form of religion to facilitate societal progress. White contends that conceptualizing religion as a factor for social order is misguided, as religion is a source of progress, and social order is not always the case. There are instances when religion can lead to social disorder, intense emotions, political revolutions, and

⁴⁹ Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Culture*, p.99.

⁵⁰ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (JHU Press, 1993) challenged not only the Western conception of religion and culture, but also the conceptual explanation of Clifford Geertz. Asad critiqued Geertz definition of religion as a set of sacred symbols that explain reality and enables the man to accommodate the ambiguities through a world view that gives a moral and psychologically coherent world view. Instead, Asad mentioned that religion must be understood as a historically particular category that is impacted by ideologies and practices of power.

⁵¹ Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Culture*, p. 132.

⁵² Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Culture*, p. 42.

⁵³ Robert White. *Religion and Media in the Construction of Culture*. (Sage Inc., 1997), p.38.

resistance. Therefore, religion can sometimes be a source of social disintegration rather than cohesion and progress.⁵⁴

In the same way that religious theories departed from studying religion from a linear and reductionist viewpoint as a functionalist paradigm, media theories moved away from viewing their role as only circulating and transporting information needed for industrial progress. Scholars of media and religion have become aware that humans *create* their conception of past and future history. Both disciplines recognize the meaning-making process as aligning with or detached from common sense. Moreover, religion and media studies describe *reflexivity*, which is defined as “the conscious, monitored dimension of social life that constantly assigns meaning to the transactions of everyday life.” This consciousness becomes verbalized in a system of meaning and engages in explanations and justifications of matters.⁵⁵

Wouthnow’s approach suggests that the study of religion is not merely about how individual beliefs interact with and reflect social structures, such as class systems and institutions. Instead, he suggests that analyzing the meaning in texts, discourse, and media shifts the study of religious culture from focusing on the meaning in symbols to examining the symbolism of meaning. Bellah has further elaborated on this concept in the context of “symbolic realism.” As discussed earlier, media studies have moved from exploring the “pro-social or anti-social effects” to engaging with new paradigms of meaning at the intersection of common sense and the unexplainable. For instance, Silverstone utilized Levi Strauss’s model to illustrate how conflicting cultural meanings are resolved through mythical news, television, and dramatic narratives. The media take irrational and esoteric information,⁵⁶ knit it with new data, and present it as understandable common sense discourse.⁵⁷

Inspired by Victor Turner’s concept of media as a ritual process, scholars argue that media serves as a source of entertainment and a cultural arena where individuals experience a sense of unity and emotional connection akin to a religious ritual. Ritual communication illustrates the importance of meanings in how media interprets social reality. Stuart Hall and other scholars perceive media as a distinct realm for ideological conflicts. Media discourse embodies these ideologies and impacts political and economic perspectives. Both media and religion serve a common purpose: creating meaning and a perceived reality. Establishing a shared goal-meaning- and a collective perception of reality is essential for constructing a cohesive society and developing a hegemonic culture. This principle represents a fundamental construct of societal frameworks within a cultural context. It is frequently posited that such unity is vital for societal advancement, as it fosters common understanding, solidarity, and social order. Conversely, it can be contended that the constructed reality and meaning may also lead to disorder, heightened emotions, and cultural conflicts. This phenomenon may occur when, for instance, media outlets propagate narratives that elicit negative emotional responses.⁵⁸

Having said that, both religion and media studies have shifted away from the reductionist functions of social integration and modernization toward cultural sciences and the analysis of a) the cultural practices within a society that sustain a process of meaning-making, b) how both

⁵⁴ Robert White. *Religion and Media in the Construction of Culture*. (Sage Inc., 1997), p.40.

⁵⁵ White. *Religion and Media in the Construction of Culture*, p. 38-40.

⁵⁶ Meyers, Stengs, and Engelke’s works emphasize how religion is mediated and how this mediation manifests the relation between the known and the unknown, as well as how this mediation shapes the way humans link with the unknown. Berger et al. *Religion as Relation*, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Robert White. *Religion and Media in the Construction of Culture*, p.38-40.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

media and religion focus on defining the boundaries between what is considered common sense and what is not, c) the practice of constructing a value system that elevates core values as sacred and serves as tests within a culture, generating debates among various subcultures, d) how different cultures assess each other, and e) finally, an examination of the ongoing debate regarding ideological discourses.

This shift in scholarship helps us understand the nuances of meaning-making, specifically moving beyond merely identifying meaning-making or symbols as essential conclusions. Instead, scholars have embarked on an exploration toward a profound and intricate analysis of not just what meaning is, but how it is created through our experiences and interactions. This deeper understanding invites us to examine the various practices surrounding meaning-making, which enrich our comprehension and allow us to engage more fully with the multiple disciplines involved in the process.

The theories of intertextuality within religious discourse serve as significant exemplars of how contemporary scholarship has oriented its focus toward the premise that authorship is intrinsically tied to the construction of meaning within the original text. After the foundational intertextuality studies, it becomes evident that meaning is not a linear transaction occurring solely from the original text and its author to the reader. Instead, meaning emerges as a relational phenomenon, instantiated by a complex interplay among the reader, the text (often considered original), derivative texts that reinterpret and augment the original ideas, and the culturally specific contexts that contribute to the meaning-making process.⁵⁹

Julia Kristeva's pioneering articulations of intertextuality foreground the interconnectedness inherent in modern existence, particularly emphasizing the relational dynamics of meaning. This relationality transcends the confines of textual interpretation; it manifests both implicitly and explicitly across various disciplines, including semasiology (the study of meaning in signs), semiotics (the exploration of the relationship between culture, texts, signs, and symbols), and literary studies (the examination of intertextual relationships within the literary canon). Intertextuality—characterized as a “new tissue of past citation” or a “dense web of allusion”—has been adeptly applied beyond the literary domain to encompass various forms of media such as photography, film, music, painting, and even architecture. Consequently, the meaning-making process becomes intricately interwoven with the fabrics of media, religion, and culture.⁶⁰ As an understudied area of inquiry, intertextuality and media are particularly relevant to contemporary news framing and constructing meaning within a global culture that extends beyond textual boundaries. This relevance highlights the importance of examining how media narratives shape and are shaped by intertextual references, thereby contributing to our understanding of communication in the modern world.

C. Religion, Media, and Culture in 20th-century Practice

After exhibiting the theories and paradigms of religion, media, and culture, showing the intertwined process of meaning-making across these three disciplines, this chapter will discuss meaning-making through the examples provided by Edward W. Said in the 20th century. The

⁵⁹ Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta. “Ancient Religious Texts and Intertextuality”, in Berger et al. *Religion as Relation*, p.135: “The origins of intertextuality go back to the twentieth century and more specifically to the studies of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and the Russian Philosopher and literary critic Michael M. Bakhtin (1895-1975). While the former established a relational nature of meaning and thus of texts by pointing to the systematic features of language, the latter introduced the notion of dialogic works of literature, namely texts that are in continuous dialogue with other texts.

⁶⁰ Lanzillotta. “Ancient Religious Texts and Intertextuality,” p.136.

20th century marks the marriage between political regimes and religion in the Middle East (MENA).

In her research titled “*Islam: Religión Y Política. Problemas Y Cuestiones En Juego*” Andrea Paula De Vita explains that religion was the main driver for a political society that conformed to Islamic norms. For example, the creation of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin* in Egypt was a proliferation of the Islamic movement in the Arab world until the 1970s and the assassination of the Egyptian President al-Sadat. Following the Arab Spring in 2010, the MB reemerged in the political arena and secured seats in parliament. The MB created a national Islamism shaped by political struggle relying on a Muslim theory of state. Importantly, De Vita noted that “it would be a mistake to characterise the Muslim Brotherhood as monolithic, at the risk of turning them into an abstraction synonymous with terrorism.” She also argues that such an example of Islamism defines a specific type of worldview that we can call an ideology, but does not necessarily define an original religious worldview.⁶¹

In his book, *How the Media and Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, Said provides examples from news, films, press, art, and literature, illustrating how Islam has been frequently covered in the media since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the intense friction between the United States and the Islamic state of Iran. Said examined how this incident led not only to an antagonistic perception of Iranians but also to the generalisation and demonisation of Islam in a fictional manner that often mixes and confuses realities, resulting in a dichotomy of Islam versus the West.

What is interesting about Said’s argument is that he not only focuses on the media coverage of Islam after the Iranian Revolution and how it shaped the perception of the entire Arab Islamic world (orient), but he also analyses how political and economic factors influenced the media’s operations during that time. In his theory, financial and political elements contributed to the establishment of an anti-Orient campaign supported by the media discourse;

It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that before the sudden OPEC price rises in early 1974, “Islam” as such scarcely figured either in the culture or in the media. One saw and heard of Arabs and Iranians, of Pakistanis and Turks, rarely of Muslims. But the dramatically higher cost of imported oil soon became associated in the public mind with a cluster of unpleasant things: American dependence on imported oil (which was usually referred to as “being at the mercy of foreign oil producers”), the apprehension that intransigence was being communicated from the Persian Gulf region to individual Americans; above all a signal—as if from a new, hitherto unidentified force—saying that energy was no longer “ours” for the taking. Words like “monopoly,” “cartel,” and “block” thereafter achieved a remarkably sudden if selective currency, although very rarely did anyone speak of the small group of American multinationals as a cartel, a designation reserved for the OPEC⁶² members.⁶³

⁶¹ Andrea Paula de Vita. *Islam: Religión y Política. Problemas y Cuestiones en Juego*.

⁶²OPEC stands for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and it is a permanent, intergovernmental Organization, created at the Baghdad Conference on September 10–14, 1960, by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. Many other countries joined later, and the purpose of the organization was to co-ordinate and unify petroleum policies to secure fair and stable prices.

Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. (n.d.). Home. OPEC. <https://www.opec.org/>

⁶³ Edward Said. *Covering Islam: How the Media and Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. (Random House, 1981), p. 33

Saying so, Said suggests that Islam emerged in media discourse after the geopolitical situation in the early 1970s. The rising energy prices controlled by OPEC countries have generated economic stress around the globe, particularly in the U.S.A. The media's language was loaded with implicit meanings related to the loss of entitlement, the Middle East's monopoly over resources, and the West's economic vulnerability stemming from the perceived injustices of oil-exporting nations.⁶⁴

As an example, Said mentions Michael Walzer's essay *The Islam Explosion*, published on December 8, 1979, in *The New Republic*. In this essay, Walzer addressed what he perceived as some of the most outrageously violent events of the 20th century in Palestine, the Philippines, Iran, and other locations. He concludes that these incidents are all manifestations of the same underlying issue: Islam. According to him, these events demonstrate: a) a persistent pattern of aggression against the West, b) that resistance (as seen in Palestine) is driven by religious motivations rather than political or humanitarian ones, and c) a pushback against secularism, socialism, and liberalism. Edward Said further notes that Flora Lewis, in a series of articles in *The New York Times* in December 1979, seemingly amplified the incident of the American embassy in Iran that year. In her view, the "peculiarities of the Arabic language, the oddities of its beliefs, the illiberal aspects of its totalitarianism, and its domination over the faithful" showed that the very concept of Islam inherently suggests antagonism toward "us."⁶⁵

Another example is the renowned news anchor Walter Cronkite, who utilised the phrase "that's the way it is" as a definitive statement, effectively framing the day's news in a manner that exudes authority and finality. In Said's insightful analysis, this phrase serves as an implicit assertion that the events reported in the media are not only natural but also unchanging, establishing a clear divide between what is considered "foreign" and what is deemed "us." This framing technique resonates beyond the American context; for instance, the French magazine *Nouvel Observateur* highlighted a similarly loaded statement, asserting that "*les États-Unis [sont] assiégés par l'Islam*" which translates to "Islam besieges the United States." Such language reveals a perspective that positions the U.S. in a state of vulnerability, evoking a narrative of being under siege. This comparison underscores the broader implications of media framing and its influence on the public's perception of cultural and geopolitical dynamics.⁶⁶

Edward Said showed numerous examples from Western media, particularly in the United States, illustrating how the power of framing influences the perceptions of cultures. He highlights the example of the Islamic and Arab world, viewed in a one-sided manner, based on a single event, detached from the diversity of time and space in Islam. This media framing and political discourse ignore the fact that there are different expressions of Islam among people in Iran and elsewhere. Additionally, numerous studies on communication and the processes of gathering and producing news support Said's proposition that news and opinion in society primarily operate within established frameworks, governed by conventions that give the entire news-making process a distinct overall identity.

People may not be aware that news is often framed to serve a specific, pre-determined purpose. Reporters, in the process of gathering and creating news, contribute more to the events they cover than they extract from them. When a reporter covers stories, they may be unaware that their news agency is involved in the country's political power through an implicit expression of loyalty and patriotism. Therefore, while objective journalism is an admirable pursuit,

⁶⁴ Edward Said. *Covering Islam*, p. 33.

⁶⁵ Edward Said. *Covering Islam*, p. 39

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 39-42

examples demonstrate that news is biased and presents distorted fictional concepts as realities.⁶⁷

D. Conclusion

This chapter explores the concept of religion and its interconnections across various disciplines. It aims to contextualise the study of religion and embed it within an appropriate conceptual and theoretical framework. However, this endeavour has proven to be problematic and controversial among scholars in various disciplines. As noted in the previous section, religion is deeply intertwined with culture and is frequently utilised by the media and political discourse explicitly and implicitly. The academic study of religion has demonstrated that religion as a category is complex and nuanced. One example mentioned in the chapter reflecting this complexity is the intertextuality of religion. The assumptions about meaning arising solely from the original text are challenged by intertextuality. Intertextuality considers culturally specific contexts and parallel meanings that contribute to meaning-making, which hold equal significance to the original text. Today, symbols, references, and depictions in the media is an example of religion-related meaning, which also plays a role in enforcing a perception or reality about a religion in general. The media role and interplay between religion, meaning, and intertextuality is an area that needs further research.

The final section of the chapter, "*Religion, Media, and Culture in the 20th Century*," presents Edward Said's analysis. In his book *Covering Islam*, he examines the implicit, economic, and political factors that frame Islam as a violent anti-West religion dominating the media discourse and explores how this framing has influenced perceptions of Middle Eastern culture. Ultimately, religion serves as a powerful tool, deeply rooted and strongly connected to culture; thus, it has been used by the media to amplify its message and influence the public.

IV. Framing Wars in Contemporary Context

Background

Although there is no evidence that religious traditions are more prone to violence than others, it is a matter of fact that political and religious leaders adopt a religious discourse to implement or justify violence. They use heightened speech and emotionally charged messages to direct the masses. As Michel Foucault asserts, political forces mobilise the public using their power and knowledge to direct people to adopt certain narratives that facilitate the policy they desire to impose. A culture of fear facilitates this, where politicians act as guardians of "us" versus "them". Politicians create an illusory sense of necessity and need to protect what identifies "us" and what protects "us".⁶⁸

Whether religion is a primary driver for conflicts or not is a core question in media research in a global context. This question has provoked scholarly debate, particularly by Galtung and Huntington in their work on extremism and hate speech.⁶⁹ Galtung argued that religion is the

⁶⁷ Edward Said. *Covering Islam*, p. 47.

⁶⁸ As referred to in Lana Kazkaz. *Extremism and Hate Speech in Arabic-Speaking Media* (Doctoral Dissertation, Universitat Ramon Llull, 2023), <http://hdl.handle.net/10803/689833>, p.6.

⁶⁹ The most prominent work for Huntington is "Clash of Civilizations" which provoked a huge debate in international affairs and politics. Huntington's ideology is that the cultural identity among different civilizations become source of conflicts. He distinguishes the West from other civilizations such as the Islamic (which he

source of cultural violence because religion, language, ethnicity, or ideology, which are elements of culture, become motivations for discrimination and violence. Similarly, Huntington suggested that religious and cultural identities are the leading causes of conflicts, primarily when nations compete and clash among each other, promoting violence nurtured among ethnic and religious groups. Such antagonism is motivated by the cultural boundaries these groups try to protect against others and perceive as integral to their own identity.⁷⁰

Silvestry and Mayall state that patriarchal ideologies and male leadership allow for oppressing and marginalising groups using violence and exaggerated male-controlled narratives of wars and martyrdom. Karen Armstrong counter-argued this concept, suggesting that economic and political reasons generate conflicts, especially in today's wars. Researchers like Maher Farghali, argued that religion is one motivation for wars and a factor in conflicts, but not the only factor.⁷¹ In her doctoral dissertation, Kazkaz mentions that Farghali noted that some theorists tend to neglect other mutually influential factors. He is critical of Huntington and scholars with a similar mindset because they make religion the centre of the problem.⁷²

On the other hand, as discussed in the first chapter, research on news framing explains how the media, especially news, organises and prioritises issues, thereby influencing an individual's cognitive understanding of these issues. The sociological dimensions of framing emphasise how communication messages employ images, words, styles, and symbolic patterns to construct meaning. Erving Goffman described it as a schema of interpretation through which individuals locate, identify, perceive, and label events. This cognitive structuring governs people's perceptions of events and shapes their subjective involvement. Further, beyond the individual communication process, framing functions as a cultural structure that enables people to develop a subjective orientation and sense of reality about the world around them.⁷³

Religion similarly plays a crucial role in shaping collective perceptions of reality by providing a moral and ideological framework through which events, particularly those occurring during wartime, are understood. Religious narratives often serve as unifying forces, binding individuals together through shared beliefs, traditions, and values. In this sense, religion serves as a connecting agent between personal interpretation and a larger communal understanding. Media representations incorporating religion into their framing can amplify this effect, reinforcing collective identities and influencing public attitudes toward conflict. Religious discourse in the media can shape individual cognition and collective perception, whether through justifying war, fostering solidarity, or legitimising resistance. Therefore, analysing the intersection of religion and news framing is essential to understanding how public discourse and narratives are shaped during times of war.

Media, Religion, and Culture critically assess the relationship among the three elements. They examine how the media contributes to transmitting and interpreting religious messages, often serving as a source of conflict. As they propose, the framing of news stories is culture-bound because specific frames align with or threaten cultural values. Within this scope, through the

claims to be among the violent and bloody ones), the Latin American, the Confucian, the Slavic-Orthodox, and the African. Huntington, Samuel. (1997). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. London: Simon & Schuster

⁷⁰ Lana Kazkaz. *Extremism and Hate Speech in Arabic-Speaking Media*, p.59.

⁷¹ A Political Islam Affairs specialist and researcher interviewed in Lana Kazkaz doctoral thesis.

⁷² Kazkaz. *Extremism and Hate Speech in Arabic-Speaking Media*, p.60.

⁷³ Fransisco Olmastroni. *Framing War: Public Opinion and Decision Making in Comparative Perspective*. (Routledge Studies in Global Information, Politics, and Society, 2014), p.11-12.

framed message, the news offers the audience a window to the world, where they see themselves as part of a collective “us” versus the rest. Hence, the framed news becomes a vehicle by which people create a perception, judgment, and opinion of what is considered good and evil. That is why news frames substantially affect citizens’ beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour.⁷⁴

Following this overview, the following section offers a historical background on the conflicts that underpin the comparative analysis of how media frames war coverage. This section does not attempt to be exhaustive but provides the necessary information to understand the milestones in these wars.

A. The Ukraine-Russia War in February 2022

February 2022 was not the first time the two neighbours, Ukraine and Russia, had a confrontation. The roots of this war can be traced to the Second World War. Since the 1990s, Russia has been watching Ukraine closely to exert control over it. Following the dissolution of the USSR after the Cold War, Russia has been continually building networks and attracting Eastern European countries to its alliance to counter Western and European powers, particularly those of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).⁷⁵ Although Moscow has cultural ties with Ukraine, such as the Russian-speaking regions, the political and media discourse has often described the Ukrainian state as a failed system that allowed complete control of Western power over the Ukrainians.⁷⁶

Between 2004 and 2014, the Ukrainian population expressed collective anger through the mass protests known as the Orange Revolution, which advocated for independence from Russia. Conversely, the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk⁷⁷ sought independence from Ukraine. During this period, Russian military intervention was anticipated. Subsequently, on February 21, 2022, President Vladimir Putin announced a special military operation, citing reasons such as alleged genocide in the bordering cities that were mentioned earlier. In addition to that, Ukraine’s development and expansion of nuclear projects intended for use against Russia and its alliance with NATO, which included the establishment of multiple military bases close to Russia’s borders. Beyond geopolitical and security considerations, Putin sought to reshape the identity of Ukraine, which he claimed was distorted by European and American influence. He characterized the antagonism from Europe and the U.S. as part of their “anti-Russian project.”

⁷⁴ Steewar M. Hoover and Knut Lundby. *Media, Religion, and Culture*. (Sage Publication United States, 1997).

⁷⁵ The foundation of this treaty was laid in 1949, what is also known as Washington Treaty. The treaty started with 12 member states and now 32 discussing security and political issues and make decisions. After the fall of Berlin war, the end of the cold war, and the dissolution of USSR, more countries were eager to join the NATO especially from Eastern Europe. Some of the missions of the NATO is preservation, mutual defense and deterrence, nuclear consultation and disarmament, and others. NATO. Retrieved April 28, 2025. <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/index.htm>

⁷⁶ Al Jazeera News. ماذا يحدث بين روسيا وأوكرانيا، وما هي خلفيات الحرب وماذا يريد بوتين؟ [What is happening between Russia and Ukraine, what are the war’s backgrounds, and what does Putin want?]. (YouTube, February 24, 2022). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URL>

⁷⁷ Donetsk is a cultural and strategic area that belongs to the Donets River on the southwestern Russian and eastern Ukraine. Lugansk is a city in Eastern Ukraine in Donbas. Backed by Russia, in 2014 both regions were in clashes with Ukraine claiming self-governing.

Encyclopædia Britannica. *Donetsk*. In *Britannica.com*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Donetsk-Ukraine>
Encyclopædia Britannica. *Luhansk*. In *Britannica.com*.

Even though Ukraine was not a NATO member, its growing ties with the West and aspirations to join the European Union were framed by Russia, notably by Putin, as a significant threat.⁷⁸

Before his military operation against Ukraine in February 2022, Putin recognized the independence of the two border regions with Ukraine, Donbas and Luhansk.⁷⁹ Recognizing the independence gave Putin a reason, at least in his view, to claim that he responded to the calls of the Russian-speaking population in these areas, who suffered humiliation and anticipated genocide by Ukraine. Moreover, he stated that this war is against the nazification and the Western attempts to destroy the identity of people in Ukraine. According to John J. Mearsheimer, the USA played a significant role in bringing Ukraine into NATO. This alliance started with the administrations of Presidents George W. Bush (U.S.) and Yushchenko (Ukraine) in 2008. In 2021, the Joe Biden Administration in the U.S. continued these collaborations to ensure a bulwark on the Russian borders. Accordingly, in February 2022, Vladimir Putin reacted to that with an invasion of Ukraine.⁸⁰

On 24 February 2022, Vladimir Putin announced a full-scale land, sea, and air invasion targeting Ukraine's military assets and cities. "Since the summer of 2022, fighting has largely been confined to Ukraine's east and south, with Russian cruise missiles, bombs, cluster munitions, and thermobaric weapons devastating port cities along the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov." In the Western narrative, Putin resembles the former Soviet Union, which had ambitions to expand by conquering Ukraine and subsequently pursue this imperial project through other invasions. In the West's eyes, Putin is the one responsible for the start and continuation of the war, which has had disastrous effects.⁸¹

Arguing against that, John Mearsheimer refers to Putin's speech before the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, when he affirmed that the sovereignty of Ukraine is well respected. Still, Putin cannot accept that Ukraine becomes a "springboard for Western aggression." Therefore, a territorial or Soviet expansion was not proposed or hinted at by the Russian side. Mearsheimer further argues that Putin limited his military strikes to certain places and did not target the capital, Kyiv.⁸² Conducting a discursive analysis of the media and political rhetoric of the Ukraine-Russia war, Olga Brusylovska and Maksymenko took a similar stance, concluding in their study that this special operation is an unavoidable war caused by Ukraine. Russia was dragged into this war to save Ukrainians and to protect Russia and its civilization.⁸³

Although President Zelensky, elected in 2019, showed an interest in cooperating with Russia at the beginning of his presidential term. Nevertheless, he eventually changed his course of action. In 2021, he further deepened collaboration with NATO and took severe measures

⁷⁸ Jeffrey Mankoff. *Russia's war in Ukraine: Identity, history, and conflict*. (Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2022) https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/220422_Mankoff_RussiaWar_Ukraine.pdf?VersionId=tGhbfT.eyo9DdEsYZPaTWbTZUtGz9o2

⁷⁹ Mankoff, J.. *Russia's war in Ukraine: Identity, history, and conflict*.

⁸⁰ John Mearsheimer. *The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine War*, (21). (Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development, 2022), p. 12. <https://www.cirsds.org/en/horizons/horizons-summer-2022-issue-no.21/the-causes-and-consequences-of-the-ukraine-war>.

⁸¹ John. Mearsheimer. *The causes and consequences of the Ukraine war. Horizon*. (Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development, 2022), p.21.

⁸² Since the current escalating situation between Ukraine and Russia has lead to targeting the capital in Ukraine and strikes near the presidential office, this argument can only be considered within the geopolitical and time context of the beginning of the war.

⁸³ Olga Brusylovska, and Iryna Maksymenko. *Analysis of the media discourse on the 2022 war in Ukraine: The case of Russia*. (Regional Science Policy & Practice, 2023). p, 224.

against Russia, like shutting down pro-Russian TV stations and arresting pro-Putin individuals with treason charges. On the other hand, during Zelensky's visit to the White House during Biden's term, Biden confirmed that he is "firmly committed to Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations." Following that, both countries signed the "*U.S.- Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership*."⁸⁴ Although the Ukrainian joining of NATO was perceived by the Russians as the "brightest of red lines", the supporters of this policy see no threat in joining NATO as it is a defensive alliance, but Putin and his allies see NATO as a threat.⁸⁵

The war in Ukraine has resulted in disastrous humanitarian and economic consequences. Millions have fled their homes, the economy has shrunk by 50%, and Kyiv requires around \$ 5 billion a month to keep the government running amidst all the damage caused. Needless to say, several narratives were adopted during the war coverage. The alleged claim that the war is a special operation was justified by the need for denazification, with no intention to take Ukrainian lands. Therefore, Brusylovska concludes that the war is a response to Ukraine's hostility and its discrimination against the people of Donbass.

Another narrative propagated by Russian media is the right to combat the unfair sanctions imposed by the West, which suffocate not only the elites but also individual citizens. The media also emphasized the impossibility of punishing Russia for its nuclear or economic activities, as doing so would lead to a global conflict that the world should avoid.⁸⁶

B. The Gaza-Israel War in October 2023

On the morning of October 7, 2023, Israel was surprised by an unanticipated air, land, and water attack by Hamas from the border side of Gaza. According to Sky News, Hamas launched more than 4300 rockets at Israel, followed by 6000 Hamas militants who crossed the border, killing and taking hostages. According to the IDF, 364 civilians were killed and at least 40 were taken hostage during the Nova music festival in an Israeli border city, marking the largest operation done by Hamas. In other villages, police and Kibutz members as well as civilians were killed, at least 130 as reported by SkyNews.⁸⁷

Around 120 Hamas-led militants broke into the Erez border from the Gaza Strip, surprising the Israeli troops and leaving them unable to defend the position. As a result, nine soldiers were killed and three were abducted. To control the expansion and varied operations by Hamas, Israel responded with a counter-air strike. The Hamas attack sparked a significant debate not only because of the extensive operations that destroyed multiple Israeli military bases around the Gaza Strip, but also because of the inability of the Israeli Defence Forces to counter and prevent the attack. This has raised many questions for the Israeli authorities regarding their level of preparedness. Moreover, the international community wonders about the readiness and

⁸⁴ A charter by which, both countries are committed to deep and comprehensive reforms as well as full integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. This document complimented the 2008 Bucharest summit Declaration. NATO. (n. d). Retrieved April 28, 2025.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm

⁸⁵ John Measheimer, *The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine War*, p. 20-21.

⁸⁶ Brusylovska et al. *Analysis of the media discourse on the 2022 war in Ukraine*. p, 232.

⁸⁷ Sky News. *What happened during the Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023 | Israel-Hamas war* [Video]. YouTube. (2023, October 7) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkZ8AOUqWU0>

the variety of military equipment and tools used by Hamas, which raises concerns about the potential involvement of other countries, such as Qatar and Iran.⁸⁸

There is a long history of conflicts between Hamas and Israel, or even largely between Palestine and Israel, since World War I. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the twentieth century, Palestine came under British colonial mandate. Tensions escalated when Foreign Minister Lord Arthur Balfour promised the inclusion of Palestinian land into the Arab region and the establishment of a national home for Jews in Palestine. At that time, Jewish Arabs were present in smaller numbers compared to the Christian and Muslim majority in the Palestinian lands. Meanwhile, European Jews began to flee in large numbers to Palestine to escape the Nazis and the Holocaust.⁸⁹

On May 14th, 1948, Rothschild Boulevard marked a turning point and the beginning of a war between Arabs and Israelis when David Ben Gurion announced the official declaration of Israel as an independent state. Although his declaration stated the intention of creating a national home and promised to ensure social and political rights for all citizens without discrimination based on religion, sex, or race, the tension between Palestinians and Israelis under British control after World War I led the UN to propose a partition plan. This plan aimed to create two independent states, Jewish Israeli and Palestinian Arab, while designating Jerusalem as an international zone. While 10 UN member states abstained from voting on the proposal, 13 voted against it, and 33 countries approved the partition plan, which was eventually adopted.⁹⁰

The partition plan did not achieve its goal of resolving the ongoing tensions between Palestinians and Israelis. Moreover, mass deportation of Palestinian Arabs accompanied by armed violence occurred. During this period, the Arab states in the region gained independence from British colonisation and formed the Arab League to promote Arab nationalism. Consequently, Jordan, Syria, and Egypt decided to march towards Israel to retaliate against the mass deportation of the Palestinians and the killing and theft of lands and wealth in 1948. While the UN again intervened to reduce the violence with a 4-week cease-fire, Israel refused. After the cease-fire ended, Israel occupied two major Arab cities, displacing 70,000 individuals and occupying more lands between 1948 and 1960.⁹¹

While the Arab forces had to accept a ceasefire and a green area according to a treaty with Israel following the defeat of 1948, the Egyptians withdrew from Gaza, where they were based, followed by the withdrawal of forces from Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, who accepted the results of the war. However, Jordan was given the West Bank as King Abdullah cooperated with Britain and the Zionists. The war ended with Israel controlling 78% of the land while Palestinians made up 66% of the population.⁹²

⁸⁸ Emanuel Fabian. *120 Terrorists Invaded Erez Crossing, Adjacent Base on Oct. 7, As Troops Made Brave Stand*. (The Times of Israel, March 31, 2024). <https://www.timesofisrael.com/120-terrorists-invaded-erez-crossing-adjacent-base-on-oct-7-as-troops-made-brave-stand/>

⁸⁹ Sherim Nour. War in Gaza: a cross-cultural analysis of news reporting and reception. P. 49

⁹⁰ TRT World. (2018, May 14). *The Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and Nakba explained* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTMRMX7Pw5U>

⁹¹ The former president of Palestine, Yasir Arafat, has chosen 15 of May to commemorate the Nakba. Or the catastrophe. This day, which come one day after the declaration of Israel as an independent state after securing the support of the UN member states, it marks the aftermath and exodus, and the massacre of Deir Yassin. Palestinians commemorate the mass killing and humiliation of men, women, and children.

⁹² TRT World. *A Brief History of the Israeli Occupation of Palestine*. Accessed April 28, 2025. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/a-brief-history-of-the-israeli-occupation-of-palestine-12733173>

Another milestone in the tense relations between Palestinians and Israelis occurred in 1967. According to the Israeli narrative, Israel launched a defensive attack after feeling threatened by the Arab countries. Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser had his army positioned near the Sinai border. Moreover, he requested that UN forces withdraw from the Sinai Peninsula. Additionally, he closed the Tiran passage to prevent Israeli ships from crossing through the Red Sea. Israel was also concerned about the escalating tension along the Syrian border. The Israeli media used these events as propaganda to justify the inevitability of the war, describing it as a combined demonic effort to erase Israel from the Middle Eastern map. Israel was far more prepared than the Arab nations and launched airstrikes against Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, achieving its goals.⁹³

On the 6th of October 1973, Egypt launched an unprecedented attack on the Israeli-occupied territories in Sinai that had been taken after the 1967 war. Simultaneously, Syria was involved in this war by attacking from the side of the Golan. The situation was escalated by the fact that the U.S.A. and the USSR got involved in the war, the former providing armed support to Israel and the latter to Egypt and Syria, pumping their respective allies with heavy weapons. The escalation put the world on the verge of a global conflict involving nuclear weapons through the intervention of Russia.⁹⁴ However, the advancements made by the Israeli side forced the Egyptian and Syrian armies to retreat and accept the loss of territories that Israel could control. While the President of Syria, al-Assad (Senior), aimed to destroy Israel, Egypt, under President Sadat, sought to initiate peace talks and negotiations.⁹⁵

Since the 1990s, the relationship between Palestine and Israel has become increasingly complicated, and despite Arab and international mediations, the situation has worsened. In Palestine, the official Palestinian Authority (PA) is Fatah. Hamas, the Islamic reference group, has controlled the Gaza Strip since 2007 after coming to power with a majority of votes. The relationship with Hamas is much more complex because Fatah has, to some extent, been constrained by Israel and has agreed to negotiate. While the PA has chosen non-armed confrontations and advocates for a two-state solution, Hamas fully supports armed resistance, suicide attacks, and a one-state solution.⁹⁶

In 2014, Mousa Abu Marzouk, a senior figure in Hamas, said, “Hamas will not renounce violence until Israel is destroyed.” According to Ehud Eilam, any progress with the PA pushed Hamas to engage in “desperate acts like confronting Israel, aiming at sabotaging the peace process.” For example, the peace process aimed at signing an agreement in 2014 between the PA and Israel reached a dead end because Israel required the PA to contain Hamas. On the

⁹³ It is worth noting that the Egyptian ERTU Radio announced fake news claiming the war ended with the defeat of Israel and the triumph of the Arab nations. Only those with access to international radio channels and knowledge of English could discern the truth.

⁹⁴ Al Arabiya. *لدمع مصر وسوريا بحرب 73.. هددت موسكو بحرب عالمية ثالثة* [To support Egypt and Syria in the 1973 war... Moscow threatened a third world war]. (October 20, 2023).. <https://www.alarabiya.net/last-page/2023/10/20/الدمع-مصر-وسوريا-بحرب-73-هددت-موسكو-بحرب-عالمية-ثالثة>

⁹⁵ After the “humiliating” defeat of the Egyptian and Arab forces in front of Israel, the Free Officers who took power in Egypt after their coup d’état against the monarchy that they held responsible for the defeat, corruption, and selling the Palestinian holy lands. E -Sadat, the President, continued the war plan following the steps of the former president. He initiated a peace talk by surprising Israel during what they call Yom Kippur or the catastrophe. He accepted Israel as an equal, independent sovereign state to gain power over some lost lands. Due to his peace efforts, Sadat won the Nobel Prize for peace, but that generated a lot of disputes and hatred not only among Islamists in Egypt but around the Arab regions and led to his assassination in 1981 during an annual victory parade.

⁹⁶ Ehud Eilam . *Israel, Hamas, and the Palestinian Authority in Containment in the Middle East*. (University of Nebraska Press, 2019). P, 94.

other hand, Hamas presents itself as the legitimate authority entitled to approach Israel, backed by popular support. “Yet the price Palestinians paid, mostly those in the Gaza Strip, points out the abyss to which Hamas is dragging its people.”⁹⁷

The Gaza Strip has experienced a staged siege and military operations. After Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005, Hamas took Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit hostage. In 2008, hundreds of Palestinians were killed in a rocket strike by Israel. In 2014, Israel invaded Gaza following clashes between extremists from both sides. In 2021, tensions escalated, particularly after the United States recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The clashes extended into the Gaza Strip, contributing to the ongoing conflict. Amid such intense events and ongoing strife, Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel, claiming this war was initiated in response to Israel’s atrocities against the people and the continued siege of Gaza, which resulted in limited access to clean water, energy, electricity, and consumer goods. Concurrently, students struggled to leave the strip for universities, while humanitarian conditions peaked in one of the world’s most densely populated regions. As of that date, the conflict continues, with deaths and hostages on both sides, but the Gaza Strip is severely devastated, with no infrastructure or access to food, proper hospitalisation, or basic means of life.

C. Conclusion

This chapter examines the intersection between religion and media during war, using two examples of ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. This thesis hypothesises that media weaponises religion by using it to frame its stories, overtly or covertly, during disputes. The historical context presented the two wars and how each country presented a narrative. One of the narratives that is strongly present in the war between Hamas and Israel is the religious frame. This thesis proposes that religion is used implicitly and explicitly in the news coverage of the war, questioning the journalistic attitude of the media. To support this claim, the following section presents an in-depth comparative analysis of news stories, which will be conducted using qualitative content analysis. This methodology aims to investigate whether the religious factor is a component of war coverage and identify the media messages that manifest in various forms, including texts, images, symbols, selected sources, and analogies. Although the thesis aims to question such a journalistic attitude, it does not seek to provide definitive answers at this stage. This complex analysis requires triangulation and mixed methods, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

V. Methodology, Results, and Discussion

Although many scholars critique framing as conceptually inconsistent, disputable, and sometimes ambiguous, De Vreese contends that it has key characteristics and aspects that can be identified. According to him, framing is a dynamic communication process rather than a static one. De Vreese confirms that earlier research on framing has been tentative in defining and operationalising frames.⁹⁸ This lack of consensus on how to define a frame in news causes

⁹⁷ Eilam . *Israel, Hamas, and the Palestinian Authority*. p, 95.

⁹⁸ Abdulrahman Elsamni notes that the lack of a codified definition of framing or a consented approach to studying framing reflects the diversity and the multiplicity of approaches and disciplines to framing. Therefore, framing research deserves to be studied from both the media effects approaches and from a broad generalist approach that addresses its theory and development. Abdulrahman Elsamni. *Framing Arab refugees in global news [Master’s Thesis, the American University in Cairo]*. (AUC Knowledge Fountain, 2016). <https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/254>

challenges for researchers attempting to apply methods to gathering and analysing data. To identify and methodologically examine the frames used in news coverage, two approaches are employed: the inductive and the deductive. The *inductive* approach does not assume the presence of specific frames in the news before collecting and analysing the data; the frames emerge during the process. The *deductive* approach, which this thesis applies, investigates frames that are defined and operationalised prior to data collection and analysis.⁹⁹

Some scholars prefer predefined frames, using content analysis as a method in a deductive approach. However, to analyse “any production feature of verbal or visual texts as a candidate for news frames is a too broad view.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, De Vreese suggests four criteria that narrow down the scope of definition and analysis, which will be followed in this thesis. First, a frame must have identifiable conceptual and linguistic characteristics. Second, the characteristics should be observed in journalistic practice. Third, a specific frame should be distinguished from another frame. Finally, the frame must have representational validity, and it is not a figment of the researcher’s imagination.¹⁰¹

For instance, when working with the deductive approach to structure a proper methodology, the question of the study should be: What components constitute a frame in a news story? In that sense, the presence or absence of specific keywords, phrases, sources of information, stereotypical images, and sentences maintains a thematically reinforced cluster of judgments or facts. Additionally, the choice of language, the condensed information, and the packaging of the media message all play a role in news framing. Researchers examine in news stories: (1) catch phrases, (2) metaphors, (3) examples, (4) depictions, and (5) visual images as framing devices.¹⁰²

James Tankard, in his empirical approach to the study of news framing, listed eleven framing mechanisms that act as a focal point for identifying and measuring frames in news:

1. Headlines
2. subheads
3. photos
4. photo captions
5. leads
6. source selection
7. quote selection
8. pull quotes
9. logos
10. statistics and charts, and
11. concluding statements and paragraphs.¹⁰³

Therefore, this thesis relies on most of these measuring mechanisms in constructing the coding sheet to conduct the content analysis of the news. In addition to the guiding mechanisms for the coding sheet, the method is guided by Entman’s definition of framing, which includes salience and selection. These two components are essential in the framing of news stories. The choice of certain words or images, along with their repeated use, implies something about the

⁹⁹ Claes De Vreese. *News framing: Theory and typology*. (2005) (Information Design Journal + Document Design, 13(1), 2005), p. 51.

¹⁰⁰ De Vreese. *News framing*, p. 51

¹⁰¹ De Vreese. *News framing*, p. 51

¹⁰² De Vreese. *News framing*, p.54

¹⁰³ De Vreese. *News framing*, p.54

narrative presented to the audience. In other words, such media performance plays a role in defining problems, suggesting causes, recommending remedies, and judging moral terms.¹⁰⁴

A. Method

As mentioned earlier in the *Introduction*, this study employs a qualitative content analysis method that involves a purposive sample of news stories to examine the religious frame in the coverage of wars.¹⁰⁵ The sample includes videos from news bulletins, talk shows, in-studio analysis, and other programs from the France 24 news channel, sourced from the channel's official website. The qualitative study was conducted after consulting Hasan et al.'s "*Framing Islam: A Comparative Content Analysis*", which reflects on the advantages of conducting content analysis in framing studies. This method enables the quantification of data and results while also facilitating a qualitative and in-depth interpretation of these numbers.

Wimmer and Dominick in *Mass Media Research* noted that there are several definitions of content analysis. One definition is that it is a "systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information." It is also a research technique that enables researchers to make replicable and valid data comprehensible in their context. The uses of content analysis include measuring a communication message, comparing media content to the real world, testing hypotheses about message characteristics, examining the image of a particular group, and serving as a starting point for studies on the effects of media. Like any research method, content analysis has its research limitations. Content analysis can be issue-specific or context-specific. For example, studying the framing of native groups by global media may be relevant only to global media, not to the local channels and journals in the same country. Another limitation is that it serves as a starting point, and results typically require additional methods of analysis to achieve an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Moreover, content analysis can be time-consuming and demanding, considering the scope of analysis and the number of samples that need to be gathered.¹⁰⁶

B. Unit of Analysis

News stories in video format—including news bulletins, daily shows, short reports, and studio analysis—are available on the France 24 channel and serve as the unit of analysis. The samples were gathered from the France 24 website, which is publicly accessible and contains archives of news broadcasts in multiple languages; however, the study focused on English-language videos. The data analysis process relied on a coding sheet created with a Google form equipped with user-friendly statistical graphs and Excel sheets that are user-friendly and do not require special training. Before starting the coding, under the supervision of Dr. Abdulrahman Elsamni,¹⁰⁷ a pilot of eight content analyses was conducted.¹⁰⁸ Four on the Gaza-Israel war and the rest on the Ukraine-Russia war. The pilot was a crucial step that revealed many shortcomings in the operational definitions initially made, the formulation of the questions that guided the coder, and the order of the coding process. For instance, the coding sheet only

¹⁰⁴ Abdulrahman Elsamni. *Framing Arab refugees in global news* [Master's Thesis, the American University in Cairo]. (AUC Knowledge Fountain, 2016), p.44.

¹⁰⁵ See *Introduction* for definition of qualitative and quantitative research on page, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Roger Wimmer and Joseph Dominick. *Mass Media Research*, p.159-160.

¹⁰⁷ Dr. Elsamni is an Assistant Professor and media expert, especially in framing theory and quantitative media analysis. He has a long career teaching media research methods and has several published articles. I would list some of them here in the final version.

¹⁰⁸ A test of the research procedure to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. It also helps the researcher to refine the research design and data collection. It is a trial attempt before starting the coding process to detect possible errors and polish the method of data collection and analysis.

defined the religion frame. However, following the pilot, it was noted that the remaining frames — geopolitical, humanitarian, and conflict — required a definition to guide the coder and provide mutually exclusive categories in the coding sheet. Another instance is that closed-ended questions were initially coded with digits (0 and 1). Nevertheless, it was recommended to change the coding method of the questions to “Yes” and “No” to simplify the calculations.

Figure (1)

The structure of the pilot coding sheet.

The collection of news stories was a challenging process. The hashtags generated on the France 24 website guide the web visitors to the most current, trending, and researched topics. The results of the searched hashtags appear in chronological order, from most recent to oldest, and include an exhaustive selection of videos, press reports, hard news, soft news, and pictures. There were two hashtags for the two analysed wars on the website. During the coding process for the pilot, one of the hashtags was no longer available on the page. As a result, the researcher had to extract the videos one by one from a massive collection of war-related videos by eliminating the irrelevant ones. To mark the starting points of each war, the links of the pages featuring videos on the war between Ukraine and Russia from February 2022 and the war between Hamas and Israel in October 2023 were saved.

C. Coding sheet and quantification

Although the study used a qualitative content analysis method, which means that results cannot be generalised and thus lack external validity, the chosen method necessarily incorporates numbers to indicate the frequency of specific frames, texts, and characteristics in the news message.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the frequency of repeated texts and symbols is crucial for detecting patterns in journalistic practice. Therefore, the coding sheet was designed with closed-ended questions, where the responses are Yes or No. Additionally, open-ended questions were included that solicit responses regarding stereotypical images, implicit and explicit religious symbols, and the types of sources used in news coverage. The third type of question on the coding sheet required short answers on the length, link, heading, headline, and subheadline of the videos.¹¹⁰

D. Results and Analysis

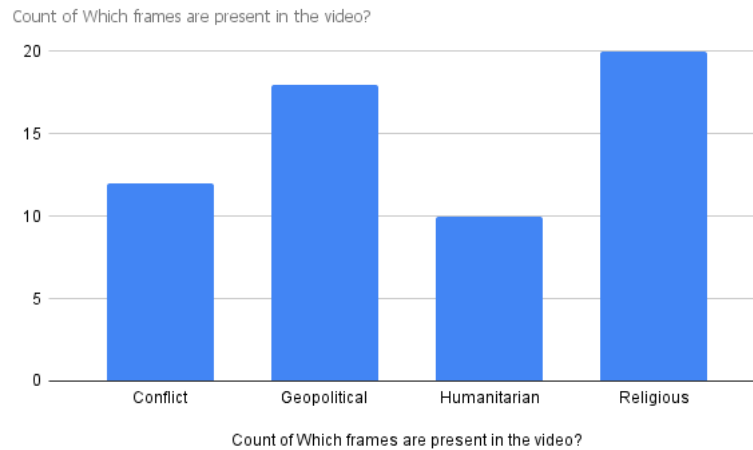
A total of 20 hours, 33 minutes, and 42 seconds of analysed videos cover war news, divided unequally between the Ukraine-Russia war and the Gaza-Palestine war. Some video stories were significantly longer than others, extending up to 45 minutes compared to videos that last for 1 minute and 16 seconds. Nevertheless, an equal number of videos were analysed: thirty

¹⁰⁹ For definition of the external validity, see *Introduction*, page. 5.

¹¹⁰ See appendix for coding sheet designed in the form of questions, and answers varied from check boxes, short ended, and open ended, p. 44.

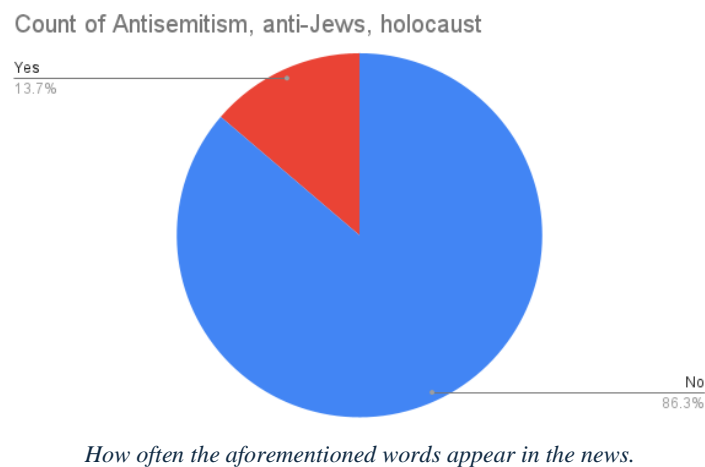
videos from each war on France 24 news since the start date of each conflict. Examining the types of frames used in the coverage of wars, I limited the comparative frames to four: religious, geopolitical, humanitarian, and conflict frames. After analysing 60 videos over twenty hours, the results show that most of the news is religiously framed. However, the religious frame is exclusively utilised in the coverage of the Gaza-Israel war.

Figure (2)



Predictably, given the deductive approach and proposed hypothesis, religion was a significant factor in the coverage of 33.3% of war stories of the Hamas-Israel conflict by France 24. Moreover, more than 14% of these war news pieces explicitly mention and repeat words or phrases such as “anti-Jews, anti-semitism, and holocaust.” In the video title, at least twice, the attack on Israel is called “Israel’s September 11th.” While one of the videos discusses the intensity of the attack on Israel by mentioning that 1500 bodies of Hamas militants were found in Israel, the cover photo of the video displays a head-covered (hijabi) woman in Gaza. Finding 20 videos out of 30 analysed on the Hamas-Israel war frame the war in the context of religion, either directly or indirectly.

Figure (3)

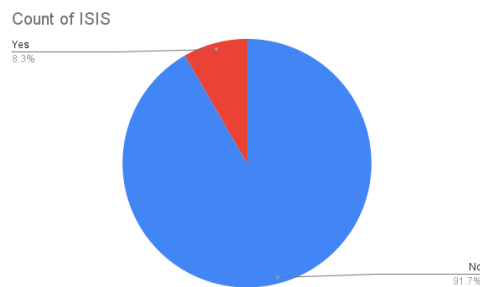


One of the videos is a report on Yahia Senwar, a Hamas leader classified as an international terrorist. The report narrates the story of the Israeli government’s intervention to save Yahia’s

life after he faced a serious health condition during his imprisonment. Israel provided healthcare and saved his life through a surgical operation to treat his brain tumour. While verifying this story is not the aim of this thesis, what is relevant is the implicitly contextual narrative constructed in the video. Throughout the video, the background features an Islamic call to prayer, religious phrases and quotes from the Quran, alongside images of bearded men and scenes of daily prayer. In this manner, the image created in the viewer's mind associates terrorism, violence, and anti-Jewish sentiment with this ungrateful terrorist and Islamic practices in general.

Almost half of the analysed data reveal that Hamas and its supporters are compared to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Although the allies of Hamas, namely Iran, Turkey, Hizbullah, Houthis in Yemen and Qatar were not very often mentioned, 4 out of 30 videos refer to this alliance explicitly as axis of resistance, or pose a question on the possibility of interference from any of these countries to escalate the situation and support the Shia project against the Sunni.

Figure (4)



How many times was ISIS repeated in the video?

Figure (5)



How many times are these words repeated in the video?

Nine of the thirty videos on the Gaza-Israel war show footage of a religious symbol, whether it is a quoted sentence from the Quran, a performance of daily prayer, a funeral prayer, women with covered hair (hijab), women with veiled faces (niqab), long-bearded men, the logo of the military branch of Hamas, or invocation of Islamic phrases while attacking Israel. In some videos and talk shows, the coverage of the war did not include any religious symbols. Still, the analysts gave religious references by making an analogy with the September 11th attack and the holocaust. Moreover, the press analysis shows selected newspapers that frame the war from a religious narrative.

Figure (6)

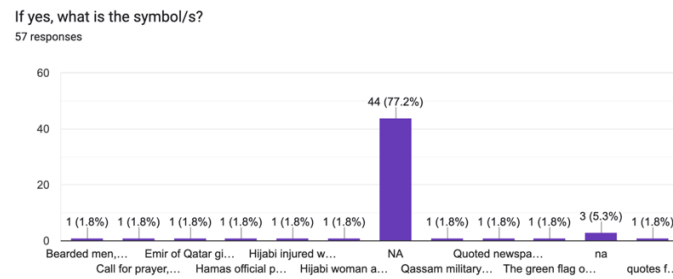
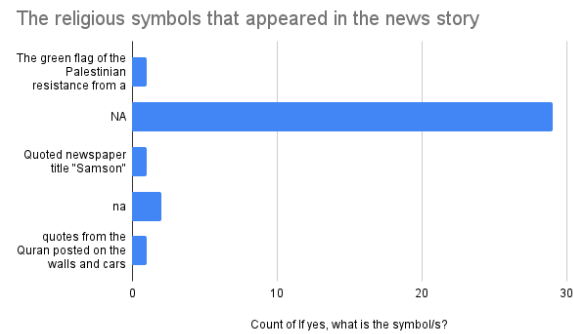


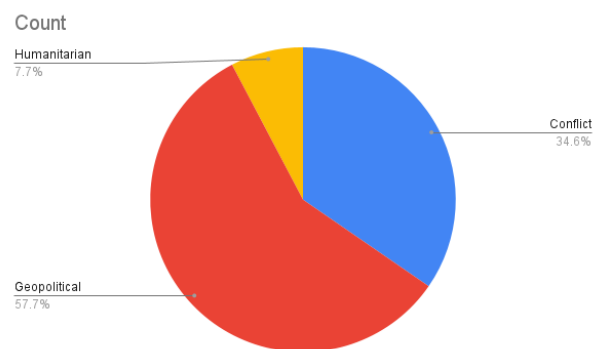
Figure (7)



The types of symbols

On the other hand, analysing the Ukraine-Russia war, there is not a single instance of a religious frame. In the thirty videos analysed regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, phrases, sources, and footage illustrate the humanitarian crisis and its consequences on the geopolitical and economic landscape. The war was primarily framed as a geopolitical issue, as evidenced by 15 out of 30 videos indicating so, compared to 9 that contain a conflict frame. The humanitarian frame was also present at a low frequency compared to the other frames. Yet, some reports covered the obstacles and challenges that Ukrainians face due to the war. The videos also mention how the collapsing economy and infrastructure are reflected in the individuals.¹¹¹

Figure (7)



No mention of religion framing in the Ukraine and Russia war.

¹¹¹ See figure (1) for statistics on types of frames.

E. Discussion

It is essential to recognise that this research aims to investigate the media coverage of wars and the role that religion plays as a framing device for these conflicts. Given the complexity of the subject matter, such an examination necessitates a comprehensive analysis that utilises mixed research methods. However, the present study does not aim to provide definitive answers to the questions that have been raised. Instead, it serves as a starting point for exploring the role of religion in media coverage during wartime and the extent to which it influences public perception. The outcomes of the qualitative analysis of the media coverage about the two wars are not exhaustive and, consequently, lack external validity. Nevertheless, this study offers valuable insights into the interplay between religion, framing, and media. It serves as a starting point for a deeper investigation that expands the period, the research methods, and the media agencies in future research.

Analysing 60 videos that compared the coverage of two wars by the same news channel facilitated the examination of journalistic performance and the presentation of events. One noticeable factor was the use of religion as a reason for the war. In that case, the religion factor was readily detected in the videos by direct reference, such as “anti-semitic, killing Jews, Islamic Jihad, fanaticism, or another Islamic state, aka ISIS.” In such instances, the study can confirm that an explicit, religiously framed message was present.

Nevertheless, the religious frame was sometimes implicit in nuanced ways. Even though the news channel did not present a loaded message with a religiously framed message, it engaged in discourse that heavily referenced religion by repeating political discourse and selecting sources that place the media message within a religious context. For instance, one of the talk shows, titled “The Show,” featured an in-studio analyst and journalist who selected press articles covering the war story. Most of the selected newspapers were filled with phrases that framed the war as a religious conflict. Moreover, some of these newspapers feature stereotypical images and symbols of religion.¹¹²

On the other hand, the analysis of the Ukraine-Russia war shows the diversity of angles that France 24 adopted in its coverage. The invasion was framed in multiple ways and, most importantly, revealed that the war was motivated by economic, geopolitical, and colonial agendas. In addition, the war had disastrous consequences on humanitarian, financial, and geopolitical levels, as well as on the global ethical stance against Western values. Worth noting is that there was not a single video covering the Ukraine-Russia war from a religious perspective. The three frames—geopolitical, conflict, and humanitarian—were present, but religion was utterly absent. The diversity of approaches to covering the Ukraine-Russia conflict is evident, encompassing coverage of ecosystems, natural resources, and other topics that extend beyond the geopolitical.

Conversely, the Hamas attack was primarily framed around religion and antagonism against the Jews. A notable example is the repetition of the word “anti-Semitic” and the selection of stories. For instance, a story covered the fear of the Jewish community in Argentina of being attacked by Arabs and Muslims there. Interviews with citizens revealed they had received calls from their children's Jewish school, asking them to refrain from dressing their kids in anything

¹¹² France 24. *Scale of atrocities in southern Israel provokes both shock and division* [Video]. (October 11, 2023). <https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/in-the-press/20231011-scale-of-atrocities-in-southern-israel-provokes-both-shock-and-division>

that identifies them as Jewish. The actions and reactions to the long-standing Israeli conflict were likened to the Holocaust and the human suffering endured by the Jewish people in Europe.

Even at an implicit level, no religious symbols were associated with the conflict between Ukraine and Russia—the sole instance of analogy being the comparison of the conflict with previous wars such as Pearl Harbour. Conversely, the coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was predominantly framed through a religious lens, often likening the war to the September 11 attacks on the Twin Towers in the United States. This incident evokes memories of the alleged war on terrorism and the Islamic fanaticism represented by al-Qaida, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Additionally, Hamas was described as a terrorist organisation seeking to establish an Islamic state similar to ISIS.

Religious symbolism was heavily present in the videos, despite the show's content and screen texts containing no religious references. Random photos of the Quran appeared amid the destruction of Gaza neighbourhoods, and quotes from the Quran were seen on cars or houses. There were usually fully covered women, often wearing hijabs or face veils. The sound of a call to prayer could be heard, along with men performing daily prayers or Islamic funeral prayers. Additionally, the military wings' logo for Jihad appeared in the videos. Even though Hamas is an Islamic group with an ideology deeply rooted in a religious background, describing the war in Gaza as a war against Islamic terrorism may create a perception that Islam, or religion in general, is a source of violence and hatred.

F. Limitations

This study has encountered several limitations that do not undermine the significance of the findings but rather highlight the shortcomings of the current research and, more importantly, open up possibilities for expanding this field of study.

- Firstly, selecting a qualitative research method was appropriate for presenting an in-depth analysis of the complex research problem. Nevertheless, fulfilling this task proved challenging, particularly in involving some basic quantifications and interpreting them in a qualitative and intelligible manner for readers from both media and religion specialisations.
- Secondly, one of the disadvantages of quantitative content analysis is the potential bias that is lessened and managed through the use of quantitative content analysis and sampling error.
- Thirdly, content analysis has been very time-consuming, especially given the time constraints for submitting the thesis.
- Finally, concluding that religion is weaponised and utilised as a tool by the media during war coverage raises questions regarding the potential consequences for the public and the motivations behind such media behaviour. However, these questions necessitate further investigation, involving additional media and religion theories and methods of analysis. Moreover, due to time constraints, the analysis has focused on 60 videos covering both the Gaza-Israel and Ukraine-Russia wars. Additionally, only one channel has been taken as a unit of analysis.

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Conclusions

This research aimed to analyse media framing of war coverage to determine whether religion played an essential role in it. The significance of this research lies in the fact that it provides preliminary evidence showing how religion is weaponised and used as a frame in two cases of war coverage. Such framing enhances stereotypical notions and deepens misunderstandings that lead to a cultural divide, generating distorted perceptions of religions. The comparison between the Hamas-Israel and Ukraine-Russia wars through content analysis reflects that news coverage is selective in presenting the content message, which, in the case of the Hamas-Israel war, was primarily focused on the religious frame as a reason and motivation for this war.

Since the eruption of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on 7 October 2023, following Hamas's surprising attack on Israel and the taking of hostages, France 24 has been covering the conflict from a singular perspective. Most news coverage was framed religiously during the first month of reporting on the war. Seventy per cent of the video broadcasts, whether news bulletins, talk shows, or news analyses, reference religion. In comparison to three other frames—the geopolitical, the humanitarian, and the conflict frame—the religious frame is the most prominent. Many news reports lacked mention of other possible motivations or consequences of the war. They were primarily centred on religion and violence, lacking a diversity of angles to cover the conflict.

“Terrorism, Jihad, Islamism, fanaticism, or fundamentalism” are among the words that were repeatedly mentioned. The attack by Hamas was often compared to the 11th of September 2001, a terroristic attack on the United States by al/Qaeda on the World Trade Centers causing many deaths and taking the United States to wars for years. Additionally, the surprise attack by Hamas was several times interpreted as part of a bigger conspiracy, namely the Shi’a project that wishes to expand its hegemony to counter the Sunni dominance.¹¹³

Besides explicitly framing religion as the primary or only reason for war, the religion factor was implicitly implied in the media message. Analysing the content qualitatively revealed that religion was indirectly implied by showing stereotypical images that are usually attributed to religious symbols, such as covered women, bearded men, quoted verses from the Quran, and the call to prayer. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the media content of war news is characterised by the religious frame, even if the news channel implicitly manufactures the narrative through the quoted sources or the images that appear in the videos with religious symbols.¹¹⁴

Oliver et al. state that there is neither objective information nor raw data; at the core of these informational packages is a frame—an organising idea that gives meaning to events. These frames guide people’s perception and interpretation of those events. In that sense, the frames shape people’s attitudes, behaviours, and responses to issues they follow in the media.¹¹⁵

Such framing is not necessarily founded on moral and rational arguments. Instead, media frames can be based on falsehoods or amplifications, deliberately promoting the emotions of fear and prejudice to strongly influence the public. These frames stand on carefully chosen language and symbols that resonate with existing cultural beliefs involving the psychological

¹¹³ Words like “*Jihad and Islamic States*”

¹¹⁴ See figure with symbols.

¹¹⁵ Oliver et al. *Media Effects*, p. 53.

appeal of the audience. As a result, they create a sense of reality that is above doubt or question.¹¹⁶

The strength and repetition of a frame, the competitive environment, individual motivations, and the level of education of the audience, alongside culture-based meaning and emotional appeals, contribute to the installation of the frame. As scholars have suggested, individuals with limited knowledge or who are unaware of alternative narratives and frames tend to accept these narratives without challenge. Furthermore, if media sources are perceived as highly trustworthy, the frames are generally regarded as culturally valid meaning.¹¹⁷

Although it could be argued that the media represents an aspect of truth, it uses frames that bias news content in practice. The selection or omission of information, along with its ranking and presentation, alters the viewer's understanding and interpretation of an event. In this way, the media provides different representations of reality. With such psychological and instrumental manipulations, people engage with the narrative that the media promotes. Such implications are reflected not only in the findings of content analysis but also in the secondary data. There are plenty of historical examples of wars waged in the name of religion or in response to terrorism and religious threats.

The examples offered in Chapter 3 show that Michael Walzer's essay and Flora Lewis in The New York Times reflect the conclusions both draw from particular conflicts, generalising these events as manifestations of a singular underlying issue: Islam. Lewis argued that the very concept of Islam inherently suggests antagonism toward the West. With such framing and generalisation, the perception of an entire group is distorted based on a specific event.¹¹⁸

Religion plays a crucial role in shaping collective perceptions of reality by providing a moral and ideological framework through which events, particularly those occurring during wartime, are understood. Religious meanings act as unifying forces, binding individuals together through shared beliefs, traditions, and values. This is when religion connects individual perception of a culture to a larger collective perception of others. Therefore, religiously framed messages resonate with people, reinforcing collective identities and influencing public attitudes toward a conflict. That possible leads to justifying war, fostering solidarity, or legitimising resistance, whether through justifying war, fostering solidarity, or legitimising resistance.

Discussing the *weaponisation of religion* in media coverage of wars has been a daring area of investigation for several reasons. Religion is a highly sensitive topic and is often regarded as a private and individual experience that should not belong to the public sphere. However, almost every aspect of life intertwines with religion. For an academic study of religion, it is a complex topic rife with disputes and disagreements, even regarding the definition of religion itself. Moreover, there is ongoing debate about how religion should be studied as a category, given the lack of a universally agreed-upon conceptual definition enabling a systematic, valid, scientific study comparable to other disciplines, such as the social sciences. Therefore, it is astonishing how the media claims to accurately identify and frame religions, attempting to generalise and shape perceptions of a religion.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman. *Framing Theory*. (Annual Reviews, 2007), p. 111.

¹¹⁷ Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman. *Framing Theory*. (Annual Reviews, 2007), p. 111.

¹¹⁸ Edward Said. *Covering Islam*, p. 39

¹¹⁹ Berger et al. *Religion as Relation*, p. 3-4.

The significance of Framing Theory lies in explaining, conceptually, how the media's role is not merely to inform the public by providing raw data on events in an objective and balanced manner. Entman argues that, contrary to the belief that individuals construct their own narratives, the narrative is actually pre-formed by selecting and highlighting specific aspects of reality to elicit certain perceptions and reactions.¹²⁰

Additionally, framing is not merely a theoretical concept applicable only to theorisation. The thesis offers a contemporary example of war coverage and investigates how framing affects public perception and shapes a constructed reality surrounding religion. Media framing employs culturally and socially relevant elements to reinforce their message, making it resonate not only with individuals but also as a communal issue. By assigning a particular hierarchy to news, such as what is presented first and last, the duration of coverage, the choice of language, and the selection of sources representing opposing sides in conflicts, and utilising stereotypical imagery, a package is delivered to influence public discourse.¹²¹

Religion is a powerful tool, deeply rooted and strongly connected to culture; thus, the media has used it to amplify its message and influence the public. Throughout history, politicians and leaders have used religion to justify wars and violence. According to Edward W. Said, although the war against religious fanaticism has been claimed since the Iranian revolution, the reality is that it has only brought more violence and religious phobia to the West.¹²²

B. Recommendations for Future Studies

As noted in the previous chapter, this research seeks to highlight a problem and analyse it qualitatively using the available sources. There is no doubt that time constraints posed a challenge; hence, some shortcomings have been addressed. Qualitative content analysis was chosen because the main objective of the thesis is to examine the religious factor in war news. It aims to serve as a starting point to highlight how the religious framing of wars appears in media content, both implicitly and explicitly, and how this influences public perception of religion and culture. A future study employing a quantitative method will facilitate testing the effects of such media practices on the audience. Surveys, interviews, or experiments can be utilised to empirically test the hypothesis and present results with greater control over bias and sampling error.

Applying mixed methods will help expand the population sample and include more data in the research. To that end, analysing more than one news channel will be helpful. This will help to test if there is a correlation between the type of media (state-owned or private) and its agenda. In addition, it will be an added value to indicate the similarities and differences in framing the war news between English and Arabic broadcasts within the same channel. This will give a perspective on the media agenda, the audience addressed, and the role language plays in framing messages. It will be crucial at a doctoral level to provide a profound theoretical investigation of religion (the religion factor) to thoroughly understand the theological meanings and functions.

¹²⁰ Victoria Fielding. *Media Inequality. News Framing and Media Power* (1st edition), p. 22.

¹²¹ Mary Beth Oliver, Arthur A. Raney, and Jennings Bryant (eds). *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (4th ed.). (Routledge New York, 2020), p. 53.

¹²² Edward Said. *Covering Islam*, p. 33.

Bibliography

- Al Arabiya. *ل دعم مصر وسوريا بحرب 73 .. هددت موسكو بحرب عالمية ثالثة* [To Support Egypt And Syria In The 1973 War... Moscow Threatened A Third World War]. (October 20, 2023,).
<https://www.alarabiya.net/last-page/2023/10/20/-ل دعم مصر وسوريا بحرب 73-هددت موسكو بحرب عالمية ثالثة>
- Berger, P. A., Buitelaar, M., & Knibbe, K. E. (2021). *Religion As Relation: Studying Religion in Context*. Equinox Publishing.

- Bryant, J., & Zillmann, D. (Eds.). (2020). *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (4th ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing Theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10, 103–126. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054>
- Claes de Vreese. *News Framing: Theory And Typology*. (2005) (Information Design Journal + Document Design, 13(1).
- De Vita, A. P. (2002). Islam: religion y politica: problemas y cuestiones en juego*. Cuadernos de Teología, 21, 213-229.
- Eilam, E. (2019). *Israel, Hamas, and the Palestinian Authority in Containment in the Middle East*. University of Nebraska Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpwhf6xElsamni>, A. (2016). *Framing Arab Refugees in Global News* [Master's thesis, The American University in Cairo]. AUC Knowledge Fountain.
- Fabian, Emmanuel. *120 Terrorists Invaded Erez Crossing, Adjacent Base on Oct. 7, As Troops Made Brave Stand*. (The Times of Israel, March 31, 2024). <https://www.timesofisrael.com/120-terrorists-invaded-erez-crossing-adjacent-base-on-oct-7-as-troops-made-brave-stand/>
- Encyclopedia Britannica. *Donetsk*. In *Britannica.com*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Donetsk-Ukraine>
- Encyclopedia Britannica. *Luhansk*. In *Britannica.com*.
- Entman, R. M. (2009). *Projections Of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and US Foreign Policy*. University of Chicago Press.
- Fielding, V. (2024). *Media Inequality: News Framing and Media Power* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- France 24. *Scale Of Atrocities in Southern Israel Provokes Both Shock and Division* [Video]. (October 11, 2023). <https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/in-the-press/20231011-scale-of-atrocities-in-southern-israel-provokes-both-shock-and-division>
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Culture*. Basic Books.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Culture*. Basic Books.
- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media and The Making and Unmaking of the New Left*. University of California Press.
- Hoover, S. M., & Lundby, K. (Eds.). (1997). *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture* (Vol. 23). Sage.
- Huntington, Samuel. (1997). *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*. London: Simon & Schuster.

- Kazkaz, L. (2023). Extremism and Hate Speech in Arabic-Speaking Media. [Doctoral Dissertation, Universitat Ramon Llull].
- Lanzillotta, L. R. (2021). "Ancient Religious Texts and Intertextuality: Plato's and Plutarch's Myths of the Afterlife." In *Religion as Relation: Studying Religion in Context* (pp. 134-149). Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Lurie, R. A. (2012) "Is Religion the Cause of Most Wars?" HuffPost.
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/is-religion-the-cause-of_b_1400766
- Mankoff, J. (2022). Russia's War in Ukraine. Centre for Strategic & International Studies, 6(4), 439-440.
- McCombs, M., & Reynolds, A. (2020). *News Influence on our Picture of The World*. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (4th ed). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Measheimer, J. (2022). *The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine War*. Centre for International Relations and Sustainable Development.
<https://www.cirsd.org/en/horizons/horizons-summer-2022-issue-no.21/the-causes-and-consequences-of-the-ukraine-war>.
- NATO. (n. d). Retrieved April 28, 2025.
https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm
- NATO. (n.d). Retrieved April 28, 2025. <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/index.htm>
- Olga Brusylovska, and Iryna Maksymenko. *Analysis of the media discourse on the 2022 war in Ukraine: The case of Russia. (Regional Science Policy & Practice, 2023)*.
- Oliver, M. B., Raney, A. A., & Bryant, J. (Eds.). (2020). *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Olmastroni, F. (2014). *Framing War: Public Opinion and Decision-Making in Comparative Perspective*. Routledge.
- Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. (n.d.). Home. OPEC.
<https://www.opec.org/>
- Said, E. W. (1981). *Covering Islam: How the Media and Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. Random House.
- Shreim, N. (2012). *War In Gaza: A Cross-Cultural Analysis Of News Reporting And Reception*. (Doctoral dissertation, Loughborough University).
- Sky News. *What happened during the Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023 | Israel-Hamas war* [Video]. YouTube. (2023, October 7)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkZ8AOUqWU0>

- Tewksbury, D., & Scheufele, D. A. (2019). *Media Effects: News Framing Theory and Research*. In M. B. Oliver, A. A. Raney, & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- TRT World. (2018, May 14). *The Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and Nakba explained* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTMRMX7Pw5U>
- TRT World. *A Brief History of the Israeli Occupation of Palestine*. Accessed April 28, 2025. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/a-brief-history-of-the-israeli-occupation-of-palestine-12733173>
- Vultee, F. (2022). *A Media Framing Approach to Securitisation: Storytelling in Conflict, crisis and threat*. Routledge.
- White, R. A. (1997). *Religion And Media. Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, 23, 37.
- Wimmer Roger and Joseph Dominick. (2011). *Mass Media Research*. Wadsworth.
- Woodlock, R., Loewenstein, A., Caro, J., & Smart, S. "Doesn't Religion Cause Most of the Conflict in the World?" The Guardian (2019, February 17) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jul/02/religion-wars-conflict>

Appendix

Coding sheet

- Q. What is the name of the news channel?
- France 24
- Q. Which war does the news channel cover?
- Hamas-Israel
 - Ukraine-Russia
- Q. What is the source (link)?
- Q. What is the date of broadcasting the video on the website?
- Q. What is the video title?
- Q. What is the Heading inside the video?

Q. What are the subheadings?

Q. What is the cover photo of the video?

Conceptual definitions of frames (choose the frame that applies using the definitions as a guide)

Religious: information on how an event aligns with religious teachings, portrays actors as good or evil based on faith-based standards, or draws on religious authority to legitimise certain viewpoints

Geopolitical: information on the struggle over hegemony in places and spaces. As a theoretical concept, located between geography and political sciences, it is contested because of its connections to colonial and imperial thinking and particularly due to its use in Nazi Germany.

Humanitarian frame: information on a broad dedication to and belief in the fundamental value of human life. It is a systemic response to crisis, conflict, natural disaster, epidemic, and famine. The focus in these disasters is on the immediate need of assistance or protection.

Conflict frame: information on an active disagreement with opposing opinions or principles, in the research case, between nations. It also refers to situations, needs, beliefs, and facts that cannot coexist.

Q. Which frames are present in the video?

- Religious
- Geopolitical
- Humanitarian
- Conflict

Q. After selecting the frame, which words are present in the video? (Yes and No)

Attack, invasion, war, offensive

- Yes
- No

Terrorism, fundamentalism, fanaticism, jihad, Islamism

- Yes
- No

NATO expansion

- Yes
- No

Special (inevitable) war (operation) to save people

- Yes
- No

Refugees

- Yes
- No

Antisemitism, anti-Jews, holocaust

- Yes
- No

We must support, we stand with

- Yes
- No

With open arms, in solidarity

- Yes
- No

War on terror

- Yes
- No

ISIS

- Yes
- No

Qatar, Iran, Hezbollah, Houthi, planning or supporting

- Yes
- No

Shia project, Shia expansion

- Yes
- No

Using women and children as human shields

- Yes
- No

September 11th

- Yes
- No

Footage of religious symbols?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what are the symbol/s? (Short answer text)

Are there sources appearing or being referred to in the video?

- Yes
- No

What are the sources?

Which side of the war does the source present?

- Hamas
- Israel
- Ukraine
- Russia

Is there a logo from a quoted source or analyst?

- Yes
- No

What is the logo or symbol? (Short answer text)

What is the length of the video? (Short answer text)

