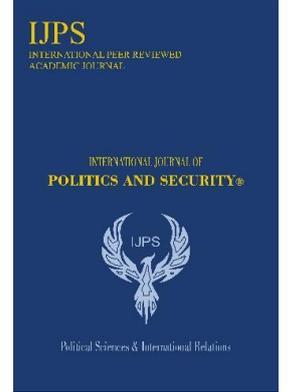


## International Journal of Politics and Security (IJPS)

ISSN: 2667-8268

<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/ijps>



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### Countering Psychological Operations and Deceptions that Indoctrinate Anti-Islam Hate and Violence

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**Source:** International Journal of Politics and Security (IJPS) / Vol. 2 / No. 5 / Oct. 2020, pp.94-126

**Received Date** : 23.04.2020

**Accepted Date** : 07.09.2020

#### How to cite this article:

Firinci, Yusuf. "Countering Psychological Operations and Deceptions That Indoctrinate Anti-Islam Hate and Violence". *International Journal of Politics and Security (IJPS)*, Vol. 2, No. 5, 2020, pp.94-126

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## Countering Psychological Operations and Deceptions that Indoctrinate Anti-Islam Hate and Violence

Yusuf FIRINCI\*

### Abstract

*This research article examines the connection between anti-Islam indoctrinations, pseudo-reality construction using engineered misinformation, and ideological aggressions resulting in crimes against Muslims such as massacres with anti-Islam media and internet networks. It can be argued that various kinds of education strategies on indoctrinations of various topics such as nationalism, conservatism, or extremist ideologies resulting in terrorism can be designed, constructed, and transferred by creating fictions, engineered-informations, and pseudo-realities within the digital cyberspace.*

*Today, it can be argued that the internet is a secret weapon, and some institutions very well discovered how to use it on the psychological front. This article suggests that the misinformants must be warned and educated, whereas manipulators and disinformants must be prevented, to save innocent people. This research analyzed the influence, deception, and indoctrination strategies by utilizing critical discourse analysis methods, such as Ideological Square Model developed by Teun A. Van Dijk. The essential steps of possible counter psychological indoctrinations are briefly illustrated.*

**Key Words:** Manipulation, Disinformation, Psychological Operations, Anti-Islam Violence, Critical Discourse Analysis.

## İslam Karşıtı Nefreti ve Şiddeti Telkin Eden Aldatma ve Psikolojik Operasyonlara Karşı Koyma

### Özet

*Bu araştırma makalesi Müslümanlara karşı katliamlar gibi suçlara neden olan anti-İslam telkinleri, yanlış bilgiler ile tasarlanmış düzmece gerçeklik inşaları, ideolojik saldırganlıklar ile anti-Islam medya ve internet ağları arasındaki bağları inceler.*

*Dijital siber alemde; kurgular, tasarlanmış bilgiler, sahte gerçeklikler yaratmak suretiyle, milliyetçilik, muhafazakarlık veya terörizme yol açabilen aşırı ideolojiler gibi çeşitli konularda telkinler üzerine çeşitli eğitim stratejilerinin dizayn, inşa ve transfer edilebileceği iddia edilebilir.*

*Günümüzde internetin gizli bir silah olduğu ve bazı kurumların bunun psikoloji cephesinde nasıl kullanılacağını çok iyi keşfettikleri iddia edilebilir. Bu makale masum insanların korunması için; yanlış bilgi yayınların uyarılması ve eğitilmesini, diğer taraftan dezenformasyon ve manipülasyon kaynaklarının ise önlenmesini önermektedir.*

*Bu araştırma Teun A. Van Dijk tarafından geliştirilen İdeolojik Yerleştirme Modeli gibi eleştirel kavram analiz metodlarını kullanmak suretiyle tesir, aldatma ve aşılama stratejilerini analiz etmiştir. Gerekli karşı psikolojik tesirlerin temel basamakları kısaca tasvir edilmiştir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Manipülasyon, Dezenformasyon, Psikolojik Operasyonlar, Anti-İslam Şiddet, Eleştirel Kavram Analizi

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## 1. Introduction

Hate crimes against the Muslims have been fueled since the various levels of media and populist politicians around globe have been pumping misinformation and disinformation against Islam and Muslim immigrants from invaded or conflict infected post-colonial countries of Muslim populations. In some cases, right-wing populism results in islamophobia which results anti-Muslim hate. Islamophobia can be defined as a modern word for a prejudice that dates back to the Middle Ages and “it refers to the fear of and hostility toward Muslims and Islam, as well as the discriminatory, exclusionary, and violent practices arising from these attitudes that target Muslims and those perceived as Muslims”.<sup>1</sup>

Islamophobia and some of the anti-Islamic narrations may result in hate crimes, violence or even terrorist ideologies and terrorist attacks. Hate crimes can be defined as “criminal acts motivated by bias or prejudice towards particular groups of people”.<sup>2</sup> Hate crimes may be fueled or prevented by using perception management strategies. Perception management aims to shape “the attitudes of people, whether domestic publics, the ‘global’ public, or audiences within conflict zones”.<sup>3</sup> This research paper focuses on prevention of islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims by prevention of destructive perception management strategies and promotion of peaceful perception management policies.

According to Haig & Hajdu,<sup>4</sup> in hybrid warfare, the frontiers between enemies blurs, the boundary between soldiers and civilians vanish, non-state actors seem like combatants whereas every conflicts within the cognitive space require a solution again within the cognitive space.

As if a combatant of a hybrid anti-Muslim warfare, recently an anti-Muslim terrorist from Australia, who have been announcing his hate freely on internet, had attacked two

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<sup>1</sup>Todd Green, “Islamophobia,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (2019), <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-685>, (05.09.2020).

<sup>2</sup>OSCE Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Preventing and Responding to Hate Crimes*, (Warsaw, 2009): 15.

<sup>3</sup>Piers Robinson, “News Media, Communications, and the Limits of Perception Management and Propaganda during Military Operations” in *At the End of Military Intervention: Historical, Theoretical and Applied Approaches to Transition, Handover, and Withdrawal*, eds. Robert Johnson and Timothy Clack (Oxford University Press, 2015), 273.

<sup>4</sup>Zsolt Haig and Veronica Hajdu, “New Ways In The Cognitive Dimension Of Information Operations,” *Land Forces Academy Review* 22, no. 2 (2017): 95.



mosques in New Zealand and murdered in cold blood 51 innocents people while they were praying.

Interestingly, before the attack, the terrorist, identifying himself as fascist and ‘European-blood’ published an anti-Muslim manifesto titled *The Great Replacement*, and during his raid, he streamed live online via social media. What more important and related to the topic of this essay is the fact that the anti-Islam terrorist declared in his manifest that he received/researched/developed his beliefs by using internet. This research article illustrates the connection between anti-Islam indoctrinations resulting in monstrous terrorist acts and global and local anti-Islam and anti-Muslim media and internet networks.

Many commentators stated that seeming like a computer game, the video of the Christchurch mosque massacre gave other online fascists the message that, by opening fire on perceived enemies, they too could become the main player and not a non-player character.<sup>5</sup> Online communities may pose great threat to civilization when these groups are used for indoctrinating hate and violence.

Inspired by Jacques Lacan’s statement as: “truth is structured like a fiction”,<sup>6</sup> Al-Zaman<sup>7</sup> argues that the digital cyberspace provides a world of “pseudo-reality” and any wrongdoer information-holder will misguide people with the “engineered information”. He also emphasizes that the digital dis-informants construct incorrect stories deliberately in a fictional style to attract more attention. Considering these findings, it can be argued that various kinds of education strategies on indoctrination of various phenomena such as nationalism, conservatism, cultural/historical stories or extremist ideologies resulting in terrorism can be designed, constructed and transferred by creating fictions, engineered-informations and pseudo-realities within the digital cyberspace.

In this respect, a reminder about the roles of human communication will be inspiring. Melvin L Defleur describes human communication, the basis for group norms, as the means by which social control is exercised, roles are assigned, organization of effort is accomplished,

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<sup>5</sup>Jeff Sparrow, “What Induces Men to Imitate the Christchurch Massacre?” *The Guardian* (2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/05/what-induces-men-to-imitate-the-christchurch-massacre> (19.03.2020).

<sup>6</sup>Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications 1977), 306, quoted in Sayeed Al-Zaman, “Digital Disinformation and Communalism in Bangladesh,” *China Media Research* 15, no. 2 (2019): 68-76.

<sup>7</sup>Sayeed Al-Zaman, “Digital Disinformation and Communalism in Bangladesh,” *China Media Research* 15, no. 2 (2019): 68-76.



expectations are made obvious, and the social operation is carried on.<sup>8</sup> Considering this fact, governments and citizens must be well aware of the functions of communication strategies, social control tactics and social operations.

## 2. Lessons from Brief Historical Facts

Whether in the forms of misinformation or in the forms of global/glocal disinformation campaigns, the wrong accusations and misinformation policies regarding Islam have been toxicating the hearts and minds of peoples, both Muslim and non-Muslims, all around globe intensely.

Psychological operations are defined as: “planned activities using methods of communication and other means directed at approved audiences in order to influence perceptions, attitudes and behavior, affecting the achievement of political and military objectives”.<sup>9</sup> Hostile psychological operations must be confronted and prevented by counter psychological operations.

The foundational article Psychological Warfare, written by Office of War Information veteran Paul Linebarger (1948) stated that the very first case of psychological warfare can be the Gideon’s deception against the Midianites in the Old Testament.<sup>10</sup> Whereas Alexander the Great is also accepted as one of the developers of psychological methods and the hidden cause of many of his victories and his practices were:

- a) *“Maintain good relations with pacifist elements within neighbouring people in order to take advantage of favourable opinions and sentiments.*
- b) *Use secret agents to infiltrate and spread rumours and news.*
- c) *In moments of crisis, bury the enemy — with public opinion — under an avalanche of information, true or false, that can produce concern, demoralisation and chaos.”<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup>Melvin L. Defleur, *Theories of Mass Communication*, (New York: David McKay, 1966), quoted in Sunil Narula, “Psychological Operations (PSYOPs): A conceptual Overview,” *Strategic Analysis* 28, no.1 (2004):189.

<sup>9</sup>NATO AJP-3.10.1 *Allied Joint Doctrine For Psychological Operations*, Edition BO Peracje psychologiczne (2010) DD/3.10.1 (A), (2014) Sztab. Gen., op. cit., p. 14. Warszawa, quoted in Zsolt Haig and Veronica Hajdu, “New Ways in The Cognitive Dimension of Information Operations,” *Land Forces Academy Review* 22, no. 2 (2017): 96.

<sup>10</sup>Paul Linebarger, *Psychological Warfare*, (Oxford: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), quoted in Jeffrey Whyte, “A New Geography of Defense: The Birth of Psychological Warfare,” *Political Geography* 67 (2018): 32.

<sup>11</sup>Sunil Narula, “Psychological Operations (PSYOPs): A conceptual Overview,” *Strategic Analysis* 28, no. 1 (2004): 180.



When we look into 20<sup>th</sup> century, in 1918, Britain assigned Lord Beaverbrook, owner of *The Daily Express*, as the first head of Ministry of Information to control home and allied morale through propaganda whereas the owner of *The Daily Mail* and *The Times*, Lord Northcliffe was assigned as the head of The Enemy Propaganda Department to conduct practices that today are called psychological operations.<sup>12</sup> After the end of Great War, Lord Northcliffe suggested that good propaganda presumably saved Britain and its allies a year of war and a million lives.<sup>13</sup> It is evident that psychological operations have been utilized very effectively by some strategists.

University of Chicago's radio program director Sherman Dryer,<sup>14</sup> (1942), argued that “radio is a secret weapon. The secret is how to use it as a weapon ... For all the ballyhoo about the power of radio on the psychological front,” Dryer<sup>15</sup> demurred, “we still have not discovered that secret, nor has any other country”. Today, it can be argued that internet is the secret weapon and some groups/agencies very well discovered how to use it on the psychological front.

Whereas regarding psychological warfare, in his work titled *The Strategy of Terror*, Edmond Taylor (1940) stated that “*the battlefield of the mind, where ideas and ideologies, propaganda and emotions, clash in ordered ranks, disciplined like soldiers. The war never ends. It was raging before the first gun spoke*”.<sup>16</sup> It can be argued that the studies on and utilization of psychological warfare have been continuously evolving since the known history and the clash of disciplined ideas, disciplined ideologies and emotions never ends in the battlefields of minds.

During Vietnam War, United States Psychological Operations leaflets from 1968 entitled “Freedom of Religion” promoted the idea of “South Vietnamese enjoy freedom of religion. All religions are developed beautifully”.<sup>17</sup> Considering this example, this article also

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<sup>12</sup>Phillip Taylor, “Munitions of the Mind: A Brief History of Military Psychological Operations,” *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 3, no.3 (2007): 198.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Sherman Dryer, *Radio in Wartime*, (New York: Greenberg, 1942), 36, quoted in Jeffrey Whyte, “A New Geography of Defense: The Birth of Psychological Warfare,” *Political Geography* 67, (2018): 41.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Edmond Taylor, *The Strategy of Terror: Europe's Inner Front*, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1940), 2, quoted in Jeffrey Whyte, “A New Geography of Defense: The Birth of Psychological Warfare,” *Political Geography* 67, (2018): 36.

<sup>17</sup>Marcin Górniewicz, “Evolution of the US PSYOP Products’ Effectiveness during Vietnam War 1965-1969,” *Security and Defence Quarterly* 1, no. 2, (2013): 114.



suggests prevention of false extremist indoctrination against Islam and suggests constructing positive approaches regarding information operations on Islam.

### 3. Some of the Theoretical Tools

Surely, information operations, psychological operations and similar fields have been the main focus points of social psychology and neuroscience. Social psychologists already discovered that when people interact, they are inclined to imitate each other's expressions, actions and they tend to deduce each other's emotions & intentions which can be related to neuroscientific discovery of mirror neurons.<sup>18</sup> Also, according to the social brain concept, sensitivity to the emotions and intentions of others allow persons to engage in shared agendas such as jointly activating the practical cycles of planning, acting, reflecting, and re-planning to solve problems and also constructing new collective understandings which can be defined as inter-thinking.<sup>19</sup> It can be argued that psychological operations and warfare strategists utilize the psychological science to reach maximum effects. Countering psychological operations also requires depth in knowledge of psychological science.

Also, constructivist theories can be utilized to understand how the learners construct their knowledge. According to Jean Piaget's cognitive constructivism, knowledge is constructed in the learner's mind while the person is organizing his/her experiences & cognitive structures and cognitive constructivism can be utilized to analyze how the individual understand things in developmental stages and learning styles.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand According to Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism, knowledge is constructed via social, cultural interactions and social constructivism can be utilized to analyze how meaning and understanding grow out of social encounters.<sup>21</sup> Discourses, rhetorics, various information operations can both be designed or analyzed by using constructivist theories.

Evaluating the influence strategies by media may include evaluating the narration of news and stories by examining what part of the story is written and by examining what part of the story is left out. Thomas Huckin's (2002) 'manipulative silences framework' is about

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<sup>18</sup>Neil Mercer, "Education and the Social Brain: Linking Language, Thinking, Teaching and Learning," *Éducation and Didactique* 10, no. 2 (2016): 9-24.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Khadija Kouicem and Kelkoul Nachoua, "Constructivist Theories of Piaget and Vygotsky: General Teaching Implications," *University of Eloued DSpace*, 64-75, <http://dspace.univ-eloued.dz/handle/123456789/2775> (22.04.2020).

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.



covering relevant information deliberately from the reader or listener to the advantage of the writer or speaker.<sup>22</sup> McLaren & Patil<sup>23</sup> applied the ‘manipulative silences framework’ in media discourse analysis and argued that media’s discursive tools, to influence the public mind, existed in both what is written in text and what has been left out (silences). This dimension of deliberate information silencing can be useful in understanding some of the basics of the media strategies.

Considering the scope of this research paper, the critical discourse analysis methods can be relevant and beneficial for analysing the psychological indoctrinations and operations. Our main instrument may be utilization of methods that focus on manipulation of discourses. Internet and in general, cyberspace have been functioning as an arena of manipulation of discourses whether in the form of information warfare or in the form of psychological operations.

Manipulation is a social practice of power abuse which involves controlling people’s knowledge, opinions and beliefs, and manipulative discourse typically exists in mass communication controlled by dominant political, bureaucratic, media, academic or corporate elites.<sup>24</sup> Manipulative discourses regarding this research paper are constructed mostly within the forms of representation of the self in positive discourses and representation of the others within negative discourses.

The Ideological Square Model, developed by Teun A. Van Dijk can be used in this research because it specifically focuses upon the polarizing macro strategy of ‘positive self-representation and negative other-representation.’<sup>25</sup> According to Dijk’s macro-analysis, four basic strategies are used to legitimize the self and de-legitimize the other:

- a) “Emphasize positive things about ‘us’;
- b) Emphasize negative things about ‘them’;
- c) De-emphasize negative things about ‘us’; and.

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<sup>22</sup>Thomas Huckin, “Textual Silence and the Discourse of Homelessness,” *Discourse & Society* 13, (2002): 347-72, quoted in Helen Jacqueline McLaren and Tejaswini Vishwanath Patil, “Manipulative Silences and the Politics of Representation of Boat Children in Australian Print Media,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 30, (2016): 602–12.

<sup>23</sup>Helen Jacqueline McLaren and Tejaswini Vishwanath Patil, “Manipulative Silences and the Politics of Representation of Boat Children in Australian Print Media,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 30, (2016): 602–12.

<sup>24</sup>Teun A. van Dijk, “Discourse and Manipulation,” *Discourse & Society* 17, no. 2 (2006): 359–383.

<sup>25</sup>Mohsin Hasan Khan et al. “Muslims’ Representation in Donald Trump’s Anti-Muslim-Islam Statement: A Critical Discourse Analysis,” *Religions* 10, no. 115 (2019):1-16.



d) De-emphasize positive things about ‘them’”.<sup>26</sup>

However the Dijk’s micro level analysis includes rhetorical discursive strategies such as: “Actor description, authority, burden, categorization, comparison, consensus, counterfactual, disclaimer, euphemism, evidentiality, argumentation, illustration/example, generalization, hyperbole, implication, irony, lexicalization, metaphor, national self-glorification, norm expression, number game, polarization (us-them), populism, presupposition, vagueness, and victimization.”<sup>27</sup>

These macro and micro level discourse analysis methods are relevant in our quest to understand and interpret the manipulative, polarizing information operations and psychological influencing indoctrinations.

On the other hand, there are various theories that can either be utilized to construct or deconstruct strategies behind psychological operations such as manipulation. For example, a recent theory of deceptive discourse production : Information Manipulation Theory 2 explains deception as involving the covert manipulation of information through various dimensions and as a contextual problem-solving exercise directed by the thirst for fast, effective and practicable communicative solutions.<sup>28</sup> Information Manipulation Theory 2 is built upon synthesizing literatures such as cognitive neuroscience, linguistics, artificial intelligence and speech production.<sup>29</sup> This kind of theories may also be instrumentalized to further our understanding about manipulation, but due to the scope of this research paper, only critical discourse analysis methods will be utilized.

#### **4. Cyberspace, Influence, Indoctrination**

The capability of social media to influence people’s minds and also subconscious sphere may transform the individual in the form of zombification and wide ranges of manipulative techniques such as; information overload, substitution or rewriting history, use of 25<sup>th</sup> frame technology to hide the fact of information-psychological influence.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Teun A. Van Dijk, *Politics, Ideology and Discourse*, Elsevier, quoted in Mohsin Hasan Khan et al. “Muslims’ Representation in Donald Trump’s Anti-Muslim-Islam Statement: A Critical Discourse Analysis,” *Religions*10, no. 115 (2019): 6.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Steven A McCornack et al. “Information Manipulation Theory 2: A Propositional Theory of Deceptive Discourse Production,” *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, (2014): 1-30.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Yuriy Danyk and Serhii Hudz, “Special Operations for Disruption of State and Military Control System Security and Military Control System,” *Security & Defense Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (2015): 51.



To prevent and counter the spread of cyberspace toxic information that cause Anti-Muslim hate crimes and terrorism, this research suggest to develop and instrumentalize counter-information operations and counter-psychological operations against these sources of extremisms.

Misinformation is described as false information disseminated by the persons believing that it is true, whereas disinformation is described as false information disseminated by the persons knowing that it is false, put it simply, disinformation is deliberate, intentional lie by malicious actors.<sup>31</sup> Whereas black propaganda is described as the false information and material seeming to be from a source on one side of a conflict, but is actually from the opposing party which is typically practised to vilify, shame or misrepresent the opponent.<sup>32</sup> The misinformants must be warned and educated, whereas disinformants must be prevented to save innocent people. The institutional level misinformation or disinformation must be classified into various categories such as global disinformation operations, and must be prevented by using international cooperation strategies such as naming and shaming.

Deception is one of the most important components of psychological operations. NATO definition of deception is: “Those measures designed to mislead the enemy by manipulation, distortion or falsification of evidence to induce him to react in manner prejudicial to his interests.”<sup>33</sup>

To achieve this target, essentials of psychological operations may be utilized. Polish national doctrinal document may provide inspiration to construct counter psychological operations against anti-Islamic information operations. The essential steps of possible counter psychological operations doctrinations may be defined as:

- a) “Weakening of the will to act and the aggressive intentions of the opposite or potentially opposite target audiences;
- b) Strengthening the commitment and support from friendly target audiences;

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<sup>31</sup>Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, “Thinking About ‘Information Disorder’: Forms of Misinformation, Disinformation and Mal-information,” in *Journalism, ‘Fake News’ & Disinformation, Handbook for Journalism Education and Training*, eds. C. Ireton and Julie Posetti, (UNESCO Series on Journalism Education, 2018): 43-54, <https://bit.ly/2MuELY5> (30.06.2019).

<sup>32</sup>Leonard W. Doob, “Gobbels’ Principles of Nazi Propaganda,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1950): 419-442, quoted in Marcin Górnikiewicz, “Evolution of The US PSYOP Products’ Effectiveness during Vietnam War 1965 – 1969”, *Security and Defence Quarterly* 1, no. 2, (2013): 124.

<sup>33</sup>Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej *Operacje Informacyjne : DD-3.10(A)*, (Centrum Doktryn I Szkolenia Sił Zbrojnych, 2017), quoted in Zibigniew Modrzejewski, “Informační Operace Z Polské Perspektivy, Information Operations from the Polish Point of View,” (2018): 126, 127.



c) Obtaining support and cooperation from uncommitted or undecided communities”.<sup>34</sup>

These strategies may assist any institution or authority which aims to counter anti-Islam information operations or anti-Islam extremist thinking.

Whereas regarding terrorist group divisions, the use of divisive propaganda in psychological operations could include fabrication of information or correspondence ‘on behalf of’ targeted organisations or persons designed to misrepresent them and also it should be emphasized that ethical issues of PSYOP must be recognized when *agents provocateurs* are encouraged to carry out acts of violence.<sup>35</sup> Governments and institutions must take precautions and all citizens must be informed, prior to possible plots of provocateurs.

The targets of psychological operations or psychological warfare may support hidden agendas. For example, the main goal of psychological warfare may include objectives such as “...making the opponent’s military and civil population support the attacker to the detriment of their own government and country”.<sup>36</sup> Regarding psychological operations in the field of information on religion; the hidden agenda strategies may include making the citizens of a country or the members of a religion to support the attacker to the detriment of their own values, cultures and religion. One crucial kind of misinformation or deception may be the ones, that are designed by using some of the so-called ‘reformers’ or some of the so-called ‘modernists’. Some of the modernists might had sincere and loyal thoughts for the progress of their communities but some might had been misinformed. For example, the co-founder of Singapore reformist journal *al-Imam*, Sayed al-Hadi (1867-1934), went so far as to praise British colonizers in his country as God’s ‘righteous servants’.<sup>37</sup> Also, it was recently revealed that a so-called activist, who claims to be a defender of Muslim women rights and, who writes on the

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<sup>34</sup>Zibigniew Modrzejewski, “Psychological operations After the Second World War,” *Security and Defence Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (2016): 74-99.

<sup>35</sup>George Garner, “Case Studies in Exploiting Terrorist Group Divisions with Disinformation and Divisive/Black Propaganda,” *Journal of Terrorism Research* 1, no. 1 (2010): 11, 12.

<sup>36</sup>Janis Berzins, “Russia’s New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defence Policy,” *National Defence Academy of Latvia, Center for Security and Strategic Research*, <http://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Russia%E2%80%99s-New-Generation-Warfare-in-Ukraine%3A-for-B%C4%93rzi%C5%86%C5%A1/20509c9769cfc7920908f7b7e959ecd43ca2f4> (22.04.2020), quoted in Tomáš Čížik, “Baltic States - How to React to “New Warfare” in the Context of the Article V?,” *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences* 17, no. 2 (2017): 189.

<sup>37</sup>Charles Kurzman, “The Modernist Islamic Movement,” in *Modernist Islam 1840-1940*, ed. Charles Kurzman, (Oxford University Press, 2002): 3-27.



so-called need of Islam for reformation is not a mere critic of Islam but a cheerleader, labelling Islam ‘a destructive, nihilistic cult of death’ that must be ‘crushed’.<sup>38</sup>

Today, it is an undeniable fact that psychological operations are increasingly using cyberspace and related fields. Accordingly, network warfare entails manipulating or degrading the information networks of the adversaries whereas the strategies for attacks may include; denying, disrupting, degrading, stealing, exploiting, intercepting, modifying, corrupting the information to change the perceptions of peoples towards the information.<sup>39</sup> Regarding religion, especially thinking on Islam, it can be argued that it becomes harder to reach true information and reliable sources due to these kinds of manipulative, degrading, modifying information attacks.

In their article, illustrating how misinformation can pave the way for brutal conflicts and how refutation of misinformation can be instrumental in peace, Lewandowsky et al.<sup>40</sup> argue that; cognitive tools such as framing a conflict or designing narratives, facilitate communication even if they emphasize facts unevenly and popular narratives within the United States, leading up to Iraq War of 2003 helped the distribution of misinformation, some of which has been resilient to correction for up to a decade.

Almost immediately after the 9/11 attacks, American president Bush framed American response within a metaphor of war between civilization and barbarism within ‘Global War on Terror’ label and this simplistic ingroup-outgroup conflict framing highlighted United States as a good Christian nation while feeding a culture of fear of Islam with the help of most of the media coverages.<sup>41</sup> According to a UN report, the invasion caused more than 32000 civiliandeaths and according to another institution, 58000 security personnel and 42000 opposition combatants were killed during the invasion.<sup>42</sup> Whereas in 2001, during the very early days of bombings, the Taliban leadership was ready to discuss handing over Osama bin Laden to a neutral country if the US had stopped the bombing of Afghanistan but US rejected Taliban’s

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<sup>38</sup>Azeezah Kanji, “Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Brett Kavanaugh, and Imperial Feminism,” *Aljazeera*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indephpt/opinion/ayaan-hirsi-ali-brett-kavanaugh-imperial-feminism-181004212426518.html> (22.03.2020).

<sup>39</sup>Brett Van Niekerk and Manoj S. Maharaj, “The Information Warfare Life Cycle Model,” *SA Journal of Information Management* 13, no. 1 (2011): 2.

<sup>40</sup>Stephan Lewandowsky et al. “Misinformation, Disinformation, and Violent Conflict, From Iraq and the ‘War on Terror’ to Future Threats to Peace,” *American Psychologist Association* 68, no. 7 (2013): 488.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid. 489, 490.

<sup>42</sup>British Broadcasting Company (BBC a), “Afghan Conflict: US and Taliban Sign Deal to End 18-Year War”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51689443> (01.03.2020).



offer.<sup>43</sup>The roles of national and global media have always been important. For example one week before the 2004 elections in U.S., terrorist Osama bin Laden's threatening speeches were disseminated via American and global media and these broadcastings by instilling fear during this crucial time allegedly affected American election results.<sup>44</sup>

Interestingly, even though American psychological operations doctrine strictly orders to target only non-U.S. citizens since U.S. laws prohibit the implementation of military operations on civilian populations, a Defense Department document illustrated that psychological war has been transmitted to U.S. audiences and Tyler Wall<sup>45</sup> (2010) argues that this militarization of U.S. citizens by psychological war tactics to construct approval for war and to impose a 'military definition of reality' is equally concerned with executing imperial fantasies such as having power over foreign territories, ideas and also bodies through practices of violence and subjugation.

## **5. Cloaked Social Media Channels as the Agents of Deception and Psychological Warfare**

One of the known covert operations within the history of false-flag manipulations may be the Lavon Affair, named after Israel's one of the former minister of defense, Pinhas Lavon. This false flag operation was aiming to organize bombings of Western and Egyptian institutions in Egypt by activating a sleeper cell of Israeli Military Intelligence while the blame was planned to be put on members of the groups such as Muslim Brotherhood or the Communist Party.<sup>46</sup> False-flag operations can be defined as strategies designed to discredit opponents or enemies by putting the blame of various crimes and accusations that are covertly prepared by the strategists themselves. Cloaked media operations can be defined as one of the kinds of covert operations or false-flag manipulations.

Similarly, some government covert operations such as US Federal Bureau of Investigation's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) may include psychological targets. COINTELPRO covert operations under the official label took place between 1956 and

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<sup>43</sup>The Guardian. "Bush Rejects Taliban Offer to Hand Bin Laden Over," (2001) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/14/afghanistan.terrorism5> (01.03.2020).

<sup>44</sup>Zohar Kampf, "Rhetorical Bypasses: Connecting with the Hearts and Minds of People on the Opponent's Side," *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 11, no. 2 (2016): 154.

<sup>45</sup>Tyler Wall, "U.S. Psychological Warfare and Civilian Targeting," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 22, (2010): 288–294.

<sup>46</sup>Leonard Weiss, "The Lavon Affair: How a False-Flag Operation Led to War and the Israeli Bomb," Sage, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 69, no.4 (2016): 58.



1971 but “COINTELPRO tactics are still used to this day and have been alleged to include discrediting targets through psychological warfare; smearing individuals and groups using forged documents and by planting false reports in the media; harassment; wrong imprisonment; and illegal violence including assassination”.<sup>47</sup>

Living within the information warfare era, media plays crucial role in influencing masses. Various interest groups or institutions, political parties or state agencies have sometimes been using covert media operations to discredit their opponents and to indoctrinate anti-Muslim sentiments. Carefully designed fake Muslim profile comments have sometimes been serving affectively to spread anti-Muslim hate, such as:

*“Alhamdulillah. We take over Denmark and you kuffars [infidels] can’t even stop us. We transform shitty Denmark into an Islamic state and this will happen before your eyes, and you can’t do a thing about it. Your churches will be turned into mosques, your whore women will be fucked and used by us Muslims to make our babies, we take your money that you work 7 to 5 to earn while we Muslims live in luxury, your food will become halal and your laws will be sharia and what are you going to do about it? NOTHING!”<sup>48</sup>(Islam: The Religion of Peace, [fake] Facebook Post)*

Based on discourse analysis methods, it can be argued that the message above, clearly illustrates rhetorical discursive strategies such as: emphasizing negative thing about ‘them’, outgroup actor description in a negative way, victimization, using counterfactuals, touching the feelings of target audience, categorization, comparison and hyperbole.

Fake Muslim Facebook pages are designed to construct *platformed antagonism* with illustrations such as ‘the barbaric Muslim’ against ‘the civilized Dane’ and ‘the naïve Dane’ unable to understand that the Muslim conspiracy happening ‘in front of their very eyes’.<sup>49</sup> For instance, a post of a social media profile, can be presented as an example:

*“LOL, people write tomesaying that Muslims won’t take over Denmark, but just look around you!! You can’t pretend it’s not already happening, while the food you eat is halal. While you’re cheap women are having sex with Muslim men. While we take your money and apartments. While churches are torn down and Mosques are built.”<sup>50</sup> (Ali El-Yussuf, 4 June 2015, Facebook Post,).*

<sup>47</sup>Wikipedia, “COINTELPRO” (2020), <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/COINTELPRO> (20.03.2020).

<sup>48</sup>Johan Farkas, Jannick Schou and Christina Neumayer, “Cloaked Facebook Pages: Exploringfake Islamist Propaganda in Social Media,” *New Media & Society* 20, no. 5 (2018):1850, 1851.

<sup>49</sup>Johan Farkas, Jannick Schou and Christina Neumayer, “Platformed Antagonism: Racist Discourses on Fake Muslim Facebook Pages,” *Critical Discourse Studies* 15, no. 5 (2018): 463-480.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid. 472.



Discourse analysis methods can help us identify that the message above was constructed with rhetorical discursive strategies such as: actor description, categorization, victimization, evidentiality, hyperbole, using counterfactuals, touching the feelings of target audience.

It is also an undeniable fact that anti-Islam user comments may also fuel antagonisms. The media user comments may serve as destructive as fake profile comments that these anti-Islam comments make readers think that some of these user profiles are also designed to fuel and spread constructed hate.

By using Essex School of discourse analysis, Farkas et al.<sup>51</sup> analysed 77 social media posts together with 21.739 user comments, and they found out that comments from social media users attached a crucial, extra layer to the construction of aggression and hostility by actualizing the enemy of the political identity of ‘Muslims’, as designed by the social media pages.

Cloaked social media profiles named such as Mohammed El-Sayed, Fatima El-Mohammed and Zahra Al-Sayed deceived thousands of Danish social media users and some of these users supported a dominant anti-Muslim narratives as a result of posts such as:<sup>52</sup>

*“We Muslims have come here to stay. We have not come here for peace but to take over your shitty infidel country. But of course we can’t take over the country right away so we wait. While we Muslims wait, we take your money, houses, we fuck your cheap women and exploit them to make our babies, exploit your educational system so we Muslims can use it against you infidel pigs. These things happen before your very eyes and you infidel pigs can’t do a thing about it 😊. You infidel pigs are afraid of us Muslims because Allah (swt) has given us the strength for it. Just you wait until we Muslims have you infidel pigs removed under sharia law. Takbir! Allahu Akbar! P.S my imam is an ethnic Dane.”<sup>53</sup> (Mohammed El-Sayed, Facebook post, 30 June 2015).*

Discourse analysis methods can help us identify that the message above was constructed with rhetorical discursive strategies such as: emphasize positive things about ‘us’, presupposition, emphasize negative things about ‘them’, actor description, categorization, victimization, hyperbole, using counterfactuals, generalizations, irony, touching the feelings of target audience. One can also find manipulative silencing tactics in this message since the some parts of the story such as hardships of being Muslim or hardships of being foreigner to the culture are omitted.

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid. 467.

<sup>52</sup>Johan, et all. “Cloaked Facebook Pages,”1850-1867.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid. 1859.



Considering the professional construction design in these above mentioned social media posts, it can be argued that these posts seem not to be prepared by random media users. These messages seem to be designed exclusively to fuel hatred by professionals who have expertise in scientific fields such as social psychology, mass communications, and deception and information operations.

One way to detect misinformation, disinformation and deception may be raising awareness on logical fallacies and focusing on sharpening critical thinking skills. Media persuasion and influence can be inspected and controlled if one can develop critical thinking skills and evaluate logical fallacies hidden in information, served. Critical thinkers are advised to check; logical fallacies such as:<sup>54</sup>*Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc* (after, therefore, because of), *Cum Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc* (along with, therefore because of), *Dicto Simpliciter* (sweeping generalization), *Petitio Principii* (begging the question), *Argumentum Ad Hominem* (argument against the man), *Argumentum Ad Verecundiam* (argument to authority), *Argumentum Ad Antiquitatum* (appeal to tradition), *Argumentum Ad Populum* (appeal to public), *Argumentum Ad Numerum* (appeal to numbers), *Tu Quoque* (you too).

Recently, BuzzFeed News research illustrated that “Researchers say Facebook is the primary mainstream platform where extremists organize and anti-Muslim content is deliberately spread”.<sup>55</sup> It is also emphasized that that Facebook’s mysterious algorithm identifies viewers of hate-speech posts and “recommends related groups that can point people to extremism.”<sup>56</sup> Recently Sri Lankan government blamed Facebook of failing to control rampant hate speech that contributed to anti-Muslim riots that left three people dead.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, Chinese state media targeted to cast doubt on human rights violations in Xinjiang Muslim Internment Camps and depict them as just great, via Facebook

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<sup>54</sup>Golden Gate University, “Fake News: Common Logical Fallacies,” <https://ggu.libguides.com/c.php?g=810754&p=5785291> (01.03.2020).

<sup>55</sup>Jane Lytvynenko, “Anti-Muslim Hate Speech Is Absolutely Relentless On Social Media Even As Platforms Crack down on Other Extremist Groups,” *BuzzFedd News*, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/janelytvynenko/islamophobia-absolutely-relentless-social-media> (30.04.2020).

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Michael Safi, “Sri Lanka Accuses Facebook over Hate Speech after Deadly Riots,” *The Guardian* (2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/14/facebook-accused-by-sri-lanka-of-failing-to-control-hate-speech> (01.03.2020).



advertisements.<sup>58</sup> Whereas in 2019, WhatsApp, owned by Facebook was used for spreading of hate speech, disinformation and scary rumors, resulting in violence and deaths in India.<sup>59</sup>

Another social media network with islamophobic hate and disinformation, was subject to a research and the data from the summer and fall of 2018 illustrated that many of the top 100 YouTube videos cited in this social media platform, contained graphic and patently false rumors about Islam and topics such as pedophilia and violence.<sup>60</sup> It can be argued that if some researchers could easily find hate campaigners by simple internet search methods, then the local and international authorities could take necessary actions to prevent the spread of anti-Islam hate and disinformation.

After the devastating terror attacks on mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, some online community networks of the far right extremists self-censored or mass-deleted user comments celebrating the horrific attacks because the administrators of these hate servers feared to be considered as accomplices of the terrorist.<sup>61</sup> But the government authorities or international organizations acted not much active as them, in preventing anti-Muslim hate campaigners.

As a result of various factors such as the desire to gain more acceptability, some of the 'western' online groups today, mostly do not attack Muslims explicitly. It can be argued that most of these kinds of online groups nowadays hide their attacks under the cover topics such as women's rights. Examples of this strategy can be seen in France." Online activities of NGOs such as *Printemps Republicain* (Republican Spring) and *Comité Laïcité République* (Laïcité–Republic Committee) do not attack Muslim people straightforwardly but hide their anti-Muslim

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<sup>58</sup>Ryan Mac, "These New Facebook Ads From Chinese State Media Want You To Believe Xinjiang's Muslim Internment Camps Are Just Great," *BuzzFeed News* (2019), <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ryanmac/chinese-media-facebook-ads-xinjiang-ughur-propaganda> (01.3.2020).

<sup>59</sup>Rohit Chopra, "In India, WhatsApp is a Weapon of Antisocial Hatred," *The Conversation*, <http://theconversation.com/in-india-whatsapp-is-a-weapon-of-antisocial-hatred-115673> (01.03.2020).

<sup>60</sup>Samuel Woolley, Roya Pakzad and Nicholas Monaco, "Incubating Hate: Islamophobia and Gab' Working Paper: Preliminary Research Findings," *The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Digital Innovation and Democracy Initiative* (2019): 1, <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/incubating-hate-islamophobia-and-gab> (30.04.2020).

<sup>61</sup>Keegan Hanks, Caroline Sindors and Unicorn Riot, "Extremists Purge Hateful Messages after Christchurch Massacre," *Hatewatch, The Southern Poverty Law Center*, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/05/09/extremists-purge-hateful-messages-after-christchurch-massacre> (30.04.2020).



racism under the veil of secularism, women's rights, and Jacobin ideology".<sup>62</sup> Raising awareness on these kinds of covert strategies may be very important.

What more unimaginable is that a recent investigation exposed that some of the major charities in USA have been helping anonymous donors to fund millions of dollars for production of anti-Muslim movies?<sup>63</sup> Governments and international organizations can prevent anti-Muslim hate campaigns and related terror attacks by fighting against these kinds of wealthy secret financiers.

Whereas in Germany, a far-right nationalist party, whose platform includes explicit hostility to Islam and Muslims has enjoyed the enthusiastic financial support from an American philanthropist, whose website, spreads endless fake news about the threat of Islam, and spreads false reports of non-European migrants raping German women, migrants bringing deadly infectious diseases into Germany.<sup>64</sup>

Recently in India, coronavirus pandemic fears used to fuel anti-Muslim hate. Videos, falsely claiming to illustrate members of an Indian Muslim group spitting on police and other people, went viral on social media with hastags such as #CoronaJihad, worsening an already dangerous atmosphere for Muslims.<sup>65</sup>

A recent United Nations Human Rights Council report titled: "Report of the Independent Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar" described Facebook as a "useful instrument for those seeking to spread hate".<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, UN seems to fight against extremism, violence, and terrorism, at least theoretically, considering many pages of UN documents such as Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy or resolutions such as A World against Violence and

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<sup>62</sup>Léonard Faytre, "Islamophobia in France: National Report 2019," in *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, eds. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (Istanbul: SETA, 2020), 317.

<sup>63</sup>Alex Kotch, "Exposed: Major Charities Are Helping Anonymous Donors Fund Anti-Muslim Films," *Sludge*, <https://readsludge.com/2019/03/06/exposed-major-charities-are-helping-anonymous-donors-fund-anti-muslim-films/> (22.04.2020).

<sup>64</sup>Jason Hannan, "Trolling ourselves to death? Social media and post-truth Politics," *European Journal of Communication* 33, no.2 (2018): 222.

<sup>65</sup>Billy Perrigo, "It Was Already Dangerous to Be Muslim in India. Then Came the Coronavirus," *Time*, <https://time.com/5815264/coronavirus-india-islamophobia-coronajihad> (22.04.2020).

<sup>66</sup>United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, 12.09.2018, A/HRC/39/64, quoted in Pranav Dixit, "Facebook Failed the Rohingya in Myanmar. Now It may be Repeating Its Mistakes in Assam", *BuzzFedd News* (2019), <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/pranavdixit/facebook-failed-the-rohingya-in-myanmar-now-it-may-be> (30.04.2020).



Violent Extremism.<sup>67</sup> But considering the capabilities of UN, it seems not acceptable to argue that the UN fights efficiently against the spread of anti-Muslim extremism.

Another field, which may be utilized as fertile lands to seed hate propaganda easily and very effectively may be the media channels regarding politicians and political debates which attract immense attention from huge part of citizens. Any message infiltrated through these communication channels will reach and influence great number of intellectuals.

Recently, it is discovered that two Muslim US congresswomen, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib have been targeted by a vast international operation of a mysterious Israeli-based group, disseminating more than a thousand coordinated fake news posts of distorted news and pure fabrications per week to more than a million followers by using 21 Facebook pages across the USA, Australia, UK, Canada, Austria, Israel and Nigeria.<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, in February 2020, it was revealed that Facebook failed to stop anti-Islamic hate and disinformation network even though almost two months ago this network was publicly exposed for spreading anti-Islamic sentiment across the western world.<sup>69</sup> Considering the level of organized hate propaganda and influence management, it becomes an undeniable fact that organized hate propaganda must be recognized and tracked as international organized crime.

One of the reporters of this kind, a reporter fabricating fake news, admitted that he ignored certain facts and took situations out of context to fit his narrative. Regarding a Muslim community three hours of Manhattan, ex-reporter for *Infowars*, Josh Owens<sup>70</sup> recently revealed that, by preying on the vulnerable and feeding the prejudices and fears of their audience, they fabricated information and posted headlines like: “*Shariah Law Zones Confirmed in America*”, “*Infowars Reporters Stalked by Terrorism Task Force*”, “*The Rumors Are True: Shariah Law Is Here!*” This example may emphasize the need for fact checking before believing news, informations and even truths.

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<sup>67</sup>UN United Nations, *UN Documents Office of Counter-Terrorism*, <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/documents> (19.03.2020).

<sup>68</sup>David Smith, et al. “Revealed: Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib targeted in Far-Right Fake News Operation,” *The Guardian* (2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/dec/05/ilhan-omar-rashida-tlaib-targeted-far-right-fake-news-operation-facebook> (19.03.2020).

<sup>69</sup>Christopher Knaus and Michael McGowan, “Far-Right ‘Hate Factory’ Still Active on Facebook despite Pledge to Stopit,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/feb/05/far-right-hate-factory-still-active-on-facebook-despite-pledge-to-stop-it> (30.04.2020).

<sup>70</sup>Josh Owens, “I Worked for Alex Jones. I Regret It,” *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/05/magazine/alex-jones-infowars.html?action=click&module=Editors%20Picks&pgtype=Homepage> (30.04.2020).



Information operations against Muslims can also be conducted in international level. A Recent US Senate Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence stated that in 2016, Russians in Saint Petersburg used a Facebook page called “Heart of Texas” to promote a protest against Islam outside the Houston Islamic Da’wah Center and consequently, Russians used a Facebook page called “United Muslims for America” to promote an event the same place, date and time, which resulted in escalation of two protests into confrontation and verbal attacks.<sup>71</sup> According to this intelligence report, “social media researcher John Kelly characterized the operational intent as “kind of like arming two sides in a civil war”.<sup>72</sup> This instance may be the international dimension of covert information warfare which targets Muslims, Islam and the countries they live.

Similar to this covert information warfare operation, another obvious version of information operation had been designed to deceive international community. Before the invasion of Iraq, USA illustrated fake evidences on weapons of mass destruction that Iraqi armed forces supposedly had. After the American presentation by former Secretary of State Colin Powell, most academics and politicians were not satisfied by the evidences but the invasion forces and their supporters did what they had in their minds. Today, the evidence that Powell presented about Iraq’s weapons program and Iraq’s ties to terror group Al Qaeda proved to be incorrect. Recently, Colin Powell’s former Chief of Staff, retired U.S. Army Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson who prepared the Powell’s presentation in U.N. Security Council which resulted in invasion of Iraq, admitted that the false evidence was fabricated, by emphasizing his regret on his role in orchestrating the presentation: “I regret it. I will regret it to my grave. I wish I’d resigned”.<sup>73</sup> Various groups had opposed the invasion of Iraq. For example the 150 theologians and religious leaders organized by Orthodox Peace Fellowship in North America<sup>74</sup> wrote a letter to American president Bush and among other things, stated that “the Orthodox

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<sup>71</sup>Todd J. Gillman, “Russian Trolls Orchestrated 2016 Clash at Houston Islamic Center, New Senate Intel Report Recalls,” *The Dallas Morning News*, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/2019/10/08/russian-trolls-orchestrated-2016-clash-houston-islamic-center-senate-intel-report-says> (30.04.2020).

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Bridge Initiative Team, “Iran, and Our Not So Distant Past with Iraq / Colonel Wilkerson,” *Bridge, A Georgetown University Initiative*, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/video/3240/> (22.04.2020).

<sup>74</sup>Orthodox Peace Fellowship in North America, “OPF’s Iraq Appeal: A Letter to President Bush. A Plea for Peace from the Orthodox Peace Fellowship in North America,” (2004), <https://incommunion.org/2004/10/19/iraq-appeal/> (30.04.2020).



Church has never considered any war to be just or good”.<sup>75</sup> But they could not prevent the invasion.

Considering the facts regarding disinformation strategies used in Iraq such as the one mentioned above, it would be not surprising to hear that fake videos illustrating Islam with terrorism, were fabricated for various strategies. In Iraq, it was revealed that a PR agency, which was working at the hearth of military intelligence, was paid more than half a billion dollars to run a top secret propaganda program including production of fake al Qaeda terror videos.<sup>76</sup>

Far right groups may indoctrinate hostile propaganda to misrepresent the Muslims very effectively. Some right wing group influencers may like media coverages regarding crimes of some terrorists or criminals, to legitimize their opposition against all Muslims living in the West.

One of the intellectual thinkers of new right ideology in Europe emphasizes that “The widely circulated videos showing the beheading, with a long blade, of hostages of jihadists, are much more eloquent than the rhetoric of people wanting to explain to us that Islam is a religion of peace, tolerance and love”<sup>77</sup> This example illustrates how the media coverages can be effective tools for perceptions of masses against a whole religion and all Muslims. But the public perception of Western masses may be enlightened if additional facts revealed on various similar issues. For example, when it was revealed that, three British schoolgirls in the ages of 15, 15 and 16 aiming to join ISIS were allegedly helped by an intelligence agent working for one of the states in the US-led coalition fighting against ISIS, it was said that British Foreign Minister was responded this information with the words: ‘just as usual’.<sup>78</sup>

Interestingly, in 2016 Donald J. Trump declared that American President Barack Obama created terrorist organization so-called Islamic State (ISIS) by saying: “He’s the founder of

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<sup>75</sup>Boris Knorre and Aleksei Zygmunt, “Militant Piety” in 21st-Century Orthodox Christianity: Return to Classical Traditions or Formation of a New Theology of War?” *Religions* 11, no. 2 (2019):9.

<sup>76</sup>Crofton Black and Abigail Fielding-Smith, “Pentagon Paid for Fake ‘Al Qaeda’ Videos,” *The Daily Beast*, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/pentagon-paid-for-fake-al-qaeda-videos> (25.01.2020).

<sup>77</sup>Pierre Vial, “Email Interview with the Author Jose Pedro Zúquete,” (2015) quoted in Zúquete J. P. *The Identitarians, the Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 202.

<sup>78</sup>Matthew Taylor and agencies. “Man Suspected Helping British Schoolgirls Join ISIS Arrested in Turkey,” *The Guardian* (2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/12/man-british-schoolgirls-join-isis-arrested-turkey> (29.03.2020).



ISIS.....”, “I would say the co-founder would be crooked Hillary Clinton”.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, French Minister of Foreign Affairs declared “France is in Libya to combat terrorism”<sup>80</sup> by wrongly using the term jihadists instead of terrorists. Jihad has different meaning in Islam which is not terrorism. However in past, regarding French troops in Libya, Libya’s U.N. backed government completely rejected the violation of the nation’s sovereignty and Libyan people protested France with placards that read “Get your hands off Libya”.<sup>81</sup> Recently, Libya’s U.N.-backed government accused France of supporting war criminal and rebel commander Haftar<sup>82</sup> Also, Libyan Prime Minister accused France of supporting ‘dictator’ Haftar and interestingly, US president Donald Trump also supported Haftar for his “significant role in fighting terrorism and securing Libya’s oil sources”.<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, United Nations condemned Haftar’s attack on Libya’s Tripoli port.<sup>84</sup> One can ask what the role of information warfare is, in legitimizing attempts of the various countries for the sake of their interests.

Another important point that must be mentioned may be identifying and portraying the primary reasons behind some of the attacks or conflicts correctly. It was revealed that in some cases of suicide terror attacks, “religion is not a necessary or sufficient condition”.<sup>85</sup> Some of the attacks to Western military forces conducted by operatives of international terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda may not be motivated primarily by religious fundamentalism. An examination of 71 cases of suicide attacks between 1993 and 2003 revealed that “the presence of American military forces for combat operations on the homeland territory was stronger than

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<sup>79</sup>Nick Corasaniti, “Donald Trump Calls Obama ‘Founder of ISIS’ and Says It Honors Him,” *The New York Times*, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/11/us/politics/trump-rally.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/11/us/politics/trump-rally.html?_r=0) (25.01.2020).

<sup>80</sup> Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MfEFA), “Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian: “France is in Libya to Combat terrorism,” *France Diplomatie* (2019), <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/our-ministers/jean-yves-le-drian/press/article/minister-jean-yves-le-drian-france-is-in-libya-to-combat-terrorism-02-05-19> (22.04.2020).

<sup>81</sup>Sudarsan Raghavan and James McAuley, “Libya’s U.N.- Backed Government Decries French Troop Presence in Rival Zone,” *The Washington Post* (2016) [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/libyas-un-backed-government-decries-french-troop-presence-with-rival/2016/07/21/71168ede-4f33-11e6-aa14-e0c1087f7583\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/libyas-un-backed-government-decries-french-troop-presence-with-rival/2016/07/21/71168ede-4f33-11e6-aa14-e0c1087f7583_story.html) (22.04.2020).

<sup>82</sup>France 24, “Libya’s UN-Backed Govt Accuses France of Supporting Haftar, ends Cooperation,” <https://www.france24.com/en/20190418-libya-france-end-cooperation-haftar-warrant> (30.04.2020).

<sup>83</sup>France 24, “Libyan PM Accuses France of Supporting ‘Dictator’ Haftar”, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190424-libyan-pm-accuses-france-supporting-dictator-haftar> (30.04.2020).

<sup>84</sup>TRT World, “UN Tries to Salvage Libya Talks After Government Pulls Out”, <https://www.trtworld.com/africa/un-tries-to-salvage-libya-talks-after-government-pulls-out-33932> (01.03.2020).

<sup>85</sup>Stuart A. Wright, “Reframing Religious Violence After 9/11: Analysis of the ACM Campaign to Exploit the Threat of Terrorism,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 12, no. 4 (2009): 22.



Islamic fundamentalism in predicting whether individuals from that country would become al-Qaeda suicide terrorist”<sup>86</sup>

To return to understanding the roles of media channels, one of the most effective way to spread anti-Muslim emotions easily, is throughusing TV shows, dramas, series. For example highly popular drama of British Broadcasting Company (BBC), *Bodyguard*, with several awards and more than 10 million viewers, pandered to stereotypes of Muslim women who use hijab as oppressed or subservient.<sup>87</sup> Besides, popular TV shows such as *24*, *Sleeper Cell*, and *NCIS* were also referring Muslims and Arabs only from the standpoint of so-called Islamic terrorism.<sup>88</sup>

Mind control studies on cult researches may be instrumentalized to add new perspectives to visions and understandings on perception management policies regarding Islam. It can be argued that some ‘western’ governments or institutions may falsely attempt to construct their own kind of Islamsuch as so-called German Islam or so-called French Islam. These isntitutions may try to persuade Muslims to accept their form of Islam. These practices may even embody ‘coercive persuasion’. Robbins<sup>89</sup> argues that some cults use coercive persuasion forms which are more effective than persuasion techniques used in prisoner of war camps to indoctrinate prisoners. It can be argued that some of the ‘western’ initiatives to develop new forms of Islam may in the future result in these kinds of coercive persuasionssimilar to cultist proselytizing techniques which may increase vulnerability of Muslim citizens.

On the other hand a meme, celebrating the murder of Muslim men, women and children featuring Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia on terroristBrenton Tarrant’s Facebook.<sup>90</sup> Actually, Vlad the Impaler was described as a ‘demented psychopath, a sadist, a gruesome murderer, a masochist’<sup>91</sup> even by some other Europeans at his time. Distortion of history and glorification

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<sup>86</sup>Robert Pape, *Dying to Win*, (Scribe Publications, 2005), 103, quoted in Stuart A. Wright, “Reframing Religious Violence after 9/11: Analysis of the ACM Campaign to Exploit the Threat of Terrorism,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 12, no. 4 (2009): 22.

<sup>87</sup>Faisal Hanif, “State Of Media Reporting On Islam & Muslims,” *Quarterly Report: Oct - Dec 2018*, (Centre of Media Monitoring, 2018): 42.

<sup>88</sup>Maheen Haider, “The Racialization of the Muslim Body and Space in Hollywood,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 14 (2019): 3.

<sup>89</sup>Thomas Robbins, “Constructing Cultist ‘Mind Control’,” *Sociological Analysis* 45, no. 3 (1984): 247.

<sup>90</sup>TellMAMA, “Brenton Tarrant: How the Media Helped Turn the ‘Shitposting’ Terrorist into a Meme”, *Tellmamauk* (2019), <https://tellmamauk.org/brenton-tarrant-how-the-media-helped-turn-the-shitposting-terrorist-into-a-meme> (01.03.2020).

<sup>91</sup>Radu Florescu and Raymond T. McNally, *Dracula, Prince of Many Faces: His Life and His Times*, (Back Bay Books, 1989), quoted in Wikipedia, “Vlad the Impaler”, and [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vlad\\_the\\_Impaler](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vlad_the_Impaler) (01.03.2020).



of brutalities of Radovan Karadzic or Vlad III is not patriotism but weaponization of misinformation toxicating young minds.

Another crucial dimension of misinformation that aims to discredit the Muslims may be disinformative social media sites that spread wrong information about Islam. The Creator warns the believers against the disinformants by saying: “And when you see those who engage in [offensive] discourse concerning our verses, then turn away from them until they enter into another conversion. And if Satan should cause you to forget, then do not remain, after the reminder, with the wrongdoing people”.<sup>92</sup>

The ingroup misinformation and preventing misinformation against Muslims is important since these kinds of misinformations may misdirect or trigger the emotions of some non-muslim communities with the ideology of what Knorre and Zygmunt<sup>93</sup> define as ‘militant piety’.

Also, white nationalism uses some misinformation and disinformation strategies to attract followers. White nationalism, an US export ideology driven by the fear over the loss of white primacy, used the internet worldwide to share their ideas and encourage violence, is now accepted as a global terror threat.<sup>94</sup> Information warfare must also be used to struggle against conspiracy theories such as ‘white-extinction conspiracy theory’ or ‘white-genocide conspiracy theory’, which suggest that white people face existential decline, even extinction as a result of rising immigration in the West and declining birthrates among white women.<sup>95</sup> It should not be underestimated that these theories also result in rising hate crimes.

International online groups such as the ‘far-right’ Identitarian movement which is under growing scrutiny for allegedly having links to the Christchurch attacker, must be monitored effectively since they may stroke fears of a ‘great replacement’ and they may use Islamophobic

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<sup>92</sup>Quran, *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, <http://kuran.diyanet.gov.tr/mushaf/kuran-meal-1/enam-,suresi-6/ayet-68/diyanet-isleri-baskanligi-meali-1> (30.04.2020).

<sup>93</sup>Boris Knorre and Aleksei Zygmunt, “Militant Piety” in 21st-Century Orthodox Christianity: Return to Classical Traditions or Formation of a New Theology of War?, *Religions* 11, no. 2 (2019): 1-17.

<sup>94</sup>Art Jipson and Paul J. Becker, “White Nationalism, Born in the USA, is Now a Global Terror Threat,” *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/white-nationalism-born-in-the-usa-is-now-a-global-terror-threat-113825> (30.04.2020).

<sup>95</sup>Farhad Manjoo, “The White-Extinction Conspiracy Theory Is Bonkers,” *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/20/opinion/new-zealand-great-replacement.html> (30.04.2020).



provocations such as mosque occupations or 'pork sausage and booze' parties in Muslim neighbourhoods.<sup>96</sup>

Recently German terrorist Tobias R. killed nine innocent persons with a racist motive and German Chancellor Angela Merkel said "racism is poison"<sup>97</sup> but the anti-immigrant attacks have been going on for decades and these kind of declarations which are not supported by sound policies are not satisfying the conscioussnesses of masses.

Lastly, scholars describing Muslims and Islam to non-Muslim crowds, must be careful not to use terminologies such as 'radical Islam', or 'fundamentalist Islam' because these kinds of stigmatizations discredits the whole religion and all believers. Similarly, as seen in the example of Gillespie,<sup>98</sup> western scholars must not simplify, generalize and accuse Islam for being the source of inspiration to antimodern forces. In a similar way, some of the American neoconservative intellectual elites portray Islam as hostile to America's very foundation, they cast Islam as a fatal hazard to everything good in the world and this kind of extremism, forms an ideological aggression which is far more worse than the invasion of other people's country with the stated motive of protecting the world from chaos.<sup>99</sup> To sum up, it can be argued that, just as Søren Kierkegaard suggests that "Christianity is not a doctrine"<sup>100</sup>, one can suggest that not believing to Islam does not necessitate being a supporter of an anti-Muslim doctrine or being a supporter of ideological aggression against Islam.

## 6. Conclusion

Just as Jacques Lacan stated before in 1977, reality is structured like a narration, contemporary era of global war against Islam is an arena of engineered informations, pseudo-realities and various communication operations that shape group norms and utilized for social control strategies. Nowadays, teaching skills to combat fake news and misinformation has

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<sup>96</sup>Jason Wilson, "With links to the Christchurch attacker, what is the Identitarian Movement?," *The Guardian* (2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/28/with-links-to-the-christchurch-attacker-what-is-the-identitarian-movement> (19.03.2020).

<sup>97</sup>British Broadcasting Company (BBC b) "Germany Shooting: Chancellor Angela Merkel Says 'Racism is Poison'," <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-51577265/germany-shooting-chancellor-angela-merkel-says-racism-is-poison> (01.03.2020).

<sup>98</sup>Michael Allen Gillespie, *the Theological Origins of Modernity*, (The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 299n3.

<sup>99</sup>Robert Dickson Crane, "Human Rights in Traditionalist Islam: Legal, Political, Economic, and Spiritual Perspectives," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 25, no. 1 (2008): 82-105.

<sup>100</sup>Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 467, quoted in Russel Johnson, "The Ministering Critic: Kierkegaard's Theology of Communication," *Religions*, (2020): 11, 35.



become a popular trend in higher education institutions such as University of Washington<sup>101</sup> but states and international organizations must fight against fake news. Against the destructive effects of information warfare, studies intensified to foster the immunity of societies against disinformation and to construct a disinformation resilient society.<sup>102</sup> Constructing disinformation resilient societies must be regarded as one of the core functions of the governments and international institutions. Psychological operations spreading anti-Muslim misinformations and anti-Islam hate must be prevented effectively by counter-psychological strategies designed by national authorities and international cooperation efforts.

In the light of evaluations on psychological operations and historical lessons, this research analyzed the influence, deception and indoctrination strategies by utilizing discourse analysis methods, such as Ideological Square Model developed by Teun A. Van Dijk. The essential steps of possible counter psychological indoctrinations are briefly illustrated. The literature review allows us to trace back the roots of psychological operations found in the verses of Old Testament and proceeding throughout the strategies of Alexander the Great or prominent newspapers such as *The Daily Mail* or *The Times*. Apart from patriotic uses of information and psychological operations, various forms of fabrications of informations, hidden agenda strategies, manipulating or degrading information networks have been used to design popular narratives and distribution of misinformation.

Since cyberspace provides a world of pseudo-reality, this research analyzed some of the cloaked social media messages, coordinated fake news posts and psychological methods that were designed to spread anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim hate. Social brain concept and mirror neurons may allow us to understand the battlefields of minds, clashing ideologies and emotions. Fake Muslim profiles and provocative comments are evaluated and rhetorical discursive strategies embedded within these hate campaigns are briefly illustrated. These analysis illustrated that the cloaked social media pages, comments and some of the responses to these provocative hate messages may specially be designed by psychological operation experts. Piaget's cognitive constructivism, Vygotsky's social constructivism and Huckin's manipulative

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<sup>101</sup>UoW "Trends and Issues in Higher Education," *University of Washington*, (2018), [https://www.washington.edu/trends/teaching-skills-to-combat-fake-news-and-misinformation/\(01.03.2020\)](https://www.washington.edu/trends/teaching-skills-to-combat-fake-news-and-misinformation/(01.03.2020)).

<sup>102</sup>Ondřej Filipec, "Towards a Disinformation Resilient Society? The Experience of the Czech Republic," *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: an interdisciplinary Journal* 11, no. 1 (2019): 1-26.



silences framework, may be utilized in deconstruction and prevention of these cloaked media strategies, and conspiracy theories such as White-genocide conspiracy theory.

Since these false flag communication strategies and destructive psychological operations have been defined as some of the probable reasons causing terrorist massacres such as Christchurch massacre and genocides such as Myanmar, the need for struggling against black propaganda and deception by defining them as anti-Muslim terror crime may be a must. Theories of deceptive discourse production such as information manipulation theory 2 may be utilized to prevent substitution or rewriting history and zombification of the individuals. Developing critical thinking skills and detecting logical fallacies are also important. Whereas the misinformation channels must also be monitored and warned by international institutions to correct the wrong informations since they may feed platformed antagonism and a culture of fear of Islam.

Psychological operations can still be used as popular instruments utilized to blame and degrade Muslims via million dollars of anti-Muslim film industry or social media networks reaching millions of followers that propagate hate against Muslims.

The terror management theory<sup>103</sup> illustrates that individuals who would not normally tolerate aggressive attacks on others can be inclined to support those actions when their need for safety from existential fear, as a result of an out-group that challenges core characteristics of their cultural worldview, is alleviated.<sup>104</sup> Social media channels and psychological operations that may trigger existential fears of individuals, must be prevented.

The motivations that feed anti-Islam extremisms must be detected and prevented. A research on 34 former White supremacists illustrates that various motivations and methods such as incarceration and therapies such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy may help them to disengage from an extremist group.<sup>105</sup> Prevention of anti-Muslim hate may be achieved by raising awareness on and utilization of these methods effectively.

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<sup>103</sup>Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski and Solomon Sheldon, "The Causes and Consequences of a Need for Self-Esteem: A Terror Management Theory" in *Public Self and Private Self*, ed. R. F. Baumeister, (New York: 1986), 189–212

<sup>104</sup>Johannes Beller and Christoph Kröger, "Religiosity, Religious Fundamentalism, and Perceived Threat as Predictor of Muslim Support for Extremist Violence," *American Psychological Association* 10, no. 4 (2018): 345-355.

<sup>105</sup>Brian F. Bubolz and Pete Simi, "Leaving the World of Hate: Life-Course Transitions and Self-Change," *American Behavioral Scientist* 55, no. 12 (2015): 1588–1608, quoted in John Horgan, Mary Beth Altier, Neil



Prevention of anti-Muslim hate crimes may also be achieved throughout two processes. First disengagement, then deradicalization. It should not be forgotten that “disengagement strategies categorize a violent extremist who decides to set aside the use of violence for strategic purposes as a success due to the reduction in violence, whereas deradicalization initiatives do not consider these cases a success because of the individual’s continued adherence to extremist beliefs”.<sup>106</sup> Security authorities of all levels, must be trained both in disengagement and deradicalization strategies by the governments that experience hate crimes against their citizens.

Also, members of far right groups must be examined and controlled for specific disorders that may pose risk for misconduct such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder.<sup>107</sup>

If the laws are for protection of all citizens, including the Muslims living in the West, the governments and communities must take necessary steps to prevent misuses of information such as disinformation, manipulation, deception and covert operations.

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<sup>106</sup>Cameron Sumpter, “Countering Violent Extremism in Indonesia: Priorities, Practices and the Role of Civil Society,” *Journal for Deradicalization* 11 (2017): 112–146, quoted in Gary LaFree and Joshua D. Freilich, “Government Policies for Counteracting Violent Extremism,” *Annual Review of Criminology* 2 (2019): 383-404.

<sup>107</sup>Mark T Palermo, “Developmental Disorders and Political Extremism A Case Study of Asperger Syndrome and the Neo-Nazi Subculture,” *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice* 13, no. 4 (2013): 341-354.



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