

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Communicative dynamism of Muslim stereotypes and the war in Ukraine

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### ABSTRACT

The article explores communicative dynamism of stereotypical ideas about Muslims in predominantly Christian Ukraine. The purpose of the study is to analyze the current substitution features of Islamic values objectified by the Russian-Ukrainian war. The research methodology is based on the modern scientific media linguistic approaches to religion communication and religious ideologemes. In particular, attention is paid to the ideologeme of Jihad, which is used in the motivational practice of international recruiting as media technique. The research also reveals and examines semantic components of the media conceptualization of OWN and ALIEN Muslim. The results show that negative stereotypes of Muslims are used in the hybrid war as a cognitive tool of psychological pressure on and intimidation of Ukrainians. Stereotypes can also acquire the forms of power and control used by religious leaders and political institutions in mass media. The communicative specificity of stereotypical representations of Ukrainians is analyzed within the framework of religious marketing research.

**Keywords:** Islamic narrative; Muslim stereotypes; Ukraine; religious ideologema; Jihad; media; war

## 1. Introduction

Ukraine today is a hot spot on the world map. For ordinary people, this war was unexpected. At the same time, analysts predicted the war. According to the civilizational division of the world represented by Huntington<sup>[1]</sup> back in 1996 Ukraine belongs to the Orthodox (Eastern Christian) civilization. At the same time, some of its regions (for example, the Crimea) belong to the Islamic civilization. Within this approach, two dividing lines overlap in the East and Southeast of Europe: a civilizational and a global geopolitical between the North and the South. This causes an uneasy geopolitical situation, inter- and intrastate conflicts on ethnic and religious grounds. The inevitability of such conflicts in the 21st century was predicted by Huntington<sup>[1]</sup> for Ukraine as well. Regarding our research, we should note that the countries of conditional autochthonous spread of Islam in Europe are Albania, some regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, North Macedonia, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Ukraine, Russia (in the North Caucasus—Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia—Alania, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, as well as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan). These territories are located on the Southeastern edge of Europe<sup>[2]</sup>.

Followers of Islam, not only from these countries, but also from other Islamic regions, for various reasons decided to take part in the bloody war between predominantly Christian Russia and Ukraine. It seems that S. Huntington did not foresee this, although he wrote about the Islamic revival and the bloody borders between

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Islamic and non-Islamic civilizations.

It also isn't a manifestation of the "Dialogue between civilizations" and the "Alliance of Civilizations", which were written about by Said<sup>[3]</sup> and other supporters of the thesis. It was about the concept and its usefulness in the development of the theory of intercultural communication criticizing the thesis of Huntington<sup>[4]</sup>.

Fukuyama is convinced that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a story about a true dictatorship. Moreover, the definition of a true dictatorship should be understood as a perfect dictatorship<sup>[5]</sup>. Dictators haven't disappeared, and dictatorships are adapting to the conditions of a globalized world. Their designs are becoming more and more creative.

The military confrontation continues. It is too early to draw conclusions, but media monitoring makes it possible to understand the communicative technology of large-scale changes in the worldview of consumers of media information. In our approach, the instruments of these changes are stereotypical images of Muslims. That is why in our study, we tried to analyze the dynamics of communicative phenomena, particularly stereotypes, because "It also augments the power-knowledge model to provide conceptual and analytical tools for understanding the exploitation of ignorance for the purposes of enhancing particular groups' or individuals' power"<sup>[6]</sup>.

Social practice proves that the heterogeneity of Muslims in European countries contributes to the fluctuation of attitudes towards Muslims and the objectification of very different stereotypes in different periods. The reasons for such dynamics in each country are special. In the context of the researched problem, the dynamics of ideas about Muslims in the countries of the former socialist camp with an atheistic worldview or in predominantly Christian countries are most revealing. For example, in Bulgaria, the attitude towards local Muslims experienced both periods of complete tolerance and complete intolerance, up to ethnic cleansing, when up to 30,000 Turks were expelled from the country in a week, according to Nuriev<sup>[7]</sup>.

Researchers of stereotypes have noted that up until recently, Bulgarians treated Roma the worst. Now this hostility towards them has shifted to immigrants, in particular Muslims—natives of Africa and Muslim countries—Arabs, Albanians, Kurds. These foreigners have many peculiarities in their way of life, so Bulgarians treat them with apprehension. Due to this the misunderstanding keeps on feeding the negative stereotype.

At the same time, local Muslims had developed an image of being bad marriage partners. Instead, the perception of local Muslim Turks as vengeful, cruel and "religious fanatics" has now shifted towards "hardworking and kind traders", according to Alekseeva<sup>[8]</sup> as the wars with the Ottomans and the ethnic cleansing of the communist regime have passed. The situation in the modern Czech Republic has got similar signs. Only in 2004, Islam had received official registration there. Before that, at the turn of the century, Muslims from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Caucasian regions of Russia, began to move to the Czech Republic. Also, a large part of Muslims in the Czech Republic are natives of Egypt, Syria and other countries of the Middle East, who are often the children of those who studied in socialist Czechoslovakia and then decided to stay here. At the same time, there are several hundred ethnic Czechs who voluntarily accepted Islam, according to Panyrkov's statistics<sup>[9]</sup>. But the immigration of the following period led to the fact that the Czechs "have the worst attitude towards citizens of the Muslim world from Iran, Palestine, Afghanistan, according to Pelenska<sup>[10]</sup>.

Of course, a number of examples of such images can be presented. Each case deserves an independent investigation. We did not set such a goal. We studied only the Ukrainian media space, which forms such worldview changes.

The communicative specificity of religious mass media, in particular in respect of popular stereotypes, is a relatively new object of communicative analysis. Attempts to reveal stereotypes about Muslims have already taken place in popular Ukrainian content. However, these stereotypes have not been analyzed as media-technological religious ideologemes, particularly of a strategic nature, as the cognitive basis of Islamic narratives in Ukraine.

It should be noted that the dynamics of Islamic stereotypes in Ukraine most closely correspond to Islam in Russia. It's radicalization was recorded by Russian scientists themselves, regardless of Ukrainian events: "It is concluded that the leading causes for politicization of Islam in the macro-region are: Delegitimation of the secular political order, the weakening of the state secular institutions and their regulatory functions, uncertainty of goal-setting development, lack of regulatory abilities of secular norms that entail archaization of the regional community, facilitate geopolitical pressure of foreign countries, international organizations and the spread of religious radicalism. The article notes the growing influence of Islamic identity, which becomes the basis of group solidarity and mobilization, political positioning. Instability creates grounds for extremist religious groups"<sup>[11]</sup>.

Against this trend, Islamic content in the Ukrainian media made a positive impression for a long time. In the Islamic narrative in Ukraine, a distinction was made between the local Muslim narrative and the foreign Muslim. Arguably, with regard to local Muslims, the Ukrainian mass media is using the characteristics of Islam as markers for recognizing the concept OWN. Until recently, in the pre-war period, Muslims lived peacefully and cooperated with believers of other faiths in Ukraine. Islamic communication marketing had good prospects for conflict-free implementation of Islamic values in non-Islamic Ukraine. Halal business occupied a special position in this process. According to experts, this parameter singled out Ukraine among other European countries as an example to follow<sup>[12]</sup>.

Also, the market of Islamic tourism in Ukraine began to develop and quickly proved its potential. The general situation contributed to the formation of positive stereotypes about Islam in a predominantly Christian country.

However, the war has brought many changes in the attitude of Ukrainians towards the followers of Islam. Negative stereotypes about the aggressiveness of Muslims began to intensify. At the same time, Ukrainian Christians and Muslims united in the fight against Russian Christians and Muslims. In this confrontation, the image of the Lord Judge for many lost clear features. Instead, the Islamic factor became threatening.

Therefore, the article aims to investigate the cognitive mechanisms employed to substitute Islamic values in Ukrainian realities as well as looks into the media practice of using stereotypes about Muslims and the dynamics of Islamic content.

## **2. Methods**

The article is based on the methodology of critical discourse analysis (CDA). According to Galanopoulos and Stavrakakis<sup>[13]</sup>, "discourse is a social practice that performatively shapes the social world. Human reality is thus articulated through discourse and obtains its meaning precisely through this discursive mediation. All social practices are therefore understood as discursive ones. To the extent, however, that processes of articulation are never taking place in a vacuum and are bound to involve different or antagonistic political orientations, the field of discursivity comes to be seen as a field marked throughout by the primacy of the political".

Among other things, the analysis of the communicative specificity of Islamic identity also focuses on discursive semiotics. This approach to identity in the conditions of epistemological pluralism, when, on the

one hand, Islamic identity is analyzed as a polymorphic phenomenon with a legitimizing component regulated by Islamic institutions in order to expand its influence, and, on the other hand, as a projective identity, since the research examines functions of this identity in the Ukrainian multi-confessional society and media space. According to the approaches of Stavrakakis, we analyze identity not as a result, but rather as a process, potential, motivation for solidarity with a belief system.

Here, stereotypes are interpreted within the framework of the approach put forward by the founder the theory of stereotyping Lippmann. Thus, stereotypes are viewed as perception clichés that exist in the minds of people, “the pictures inside our heads”, which the individual creates independently or receives ready-made from others. It is difficult to overestimate the huge role of stereotypes: “For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see, according to Lippmann<sup>[14]</sup>. In the processes of perception, stereotypes save cognitive effort. They also allow certain experiences to be passed along with their evaluation. Lippmann defined stereotypes as the core of human tradition, a zone of psychological comfort, a tool for protecting one’s own picture of the world and value system. This is the most important part of our knowledge about the world, which forms this knowledge itself. Lippmann emphasized that attempts to change stereotypes are perceived as attacks on the foundations of the world order.

Stereotypes are ‘generalizations about a group of people in which identical characteristics are assigned to virtually all members of the group,’ regardless of their individuality. This means that stereotypes are broadly shared assumptions in society about certain characteristics of members of certain groups<sup>[15]</sup>.

Within this approach, one can define religious stereotypes as a set of clichés that are relevant to religious identity. In turn, the religious stereotype can be interpreted as a standard idea of something inherent in many people who form a particular denominational group.

According to the communicative specifics, a religious stereotype is a linguistic and cultural model common in a certain linguistic and cultural environment, which captures the generalized ideas of this environment about certain religious groups.

The research also draws on Fairclough’s approaches<sup>[16]</sup> to the analysis of hybrid discourses and “interdiscursive hybridity”. The dynamic relationship and tension between new experience and mediated experience entail the emergence of new hybrid discourses, genres and styles. In our opinion, “interdiscursive hybridity” defines religious communication. In today’s world, the sacred and the secular are not completely separated, and perhaps have never been. They exist in the same space, have similar functions and can serve similar goals. In our opinion, it is important to understand how Muslim industries work and interact with the public in a multi-faith environment.

Modern media operate in many genre forms that are used as tools to achieve rapid pragmatic cognitive changes based on various sensory experiences. It is noteworthy that modern communication technologies make it possible to dynamize even stereotypical ideas, including those about international interaction. We study this dynamic within the framework of comparative approaches.

Media discourse is endowed with a special type of intertextuality functions. It is formed by semantic structures of various types (topics, arguments, concepts, precedent texts, quotations, allusions, etc.), which makes it possible to pragmatically shape the text and to creatively model the connection with the primary source. Within the framework of Fairclough’s approach, the study makes use of such forms of intertextuality as vagueness, evidentiality, presupposition, proposition, etc. In religious communication, there is a denominational specificity in the interpretation, channelization and dissemination of information. These terms are used in the analysis of this type of specificity.

The research also employs Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach<sup>[17]</sup>. In particular, Van Dijk regards narrative as a discourse of action, which is formed by intentions, goals (effects, results) and actors.

The research applies Gumperz's methodology of interactional sociolinguistics<sup>[18]</sup> which is grounded on the theory of situational inference in the anthropological perspective. In other words, the motivational nature of a communicative interaction is considered in its connection with cultural and social factors. In turn, situational semantical meanings are analyzed within Goffman's theory of framing<sup>[19]</sup>.

In addition, the study uses the approaches of Dimitriu and Graaf<sup>[20]</sup> to explore strategic narratives, which made it possible to understand: 1) how governments employ strategic narratives to gain public support; 2) how strategic narratives develop in the course of a conflict; 3) how these narratives are disseminated, framed and perceived through various media outlets; 4) how domestic audiences respond to strategic narratives; 5) how this interplay is conditioned by both events on the ground and by structural elements of the domestic political systems.

Language components of Islamic marketing were analyzed within the interdisciplinary framework of such areas as marketing linguistics, suggestive linguistics, sociolinguistics, media linguistics, etc.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the current substitution features of Islamic values objectified by the Russian-Ukrainian war. The research methodology is based on the modern scientific media linguistic approaches to religion communication and religious ideologemes. The tasks are as follows: to analyze the meaningful vectors of the dynamics of stereotypical ideas about Muslims in Ukraine, to identify cognitive features, relevant substitutions of Islamic values in a predominantly Christian country in conditions of war. It should be emphasized that the media image of Ukrainian Muslims as an indigenous people and Muslims of the rest of the world correlates with various narratives in the Ukrainian information space. The communicative specificity of stereotypical representations of Ukrainians is analyzed within the framework of religious marketing research.

### **3. Data collection**

The research is based on the material of modern Islamic content in the Ukrainian mass media and media representations of Ukraine's Islamic institutions throughout the decade starting from 2014 to 2023. These are also materials posted on RISU—The religious information service of Ukraine that regularly posts Islamic materials in order to establish an effective interreligious dialogue.

Semantic structures of texts, interpretive frames and rhetorical specificity are used to present the analysis of Islamic narrative.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Informational reference**

In Ukraine, Islam belongs to traditional religions. Despite the fact that the population of Ukraine is mainly Christian, according to various estimates, by 2014 there were from 600 thousand to 2 million followers of Islam<sup>[21–24]</sup>. At the same time, this indicator has changed considerably by now. The number of Ukrainian Muslims has rapidly decreased. A large number of Muslims have left Ukraine due to the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and military operations in the territories of traditional Muslim residence (mainly in the Donbas, as well as in the cities of Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, etc.). Currently, it is simply impossible to establish the exact number of Muslims in Ukraine<sup>[23]</sup>. Muslims in Ukraine have always practiced Sunnism, although some Sufis lived here.

## 4.2. Ukrainian stereotypical ideas about Muslims

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a stereotype as a “widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing”<sup>[25]</sup>.

According to Bordalo et al.<sup>[26]</sup>, social science has produced three broad approaches to stereotypes: economic, sociological and, finally, social cognition. The current research applies the social cognition approach, which, at the initial stage, was rooted in social psychology. In modern researches, however, it is employed in interdisciplinary studies, in particular in the field of communication sciences.

As Kobynets<sup>[27]</sup> notes, an analysis of Ukrainian popular media has made it possible to reveal the main ten stereotypical perceptions of Ukrainians about Muslims, which are summarized in the publications quoted here, namely:

- 1) Islam is an aggressive religion, the Quran calls Muslims for violence.
- 2) Muslims are very religious.
- 3) Muslims live in isolated communities and do not adopt customs of the countries or regions where they reside.
- 4) Islam supports polygyny.
- 5) A woman has no rights and must submit to her husband in Islam.
- 6) A Muslim woman cannot marry or divorce at her own will.
- 7) All Muslim women must wear a headscarf.
- 8) Muslims eat only Halal food.
- 9) Islam bans secular entertainment.
- 10) A mosque is only for Muslims.

Variants of these stereotypes have been identified by other researchers<sup>[28–30]</sup>. In almost every article on Ukrainian Muslims, the authors touch on these beliefs to a greater or lesser extent. Mufti Sheikh Murat Suleiman is convinced that “To destroy the stereotypes, you need to meet, communicate, and then people perceive differently” (Sheikh Murat Suleiman on Islam and interreligious dialogue in Ukraine)<sup>[31]</sup>.

In this publication, we will analyze only stereotypes that have a hidden connection with conflict discourses and the war in Ukraine. Some aspects of the topic have already been analyzed by the author of this study<sup>[32]</sup>.

As noted by Butyrina<sup>[30]</sup>, a Ukrainian researcher of Islamic stereotypes of previous historical stages, in the first years of independence (after 1991), the Ukrainian mass media paid great attention to the formation of a collective image of the “new post-Soviet believers” and authentic Christian identity. It contrasted with the negative image of followers of a foreign religion. Then, within the framework of the “ALIEN” concept, a cognitive basis was formed. In media reports, the concept of “Islam” was associated with the concepts of “war”, “terrorism”, “violence”. Terrible statistics of terrorist acts in European countries and journalistic illiteracy caused media extrapolation of extremism to the whole Islamic tradition. Fueled by politics and the media, Islamophobia reached its peak in the late 20th and the early 21st centuries.

At the next stage, the mission of balancing the image of a Muslim and Islam was carried out by Ukrainian media resources of Muslim cultural, spiritual and educational centers. Ukrainians began to discover a positive image of moderate Islam. But this process was interrupted. As the war in Ukraine shows, Islamophobia is used as a convenient tool of hybrid influence and institutional strengthening of fear and anger in conflicts between countries that are quite far from the Islamic world.

The three sections below discuss the dynamics of the Islamic stereotypes during the time of war.

#### **4.2.1. Muslims do not assimilate with other cultures**

In Ukraine, this stereotype was practically not objectified. Local Muslims have long lived in Ukraine and belong to indigenous peoples such as the Tatars, but Meskhetian Turks, Armenians and other ethnic groups have also lived there. Muslims arrived in Ukraine, primarily in its south, as a result of Ukraine's location on the border of the two great civilizations, Christian and Muslim. Therefore, the geographical position of Ukraine predetermined its active interaction with Muslim countries and peoples. The majority of Muslims in Ukraine were Crimean Tatars<sup>[33]</sup>. The history of Islam and Muslims in Ukraine began with Crimea. Crimea was a powerful source of Islam in this part of Europe.

The second largest ethnic group is the Kazan (Volga) Tatars, who have lived in Donbas for over a century, and Ukraine is the only country which they associate themselves with. Within the boundaries of modern Ukraine, Islam played a significant ethno-forming role in the life of individual peoples that formed on Ukrainian lands. In the XIX-XX centuries, it became a factor of ethnic self-preservation of Tatars (Volga Tatars).

The history of the relations between Ukrainians and those historical communities who lived on the neighboring territories and followed the Islamic tradition has not been researched properly. In Christian-centric historiography, researchers give these relations mostly negative evaluations. At the same time, actual interreligious communication has never been hostile. On the contrary, it has been marked for cooperation, understanding and even joint historical activity.

Giving a general assessment of these processes, modern Ukrainian historians remind that Islam in translation from the Arabic language means 'submissive, peaceful'. We believe that one should be able to live with Islam, and not make an enemy of it, Kolodny noted<sup>[29]</sup>.

During the Soviet period, Muslims were often persecuted and even destroyed by the system. In 1944, the Bolsheviks deported Crimean Tatars and Muslims from Western and Southern Ukraine to Siberia and Central Asia. Within the official ideology, it was believed that there is no Islam in Ukraine. Religious rites, mainly burials, were performed only in secret. Therefore, in Ukraine, the stereotype "Muslims are very religious" was not objectified for political reasons for a long time. Soviet ideology caused the secularization of local Muslims. The gradual revival of Muslims' religious life began only after the declaration of Ukraine's independence in 1991.

Therefore, although Islam has a thousand-year history on the territory of Ukraine, ordinary Ukrainians know little about Muslims, because for a long time Ukrainian Muslims have not been identified by formal signs (clothes, five-times-a-day prayer, food restrictions, etc.), but at the same time they have been good neighbors.

Ukrainian scientists are actively developing these fields<sup>[34]</sup>. The diffuse nature of the multi-vector interaction of ethnic and religious groups on the territory of Ukraine also affected their languages, in particular Crimean Tatar. For example, the Ukrainian language has approximately 4,000 Turkisms, including Crimean Tatar ones. More than half of them are commonly used: *harbuz* (pumpkin), *kylym* (carpet), *kyshmysh* (kishmish), *otara* (flock), *tuman* (fog), *tyutyun* (tobacco), *shtany* (pants), *bury* (brown), etc.<sup>[35,36]</sup>.

The linguistic influence has always been two-way: the Crimean Tatar language also contains Ukrainian words, i.e., close contacts of Crimeans and Ukrainians are reflected in the vocabulary. Ukrainian words have been successfully adapted in the new language. Semantic changes in vocabulary, the use of Ukrainian words in the process of hybridization, emerging petioles and synonyms showcase this adaptation: *varenikler* ('ukr. *varenyky*'), *kürpe* ('ukr. *krupa*'), *ştan* (ukr. 'shtany'), *paseka* (ukr. 'pasika'), *barazna* (ukr. 'borozna'), *çast* (ukr. 'shchastyia'), *meca* ('ukr. *mezha*'), *grivna* (ukr. 'hryvnya'), *ukrainalılar* (ukr. 'ukrainets'), *ukrain tili* (ukr.

‘ukrayins’ka mova’)<sup>[37]</sup>. So, the facts of linguistic interaction confirm the historical interaction of Ukrainian Christians and representatives of Islam.

At the level of language policy, media attention is drawn to the Tatar language and its correct interaction with the Ukrainian language for obvious objective reasons. Ukrainian experts understand that the Crimean Tatar language is ancient. Its formation was completed as early as in the 13th century. Therefore, the vocabulary is protected from incorrect borrowings. Words for new terms are not taken from Russian, English or Turkish. In 2021, the President of Ukraine legitimated the transition of the Crimean Tatar language to Latin script. The strategy and the development of the Crimean Tatar language based on Latin graphics is expected to be completed by 2032<sup>[38]</sup>.

Therefore, language facts indirectly testify to the interaction of people. There was no isolation. Interaction had historical manifestations and still exists.

At the same time, modern communication has its own specifics. It is formed by extra lingual factors. The Ukrainian situation is different from that of in many European countries. In Western Europe, as a result of mass immigration from the countries of the Islamic world at the beginning of the 21st century and the growth of the number of Muslims in the regions of their non-traditional residence (Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, France), the conflict discourse has been objectified. Instead, Ukraine peacefully coexisted with Muslims until recently. This fact has weakened peculiar religious features and strengthened national identities. The process has produced its side effect, namely the assumption of some Ukrainians that Muslims are only foreigners (The locals).

In the pre-war period, Ukrainian materials of Islamic content were as a rule thoroughly checked and criticized for violating ethical standards. Intentions of religious influence on the part of Ukrainian Muslims are objectified exclusively through messages that contain concepts of Moderate Islam and solidarize with the Ukrainian interreligious dialog, freedom of religious beliefs and the Ukrainian spiritual tradition where Islamic motives play a prominent role. Literary Islamic studies were started by prominent Ukrainian cultural pillars of the 19th–early 20th century, and this trend is being developed nowadays (cf., I. Franko, A. Krymsky, M. Kotsiubynsky, M. Asad and others).

In the mass media field, the interaction of spiritual traditions is objectified by political events. The annexation of Crimea forced many Muslims to move to central and western Ukraine. Therefore, the tactics of positive self-presentation in the media activities of Islamic institutions have become a tool for adaptation to new conditions and are often used in Islamic content. The linguistic specificity of textual representations reflects the implicit intention of harmonious implementation into the Ukrainian picture of the world. Memorability of information is provided by suggestive activation of various channels of information promotion.

Ethnonyms (from Greek *ἔθνος*, ‘people’, and *ὄνομα*, ‘name’) are pragmatically used in titles corresponding to strong positions in the distribution of perceptual attention. (“Can You Answer a Question on Crimea and Crimean Tatars? Have a Gingerbread!”)<sup>[39]</sup>. The rhetorical technique of multiple repetition of ethnonyms in the text makes it possible to objectify mnemonic techniques. For example, in the material about the contest with questions about the culture of Crimean Tatars, semantic repetition is applied to the words Crimea, Crimean Tatars, national minorities as well as to the lexeme gingerbread used seven times (its visual images included).

The texts tend to contain lexemes to name a color. Color symbolism is rooted in ethnic conceptualization and has the implicit function of a visual identifier. Such lexemes are pragmatically used in descriptions of flags, typical landscapes, clothes, ethnic dishes or decorative objects, etc.



Techniques of “gastric” suggestion are also used when information is channeled through the taste modality (“And the sweet component of the programme, gingerbread sugar coated to look like a Crimean Tatars blue flags with golden Tamga”).

It should be noted that this competition was held in 2018 in the Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia that boasts a large Muslim population and the Islamic Cultural Center. At that time, however, Crimea was already annexed by Russia (the annexation took place in 2014). Therefore, this form of latent “reminder” about Crimea, implemented on the website of the Council of Ukrainian Muslims, was part of the political strategy of returning all annexed territories. Hedging as a form of cognitive strategy implementation was a communicatively correct pragmatic decision under these conditions, i.e., it functioned to introduce vagueness into the statement.

The texts presented in various information cases on institutional Islamic sites have in common such features as frequent use of words that mean various forms of solidarity, openness and positivity:

“The Charter of Muslims of Ukraine” sets an example for the followers of other religions” 06.12.2016;

“Women’s Role in Spreading the Culture of Peace: Conference on Mothers’ Day” 15.05.2018;

“This Year’s International Students Gathering is to be Held at Kyiv ICC! Welcome!” 25.04.2019

“Kyiv East Fest: new place, new participants, more guests and traditional coloring” 06.06.19;

“Kyiv ICC Hosted Guests as Part of World Interfaith Harmony Week” 08.02.20;

“Arabic in 5 minutes, mehendi, and calligraphy: Kharkiv ICC’s activists visited school” 22.12.2020

Activation of the image resource is carried out through the use of a significant amount of ameliorative vocabulary, semantic intensification of verbal positivity, exoticisms, various types of religious apperceptions (when the perception of reality is influenced by collective experience rooted in the text of the Qur’an).

An important discursive characteristic of Islamic institutional communication in Ukraine is assertiveness. Assertiveness is speakers’ ability to defend their position in a communicative situation without violating the boundaries and freedoms of another person. The image concept of interreligious dialogue is represented by the ability to form communicative parity with other subjects and respect their conceptual systems:

“Let’s try not to see each other as enemies just because of belonging to different faiths” 8.10.2016;

“Protestants provided kids with lunch, Muslims fed them with supper”;

“Welcoming Everyone for a new exhibition of photo artist Arvydas”;

“I love Mary, mother of Jesus, because I am a Muslimah”—An awareness campaign in Mariinsky park” 20.09.2019.

This rhetorical arsenal turns the message into a vivid information event that attracts attention in the information market. Such religious marketing, especially the tactics of emphasizing the advantages, makes Islam attractive to Christians and increases the number of new followers, including former Christians<sup>[40]</sup>.

When social reality changed and vagueness (in Fairclough’s terms) was replaced by articulation (the full-scale war), the semiotics of Islamic content was structured around the concept of Ukraine’s political independence. Local Muslims united with Ukrainians of other faiths and together defend their Motherland.

“Russia is also our enemy, Muslim soldiers say as they prepare to defend Ukraine” 20.01.2022

“Ukrainian Muslims took part in a meeting with the leaders of world religions” 14.04.2022

“Ukraine is trying to exchange Muslim prisoners of war according to the principle of ‘all for all’” 11.04.2023;

“Muslim women of Chernivtsi organized a campaign for the Day of Vyshyvanka” 17.05.2023

“The Council of Ukrainian Muslim activists provided humanitarian aid to over 300 families who were affected in the Kherson Region” 21.06.23 (All examples are taken from the site Islam.ua).

Together with Ukrainians, Muslims fight at the front, help the army in the rear, save people and animals from death and starvation in the Kherson region after the destruction of the hydroelectric power plant. Ukrainian Muslims and believers of other faiths cry and laugh together.

Therefore, the stereotype “Muslims live in isolated communities and do not adopt customs of those countries or regions where they reside” is not relevant for Ukraine.

#### **4.2.2. Islam is an aggressive religion**

Politics in Islam is not separate from belief in the supernatural, Islam is not an isolated factor, it forms an inseparable complex with political phenomena, which is very unusual for people raised in the Christian tradition, where the separation of politics and religion is common and desirable, according to Kiryushko<sup>[41]</sup>.

In Ukraine, the stereotype of “Islam is an aggressive religion” is reinforced by perceptions of foreign Muslims. It was formed by Soviet films about the war in Afghanistan, terrible news about attacks of Islamic terrorists in different parts of the world. And now the war in Ukraine is reviving it. Islamic warriors led by Ramzan Kadyrov and his aides arrived in Ukraine. In the Russian propaganda media, special attention is paid to these soldiers. They are described as a unique military force. At the same time, the military alliance of Russian Christians and Muslims in the Russian-Ukrainian war is objectified as a struggle against Satan<sup>[42]</sup>.

It is known that the God (truth)-Satan (lie) dichotomy is often manipulatively used in the discourse of power. Within this approach, religious concepts are used as oppositional ideologemes, because, according to Galanopoulos and Stavrakakis<sup>[13]</sup>, “Truth and knowledge production—both mediated by language and discourse—are always over-determined by processes of articulation that very rarely operate in isolation from power relations”.

In turn, Ukrainian mass media responded to the enemies, using mainly emotional arguments. In particular, there are also threats to rub the deadly bullets with lard and to wrap the bodies of the dead in pigskin, which revealed a collective hatred to Islamic foreigners. If the threats are fulfilled, the warriors of Islam will only go to hell.

As practice has shown, the war activated the stereotype of irreconcilable hatred between Christians and Muslims. Texts with such pathogenic conventional implicatures resonate in Islamic countries around the world. The adviser to the President of Ukraine even appealed to the Ukrainian military not to use such arguments because “Muslims of the whole world are not our enemies”<sup>[43]</sup>.

However, the stereotype was objectified again when “On the eve of the Holy Ramadan, the Russian propaganda started spreading fake news about soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine slicing pork fat on the Qur’an and burning the Qur’an”<sup>[44]</sup>.

It is known that the desecration of sacred symbols is often used as an excuse for international terrorism. The leader of Ukrainian Muslims, the ex-mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine “Umma” Sheikh Sayid Ismagilov defines this form of black propaganda as specially designed to influence the mass media in order to provoke terror<sup>[44]</sup>.

This hopeless dialogue was rationalized in the argumentative model offered by Islamic leaders who opposed the participation of foreign Muslims in this war. The popular and radical critic of traditional Islam, Sheikh Abdullah Kosteksky<sup>[45]</sup>, urges Muslims to read the Qur’an carefully, study it and avoid being used for purposes immoral and harmful for Islam.

According to Sasitlinsky<sup>[46]</sup>, greasing bullets with lard and wrapping corpses in pig skins is superfluous, unnecessary because Allah Himself will punish sinners for their unworthy decision. He classifies as sinners those who joined the Russian army for money and those who do not have the intelligence to understand the

essence of Russia's colonial policy in many countries around the world, including the Caucasus. Sasitlinsky places a special blame on the imams who distort Islam, serve propaganda, power, the system, and not Islam.

The assumption that America and Russia are fighting on the territory of Ukraine, that Ukraine is not the subject of this struggle but just a misfortunate victim is criticized by Ukrainian Muslim leaders. To their mind, Ukrainian Muslims protect their land. Therefore, their struggle does not contradict the values of Islam. Therefore, it is a just, not a "holy" war<sup>[47]</sup>.

According to Sheikh Sayid Ismagilov<sup>[48]</sup>, the Russian aggression has the support of some countries of the Arab and Muslim world for several reasons: Muslim countries do not recognize Ukraine as a subject in this struggle, they believe that this is a war between Russia and America; the stereotype "Russians are allies because they are against America" has been formed as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict when the collective Arab and Muslim world opposed Israel and the collective Western world supported Israel; is the result of powerful Russian propaganda in Muslim countries, where little is known about Ukraine due to the weakness of Ukrainian diplomacy.

Special attention in this propaganda activity is paid to the religious image of Russia as a country that respects the values of Islam and where Muslims have the opportunity to freely realize their religious feelings and beliefs. In media representations of this type, there are connections with the stereotype of a Muslim as a militant, energetic, physically strong and religious person. The heroes of such videos have an attractive appearance, military uniforms are suitable for them, they are well armed, they often dance on the spot because life just flows from them, shout Allah Akbar, laugh, etc. This video series is exclusively hedonistic in nature. Their heroes are adventurers, happy with their lives. Such videos do not correspond to the real war. These are the so-called TickTock soldiers. At the same time, they find their audience of consumers owing to the religious narrative and this kind of clip aesthetics. The aestheticization of international terrorism makes it possible to define these media representations as pathogenic texts. As regards to their semantic aspects of influence, we note that "terrorist action is the outcome of an identity and a corresponding narrative that legitimize violent action, according to Archetti<sup>[49]</sup>.

The special attachment of R. Kadyrov's fighters to Russia and personally to V. Putin is emphasized in the media. These soldiers perform special tasks and destroy internal political opponents in Russia (members of Ye. Prigozhin's army, partisan resistance of the Belgorod region, etc.)<sup>[50]</sup>.

According to Ismagilov<sup>[51]</sup>, the media demonstration of vitality, aggressiveness and ostentatious religiosity serves the mobilization intentions of the Russians to find Muslim volunteers to participate in the war and, in general, to obtain international support for the Russian Federation in the Islamic world. It is possible, in fact, to say Russia uses it as a type of mobilization advertising in international communication and social media as emerging platforms. With this approach, Russia's hired Islamic helpers reinforce the aggressive image of Islam. A group of Muslim leaders have declared war as jihad<sup>[52]</sup>.

This image strategy is based on the latent 'politics of identification', according to Calhoun<sup>[53]</sup>, and built to contrast with the position of Ukrainian Muslim soldiers and their like-minded people, who for security reasons deliberately remain in the shadows, do not engage in self-promotion and generally do not publicly identify themselves as religious military group. In accordance with the traditional principles of channeling information in Muslim cells, the media mouthpiece of these soldiers is S. Ismagilov as the religious opinion leader. In turn, his textual representations also contain markers of Islamic identity. In particular, it is informing about the obligatory consumption of only Halal food, prayer, etc. even during the war.

Overall, we have another example of the fact that the narratives of local Muslims and foreigners in the media space of Ukraine are being created by different means of expression and are relevant to the antagonistic

pictures of the world. Unfortunately, the media image of a Muslim foreigner has a stronger influence rather than the image of Ukrainian Muslims. It is quite easy for an average Ukrainian to recognize the frightening features of a militant Muslim in the generalized portrait of the enemy.

In the Russian propaganda company, Kadyrov's soldiers are constantly in the center of media attention. Therefore, they are easy to recognize compared to other group actants of the enemy community. The characteristics of the stranger and the enemy are combined in the conditions of war. That is why the influence of the negative stereotype increases.

Within the framework of the Ukrainian approach, the mass media emphasize that "this war is sacred for Ukrainian Muslims," because the Koran recognizes the right to kill enemies in self-defense<sup>[54]</sup>. According to the Head of the Department of Military Chaplaincy of Muslims of Ukraine Putilin Haji Murad, this is a war of liberation. Muslims in the Ukrainian army profess the same human principles as representatives of other religions. Therefore, it is not necessary to say that Muslims are somehow different from Christians or Jews because, in the army, everyone is fighting for a common victory.

"I don't see the difference whether it's Muslim or not. When we arrive at positions, everyone turns to me. Someone needs to discuss spiritual issues, someone just needs to get support, and someone can tell you what they are planning or have already converted to Islam," says Putilin<sup>[54]</sup>.

The chaplain claims that the number of Muslims in the Ukrainian army is growing. At the same time, the motivation of these soldiers does not correspond to the stereotype of Islam as an aggressive religion.

Ukrainian Muslims promote the joy of life in Islam, which is in the opposition to the value of death in Islam, that is being promoted by the aggressors. The instrument of aggression in this conflict is the idea of a holy war. But Ukraine is a secular state, Political identification is prioritable. In this war, there are no religious symbols on the tombstones of the dead, but there are state flags.

Heroic deaths, ceremonial burials, awards and commemorations of soldiers are very important in the war media content. At the same time, in the actual conditions of combat operations in this war, it is often problematic to identify the dead in any way. In addition, the Islamic world and the Ukrainian reality give different moral and ethical answers to the question "Who am I?"

According to Wanner et al.<sup>[55]</sup>, in regions that have experienced traumatic violence, the details of who died where and how are often elusive. The very absence of burial sites offers only nagging questions without answers. And yet, there is a tacit acknowledgement that if the dead can be identified, materialized, and animated, they can become powerful agents in pursuit of justice and longed-for change. Locations of mass burials are deliberately hidden. In order to restore justice, exhumation for political reasons is becoming a reality in Ukraine.

This is the practice of a secular country, which is implicitly presented in the mass media, because the level of psychological trauma is high. Currently, Ukrainians define the ontological status of the Islamic narrative mainly as frightening and hostile. At the same time, political identification is objectified in relation to Ukrainian Muslims.

It should be noted that the debate about the correct interpretation of the meaning of Jihad is an intra-Muslim problem, moreover, the armed narrative can only destroy, instead, normal peaceful life needs dialogue. I hope that this dialogue will eventually restore the trust of Ukrainians in foreigners from the Muslim world. I believe that promising business dialogue and religious tourism with the Muslim world will return to Ukraine.

Schønemann<sup>[56]</sup> noted that "Stereotypes go beyond the identity issue and are part of a broader cultural system that explains social practices and norms in various social contexts. Stereotypes make us feel safe by allowing us a sense of control over our social contacts, and help us reduce uncertainty and avoid risky situations, which is something that has been largely ignored by most theorists".

So, it can be concluded that the participation of foreign Muslims in the Russian aggression has activated negative stereotypes, which has quickly gained strategic importance and become part of a weaponized Islamic narrative in Ukraine. The ideologeme Jihad became the verbalizer of the concept of Ukrainian-Russian policy.

## **5. Discussion**

In Europe, the level of tolerance towards the representatives of ethnic groups and religions that are not traditional for a given region or country is noticeably decreasing. Islam is also characterized by this process. The attention of researchers to stereotypes about Islam in many countries of the world is based on the concepts of security. Public monitoring of religious communication makes it possible to prevent conflicts. Stereotypes are interesting objects for multi-purpose monitoring. Their study in an interdisciplinary field is promising for the creation of a new security architecture.

Sides and Gross<sup>[57]</sup> researched the role of stereotypes in the social reflection of Americans as a consequence of the War on Terror: “We investigate Americans’ stereotypes of Muslims. We distinguish specific dimensions of stereotypes and find that negative stereotypes relating to violence and trustworthiness are commonplace. Furthermore, these stereotypes have consequences: those with less favorable views of Muslims, especially in terms of violence and trustworthiness, are more likely to support several aspects of the War on Terror”. Researchers are convinced that citizens do use specific stereotypes when there is a close correspondence between the dimension of the stereotype and the policy in question.

Islamophobia is comprehensively studied by researchers from all over the world. They reveal both the sources of its strengthening and ways of weakening it.

It is clear that media intervention is of fundamental importance. Therefore, Islamic content is systematically checked. Understanding what content is effective in real-world contexts is essential to determine where to invest resources to have the greatest impact. It is good when such modeling is hypothetical and the limitations of the theory come forward, according to Davidson<sup>[58]</sup>. The search is conducted in different planes and the analyzed cases are constantly diversified.

In particular, there has been Westra’s research<sup>[59]</sup> into the role of stereotypes in the psychological image of ALIEN: “stereotypes centrally involve character-trait attributions, which play a systematic role in the action-prediction hierarchy. On this view, when we apply a stereotype to an individual, we rapidly attribute to her a cluster of generic character traits on the basis of her perceived social group membership. These traits are then used to make inferences about that individual’s likely beliefs and desires, which in turn inform inferences about her behavior”. This is the convenience of stereotypes as an analytical tool for both individual and social forecasting.

On the other hand, according to Hilton and von Hippel<sup>[15]</sup>, stereotypes distort reaction to information. So long as stereotypes do not change, people under-react or even ignore information inconsistent with stereotypes. However, if one receives enough contrary information (e.g., if one observes more women than men succeeding at math), stereotypes change, leading to a drastic re-evaluation of already available data. Cognitive factors (and often motivations behind them) play an important role in stereotype formation, maintenance, application, and change.

Western countries have witnessed increased hostility towards Muslims among individuals as well as in the ways that the media covers stories related to Islam/Muslims and in policies that infringe on the rights of Muslim communities. In response, practitioners have created media interventions that aim to reduce Islamophobia. However, it is unclear what causal effects these interventions have on reducing Islamophobia. This research highlights that drawing attention to structural biases, including biased media coverage of

Muslims, is one potential strategy to ameliorate Islamophobia, according to Moore-Berg et al.<sup>[60]</sup>.

The relevance of the Ukrainian study of stereotypes is motivated by the negative dynamics of the Islamic narrative. Within this dynamic, the narrative of successful business and geopolitical neighborhood first became a strategic narrative and later turned into a weaponized narrative. Accordingly, the priority of stereotypes in public perceptions has also changed. Negative stereotypes imbued with frightening affectivity are being strengthened by the media technologies of the aggressor country.

In addition, Islamophobia as a factor in the Ukrainian conflict discourse is developing against the background of the split of the Orthodox Church, which is also accompanied by the growth of social aggression. The emotional damage of the Ukrainian media space by the virus of hatred is a natural ethno-specific mental manifestation of Ukrainian cordocentrism<sup>[61]</sup>, which in peacetime was embodied in numerous empathetic and tolerant social reflections, in particular regarding foreigners' religious feelings and beliefs.

This problematic approach resonates with studies of Islamic extremism that explores the ambivalent role of religious concepts. It is argued that master narratives are not static communicative phenomena, but that they result from a constant revision of individual and collective perception of religious experience, according to Halverson et al.<sup>[62]</sup>.

In other words, the more tension exists between groups, the more individuals become extremists. Alizadeh et al.<sup>[63]</sup> also found that intergroup conflict escalation lowers opinion diversity in the population compared with normal situations.

At the same time, the article "Muslim threat: Illusion or Reality?" written long before today's tragic events by Kolodny<sup>[29]</sup> reveals that the cause of these processes does not lie only in the context of the world, but also in the Ukrainian territories. The author argues that the reason for emerging and expanding Muslim extremism resides not in Islam itself, but rather in external factors. It is important how the factors of the adaptation environment interact with Islam.

According to Archetti<sup>[64]</sup>, "a strategic narrative can be conceptualized for analytical purposes as a brand, particularly in terms of measuring the extent to which the narrative varies across countries and terrorist groups, over time, and in the mind of audiences". As we can see, stereotypes are convenient tools for such conceptualization.

Ex-Mufti of "Umma", the Religious Administration of Ukraine's Muslims, Sayid Ismagilov<sup>[48]</sup> argues, "Russian propaganda in the war in Ukraine uses stereotypes developed during the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the Muslim world, all this is presented as Russia's war against America. Others call it Jihad—That it is supposedly a war in the way of Allah Almighty against Ukraine".

According to him, as a result of Russian propaganda, a significant number of well-known Muslim figures, in particular the Supreme Mufti of Russia and the head of the Central Religious Administration of Russia Talgat Tajuddin, the supreme Mufti of Chechnya Salakh Mezhiev, the same Mufti of Moscow and the Central Russian Region Albir Krganov and others, openly support this war, bless it and call on Russian Muslims to war against Ukraine<sup>[65]</sup>. In this approach, the religious ideologeme of Jihad is verbalized within the framework of the motivational intention to be sanctified by a heroic death<sup>[66]</sup>. Instead, the stereotype of an aggressive Muslim-enemy is used as a destructive assimilation factor in communicative influences. The image of the enemy is constructed as a communication technology<sup>[67]</sup>.

On the other hand, political and religious leaders of many countries of the world have joined the search for ways to restore peace in Ukraine. It is quite obvious that without the introduction of cognitive tools to reduce the dramatic consequences of modern hybrid wars, this process has no chance of success. Religious

dialogue, not enmity, can become a reliable basis for social progress.

In turn, scientists comprehensively research media technologies for constructing the image of the enemy. A recognized enemy is no longer as scary as a hidden one<sup>[67,68]</sup>. Fakes about Islam in Ukraine<sup>[69]</sup> revealed and the friendly image of Islam is restored. But the war is still going on<sup>[70]</sup>.

## **6. Conclusions**

The study into the meaningful vectors of the development of the Islamic narrative in Ukraine reveals its convergence with the concepts of political Islam. Cognitive features relevant to the negative image of militant Islam in a Christian country were uncovered. Monitoring Ukrainian mass media enables us to identify epistemes that form the concept of OWN and ALIEN Muslims in the Ukrainian Islamic narrative. In the worldview of Ukrainian Muslims, faith imparts the courage necessary to fight for freedom, to achieve and maintain peace. In the worldview of foreign Muslims, faith has become the basis for the aggressive intention to destroy everything Ukrainian. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, negative stereotypes of the aggressive religiosity of Muslims and their foreignness to Ukrainian identity are articulated as a cognitive weapon.

Before the war, the Islamic narrative in Ukraine was not viewed as strategically important. It was created by local Muslims in various forms of activity, aimed at conflict-free development of Islamic values in predominantly Christian Ukraine as well as at promoting positive historical experience that highlighted examples of cultural exchange and cooperation between Christians and Muslims. Within this approach, Ukrainian Muslims, as a religious ethnic community, used legal opportunities for ethnic and religious preservation and reproduction of Islamic concepts within the independent Ukrainian state. Cross-cultural specificity ensured the formation of Islam's attractive image in Ukraine. This is the narrative that continues to develop, presenting both challenges and opportunities for Ukrainian society. Under these circumstances, cultural assimilation of Muslims took place, but negative stereotypes about local Muslims did not spread. Taking into account the lessons of history, promoting cultural integration and interfaith dialogue, Ukraine could work towards a future characterized by peaceful and constructive interaction between different ethnic groups and religious communities.

The war created a new format of Islamic representation in the media space of Ukraine, resulting in a destructive Islamic narrative. It continued to improve the strategies that support extremism and reflect intra-Islamic conceptual conflict. In addition, it also deepened the confrontation between the values of the Islamic and the Western worlds. This narrative activated negative stereotypes about aggressive religiosity of Muslims.

The research also revealed content asymmetry in media representations. At the first stage of the war, the Islamic aggressive narrative of the enemy was stronger than the Ukrainian one, insufficiently objectified for security reasons. Yet, Ukrainian Islamic institutions gradually changed their media tactics. Currently, there are many materials about the participation of Ukrainian Muslims in the military confrontation. At the same time, unlike the Russian narrative, such content presents a collective portrait of Ukrainian Muslims, and not a personal one, as in the Russian approach. It is interesting that, in addition to military men, women became the heroines of Russian propaganda storytelling. Let us assume that the reframing of women's Islamic stereotypes is also a part of modern media technologies of influence. Moreover, the main emphasis in the practice of portraiture falls on religious beliefs.

In particular, the contribution of religious authorities was important for understanding the technology of creating a destructive religious narrative. We emphasize that in religious communication, it is the position of an opinion leader that ensures the provability of information. This can become a trigger of certain strategic

decisions. This specificity determined the place and role of Islamism in Ukrainian contexts.

In the Ukrainian approach, “Jihad” is primarily a moral and ethical category, efforts aimed at spiritual purification (S.Aryfov, S.Ismagilov, I. Kozlovskiy et al). This interpretive vector determines the psychoecological function of media representations of “Jihad”.

Instead, in the Russian propaganda frames, the religious ideology of “Jihad” is used as a mobilization trigger. Mobilization advertising sells the jihadist’s attractive image and militant intent as meaningful. The attractiveness of the media image of Muslim soldiers in Russian advertising ensures communicative loyalty to the war intention, creates the illusion of its legitimacy and, within the war rhetoric, forms an attractive emotional correlation of the informational message. The concept of a glorious death, not the concept of a glorious life, is objectified in such advertising representations. By the quality of its influence, this is a pathogenic text that found its application in the modern hybrid war between Russia and Ukraine. But in the countries of the Islamic world, such an argumentation strategy helps to find those willing not only to fight, but even to die in Ukraine. Such blinding by belief corresponds to religious fanaticism.

The jihadist position expressed by a group of Islamic public opinion leaders regarding the war in Ukraine has objectified negative stereotypes about Islam as an aggressive religion that encourages fanaticism. As a result of the change in the cognitive model of Muslim discourse in Ukraine, the Islamic narrative has turned into a cognitive tool of international terrorism that has no connection to any system of religious (as well as spiritual, cultural, humanitarian) values.

Stereotypes determine the nature of language interpretations in combination with the pragmatics of actions; they help to rearticulate semantic meanings as experiences are cognitively assimilated. Negative stereotypes are pragmatically used in mass media for various purposes. As far as the stereotyping of Islam is concerned, the priority lies with the function of identification. In the semiosis of military confrontation, marking (predication) is determined by the dominant discourse. Under these conditions, a good or bad Muslim is a harmless or dangerous person. Reality is modeled as an epistemological dichotomy of life and death. But the labels change depending on the argumentative strategy in the dominant discourse.

In the value paradigm of Ukrainian Muslims and their supporters, the war objectified the concepts of service and duty. According to this approach, a harmless Muslim is simply a Ukrainian. The protective function does not contradict either the values of Islam or the values of independent, multi-religious Ukraine. That is why (Ukraine’s) OWN Muslims protect life and die for the values of life.

The stereotype of the aggressive fanatical ALIEN Muslim in the symbolic system of the militant Islamic narrative is used as a reference to the holy war in the God-Satan dichotomy. Its cognitive basis in the Ukrainian version is not created by religious, but rather by political ideologemes that justify death, violence and the need for a new civilizational choice.

The growth of strategic tension in religious communication has formed a new experience in the secular country where religion is separated from the state. The Church’s distance from political ideology was used by the enemies in a hybrid war against Ukraine. This contributed to the process of establishing Ukrainian Orthodoxy as an institution independent of Russia, which has obligations to believers, especially in days of severe trials. As it turned out, there is a public demand in Ukraine for a church that supports democracy. A similar social demand exists in the Islamic value system.

The war shows that religious doctrines can be puppets of political regimes. Islam is no exception. In particular, stereotypes of Muslims are used in the hybrid war as a cognitive tool for psychological pressure and intimidation of Ukrainians. Stereotypes may also acquire the forms of power and control, which are used by



religious leaders and political institutions for mass media activity. Also, it shows that the threat of global self-destruction is increasing, so there is a need to replace the concept of holy war with the concept of sanctity of human life and peace.

Muslim nations have their own unique experience of revival and spiritual purification after bloody wars. Perhaps now is the best time to share this experience.

## Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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