

TOAEP



Religion, Hateful Expression and Violence

Morten Bergsmo and Kishan Manocha (editors)



E-Offprint:

Fathi M.A. Ahmed, “Translational and Terminological Sensitizing of Muslim Religious Leaders of Al-Ázhár in the Combat Against Hate Speech”, in Morten Bergsmo and Kishan Manocha (editors), *Religion, Hateful Expression and Violence*, Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher, Brussels, 2023 (ISBNs: 978-82-8348-141-9 (print) and 978-82-8348-142-6 (e-book)). This publication was first published on 17 July 2023.

TOAEP reserves all rights pursuant to its general open-access copyright and licence policy which you find at <https://toaep.org/copyright/>. You may read, print or download this publication or any part of it, but you may not in any way charge for its use by others, directly or indirectly. You can not circulate the publication in any other cover and you must impose the same condition on any acquirer. The authoritative persistent URL of this publication is <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/f1rms5/>. If you make the publication (or any part of it) available on the Internet by any other URL, please attribute the publication by letting the users know the authoritative URL. TOAEP (with its entire catalogue of publications) has been certified as a digital public good by the Digital Public Goods Alliance.



© Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher (TOAEP), 2023

Front cover: Segment of the painting ‘St. Yves Administering Justice’ by Maestro di Sant’Ivo (1405–1410), the original of which can be seen in Galleria dell’Accademia in Florence (one block from where the project-conference took place). St. Yves (1253–1303), patron saint of lawyers, turns his attention to the poor and victimized. Similarly, religious leaders should protect victims of hate speech by their members or in the name of their community.

Back cover: Detail of the ancient pietra serena frame of the entrance to the CILRAP Bottega in Via San Gallo in Florence. Diametrically opposed to hateful expression (the topic of this book), the hand-carved surface is a loving expression of the meticulous work of the stone mason. The modest pietra serena stone has been quarried from hills outside Florence for centuries. All volumes in this Publication Series display a picture of publicly accessible ground (or frame that leads to the ground) on the back cover. Photograph: © CILRAP 2022.

Translational and Terminological Sensitizing of Muslim Religious Leaders of Al-Ázhár in the Combat Against Hate Speech

Fathi M.A. Ahmed*

31.1. Introduction

Nine years have passed since the establishment of ‘*Da‘ish*’, previously named the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (‘ISIS’), the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (‘ISIL’) and the Islamic State (‘IS’) among other names. Although it is alleged to have been militarily defeated, its extremist ideology is reportedly still spreading virally, not only in the Arab world, but also in the whole world. *Da‘ish*, the discourse of which is the focus of this chapter, has also lured significant numbers of recruits through online propaganda material, including videos and magazines, produced in and translated into English, French, German, Spanish, Turkish, Swahili and a variety of other languages. The group presents its ideology in specific language templates and uses certain terminologies. For this

* **Fathi M.A. Ahmed**, pronounced as *Faṭḥī Muḥammad ‘Abderrá‘ouf Aḥmad*, is one of the leading Arabic-English-Arabic translators in the fields of international law and organization. He has, *inter alia*, translated several books by the late M. Cherif Bassiouni into Arabic and has multiple publications on translation-related matters. He holds a Master’s degree in translation studies from the University of London and did his undergraduate studies at Helwan University (both *summa cum laude*), followed by diploma studies in translation at the American University of Cairo which hired him to teach legal and United Nations (‘UN’) translation. He has also taught at Ain Sham University in Cairo where he co-developed legal, UN and other translation courses. Having passed several international competitive language examinations, he has provided translation, terminology and editing services to the UN Secretariat (New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi), several UN specialized agencies (including the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN Environment Programme), the International Criminal Court (‘ICC’) Office of the Prosecutor, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Center for Asset Recovery of the Basel Institute on Governance, Bahrani Independent Commission of Inquiry and the Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights. He is the Centre for International Law Research and Policy’s (‘CILRAP’) Arabic Translation Team Leader, who revised and project-managed the Arabic translation of the Lexisus Commentary on Law of the International Criminal Court the comprises the ICC Statute and Rules of Procedure and Evidence, among other projects. For an audio-visual recording of his statement to CILRAP’s conference in Florence in April 2022 on the topic of this anthology, please see <https://www.cilrap.org/cilrap-film/220409-ahmed/>.

purpose, it either takes on translating specific verses of the *Holy Qur'an* ('*Qur'an*') and Prophet Muhammad's *hadiths* (that is, sayings) or selectively picks out an existing translation that best reflects its unorthodox interpretation of the *Shari'ah* law.

Although the root causes of violent extremism are complex, multifaceted and intertwined, strategies to combat hate speech, as a driver of extremism, concentrate on the subject-matter rather than the language. Language is the means through which hate speech is expressed and is countered.

According to the UN Development Programme's Conceptual Framework for Preventing Violent Extremism, strategies for preventing violent extremism should include, "working with faith-based organizations and religious leaders to counter the abuse of religion by violent extremists".¹

In November 2020, the author delivered a lecture at Al-Ázhár Ash-Sharíf ('Al-Azhar'),² namely, Al-Azhar's Observatory for Combating Extremism ('Observatory'), one of the most prominent entities engaged in combating extremist discourse in 13 languages, on how to best use translation and terminology in drafting counter-narratives.³ The lecture aimed at helping the Observatory fine-tune its commendable efforts in this critical domain. The recommendations and the best practices that were shared included: giving preference to writing than to translation; giving preference to affirmative than to negative language forms; being concise in drafting; using challenging rather than self-proclaimed names of extremist organization; avoiding euphemism in quoting from and responding to hate speech; using internationally agreed terminologies and gender-inclusive language for a universally harmonized response; using cautious language as appropriate; using fact-based rather than rhetorical language; highlighting wrong translations of the *Qur'an* or *Shari'ah* terminology; and co-operating with social media platforms and providing them with relevant, smartly-drafted and updated keywords for identifying, reviewing and removing, if appropriate, hate speech content without compromising freedom of expression.

¹ UN Development Programme, "Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity: A Development Response to Addressing Radicalization and Violent Extremism", 1 July 2016, pp. 30–31 ('Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity') (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/guylbf/>).

² Often written *Al-Azhar Al-Sharif* as an official name.

³ "Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism Organizes a Lecture on the Impact of Terminological and Translational Accuracy in Promoting Counter Extremism Activities", *Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism*, 22 November 2020 ('Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism Organizes a Lecture') (in Arabic). For a valuable discussion of and more information on the role of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif in combating extremism and hate speech in light of international instruments, see Chapter 29 of this anthology.

The lessons learned from this experience are making advice problem-centred rather than content-centred; giving advice an experience shared rather than a lesson taught; involving religious leaders in discussion, giving religious leaders the impression that they lead the discussion; and giving sensitive advice in the form of a thought to reflect on or a question to answer.

This chapter addresses how to draft stronger, more relevant and more effective counter-speech and how to approach religious leaders. It aims at providing a set of criteria to be used in drafting counter-speech from a translational, terminological and more generally a linguistic point of view. It gives concrete examples of more effective language that ought to be used in combating extremism and shows how it can promote a universally harmonized response. It also shows the lessons learned from the experience mentioned above.

31.2. Definitions

For the purposes of this chapter, the following terms are defined as follows:

- *Hate speech* is:
any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.⁴
- *Counter-speech* is any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour that presents an alternative to hate speech and that responds to it by refuting its narratives.
- *Faith-based organization* is:
[an] organization that derives inspiration and guidance for its activities from the teachings and principles of the faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within that faith.⁵
- *Religious leader* is a man or a woman who is formally or informally affiliated to a faith-based organization and who plays an influential role on his or her community, followers and/or supporters and/or on the wider society.

⁴ UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, 31 May 2019, p. 2 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/5rrb5b/>). Although it acknowledges that there is no international legal definition of hate speech, the UN defines hate speech as shown.

⁵ Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings (eds.), *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2008, p. 107.

31.3. Working with Religious Leaders to Counter Hate Speech

Over the past two decades, the international community has sought to address violent extremism primarily within the context of security-based counter-terrorism measures adopted in response to the threat posed by al-Qá'idah and its affiliated groups. However, with the emergence of a new generation of groups, there is a growing international consensus that such counter-terrorism measures have not been sufficient to prevent the spread of violent extremism. Violent extremism encompasses a wider category of manifestations and there is a risk that a conflation of the two terms may lead to the justification of an overly broad application of counter-terrorism measures, including against forms of conduct that should not qualify as terrorist acts.⁶

In his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, the UN Secretary-General noted that,

Faith and community leaders are critical in mentoring vulnerable followers so as to enable them to reject violent ideologies and in providing opportunities for intra- and interfaith dialogue and discussion as a means of promoting tolerance, understanding and reconciliation between communities.⁷

He adds that,

[t]here is a need to take a more comprehensive approach which encompasses not only ongoing, essential security-based counter-terrorism measures, but also systematic preventive measures which directly address the drivers of violent extremism that have given rise to the emergence of these new and more virulent groups.⁸

According to the UN Development Programme's conceptual framework for Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity, global, regional and national strategies for preventing violent extremism should include, among others, "working with faith-based organizations and religious leaders to counter the abuse of religion by violent extremists".⁹

On 12 October 2015, the United Nations Human Rights Council ('UN-HRC'):

⁶ UN Secretary-General, Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, UN Doc. A/70/674, 24 December 2015, para. 4 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/ui69e3/>).

⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 36.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity, 2016, see *supra* note 1.

[Underscored] that preventing and countering violent extremism requires a whole-of-society approach, involving government, civil society, local and religious leaders and the private sector, and acknowledging that the active participation of civil society is a key factor in governmental efforts to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms while preventing and countering violent extremism.¹⁰

Faith matters to people. Spiritual faith is the driver for action for many of them. In many parts of the world, faith-based organizations and religious leaders are influential in both the political and social spheres and have a broad following in their societies. Their presence in local communities, coupled with their capacity to deliver critical services, allow them to mobilize grassroots support, earn the trust of vulnerable groups and influence cultural norms – all of which make them vital stakeholders in development. With their involvement in local communities and their standing as moral leaders, many faith-based organizations and religious leaders command the respect of local and national authorities, which can make them valuable peace mediators in tense environments.¹¹

Religion is a source of motivation and inspiration for the vast majority of people around the world, who act in a spirit of generosity and kindness. Strategies to combat violent extremism must be rooted in a nuanced understanding of the role of religion, ideology and identity and its impact on individuals, communities and institutions. It is also important to counter the growing narrative that it is religion *per se* that is the cause of violence; manipulation of religious politics and fanatical ideas is the challenge. Religious leaders therefore bear a particular responsibility to help prevent violent extremism. ‘Intra-faith’ and ‘inter-faith’ dialogues at the regional and global levels can promote a counter-narrative to violent extremism and also develop more concrete measures at the local and community levels that could be implemented through networks of religious organizations and institutions. Regional context needs to be taken into account.¹²

On 2 July 2021, the UN Security Council:

[Urged] all Member States and the United Nations to unite against terrorism and violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism, encourages the efforts of relevant actors, including religious leaders of all faiths, to discuss within their communities the drivers of terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism and to

¹⁰ UNHRC, Resolution 30/15 on Human Rights and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/30/15, 12 October 2015 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/bf95de/>).

¹¹ UN Development Programme, “Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations and Religious Leaders”, October 2014.

¹² Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity, 2016, pp. 31–32, see *supra* note 1.

evolve strategies to address them, and underlines that Member States, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, religious bodies and the media have an important role to play in promoting tolerance and facilitating understanding, inclusive dialogue and respect for religious and cultural diversity and human rights.¹³

Working with religious leaders can be complex for many reasons including the fact that many of them do not have an inclusive perspective. Furthermore, different interpretations of sources of religion can make working with those leaders even more complex. Faith actors are not the same even in any given local community. All religious leaders need to be engaged in dialogue on countering hate speech as a driver of extremism. Religious leaders left behind can be a source resentment which may trigger hate speech.¹⁴

31.4. Case Study

In November 2020, the author delivered a lecture¹⁵ at Al-Azhar,¹⁶ or the Observatory,¹⁷ on how to best use translation and terminology in drafting counter-narratives. The lecture aimed at helping the Observatory foster and fine-tune its commendable efforts in this critical domain. Following are the recommendations given and best practices shared. They should apply to all situations of giving specialist advice to religious leaders *mutatis mutandis*.

Responders to hate speech are advised to:

31.4.1. Give Preference to Writing Than to Translation

Translation is an imperfect reflection of any original text. In order to avoid the problems and pitfalls of translation and not to have something lost in translation, preference should be given to writing than to translation, if possible and appropriate. It would be more effective and relevant to write in 13 different languages, taking into account the specificities of each culture as reflected by its language than to write a master text in Arabic, for example, and then translate it into those languages. An outline can still be used showing the overall idea of the body of responders, who should then adapt it to the respective languages they use in their

¹³ UNHRC, Resolution No. 75/291 on the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Seventh Review, UN Doc. A/RES/75/291, 2 July 2021, para. 13 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/ww6q5g/>).

¹⁴ For an informative and in-depth discussion of how responsible religious leaders should react to hate speech in their communities, see Chapter 27 of this anthology.

¹⁵ Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism Organizes a Lecture, 2020, see *supra* note 3.

¹⁶ For more information on Al-Azhar, see its web site (in Arabic but partially available in other languages).

¹⁷ For more information on the Observatory, see its web site.

response. A hate speech message originated in Africa, for example, should be responded to in a way that is unique to the African context.

31.4.2. Give Preference to Affirmative Than to Negative Language Forms

Affirmative language sounds stronger and firmer than negative language. Sounding defensive is always a weaker form of expression. For example, when a religious leader says that ‘Islám *does not* promote hate for non-Muslims’, it simply means that he or she has this idea at the back of his or her mind and that he or she is now trying to refute it. While this may be the case in some situations, it should not be the general practice in writing or speaking in the context of counter-speech.

31.4.3. Write and Speak Concisely

In addition to clarity and coherence, and unlike in the context of preaching, conciseness should be observed in counter-speech in particular. Conciseness denotes solid ideas and stronger beliefs, whereas lengthy language denotes weak argument and the speaker’s or writer’s need to cover up his or her weak argument. According to Joseph M. Williams, a good practice is to delete: (i) useless adjectives and adverbs; (ii) words that mean little or nothing, that repeat the meaning of other words and that are implied by other words; and (iii) to replace phrases with words.¹⁸

31.4.4. Use Challenging Rather Than Self-Proclaimed Names of Extremist Organizations

Having expanded into Syria in 2013, *Da‘ish* adopted the name: (الدولة الإسلامية (في العراق والشام). The group’s name was translated as the *Islamic State in Iraq and Ash-Sham*,¹⁹ the *Islamic State in Iraq and Syria* (both abbreviated as ‘ISIS’) or the *Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant* (abbreviated as ‘ISIL’). In June 2014, the group declared the creation a so-called ‘*caliphate*’ and shortened its name to *Islamic State* (abbreviated as ‘IS’) to reflect its expansionist ambitions. However, *Da‘ish* has been widely used by the group’s Arabic-speaking detractors when referring to it, because this name is considered derogatory. It resembles the Arabic words ‘*da‘is*’ (داعس), that means one who crushes, or tramples down, something underfoot. Thus, the latter name has been used as a way of challenging the legitimacy of the group due to the negative connotations of the word in Arabic. The group’s supporters object to its use.²⁰ Within areas under its control, *Da‘ish*

¹⁸ Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, 8th ed., Longman, London, 2005, p. 122.

¹⁹ ‘*Ash-Sham*’ is the Arabic name for the Levant or Greater Syria.

²⁰ Faisal Irshaid, “Isis, Isil, IS or Daesh? One Group, Many Names”, *BBC News*, 2 December 2015.

punished the use of this name by flogging²¹ or cutting out the tongue.²² In December 2015, United Kingdom ('UK') Prime Minister, David Cameron, addressed the UK Parliament mentioning that "this evil death cult is neither a true representation of Islam, nor is it a state" and announced that "it is time to join our key ally France, the Arab League, and other members of the international community in using as frequently as possible the terminology Daesh rather than ISIL".²³

Da'ish is currently used at the UN as a preferred name to refer to the group. In an internal circular, the UN Secretariat mentioned that, as of July 2021, *Da'ish* will be the preferred term for ISIL and should be used in all documents originating in the Secretariat.²⁴

Following the names self-proclaimed by terrorist organization is a form of acknowledgment of their claims. Therefore, the author's recommendation is to use the names that best challenge such organizations' ambitions and legitimacy. *Da'ish* should be the name given to this group in order to terminologically confirm that it is no more than a terrorist organization. Furthermore, this would be in line with the author's recommendation in Section 31.4.6.

31.4.5. Avoid Euphemism in Quoting from and Responding to Hate Speech

According to Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, euphemism is "the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant".²⁵ Euphemisms may be used to mask profanity or refer to topics some consider taboo such as disability, sex, excretion or death in a polite way.²⁶ It is a general rule to use euphemism and be politically correct. However, hate speech content should be refuted openly and directly. For example, when post or tweet on social media refers to a moderate Muslim leader, such as the Grand Imám of Al-Azhar,²⁷ offensively as sheep, which is an

²¹ Rania Abouzeid, "Syria's Uprising Within an Uprising, European Council on Foreign Relations", *European Council on Foreign Affairs*, 16 January 2014.

²² Maria Vultaggio, "ISIL, ISIS, Islamic State, Daesh: What's The Difference?", *International Business Times*, 16 November 2015.

²³ Office of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, "PM's Opening Statement to Commons Debate on Military Action in Syria", 2 December 2015.

²⁴ UN Secretariat, "Internal Circular to UN Language Staff dated 2 July 2021", 2 July 2021 (on file with the author).

²⁵ "Euphemism", in *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*.

²⁶ "Euphemism", in *Online Etymology Dictionary*.

²⁷ For more information about the current Grand Imám of Al-Azhar, see the web site of Al-Imám at-Ṭāyyib (in Arabic).

offensive reference in Arabic, it is recommended to quote the offensive expression as is and expose it explicitly.

31.4.6. Use Internationally Agreed Terminologies and Gender-Inclusive Language for a Universally Harmonized Response

Religious leaders are advised to be aware of and use internationally agreed terminologies, such as hate speech, extremist ideologies, extremist narratives and the like terminologies. A universally harmonized response requires a harmonized lexicon. They are also invited to add to this lexicon.

In addition, it was recommended to translate these terminologies using the functional rather than purely linguistic equivalents. This also applies to international humanitarian law and international criminal law terminologies. Take, for example, the crime of aggression. The crime is expressly mentioned in the *Qur'án*. In the second chapter of the *Qur'án*, God commands Muslims as follows:

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ [البقرة:190]

Pickthall's English translation of the verse reads:

Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors [The *Qur'án*, 2:190].²⁸

Arberry's English translation of the verse reads:

And fight in the way of God with those; who fight with you, but aggress not: God loves not the aggressors [The *Qur'án*, 2:190].^{29,30}

Regarding gender-inclusive language, attention was drawn to the fact that Arabic is a gender-inclusive language by nature. However, it has a unique system of gender. It uses what seems to be masculine gender when gender-neutrality is meant.³¹ This is the reason why it is commonly misunderstood. Inadequate translations of the *Qur'án* from Arabic language into other languages may well promote this wrong understanding, leading to exclusion of and possibly bias against women. Any *Qur'anic* verse about men is about men and women alike unless it is specifically about women or about men.

²⁸ Mohammed M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of The Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation*, 2nd ed., George Allen & Unwin, London, 1948, p. 48.

²⁹ Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted: A Translation*, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, p. 1.

³⁰ For an in-depth discussion of the crime of aggression in the *Qur'án*, see, Tallyn Gray (ed.), *Islam and International Criminal Law and Justice*, Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher ('TOAEP'), Brussels, 2018, pp. 87–99 (<https://www.toaep.org/nas-pdf/2-gray/>).

³¹ See, for example, Fatima B. Said, "Masculine and Feminine Words of the Noble Qur'án: A Descriptive Analytical Study", Master's dissertation, Al-Haj Al-Khedr University, 2008.

Following is an example of a *Qur'anic* verse where the word '*rijal*' (رجال), which literally means *men*, is used. The context of the verse is the condition of people in Paradise. The verse reads:

[...] وَعَلَى الْأَعْرَافِ رِجَالٌ يَعْرِفُونَ كُلًّا بِسِيمَاهُمْ [...] [الأعراف:46]

In Ibn Kathīr's commentary on the *Qur'an*,³² reference to what is literally *men* is in fact to *people* of Paradise. In addition, two modern commentaries by Al-Azhar,³³ and Hijazī,³⁴ introduced by the current Imām of Al-Azhar, interpret the word '*rijal*' as *people*.

A modern English translation by Mufti Taqi Usmani, that reflects this understanding, reads:

And on A'raf (the Heights), there shall be people who recognize each group through their signs [The *Qur'an*, 7:46].³⁵

Another translation by Sarwar, that reflects this understanding, reads:

There will be people on the heights who know everyone by their faces and who will say to the people of Paradise, "Peace be upon you" [The *Qur'an*, 7:46].³⁶

Unfortunately, seven out of 13 different translations of the *Qur'an*, reviewed by the author for the purposes of this chapter, literally render what seems to be *men* as *men*.³⁷

In addition, it was recommended to use universally accepted standards for transliterating Arabic names into English and other languages in order to avoid potential confusion or incrimination of innocents, including by using the spelling of names used in the UN Consolidated List of Individuals and Entities Subject to Measures Imposed by the Security Council,³⁸ among other credible sources.

³² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān 'Al-'Azīm (Commentary on the Great Qur'ān)*, Ibn Ḥazm Publishing House, Beirut, 2000, p. 315.

³³ A Committee of Scholars, *At-Tafsīr Al-Wásīṭ Lil-Qur'ān Al-Karīm (Semi-Abridged Commentary on the Noble Qur'ān)*, Islamic Research Academy of Al-Azhar Al-Sharēf, Cairo, 1997, pp. 1428–1429.

³⁴ Muḥammad M. Hijazī, *At-Tafsīr Al-Wāḍiḥ (Self-Explanatory Commentary (on the Qur'ān))*, Muslim Council of Elders, Cairo, 2019, pp. 759/1–761/1.

³⁵ Mufti Taqi Usmani, *The Noble Quran*, Maktaba Ma'ariful Quran, Karachi, 2016, p.15.

³⁶ Muhammad Sarwar, *The Holy Quran*, Islamic Seminary, New Jersey, 2001, p. 62.

³⁷ Out of 13 translations published on the Quran Explorer's web site, six translations *explicitly* reflect this gender-inclusive understanding. They are one out of five for English, one out of one for French, one out of two for Spanish, one out of one for Turkish, two out of three for Urdu and one out of one for German.

³⁸ UN Security Council, "United Nations Security Council Consolidated List".

31.4.7. Use Cautious Language as Appropriate

Cautious language, also referred to as hedging language, is used to convey how certain you are of the opinions or arguments you are using in your writing or speaking, especially when writing an argument. It is important to be cautious or tentative in your claims unless they are proved without any doubt. According to Andy Gillett, examples of hedging language include using: (i) introductory verbs: for example, seem, tend, look like, appear to be, think, believe, doubt, be sure, indicate, suggest; (ii) certain lexical verbs: for example, believe, assume, suggest; (iii) certain modal verbs: for example, will, must, would, may, might, could; (iv) adverbs of frequency: for example, often, sometimes, usually; (v) modal adverbs: for example, certainly, definitely, clearly, probably, possibly, perhaps, conceivably; (vi) modal adjectives: for example, certain, definite, clear, probable, possible; (vii) modal nouns: for example, assumption, possibility, probability; (viii) ‘that’ clauses: for example, ‘It could be the case that’, ‘It might be suggested that’, ‘There is every hope that’; (ix) to-clause plus adjective: for example, ‘It may be possible to obtain’, ‘It is important to develop’, ‘It is useful to study’.³⁹ Therefore, in news stories, for instance, until someone is irrevocably convicted of a crime, he or she should always be referred to as alleged perpetrator, suspect or accused, as the case may be, but not perpetrator or actor. Showing respect to facts is a value added to counter-speech. It is also a way to gain credibility and show how accurate, precise and honest responders are.

31.4.8. Use Fact-Based Rather Than Rhetorical Language

A rhetorical device is a technique that an author or speaker uses to convey to the listener or reader a meaning with the goal of persuading them towards considering a topic from a perspective, using language designed to encourage or provoke an emotional display of a given perspective or action. Rhetorical devices evoke an emotional response in the audience through use of language, but that is not their primary purpose. Rather, by doing so, they seek to make a position or argument more compelling than it would otherwise be.⁴⁰ Rhetorical language is commonly used by religious leaders in preaching. However, when it comes to responding to hate speech and refuting perverse ideologies, it is advised to rely more largely on fact-based statements. A well-drafted fact-based statement will include specific quotations, times, events, numbers and so on. A rhetorically drafted statement will include none of the items mentioned and will rely on too general wordings. An example of a fact-based statement is, ‘Dealing justly with

³⁹ Andy Gillett, “Features of Academic Writing: Hedging” (available on the Using English for Academic Purposes’ web site).

⁴⁰ Timothy Crews-Anderson, *Critical Thinking and Informal Logic*, Humanities-Ebooks, London, 2010, p. 40.

non-Muslims is instructed in the *Qur'ân* twelve times as in the following verses. The contexts of revelation were as follows'. An example of a rhetorical language statement is, 'Those who deny the injunction to deal justly with non-Muslims are just liars'.

31.4.9. Highlight and Correct Wrong Translations of the *Qur'ân* and *Shari'ah* Terminology

There are hundreds of different translations of the *Qur'ân*. Translation of the *Qur'ân* is particularly challenging due to many reasons including the fact that all languages exist *sui generis*, that is, not exemplified or unclassifiable in reference to one another and each offering a new version of life or a new window on the world. Arabic, the original language of the *Qur'ân* and *Shari'ah*, is particularly unique. It has its own features and characteristics such as parsing, duality, inter-sentence connectors and diacritical markers. It is the only language in which the *Qur'ân* is positively believed to be fully understood.⁴¹

Al-Ghussain argues that:

[through] translation, translators become transmitters of different civilizations. Inevitably to some extent, any translation will reflect the translator's own mental and cultural outlook, despite the best of impartial intentions. Every translator has her/his own beliefs, knowledge and attitudes.⁴²

The opening chapter of the *Qur'ân* (Al-fatihah) is recited by a Muslim at least 17 times a day. It is a summary of the teachings of the *Qur'ân*. Therefore, a translation of this chapter is essential for practicing as well as understanding Islâm. The last verses of that chapter read:

أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ (أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ (٦) صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ
الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ (٧) [الفاتحة: 6-7]

The verses make a reference to two categories of people. According to Yusuf Ali's widely acceptable translation of the *Qur'ân*, the verses read:

Show us the straight way. The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, Those whose (portion) is not wrath and who go not astray [The *Qur'ân*, 1:6-7].⁴³

⁴¹ Muhammad Abdul-Fattah A. Taghian, *Translating Qur'anic Mutashābihāt: A Linguistic Approach*, LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, London, 2014, p. 10.

⁴² Reem A.A.L. Al-Ghussain, "Areas of Cultural and Linguistic Difficulty in English-Arabic Translation", unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Durham, 2003, p. 15.

⁴³ Abdullah Y. Ali, *The Holy Qur'ân: Text, Translation and Commentary*, Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ân, 1998, p. 4.

In addition, according to Arberry's translation of the *Qur'án*, the verses read:

Guide us in the straight path,
the path of those whom Thou hast blessed,
not of those against whom Thou art wrathful,
nor of those who are astray [The *Qur'án*, 1:6–7].⁴⁴

Also, according to Assami and others, often referred to as 'Şaḩeeḩ International',⁴⁵ the verses read:

The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor, not of
those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray
[The *Qur'án*, 1:6–7].⁴⁶

However, few other translations depart from this orthodox understanding, as reflected by the above translation, not to mention the exact wording of the Arabic text. Furthermore, a review of several commentaries on the *Qur'án*, including three commentaries by Al-Azhar Islamic Research Academy;⁴⁷ by *Qur'án* and Prophetic Tradition Commission of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs of Egypt;⁴⁸ by Eissa, an Al-Azhar Scholar,⁴⁹ introduced by a prominent Al-Azhar scholar, Muḩammad Mitwallí aṣḩ-Shá'ráwí; and by Híjazi,⁵⁰ introduced by the current Imám of Al-Azhar, shows that those two categories of people are: those who have ignored the right path and those who are already away from the right path unknowingly and because of unwarranted confusion. Therefore, the above translations reflect the understanding of Al-Azhar of these verses.

On the other hand, a translation by Al-Hilali and Khan, that is among the most widely read translations in the world and is mostly misused by ultraconservatives, extremists and promoters of hate speech reads:

Guide us to the Straight Way. The Way of those on whom You have
bestowed Your Grace, not (the way) of those who earned Your

⁴⁴ Arberry, 1964, see *supra* note 29.

⁴⁵ This English translation is frequently used by the Observatory.

⁴⁶ Şaḩeeḩ International, *The Qur'an: English Meanings*, Emily Assami, Mary Kennedy and Amatullah Bantley (trans.), Abdul-Qasim Publishing House, Jeddah, 1997, p. 1.

⁴⁷ A Committee of Scholars, 1997, pp. 22–23, see *supra* note 33.

⁴⁸ Qur'án and Prophetic Tradition Commission of Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, *Al-Muntakhab fi Tafsiir Al-Qur'án Al-Karím (Elected Commentary on the Noble Qur'án)*, 26th ed., Dar Al-Thaqafa, Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, Cairo, 2018, p. 1.

⁴⁹ 'Abdul-Jalíl 'Issa, *Taysir At-Tafasir (An Abridged Commentary [on the Qur'án])*, Muslim Council of Elders, Cairo, 2019, p. 49.

⁵⁰ Híjazi, 2019, p. 84/1, see *supra* note 34.

Anger (such as the Jews), nor of those who went astray (such as the Christians) [The *Qur'án*, 1:6-7].⁵¹

Another example is the designation of '*al-kufár*' (الكفار). It is the plural form of '*kafir*'. It shares the same root as '*taḳfír*' meaning "excommunication/accusation of unbelief in Islam"⁵² of a Muslim by a Muslim person or a Muslim body. In extremist Islámic discourse in languages other than Arabic, reference is typically made to non-Muslims using the word '*al-kufár*' in Arabic.⁵³ That is to say, the word is transliterated rather than translated. As such, it only gives a strong impression that it has a meaning that is peculiar to Arabic and does not have an English equivalent. Therefore, non-Arabic speaking Muslims understand it as derogatory word used with pejorative overtone. Since it means something that is not simply *others*, it gives the impression that non-Muslims are enemies of Muslims.⁵⁴ However, this word simply means unbelievers, according to Arberry's translation⁵⁵ for instance. In a Muslim context, it means non-Muslims.⁵⁶ Furthermore, in the second chapter of the *Qur'án*,

⁵¹ Muhammad T. al-Hilali and Muhammad M. Khan, *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, Madinah, 1999, pp. 14–15.

⁵² Gray, 2018, p. xii, see *supra* note 30.

⁵³ For a useful elaboration on the approaches of extremists to Islámic *Shari'ah* that lead to religious hatred, see Chapter 16 of this anthology.

⁵⁴ According to Muḥammad Rashíd Reḍa, *Terminologies Used by Contemporary Writers*, Majallat al-Manár, Vol. I, Cairo, 1898, pp. 17–18:

The designation of *al-kufár* applies, as usually used by writers today, to atheists [...]. Whenever we use it in our writings or speech, we mean what I have just said. We do not call believers in other religions *al-kufár*, because the designation does not apply to them in this sense. Furthermore, I hold that that it is not permissible in *Shari'ah* to call them *al-kufár*; because the designation has become one of the ugliest insults and the most painful ways of humiliation. This act is prohibited by *Shari'ah* as unanimously acknowledged by scholars of Islam. This argument is not at odds with the tradition of using the designation during the first eras of revelation. It was not used at the time of divine legislation for this purpose. It was rather used as one of the most courteous designations. It was devoid of any connotation of respect or offense, not to mention insult or harm, to non-Muslims, which would be otherwise be contrary to the purposes and morals of the religion. Since the situation has become different and the [language] usage has changed, followers of a religion, who believe in God, should not be called *al-kufár*.

⁵⁵ Arberry, 1964, p. 664, see *supra* note 29.

⁵⁶ In a recent statement by the Grand Imám of Al-Azhar, he referred to non-Muslims literally as *non-Muslims* amid a controversy aroused by an Egyptian restaurant which denied serving food to a non-fasting (non-Muslim) person during the day in the month of *Rámádán*, maintaining that placing restrictions on non-Muslims during *Rámádán* is an absurd act. See, for example, "Restrictions on Non-Muslims During Ramadan 'Absurd', Says Al-Azhar Imam", *Egypt Today*, 19 April 2022 (in English) and Abdulrahman Mohammed, "Sheikh of Al-Azhar:

reference is made to Muslim believers as those who are ‘*al-kufār*’ of evil, meaning that they are unbelievers in evil.

The same applies to the word *tāghūt* (الطَّاغُوت), which, according to Yusuf Ali’s translation, means *evil* in general. Verse no. 256 of Al-Baqarah (the Heifer) reads:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ سَدَّدَ نَبَّيْنَ الرُّشْدِ مِنَ الْغَيِّ ۚ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِن بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا⁵⁷ (البقرة-256)

Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from Error; whoever rejects Evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks [The *Qur’án*, 2-256].⁵⁷

In addition, according to Arberry’s translation of the *Qur’án*, the English translation of the verse reads:

No compulsion is there in religion. Rectitude has become clear from error. So whosoever disbelieves in idols and believes in God, has laid hold of the most firm handle, unbreaking; God is All-hearing, All-knowing [The *Qur’án*, 2:256].⁵⁸

However, the English translation of the *Qur’án* by al-Hilali and Khan reads:

There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in *Tāghūt*,⁵⁹ and believes in Allāh, then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break. And Allāh is All-Hearer, All-Knower [The *Qur’án*, 2:256].⁶⁰

In ultraconservative discourse, reference is made to evil, especially political tyranny and rulers in general using the word ‘*tāghūt*’, which is transliterated but not translated, to describe opponent politicians who, in the view of extremists, do not properly apply *Shari’ah* law. As such, the term is burdened with political connotations that best serve the ideology of extremists. However, according to Hijazi for example, ‘*tāghūt*’ linguistically means exceeding limits. Technically, it refers to Satan and is ascribed to any thing or person, other than

Restricting Non-Muslims in Food and Drink During the Day in Ramadan Is Against Religion”, *El Balad News*, 19 April 2022 (in Arabic).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁵⁸ Arberry, 1964, p. 37, see *supra* note 29.

⁵⁹ This chapter uses the transliteration ‘*tāghūt*’, pursuant to TOAEP editorial guidelines.

⁶⁰ Al-Hilali and Khan, 1999, p. 33, see *supra* note 51.

God, that is worshipped.⁶¹ Even in old classical commentaries, such as the Commentary by Ibn Kathīr,⁶² ‘*tāghūt*’ is interpreted as Satan.

Therefore, responders to hate speech should have in place an informed methodology based on which they select the most credible translation that best serves their counter-speech strategy, not to mention taking this point into their consideration when translating the *Qur’án* themselves. A counter-speech content that is even very well drafted in English, for example, but uses an English translation that is not in line with the understanding of the *Qur’án* and *Shari’ah* by responders would be counterproductive.

Through its own translation centre, Al-Azhar is currently developing its first-ever translation of the *Qur’án* into English, French and Swahili languages. It plans to translate it into 27 other languages.⁶³ A translation by Al-Azhar, reflecting its orthodox understanding of the *Qur’án* would be an excellent value added to the global understanding of Islám and would be a step forward in promoting the multilingualism of Al-Azhar’s response to hate speech.

31.4.10. Co-operate with and Provide Training to Social Media Platforms

According to the Italian Institute for International Political Studies, the conflicts in Syria and Iraq have attracted over 40,000 foreign fighters, who have travelled to these countries to join the ranks of *Da’ish* and other armed groups.

Although accurate figures are not available, it is estimated that at least 5,000 jihádíst foreign fighters came from Europe. Over 1,500 have already returned home, while at least 1,000 might still be in Syria and Iraq. These jihádíst travellers include not only male adults, often with combat experience, but also women and children, with different backgrounds and motivations.⁶⁴

According to *Da’ish* Youth Recruitment Strategy by the Observatory, the group holistically and effectively uses social media platforms, such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram among other platforms to communicate with and recruit its supporters to join its ranks and/or to disseminate its message including by tweeting and retweeting, to gather intelligence and to co-ordinate the group’s response to the voices expressed in defiance to its activities and aims. The Observatory is of the view that using social media by the group is due to its popularity among young people who can be easily deceived while seeking more freedom from traditional ways of thinking. The Observatory also notes that the

⁶¹ Hijazí, 2019, p. 240/1, see *supra* note 34.

⁶² Ibn Kathīr, 2000, p. 322, see *supra* note 32.

⁶³ Shaima A. Hadi, “Al-Azhar Translation Centre Coordinator: The Centre Plans to Translate the Noble Qur’án into 30 Languages”, *Al-Ahram News Portal*, 2 April 2018.

⁶⁴ Francesco Marone, “Tackling the Foreign Fighter Threat in Europe”, *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, 9 January 2020.

group uses highly influential videos, in addition to other videos in which it shows how powerful it has become, trying, through using very eloquent language, to persuade young people to join it. It also uses the power of images which includes decontextualized *Qur'anic* verses and *hadiths* translated into a variety of languages in a bid to legitimize its acts of killing and other heinous acts. It also uses infographics to show the numbers of its suicide operations and training sessions. In addition, the group uses surveys to assess and direct public opinion. It also uses private chats for more recruitments. The group created an Android-based application to publish its news. In an effort to create a new generation that supports its ideology, it developed a mobile application asking children if they wish to attack tourist attractions such as the Statue of Liberty. Children were given points if their answers were yes. In 2017, it had 30 to 40 channels on Telegram. It also created videos in sign language. In order to reach the biggest number of social media users, the group uses hashtags very effectively including irrelevant hashtags to show, including to accidental viewer, their wide presence and power. In 2014, for example, they used #Brazil2014 to gain more views of their tweets.⁶⁵

An example of the initiatives to combat online hate speech is the Joint Statement of European Union ('EU') Ministers for Justice and Home Affairs and Representatives of EU Institutions on the Terrorist Attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016, dated 24 March 2016, which underlines that:

the [European] Commission will intensify work with [information technology] companies, notably in the EU Internet Forum, to counter terrorist propaganda and to develop by June 2016 a code of conduct against hate speech online.⁶⁶

According to The EU Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online,

the [information technology ('IT')] Companies [are] to encourage the provision of notices and flagging of content that promotes incitement to violence and hateful conduct at scale by experts, particularly via partnerships with [civil society organizations ('CSOs')], by providing clear information on individual company Rules and Community Guidelines and rules on the reporting and notification processes. The IT Companies [are] to endeavour to strengthen partnerships with CSOs by widening the geographical spread of such partnerships and, where appropriate, to provide

⁶⁵ Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism, *Da'esh Youth Recruitment Strategy*, Cairo, 2017, pp. 30–35.

⁶⁶ Council of the EU, Joint Statement of EU Ministers for Justice and Home Affairs and Representatives of EU Institutions on the Terrorist Attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016, 24 March 2016, No. 158/16.

support and training to enable CSO partners to fulfil the role of a “trusted reporter” or equivalent, with due respect to the need of maintaining their independence and credibility. [...]

The IT Companies [are] to provide regular training to their staff on current societal developments and to exchange views on the potential for further improvement.⁶⁷

In practice, the algorithms and human interventions recently used by social media platforms to identify, review and remove hate speech content have proven to be inadequate. Another good reason for this is that those platforms inadequately trained persons to review the potentially harmful content. Most recently, social media platforms have been widely criticized for failure to remove offensive hate speech content while removing normal everyday content instead.

Therefore, it was recommended to co-operate with social media platforms by providing them with smartly drafted and updated keywords for alerting their systems. Training of human reviewers on how to do this critical job without compromising freedom of expression was also highly recommended. Engagement should also include exchanging views on the potential for further improvement. For example, a simple quotation of the *Qur’án* should not be censored unless it is accompanied with a perversive interpretation or a specific hate speech content directed at a religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or any other identity factor. Also, Arabic expressions, such as *Alláhu Akbár* (الله أكبر), which means ‘*God is greater*’, although unfortunately linked to use by suicide bombers and extremists, should not be censored *per se*, simply because this is a Muslim everyday expression. It does not have any violence-related meaning or connotation.

31.5. Lessons Learned

For a specialist advice to religious leaders responding to hate speech to be effective and productive, leaders should be approached very carefully and delicately. In a nutshell, the following rules are recommend:

1. Trust building and showing respect for faith should be the first steps to take.
2. Finding a common ground, on countering hate speech in this context, should follow.

⁶⁷ European Commission, “Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online”, 30 June 2016, pp. 2–3 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/i7180r/>).

3. Advice should be relevant and problem-centred rather than content-centred. This means that examples given should reflect the real-life challenges.⁶⁸
4. Advice should be given as an experience shared rather than a lesson taught.
5. Religious leaders should be involved in discussion, giving them the impression that they lead it and are not just listeners or learners. The advisor should still have control on the discussion. In in this regard, elicitation, as a presentation technique, can be used.

Some sensitive advice should be shared as a thought to reflect on or a question to answer in order to open the door for a discussion without any provocation or defensiveness.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ The author used examples from the website of the Observatory in preparation for the lecture delivered at the Florence conference on 9 April 2022.

⁶⁹ For example, gender-inclusive language was addressed, in the context of showing religious leaders a world trend, asking them if this could be accommodated without prejudice to religious rules. Examples of Arabic language being gender-inclusive by nature were shown.

Publication Series No. 41 (2023):

Religion, Hateful Expression and Violence

Morten Bergsmo and Kishan Manocha (editors)

The focus of this comprehensive anthology is hate speech by religious actors or in the name of religion. Such hate speech has grown in severity, leading to tragic occurrences of violence and acts of terrorism. This has become a challenge of concern to the international community as a whole. The anthology offers in-depth case studies of religion-based or -related hate speech (India, Myanmar and the former Yugoslavia); explanations and discussions of relevant international law, philosophical and religious normative frameworks; expert analyses of factors motivating hate speech in the name of religion (including personality and situational factors, colonial prejudice, abuse of religious themes and exploitation of social influence); and 250 pages of analysis of measures available to assist religious leaders to reduce or prevent hate speech by their members or in the name of their community. The book identifies a variety of formal and informal sanctions or means of disapproval that may be available to religious leaders who seek to reduce hate speech.

The anthology contains 31 chapters and several forewords, with contributions by 40 leading authors from diverse backgrounds, in alphabetical order: Fathi M.A. Ahmed, U Aye Lwin, Mohamed Elewa Badar, Dorit Beinisch, Morten Bergsmo, Charles M. Bo, Emiliano J. Buis, Vincenzo Buonomo, Ioana Cismas, Medha Damojipurapu, Laura Dellagiacoma, David Donat-Cattin, Bani Dugal, Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal, Mona Elbahtimy, Rana Moustafa Essawy, Nazila Ghanea, Majda Halilović, Harleen Kaur, Claus Kreß, U Kyaw Tin, Jacques P. Leider, Madan B. Lokur, David J. Luban, Adel Maged, Kishan Manocha, Michael Marett-Crosby, Ariel Merari, Svein Mønnesland, Shruti Narayan, Matthias Neuner, Gilad Noam, Ochi Megumi, Fania Oz-Salzberger, Eli Salzberger, Song Tianying, Eliyahu Stern, Peter J. Stern, Usha Tandon and Johan Vibe.

ISBNs: 978-82-8348-141-9 (print) and 978-82-8348-142-6 (e-book).

The logo for TOAEP (Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher) is displayed in a white box. The letters 'TOAEP' are in a large, bold, sans-serif font.

Torkel Opsahl
Academic EPublisher

Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher
Via San Gallo 135r
50129 Florence
Italy
URL: www.toaep.org