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Chapter Four

Television, Islam, and the Invisible: Narratives on Terrorism and Immigration

Tim Karis

During the first hours and days after the killing of Osama bin Laden had been announced, the Obama administration had to face a lot of questions. Had the operation been carried out in accordance with international law? Was the codename *Geronimo* offensive to Native Americans? Had Islamic laws been breached by burying the body at sea? And most importantly: was it really him? The latter question often came alongside the public demand to make pictures of bin Laden's dead body available to the public. These pictures, it was argued, would prove to the world that the story of the chase down and killing of the world's most wanted terrorist was actually true. President Barack Obama, however, decided that the pictures would not be released. When asked about this policy on *60 Minutes*, he answered: "It is important for us to make sure that very graphic photos of somebody who was shot in the head are not floating around as an incitement to additional violence." When asked about his reaction when he saw the pictures, he briefly added: "It was him."¹

To this day, the Obama administration has not released any pictures showing a dead Osama bin Laden. In a visual culture such as ours, this is highly remarkable. And yet, it is important to realize that the administration did not altogether refrain from providing the public with visual material regarding bin Laden's killing. Instead, on May 7, five days after the killing, the US Department of Defense released five clips of video footage that had been secured by US Special Forces at bin Laden's last refuge in Abbottabad, Pakistan.² In four of the five videos, bin Laden can be seen giving statements. Only one of these four appears to have been produced for release with the remaining three appearing to be rehearsal material. Bin Laden gives his statements in sparse and unimpressive surroundings and, at one point, misses a cue. Although the videos were released with their soundtracks erased, it is apparent just by looking at the visual material that these videos would have destroyed bin Laden's

larger-than-life appearance had they been released by Al-Qaeda. It was, however, a fifth video that by far gained most of the attention. The media called it “most revealing,”³ “extraordinary” and “astonishing.”⁴ One journalist wrote: “In the most candid scenes, bin Laden can be seen watching news coverage of himself on television.”⁵

In the following, I will take the video of bin Laden’s channel surfing through television news programs as a starting point for an analysis of how television creates public images and narratives. These images and narratives can change over time in a complex and often ambiguous media discourse. Taking the leading German television news magazine *Tagesthemen* (1978–present) as an example and focusing on the media narrative on Islamic terrorism, I will briefly trace that developing narrative from the Beirut attacks of 1983 to the prevented attacks on Times Square in 2010, sketch out its component parts, and end with some reflections as to whether this narrative may have been dissolved in the context of the release of the bin Laden videos. Most importantly, I will point out how the terrorism narrative got entangled with a different media narrative revolving around Muslim immigration to Germany and other European countries. The link between the two narratives, I argue, is based on a notion of “invisibility” that is applied both to terrorists hiding from criminal prosecution and immigrants allegedly creating so called “parallel societies” that have but little contact with the rest of the country. My main argument is that since television creates what is visible and what is invisible in a society, it is of major importance to re-evaluate its role in creating public images of Islam, to take seriously the complexities and ambiguities of media discourse and, thereby, to go beyond the notions of “bias” and “Islamophobia” that have for a long time dominated academic research on Islam in the media.⁶

THE VIDEO: BIN LADEN CHANNEL SURFING

I want to start by describing the famous video of bin Laden’s channel surfing in a bit more detail. For the first minute of the 4:14-long video, all we see is a television set displaying a list of television channels, apparently an on-screen menu. As we learn from an information box at the bottom of the screen, Al Jazeera is then selected and watched for a few seconds. At this time, Al Jazeera is broadcasting some footage showing Osama bin Laden calmly walking around in a mountainous region with a companion. Shortly before the on-screen-menu is displayed again, bin Laden can be seen shouldering a machine gun. Next, there is a camera panning from the upper left to the lower right, away from the television set and on to Osama bin Laden

holding a remote control in his hands and apparently watching the footage of himself on Al Jazeera. After that, the camera zooms out so that both the television set and bin Laden huddling in front of it can be seen. He wears a ski-cap and is covered in a brown blanket. During the rest of the video, the camera sometimes zooms on to the television set again, but otherwise stays in the same position. On the television, various images of Osama bin Laden are shown as well as an image of the burning Twin Towers of New York's World Trade Center.

A quick review of media reporting on the video reveals what was found most remarkable about the video was its extraordinary *ordinariness*. In the video, bin Laden does not appear as a "gun-toting rebel or the scholarly sheikh dictating messages to the outside world"⁷ but rather "aged and frail,"⁸ "haggard,"⁹ or simply "like an elderly grandfather."¹⁰ Commentators found the footage to be evidence of bin Laden's vanity and obsession with his own public image or, in a rather different nuance of the same argument, his strategic will to create a particular image of himself in the public mind. In an interview with *ABC News*, Lawrence Wright, author of an acclaimed Al-Qaeda history, put it like this: "He's always been very careful about controlling his image and he was nurturing his image, watching himself on television in what was the most revealing, most human, least controlled moment of his entire career. [This is] just a guy who wants to be seen, who wants to be known . . . Very pathetic in a way."¹¹

A lot more has been said about this video and even more could be added, but I want to focus on two aspects here. First, it is important to realize that the footage of an old man watching television can only be of impact in the context of a larger discourse, in which this particular old man, Osama bin Laden, is widely known and commonly associated with a particular style of visual appearance. Seeing bin Laden in a different visual context has an eye-opening effect for viewers, which is further enhanced by the juxtaposition of the aged bin Laden in front of the television set with the agile bin Laden on the television screen. Second, the video creates confusion about the roles of the observer and the observed. In the discourse so far, distinctions have been quite clear: a Western recipient of a newscast would be "the observer" and Osama bin Laden would be "the observed." But now, all of sudden, bin Laden himself becomes a recipient of a newscast, thus identical with "the observer" and therefore necessarily different from "the observed." This has a major effect on the believability of bin Laden's former media image: if Bin-Laden-on-television is not identical with Bin-Laden-outside-television, then the Bin-Laden-on-television becomes less believable. The powerful symbol of Islamic terrorism becomes a media invention, a hoax, a chimera. Thus, the whole media discourse centering on Osama bin Laden, or rather, as pointed

out in the following, the media narrative on Islamic terrorism is substantially called into question. Had a picture of bin Laden's dead body been released, this would have been a clear proof of his demise, but with the release of the video of bin Laden watching television something much more important happened—bin Laden died as a discursive symbol.

In short, the video quite uniquely demonstrates that television images are not copies of the real world, but contingent symbols that are created and shaped in media discourse. These symbols can become very powerful for a time, as the example of Osama bin Laden plainly proves, but they are at the same time very fragile elements of a media discourse that is itself ever-changing and full of ambiguity.

ISLAM AND THE MEDIA

In the following, I will sketch out the media discourse in which the symbol "Osama bin Laden" has played a significant part for more than ten years after the 9/11 attacks. In order to do that, I draw on a larger research project, in which I analyzed news coverage on Islam in the 1979–2010 time period.¹² This research is centered on the German television news magazine *Tagesthemmen*, which is one of the most popular, most influential, and most trusted news programs of the country. For the study, I conducted 80 in-depth-analyses of the 3–5-minute reports that are characteristic for the format, concentrating on the visual material used in the television reports.

Research on the portrayal of Islam in Western media has been conducted for a rather long time, starting with Edward Said's renowned study *Covering Islam*¹³ in which he applied the critical stance toward Western notions of Islam first developed in *Orientalism*¹⁴ onto contemporary media reporting. Today, research on Islam and the media is an interdisciplinary endeavor bringing together expertise from media studies, religious studies, sociology, political sciences, Islamic studies, and other disciplines. This research tradition has produced a lot of important and sometimes disturbing insights into the way Western media portray Islam in an often uninformed and, at times, hostile way.¹⁵ However, I argue in my work that too many studies are confined to the identification of a rather homogenous set of stereotypes. Researchers commonly assume that this set of stereotypes has been passed on in the West for generations. Its widespread use in media reporting is interpreted by researchers as an indication of a one-dimensional Western perception of Islam, variously called "Orientalism," "Islamophobia," or, in the German context, "*Feindbild Islam*." By basing their research on these concepts, too many studies fail to get a deeper understanding of the fine nuances and

ambiguities that are characteristic for the discourse. For example, most studies miss that a lot of media coverage actually revolves around the fact that many Muslims are victims of various discriminations—and that the reporting journalists unanimously condemn these discriminations. These reports, I argue, should not be considered to be exceptions to a media discourse that is, in essence, islamophobic. Rather, they should be considered to be a distinct part of a complex discourse in which various, and sometimes opposing, elements are in many ways entangled.¹⁶

DISCOURSE AND NARRATIVE

In order to analyze such a complex discourse, it is helpful to turn to the understanding of mass media as producers of contingent and dynamic orders of knowledge, as it is put forward by the British Cultural Studies. It is these orders of knowledge that I call media discourses. For the purpose of analysis, it is expedient to distinguish a number of individual media discourses with each media discourse centered on a different subject matter: “the climate change discourse,” “the financial crisis discourse,” “the Islam discourse.” Within the Islam discourse, as Cultural Studies would argue, all public knowledge of Islam is produced, distributed, and continuously altered over time.¹⁷

Discourse Analysis is a heterogeneous field encompassing lots of individual approaches, which are for the most part drawing from the works of Michel Foucault. In my research, I developed a narrative approach to discourse analysis that starts with Foucault and then takes its cues from British media scholar John Fiske, British Anglicist David Herman, German sociologist Willy Viehöver, and German media scholar Knut Hickethier.¹⁸ In short, this approach proceeds on the assumption that public knowledge, which is produced in media discourses, is ordered in narratives. Thus, what we know about Islam, we know from the stories the media tell—shorter stories in individual reports and larger stories developing over time. The telling and constant re-telling of these larger stories is what makes the media, and particularly television, in the words of John Fiske, “our own culture’s bard.”¹⁹ It is by way of storytelling that the media are constantly “constructing meaningful totalities out of scattered events.”²⁰

In a *longue durée* perspective, the larger narratives are of particular interest. Thus, the aim of my research on the coverage of Islam on *Tagesthemen* between 1979 and 2010 was to identify a repertoire of Islam narratives that journalists have drawn on in that time period, to describe the narrative’s relationships to each other and to call into question the taken-for-grantedness with which they are told. In order to do that, a qualitative research method

was developed. The interpretive work centered on the question, in which way individual journalistic statements from the *Tagesthemen* reports and individual images used in these reports reflected larger narratives on Islam and, at the same time, contributed to the further development of these narratives. As a result of this research, the following narratives were identified: (1) The Rise of Fundamentalism, (2) The Decline of the Old Orient, (3) The Clash of Civilizations, (4) The Islamic Terrorism, (5) The Problem of Integration, and (6) The Discrimination of Muslims. In the following, I will focus on the fourth of these narratives and briefly discuss its special relationship with the fifth.²¹

THE TERRORISM NARRATIVE

According to the narrative approach developed in my research, a narrative is comprised of five elements. It starts with a state of equilibrium (1), which is then disrupted by the action of a villain (2), creating disequilibrium. The narrative then charts the course of this disequilibrium (3), particularly the ways in which this disruption is harmful for people, who are presented as the victims in the narrative (4). Media narratives usually do not have final resolutions. Instead, several different versions of possible resolutions (5) are inscribed into the narrative.²²

Thus, the first question that needs to be asked about the terrorism narrative is: which is the state of equilibrium that is assumed to have been disrupted by the emergence of terrorism? In one word, this state of equilibrium can be called “security.” This concept, however, has several meanings. First, terrorism clearly endangers the operational safety of buildings and other infrastructure and the physical integrity of humans. In that sense, the concept of security is ever-present in *Tagesthemen* reports. More importantly, however, references to security are also made in a more general sense. Security is then understood as an overall normalcy, as the basic condition for everyday life. For example, this can be seen in a *Tagesthemen* report from 1983 that was broadcast on the occasion of terrorist attacks on French and American soldiers in Beirut. In the words of the reporting journalists, the attack had to be understood as an “assault on peace.”²³ According to this statement, the attacks should not be understood as an attempt to accomplish strategic goals within a military conflict, but as an end in itself. Thus, a disruption of equilibrium is assumed to be not only the result of terrorist activity, but also its actual aim—a feature of the narrative that sharply differentiates it from the other narratives of the Islam discourse. Another example of this notion of terrorism can be found in a *Tagesthemen* report from February 27, 1993, which was broadcast one day after the first terror attacks on the World Trade Center in New York

City. In this report, Mario Cuomo, then governor of the State of New York, is quoted as follows: "Fear is the weapon they use against you. And that's what terrorists are all about. . . . What they're trying to do is deny you normalcy."²⁴ This idea of terrorism aiming at the destruction of normalcy as such is the true beginning of the terrorism narrative. It does not start with terror attacks in the West, but with the insight that Western security might, from one moment to the other, prove a false security.

1993 AND BEYOND: ASSOCIATIONS

This leads to the question as to when this narrative was first established in media discourse. When was the notion of terrorism as an ultimate threat to Western normalcy first introduced in the media? Drawing on a sample of eighty reports from a singular news magazine, this question can hardly be answered with any certainty. However, it is striking to see how *Tagesthemen* reports from 1993 on the World Trade Center bombings differ a lot from reports on the Oklahoma City bombings of 1995. In 1993, journalists were very reluctant to speculate on the question whether the explosions in the World Trade Center had, in fact, been caused by a bomb and, if so, whether this might suggest a terrorist background. Ever since the events of 1993, however, journalists were quickly jumping to conclusions and speculated excessively on the alleged probability of a terrorist background and on the likely villains in that scenario: Muslims. This is particularly evident in the context of the Oklahoma City bombings from 1995. On April 20, 1995, the day after the bombing, that day's edition of *Tagesthemen* is full of references to the events of two years earlier. "Then, too," it is stated in one report, "America had considered itself to be safe."²⁵ Right after that statement, images of those responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center are displayed. In another report from the same day, Oklahoma City is coined "one of the largest centers of Islamic fundamentalism." Furthermore, *Tagesthemen* reporters talk about a "growing suspicion of the responsibility of Arab terrorists" for the Oklahoma City bombings. In that same report, a terrorism expert is interviewed, according to whom the attack "appears to have a connection to the Middle East" and has been conducted due to the "hatred different Islamic organizations nourish against the United States."²⁶

These assumptions are of particular interest because, as was revealed in breaking news during the same edition of *Tagesthemen*, Muslims were, in fact, not responsible for the Oklahoma City bombings. Rather, the attack was executed by Timothy McVeigh, a non-Muslim American. Thus, while journalists in 1993 apparently lacked the possibility to bring the event in line with an established

interpretive pattern, in 1995 they prematurely invoked the Islamic-terrorism narrative. By 1995, thus, this narrative was an integral part of the journalistic repertoire and an obvious choice when it came to interpreting bombing attacks.

In the following years, whenever a terrorist attack occurred, *Tagesthemen* journalists would look back at earlier attacks and draw comparisons. For example, a report that was broadcast on September 11, 2001, actually starts with footage from 1993 in which a fireman strides across a scene of devastation not unlike the ones emerging in New York City at the time of broadcasting. These visual similarities are verbalized in the report: "February 26, 1993, the images are much alike: an attack on the World Trade Center in New York. Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, one of the captured bombers, stated in his interrogation that if he had had more explosives, he would have been able to cause the collapse of both towers."²⁷ The reference to and use of similar images show that the narrative is essentially based on an associative rather than a causal structure. Within the logic of the narrative, terrorist attacks occur not *because* a different terrorist attack occurred before, but rather both attacks *independently* give evidence of the existence of Islamic terrorism. It is by way of linking events to each other that narrative coherence is produced and it is this coherence that allows journalists to talk about what is unwrapping before them in a meaningful way. Even on September 11, 2001, a day often cited to have been an enormous challenge for journalists due to its unexpectedness, the media, after an initial phase of confusion, were actually very quick to invoke the Islamic terrorism narrative.²⁸ Just hours after the attack, *Tagesthemen* showed the aforementioned images from 1993 and proceeded by portraying a "bloody trace of terror" from 1993 via the Nairobi and Darussalam attacks of 1998 to the present day.²⁹ After 9/11, the attacks from that day became the central point of reference in *Tagesthemen*, as is the case, for example, in *Tagesthemen* reports on the bombings in Madrid in 2004 and the *Tagesthemen* report on the prevented bombings on New York's Times Square in May 2010: "The bomb was supposed to hit the heart of New York. Today, many people think of when, back then, two airplanes brought the terror into the city."³⁰ This associative narrative structure has one important effect—It gives rise to the disturbing expectation that one terrorist attack will certainly be followed by another.

VILLAINS: OSAMA BIN LADEN AND THE INVISIBILITY OF TERRORISM

On September 11, 2001, *Tagesthemen* did not fail to mention who they held responsible for the attacks: "Terror is given a face: Osama bin Laden. The Saudi multi-millionaire becomes the world's most wanted man."³¹ Based on

my research sample, it appears that the focus on bin Laden as the major villain of the narrative really begins with the 9/11 attacks. Before that, Islamic terrorists were hardly ever mentioned by name. Instead, narrative coherence was produced by frequent reference to a number of alleged common features of Islamic terrorists—features that after 9/11 would, in part, also be applied to bin Laden. The first of these features is the terrorist's presumed irrationality. This notion is in line with the basic idea of the narrative outlined above: terrorists do not act out of strategic considerations, but out of sheer hatred. In the context of the Oklahoma City bombings, which *Tagesthemen* considered to be an attack executed by Islamic terrorists, this idea of terrorism as an end in itself is evoked several times. This is one example: “[The attack] shows that there are terrorists—religious or other kinds of fanatics—who, unlike politically motivated perpetrators, do not waste any thought on who they are killing or how many people. Mass murder seems to be factored in, or rather, it seems to be the point.”³² This notion of the religiously fanatic terrorist can also be found much earlier in the material. In a *Tagesthemen* report on the Beirut attacks from October 1983, these attacks are commented upon as follows: “The members of this militant group have proven their hatred against Americans several times during the past weeks. . . . Americans and Frenchmen are foreign devils, that is the position of this militant group. . . . They consider it their divine mission to humiliate the foreign devils and to kill them. In order to execute this mission, they are even willing to give their lives.”³³ It is striking how these notions are echoed in more recent *Tagesthemen* reports concerned with Al-Qaeda. As is stated on *Tagesthemen* on September 11, 2001, “[Al-Qaeda's] terror is not directed against representatives of the United States alone, but increasingly becomes a compulsion to the mass killing of innocent people.”³⁴ In these examples, terrorism does not appear as a political strategy, but as pure hatred or even—as is implied by the word “compulsion”—as a mental deficiency. Thus, the question, that is repeatedly asked with regards to Islamic terrorists is not “What do they want?,” but “Where does the hatred come from that causes terrorists to do things like that?”³⁵

At the same time, when it comes to Al-Qaeda, the notion of terrorist irrationality, while never completely dismissed, is sometimes eclipsed by a notion of terrorist professionalism. Throughout the reports, Al-Qaeda is depicted not as a fanatic mob, but as a highly regulated organization. For example, referring to the attack in Madrid in 2004, it is said that “the range of the attack and the coordination necessary to have ten bombs explode at different places at the same time”³⁶ indicated the likeliness of Al-Qaeda's responsibility. Osama bin Laden embodies this professional terrorism. In the footage shown of him, he never appears fanatic, outraged or hateful, but—while the West is seized with panic and fear—relaxed and reflective, calm and confident.

The second feature Islamic terrorists share, according to the terrorism narrative, is their invisibility. Again, the *Tagesthemen* reports on the Oklahoma City bombings provide some good examples. The alleged decision of Muslims to make Oklahoma City “one of the largest centers of Islamic fundamentalism” is explained with reference to the fact that Oklahoma is located in the Midwest where, for the Muslims, it would be “easy to escape public attention.”³⁷ The notion of an anti-Western Muslim conspiracy is further evoked in the report by showing amateur footage of a Muslim conference held in Oklahoma City in 1992. Unlike other footage, these unprofessional recordings with poor image quality give the impression that this footage was not meant to be released to the public. Audience members are led to believe that by showing this amateur footage, *Tagesthemen* is providing an exclusive look behind the curtain of the secret terrorist underground. To give another example, in a report on the situation in Algeria, which was broadcast on January 6, 1993, the existence of a “terrorist underground,” an “Islamist underground,” or an “armed Islamist underground” is mentioned.³⁸ Twelve years later, again referring to Algeria, the notion of terrorist invisibility is evoked again: “It is in the mountains behind the village that the fanatic Muslims had their hiding place.”³⁹

Most notably, the notion of terrorist invisibility is evoked with reference to Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. Bin Laden and the “worldwide web of terrorist cells [he is] supposed to have woven”⁴⁰ can be regarded as an embodiment of the notion of terrorist invisibility. The notion of an invisible terrorist network comprised of cells “just waiting to be called to action”⁴¹ perfectly fits a narrative, in which the story of an invisible, yet ever-present menace is told. Bin Laden’s invisibility is pointed out on *Tagesthemen* when there is mention of the way he only communicates with the West by way of “messages on an audio tape”⁴² or when it is stated that he “found shelter in Afghanistan with the holy warriors of the Taliban”⁴³ At the time of this statement, again, low quality, low light amateur footage is used, showing bin Laden in midst of mummified companions in a small tent.

Remarkably, just after this footage of the “invisible” bin Laden is shown, the report proceeds by showing footage of Afghan women wearing burqas. At this point in the report, the burqas are quite likely symbolizing Taliban rule in Afghanistan. But it is also tempting to think about the burqa as a symbol oscillating between visibility and invisibility. On the one hand, the burqa as such is highly visible. In fact, it is so visible that in some European countries, attempts have been made to ban the burqa from public spaces although only a few Muslim immigrants in these countries actually wear burqas.⁴⁴ Apparently the burqa exceeds the visibility of other garments in such a way that it can hardly be ignored. On the other hand, what is most striking about the burqa

is the invisibility of the person wearing it. In the scene described above, this is impressively captured in a camera shot which starts with a total view of several women in burqas, then zooms in and ends on a close-up of one of the women's veiled faces.⁴⁵ Normally, a close-up of a person's face is expected to reveal not only what a person looks like, but also that person's inner emotions, thoughts and subjectivity. Since this is clearly not possible in case of the veiled face of the woman wearing a burqa, the shot creates confusion and fundamentally disappoints standard viewing habits.

THE INVISIBILITY OF THE "PARALLEL SOCIETY"

The burqa, in short, is an ambiguous if not paradox symbol. As such it can also be found in *Tagesthemen* reports dealing with matters of immigration of Muslims into European countries. In those cases, the burqa becomes a symbol of what, in Germany, has been called the "parallel society."⁴⁶ This term is used to describe the fact that in some European countries, large Muslim communities emerged who have but little contact with the so-called "majority society." In these communities, Muslim immigrants were able to build a widely independent infrastructure (shops, clubs, restaurants, etc.) thereby creating an environment in which it became possible for Muslims living in Germany to hardly get in contact with traditional German culture and, most importantly, the German language. While similar communities have existed for a long time in other countries, such as the United States, Germany for a long time did not consider itself to be an *Einwanderungsgesellschaft* (immigration society). Migrants who came to Germany were—and for the most part still are—expected to seamlessly blend into German society—to "integrate." It is due to their presumed lack of contact with non-Muslims that Muslims living in the "parallel society" are perceived as invisible to the rest of the country and it is precisely for this reason that the burqa is used as a symbol for the "parallel society." Furthermore, this notion of migrant invisibility creates a highly problematic connection between the terrorism narrative and the integration narrative.

The notion of a parallel Muslim society emerging in Germany can be found in *Tagesthemen* reports as early as 1980, thus long before the term "parallel society" was first used. In a report from March 13, 1980, focusing on an Islamic school, the notion of a willful segregation of Muslims from German society is expressed as follows: "Because they fear Western influence on their children, many Turks send even their youngest children to the Imam in order to have them cram the Qur'an. In Turkey, religious education for young children is prohibited. Whereas in Germany, it is a vehicle for political agitation and a cordon against the integration of young Turks into Germany."⁴⁷

However, in the 1980s, the “parallel society” is not considered to be a security threat for German society. In later years, especially after 9/11, this changes significantly. For example, in a report about the Madrid attacks from March 2004, Spain is called a “refuge” for terrorists and a “safe place for bin Laden’s fighters, since many Arabian immigrants live here, which makes it easy to keep a low profile if wary authorities start asking around.”⁴⁸ The invisible “parallel society” of Muslims is thus depicted as a safe haven for terrorists who want to remain invisible. Similarly, on September 19, 2001, *Tagesthemen* reported: “These days, time and time again, the Federal Republic of Germany is being referred to as a refuge for Islamic terrorists.”⁴⁹ The illustration used for this statement is highly problematic, because an image of Muslims kneeling in prayer is displayed. Terrorism is thereby suggested to be a characteristic of the Muslim citizens of Germany or of Islam as such. Likewise, in a report broadcast in November 2004, days after a radical Muslim assassinated Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam, the Netherlands is portrayed as follows: “The country is thrown out of joint. What happened? The former model country for an open, multi-cultural society has failed in the matter of integration, has let it happen that a dangerous parallel society could emerge. A minority, arguably, but it despises the values of the West and considers Islam to be a superior culture.”⁵⁰ Again, this statement is illustrated with imagery derived from an Islamic religious context: the camera is positioned in a mosque and pointed to the entrance to the prayer room. The door to the prayer room is open, but one Muslim stands in the doorway as if it was his job to keep the camera out of the prayer room. This particular imagery not only suggests an equivalence of radical Muslims capable of murdering Dutch citizens on grounds of religion, but also it conveys the impression that the Muslims are trying to keep the media from taking a good look at this “parallel society.”

The notion of Muslim migrants trying to prevent reporting is quite common in *Tagesthemen* reports. For example, a report broadcast on October 15, 2001, starts with footage showing a scuffle between *Tagesthemen* reporters and members of a radical Muslim group operating in Germany. One Muslim covers up the camera lens with his hand and another one can be heard shouting “We don’t want to talk, damn it!”⁵¹ In the context of a narrative, in which invisibility is the villains’ most important strategy, this is highly remarkable—By taking the role of investigative reporter, by addressing itself to make visible that which wants to remain invisible, *Tagesthemen*, the story’s narrator, virtually becomes the story’s hero.

To some extent, this can also be seen in reports in which *Tagesthemen* reporters are actually invited by Muslim migrants to report on their lifestyle. One example can be found in a report from October 3, 2001. In Germany,

October 3 is a national holiday and in 1997 the Muslim community chose this day to create an annual “Day of the Open Mosque” inviting non-Muslims to visit their places of prayer. *Tagesthemen*, it should be noted, did not take notice of this event until 2001, a few weeks after 9/11, when their report projected an image of the allegedly strange life going on in the “parallel society”: “Many visitors—and there are a lot more than in the last five years—learn for the first time how things are done in a mosque. In socks, they follow the prayers of the Muslims. They wonder at the strange sounds, the rhythmic movements . . .”⁵² In this example, *Tagesthemen* reporting style almost resembles the tone of an anthropological study.⁵³ This suggests that *Tagesthemen* reporters consider it their mission to enlighten the public on what goes on in an allegedly alien and usually invisible “parallel society.” This is even more evident in a report from July 26, 2005, in which reporters—at the instance of the conviction of Theo van Gogh’s murderer—visit a mosque in Amsterdam. In this report, the reporting journalists note that they were “allowed to shoot without constraints” in the mosque, suggesting that their report was a rare and particularly authentic insight into the “parallel society.” At the end of the report it is stated in conclusion: “More openness—a first step has been made.”⁵⁴ *Tagesthemen*’s “expedition” into the “parallel society” is thus considered to have been a successful (or even heroic) endeavor as it has increased the Muslim’s visibility in the eyes of non-Muslims.

My main argument here is that by applying the notion of invisibility to both terrorists and Muslim migrants the ominous equation of Muslims and terrorists becomes plausible for viewers in a very subtle and complex way. Research focusing on clear-cut stereotypes that are assumed to have been passed on through Western notions of Islam for decades cannot capture this complexity and therefore misses aspects of the discourse that should be taken into account when it comes to critically reviewing media portrayals of Islam.

WHO IS THE VICTIM?

As mentioned above, my research is based on the assumption that narratives are composed of five elements. At this point, it has yet to be answered who, in the terrorism narrative, is considered to be the victim. In order to point out the exceptionality of the terrorism narrative in this respect, a side glance to the other narratives of the media discourse on Islam is in order. In the narrative on Islamic fundamentalism, for instance, it is Muslim women and children who are depicted as the victims of strict fundamentalist regimes in Islamic countries. In the integration narrative, too, women and children are considered to be the major victims—in that case, the victims of their husbands’ or

parents' failure to provide them with the opportunity to integrate into Western society. In the infamous clash of civilizations narrative, obviously, the West as an abstract entity falls victim to Islamic culture. In the terrorism narrative, however, virtually everyone—that is to say, each and every individual in the West—is the victim of this story. In accordance with the notion that terrorism's goal is to threaten the everyday life of individuals, *Tagesthemen* reports are full of references to people, who, due to terrorist activities, are abruptly being torn out of their routines and their normalcy. One example can be found in a report from March 11, 2004, describing the situation after the Madrid bombings: "It happened this morning around 8 a.m., when, in Madrid, the devastating attack unexpectedly struck down many innocent people. The explosives detonated amidst the morning's rush hour traffic . . . In this train alone, 59 passengers, who were on their way to work like every other day, died because of the bombs."⁵⁵ Similarly, in a report covering the prevented bombings on Times Square in April 2010, *Tagesthemen*'s focus is on the effect the attack would have had on ordinary people: "It could have ended in a catastrophe. Thousands of people were on their way to have a nice evening in the restaurants and theaters on Broadway and on Times Square."⁵⁶ In one of the reports revolving around the Oklahoma bombing, a female passerby—herself symbolizing the everyday person—is asked about her emotions after the attack. Her answer encapsulates the notion described above: "We are all in danger."⁵⁷

The word "we" in that last statement is of major importance because it reveals that, if everybody is a victim in this story, the television viewer is a victim too. As is stated in the same edition of *Tagesthemen*: "The attack on Oklahoma City has put the fear of God into America. The nation is sitting in front of their television screens and is taken in by that glaring hole in that high-rise building."⁵⁸ In a way, rather unexpectedly, the television viewer becomes a participant in the terrorism narrative, becomes involved in it in a much more immediate way than is usually the case. It is safe to assume that this intrusive nature of the narrative is one of the major reasons why it became, for a time, virtually dominant within the Islam discourse.

DISSOLUTIONS

This leads back to my introductory remarks about the bin-Laden video. If the television viewer is the victim in this narrative, how can Osama bin Laden, the narrative's most prominent villain, be watching television? If bin Laden's terror organization Al-Qaeda is renowned for its professionalism, how is it possible that these videos appear amateur-like or even trashy? And most

importantly: How can it be that in these videos, bin Laden—who for a long time has been a symbol of terrorist invisibility—is not only visible, but virtually exposed, particularly in the video of him channel surfing?

Undoubtedly, after the release of the videos, journalists could not continue to tell the story of Islamic terrorism the way they used to. This does not mean, however, that they stopped telling this story altogether. For example, a few weeks after bin Laden was killed, when bombs went off in the Norwegian capital and sixty-nine people were shot on a nearby island, many journalists speculated the perpetrator had an Islamist background before it was revealed that the person was actually a non-Muslim Norwegian pursuing a racial and anti-Muslim agenda. Media narratives, thus, do not simply disappear whenever something happens that calls its leading assumptions into question. However, it is important to note that media narratives always inherently include notions of possible endings to the story they are telling. The media narratives actually depend on ideas as to how the equilibrium that was disrupted—with this disruption causing the whole story to come into existence in the first place—can be restored. For example, part of the narrative on Islamic fundamentalism is the strong notion that fundamentalists might, at some point in the future, become more moderate or else, the people in the countries they rule might rise up against them.

In the case of the terrorism narrative, the idea that terrorism can be defeated by increasing security measures at home or by military action overseas does exist in *Tagesthemen* reports, but is eclipsed by the notion that in so doing, Westerners would betray the very values that terrorism is fighting against, adding a tragic note to the narrative. There is, however, a different notion as to how this story might end. It is as simple as it is surprising: the story might end because it just does. In order to understand this, it is important to remember how the terrorism narrative begins. It begins with the disruption of an equilibrium, the equilibrium being the overall normalcy of everyday life. This equilibrium, thus, is effectively restored when everyday life unspectacularly returns. In *Tagesthemen* reports, this notion is frequently invoked. One example can be found in a report dating from February 27, 1993, the day after the World Trade Center bombings. While on the preceding day, the *Tagesthemen* report is filled with blurry images of chaotic scenery, the report from February 27 starts with a long and harmonious shot of a man slowly jogging past the World Trade Center. This shot is accompanied by the following statement: “Already, the site of catastrophe has been re-opened for workouts. Everyday life returns.”⁵⁹ Much more than all police measures, political programs, or military actions frequently demanded to be put into place in order to defeat terrorism, it is this scenery that really captures what a “happy ending” of this story might look like. On September 11, 2002, one year after the 9/11 attacks, a *Tagesthemen* journalists reports from Manhattan, Kansas, a

small village chosen to symbolize the heartland of America due to the fact that it shares its name with New York City's most famous borough. While on this day of commemoration, television screens around the world were once again filled with the airplanes crashing into the Twin Towers and the scenes of devastation that followed, this other Manhattan is portrayed as a small-town paradise: blue skies, people strolling along quiet streets, a cheerful and bright farmer's market, and finally, a loose and lighthearted atmosphere at a rock concert.⁶⁰ The "serenity of the countryside," as this setting is called in the report, becomes a metaphor for an America that might just find a way back to normalcy.

Television reports like the one just described are hardly ever put on the agenda of academic research, precisely because of their everyday character. However, by taking a thorough look at these reports, there is a lot to learn about the way media narratives are structured and media discourses are ordered. Thus, it is important for research on Islam and the media to go beyond notions of "bias" and "Islamophobia" and to acknowledge the complexities of the discourse while holding on to, or even deepening, its critical stance toward media reporting. In this chapter, I could only sketch out one media narrative within a larger media discourse drawing from material derived from only one television news magazine. Of the many ways in which this research could and should be extended, adding an internationally comparative perspective seems paramount. German media discourse on Islam undoubtedly features a lot of elements similar to the French, British, or American discourses, but at the same time, when researchers go beyond the simple identification of stereotypes and inaccuracies, they are sure to find a well of rich differences in the ways narratives are construed and entangled with each other.

Crucially, when it comes to media research on Islam, researchers have to remain open for the possibility of change in the way Islam is depicted in media discourse. The release of the bin Laden videos and the reactions to them made it quite clear that this discourse is highly dynamic. The current events in the Arabic world that have somewhat prematurely been called the "Arab Spring" provide another example of this. Interestingly, when these events first developed, journalists and politicians alike expected them to become a possible foundation for the development of a new story the media could tell about Islam. For example, a commentary for the online edition of the *Washington Post* from May 19, 2011, was titled "Writing the Middle East's New Narrative."⁶¹ In this commentary, author David Ignatius analyzes a speech given by President Obama on that same day. In his speech, Obama had called the Arab Spring a developing "story of self-determination."⁶² This story, the "new narrative of hope and self-reliance," in Ignatius's words, was supposed to replace an old story: "the old narrative of rage that was Osama bin Laden."

NOTES

1. "Obama: Bin Laden will not walk this Earth again," interview by Steve Kroft, *60 Minutes*, CBS News, May 4, 2011, accessed October 14, 2013, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/05/04/60minutes/main20059768.shtml>.

2. The five videos and a protocol of the press conference, in which their release was announced, can be found on the website of the US Department of Defense: "Background Briefing with Senior Intelligence Official at the Pentagon on Intelligence Aspects of the U.S. Operation Involving Osama bin Laden," the U.S. Department of Defense, accessed October 14, 2013, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4820>.

3. Bob Orr, "Videos Demystify the Osama bin Laden Legend," *CBS News*, May 7, 2011, accessed October 14, 2013, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/05/07/eveningnews/main20060808.shtml>.

4. "He's Coming to Get You: The Day Osama bin Laden Sat Glued Watching TV of Barack Obama, the Man Who Had Him Killed," *Daily Mail*, May 8, 2011, accessed October 14, 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1384573/Osama-Bin-Laden-sat-glued-watching-TV-pictures-Barack-Obama.html>.

5. Elisabeth Bumiller, "Videos From bin Laden's Hide-Out Released," *New York Times*, May 7, 2011, accessed October 14, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/08/world/asia/08intel.html?_r=1.

6. To name but a few of a large number of studies conducted in an interdisciplinary and international research field, see the essays in *Muslims and the News Media*, ed. Elizabeth Poole and John E. Richardson (London, New York: Tauris, 2006); Kai Hafez, *Die politische Dimension der Auslandsberichterstattung*, (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2002); and Thomas Deltombe, *L'islam imaginaire. La construction médiatique de l'islamophobie en France: 1975–2005* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005).

7. Paul Harris, "Bin Laden Videos Give a Remarkable Insight into Life in His Lair," *The Guardian*, May 7, 2011, accessed October 14, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/07/bin-laden-video-abbottabad-seals-death>.

8. Frank Gardner, "Osama bin Laden's Abbottabad House 'Was Al-Qaeda-Hub,'" *BBC*, May 8, 2011, accessed October 14, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-13325595>.

9. Orr, "Videos."

10. Harris, "Bin Laden."

11. Brian Ross and Avni Patel, "Bin Laden Tapes Show 'Pathetic' Side of Al Qaeda Leader," *ABC News*, May 9, 2011, accessed October 14, 2013, <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/osama-bin-laden-tapes-show-pathetic-side-al/story?id=13559652#.TtZbjfKVpdO>. For the Al-Qaeda biography by the interviewee, see Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Knopf, 2006).

12. Tim Karis, *Mediendiskurs Islam: Narrative in der Berichterstattung der Tagesthemen 1979–2010* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2013).

13. Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

14. Edward Said, *Orientalism: 25th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

15. For a literature review with a focus on research conducted in the United States, see Dina Ibrahim, "The Middle East in American Media. A 20th-Century Overview," *The International Communication Gazette* 71 (2009): 511–524. For research conducted in Germany, see Susan Schenk, *Das Islambild im internationalen Fernsehen. Ein Vergleich der Nachrichtensender Al Jazeera English, BBC World und CNN International* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2009): 34–55.

16. I explained this argument in further detail in Tim Karis, "Postmodernes Feindbild und aufgeklärte Islamophobie? Grenzen der Analysekategorie, Feindbild in der Islambildforschung," in *Vom Ketzer bis zum Terroristen: Interdisziplinäre Studien zur Konstruktion und Rezeption von Feindbildern*, ed. Alfons Fürst et al. (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2012): 179–190. For a critical stance on the prevalent methods of analyzing media reporting on Islam, see also Joris Luyendijk, "Beyond Orientalism," *The International Communication Gazette* 72 (2010): 9–20.

17. For a detailed discussion of this approach, see Karis, *Mediendiskurs Islam*, 59–76.

18. Both Fiske and Herman borrow from the works of Bulgarian philosopher Tzvetan Todorov. See John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1987), 138–48; David Herman, "Introduction" in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, edited by David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Willy Viehöver, "Diskurse als Narrationen," in *Handbuch Sozialwissenschaftliche Diskursanalyse Bd. I: Theorien und Methoden*, ed. Reiner Keller et al. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006), 179–208; Knut Hickethier, "Narrative Navigation durchs Weltgeschehen. Erzählstrukturen in Fernsehnachrichten," in *Fernsehnachrichten. Prozesse, Strukturen, Funktionen*, ed. Klaus Kamps and Miriam Meckel (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 185–202.

19. John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 64.

20. Elizabeth S. Bird and Robert W. Dardenne, "Myth, Chronicle, and Story. Exploring the Narrative Quality of News," in *Media, Myths, and Narratives. Television and the Press*, ed. James W. Carey (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988), 70.

21. All narratives are particularized in Karis, *Mediendiskurs Islam*, 159–307.

22. A detailed discussion of my understanding of media narratives and their component parts can be found in Karis, *Mediendiskurs Islam*, 88–99.

23. *Tagesthemen*, "Anschlag in Beirut und Reaktionen aus dem Ausland," first broadcast October 23, 1983 by ARD. All translations from *Tagesthemen* reports are my own unless otherwise noted. If available, the titles of the reports are given according to the archival entries of the broadcasting network, *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (ARD)*.

24. *Tagesthemen*, "Anschlag auf das World Trade Center New York," first broadcast February 27, 1993, by ARD. The quote given is Cuomo's original statement (not translated).

25. *Tagesthemen*, "Sicherheitsmaßnahmen in New York," first broadcast April 20, 1995, by ARD.

26. *Tagesthemen*, "Wie Washington auf den Anschlag reagiert," first broadcast April 20, 1995, by ARD.
27. *Tagesthemen*, "Bin Laden," first broadcast September 11, 2001, by ARD.
28. James W. Carey notes that, whilst hesitant at first, as the day progressed, American reporters speculated intensively about the question as to who was responsible for the attacks, thereby prominently evoking the notion of Islamic terrorism. See James W. Carey, "American Journalism on, before, and after September 11," in *Journalism after September 11*, ed. Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan (London, New York: Routledge, 2003): 71–74. For a comprehensive overview of worldwide media reactions to 9/11, see the special issue of the *Journal of Media Sociology* edited by Tomasz Pludowski and titled "How the World's News Media Reacted to 9/11. Essays from around the Globe" (Spokane: Marquette Books, 2010).
29. *Tagesthemen*, "Bin Laden," first broadcast September 11, 2001, by ARD.
30. *Tagesthemen*, untitled report on the prevented terror attacks on Times Square, first broadcast May 2, 2010, by ARD.
31. *Tagesthemen*, "Bin Laden," first broadcast September 11, 2001, by ARD.
32. *Tagesthemen*, "Wie Washington auf den Anschlag reagiert," first broadcast April 20, 1995, by ARD.
33. *Tagesthemen*, "Anschlag in Beirut und Reaktionen aus dem Ausland," first broadcast October 23, 1983, by ARD.
34. *Tagesthemen*, "Bin Laden," first broadcast September 11, 2001, by ARD.
35. *Tagesthemen*, untitled interview with Dan Shifan, University of Haifa, first broadcast September 11, 2001, by ARD.
36. *Tagesthemen*, "Al Kaida und Spanien," first broadcast March 11, 2004, by ARD.
37. *Tagesthemen*, "Wie Washington auf den Anschlag reagiert," first broadcast April 20, 1995, by ARD.
38. *Tagesthemen*, "Algerien als Polizeistaat und Gottesstaat," first broadcast January 6, 1993, by ARD.
39. *Tagesthemen*, "Algerien: Volksabstimmung über Islamisten-Amnestie," first broadcast September 29, 2005, by ARD.
40. *Tagesthemen*, "Bin Laden," first broadcast September 11, 2001, by ARD.
41. *Tagesthemen*, "Bin Laden," first broadcast September 11, 2001, by ARD.
42. *Tagesthemen*, "Al Kaida und Spanien," first broadcast March 11, 2004, by ARD.
43. *Tagesthemen*, "Bin Laden," first broadcast September 11, 2001, by ARD.
44. For a thorough analysis of these policies in several European states see Bijan Fateh-Moghadam, "Religiös-weltanschauliche Neutralität und Geschlechterordnung: Strafrechtliche Burka-Verbote zwischen Paternalismus und Moralismus," in *Als Mann und Frau schuf er sie. Religion und Geschlecht*, ed. Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, forthcoming).
45. *Tagesthemen*, "Bin Laden," first broadcast September 11, 2001, by ARD.
46. The term "Parallelgesellschaft" ("parallel society") was first used by German sociologist Wilhelm Heitmeyer in a study concerned with young Turkish immigrants living in Germany and their attitudes towards the Islamic religion, the use of violence,

and democracy. Heitmeyer wrote about this study in the popular German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* as early as 1996: Wilhelm Heitmeyer, "Für türkische Jugendliche in Deutschland spielt der Islam eine wichtige Rolle," *Die Zeit*, August 23, 1996, accessed October 25, 2013, <http://www.zeit.de/1996/35/heimmey.txt.19960823.xml>. However, the term did not gain much prominence until after the 9/11 attacks, when the discussion on Muslim migration into European countries got much more attention. For an overview of the academic and public discussion of the term see the essays in *Was heißt hier Parallelgesellschaft? Zum Umgang mit Differenzen*, ed. Wolf-Dietrich Bukow et al. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007).

47. *Tagesthemen*, "Islam in the Federal Republic," first broadcast March 13, 1980, by ARD.

48. *Tagesthemen*, "Al Kaida und Spanien," first broadcast March 11, 2004, by ARD.

49. *Tagesthemen*, "Islamgruppen in Deutschland," first broadcast September 19, 2001, by ARD.

50. *Tagesthemen*, "Niederlande: Rassismus statt Liberalismus," first broadcast November 13, 2004, by ARD.

51. *Tagesthemen*, "Kaplan-Sekte: Die heimlichen Anwerber," first broadcast October 15, 2001, by ARD.

52. *Tagesthemen*, "Tag der offenen Moschee," first broadcast October 3, 2001, by ARD.

53. Stanislaw Paulus makes a similar argument with reference to her research on TV-documentaries on Islam. See Stanislaw Paulus, "Einblicke in fremde Welten. Orientalische Selbst/Fremdkonstruktionen in TV-Dokumentationen über Muslime in Deutschland," in *Orient- und Islambilder. Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zu Orientalismus und antimuslimischem Rassismus*, ed. Iman Attia (Münster: Unrast, 2007), 283.

54. *Tagesthemen*, "Van-Gogh-Mord: Die Niederlande danach," first broadcast July 26, 2005, by ARD.

55. *Tagesthemen*, "Spanien: Anschlag im Urlaubsland," first broadcast March 11, 2004, by ARD.

56. *Tagesthemen*, untitled report on the prevented terror attacks on Times Square, first broadcast May 2, 2010, by ARD.

57. *Tagesthemen*, "Wie Washington auf den Anschlag reagiert," first broadcast April 20, 1995, by ARD.

58. *Tagesthemen*, untitled segment about the Oklahoma City bombings, first broadcast April 20, 1995, by ARD.

59. *Tagesthemen*, "Anschlag auf das World Trade Center New York," first broadcast, February 27, 1993, by ARD.

60. *Tagesthemen*, "USA. Stimmung im Land," first broadcast September 11, 2002, by ARD.

61. David Ignatius, "Writing the Middle East's New Narrative," *Washington Post*, May 19, 2011, accessed October 14, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/writing-the-middle-east-s-new-narrative/2011/05/17/AFTmAm6G_story.html.

62. "Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa," the White House, accessed October 14, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa>.