

**INTELLIGENCE, SECURITY
AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY**

ZERO SUM GAMES - ISLAM AGAINST EVERYBODY ELSE. CONTENT ANALYSIS AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN ISLAMIC PRIMARY SOURCES

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Abstract:

The current paper analyses narratives used within the Quran regarding Islam and its relationship/opposition to other religions – focusing on how Islam portrays its mission against other religions as a zero-sum-game.

Born in times of war, conquer and geographical expansion, Islam understands its da'wah mission (the act of calling people to embrace Islam) and calculates its gains in terms of losses for its adversaries. As Jihad sums up to be an obligation of any orthodox Muslim, and since many Ayyat (Quranic verses) describe conflict, revenge, war-waging and punishment for the kufr (disbelievers), Islam seems to understand its rapport to other religions in a zero-sum-game logic; briefly put, in order for the one true religion to win, all others must lose.

Complementary, after every historical win, a victorious Islam continued to perpetuate this zero-sum-game logic in relations to non-Muslims, described as disbelievers, constructing a system of "you are either on our side, or against us" when addressing communities from conquered regions; this rationale is perpetuated by DAESH today in Syria, and by Boko Haram in Nigeria. In light of the above, the present paper uses content analysis to describe how Islam and its primary source - Al Kitab (The Book, referring to the Quran) see Islam's relation to the other two Abrahamic religions. Our conclusions indicate that Islam views itself and its scope as a photographic negative (and better option) to other religions, and while it defines its primary objective to defeat others, in its perception of itself, Islam can only win as long as everybody else loses.

Keywords *Islam, narratives, zero-sum-game, game theory, politics.*

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An introduction to the zero-sum-game theory and its applications

The mathematical zero-sum-game theory, originally applied in the sphere of game theory, was developed (*or explained*) by the eccentric mathematician John von Neumann (1903-1957) in its seminal work co-authored with Oskar Morgenstern – *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour* (1944). In a classical approach, game theory is understood as the discipline of conflict where two players confront/play against each other, each being under pressure to take a decision, a course of action, a strategy (Kelly, 2003). Decisions of a player will directly affect the climate and its adversaries. Morgenstern and von Neumann focused on a two-players-matrix situation and concluded the following: each player will calculate a possible course of action of his opponent and will develop a strategy to minimize the outcome of his rival and maximize their own outcome. In game theory, a zero-sum-game (*such as chess*) provides that each player has a clear purpose (*own note: of winning against somebody*) which is perfectly opposed to other players (Morgenstern, von Neumann, 1944). In other words, every player's objective is for everybody else to lose.

The most common applications of the zero-sum-game theory are economics and political affairs – including or especially international affairs. As such, power players will aim for more influence, leverage or resources and the zero-sum-game had been the rationale for World Wars, gun trade, or the recent American-Chinese race for world domination. Even the digital coin market respects the same philosophy – Bitcoin has a fixed quota and all buyers aim for those available. Nevertheless, there is one nuclear power plant under construction in Eastern Europe, and one player will supply with gas and petrol.

Considering that people worldwide have witnessed the rationale of “*one or the other*” for as long as they can remember, the “*I against others*” or the realist motto “*homo homini lupus est*”¹, no wonder Islam have eventually developed its narratives in opposition to everybody who is not “*them*”, or “*us*”.

¹ Simply put, man will act in his best interest and will not shy off from stepping onto bodies in order to achieve what he has set to.

As per our knowledge, the concept of zero-sum-game had not been yet applied to Quranic narratives, and content analysis of the Quran verses, both qualitative and quantitative, had not been a matter of interest for scholars, regardless of their area of expertise. A reference about using secular tools for analysing religious documents was made in *Violence and Islam: Conversations with Houria Abdelouahed* (Adunis, 2015, p. 116); the author indicated that *The Book* (referring to the Quran) could use a visceral analysis of its corpus using secular tools and methods.

There are, however, references of Islam's relationship to "the other one", the non-Muslim community, citing that the traditional Islamic thinking views the world as purely Islamic in social terms. From a cultural point of view, Adunis makes the following observations on how the Quran describes the world in axiomatic terms (Adunis, 2015, p. 64):

- i) Tawhid or the paramountcy of Allah²
- ii) Creation of the world by Allah
- iii) The paramountcy of the Quranic scripture
- iv) Uniqueness of the Islamic universe³
- v) The Exclusion of other religions⁴ and compulsoriness of others to revert to Islam⁵.

Consequently, even if Islam was posterior to other religions and civilizations, it didn't manage to inherit or exceed them in terms of tolerance or respect for what is different (Adunis, 2015, p. 38). The cited linguist and poet also highlight that by assuming that the other Abrahamic religions have falsified the sacred text (but without the Quran mentioning what was falsified and how), the Quran has attacked every other religion – especially The People of the Book –, which represents an act of violence in itself towards the two other monotheist religions, Judaism and Christianity. According to the Quran, **dialogue with other religions is not possible** and refused, and the Quran uses violent terms

² There is only One God – and that God is Islamic.

³ There is only one universe, and it is an Islamic one.

⁴ There is no place for any other religion in the world and no other place for non-Muslims within an Islamic society.

⁵ The world must convert/revert to Islam, because there is no other religion and no other way.

when referring to the other two Abrahamic religions – the aforementioned source summed up 80 verses referring to Hell, while torment and punishment in an eternal hell are mentioned in 370 verses. The cited author interprets the conflicted relationship of Islam with violence, the latter being a characteristic of the victorious, living in a society which praises violence and ordeal, extreme pain, suffering – therefore the call to Jihad and war against alterity and “the other” by all means and tools at hand in the name of Allah seem all natural and disconnected to sin (Adunis, 2015, pp. 64-66).

A source which peripherally discusses segregation between people of different religions, violent acts and narratives against the other two Abrahamic religions is the memoir of English-Pakistani activist Maajid Nawaz (*Radical: My Journey out of Islamist Extremism*, 2012). Nawaz describes the lack of compassion for non-Muslims of Hizb-ut-Tahrir members in the context of 9/11, caused by the “suffering of his people”. According to the same source, dehumanizing other religious communities empowers Islamism and violence against “the other”, which facilitates marginalization, persecution and desensitization for those willing to commit terrorist attacks (Nawaz, 2012, p. 128).

Methodology and purpose

The purpose of the present paper is to dissect the relationship of Islam to the other two monotheisms, Judaism and Christianity. Our objective is to identify whether the choice of words within the primary source of Islam leaves room for interpreting Islam and its role in the world in opposition to non-Muslims and to identify whether the pattern of zero-sum-games can be found in presumed interactions between Islam and the non-Muslim world.

The analysed *Ayyat* (Quranic verses) refer to or mention other religious, non-Muslims communities, mainly Judaism and Christianity. We used tools of content analysis to describe the view of Islam on non-Muslims, about its role in the world and its course of action.

The Quran associates other confessions with “disbelievers”/ *Kufar/kufr/kafir*, reason why the present paper also diverts its focus to analysing the context in which *Al Kitab* refers to disbelievers (non-Muslims) and their opposition to the *Ummah* (community of Muslims).

In this respect, we will both analyse the passages referring to the People of the Book (*species*), as well as those with disbelievers (*genus*). Non-Muslims are referred to and associated with “those who do not judge by what Allah has revealed are truly the disbelievers” (Al-Maidah 5:44, similarly in 5:47); when dealing with other confessions (mainly Jews), they are the “wrongdoing people” (Al Maidah 5:51)⁶, “most of which are rebellious” (Al Maidah 5:59), “who deserve a punishment from Allah (...) who earned Allah’s condemnation and displeasure – some being reduced to apes and pigs and worshippers of false gods. These are far worse in ranks and farther astray from the Right Way” and “have fallen to disbelief” (Al Maidah 5:72).

We have chosen the method of content analysis, focusing on both qualitative and quantitative indicators; this was preferred to statistical analysis (as the former contains a component of statistical analysis) considering that the later will plainly indicate the number of occurrences for a given term, but will not understand the sense of the phrase (e.g. will not have a proper explanations for terms which have a negation in front of them, so the results retrieved may be false positives). Complementary to statistical analysis, content analysis performed with QDA miner focuses on qualitative indicators – number of occurrences for a term in terms of numbers and percentages, but also of co-occurrences – which refers to the semantic fields of the terms associated to Jews and Christians (portrayed as disbelievers). Content analysis brings added value to our understanding of the Quran, its message and meaning, considering that the choice of words associated with the other two monotheisms, Judaism and Christianity, sheds light on the rapport to its exterior Islam has and designs.

We have analysed all passages of Quranic Ayat which contain references to representatives of the other two Abrahamic religions, while respecting the quotation rules of Islam (which is never quote a word-count lesser than 13 words, so as not to contaminate the meaning of the Ayat and Surrah), with a mixed technique of quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Whenever the case, for analytical purposes,

⁶ O believers! Take neither Jews nor Christians as guardians – they are guardians of each other. Whoever does so will be counted as one of them. Surely Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.

we have replaced species-terms with genus-terms, to achieve accuracy and clarity (example: reducing “disbelievers” to “disbelieve”, which will include more segments into the analysis, in order to compensate for QDA shortcomings). Also, for a clearer result, we have equated the terms “Jews” and “Christians” with the term “People of the Book” – although the phrase “People of the Book” is more frequent than “Jews” or “Christians”. Lastly, connectors such as “and”, “or” and neutral verbs such as “to be” were eliminated, according to traditional methodology, in order for the analysis to provide with an accurate result.

Ethical concerns

While Quran is indeed Holy for Muslims and has religious and dogmatic relevance, it might be argued that analysing religious content with research tools (laic in their nature) would be qualified as blasphemy. In our view, the Quran is indeed the primary source of religious and theological knowledge in Islam; yet, its significance and roles exceed the one of a religious text, as the Quran was and is the basis for internal laws and regulations, social life and family life, economic and trade regulations and others. Since Quran is, besides a religious source, also a treaty of political thinking, social manifesto, ethical and even environmental philosophy etcetera, it also has an unreligious dimension, thus we argue that content analysis can generate new understanding of its meaning and message.

As the theoretical approach may leave the impression that it could furthermore result in more segregation and alienation of confessions, the intention behind the study is to merely understand how Islam portrays itself, its role in the world and its relation to Non-Muslims (i.e. disbelievers), so as to highlight a potential instrumentalization of Islam and the Quran by fundamentalist and political Islamist factions. While Muslims all around the world are peaceful and have virtually no intention to cause harm to people considered alien to their practices, lifestyle and philosophy, the author feels that the portraying of non-Muslims as adversaries might lead itself to conflicting thinking, with all due considerations for the political context and époque when the Quran was revealed.

Quantitative Content analysis

“The People of the Book”, “Jews” and “Christians” (to whom the Torah and Gospels have been revealed) are mentioned in 46 Ayyat (*Quranic verses*) and in 13 chapters, most of them in the first section of the Quran⁷.

As we will further demonstrate, references to the People of the Book are mostly negative – with two exceptions, where the Quran is less negative about other religions: “You will surely find the most bitter towards the believers to be the Jews and polytheists and the most gracious to be those who call themselves Christian. That is because there are priests and monks among them and because they are not arrogant” Surah Al Maidah 5:82, as well as “You (Muslims) are the best community ever raised for humanity – you encourage good, forbid evil, and believe in Allah. Had they (People of the Book) believed, it would have been better for them. Some of them are faithful, but most are rebellious” Surah Al Imran 3:110. This results in a percentage of 4, 34% of all references to the two monotheist religions in positive (or mildly positive terms), leaving all other to be negative (e.g.: wrongdoing, evil, malicious) as we will indicate in our qualitative content analysis. Disbelievers (*kufr*) and its derivatives are mentioned in 54 chapters and 518 Quranic verses, entirely in a negative register, in connection to diverse punishments and negative outcomes (this counts for 8, 30% of the verses within the Quran).

Qualitative and Quantitative Content analysis

As represented in the word cloud below in Figure 1, non-Muslims monotheist religions (denominated as “People of the Book”, “Jews” or “Christians”) are indicated as “disbelievers” and firmly condemned – Christians especially – for they have fallen into disbelief due to proclaiming Jesus as the son of Allah (Surah Al-Maidah 5:17, 73); own note – the dispute regarding the Holiness of the Trinity for Christianity is condemned by Muslim scholars and clerics as blasphemy, according to the Quran and Sunnah), a crime for which they “will be afflicted with a painful punishment” (Surah Al Maidah 5:73).

⁷ The Quran contains 114 chapters and 6236 ayyat/verses, excluding Bismillah (the Arabic phrase at the beginning of each chapter meaning “in the name of Allah”).

Christians, who “resent Muslims” for their faith (Surah Al-Maidah 5:59). Non-Muslims (especially Jews) are directly associated with pigs and apes, thus denying them the condition of human beings (Surah Al-Araf 7:166⁹, Surah Al-Maidah 5:60¹⁰) – a technique used in world wars, as it legitimizes the use of force against them.

Content analysis tools indicate the further most associations of the phrase “People of the Book” (or Jews, Christians) with “disbeliever”, “ignorance”, “bovine”, “judgment” and “death”, placing them in a negative and somewhat apocalyptic register. The inclusion of the People of the Book into the category of disbelievers/kufr represents for fervent Muslims the greatest sin (“shirk” or “Shirk-al-Akbar”, described as associating anyone with Allah, or believing in more than one God – directly referring to the Trinity, saints, monks or Christian scholars, or to associate Allah’s attributes with someone else); further content analysis of the verses regarding the disbelievers will determine the rapport of Muslims with disbelievers, including the People of the Book.

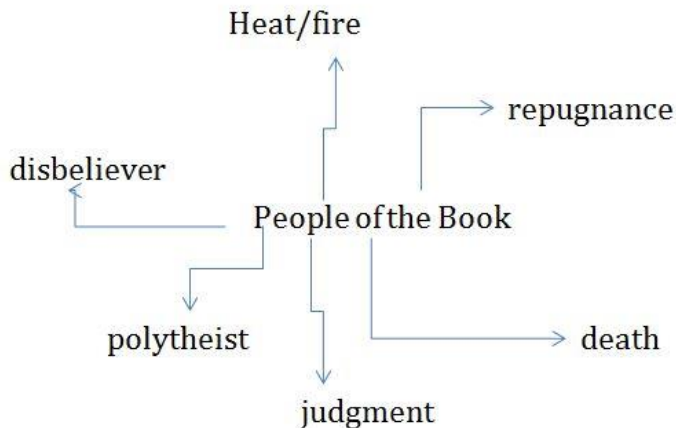


Figure 2: The most frequent co-occurrences associated with the terms “People of the Book”, “Jews” and “Christians”, designed with Tropes by the author

⁹ “But when they stubbornly persisted in violation. We said to them. Be disgraced apes!”

¹⁰ “Some being reduced to apes and pigs.”

Disbelievers are directly indicated as enemies of Allah and of the believers, with clear intentions of harming Muslims, as stated in the following examples: “they will not stop fighting you until they turn you away from your faith” (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:217); “People of the Book wish to mislead you ‘believers’” (own note – as a consequence, People of the Book are not believers) (Surah Al-Imran 3:69, 3:99); “O believers! Do not associate closely with others who would not miss a chance to harm you. Their only desire is to see you suffer” (Surah Al-Imran 3:118); “Disbelievers would wish to see you neglect your weapons and belongings, so they could launch a sweeping assault on you” (Surah An-Nisa 4:102); “disbelievers conspired to capture, kill, or exile you” (Surah Al-Anfal 8:30); “Prepare against them what you ‘believers’ can of ‘military’ power and cavalry to deter Allah’s enemies and your enemies” (Surah Al-Anfal 8:60); “Our Lord! Do not subject us to the persecution of the disbelievers” (Surah Al-Mumtahanah 60:5).

Muslims are encouraged to battle non-Muslims if they are malicious, with every mean at hand: “destroy the disbelievers” (Surah Al-Imran 3:141); “I will cast horror into the hearts of the disbelievers. So, strike their necks and strike their fingertips” (Surah Al-Anfal 8:12); “Fight those who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day, nor comply with what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, nor embrace the religion of truth from among those who were given the Scripture, until they pay the tax, willingly submitting, fully humbled” (Surah At-Tawbah 9:29); “O believers! Fight the disbelievers around you” (Surah At-Tawah 9:123).

The described scenario places “believers” (Muslims) on the righteous side, and “disbelievers” on the side of evil. The verses describing the kufr paint an image of conflict, war, massacre and danger: “Indeed, there was a sign for you in the two armies that met in battle – one fighting for the cause of Allah and the other in denial” (Surah Al-Imran 3:13); “Believers fight for the cause of Allah, whereas disbelievers fight for the cause of the Devil” (Surah An-Nisa 4:76); “So fight in the cause of Allah” (Surah An-Nisa 4:84); “disbelievers conspired to capture, kill, or exile you” (Surah Al-Anfal 8:30); “Fight against them until there is no more persecution” (Surah Al-Anfal 8:39); “So when you meet the disbelievers ‘in battle’, strike ‘their’ necks until you have thoroughly

subdued them, then bind them firmly” (Surah Muhammad 47:4); “If the disbelievers were to fight you, they would certainly flee” (Surah Al-Fath 48:22); “Struggle against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm with them” (Surah At-Tahrim 66:9).

Among the prayers in the Quran, we mention “My Lord! Do not leave a single disbeliever on earth” (Surah Nuh 71:26). However, there is a single verse which advises Muslims to deal with non-Muslims peacefully¹¹ (Surah Al-Ankabut 29:46).

Disbelievers are associated with fire/hellfire, which shall be their eternal punishment in the following verses: Surrah Al-Baqarah 2:39¹², 162¹³, Surah Al-Imran 3:24, 88¹⁴, 118 – cited above, 131¹⁵, 151¹⁶, 197, Surah An-Nisa 4:56¹⁷, 169¹⁸, Surah Al-Anfal 8:50¹⁹, Surah Al-Anbya 21:98²⁰, Surah Al-Azhab 33:64, 65²¹, Surah Fatir 35:36²², Surah 36:63, 64²³, Surah 38:27²⁴, Surah Az-zumar 39:72²⁵, Surah Ghafir 40:6²⁶, Surah

¹¹ “Do not argue with the People of the Book unless gracefully, except with those of them who act wrongfully.” And say, “We believe in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to you.”

¹² “But those who disbelieve and deny Our signs will be the residents of the Fire. They will be there forever.”

¹³ “They will be in Hell forever.”

¹⁴ “They will be in Hell forever.”

¹⁵ “Guard yourselves against the Fire prepared for the disbelievers.”

¹⁶ “Fire will be their home.”

¹⁷ “We will cast them into the Fire. Whenever their skin is burnt completely. We will replace it so they will ‘constantly’ taste the punishment.”

¹⁸ “Hell, to stay there forever and ever.”

¹⁹ “Taste the torment of burning.”

²⁰ “Certainly you ‘disbelievers’ and whatever you worship instead of Allah will be the fuel of Hell.”

²¹ “Surely Allah condemns the disbelievers, and has prepared for them a blazing Fire to stay there forever and ever.”

²² “As for the disbelievers, they will have the Fire of Hell, where they will not be ‘allowed to be’ finished by death, nor will its torment be lightened for them.”

²³ “This is the Hell you were warned of. Burn in it Today for your disbelief.”

²⁴ “So, woe to the disbelievers because of the Fire.”

²⁵ “It will be said to them.” “Enter the gates of Hell, to stay there forever.”

²⁶ “And so, your Lord’s decree has been proven true against the disbelievers – that they will be the inmates of the Fire.”

Al-Ahqaf 46:20²⁷, 34, Surah Al-Fath 48:13²⁸, Surah Qaf 50:24²⁹, Surah 57:15³⁰, 19³¹, Surah 64:10³², Surah 76:4³³.

Similarly, to alienation from non-Muslims, the Quran recommends alienation from disbelievers: "Believers should not take disbelievers as guardians instead of the believers" (Surah Al-Imran 3:28); "Believers! Do not take My enemies and yours as trusted allies, showing them affection even though they deny what has come to you of the truth (...) do not take them as 'allies', disclosing secrets 'of the believers' to the pagans out of affection for them" (Surah Al-Mumtahanah 60:1). Also, Surah Al-Imran 3:110 compares believers and disbelievers, placing non-Muslims in antithesis with Muslims, the later again on an ethically superior level³⁴.

Differences in religious convictions offers grounds for further separation and distinction, according to Surah 109:1-6: "Say, 'O Prophet', O you disbelievers! I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship. I will never worship what you worship, nor will you ever worship what I worship. You have your way, and I have my Way."

While the only outcome described places believers in Paradise on the righteous side, disbelievers will burn in an eternal Hell, the punishment being that they will forever torment with their skin replenishing, so they would permanently have to suffer for their disobedience. This paints a strongly emotional narrative in a binary logic, the text having a rather argumentative style forged to impress and generate strong emotions with somewhat strong visuals.

²⁷ "Watch for the Day 'when' the disbelievers will be exposed to the Fire."

²⁸ "We surely have prepared for the disbelievers a blazing Fire."

²⁹ "It will be said to both angels." "Throw into Hell every stubborn disbeliever."

³⁰ "So today no ransom will be accepted from you 'hypocrites', nor from the disbelievers. Your home is the Fire."

³¹ "But 'as for' those who disbelieve and reject Our signs, it is they who will be the residents of the Hellfire."

³² "As for those who disbelieve and reject our revelations, they will be the residents of the Fire, staying there forever. What an evil destination!"

³³ "Indeed, we have prepared for the disbelievers' chains, shackles, and a blazing Fire."

³⁴ "You are the best community ever raised for humanity – you encourage good, forbid evil, and believe in Allah. Had the People of the Book believed, it would have been better for them."

The two antithetic communities are facing each other, but the righteous one shall be victorious in an apocalyptic battle of epic proportions. Most verses are constructed in clear opposition, describing the two adversaries in clear antithesis (e.g. believers will go to Paradise, disbelievers will not; believers will be victorious, disbelievers will lose; Allah helps the believers, disbelievers have no helper and no protection).

Content analysis of verses describing disbelievers/kufr indicates the following results:

1. the most frequent terms are “Allah” (or “Lord”), “disbelieve” (with the derivatives “disbelief”, “disbeliever”), “punishment”, “prophet” (referring to Muhammad, Jesus or without clear indication), “book” (most verses regarding disbelievers also mention “People of the Book”), “fire”, “evil”, “Hell”, “suffer”, “torment” etc. (see figure 3). The proportion of the verses indicates that almost one half of the text (after eliminating connectors) consist of either term related to “God” and from the semantic field of “disbelieve”;

	FREQUENCY	% SHOWN	%
ALLAH	239	20.2%	
DISBELIEVE	178	15.1%	
PEOPLE	52	4.4%	
PUNISHMENT	47	4.0%	
LORD	41	3.5%	
PROPHET	41	3.5%	
BELIEVERS	41	3.5%	
BOOK	34	2.9%	
FIRE	33	2.8%	
SURELY	31	2.6%	
EVIL	29	2.5%	
REVEALED	25	2.1%	
HELL	23	1.9%	
WORSHIP	22	1.9%	
TRUTH	21	1.8%	
DAY	19	1.6%	
REVELATIONS	18	1.5%	
SUFFER	16	1.4%	
SIGNS	15	1.3%	
MESSENGER	14	1.2%	
GOOD	14	1.2%	
HEARTS	14	1.2%	
FAITH	13	1.1%	
TRUE	13	1.1%	
EARTH	13	1.1%	
FIGHT	13	1.1%	
CONDEMNED	12	1.0%	
REWARD	12	1.0%	
TURN	12	1.0%	
TORMENT	12	1.0%	
HOME	12	1.0%	
GUIDE	11	0.9%	
CLEAR	11	0.9%	
LIFE	11	0.9%	
DEEDS	10	0.8%	
DENY	10	0.8%	
FOREVER	10	0.8%	
JUDGMENT	10	0.8%	
LIGHT	10	0.8%	
MAKE	10	0.8%	
PAINFUL	10	0.8%	

Figure 3: The words with the most frequent occurrences retrieved with a QDA miner analysis of the Quranic Ayat referring to “People of the Book”, “Jews” and “Christians” (Author’s analysis)

2. the proximity plot of the terms and phrases mentioned below, as indicated in figure 3, places the “disbelievers” close to the term “Allah’ (as the disbelievers deny/do not believe in Allah), but also close to “revelations” (which they also deny), and also to “fire”, “evil”, “punishment”, “suffer” and “deny signs”;

3. the term “disbelievers” is most often associated to the following terms, as shown in the proximity plot diagram: “Allah/Lord”, “fire”, “punishment”, “Prophet”, “hell”, “evil”, “suffer”, “torment” (see figure 4).

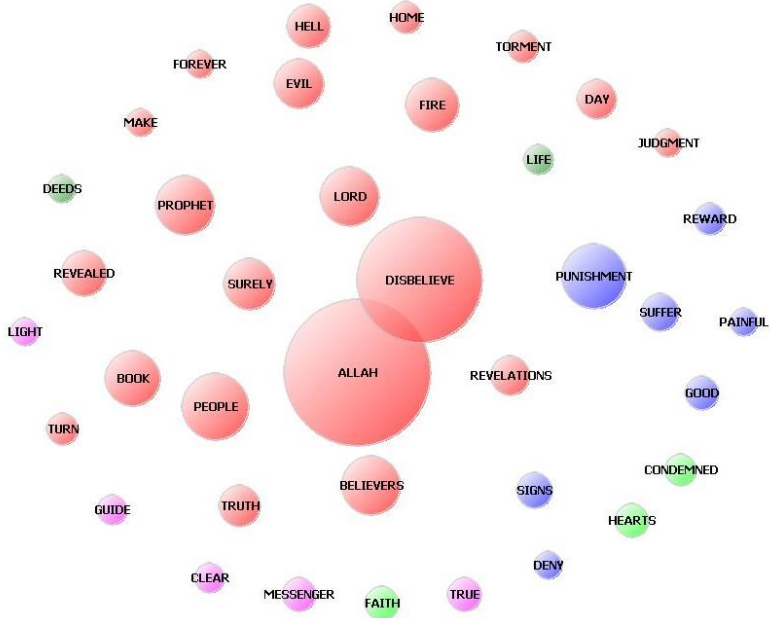


Figure 4: Proximity plot indicating the most frequent associations of the term “disbelievers” retrieved with QDA Miner, designed by the author

4. the narratives of the verses constructs the following timeline, as indicated in the Proximity ploy in Figure 5 and the Dendogram in figure 6: a) there are believers in Allah and disbelievers; b) the Book was revealed by the Prophet, containing the truth; c) there will be a Day of Judgment, when the Lord (Allah) will cast torment and evil in an eternal Hell fire for the disbelievers, for not considering His signs; d) a painful punishment awaits disbelievers for their lively deeds; e) they and their hearts are condemned for not having Faith.

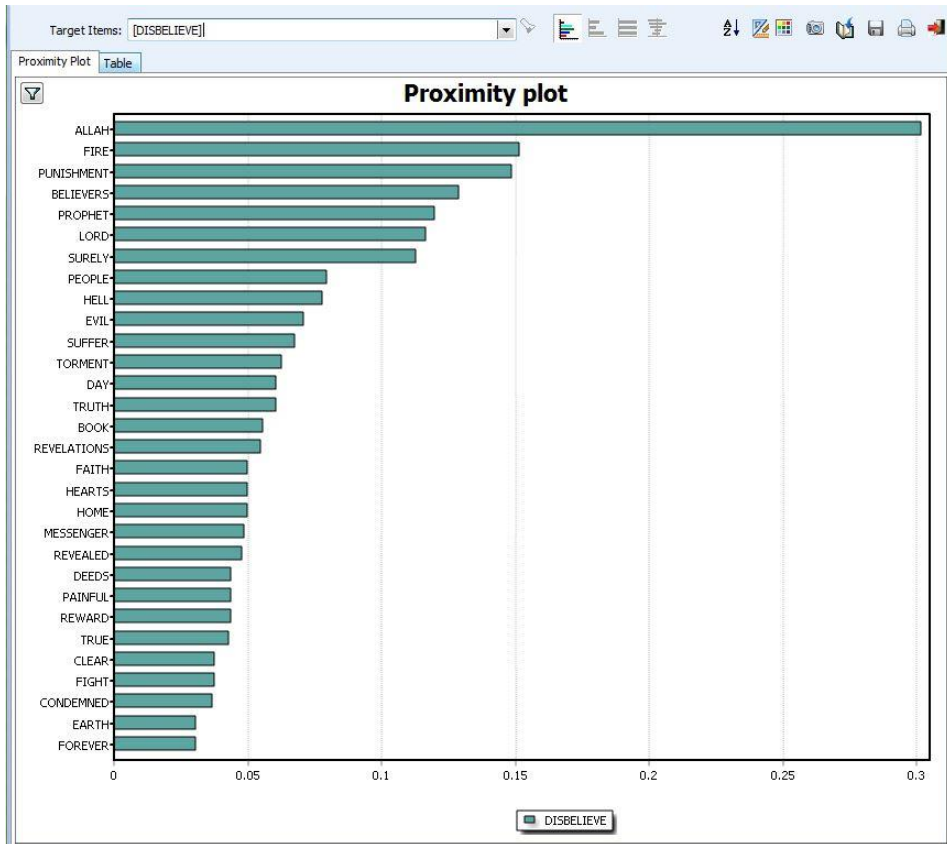


Figure 5: Proximity plot indicating the argumentative style of the text and the construction of its main narratives, retrieved with QDA Miner (author’s design)

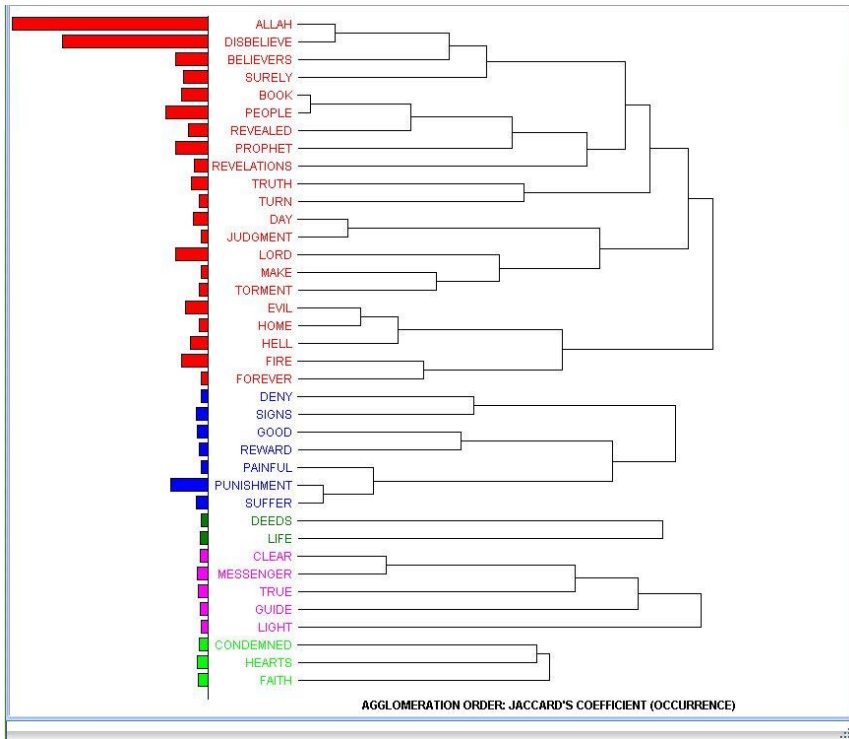


Figure 6: Dendrogram retrieved with QDA Miner indicating the principal co-occurrences, showing the main narratives and how the text is constructed using antithesis (author’s design)

The style of the Quran is rather argumentative, delivering a very emotional narrative based on antithesis with a rather concise and well-constructed epic plot. The Quran describes People of the Book in opposition to Muslims, with clear intentions of mixing truth and falsehood and leading “believers” (in Allah and the Quran) astray from their faith. The rationale uses antithesis and the argument is constructed using induction.

By directly qualifying non-Muslims as “disbelievers”/ “kufir”, the Quran draws a border between the two categories and describes a perpetual confrontation opposing the two, in a zero-sum-logic scenario, with one single possible outcome – “disbelievers” and their even existence are a threat to “believers” and “Allah”, and must be annihilated or converted.

Most references to the People of the Book, qualified as disbelievers, are negative (46 negative, in comparison to 2 mildly positive), while references to disbelievers as a category are entirely negative. Non-Muslims are indicated as species of the “disbelievers” genus and firmly condemned. Their association (usually of Jews) with animals (pigs, apes) deny them human condition, making them inhumane, an adversary easier to combat. Thus, our content analysis indicated that most associations of the phrase “People of the Book” are made with “disbeliever”, “ignorance”, “judgment” and “death”, placing them in a negative register.

Al-Kitab mentions “disbelievers” often, highlighting the level of danger, and the need for Muslims to reduce the level of evil in the world. “Disbelievers” are directly qualified as enemies of Allah and Muslims, with clear intentions of harming them. Therefore, Muslims are encouraged to fight disbelievers (category which includes non-Muslims) with their being and every instrument at hand. The battle portrayed in the Quran achieves epic proportions, with angels fighting alongside Muslims. There can only be one result – eternal submission to Allah and a wipe-out of those who do not submit to Allah (Islam means submission).

The portrayal of the rapport of Islam to non-Muslim communities as confrontational historically allowed fundamentalist and terrorist organizations to use the Quran as an instrument to legitimize violence and criminal activity throughout the world. For example, the creation of a caliphate by the Islamic State made intense use of an alleged fight against disbelievers/ infidels to attract human power and brains, while spreading chaos.

Across history, individual identity had been determined by common features the members of a community shared. In Medieval times, those features were religious; for Europe and later the American continent, that common identity was shaped by nationality or statehood; but in the Middle East, religion is still the major item individuals use to define themselves. Adding the arbitrary design of borders of the Middle East by the dominating West with no account for the distribution of tribes and ethnicity, the very opposition to colonial forces and alienation using religion shaped their very identity; facing the colonial background

of the Middle East and Northern Africa with their religious identity historically led to a rather violent personality of the peoples in these regions. As the year 2023 faces us with transnational identity of people who join each other in the multiverse based on sharing an idea or a concept, Islamism and extremist ideologies are more prone to spread from buds of intolerance and lack of sympathy for “the other”.

In our view, a “reading grid” of the Quran with a clear differentiation of devotional aspects, political, social ones and customs would reduce the *ad litteram* interpretation of the Holy Book, thus a moderate interpretation of the Quran within the Muslim world would only benefit and continue the present study.

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