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Comparative Conclusions

In this chapter, I draw from the findings presented in the previous chapter in order to compare and contrast the news from the three contexts in terms of their portrayal of France and of Muslims, and their use of the stylistic features of modality, alliteration, and metaphor. I had thought that French-language Swiss news would be more fact-based and homogenous than news from the other two countries, and that it would convey less prejudice and engage in less stereotyping of Muslims. While these expectations do not align with what we learned about Swiss society in Chapter 3, they were linked to both the way Swiss news is produced, and the supposedly center-left political position of news outlets from the French-speaking region, which does not reflect that of the rest of the country. I expected British and Spanish news to divide along political lines on all of the variables studied except alliteration, which I thought would be far more common in British news. Similarities and differences in how each country's news articles encourage prejudice and the conflation of terrorism with Islam, and contribute to a discourse of fear, will be the central focus here. Finally, connections will be drawn between these similarities and differences, and the comparative discussions of the three societies earlier in this book.

The novel approach I applied in this study, which considers news about events, countries, and people abroad as an instance of cultural translation and consisted of examining stylistic features of news about a violent attack abroad, yielded interesting results which mostly confirmed my hypotheses. The attack in Nice was certainly an extremely violent, shocking, and reprehensible act. It was also seen as a justifiable reason to report frequently and at length on the "significant" Muslim population of France, terrorism, radical Islam, jihadism, and Daesh, and to link these themes closely together, regardless of the political leanings of the newspapers (where identifiable) and the countries where they are published. All of the news sources focus on Islamic extremism, despite the uncertainty that surrounded Bouhlel's religious and extremist links at the time of the attack and

the reporting in question, and despite occasional acknowledgment that he was probably psychologically unstable or perhaps even suicidal. Indeed, all of the online newspapers refer to terrorism and/or “the terrorist,” even though they acknowledge, at other points, that such links have not been proven. Moreover, indications that the crime was premeditated are generally seen (without proof of political/religious motive; recall the differing definitions of terrorism presented in the section “History/Experience of Terrorism” of Chapter 3) as sufficient reason for using the terror label as soon as reporting on the event begins, whereas this has not been the case with other perpetrators of violent attacks causing massive casualties (recall that of Andreas Lubitz and Germanwings, discussed in the Introduction). The *Guardian*, *El País*, *Le Courrier*, and to a lesser extent *Le Temps* are nevertheless more likely to recognize difficulties and discrimination faced by Muslims and the way that discourse surrounding this kind of attack deepens social divisions, thus aiding Daesh in its efforts to destabilize societies. Except for *Le Temps*, whose political leanings remain unclear, the list corresponds to center-left-leaning news sources.

How do the different newspapers report on these themes? In relation to portrayals of France and Nice, the country is depicted across the corpus as emblematic of Western democracy and values, which are uniformly positive. Nice is celebrated for its beauty, culture, history, and attractiveness for tourists, but also portrayed as a breeding ground for jihadists. These moves are also part of a tendency to set up an opposition between the victim—the monolithic Western “Us”—and the violent, threatening “Them.” That said, the *Guardian*, *Le Courrier*, *Le Temps*, and *El País* all historicize and contextualize more than the *Telegraph*, *La Tribune*, or *El Mundo*, by discussing the history and complexity of immigration in France or the connections between poverty, unemployment, and violence, for instance. The *Telegraph* and *El Mundo* tend to focus more on the threat of radical Islam to the home country and portray that country as superior, although *El Mundo* is more balanced than the *Telegraph* in these areas as well as in its treatment of religion (see the metaphors connected to discussion of the Qur’an in *El Mundo*, for example). The *Telegraph* truly conveys the most extreme and prejudiced views in the corpus. It is telling that two striking examples of such views, DT7 and DT26, are also the articles that most employ the term “Muslim” out of all the texts in the corpus. That said, a journalist from *Le Temps* twice links France’s Muslim population with an accrued risk of violence, and *El Mundo* misuses statistics in a way that links foreigners, and in particular North Africans, with violence. The right side of the political spectrum more frequently supports strong and enhanced anti-

terror measures, and this is seen in the *Telegraph* and *El Mundo*; they also depict the home country as tougher on security than France. The left instead emphasizes the ineffectualness of such measures, and this tendency is reflected in *Le Courrier* and *El País* in particular.

The positions described above are conveyed or reinforced in large part through stylistic choices. Regarding modality, according to the statistics, all of the newspapers examined except *Le Courrier* use it in about equal measure. That said, the type of modality that is employed varies. The trends were indeed different in the Swiss and Spanish subcorpora, on the one hand, and in the UK subcorpus, on the other: rather than tending to give unproven content a patina of factuality, as in the UK corpus (although this did happen; see discussion of LT6 by Werly), modal use in the other two corpora more often established distance from such content or allowed vacillation (e.g., on whether Daesh was involved and whether its claim of responsibility was valid; whether Bouhleh was religious; whether he was radicalized; whether he had accomplices; whether there were any Spanish victims) as well as emphasizing Bouhleh's personal and mental problems, although these trends were stronger in left-leaning sources. *La Tribune* put particular emphasis, through modality, on the questionable nature of claims about Bouhleh's religiosity and extremism. That said, it also established the link "premeditation=terrorism" using modality; moreover, the equation was made more salient through use of alliteration. *Le Temps* was the only newspaper to report rumors that had proven to be unfounded, and it also used modality to emphasize risk and doubt more than the other sources, including to roundly criticize the then socialist French government. In *Le Temps*, the notion of risk also accompanied violence, and civil war specifically, which is likely to contribute to feelings of fear, a sense of threat, or the impression that France's problems are not under control, all of which we also saw in the UK corpus.

The statistics on alliteration show that most sources associated the stylistic device with negative content much more frequently (well over 50 percent of occurrences of alliteration) than with positive or neutral content. The exceptions are *Le Temps* (50 percent negative, 48 percent neutral) and *El País* (44 percent negative, 46 percent neutral). In general, alliteration often accompanied descriptions of extremists' tactics and penchant for violence, thereby making them all the more salient and perhaps also heightening fear and the sense of threat. Two Swiss sources also used the stylistic device to emphasize the nationality of the attacker ("tués par un Tunisien"—killed by a Tunisian). In the Swiss texts, and in particular in *La Tribune*, alliteration often accompanied information

about Nice's status as a major tourist destination and information related to Swiss tourists, their options for changing their travel to Nice, and so on. In the Spanish texts, it often accompanied administrative or procedural information about the case or about governmental or institutional meetings or processes, which could explain the lesser number of negative instances. That said, across the corpus, alliteration did often accompany information (and judgments) about politics and policy, as was the case in the UK subcorpus. On the other hand, unlike in the UK *Telegraph*, it rarely accompanied religion-related content in the other two subcorpora; the exception is the right-leaning *El Mundo*. Here, though, the role and power of Salafism in Spain were emphasized (perhaps excessively), extremists' "fraudulent and opportunistic" misuse of the Qur'an was also criticized, and the criticism was rendered salient through alliteration. Religion is therefore a theme that *El Mundo* appears to treat in a more balanced way than the *Telegraph* does.

There was also not as clear a divide in use of alliteration within the Swiss and Spanish subcorpora as appeared to exist in the UK subcorpus (recall the way DT7 depicted Muslim men, which contrasts with the *Guardian's* criticism, accompanied by alliteration, of France's integration model, or the much greater emphasis on religion through alliteration in the *Telegraph*), and while alliteration did often accompany negative content, the result was not always the creation or intensification of threat. Nevertheless, various instances of alliteration, even by seemingly quite-balanced sources, demonstrate that emphasis on the "Us" versus "Them" dichotomy is still omnipresent in reporting about violent attacks seen (rightfully or not) to be linked to radical Islam. Bugnot (2012: 986) asks, "What are, in reality, these two worlds that are in conflict? A minority religion and/or race, on the one hand," European countries, on the other. Reliance on this simplistic dichotomy not only hinders the integration of those seen as "Them"; it also makes impossible an eventual cosmopolitan approach to news, effective intercultural mediation, successful cultural translation.

In terms of metaphor, according to the statistics, the two UK newspapers used it with similar frequency. In the Swiss corpus, metaphor was employed 98 times in *Le Temps*, 83 times in *La Tribune*, and 40 times in *Le Courrier* (which is not negligible, given the small number of articles). Finally, *El País* used the stylistic device much more than *El Mundo* (117 occurrences vs. 81). Metaphor was frequently negative (only the *Telegraph* and *La Tribune* go somewhat against this tendency), and very often war-related or otherwise evocative of violence (percentages of violent metaphor: TG, 53 percent; DT, 73 percent; LT, 57 percent; TDG, 42 percent; LC, 67.5 percent; EP, 68 percent; EM, 53 percent).

The longstanding “war on terror” trope is still in play, in particular through the quoting of authorities who use it. What is of particular note, though, is that violent metaphor was very often used *even when the violent attack itself was not the topic*. This particular trend confirms Bugnot’s finding that when content in the press is linked to Islam, it is accompanied by a whole “semantic network that revolves around violence” (2012: 989). Moreover, as war imagery colors much of the content, and in particular descriptions of the political situation (it is the UK newspapers, TDG, LT, and EP which most often employ violent, negative metaphors to qualify the political and societal situation, and specifically to evoke the conflict among France’s top politicians), and as violence and negativity pervade the texts, an impression of chaos, crisis, threat, and danger, already present due to the nature of the event in question and use of other stylistic devices, is likely to be heightened and, in turn, to foment fear and distrust of certain groups. On this parameter too, then, most of the sources in the corpus are guilty—the word is appropriate—of evoking a war between cultures, between Islam and “the West,” even though the perpetrator’s links to extremists acting in the name of Islam and in particular to Daesh were never, to my knowledge, clearly established.

In relation to illness/violence metaphor in particular, recall the discussions above of how terrorism and the related terms of “extremism” and “radicalization” have been “made to mean” over time; criticisms of the Prevent strategy; or opposition to multiculturalism. Moutet’s use of the virus metaphor could not illustrate more precisely Kundnani’s (2017: 148) description of how the terminology, which also underpins antiterrorism policies, has evolved:

The concept of “extremism” underwent a transformation following 7/7. ... It now emphasised attitudes, mindsets and dispositions. Above all, it referred to a free-floating ideology that did not work through recruitment but through radicalisation. “Radicalisation” referred to the process by which extremist ideology captured the minds of the young and made them into potential terrorists. Extremism was pictured as a virus, flowing from radicaliser to radicalised, infecting, spreading, infiltrating (Bettison 2009: 130–1). Naively allowing Muslims too much separation and autonomy, in the name of multicultural tolerance, had encouraged the spread of the virus.

As we saw with the virus metaphor and other disease/illness metaphors discussed in Chapter 4, the right may be more prone to using them to demonize extremists and, by extension, Muslims, while this kind of metaphor may instead contribute to contextualization in left-leaning sources. The results suggest that more work should be done on disease-related metaphor in news about violent events,

Muslims, and Islam, in particular how it may tie in with particular political positions (as the quote from Kundnani suggests). The findings also show that in this kind of study, quantitative data do not tell the whole story: even infrequent occurrences of a stylistic feature can be salient and influential.

There are nevertheless differences within and across subcorpora in how articles address the themes of Islam and terrorism and how they convey violence and negativity, and these are also partly explained by metaphor usage. Therefore, let us now consider the other types of metaphor identified and examined throughout the corpus. With respect to the UK newspapers, while both emphasize the political disarray which followed the Nice attack, the right-leaning *Telegraph* blames the socialist government that was in power, emphasizes the fact that the Nice attack falls within a violent event chain, and tends to fault Muslims/Islam and extremism, which are also portrayed as external forces, through the use of water-related and plant/growth metaphors. The *Guardian*'s use of such metaphors instead emphasizes the underlying social and economic (and therefore also partly internal) causes of violence in France, and historicizes and contextualizes both the event and the perpetrator's identity and background. Put otherwise, both newspapers use water-related metaphors in the ways identified (and criticized) by Baker et al. (2013) and Piquer Martí (2015) (for instance, using "wave" to convey the uncontrollable nature of a phenomenon such as immigration or terrorist attacks), but only the *Guardian* uses them in other ways as well. Regarding the use of water-related metaphor in the other subcorpora, it is very heterogeneous in the Swiss corpus, except for its accompaniment of violent themes in the *Tribune*. In the Spanish corpus, its use in *El País*—perhaps surprisingly—very much corresponds to the aforementioned authors' descriptions, whereas in *El Mundo* it tends instead to be used to criticize the then socialist government in France.

Regarding plant/growth metaphor—and, I shall add, animal metaphor, as it is more relevant in the Swiss and Spanish subcorpora—the former type stands out much less in newspapers from these two countries. In contrast, as already mentioned, all of the sources employ equivalents of "breeding ground" (Nice as a breeding ground for jihadists/terrorists). This gives the impression that violent "jihadists" are proliferating there. Moreover, in contrast to *El País* but very much like the Swiss *Temps*, *El Mundo* links the risk of jihadism to a significant Muslim population when it indicates that France has

a much larger breeding ground of potential terrorists among the five million French Muslims who have problems integrating. (EM15)

Perhaps more interestingly, the animal metaphor “lone wolf,” which has practically become lexicalized in relation to terrorist attacks, becomes an extended metaphor in both Spanish newspapers. It is thus in a sense “reactivated” in this subcorpus in a way that is totally absent from the other sources, and embellishes the writing and the imagery— as well as the sense of threat.

Finally, while the corpus is relatively small and focuses on a very specific event, meaning that one cannot generalize about differences in different cultures’ choice of metaphor, it is worthwhile here to comment on three particular types of metaphor identified: that related to fire, in the Swiss corpus, and those related to heart and thread, in the Spanish corpus. While certain types of metaphor were found across languages, these were much more language-specific, at least where the particular event and themes reported upon were concerned.

This corpus supports Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) assertion that conceptual metaphor is omnipresent in our discourse and shapes the way we take in and interpret information. We are accustomed to metaphor; do we also take its power for granted? We need to be aware of the prevalence and weight of metaphor in others’ and our own discourse, in our own and others’ interpretations of ideas and situations. This goes for journalists, too, as Rice-Oxley (2016), incorporating a lovely water metaphor, convincingly asserts: “Suffice [it] to say that it is vital to measure every word in our news stories carefully to navigate these precarious waters of meaning.”

It is true that by virtue of the sequencing of this study, with news from the UK being analyzed first, the UK findings became a kind of measuring stick according to which the other news sources were compared and contrasted. It is possible that simply by changing the order of the analyses, results would have been at least somewhat different. However, one has to choose a starting point, and I would argue that the very fact that the Anglo-Saxon model for news is often described as the foundation for news models across the world justifies the chronology of the study.

There was a strong and very early focus on terrorism and terrorist motivations in the news sources studied, despite the perpetrator’s background, psychological problems, and lifestyle. The latter characteristics were in fact part of counter interpretations (recall Titley 2017) which did not “stick.” The terrorism narrative instead came to overshadow more measured, balanced approaches by other authorities because of the interpretations that had already been developed and reinforced around prior links in the violent event chain. Given these observations and given the selective use of the “terrorist” label in conjunction

with recent violent events around the world, one can ask, and journalists should ask, whether the early presumption of terrorism was justified, and whether the presumption was made because of France's recent history or, instead, because the perpetrator was a Tunisian living in Nice (point of departure for a significant number of men who left to fight in Syria, as the news sources indicate).

Examining the impact of journalist identity on style and content was beyond the scope of this study; however, when one consults the full list of articles (see Appendix), one can see that it is an important question. Consider, for instance, the fact that R. Werly wrote almost all of the *Temps* articles that did not come from agencies; that N. Nougayrède, A. Chrisalis, and A.-E. Moutet are all French; that the texts by Moutet and Méléagrou-Hitchens were the most virulent in their blame of Muslims and Islam. I talk about journalist identity to some degree in my 2018 article, and Bielsa's (2016a) discussion of foreign correspondents in her work on cosmopolitanism provides some useful considerations about the topic. It certainly warrants further research.

Finally, I would like to briefly discuss two articles that came up in my search when I was selecting news texts for the corpus, articles which I was unable to include in the analysis precisely because they were not published under "News" sections of the website. Interestingly, both were from *El País*. "From María to Myriam" is a personal story of conversion and has nothing to do with jihadism, nor does it say one word about it. It is the kind of article that gives Islam a face, makes it individual and local, and thereby represents a small effort to counter the depiction of the "Muslim world" as a monolithic "Other." The other article presented Cembrero's text and could encourage readers to educate themselves about the history, presence, and role of Islam in Spain. Given the way I selected articles for my corpus, it cannot be concluded that this kind of article never appears in the other online newspapers searched. Nevertheless, their appearance here was a timely reminder that another kind of news about Muslims can be disseminated, but that such stories remain relatively rare.