

## 3. The battle over discourses

### Dancing with “ISIS wolves”

Abeer Saady Soliman

“We are invisible to the Western media. You came here just for ISIS, not for us. We are the ones who are dancing with those wolves.” These were the words Adel Alamaldin told me when we met in November 2014 at the border between Turkey and Syria.

Alamaldin is one of the local Syrian journalists who worked under a very difficult situation in the war-torn country. He had to cross a border forest on foot once a week to get an internet connection in order to send photos, thereby avoiding the eyes of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). I explained to him that I was a regional journalist who also suffered directly and indirectly from the existence of the Jihadi groups, Al Qaeda in Iraq and then the self-proclaimed ISIS in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Libya. “We, war journalists, are all ‘dancing with the wolves,’” I defended myself. However, he was right. Some local journalists, who live in ISIS areas, have no choice. Later, Alamaldin crossed the border for the very last time. His own brother joined ISIS, and his first mission was to kill the “infidel”, his brother and journalist, Alamaldin.

“Don’t compare the Lone Wolves who implement individual sudden attacks with the behaviour of wolves when wolves are organised as a pack,” Alamaldin advised me, before jumping on a boat and heading to Europe as a refugee. Usually, wolves are social animals living in packs. However, some wolves leave the pack and become “Lone Wolves”.

In fact, the number of Lone Wolf attacks around the world is less than such attacks in the ISIS areas.<sup>1</sup> Many of the ISIS Lone Wolves are

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self-radicalized (Clarke & Moghadam, 2018; ICSR, 2015). The Lone Wolf concept reflects ISIS's strategy to globalize its network. They share the same ideas and search the media for Jihadi material.

### **Countering terrorism**

Many scholars have stressed the role of the media in the work of terror organizations, pointing to the evolution of Jihadi organizations' media strategy (Baines & O'Shaughnessy, 2014; Ciovacco, 2009; Harrow, 2010; Hauner, 2009; Rabasa, 2006; Rogan, 2006). In their propaganda material, the organizations spread their ideas mixed with violence. Ayman al-Zawahiri, leader of Al Qaeda, emphasized the importance of media to Jihadi groups when he said, "The media represent two-thirds of the battle".<sup>2</sup>

Understanding the messages and the strategy behind a media machine is essential because society cannot counter what it cannot see clearly (Nacos, 2002; Rajan, 2015). It may be argued that a major mistake in the War on Terror was the assertion that destroying camps and leadership would lead to the demise of a terror group and its ideology. Countering terrorism, however, requires more integrated approaches (Nacos, 2002; Nesser, 2006; Veilleux-Lepage, 2016; Wiktorowicz, 2002)

Silencing the voice of the enemies was a rational decision by the Jihadi group ISIS to spread its own discourse and to recruit new members, and potentially more Lone Wolves. This is probably one reason why the Youtube hostage campaign<sup>3</sup> graphically eliminated journalists to declare the proclaimed state (Soliman, 2015).

On a personal level, the hostage campaign also changed my life goals. Before the campaign, I was a war correspondent and safety trainer in conflict zones. The killing of my colleagues by a jihadi group claiming to use my religion in their "holy war" was a turning point. That is how I started academic field research in order to study ISIS's media strategy, with the aim of acquiring knowledge about extremist groups and their media management, which might well be useful when the next jihadi group rises.

In this chapter, I discuss the research findings from a case study of hostage campaigns and the discourse expressed by ISIS in their Youtube videos, applying the concepts of non-state propaganda and discourse. In doing so, I will apply the social movement theory. Using the social

movement theory raises an argument about whether to consider ISIS a social movement. Wiktorowicz (2002) discussed what distinguishes Islamic activism from Western activism while applying the Social Movement theory to Islamic activism. Later, Günther and Kaden (2016) argued that ISIS can be regarded as a socio-political movement and a “quasistate” with different sources of authority and means of power pertaining to each. The propaganda theory used here is mainly based on the Institute of Propaganda’s (IPA) analysis.<sup>4</sup>

### Hostage videos

The main questions of the chapter are: What is the media strategy ISIS is using in its Youtube hostage videos? What kind of discourse does ISIS express? How do the videos reflect ideology, relationships of power, identity, representation and narration of the conflict? To answer these questions, I conducted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on five Youtube videos by ISIS as a major method, combined with analysing four semi-structured interviews, as a secondary research method. In this way, I have tried to verify and explain the identified discourses.

The videos are the following:

**Video 1:** “Message to America”, released on August 19, 2014. Shows the beheading of American photojournalist James Foley. This video was followed by five similar videos all ending with the beheading of a kneeling journalist or aid worker.

**Video 2:** “Inside Kobane”, released on the October 28, 2014. ISIS used British photojournalist John Cantlie to report in their propaganda videos in Iraq and Syria. The sample video from Kobane was the first in the series. It was followed by “Inside Mosul” (January 2015) and “Inside Aleppo” (February 2015). Earlier, ISIS had released seven episodes from another series by Cantlie called “Lend Me Your Ears”.

**Video 3:** “Healing the hearts of Believers”, released on the January 3, 2015. The Execution of Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh in Raqqa. ISIS burned him alive in a cage.

**Video 4:** “A Message Signed with Blood to the Nations of the Cross”, released February 23 2015. ISIS executed 21 Egyptian Christian (Copts) in Libya. On April 2015, ISIS released a video beheading 30 Ethiopian Christians.

**Video 5:** ISIS released on June 23, 2015 without a name before the first anniversary of the proclaimed Caliphate. The Video from Mosul shows three kinds of executions of hostages: drowning six of them caged in a pool, chilling four in a car, and exploding six with a cord wrapped around their necks.

### **Interviewees with ISIS connections**

The chosen interviewees all had direct connection with the ISIS media units. Access to interviewees was made possible, as the researcher has a background of covering the war in Syria and Iraq. The interviewees are:

**Interviewee 1:** Medyan Dairieh, producer of “Inside the Islamic State” for the Vice News channel. He is a professional journalist who created a film inside the ISIS capital in Syria. He has dealt with the media units of Al Qaeda then ISIS.

**Interviewee 2:** Zaniar Ali, a local Kurdish Syrian photojournalist. He is a founder of the Aleppo media centre, which shared the same building with the ISIS media unit in 2013. He dealt with the unit and saw their media equipment.

**Interviewee 3:** Mohamed, a member of “Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently” (RSS), a citizen journalism group exposing human rights abuses by ISIS. The research will not use his full name for reasons of risk to his safety, as ISIS has executed two members of RSS.

**Interviewee 4:** Ahmed Aboud, photojournalist from Deir ez-Zour. ISIS kidnapped him. Aboud is currently a refugee in Norway.

### **The hostage campaign**

The world heard about ISIS at the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2014, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi<sup>5</sup> gave a speech in Mosul, Northern Iraq, declaring the Caliphate. Later on, the terrorist organization received massive exposure when international media showed the beheading video of American journalist James Foley. He was the first hostage to appear in a campaign of Youtube videos, produced and circulated on social media by ISIS. The event on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2014 marked what the media considered a “multi-level international message”, to win the war through the social media. The campaign used a series of videos involving the hostages. (Rose, 2014). This quote is from the statement

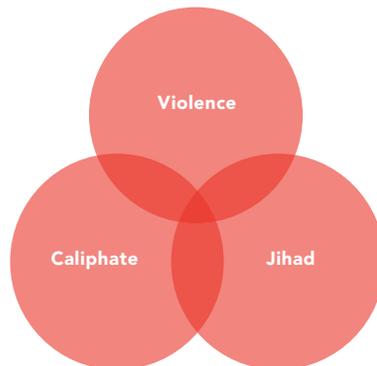
Foley gave moments before ISIS beheaded him: “I died that day, John<sup>6</sup>. When your colleagues dropped that bomb on those people (ISIS): They signed my death certificate.”<sup>7</sup>

I had known Foley since we both covered the conflicts in Libya and then Syria, where he stayed for two years as a hostage before the dramatic execution. At a later stage, ISIS also beheaded my friend, the Japanese journalist Kenji Goto. The campaign was another declaration of the jihadi organization. The first casualties were journalists covering the conflict. One of the messages ISIS communicated was that they did not want journalists to cover the conflict at all. ISIS repeated the message with the executions of local Syrian journalists. Subsequently, Lopez (2016) examined the reason why some terrorist organizations, which depends on publicity, would target journalists. He concluded that there were two reasons for this; the journalists were accused of collaborating with the enemy, and the killings could be seen as a response for negative reporting of the terrorists.

### Discourses of ISIS

The nature of the discourses ISIS expresses in the five Youtube videos of hostages analysed here, is contradictory, but at the same time well managed as a media strategy. There are three main discourses expressed: 1) The dominant discourse, which is violence, 2) The ideological discourse, which is Jihad, and 3) The embedded discourse, which is the idea of the State or Caliphate<sup>8</sup>.

Figure 1. ISIS Main Discourses



Each of the discourses has contradictions within itself and intersects with the other discourses.

### *1. Violence, the dominant discourse*

Violence is the dominant discourse. It is the tip of the iceberg, as we will see in the following. The shocking nature of violence disturbs logical-thinking and critical analysis by the audience and makes it easier to get other embedded discourses through. The multi-layer messaging of violence in the five videos clearly aims to shock; to attract supporters; to instil fear in enemies; and to encourage mainstream media to republish the message, thus putting pressure on policymakers in the home countries of the hostages.

Violence is used to demonstrate power and victory over the “others”, and may be represented by executing the hostages. Beheading, burning, drowning, and bombing hostages were events documented in the videos. Interviewee 1 explained that the IS never hide their violence, because they consider it part of their legitimacy. Interviewee 4 pointed out that ISIS was worried people would gather against them if they realized their real numbers – how few they actually were in numbers.<sup>9</sup>

The setting and filming of the execution scenes were carried out in a professional and sophisticated manner. ISIS mixed audio, narrative and visual elements for maximum impact. They included and repeated the scene of the Foley execution from Video 1 in the other videos with the ISIS representative standing masked, wearing black clothes, and armed with a knife, while the victim is kneeling, tied, and wearing an orange jump suit, recalling the treatment of Islamist prisoners at the American Guantanamo base in the period after 2001.

The treatment of Egyptian Christians in video 4 was a humiliating message over relations of power with the West. The ISIS representative in the video called them “People of the Cross”, stressing their religion. He used propaganda techniques to connect them with western forces that killed Bin Laden<sup>10</sup> to make the execution look like a revenge. The setting and scenes required rehearsal and interviewees confirmed that fact. ISIS admitted drugging victims after executing the Jordanian pilot.<sup>11</sup> However, when executing the Egyptians, they did not. One can hear the prisoners’ last prayers. This was to counter allegations that ISIS was faking executions.

Violence sends multiple messages to audiences. The ISIS media strategy reflects an understanding of relations of power in the Western democratic system. The title of Video 1 “Message to America”, was followed by a clip of former American president Obama, launching airstrikes. Foley mentions that his brother, John, who serves in the US Air Force, assuming he is bombing ISIS.

Once the victim’s message has cleared his killers of responsibility and blamed his government, the ISIS representative then presents his threatening message. The well-prepared scripts and positions reflecting ISIS’s power over the kneeling Western victim, inform the Americans that the only way to save the next hostage is to stop its airstrikes.

The contradiction in this discourse comes from the justification of shocking violence and self-victimisation. ISIS’s aim toward Western audiences is to use violence to provoke a shock reaction, but toward a potentially supportive audience, ISIS portrays violence as a legitimate act of revenge. Fairclough (2003) argues that a discursive social analysis is required to understand social background. “Revenge” is an acceptable social act religiously. The title of Video 3 “Healing of the believers’ chests”, shows ISIS burning a Jordanian pilot alive in a cage, as a response to Jordan joining the coalition against ISIS.

Killing a Sunni Muslim is complicated for ISIS, since he cannot be labelled “an unbeliever”. ISIS used the Jordanian pilot’s confessions and reminded the audience that ISIS is a victim of airstrikes. The amount of violence required the use of other techniques, such as songs used during the execution. (Lemieux & Nill, 2011). The song that is used as soundtrack to the video starts with the lyrics “You wanted to fight me”. The pilot is no longer seen as a Muslim, but as a representative of a “crusade” against ISIS. Because the Quran does not include anything to justify burning humans alive, ISIS used a quote from the jihadi scholar Ibn Taymiyyah to legitimise the act.<sup>12</sup>

By highlighting the violence of “others”, ISIS justifies its own acts of violence. ISIS uses propaganda techniques as storytelling and selection of facts out of context. In the video, we see visuals from the pilot’s actual confession. Later, we see him at the debris of a building looking regretful before his execution. Using selective bits of history is a traditional way of empowering a propaganda message (Lippman, 1922). Using symbols is a powerful form of propaganda (Lasswell, 1971). The makers of Video

4 justified the executing of the Egyptian hostages as revenge for the assassination of Bin Laden. The ISIS representative points to the sea with his sword, and threatens to invade “Rome”, a symbolic historical reference to Christianity, even though used here without being fully grounded in context.

ISIS balances its violence with self-victimisation; victimhood is raised as the justification of its brutality. “They don’t want to lose the attractiveness of being the victims,” said Interviewee 3. All interviewees believe that airstrikes empower ISIS.

## *2. Jihad, the ideological discourse*

Jihad is the ideological discourse that forms the base for ISIS’s legitimacy. The holy war against non-Muslims justifies the violence and strengthens the statehood (Caliphate). ISIS presents itself as a state in war.

Propaganda works well during times of war, and perhaps especially during ideological religious conflicts. ISIS introduces its representatives in military attire because others have declared war against them. This narrative contradicts the historical chronology of the conflict and introduces selective fragments of history.<sup>13</sup> Another propaganda method is to confuse land ownership and time realities. In all videos, coalition attacks are described as attacks on ISIS land, ignoring that these attacks have occurred on Syrian and Iraqi territories. In Video 2, the hostage John Cantlie talks on behalf of ISIS about the war against “its” land while they (ISIS) are invading the Kurdish-Syrian city of Kobane. In Video 1, the ISIS representative used the phrase “your attacks against Muslims”, presenting ISIS as a representative of Muslims. This legitimacy justifies the war by ideology (van Dijk, 1998<sup>14</sup>). Then the victim, Foley, addresses his brother, saying, “Your colleagues bombed those people”. It is personalising the conflict by using “your”, and the misleading use of the word “people” to present ISIS as wronged civilians.

Video 4 is shot in Libya and mentions Dabiq, a Syrian village with a historical ideological relevance. In Islamic eschatology, Dabiq is a possible location for an epic battle between invading Christians and the defending Muslims, which, in the future, will result in a Muslim victory and mark the end of time. Thus, this is a call for all potential supporters to join ISIS in the biggest ideological war of all time.

The ISIS representative tells the audience that ISIS is composed of the same people who are in Syria and Iraq, and now Libya. The song completes the discourse of threat; “We are coming to you by killings and death”, with the camera focused on the sword, on the ISIS representative’s challenging eyes, and the graphic impression of blood.

The notions of power and ideology are present in all the videos and is underwritten by the stress in the discourse on statehood. In Video 3, instead of wearing ISIS black clothes, the fighters wear military uniforms like classical secular armies. This presentation contradicts their anti-secular ideology, something they ignore in order to stress they are going to confront their enemies in the same manner as any army.

Because this video targets an Arab audience, ISIS carefully chose fighters to reflect sameness: height, bodybuilding, and dark eye colour. The media production shows management and awareness of its audience. As Interviewee 3 explains: “ISIS need to be in a state of war to achieve their slogan ‘Remain and Expand’. War is part of their identity. Without war, they will have to face infrastructure and service problems”.

Interviewee 1 stresses that religious ideology is mixed with the discourse of war. The output is Jihad. The legitimacy is the Sharia (Islamic holy law). ISIS presents itself as a leader in this global war to attract potential fighters. When Interviewee 1 dealt with the media unit of ISIS, they took him to the Iraqi border to show how they challenged the “Sykes- Picot” Agreement between the Western colonial powers (at the end of World War I) who divided the region – much of the former Ottoman Empire – between Britain and France.

All interviewees refer to ISIS with the Arabic initials “Daesh”<sup>15</sup>, except for Interviewee 1. He insisted on calling it “The Islamic State”. He explained that it is “a real state with borders and an army.” He also used the name as the title of his documentary.<sup>16</sup>

As for ISIS’s internal structures, Interviewee 3 believes that decentralisation facilitates ISIS’s mission. Regions are divided into counties; each have a media unit, which reports to a higher level of management. This hierarchy has been confirmed by all interviewees.

### *3. State branding, the embedded discourse*

Some scholars have argued that ISIS’s media campaign is not complex, but well planned. ISIS uses social media to promote “brand awareness”,

or to sell its image as a legitimate organisation (Berger, 2015a, 2015b; Prucha & Fisher, 2013). The research findings presented here support that argument. State branding is probably the strongest narrative embedded within the ISIS discourses. The ISIS state has different forms in the videos. Sometimes it is violent and capable of punishing its enemies, the “others” represented by the hostages. Sometimes the state is a victim facing attacks from “others”. It is always a state living through a continuous ideological Jihad. This exceptional situation justifies its violence. This explains the congruent circles in the diagram above (Figure 1).

Our research has found that ISIS suffers a contradiction in naming itself as a state while legitimating itself as a caliphate. Benigni and colleagues (2017) and Botz-Bornstein (2017) stress that establishing a caliphate was not the main motivation for Jihad. Al Qaeda never changed its strategy to control land. The findings show how ISIS takes the vision of the state a step forward, with Baghdadi establishing the Caliphate on June 2014.

Mandaville (2014), points out that Jihadi organizations reject the idea of a modern national state. Accordingly, the fact that they have called themselves “The Islamic State” and employed modern production techniques, contradicts the ideological religious concept of “caliphate”.

In the five videos, the two terms, “state” and “caliphate” are used according to the targeted audience and the objective of the message. This pragmatic approach indicates that the media strategy used in the Youtube videos is well managed. In Video 2, Cantlie mentioned the “Islamic State” 11 times before referring to ISIS fighters as “The Mujahedeen”, which reflects religious ideology. Interviewee 1 believes that ISIS is applying modern state requirements with an ideological legitimacy.

Interviewee 4 reveals that before Video 3, ISIS launched a social media survey to ask “citizens” of ISIS how to punish the pilot. The crowd’s contribution stresses the idea of citizenship. Later, this was mixed with ideology when basing the burning verdict on Ibn Taimiah views.

In Video 1, the ISIS representative attacks the West, addressing their representative saying, “You, Obama”, pointing to the camera with his sword. Here the words, visuals and voice work together to create the relation of power. The symbolic positioning the hostages kneeling, tied, and speaking in a low voice is reflected in an audience whose

members experience fear and helplessness seeing their representative submit to ISIS. On the opposite side, the ISIS representative stands, confident and threatening. The juxtaposition is clear. Analysing icons and symbols, according to Rose (2012), in a discursive approach, the orange jumpsuit in which Foley was dressed is a reference to Muslim prisoners in Guantanamo. The visuals here complete the lexical and discursive elements to present the “other” and “our” relations of power regarding this “other”.

Language is not neutral (Fairclough, 2003), and it is clear that ISIS carefully uses language to stress how different “the others” are. Naming and referring is a strategy in media discourse (Blommaert, 2005; van Dijk, 1998), which creates differences between the “us” and “them”.

For ISIS, the others are the non-believers, the attackers, who cooperate with enemies. One lexical technique is stereotyping. The citizens of Western countries—the hostages—were stereotyped through generalisations that justified attacking them. In Video 4, the ISIS representative called all Christians “Crusade worshippers”. The only time we hear the victims is when they are praying before execution.

Direct quotations support the discourses. Video 1 begins with Obama’s declaration of war against ISIS. In Video 3, graphic illustrations accompany the confessions of the pilot. In Video 2, Cantlie used indirect quotations to verify that the video was recorded during the battle for Kobane.<sup>17</sup>

The titles given to the videos emphasize the message. “A Message to America”, Video 1, is a direct threat. “Inside Kobane”, Video 2, challenges Westerners, intimidating them from reporting “Inside” ISIS cities. “Healing the Believers’ Chests”, Video 3, is a message of revenge mixed with ideology.

Applying van Dijk (1997)’s socio-cognitive ideological approach to ISIS, the movement created membership characteristics based on ideology, renewing the old religious concept of a caliphate to strengthen the resolve of unit members. The idea of a caliphate gives religious ideological legitimacy to ISIS as part of its grand narrative.<sup>18</sup>

Jihadi movements work to recruit and attract donors ( Benigni et al., 2017; Berger, 2015b; Jones & Libicki, 2008). Even though other jihadi movements in Syria and Iraq were not mentioned in the videos, ISIS stressed relations of power, presenting the legitimizing message that

ISIS itself is the sole official representative of the Caliphate.

Some messages in the videos seem to be aimed at countering stereotypes; one example is how ISIS aims to recruit women. Video 3 shows how women play an active role. The camera dwells on a masked female ISIS member beheading one of the hostages. The video itself was directed at the Egyptian regime, accusing it of forcing a woman to return to Christianity from Islam. This is a rare gender angle stressed twice in one video, and it is not done by coincidence. Interviewee 3 points out that recruiting women was stressed in Friday Prayers in Al Raqqa during the same week. Recruitment is definitely important for ISIS. In Video 4, we see the hostage Cantlie, changing sides from wearing an orange jumpsuit to wearing ISIS's black suit in a series called "Inside" from cities controlled by ISIS.

The research found that ISIS is creating a visual identity as part of the state branding discourse. Exploring the main visual features of the videos reveals common characteristics. ISIS in Libya produced Video 4, yet it followed the same style applied in Syria and Iraq. Executing more than one person was a new element, yet the following Video 5 in Iraq has followed the same format.

Supporting the idea of the state or caliphate is done visually. There are stable and changing visual icons in the videos. The most important visual icon is the black flag, a symbol of either the state or caliphate.

Choosing the topic reflects power in discursive analysis. The title of the video appears at the beginning of each video, in English and Arabic. This provides ISIS with an authority over the event. Also, the language spoken, and the translation written specifies the target audience. The objective of using stable icons can persist in the memory, remaining in the mind longer than the voiced words.

ISIS representatives are selected according to messages. In Video 3, fighters were not Westerners, because the target audience was Arabic. In all videos, ISIS representatives are military. Hostages wear Guantanamo suits, to justify the violence and the revenge.

ISIS sees its propaganda material as a weapon in this war. It controls all information disseminated in its territories. Since beheading Foley, ISIS became the only source of visuals. This monopoly forced international media to use the propaganda material with the embedded messages.

Interviewee 3, who worked at Aleppo media center, in the same building as ISIS until May 2014, talked about ISIS' monopoly on battle-field filming. Unlike Al-Nusra, ISIS trained their members to film, not allowing journalists to record their battles. "When ISIS received orders to evacuate the place one night, we found advanced media products, including drones and small high-definition cameras," he said. In Video 2, ISIS uses a drone plane to take photos from the air over Kobane. Interviewee 3 pointed out that Cantlie, one cameraperson and two fighters went to do the filming. "None of the scenes was taken on the ground. Everything was from rooftops. ISIS was losing the battle," he stressed. As these examples have shown, the ISIS videos bristle with contradictions, contradictions which ISIS has a media strategy to manage and control. Their media strategies could be conceived as an iceberg, crowned at the top with violence.

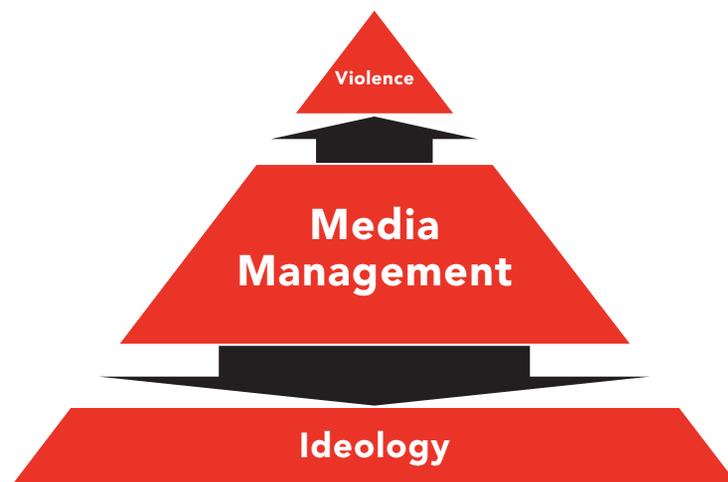
### **The ISIS iceberg – managing contradicting discourses**

Analysis of the videos reveals that, the three main outlined propaganda discourses (violence, jihad, and state branding) imply intersection and contradiction within the discourse. Violence appears in every discourse, but the biggest intersection is the ideology that provides the base for each theme. The research reveals that management of the media strategy is the hidden critical element, which controls the propaganda discourses of ISIS.

The research presents the notion of the "ISIS Media Strategy Iceberg", as illustrated in Figure 2. The tip of the iceberg represents violence, which is the dominant, most highly visible and shocking propaganda discourse throughout the five sample videos. Violence disturbs logical thinking and critical analysis. Violence makes it easier to receive other embedded discourses. However, the base of the iceberg, hidden from sight, is the ideology. Religious ideology is powerful and thus capable of justifying violence.

No one sees the middle of the "ISIS Iceberg". The study found that the media management is the hidden element of the image ISIS wants to show. In Figure 2, the media strategy is hidden between violence and ideology. Jihadi ideology gives legitimacy not only to violence, but also to Jihad and the state. In between the violence and the ideological base, middle management is the media strategy.

Figure 2. Managing discourse of ISIS



### ISIS media strategy

The findings here support both Prucha and Fisher (2013) and Galloway (2016) who describe ISIS's media campaigns as well planned, sophisticated and complex. Botz-Bornstein (2017) believes that ISIS propaganda differs from other organisations, because it accentuates the maximal exploitation and demonstration of available technology to present jihadi life as connected to modern urban culture.

While Leander (2017) and Benigni and colleagues (2017) consider ISIS' media strategy to be unique due to its decentralised nature, involving hundreds of social media users, Berger (2015b) believes that ISIS sacrifices its control in exchange for spreading its message far and wide. Interviewee 2 explains how ISIS relies on direct communication when it comes to operating in local communities. At the same time, it practices control over the use of the internet in its regions.

Teun A. van Dijk (1998) demonstrates ways through which powerful groups control the media. One is media ownership. ISIS have media establishments of their own. By producing multi-messaging high-quality videos and launching them on Youtube, ISIS reaches its lone wolves. The impact may increase when international media pick up and broadcast the propaganda material in their reports to broad

audiences. The ISIS media management reflects an understanding of newsworthiness and how traditional media operate and thus feed them accordingly. It took the global media organizations some time to realize that they actually promoted ISIS's propaganda narrative, and that this might have helped ISIS to attract new recruits and donors (Ganguly and Al-Istrabadi, 2018).

Interviewee 3, whose father was executed by ISIS for cooperating with the media, said, "Before the video of Foley, many local citizen journalists were beheaded. The hostage videos represent a message to journalists to stay away." ISIS wanted to monopolise the narrative coming from its regions.

Interviewee 1, who made his documentary in Raqqa, explained how ISIS media officials asked him to delete some scenes in an attempt to manage and control their discourse. He stressed that ISIS continuously improved its media unit, getting the best equipment and recruiting specialists who had worked at Iraqi media stations as well as media professionals trained in the West. Interviewee 2, who shared a building with ISIS media at Aleppo, told how an ISIS member tried to recruit him. This man told him of the danger there was in being a journalist who was not working for ISIS.

Two weeks after ISIS beheaded Foley, the jihadi organization media unit in Deir El Zour issued 11 rules to journalists still operating in its areas (Dearden, 2014). "They wanted to expose us. Later they published advertisements calling for media experts," said Interviewee 4, Ahmed Aboud.<sup>19</sup> Three of his colleagues were executed by ISIS.

ISIS established its own production entities for their Anashid (songs) and documentaries as a tool to recruit new members around the world (Galloway, 2016; Ingram, 2015).

Aboud considered the hidden intelligence networks of ISIS, which targets local journalists to be the most dangerous. ISIS continued killing local Syrian journalists in its regions and came after those who fled to Turkey. A father of a member of the group called "Al Raqqa is slathered in silence" was beheaded in a video and three other members were assassinated in Turkey. Nagi Al Garf, who directed a film challenging ISIS, was also shot by ISIS.

ISIS media tailor its messages according to the audiences, including those who appears in the message. Native English speakers, such as

so-called “Jihadi John”<sup>20</sup> in Video 1 or a similar one in Video 4 were used to show how multicultural ISIS is and how it penetrates other nations. However, Video 3 was totally in Arabic in keeping with its target audience.

Building identity is one activity of social movements. The analysis done here finds that ISIS through its messages tries to create a unique identity. In four of the five researched videos, one can see the ISIS flag, the uniforms of hostages, and one hears the music of ISIS in the background.

### **Supporting the dancers with the wolves**

The major finding is that while the discourses of ISIS are contradictory, their media strategy is well managed. Propaganda is the basis for all ISIS discourses. In the hostage case study, three main intersecting propaganda discourses emerge from analysing the videos, as illustrated in Figure 1. Violence is the dominant discourse due to its shocking nature. Jihad<sup>21</sup> is the ideological discourse. The third discourse is the idea of caliphate, or a state conducted according to Sharia law.

Another important finding is that media management is the hidden element of the image ISIS wants to present. It manages the contradictory discourses through controlling violence and ideology. This can be conceived as an iceberg, as illustrated in Figure 2, where its tip represents the violence, while its bottom is the ideology. Between the tip and the bottom, the hidden part is the media management, which this chapter has tried to shed new light on.

Finally, I have stressed that I will continue to value and support the local journalists operating in jihadi group controlled areas. I moved from reporting the war with them, witnessing their sacrifices, into a position where I was training them on safety and conflict sensitive journalism. Later I interviewed them as a secondary method in my research on ISIS media strategy. This helped to verify the discourses of these jihadis. I came to realize that those journalists had the power and agency to challenge the structure and doxa of the ISIS, and its attempts at controlling the journalistic field. In this way, they became the core of my current research. I am studying how the relationship between ISIS and journalism operated in ISIS controlled areas, and how the journalistic field influenced the journalists’ safety and ethical

decision-making. My case study encompassed in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Egypt and Afghanistan.

When we support and value those courageous journalists who “dance with the wolves”, we help guarantee that conflicts are covered and that speculations become enhanced or refuted with first hand factual reporting.

## Notes

1. According to the Cambridge Dictionary explanation, a lone wolf terrorist is someone who prepares and commits violent acts alone, outside of any command structure and without material assistance from any group. However, he may be influenced or motivated by the ideology and beliefs of an external group and may act in support of such a group.
2. Al Qaeda is not the first radical Islamic group that has used media; the Lebanese Shia group ‘Hezbollah’ uses propaganda techniques through its media arms (Jorisch, 2004). Hezbollah is currently using these propaganda techniques in its war with ISIS.
3. A Youtube based campaign ISIS launched in the 19th of August 2014 by executing American journalist James Foley.
4. The seven propaganda devices produced by The Institute of Propaganda Analysis (IPA): 1) Naming or labelling others to create boundaries, 2) using glittering generalisation to urge the receiver to accept or reject ideas, 3) transfer of meaning by embedding the message with something respectable to make it acceptable, 4) using testimonies of persons to endorse or reject ideas, 5) using plain folks, which depends on claiming the receiver that the ideas represent the people, 6) card staking, which depends on utilising selective facts, visuals and statements to present an idea and, 7) band wagon, which is convincing the receiver that their entire group has adopted an idea and therefore they have to follow them.
5. The Caliph, the leader of ISIS. Declaration of the Caliphate means that followers should give oath to the Caliph and be ready to fight (Jihad).
6. John is James Foley’s brother who serves in the USA army.
7. All the videos from the hostage campaign are kept as research data. Although the videos were deleted from many internet sites, they still exist on others. For ethical reasons the links are not shared here.
8. A Caliphate is an Islamic kingdom, ruled by a single religious and political leader. The only law is the Islamic law (Sharia). Yet, the Caliphate does not recognize the idea of a secular state. Here is the contradiction. ISIS call itself both names, according to whom it directs the discourse.
9. Edward Bernays (1928) introduced propaganda as a way to form public opinion. He talked about the minority using technologies and techniques to control the majority.
10. Founder of Al-Qaeda. In 2011, the American Navy killed Bin Laden and threw the body into the ocean.
11. I had this information confirmed again from an interviewee in my PhD research, who was in prison with Foley and the rest of the hostages.
12. Ibn Taymiyyah, (1263–1328), one of Islam most forceful theologians, who sought the return of the Islamic religion to its sources: the Qur’an and the Sunnah, revealed writing and the prophetic tradition. He is also the source of the Wahhābiyyah, a

- mid-18th-century traditionalist movement of Islam. More information retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ibn-Taymiyyah> [accessed 2019, February 4].
13. Lippman (1922) stresses that in forming public opinion, propagandists use peoples' pre-established beliefs and "stereotypes" and selective history to empower the propaganda message. Moreover, they use the confusion about land ownership and time realities. He presented the concepts of generalisation, summarisation, visualisation, and use of symbols.
  14. For van Dijk (1998), some basic dimensions are shown through ideology: 1) membership characteristics of a group (religion, ethnicity, gender...etc.), 2) group actions, 3) group aims, 4) group values, 5) relations and position within society, 6) how the group manages resources.
  15. Most Middle Eastern media prefer using the Arabic language acronym *Daesh*, avoiding mentioning ISIS's full name in Arabic. Acronyms are not common in Arabic and the name sounds odd and humiliating. Interviewees did the same to avoid recognising that this entity as an Islamic state.
  16. *Inside the Islamic State* is a documentary produced by VICE News. Interviewee 1, filmmaker Medyan Dairieh spent three weeks embedded alone in Raqqa in June 2014, gaining unprecedented access into the heart of the self-proclaimed caliphate.
  17. Kobane has been a battleground between ISIS militants and Kurdish fighters since September 2014, when ISIS fighters overran the small northern Syrian town, forcing almost all of its civilians to flee into Turkey.
  18. Thompson (1990) called ideology the grand narrative.
  19. Aboud, Interviewee 4 had to flee after ISIS kidnapped him. He crossed the borders to Turkey, then to Europe walking foot. He lives now as a refugee in Norway. "I was shocked when I saw this video. The ISIS executors forced my colleagues to hold explosive material that has been put in their equipment; laptops and cameras," said Aboud.
  20. Mohamed Musawi, the real name of Jihadi John, was revealed to be a graduate of the same university where I did my masters in the United Kingdom. He was studying computer science.
  21. Jihad, (holy war), is a religious duty imposed on Muslims among others to spread Islam by waging war; Jihad has come to denote any conflict waged for belief. More information retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/jihad> [accessed 2019, February 4].

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