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# The ISIS' Discourse from the Rise to the Collapse: Analysis of ISIS' Discourse through Films 'Flames of War I & II'

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The study examines the discourse of ISIS propaganda during its rise and dispersion periods, to conclude its ability to convince, when it is devoid of power, compared with its speech that was at the rising of the organization. The study's methodology based mainly on Teun A. van Dijk's and Norman Fairclough's approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis. The researcher selected two long-films to be analyzed: *Flames of War I (Flames of War: Fighting Has Just Begun)* & *Flames of War II (Flames of War until the Final Hour)*. The study found that there are differences in ISIS' discourse during the periods of the rise to the collapse. Whereas its first film carried messages to America and the global coalition in the initiative of psychological warfare, the second one carried messages to its supporters and fighters to be patient and keep away from discouragement after the defeat. The study also concluded that the best way to combat the Islamic State group is through stripping it of the technological power and expertness alike, as the battle now becomes a battle of ideologies and not a battle of weapons.

Keywords: Islamic State, terrorism, ISIS' discourse, critical discourse analysis, ISIS' films, Flames of War

It is unlikely in this time to find someone who has never heard of the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant," also known as "Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham," or *Daesh*.<sup>1</sup> The terrorist organization that captured the attention of the international world through its barbaric actions, followed by its state declaration in 2014 (Oosterveld & Bloem, 2017). Since its rise in the summer of 2014, *its media machine has held the world's attention*. As the ISIS' media has not only amplified the image of the group and its power but also accompanied with propaganda functions, which were manifested by the simple use of new media technology; to reinforce the military and organizational capabilities (Masri, 2016). Simone Molin Friis (2015) mentioned in his study that "the technological innovations of the digital age have influenced not just how war can be shown, but also who can successfully produce, choose and disseminate images of war to a larger audience" (Friis, 2015, p. 728). That is what the Islamic State understood very well and tried to exploit for its benefit. The skillfully use of media technologies which terrorist organizations have never recruited intelligently before, put us to face a whole new phenomenon of terrorism, capable of moving to a new level of development.

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Simone Friis (2015) mentioned that in the age of media technologies and increased visual communication across borders, the horror of war had been transformed and accelerated through visual images. The Islamic State employed visual communication better than we expected. Whereby, the real and the effective weapon used by the Islamic State are the high-quality videos, filmed precisely and professionally in the way mimic the Hollywood style. For instance, the films *Flames of War I & II*, which distinctly technical visual releases, emphasize the presence of expertise and competencies behind those high-tech productions, who specialized in the field of technology and political propaganda.

This accurate understanding of the nature of the visual images has made the discourse of the Islamic State influential on the audience, especially in its peak periods. ISIS, through its media, captures the imagination of a large number of young Muslims around the world. Its apparent success has also led to many conversions to Islam among marginalized young non-Muslims in Western countries, who are attracted by their violent acts and their attractive slogans (Schmid, 2015). We can say that ISIS' media machine has developed a range of uncommonly sophisticated and exceptional communication initiatives that are exceptionally accessible and attractive to its audience (Veilleux-Lepage, 2016).

Nevertheless, after the military intervention against it, there have been many indicators of the changes in ISIS' media discourse in general, coinciding with many changes that took place during this period. We can find that the propaganda activities of ISIS, especially videos releases, have been declined or perhaps slowed down in the recent period, which may reflect the losses suffered by the organization in its main strongholds in Iraq and Syria. As well as, the electronic campaign and the global efforts against ISIS' propaganda may affect its activity. According to a study by terrorism researchers at West Point, in August 2015, at the height of the media production of the Islamic State, the group issued more than 700 items from official outlets in its states. In August 2016, after a year of airstrikes and other attacks, the figure had declined to fewer than 200 items (Shane, 2016). During the same period, the proportion of military reporting material doubled to 70 percent, breaking the attention to governance, trade and other topics that depicted civilian life (Shane, 2016).

However, despite these facts, ISIS showed flexibility and adaptation in passing its media discourse and spreading its message even at the height of its collapse. That is proven by the recent video release of ISIS entitled *Flames of War until the Final Hour*, the second part of the video *Flames of War I*, broadcasted three years ago. *Flames of War II* emphasized the power and cohesion of the ISIS' media machine despite the actual loss on the battlefield. That leads us to study the ISIS' propaganda during the period of rising and dispersion, which requires in-depth analysis to compare between its foundational and new discourse, to conclude its ability to convince, when it is devoid of power, compared with its discourse that was at the rising of the organization.

## **The ISIS' Visual Discourse at the Height of Its Power**

We can assert that the peak of ISIS' media activities was between 2014 and 2015 when it broke away from Al-Qaeda. Followed by an improvement in its military and financial status, until it reached its peak with the invasion of Mosul and the declaration of the caliphate in 2014 (ISIS's Media Network in the Era after the Fall of the Islamic State, 2018). Since that time Islamic State has amazed the whole world with its highly sophisticated and, at times, shocking media operations (Veilleux-Lepage, 2016). ISIS established a powerful *Central Media Department* that was of high quality, effective and centralized (ISIS's Media Network in the Era after the Fall of the Islamic State, 2018). Through it, ISIS's media strategy

went from local to global discourse to reach target audiences around the world, as ISIS is producing its propaganda in many languages like English, Arabic, Russian, Urdu, Turkish, and even Hebrew (Williams, 2016). Moreover, to assert its authority and to promote fear, both among Muslims and non-Muslims, ISIS has published a dramatic spectacle in the videos of beheadings, torture and mass murders (Perry & Long, 2016).

It can be stated, that the power of ISIS is primarily in using high technology to deliver its discourse, as in the age of the picture; IS uses images to amplify its force and to send the message shockingly. Friis (2017) inferred that the technical skills of an Islamic State are not only reflected in the way in which it disseminates its material but also in how to organize its visual discourse impressively. Nevertheless, the power strategy of the ISIS does not limit; it focuses on the social network, audio broadcasts and electronic games which shocking the mind, logic, and inhumanity, carries through them many messages and objectives.

Over time, ISIS produced a large number of very high-quality videos that mimic Hollywood-style with exciting novels to capture the viewer's attention (Williams, 2016). Thereby, Al-Qaeda's tedious long videos have been replaced by ISIS' high definition steady-cam shots, along with carefully scripted and edited narration, besides multilingual messaging, all aimed to attract young Muslims in east and west, and encouraging them to emigrate to the newly founded caliphate (Veilleux-Lepage, 2016). Therefore, its persuasive discourse produces by professional journalists, film-makers, photographers, and editors. Moreover, it has brought in cutting-edge technology and qualified operators (Vigil, 2016). That has resulted in its film outputs like *Flames of War*, *clashing of swords*, *healing of the believer's chest*.

According to an analysis of several high-quality videos that target different audiences, Veilleux-Lepage (2016) found that the ISIS' discourse aimed to intimidate others and display its power that contributes to proving its presence and continuity. Terrorism experts realized that the Islamic State group succeeded in doing that, through the beheading videos. Friis (2015) sees in his study that during the autumn of 2014, the ISIS' beheading videos played an important role in media and public debates, as well as in official political dialogue concerning the war against ISIS (Friis, 2015). Following Zargawi's footsteps, who was the first who led the visual warfare with a joint effort of the theatre and the spectacle, the Islamic State led a series beheading and killing videos with cold-blooded murder displaying inhumanity, which undoubtedly shocked the entire world (Vigil, 2016). The intense attention devoted to beheading videos proves the apparent weight of visual images and media in contemporary war (Friis, 2015). Scenes of the execution of the hostages are a form of accomplishment of this task, as these videos have caused widespread popular acclaim all over the world. The creativity of the shots lies in skillfully playing on the emotions of the viewer and raising the degree of tension.

Hence, by the above, it can be concluded that the whole ISIS' media discourse at its highest aimed at establishing a permanent caliphate; fomenting divisions; weakening the enemy and recruiting. The Islamic State entered into the year 2015 at the height of its fame, because of the military and media successes achieved before, which was able to bring about 5000 immigrants to its ranks until that date. That led to establishing the global air coalition; to prevent it from moving towards the city of *Erbil*, and expel it from *Ayn al-Arab "Kobani"*. By the end of the first month of 2015, be practically the first severe military and media setback faced after the declaration of its state.

## The ISIS' Discourse at Its Caliphate Collapse

Much has been written about the discourse of the ISIS' media and its capabilities as we mentioned above, but after the breakdown, its media ability is witnessing a decline and deconstruction, which calls for a profound analysis of the discourse influence on persuasion when it is devoid of power.

The propaganda of the Islamic State, which has helped to attract thousands of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq, has declined dramatically; as the extremist group has subjected to military pressure that has mainly caused the decline (Shane, 2016). Many studies see ISIS' discourse at its height attracted hundreds or even thousands of young Muslim people and convinced them to join its ranks (Gates & Podder, 2015; Siboni, Cohen D, & Koren, 2015; Golan, & Lim, 2016; Awan, 2017). But the territorial losses suffered by the group after that, including the fall of the group's stronghold in Iraq (*Mosul*) and Syria (*Al-Raqqa*), seem to have a direct impact on the ISIS' media production and its propaganda discourse. By the end of the first month of 2015, to be practically the first severe military and media setback faced after the declaration of its state.

The production of official and advocacy offices has declined steadily since the end of 2015, particularly in areas related to the primary focal points of ISIS in Iraq and Syria (Winter & Parker, 2018). According to a report published in the *Ayn Al-Madina* magazine, the number of monthly leaflets issued by ISIS related to Syria did not exceed the barrier of 900 in January 2016. Also, the video footage witnessed a decrease of fewer than 140 releases from Syria and just over 400 releases from all the states in February 2016. That is, the group lost more than 45% of its media production related to Syria, which amounted to approximately 285 videos in June 2015.

The decline of the quality and quantity ISIS' discourse appears in: "shorter reports; defensive tones; late reporting and late claims of responsibility; inaccuracies and exaggerations; problems with the translation of titles and headlines from Arabic to English." (ISIS's Media Network in the Era after the Fall of the Islamic State, 2018, p. 1). Some researchers attributed this decline to ISIS' media operatives who have been killed or seriously injured in airstrikes such as Junaid Hussain, Mohammed Emwazi, Abousamra, and Denis (Zelin, Rena, & David, 2015). Other attributed the decline in quality to the loss of *Al-Raqqa*, as the content had changed dramatically when the media network's main centers were fallen (Warrick, 2018).

Cori E. Dauber, a visual communication specialist, noted that the releases of ISIS did between 2016-2017 not only decrease in quantity but also quality as the Islamic State suffered blow after blow. The video footage of the ISIS was significantly reduced, except the provinces of the state of Raqqa, where releases from *Al-Hayat* Media Center continue to be high quality, but are less frequent (Zelin, Rena, & David, 2015).

Besides, after the loss of land, ISIS' propaganda discourse has focused on the impact of the coalition aircraft bombing. For instance, the percentage of video clips that showed the effects, and victims of the raids are more than 20% of the total visual reports published by the ISIS until the end of February of 2017 (Masri, 2016). This type of discourse came in the context of appeal and grievances after it was more clearly an exhortatory context (Masri, 2016). Winter and Parker (2018) assert in their report that the Islamic State has shifted in the strategic direction which formed in advance; by changing the focus on migration to the land of the caliphate. The Islamic State no longer gives priority to this type of recruitment. Instead, it has been replaced by a new short-term goal of "retributive terrorism" (Winter & Parker, 2018).

It also has been noted the decline in the engaging content of the visual releases disseminated by the ISIS. It is possible to observe a drop of the technical effects and the dramatic output of the story, which was a reason to draw attention to the group as an immense media phenomenon. Whereas, the war reports, depicting the clashes between terrorists and the hostile forces from Iraq and Syria, had acquired more than 35% of the film material broadcast by the ISIS on its websites. At the same time, the private and professional releases have fallen to less than 8% according to a study published by *Ayn Al-Madina* magazine (2016). Moreover, the *West Point* study found an increase in material showing the execution of Islamic State fighters accused of spying or treason. On the other hand, the study found a decrease in the filming of executions of captured enemy combatants. The researchers believe the shift points to more worry inside the Islamic State about infiltrators and the desire to deter those who tend to betray the caliphate (Shane, 2016).

Some also believe that the output of the Islamic State has also slowed down due to the efforts of social media companies to thwart the Islamic State's use. Consequently, the considerable interest in avoiding actions against it has slowed its production (Shane, 2016). As a result, ISIS and its supporters turn to use Telegram application, which enables the group's members to communicate anonymously. That provides a solution to connect with activists and advocates worldwide but at the price of the difficulty of spreading the propaganda to a broader audience and spreading its messages through public debates on social networks (ISIS's Media Network in the Era after the Fall of the Islamic State, 2018).

However, as Warrick (2018) inferred, the terrorist group is now showing signs of the media reorganization. Although the group suffered a significant decline in production from coalition attacks and regime attacks, it is now taking new steps to reshape the propaganda process (Warrick, 2018). According to Parker and Winter (2018), the analysts of the Islamic State's propaganda, the group's propaganda production has changed in the post-Caliphate era; as the group lost territory, yet its online presence evolved. According to an analysis released by the SITE Intelligence Group, which specializes in jihadist content, the first weeks of 2018 saw a sharp rise in traffic on Islamist social media accounts compared to previous months (Warrick, 2018). IS also reconstructed most of its websites and propaganda agencies and started to produce better quality products. Even though the quality of ISIS's current media have not yet returned to the previous situation, its recovery is noticeable both in its central media outlets and in the local media materials. That can be noted through its releases published by its provinces in Syria, Iraq, Sinai, and Khorasan (ISIS's Media Network in the Era after the Fall of the Islamic State, 2018).

## Methodology

The study's method based mainly on Teun A. van Dijk's and Norman Fairclough's approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis. CDA was usually used marginally as a part of critical studies in social science. (Van Dijk, 1995). But most recently, CDA has become an established academic discipline as all other academic disciplines (Wodak, 2007).

According to Teun A. van Dijk, CDA studies "the relations between discourse, power, dominance, social inequality and the position of the discourse analyst in such social relationships" (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 249). In the same context, Jaffer Sheyholislami sees that the critical discourse analysis "is primarily text-based (syntax, lexicon, local semantics, topics, schematic structures, etc.)" (Sheyholislami, 2001, p. 4).

Mainly, CDA examines the discourse (the language) as a form of social practice; this social practice reveals controversial relationships between a particular discursive

case and the situations, institutions and social structures that frame it (Wodak, 2007). According to Wodak (2007), CDA characterizes by shared interests in clarifying ideologies and power through the systematic discussion of semiotic data, which may be written, spoken or visual (Wodak, 2007).

Van Diik (1995) clarified that CDA aims to study all levels and dimensions of discourse, namely, "those of grammar, style, rhetoric, schematic, organization, speech acts, and pragmatic strategies" (Van Diik, 1995, p. 18). However, discourse studies do not limit to verbal discourse, but also studies other semiotic dimensions (pictures, films, sound, music, gestures, etc.) (Van Diik, 1995).

Fairclough (1995b) determined a three-part model in analyzing any communicative interaction as Jaffer Sheyholislami (2001) mentioned in his study: the text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. The first analytical level according to Fairclough's is a text analysis (vocabulary, grammar, semantics, the sound system, etc.) (Fairclough, 1995b, cited in Jaffer Sheyholislami, 2001). The second level is discourse practice which straddles the division between society and culture on the one hand, and discourse, language, and text on the other one (Fairclough, 1995, cited in Jaffer Sheyholislami, 2001). Sociocultural practice is the third analytical level. According to Fairclough, this stage builds on three aspects: "economic (i.e., economy of the media), political (i.e., power and ideology of the media), and cultural (i.e., issues of values)" (Fairclough, 1995b, p. 62, cited in Jaffer Sheyholislami, 2001, p. 9).

The critical CDA gives us an essential approach in exploring the verbal and visual interactions in the ISIS' discourse and its hidden meanings. Besides, CDA will help to examine the link between discourse and ideologies in the ISIS' highest and collapse periods.

## Materials

To analyze ISIS' changes in its discourse, I will focus mainly on the ISIS' video releases, through analyzing textual and visual discursive of those releases. I selected two long-films: *Flames of War I (Flames of War: The Fighting Has Just Begun)* and *Flames of War II (Flames of War until the Final Hour)*. They were chosen to analyze for many reasons. First, the two films were produced in two different periods, almost three years. The first release was at the height of the military and media power of ISIS, while the second one produced at the climax of its decline and loss. So, by analyzing these two films, we can conclude the changes in the ISIS' persuasive discourse from the beginning of the rise of the caliphate to the period of decline and the collapse of the state.

Additionally, these two films, published by *Al-Hayat* Media Center, have made a wide-ranging echo, especially in the Western countries targeted by these releases as well as in the Arab and Islamic countries. These films have found fertile ground in the minds of the Arab public and the modern West alike. According to his study, Veilleux-Lepage (2016) reached that "after two days of the film *Flames of War* having been uploaded, one randomly selected page had alone recorded 18,034 views within just a seven-hour timeframe" (Veilleux-Lepage, 2016, p. 43). Thus, the films confirmed the ease and speed of ISIS' discourse to be spread, and therefore the important to analyze these two films to derive the strategy ISIS is adopting to promote its discourses.

As well, the films have high production qualities. They have implemented following the specifications of Hollywood action films, even after the collapse of ISIS. That is confirmed by the film *Flames of War II*, which constitutes the image of ISIS in the human mind as a tremendous force which cannot vanish.

Besides, these films summarize the discourse of ISIS and, focus on fundamental elements of its ideology, like empathizing on permanent caliphate; fomenting divisions; weakening the enemy and recruiting, etc. These characteristics make it interesting for critical discourse analysis.

### Analysis

To analysis ISIS discourse in its two films, we studied the overall meaning first. Then, we focused on the most pre-eminent codes covering the ISIS' discourse on those films. We divided it into three main aspects: Political; religious; psychological codes. We provided the correlation of those codes with the context, text, audio-visual clips, voiceover, dialogues that employed in the two films. Then we divided those codes to mechanisms used in ISIS discourse as followed:

Flames of War I	Political Codes	Religious Codes	Psychological Codes
	Power Amplification	The Revival of the Caliphate	ISIS' Fighters' Prowess
	The Tone of Challenge	Divine Support	Enemies' Cowardice
	The Betrayal		Deficiency of Enemies
Flames of War II	Political Codes	Religious Codes	Psychological Codes
	Recognition of Defeat	Divine Support	Enemy's Pusillanimity
	Cleavage and Desertion	Elevating morals	Enemy's Inhumanity
	The Betrayal		Excessive Brutality

### Political Codes

This code means the political techniques used by ISIS in the context of impact on the enemy and the audience behaviors, through discussing the tone of the challenge, cleavage and desertion, the betrayal, and the defeat mechanisms to draw the points of agreement and disagreement in the discourse of the ISIS during the ups and downs of its State.

#### Flames of War: Fighting Has Just Begun (Flames of War I)

##### *Power Amplification*

In its propaganda discourse, as the ISIS seeks to reduce the enemy's power and make it down at the same time, it exaggerates the reality; to portray itself as a force that does not prevail. Therefore, it justifies the viewer that the decision to establish a global coalition to fight it is; because of its strength, and the inability to confront it by one military. That puts the viewer in awe of the strength and power of this group and gives a direct indication to the public that the Islamic State is a significant force, and need armies to fight it.

For instance, in the minute marked 02.44, in footage showing the ISIS' fighters targeting US-style armors, and destroying them. Then showing attacks on various areas of Iraq, the commentator comes to say: "Obama was forced to respond to the rapid rise of ISIS." The ISIS comment is a declarative statement by which it informs about the power of ISIS. Hence, the verb "was forced" is semantic of the USA surprise about ISIS power, and "rapid rise" connotes to the of Islamic State capabilities and power. Thus, ISIS is presenting real evidence of the ISIS superiority, and the inability to confront it in the context of power amplification.



## *The Tone of the Challenge*

The film began with the challenge and direct call to confront America and other Crusader alliance (as it describes them), where the propaganda makers first began their attitude towards everyone who stood against it in its battle. The film conveys the most crucial message directed to its audience and opponents when the documentary included the Former US President George W. Bush spoke at a conference saying "either you are with us, or with the terrorists." Thus, Bush sent a clear message to his enemies; there are only two options. ISIS cleverly used this speech by using the words of its enemies to challenge its enemies. As the employment of the sentence is a verbal sign to two teams in this war. Thus, the debate was topicalized about the concept of "You are either with the Islamic State, or against it, and therefore you are our adversary."

Another example appeared at 03.11 when Abu Muhammad al-Adnani's speech used while the film was depicting the tanks of the Islamic State invading some parts of Iraq, in response to a statement by former US President Obama, who said that his troops would not resume fighting in Iraq. He stated: "the frightening has just begun, and insha'Allah we will be victorious... if you are unable to return, then we will come from every corner of the earth to fight you".

We see that Adnani's statement is metaphorically hyperbolic, where it emerges from the context of the rhetoric structure the challenge of America and its allies. The speech was topicalized about the concept of confrontation, and the inevitable victory of God for those true Believers (ISIS fighters). Where the rhetoric went too far of exaggeration when it challenges the dominant force in the world to come to its home, "we will come to from every corner of the earth" is a symbolic sign of challenging America and its allies in its homeland (by carrying out terrorist operations). Therefore, the message carries out the meaning that, ISIS will not only fight them in the territory of the conflict, but it will be everywhere.

## Flames of War until the Final Hour (Flames of War II)

### *Recognition of Defeat*

The discourse of the Islamic State in the film "The Flame of War II" (which came after the loss of most of the areas of influence in Iraq and Syria) confirmed that it had lost round in the war with the Al'ahzab (The global coalition and other countries that are fighting ISIS). The filmmakers urged its fighters in many of its shots to be patient, emphasize that the victory comes after the intensification of adversities. Whereas, the film contained a lot of words confirmed that this period experienced the Islamic State is only a period to scrutinize the true believers, as mentioned in the minute 5:29 from Al-Tawbaa Surah: 139: "So do not weaken and do not grieve, and you are superior if you are true believers." It is an imperative sentence urges the believers (ISIS fighters) to be patient and enduring as mentioned "do not weaken" "do not grieve" which is (calling for patience) and the reward will be "you are superior, victorious, and the owners of the paradise." From those phrases, we understand the significant sign of the retreat and defeat. Another example could find at the minute 03.53 when Shaykh Abul-Hasan Al-Muhajir (one of ISIS leaders) said, addressing America and its allies, "we will never be overcome, for war alternates, the days are taken in turns." This declarative statement declares implicitly that the Islamic State is in a phase of loss, decline, and regression. Whereas, "war alternates" and "days are taken in turns" are connotes of the retreat.

At the end of the film, we could find another example, as in the last minutes, the Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi said: "O Muslims, Don't be amazed at the nations of Kufr, and the state and paths of Kufr all rallying together against the Islamic State. For this is the condition of the victorious group in every era". By which the first statement was imperative "Don't be amazed at the nations of Kufr," calls on Muslims not to be surprised by the victory of the enemies of Islam (infidels), it is just a path in a long war. The second statement comes in the form of a comment "For this is the condition of the victorious group in every era" which is obvious connotes of the defeat and loss.

### *Cleavage and Desertion*

The Islamic State implicitly admitted in this film that there were cleavage and desertion blew away the organization as a result of successive defeats in Iraq and Syria. Where, the period before the release of the film witnessed the execution of some of its fleeing and dissident leaders, claiming that they are the reason for the loss and decline of the Islamic state in that time. It considered that as a stage of purification of rows, which precedes victory. Where the commentator said at the minute 05.11: "The jihad enters a new phase, purification for believers, destruction for disbelievers."

The comment is a declarative statement by which it was informing about cleavage in ISIS rows. As the sentence was implicitly aimed to declare a split and betrayal, Hence, the "believers" is a metaphor of "ISIS True fighters," "disbelievers" another metaphor referring to the dissident and traitor ISIS members. Therefore, it's clear the selectivity of its word "new phase" "purification" "destruction" as a connoted signification to the cleavage and desertion blew away the ranks of the Islamic State in the period of losing the control of vast territories of Iraq and Syria.

### *The Betrayal*

The focus on the betrayal is a common aspect of the two films. Therefore, the discourse of the ISIS also focused on both films (Flames of War I & II) on the treachery and betrayal of the military leaders to the soldiers. At the end of both films, the filmmakers focus on the escape of the senior leaders of Syrian and Iraq regimes, leaving their soldiers without leadership to face the fate of death by the ISIS. That what appeared in the first film in the minute 52.40 when a Syrian captive was talking while digging his grave with his hand, his voice appeared smothered, and the heartbreak is visible on his face, he said: "To the regime's army we are just numbers. To the regime's army, we are just dogs". That scene reappeared in the second version, at the minute marked 55.36, when the Syrian captive digging his grave spoke to one anonymous ISIS member "I served for 12 years in the Syrian army, and in the end, they didn't even offer a slipper in exchange for me."

The two dialogues were topicalized about betrayal and desertion of the Arabic (Syrian and Iraqi) regimes leaders. The visual depiction and the text are vivid evidence of betrayal and abandonment. As "numbers" and "dogs" "didn't offer a slipper in exchange for me" are a symbolic sign used to confirm that those who are in the row of infidels will confront the fate of abandonment, in the context of convincing the spectator that whoever is against the Islamic state, its fate is humiliation and shame. You worth nothing to the infidels, you are just an insignificant number, a passing dog, no one cares about his life or death. Therefore, the filmmakers ended both films with this scene to put the viewer in front of a mental and emotional trial, which makes him see that the fate of those who oppose the ISIS is nothing, and therefore his fate is execution by the Islamic State.

## Religious Codes

This code means the beneficial employment of the Islamic religion, through the exploitation of Quranic verses, Prophetic traditions and the opinions of Islamic jurists; for purely authoritarian purposes, aimed at persuasion, cooperation, and allegiance. We find this in The flames of war I & II through the use of religious discourse and historical symbols to influence the public, such as talk about the revival of the Islamic Caliphate, the sacred divine support for Mujahideen (fighters of ISIS), in addition to raising morale.

### Flames of War: Fighting Has Just Begun (Flames of War I)

#### *The Revival of the Caliphate*

From the first seconds of the film, ISIS discourse was stressing that it came to revive the Caliphate. That was noticeable in the film "flames of war I" at the second 00.28 when the commenter of the film said: "A mission that would presage the return to the Caliphate and revival the concrete of Tawhid ...to unite the Ummah on one call, one banner, one land." This sentence is predicative sentence propped by visual proof of the jihadists to move to the land of the Caliphate for a pledge of allegiance. As the "mission" here is a metaphor of the revival of the Caliphate, the lofty goal that Muslims have lost for years. Also, the "unite the Ummah" is semantic of the Caliphate which Muslims (Ummah) must support and obey.

In addition to playing with the religious terms, the Islamic state always supports its speech with sacred evidence from the holy book or the Prophet's Hadiths (tradition). We touch that in the minute 06.21 of the film, with the visual depiction of foreign Mujahideen from different countries came to Syria to pledge of allegiance of the Caliph, and migrate to the land of the Caliphate. Whereas the commentator said "from all corner of the world, they answered the call of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), "go to Al-Sham," they pledged of allegiance Amir Almuminin 'Abu Bakr Albaghdadi." The audio-visual as a text is a vivid representation of the realism of Caliphate; the message of ISIS discourse was topicalized about the concept of true Caliphate that proven by a sacred proof of Prophet Muhammad Hadith "go to Al-Sham"<sup>1</sup> which is a sign to immigrate to the land of the Caliphate (Sham) by the Messenger of Islam. Thus, this sentence connotes that, the establishing of Caliphate is only evaluates the law of Allah and His Messenger in the earth.

#### *Divine Support*

The filmmakers rhetorically employ divine support to provide a push and persuasion of the ISIS fighters. In the movie "the Flames of War I" The filmmakers rhetorically employ divine support to provide a push and persuasion that they are the victorious sect supported by divine promise. For instance, the narrator quoted Hadith (Prophet Muhammad tradition), at the minute mark 04.43 in Arabic with English translation, from one of the Prophet Mohammed's companions called Salamah bin Nufal said: "Allah will provide the fighters of my Ummah from the deviated ones until the hour comes and the promise of Allah is fulfilled". Employing such Hadith has much semantics. Where, the use of the Hadith here seems to be evidence of the divine support of the fighters of "my Ummah" which is the metaphor of (ISIS jihadists, the true Believers), against their enemies whatever they are, as the deviated ones that is a metaphor of (apostates – infidels- polytheist) and other enemies of ISIS. Besides, the phrase "the promise of Allah is fulfilled" it is indicative of divine support and inevitable triumph from Allah to the ISIS fighter (the true Ummah, the true Believers).

## Flames of War until the Final Hour (Flames of War II)

### *Divine Support*

The employment of religious texts that emphasizes divine support is apparent in the minute mark 33.03, when a jihadist provoking Mujahideen in a provocative “O protectors of Islam and guardians of the creed, know that you will be victorious, with Allah’s permission, and that victory is from Allah. Listen to the statement of Allah (may He be glorified) “how many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of Allah” (Al-Baqarah: 249).

The syntax of these statements indicates apparent rhetorical hybridity to stimulate persuasion. By which the first phrase “O protectors of Islam and guardians of the creed” is vocative case imposing attention from the protectors of Islam and guardians of the creed, which is a metaphor of (ISIS fighters). The second phrase comes in the form of a comment, thus “victorious” a metaphor of the jihadists with divine support given only to those who champion the doctrine of God on the earth. The second part of the hybridized statement (the quoted phrase of Al-Baqarah Sura) comes in a context that complete the thematic structure of the whole statement in the verbal rhetoric impact. Whereas, the verse came as a confirmation of the divine support given to those who fight in the cause of Allah, is a supporter of the victory of God, even if the confrontation between a small company which is metaphor of (ISIS fighters) and a large company which is a metaphor of (the enemies of the Islamic state, infidels).

### *Elevating Morale*

The second film focused on this aspect through give evidence and proofs from religious sources and Quranic verses that confirm its speech about the victory after the defeats; to raise morale among its fighters, at a time when the organization is subjected failures from several fronts. For example, at the minute 36.08 until 38.5 the battles fought by the Islamic state in the Sinai were filmed, accompanied by a soundtrack that instilled enthusiasm in the hearts of the fighters. The fighters were depicted as they stormed and controlled courageously. Alongside the visual depiction, comes the commenter’s speech about verse 173 of Al-Saffat Surah “And [that] indeed, our soldiers will be those who overcome.” The filmmakers in their portrayal of these battles relied on the assertion that the ISIS fighters are the “victorious sect” in the end. Hence, the phrase cited by the propaganda “And [that] indeed” is an affirmative phrase sure the final result to soldiers of Allah is the victory. In this context “our soldiers” is a metaphor of the “ISIS jihadists” who support the Allah cause. Therefore, the result of that support is that ISIS jihadists who would “overcome,” which is a significance to the superiority of ISIS jihadists in the end. Thus, the victor of the ISIS jihadists is topicalized in that verse about Allah’s division to his soldiers. Hence, the message here that the soldiers of Allah (Mujahideen) are inevitably bound by Allah victory; to raise the morale of his soldiers and encourage them to continue fighting, despite the loss suffered in both Iraq and Syria.

### **Psychological Codes**

This code means the psychological techniques used by ISIS in the context of impact on the enemy and the audience behaviors. Through showing the courage and the bravery of the

fighters; exaggerating the military and physical strength of its soldiers; depicting the excessive brutality of ISIS, showing enemy's inhumanity, and enemies' cowardice in the face of the power and the might of the Islamic State.

## Flames of War: Fighting Has Just Begun (Flames of War I)

### *ISIS' Fighters "Prowess"*

One of the essential messages carried by the film *Flame of War I* is to show the courage and the bravery of the fighters. The filmmakers excelled in depicting the ISIS fighters beating infidels without fear. They also focused on portraying the ISIS fighters as they attack, invade, and extort from the enemy. They depict the calmness, serenity, poise and fearlessness of the fighters. For example, at minute 43.37, the film depicts a jihadist with a close shot, speaking about the enthusiasm and morale of its soldiers to break into the remaining places to take over the entire headquarters of the 17<sup>th</sup> division base in Al-Raqqa: "They're active and full of energy. They haven't slept for two days, but they're ready to carry out an assault at any moment". From this active sentence, we can deduce that the quoted talk of the ISIS jihadi was topicalized about the "bravery" and "might" of ISIS. As the activity and energy of its members even they haven't slept connotes the prowess and manhood of its fighters.

### *Enemies' Cowardice*

One of the things observed in the discourse of the Islamic State that film is the portrayal of the enemy's cowardice, weakness, and its collapse in the face of the power and the might of the Islamic state. As a result of the courage of the ISIS soldiers and their boldness in the fighting, we find the escape of enemies' fighters from the battlefield. Even though the enemy has armies, weapons and equipment, they are cowards and defeated in front of ISIS lion-hearted soldiers. For example, at the minute 28.50, a wide shot shows the escape of PPK fighters from their strongholds. Alongside the visual depiction, comes the commenter's speech describing the escape of secularists (PPK fighters), and the abandonment of their headquarters. The secularists tasted the torment of Allah, the flames were scorching them, forced them to run like cowards. (And if those who disbelievers fight against you, they indeed would have their backs, then they would found neither a Wali (protector) nor a helper. (Al-Fath Surah, 48:22).

The syntax of these statements indicates rhetorical hybridity to ensure persuasive effects on the viewers by providing them with visual and textual facts. By which the first phrase "The secularists tasted the torment of Allah" is declarative statement declares the miserable situation ended by the enemy's secularists. Hence, the "secularists" is a metaphor of (PPK fighters), while the "flames" is a metaphor of (ISIS fighters). Also, "scorching them" connotes to ISIS' victory while PPK fighters fled like chicken-hearted.

The second part of the hybridized statement (the quoted phrase of Al-Fath Surah) came to emphasize that the end of all (disbelievers) who fight the true believers (the Islamic State) is flight and horror, as the affirmative phrase confirms the result of the act, they surely (have their backs) in a metaphor of flee and escape.

## *The Deficiency*

The discourse of the Islamic State from the beginning to the end of that film, and even in a general ISIS propaganda, relying on exaggerating the military and physical strength of its fighters. Besides, it is reducing and diminishing the enemy's power whatever its weight, in the context of psychological warfare. For example, at 2.30 minute, the film depicts the Islamic State's fighters thwarting all types of shelling on the enemy in an apparent reference to the inability of the major powers to end this organization, which reduces the strength of the enemy and make him confused. That confirmed by the narrator saying "the flames in Iraq growing stronger, leaving the American pondering, wondering what the strategy to fight the Islamic State?" The narrator's speech included declarative and interrogative statements provide an opportunity for the viewer to think about the powerlessness of the superpower country to fight it. The statements were topicalized about a "pondering" and "wondering" which connote confusion and helplessness, within the context of the enemies' inability and withdrawal.

### Flames of War until the Final Hour (Flames of War II)

#### *Enemies' Pusillanimity*

The Islamic State's second release continued to show the fear of its enemies (infidels) and their fleeing from their strongholds due to the bravery and courage of the Islamic State fighters. For instance, at the minute 16.59 a wide shot depicting the escape of the Al-Assad Army in the battles of Palmyra. Alongside the visual depiction, comes one jihadist's comment "they turned back, those pigs, those apostates" The phrase "turned back" connotes to fleeing and escaping, as the "pigs" "apostates" are metaphors to Al-Assad regime fighters, within the context of the enemies' inability and withdrawal.

However, in this release, this mechanism appeared less than the previous film, perhaps due to the loss suffered by the Islamic State in that period, unlike the first film, which was issued at the height of the Islamic State and its spread at the vast area of Iraq and Syria.

#### *Enemy's Inhumanity*

In this film, the propaganda of the Islamic State was adopted to show the global alliance led by America in the context of lying and hypocrisy, through presenting the images of the innocent victims who were died by the bombing of the coalition. The film at the minute 02.01 depicts clips and pictures of died children of Al-Raqqa who killed as a result of coalition' attacks. Simultaneously, it portrays President Donald Trump, talking about the brutality of ISIS "This is an evil, sadistic, monstrous enemy, absolute butchers". Thus, it is evidence that the tones of this film differ from the first release. The new one focused on emotion, showing video clips documenting the deaths of civilians as a result of the raids by the global coalition aircraft, and exploiting it to legitimize attacks that targeted Western countries.

ISIS filmmakers applied Trump declaration in the form of monologue to give the audience evidence of the contradiction of statements with the reality. Thus, propaganda makers of ISIS are presenting evidence that those who accuse the ISIS of brutality and inhumanity are more violent and sadistic. As when the clips of innocent civilians

accompanied by the description of the ISIS as “sadistic” “monstrous” “evil” “butchers” put the viewer in a case of contradiction and suspicion, and this is what the ISIS deliberately target in this release.

### *Excessive Brutality*

Although the ISIS used brutality to portray scenes of execution and slaughter of prisoners, it excelled in showing its brutality in that film in the context of the psychological impact on the enemy and on the audience. ISIS’ visual discourse in the second film focuses on the feelings of superiority and panic through visual images, which express the power and brutality that cannot be deterred and reveals the absolute cruelty toward its enemies. The slow-motion scenes employed cleverly, especially in the beheading scenes, execution, and slaughter violently with knives, destruction of heads with stones, in addition to the burning, all to show its atrocious brutality. For example, from the minute 45:00 till minute 49:00, the film shoot brutal beheadings against the captives, where ISIS’ terrorists held captives’ necks, on the side of the screen, and pulls their knife from wooden box without even looking at the camera. They slaughter the captives and throw their heads into a hole full of blood. This scene and many other scenes of that film summarize the bloody, inhumanity and provocative discourse of ISIS propaganda, which it deliberately wants to deliver to the enemies and the audience, as a clear message this time that it is still capable of terrorizing and cause awe to its enemies.

### **Conclusion**

After the analysis of the films, we can notice that the Flames of War II discourse is significantly different from the Flames of War I. The first release contained a tone of challenge and elation, as the ISIS in this release started through its discourse a psychological war against their enemy after the declaration of the global coalition to fight it. In contrast, the second one conceded defeat and carried messages to its supporters and fighters to be patient and keep away from discouragement after the collapse.

The Flames of War II was not at the level of the Flame of War I which released three years ago, but it establishes the group’s approach to the next stage. Where, we can conclude from the messages the film carried, that the ISIS in the next level will adopt the guerrilla war in territories which still under control. As well as, it would engage in terrorist operations, and start the stage of “sleeper cells” war.

We can say that there is also a common discourse between the two releases. The ISIS through them wanted to deliver a message that their movement is universal. It is adopting English as the primary language of the films, choosing a fighter who spoke in a correct English dialect, as well as showing many Western fighters; all to deliver a message to the world, especially to the West, that ISIS possesses an effective weapon that cannot be easily extracted. This effective weapon represented by the foreign fighters who already joined the group, and their supporters who are still in their country and are waiting for the signal to begin to carry out what to be ordered by their leaders. Even in the second release, ISIS confirms that even after the fall of the Islamic State, ISIS remains as a global jihadist organization.

From these two films, which depicted as Hollywood-style productions, we can understand that the technological capabilities are the most crucial stage for the time being, and are one of the most significant factors of survival. That indicates to defeat ISIS;

we need to start from the digital field first; otherwise, the war supported by aircraft and aerial bombardment will become in vain. Therefore, it is necessary to think that the ISIS will not only end militarily, but it must also take into account defeat the Islamic State technologically as well; because its fundamental power lies in this particular aspect. Therefore, the elimination of it on the ground must accompany by digital victory and stripped it of the technological capability and expertness alike.

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