# BEHEADINGS AND BURNINGS: AN ATTRACTIVE PROPOSAL?

## How Islamic State interests the population of nonviolent societies with 'spectacular violence'

### Abstract

This research investigates how IS formulates acts defined as 'spectacular violence' as attractive to people in nonviolent societies. How come people without a violent past are interested in videos where others are beheaded or burnt alive? This research shows that IS attracts its adherents by putting those actions in a specific context and setting, which is called framing. Through ten different frames, IS creates a convincing message by fulfilling the core tasks of a successful discourse: the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational tasks. These tasks entail that IS provides reasons why the violence is justified against its opponents, why it is necessary and desirable, and why people should participate in this violence.

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### I.    Introduction

The militant fight of insurgent group Islamic State (IS) caused thousands of deaths, and the number is growing every day. Whereas the United Nations declared it impossible to provide the exact numbers of these casualties, the most recent researches estimate that 470,000 Syrians (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, February 2016) and almost 200,000 Iraqis (Iraq Body Count, 2017) died in the insurgency. Syria and Iraq are the main territories where IS fights government forces and civilians, but victims also fall beyond these borders. The Salafi jihadist group is active in other states in the Middle East (e.g. Lebanon and Saudi Arabia), and it performed violent attacks in Europe (e.g. France and Germany). Besides these casualties of direct violence, multiple Syrians or Iraqis die during the dangerous travel they set up to flee their country. For example, in 2016 more than 5,000 refugees died in their attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea on often small and instable boats (Quinn, December 2016).

IS successfully attracts fighters and supporters beyond the borders of Syria and Iraq, mostly thanks to the messages they spread on online media. The insurgent group has adherents all over the world; not only in poor and unstable countries, but also in European and American democracies. It is however not a new phenomenon that insurgents seek support beyond borders by spreading their message abroad. For example, this happened during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s and during the Afghanistan War in the 1950s (Malet, 2010).

However, what is controversial about the way IS finds supporters, is that its message abroad portrays the group as an extremely violent organisation. Whereas foreign fighters in the Spanish Civil War and the Afghanistan War were attracted because the local fighters framed "the local war as one that threatened a shared transnational identity group and necessitated a defensive mobilisation" (Malet, 2010, p. 97), IS seems to attract its adherents through "a modern guillotine execution spectacle" (Kozlowska, August 2014). In its first video in this style, IS beheaded the American journalist James Foley. This video has been widely displayed on social media platforms (Friis, 2015). Kozlowska compares these videos to public executions as "guillotine spectacles", because they present murder and destruction as sensational happenings. The victims are extensively introduced in each video, they are humiliated before they are killed, and the killing itself is presented as a heroic achievement – especially when it concerns acts of martyrdom. Besides in the videos, IS presents this violence in its official magazine *Rumiyah* (earlier *Dabiq*). In this magazine as well, IS fighters demonstrate terrific images of people they killed and cities they destroyed. This research focuses on the sensational portrayal of this violence, such as killing, bombing, and plundering. When this violence is sensationally portrayed, it will be defined as 'spectacular violence'.

As said before, the public that IS wants to attract with this spectacular violence goes beyond solely the population in Syria and Iraq. The group mainly focuses on America, Europe and Russia. The videos can be watched with English subtitles, whereas the magazines are available in English, French, German, Russian and Arabic. The internet makes it easier for IS to spread its message, and there are examples that the group succeeds to attract people through its videos and magazines: the violent attacks in Germany and France, the multiple organisations that support IS thinking patterns in the Netherlands (e.g. Moslims in Dialoog, De Zuivere Aanbidding, De Ware Religie), and the fact that various supporters leave their country to fight in Syria or Iraq (according to the European Union, around 4,000 people went to do so till October 2015 (Boutin et al., 2016, p. 3)). It seems contradictory: civilised people, mostly youth with a nonviolent past, feel attracted to spectacular violence.

Therefore, this research investigates how IS formulates spectacular violence in a way that is attractive to people in nonviolent societies. The next section looks at the literature on social movements to discover how insurgent groups generally try to attract people beyond borders. The section finds that the literature on framing is most helpful in declaring what people attracts in spectacular violence, so section III focuses on frame theory: what is a frame, and what are the characteristics of a successful one? It is found that a discourse works best when it has diagnostic, prognostic and motivational parts. Section IV argues that spectacular violence can be formulated in an attractive way when the message fulfils those three core tasks, and it also distinguishes ten frames through which this message should be formulated. Section V explains the method of analysis, and it clarifies which case studies are used. Section VI provides the results of the frame analysis, and it shows that IS discourse indeed uses ten frames that together fulfil the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational core tasks of a successful discourse. Section VII concludes what are the most important findings, and it provides some recommendations for future research.

## II.     Literature Review

David Cameron, then prime minister of the United Kingdom, said in his speech at the Munich Security Conference (2011): "As evidence emerges about the backgrounds of those convicted of terrorist offences, it is clear that many of them were initially influenced by what some have called 'non-violent extremists'". This illustrates the role of other people in the development of certain beliefs, and leads to the general question of how extremist organisations attract people. Specifically, how can organisations influence opinions and values of an ordinary person?

Ducol (2015) developed a comprehensive model that explains which factors generally influence people's opinion. He argues that one's beliefs and social identity are formed by both an offline and an online life-sphere (Ducol, 2015, p. 94). These life-spheres are constructed by for example websites and family, and it depends on the individual which of these different kinds of influence dominate. For example, when an individual pays more value to opinions on forums than to opinions of family members, she is more likely to be influenced by those forums. Ducol's theory is in line with the general belief that some people are more 'vulnerable' than others to persuasion of terrorist support (Thomas, 2010, p. 444). When someone does not trust her family or friends anymore, she is more likely to be influenced online. It therefore needs to be stressed that some people are more likely to be influenced by an (online) message of an insurgent organisation than others.

According to the literature, there are three ways in which organisations are most likely to influence the opinions, beliefs, and even actions of people. Which way is best applicable to the attraction of spectacular violence? First, some scholars argue that a discourse is convincing because of the *medium* through which it is sent. Seib (2012) emphasises the role of this medium by showing how the Taliban used radio broadcasts in poor areas without internet, television and newspapers. By choosing the right medium, activists reach exactly the audience they target (Seib, 2012). IS specifically focuses on interactive online channels, such as social media and forums. According to Weimann, this is a smart strategy for three reasons:

> "First, these channels are by far the most popular with their intended audiences […]. Second, online media channels are user-friendly, reliable, and free. Finally, online networking allows terrorists to reach out to their target audiences […] in contrast to […] websites in which terrorists had to wait for visitors" (Weimann, 2014, p. 3).

Moreover, Weimann (2014, p. 3) argues that insurgent organisations find personal information online, which enables them to target the individuals in a productive way. For example, when they approach highly religious youngsters, they focus on the role of religion in their organisation. It is not a controversial thought that the internet facilitates the way to communicate and to reach people: Freedman and Thussu (2012) mention that the invention of online media provided new possibilities to the poor and powerless, and in the US Congress was said: "the Internet allows [individuals] to share violent goals" (Congress US, 2007, p. 2). In short then, proponents of this view argue that a discourse focusing on spectacular violence is convincing because through these media, it is easier to reach more people.

However, this theory might not work for spectacular violence, according to several scholars. Benson (2014) for example shows that the increased access to the internet did not lead

to an increase in terrorist attacks. Similarly, the European Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) found that videos with a lot of views did not necessarily mean that the watchers shared the beliefs presented in the videos (RAN, 2012, p. 4). This research concludes that online behaviour differs from offline behaviour, i.e. watching IS videos does not mean that someone supports IS beliefs. Therefore, it does not seem that the medium of an insurgent organisation plays a role in the reason why its discourse with spectacular violence is so attractive.

A second explanation for why this discourse is attractive, concerns the *messenger* that sends it. When the public does not trust a messenger, it does not rely on the information she provides. Consequently, the public is more easily convinced by the other side of the debate: "people are more influenced by an argument made by a fellow group member than the same argument made by an out-group member" (Bartlett, Birdwell & King, 2010, p. 44). Concerning terrorists then, "[they] were unique in their loathing of Western society and culture" (Bartlett et al., 2010, p. 10). Multiple scholars show that governments generally emphasise one side of the story (Dimitru & de Graaf, 2016; Miller & Sabir, 2012; Seib, 2012) – also in West European states. Consequently, when someone notices flaws in the story of the government, she will stop to believe this messenger (Dimitru & de Graaf, 2016).

Similarly, people are more easily convinced by messengers they like. A European Commission (EC) expert group on violent radicalisation found that charismatic leaders play an important role in the impact of messages (EC expert group, 2008, p. 15). In this way, proponents argue, people's attitude towards spectacular violence depends as well on who supports and presents those deeds.

However, in the case of spectacular violence, it seems quite extreme that someone who distrusts or disagrees with a messenger immediately supports spectacular violence – just because the messenger of that insurgent group is an inspiring Iman or a great soccer player. Thus, that is often not the case. Whereas people stop believing a government when it is lying, that does not mean that they immediately start to believe the other side of the story (Dimitru & de Graaf, 2016). Therefore, scholars who mentioned the role of the messenger in the formation of opinions, simply say that the messenger is "relevant" and "important" (EC expert group, 2008, p. 15), but add: "other research on terrorism minimises the importance of these individual actors in the actual process of radicalisation" (EC expert group, 2008, p. 15). Therefore, the literature on messengers cannot sufficiently declare why people are convinced by a discourse about spectacular violence.

The third and last answer to how spectacular violence is made so attractive, focuses on the *message* itself. During any war, the warring parties try to convince people that the sender's

side is the 'right' side (Snow & Taylor, 2006, p. 390). This is done by spreading a message that explains their view on the happenings within and around the war. In social movement theory, this process is called 'framing' (Alimi, 2007; Della Porta, 2013; Snow & Byrd, 2007). This entails that messages systematically construct certain happenings so that it influences the individual's view on reality (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614).

Looking to spectacular violence, several researchers of the past explained the role of framing to declare the attraction to this. For example, Herf (2006) shows that during the Second World War, the Jews were framed in such a way that multiple Germans started to support violence against them. According to Thompson's (2017) research, there are at least ten parallels between the Nazis and IS in how they formulated their messages. That IS uses framing is also emphasised by others: Gambhir (2014) argues that the group uses various frames in its messages to "justif[y] its activities to particular audiences" (p. 1), whereas Robinson (2017) directly investigated the framing strategy of IS to motivate others to perform the jihad.

Therefore, this review found that framing is the best way to discover how an insurgent organisation attracts people through spectacular violence. The support for frame theory to declare the attraction to spectacular violence is predominantly bigger than the support to declare it through the medium or the messenger. Even though the contributions to the latter two categories are important, this research will focus on frame theory. The next section therefore explains the meaning of this theory, whereas it also investigates which core tasks a successful discourse should fulfil.

### III.    Theoretical Framework

Goffman (1974) was the first to study 'frames' in the context of social movements. He defined frames as "schemata of interpretation" (p. 21), which make individuals "locate, perceive, identify, and label" (p. 21) phenomena in the world. Because frames organise how something is experienced, they can be a way to guide actions (Benford & Snow, 2000). More specifically, sometimes they are even meant to inspire and legitimise activities and campaigns of social groups. In that case, they are known as "collective action frames" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614).

'Framing' is a way to construct reality. It is recognisable by four characteristics: it is active, it is processual, it implies agency, and it is contentious (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). Framing is active because the messenger consciously adapts the message to construct reality, and it is processual because it is a continuous procedure where new events receive their own place in the constructed reality – which requires framing as well as reframing (Alimi, 2007, p.

13). It involves agency in the sense that the formation of the frame is the work of social groups or movements, and it is contentious because it involves the generation of interpretive frames that differ from – and may challenge – existing ones. In this way, a framed discourse differs from an ordinary dialogue because the messenger consciously constructs a reality through this discourse. In a framed message, the messenger formulates phenomena in the way most beneficial to herself. It is arguable that any (political) leader or organisation uses framing to a certain extent, just to gain public support.

Since Goffman (1974), researchers on social movements, insurgencies, and terrorism have acknowledged the important role of collective action frames: "framing processes have come to be regarded […] as a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movements" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 611). Some scholars argue that groups can motivate individuals to perform political violence through frames. For example, Della Porta (2013) states that "[a]lthough radical beliefs are not themselves the cause of violence, the narrative frames through which the militants interpret their daily encounters with political violence tend to dramatize the significance of these events" (Della Porta, 2013, p. 298). Some even call frames "the key part of the radicalisation process" (EC expert group, 2008, p. 16). Other scholars are more careful, and only state that individuals are "vulnerable" (Thomas, 2010, p. 444) to narrative frames because they influence the individual's view on socio-political conflicts. Although the scholars discussed differ in the significance rewarded to it, they all note that the concept of framing is a key aspect in the attractiveness of radical groups.

This raises the question of how collective action frames work. As argued by Alimi (2007, p. 9), a frame is the link between a social change and an assertion. It should thus be treated as an intervening variable, which explains how a structural or political change leads to certain beliefs or even actions. For example, a regime change leads to the construction of new frames (Della Porta, 2013, p. 35), and these frames construct the beliefs and actions of the population. This research focuses on the process between framing and belief change, so it will not zoom in on how a social change leads to a specific frame.

So, how can a discourse influence beliefs or actions? According to Snow and Byrd (2007), a successful discourse fulfils three core framing tasks: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational. When the discourse meets these three requirements, it is successful because it solves the two main problems that needs to be solved to influence beliefs or actions (Snow & Byrd, 2007, p. 122). First, the consensus problem, which fosters agreement among the group, and second, the action problem, which fosters active engagement in the proposed solution to this problem. The three core tasks solve those problems in the following way. First, the

diagnostic task focuses on binding a group of people and solving the consensus problem (Snow & Byrd, 2007, p. 124). Examples of a diagnostic kind of framing include activists that frame the opponent as unjust, or activists that frame the own group as victims (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615). In this way, the diagnostic task of the frame focuses on problem identification (Robinson, 2017, p. 176), which is the basis to justify the ultimate action: because of the serious problem, a solution is necessary. Second, the prognostic framing task stipulates certain solutions as the best or only ones (Snow & Byrd, 2007, p. 126). In this way, the action problem is partially solved. To provide an example; the prognostic part frames the own solution as most logical or most efficient (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617). Consequently, the proposed solution will be shown as necessary and desirable. Third, the motivational framing task entails a direct call to act (Snow & Byrd, 2007, p. 128). Examples of motivational parts of a discourse are the statements that participation is urgent, or that participators receive rewards (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617).

In short then, the characteristics of a successful and convincing discourse are threefold: the diagnostic one that binds people by identifying a problem, the prognostic one that steers them towards a certain solution, and the motivational one that motivates them to act according to that solution. This explains how a message leads to a certain belief or action through framing. So, which frames can an organisation use to attract people in nonviolent societies with spectacular violence?

## IV.     Argument

Frames influence beliefs and occasionally even actions. In this section, I argue that a discourse that fulfils the three core tasks of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing will attract people to spectacular violence. The next subsections will mention several frames for each core task. Based on the literature of social movement theory, per frame, the characteristics of how to recognise it in a discourse will be discussed.

### a.  Diagnostic framing

As explained before, the diagnostic core framing task needs to solve the consensus problem. In the case of spectacular violence, it needs to identify the problems that the opponents of the framing group bring. What problems can they be blamed for? Why should others have grievances towards them? Through this kind of framing, recipients of the frame will at least feel that the violence against the opponents is justified: it will make them turn against the opponents of the framing group.

Based on the literature, I distinguished two frames for this core framing task. The first is called the 'blame game' (Snow & Byrd, 2007, p. 125). One characteristic to recognise this frame in a text, is that insurgent groups blame their opponents for the problems that their society experiences. In the case of spectacular violence, it is likely that they stress the destructions that the opponents performed on the villages, or the famine caused by them. Another characteristic of the 'blame game' is that the insurgent group portrays its opponents as 'the bad ones' (Bartlett et al., 2010, p. 31). This leads to a phenomenon which Bonelli (February 2015) calls "the appeal of the righteous cause" (p. 2). This holds that people naturally feel less attracted to the group that identifies as immoral or evil. In this way, frame recipients come to think the opponents deserve spectacular violence.

The second frame within the diagnostic task of framing is called 'dehumanisation': "the process by which the perpetrators come to perceive their victims as 'not human' or 'subhuman'" (Lang, 2010, p. 225). Researchers in social psychology state that "it is difficult to mistreat humani[s]ed persons without risking selfcondemnation" (Lang, 2010, p. 227), with the main example World War II: "for the Nazis these [prisoners] were not, after all, fully human beings; they were a subhuman species" (Sabini & Silver, 1980, p. 206). Kressel (2002, p. 172) even states that "no mass atrocities in the contemporary world have occurred without some form of dehumani[s]ation". In discourses, dehumanisation can be recognised by three characteristics. The first characteristic is the reference to religion (EC expert group, 2008): in these statements, jihadi Salafist groups literally state that the blood of non-Muslims is less worthy, and therefore permissible to be spilled. Moreover, dehumanisation could occur because the insurgent group compares its opponents to devils or demons (Bartlett et al., 2010, p. 31), or because it attributes negative character traits to them so that extinguishing seems less bad. Third, the insurgent group compares its opponents to animals (Lang, 2010, p. 228). By downgrading the life of the opponents, an insurgent group makes spectacular violence against those people acceptable.

### b. Prognostic framing

When the core task of diagnostic framing is fulfilled, the consensus problem is solved. Now the recipients of the discourse know why the opponents of the framing group are to blame, and why violence is justified. However, such a justification of the violence does not necessarily mean that the recipients immediately think this is the correct action to perform. In other words, the prognostic kind of framing needs to solve the first part of the action problem, which is demonstrating that spectacular violence is a necessary and desirable solution.

The literature provides four frames through which the prognostic core task can be conducted. First, insurgent groups can state that spectacular violence is the 'only solution' to stop or defeat the enemies. Other methods have been tried, but failed, so now there is no other option than to grab arms and perform this violence. The frame of 'only solution' is characterised by references to the positive effects of the spectacular violence that had already been performed. Thus, by showing e.g. destroyed vehicles or dead bodies, the insurgent group shows that spectacular violence affects its opponents (Kibble, 2016, p. 30). Moreover, there is an emphasis on the psychological factors, such as fear (Kibble, 2016, p. 30), that accompany spectacular violence. These factors are stronger in the case of spectacular violence than they would be if the killings and destructions happened in a war-like battle. A third characteristic of this frame is that the insurgent organisation explicitly states that the violence is the only way to take revenge: the group performs what its opponents did, but worse (Bartlett et al., 2010, p. 20).

Second, jihadi Salafist groups often emphasise that they fight because it is 'Allah's desire'. Several scholars emphasise the role of religion in the reasons for insurgent fights (EC expert group, 2008), and Gambhir (2014, p. 2) specifically mentions the religious justification of spectacular violence. Al Qaeda strategist Abu Bakr Naji is one of the founders of the idea that Allah supports spectacular violence (Kibble, 2016, p. 31): "[jihad] involves naught but violence, crudeness, terrorism, frightening [others] and massacring […]. We need to massacre and [take] actions like those that were undertaken against the Banu Qurayza and their like" (Naji, 2004, p. 52). Additionally, the Koran is often used to legitimise violence in the form of the jihad (Chatfield, Reddick & Brajawidagda, 2015, p. 239). For example (Kibble, 2016, pp. 30-31), the groups refer to the Koran 8:12: "I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Therefore, strike off their heads and strike every fingertip of theirs", or to 47:4: "When you meet the unbelievers, strike their necks till you have bloodied them". In this way, the insurgent group states that the spectacular violence is desired by Allah and is dictated in the Koran. Therefore, spectacular violence is the best and most desirable solution.

Third, the group that aims to perform spectacular violence might refer to 'history' as a frame (Kibble, 2016, p. 31). In this frame, the group refers to famous stories of spectacular violence – which are generally known, accepted and even admired – and compares this history to the current situation (EC expert group, 2008, p. 17). An example of a historical happening that is used to show the general acceptability of spectacular violence, are the beheadings of the Jewish clan Banu Qurayza. Historian Ibn Ishaq tells this story, a beheading of between six hundred and nine hundred Jews, as a great victory for the Muslim world (Kibble, 2016, p. 31).

Such a reference to historical spectacular violence frames the current violence as less exceptional, and it shows that it works in defeating the enemy.

Fourth and last, the insurgent group can refer to the 'comparability' between itself and the recipients of the frame as prognostic framing. A characteristic of this frame is that IS refers to the common religion as a connecting aspect, or to the common roots. "Describing a conflict in terms of a global identity threatened locally by an enemy coalition is effective in attracting foreign volunteers" (Bonelli, February 2015, p. 2). Through emphasising this similarity, the insurgent group shows that the fighters are as humane as the recipients of the frame: they recognise that spectacular violence is not a regular way to solve problems. Because the fighters are comparable to the recipients, the recipients imagine that such extreme violence is indeed the last possible solution to solve the problem of the evil opponents. A second characteristic is that the insurgent group depict itself as intrinsically good, for example by showing their willingness to help people in need. In this way, they make people more willing to identify themselves with the fighters, which has again to do with Bonelli's (February 2015, p. 2) "appeal of the righteous cause". Through this last frame, people see the insurgent group as humane and realise that the choice for spectacular violence must be rational in a certain way.

### c. Motivational framing

The last core framing task is motivational framing. As explained above, this kind of framing directly motivates the frame recipients to perform the spectacular violence themselves. Now that the first two core framing tasks convinced them that spectacular violence is not only justified, but also necessary and desirable, the recipients still need to be willing to participate in the violent acts. There are four frames through which an insurgent group could stimulate this.

First, the literature talks about 'rewards and punishments' for the fighters as a direct motivation to participate (Snow & Byrd, 2007). Especially martyr actions are referred to as spectacular violence which will lead to magnificent rewards – religious as well as non-religious. The religious rewards will be received in the afterlife, and entail e.g. Jannah (paradise) and 72 virgins. Non-religious rewards could be money (Snow & Byrd, 2007), but it is mostly honour (Snow & Byrd, 2007) by the insurgent organisation. Alternatively, insurgent groups proclaim that non-participation will lead to religious and non-religious punishments. Allah will punish the non-participators in the afterlife, or the insurgent organisation itself will kill them. In this way, recipients of the frame are motivated to participate because of rewards or punishments.

Second, insurgent groups often refer to the 'moral duty' to help. In this case as well, the characteristics can be religious or non-religious. The religious duty (Snow & Byrd, 2007) is

prominent in the statements that the opponents fight against e.g. all Muslims, and thus also affect the Muslim recipient of the frame (Robinson, 2017, p. 184). The non-religious duty refers more to the emotional aspect: innocent people are killed and they need your help. Also in this case, people might be affected by Bonelli's (February 2015, p. 2) "appeal of the righteous cause". People are motivated to help, because they feel it is necessary to help the ones in need. A feeling of urgency is often emphasised in this frame (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617): the later one acts, the more victims will fall Through the frame of 'moral duty', people feel that they are personally needed in the fight.

Third, frame recipients are motivated to participate in the violence when the insurgent group 'predicts quick victory'. As Bonelli (February 2015) argues, every person wants to be on the winning side in a war. Therefore, when an insurgent group depicts the fighters as extremely tough and smart, people become more motivated to participate. The violence would after all only endure for just a couple of months, and thereafter, they will enjoy the victory. Another way through which quick victory can be depicted, is the emphasis that Allah will help the insurgent group. With His help, the insurgent group is protected from huge losses. In this way, the 'prediction of quick victory' motivates frame recipients to participate.

Fourth, people might become motivated to perform spectacular violence because of the 'romanticisation' frame, which depicts the spectacular violence as heroic or adventurous. One of the two characteristics of this frame is that the spectacular violence is depicted as a fantasy war (EC expert group, 2008, p. 17), for example by calling the battles "cool and exciting" (Bartlett et al., 2010, p. 32), or by showing images of soldiers running over the battlefield without getting hurt. The other characteristic of romanticisation is that the spectacular violence is depicted as less real, by comparing it to myths, films or video games. Consequently, recipients of the romanticisation frame tend to participate in the violence because they are blinded for the real terror behind it.

*Table 1: Framing of Spectacular Violence*

| Core Framing Task | Frame and Characteristics |
|---|---|
| Diagnostic<br><br>= Reasons why spectacular violence against the opponents of IS is justified | Blame Game<br><br>- Blame the opponents for the problems that society experiences<br>- Depict the opponents as evil |

| | Dehumanisation<br><br>- Stress the non-religiosity of the opponents<br><br>- Stress the opponents are like devils, or mention other negative character traits as cowardice<br><br>- Stress the opponents are like animals |
|---|---|
| Prognostic<br><br>= Reasons why spectacular violence is a necessary and desirable solution | Only Solution<br><br>- Spectacular violence leads to huge losses for the opponent<br><br>- Spectacular violence leads to psychological damages for the opponent<br><br>- Violence can only be answered by even more violence: revenge is necessary |
| | Allah's Desire<br><br>- Allah has stated Himself that spectacular violence should be performed<br><br>- The Koran dictates spectacular violence |
| | History<br><br>- In the past, this kind of violence was normal and led to victory, so now it is desirable and necessary as well |
| | Comparability<br><br>- IS fighters are as ordinary and humane as the recipients of the frame (e.g. similar religion, norms, language, etc.), and thus the fighters would not act so violent without a good reason<br><br>- Refer to itself as intrinsically good, so that the recipients of the frame are willing to identify themselves to the insurgent group |

| Motivational | Rewards and Punishments |
|---|---|
| = Reasons for the recipients of the frame themselves to participate in the violence now | - Religious rewards (afterlife)<br><br>- Non-religious rewards (honour)<br><br>- Religious punishments (afterlife)<br><br>- Non-religious punishments (destruction by the insurgent group itself) |
| | Moral Duty<br><br>- Religious duty (help other Muslims)<br><br>- Non-religious duty (help the ones in need) |
| | Prediction of Quick Victory<br><br>- The fighters of the insurgent group are stronger and smarter than their opponents<br><br>- Allah will help the insurgent group to win the war |
| | Romanticisation<br><br>- Depict the violence as adventurous and heroic<br><br>- Make the war spectacular violence seem less real, by comparing it to stories, films, or video games |

This section distinguished ten frames that any insurgent group should meet to make its spectacular violence attractive. These ten frames together fulfil the core framing tasks of a successful discourse. Per frame, it is explained how one can recognise it in a discourse. The next section outlays the method of this research, and it specifies which texts and videos are investigated.

## V.      Method

Frame analysis is a qualitative method of analysis introduced by Goffman (1974), which "holds that the local norms governing everyday interactions must be accounted for in order to

understand and explain social action" (Ruiz Ruiz, 2009, p. 8). It is a form of contextual discourse analysis, a method that focuses on the space in which the discourse emerged, because this space provides the discourse its meaning (Ruiz Ruiz, 2009, p. 7). This means that to assign meaning to a discourse, one should look beyond the uttered words. For example, one should look at the actual happenings and consider the social atmospheres.

As showed in the previous section, I argue that there are ten different frames through which spectacular violence can be formulated attractively. In that section, I also showed how one could recognise each frame within a discourse, and as Johnston (2002) emphasises: "the coding of texts […] is based on the judgment of the researcher" (p. 69). Therefore, the analysis is performed as follows: the sources (magazines and videos) are completely read and watched. Every time when statements referred to the concept of spectacular violence (defined as 'a sensational portrayal of killing, bombing, and plundering of IS'), the statement was written down in Appendix B, with some comments to which frame the statement belonged and why. For the magazines, the program Citavi 5 is used. Section VI summarises the findings of this frame analysis.

The official IS magazine *Rumiyah* is the core source on which the frame analysis is performed. The first issue of this magazine released in September 2016, and at the time of writing there are nine issues of the magazine. This magazine was judged as a valid way to study the discourse of IS, because it focuses on the Western European population as target audience (Gambhir, 2014), and because it is written and designed by IS itself – and therefore directly reflects the framing. The case selection of the analysed magazine issues had been completely random. The issues that have been studied are *Rumiyah* 1 (Islamic State, September 2016), *Rumiyah* 4 (Islamic State, December 2016a), *Rumiyah* 6 (Islamic State, February 2017), and *Rumiyah* 9 (Islamic State, May 2017).

However, the acts of spectacular violence are mostly known because of the videos that IS produces. Therefore, in addition to the four issues of *Rumiyah*, this research analyses five videos to which the other issues of the magazine refer. The videos that have been analysed, were picked because they are the ones the magazines paid most attention to. The first video *The Making of Illusion* – which was attached to *Rumiyah* 2 (Islamic State, October 2016) and released in September 2016 – was the one most recommended (p. 37): it was referred to by the biggest text block and it had a "must watch" label. I analysed the version re-released in November 2016 (Islamic State, November 2016b), because this one had English subtitles. The second video *You must fight them, O Muwahhid* (Islamic State, November 2016c) belonged to *Rumiyah* 3 (Islamic State, November 2016a) and was the only video referred to by the magazine

(pp. 10-12). The third video *Shield of the Cross* (Islamic State, January 2017b) is linked to *Rumiyah* 5 (Islamic State, January 2017a), and was selected because the magazine talks very extensively about this video (pp. 16-19). The fourth video links to *Rumiyah* 7 (Islamic State, March 2017) and is called *Tank Hunters* (Islamic State, January 2017c). This is the only video to which the text extensively refers (pp. 12-13). Lastly, *Rumiyah* 8 (Islamic State, April 2017) refers to the video *My father told me* (Islamic State, December 2016b). Again, this video was selected because it received most attention in the magazine: it is mentioned on the title page (p. 1), but also on pp. 32-34 and p. 38.

More information about the frame analysis on both the videos and magazine issues can be found in the appendices. Appendix A shows how many statements per text compose each of the ten frames, whereas Appendix B shows the extensive frame analysis for each video and magazine. The next section provides an overview of the results of this analysis.

## VI.      Results

As shown in Appendix A, the ten frames distinguished in section IV to formulate spectacular violence as attractive, were found in the discourse of IS. The statements were attributed to a frame according to the characteristics mentioned before. This is more extensively explained in Appendix B.

### a. Diagnostic framing

IS firstly uses the frames 'blame game' and 'dehumanisation' to fulfil the diagnostic core task of framing. To start with the 'blame game', IS regularly refers to the violence of its opponents to show that they are responsible for the problems that the region experiences. For example, in *Rumiyah* 1 they state: "There was no way to credibly verify the extent of losses incurred by the murtaddin as a result of the assault" (p. 23). Other statements that fulfil this characteristic are "In some prisons, Muslim women are raped every day. They are being humiliated" (Islamic State, November 2016c), "He relentlessly bombarded and destroyed houses upon the heads of their inhabitants" (Islamic State, December 2016a, p. 6), "The victims of their barbaric strikes were dozens of killed and wounded among the weak and the defenceless" (Islamic State, January 2017b), "Crusader Russia – the ally of the regime – which killed thousands of helpless people, destroyed cities and villages" (Islamic State, February 2017, p. 5), and "They descended in the heart of the homeland […] and committed much oppression and perversion" (Islamic State, January 2017c). Moreover, IS shows multiple images and recordings of dead bodies and the harm that its opponents have performed. For example, the video *Shield of the Cross* (Islamic

State, January 2017b) shows wounded children in a hospital, who were attacked by Turkey. Besides this emphasis on blaming the opponents for problems of the villagers, the 'blame game' is used to show how inherently wrong the opponents of IS behave. This wrongness is shown in statements as "Make the deaths of righteous men" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 2), but also in the opponents' reason for fighting: "This is not a war against the Islamic State alone. This is a war against Islam" (Islamic State, November 2016c), "[The Rafidah are] incited by their animosity and thirst for vengeance" (Islamic State, December 2016a, p. 5). In this way, the 'blame game' is performed by IS to solve the consensus problem as the diagnostic core task of a successful frame.

IS also dehumanises its opponents in several ways. To start with, IS states multiple times that the blood of non-Muslims is less worthy and may be spilled: "The blood of a kafir is cheap, filthy, and permissible to shed" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 35), "warning Muslims from mixing with mushrikin" (Islamic State, February 2017, p. 14), "The default with regards to the blood of mushrikin is that it is permissible to shed" (Islamic State, May 2017, p. 5). Moreover, IS dehumanises its opponents by portraying them as inhumane creatures such as devils: "he is a devil – whether vocal or mute" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 29), and "the worst creatures under the sky, deserving to be killed" (Islamic State, December 2016a, p. 6), or unworthy cowards: "Crusaders remain afraid by the grace of Allah" (Islamic State, November 2016c) and "you fight a people who have no intellect, nor proof, nor religion, nor victorious dunya" (Islamic State, December 2016a, p. 5). Lastly, IS also refers to its opponents as animals: "The blood of one of them is as base and inferior as that of a dog" (Islamic State, January 2017b) and "Shedding his blood is permissible without exception, just like swine" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 36). Moreover, IS shows videos where it treats its opponents as animals. For example, in *The Making of Illusion* (Islamic State, November 2016b) they kill and hang the soldiers like cows in a slaughterhouse, whereas in *You must fight them, O Muwahhid* (Islamic State, November 2016c) they shoot at a Kurdish soldier who is ordered to run away: as if they are hunting him.

### b. Prognostic framing

To fulfil the prognostic core task of a successful frame, IS uses the frames: 'only solution', 'Allah's desire', 'history' and 'comparability'. To start with the frame that treats spectacular violence as the only solution to solve the problem of how to defeat the opponents of IS, there are three characteristics to recognise this frame. First, IS shows that spectacular violence brought them huge victories in the overall fight. For example, "These mines played a major role

in causing mass casualties and losses" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 24), "500 Crusaders were killed and injured" (Islamic State, November 2016b), "most of that was through operations by individual mujahidin, with the simplest of tools, without consolation" (Islamic State, November 2016c). Moreover, in several videos such as *Shield of the Cross* (Islamic State, January 2017b) and *The making of Illusion* (Islamic State, November 2016b), IS performed the spectacular violence live to increase the realisation of its effects. As a second characteristic, IS refers to the psychological effects of spectacular violence, such as fear and awareness. It does so by using statements as: "These operations reflect a great challenge to the tawaghit and highlights huge flaws in their security apparatus" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 26) and "make an example to others" (Islamic State, November 2016c). The live performances of spectacular violence also showed the psychological effect on the opponents themselves, such as the crying soldiers in *My Father told me* (Islamic State, December 2016b). The third characteristic of the 'only solution' frame, is that IS explicitly states that the violence can only be limited with more violence – in the form of revenge: "Chopping their heads and taking revenge for the Muslims" (Islamic State, November 2016c) and "The Kufr killed my parents, now I will kill them" (Islamic State, December 2016b).

Second, IS often proposes spectacular violence as the best solution through a reference to 'Allah's desire'. This could be in direct references to what He wants: "Allah Punishes Them through Your Hands" (Islamic State, May 2017, p. 10), "Allahu Akbar" (Islamic State, December 2016b), "It is a trial by Allah for His slaves and an examination for His Awliya" (Islamic State, January 2017c), and "The soldiers of the Khilafah will take revenge against you by Allah's permission" (Islamic State, January 2017b). However, it could also be because of religious quotations from the Koran: "'And if you punish, then punish them with the like of that with which you were afflicted' (An-Nahl 126)" (Islamic State, January 2017b), and "My father told me that the Koran prescribes violence when necessary" (Islamic State, December 2016b).'

The third frame through which IS aims to fulfil the prognostic core task of a successful frame, entails 'history'. For example, in *Rumiyah* 1 is stated "many of them were killed on the fronts of jihad, fully achieving knowledge and action" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 28). In other issues of the magazine, it is stated that "[Muslims] have a glorious history of sacrifice and jihad" (Islamic State 2016a, p. 12), that "we have seen [chopping people's heads] many times throughout the history of this blessed jihad" (Islamic State, February 2017, p. 10), or that "History repeats itself. The logic of events across ages does not change" (Islamic State, January 2017c). In this way, IS shows that the spectacular violence it performs is comparable to violence in the past, violence which is now generally accepted.

Lastly, IS frames spectacular violence as a desirable and necessary solution through the 'comparability' frame. Through the first characteristic of this frame, IS refers to the common roots with its watchers or readers. In this way, IS shows its humane side, and therefore the watchers and readers should realise that there is no other option than this violence. IS emphasises its humane side in statements as "all people are equal, including prophets and righteous people as well as disbelievers and tyrants" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 2) and "Now it is up to me to protect my little brother" (Islamic State, December 2016b). Moreover, in the magazines IS tend to mention duties for Muslims, such as the rights of Muslims over each other in *Rumiyah* 6 (Islamic State, February 2017, p. 7) and the seven examples of good deeds in *Rumiyah* 9 (Islamic State, May 2017, p. 17). The second characteristic of the 'comparability' frame occurs as well in the IS discourse, and this entails that the organisation portrays itself as intrinsically good. For example, it states: "[IS fighters] meet with the prisoners and those under investigation so they can look into their affairs and take their complaints if they have any" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 12), "The Mujahiddin were able to rescue the sick in the hospital" (Islamic State, January 2017c), and in *My Father told me* (Islamic State, December 2016b) IS emphasises how they take care of the orphaned children.

### c. Motivational framing

When spectacular violence is proposed by IS as a necessary and desirable solution, the insurgent group only needs to encourage others to participate. An insurgent group can do this through four frames, and the discourse of IS fulfils again the characteristics for all these. To start with, IS regularly refers to 'rewards and punishments' for the ones who do and do not participate. There are a lot of references to religious rewards, such as "bringing [the performer of spectacular violence] what he had long awaited – shahadah in the path of Allah" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 17), "those killed from among the Muslims were in Jannah, and those killed from among the mushrikin were in Hellfire" (Islamic State, February 2017, p. 9), and simply "Allah rewards martyrs" (Islamic State, December 2016b). There are also many references to non-religious rewards, mostly honour, for example when names are mentioned such as "Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 3) or when IS simply mentions the steadfastness of its fighters: "As those young men who yesterday departed from the heart of Europe, intending hijrah for the cause of Allah" (Islamic State, November 2016b) and "I will not forget here to praise the knights of da'wah" (Islamic State, November 2016c). However, IS also refers to the punishments of the ones who ignore the fight and do not help the organisation. Also for here, there are religious punishments as "whoever turns away on that day, unless

changing direction for combat or joining [another] company [of troops], then he has earned the wrath of Allah (Islamic State, December 2016a, p. 21) and "Whoever turns away from it, then indeed, he will bear on the Day of Resurrection a burden" (Islamic State, May 2017, p. 25). There are also non-religious punishments, such as "those who know but do not act upon their knowledge are dispraised according to the Shari'ah" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 29) and "they will have a painful punishment" (Islamic State, May 2017, p. 54).

Second, IS refers to the 'moral duty' of the watchers and readers to participate. IS refers here to the religious duty to help, for example in "striking terror into the hearts of all disbelievers is a Muslim's duty" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 36), "Fight for your religion" (Islamic State, November 2016c), and "Take revenge for your religion" (Islamic State, January 2017b). However, it also appeals to the feelings of the readers and watchers by showing the terrific happenings in the region, and emphasising that the people who die are related to them in some way: "they are killing your brothers every day" (Islamic State, January 2017b), "We have many brothers who struck the enemies of Allah" (Islamic State, January 2017c), and "Do not close your eyes for what happens in the world" (Islamic State, December 2016b).

The third frame is the 'prediction of quick victory'. By situating IS on the winning side, the organisation tries to encourage people to join them. Also in here, there are religious signs that IS will soon win the war – mostly with the help of Allah: "Allah had hono[u]red Islam and made it victorious" (Islamic State, December 2016a, p. 21), "the only ones for whom He decreed victory, conquest, and consolidation" (Islamic State, February 2017, p. 6), and "Victory is not under their control, rather it is purely a grace of Allah upon them" (Islamic State, January 2017c). Moreover, IS predicts it will win the war because of the successes it made – mostly thanks to its fighters: "a huge collapse in morale within the ranks of the PKK" (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 23), "This [wonderful] image of the Crusader intelligence agent appeared, over time, to be no more than illusions" (Islamic State, November 2016b), and "The Americans did not leave Iraq except knocked down and paralysed, or missing arms or legs, or psychologically damaged" (Islamic State, November 2016c).

The last frame of the motivational core task is 'romanticisation', in which IS depicts the war as an exciting adventure, comparable with video games and films. This is done by directly calling the war a cosmic one, for example as "epic battles" (Islamic State, December 2016a, p. 2) or as "fiery operations and scorching battles" (Islamic State, January 2017b). Moreover, pictures show happy fighters with big guns, depicting them as real heroes (Islamic State, September 2016, p. 24). According to the second characteristics, especially the videos depict the fight as unreal, with a lot of similarities between films and video games. For example, *Tank*

*Hunters* (Islamic State, January 2017c) is composed as if one shoots the tanks herself in a video game, and in *My Father told me* (Islamic State, December 2016b) the video is recorded as if one runs with a gun herself. Moreover, *Tank Hunters* shows the war against the Persians several ages ago, meaning that they performed that story for the purpose of the video. All videos have several slow-motion, reverse, zoom, and sound effects, which make it less believable that the violence is performed on real human beings.

As had been shown, IS fulfils the three core framing tasks of a successful discourse through these ten frames. Consequently, the group formulates spectacular violence in an attractive way, even to people in nonviolent societies.

### VII. Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

This research investigated how IS depicts spectacular violence attractively to people in nonviolent societies. It showed that the insurgent organisation utters its message in a successful way because it fulfils Snow's and Byrd's (2007) three core tasks for convincing discourses. First, through the frames 'blame game' and 'dehumanisation', IS solves the consensus problem by diagnostic framing. The group justifies the violence against its opponents by blaming them and depicting their lives as less worthy. Second, through the frames 'only solution', 'Allah's desire', 'history' and 'comparability', IS partially solves the action problem by proposing spectacular violence as the best solution. By this prognostic framing, the watchers and readers of the IS discourse come to see spectacular violence as a necessary and desirable solution. Third, through the frames 'rewards and punishments', 'moral duty', 'prediction of quick victory' and 'romanticisation', the action problem is completely solved by motivational framing. Consequently, recipients of the frames feel that they should perform spectacular violence as well.

Note with sending the results of this research, there are two main implications. First and foremost, the codification of the statements was a subjective process. In contradiction to discourse analyses in other researches, this analysis was performed by one individual instead of multiple scholars working together. Consequently, another scholar might attribute other statements to the frames. However, the purpose of this research was not to find out how many statements could be categorised to the frames. It was to show that IS frames its message according to a specific structure, and that is sufficiently revealed by the analysis performed. Second, one could argue that the number of analysed sources should be increased for the research to be representative. Even though it is not denied that more resources would depict the

frames of IS in an even better way, it can be argued that the analysed sources are representative enough to comprehend the IS discourse – mainly because the texts and videos are randomly selected in the timeframe from *Rumiyah* 1 till present.

The implications mentioned above can be solved by future research that performs similar frame analyses on IS discourses. Moreover, future research could ask proponents of IS if they support the organisation for the same reasons as the frames are meant for. This gives more insight into the effects of the frames. Another question that future research could ask is about other (maybe non-religious) insurgent groups: are their messages framed in a similar way?

This research showed the inherent mechanisms of opinion change, and therefore it could help governments or international security organisations to make the messages of their opponents less convincing, or to formulate an attractive counterproposal. In this way, the number of foreign fighters or extremists that leave their country could be limited. However, such a limitation remains a challenge: as had been shown, the message of IS is carefully considered. It goes much deeper than the performance of beheadings and burnings alone.

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