

**TRANSLATING 'ISLAMIC STATE': MULTIMODAL NARRATIVES  
ACROSS NATIONAL AND MEDIA BOUNDARIES**

**by**

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## Abstract

This thesis provides an original contribution to ongoing research on so-called Islamic State ('IS') by using a multiple case-study approach to offer an in-depth analysis of Arabic and English language narratives related to four atrocities committed by the group: (1) the mass killing of hundreds of Iraqi soldiers, known as the Speicher massacre, (2) the captivity and sexual enslavement of Ezidi girls, known in Arabic as *sabi*, (3) the executions of a number of western, Arab, and Kurd victims, and (4) the destruction of cultural artefacts in Nineveh province. The analysis engages with the discourses of 'IS', western, Arabic, Iranian, and Kurdish media, survivors, 'IS's' religious opponents, and other actors.

The dissertation uses a social narrative theory as its conceptual framework that I seek to develop by focusing on the fragmentation in narratives, on one hand, and on the multimodal resources through which narratives circulate, on the other. To this end, I combine the theory with Boje's (2001) notion of antenarrative and Kress'(2009) understanding of the three resources of discourse, genre, and mode, to investigate ways in which narratives first unfold and how they later change as they are translated.

Translation is understood in the thesis as a multi-directional movement that simultaneously takes place across multiple resources without necessarily crossing language boundaries. The findings of this study reveal that the aforementioned resources contribute to transforming narratives. In translation, 'IS's' narratives can be delegitimized and confronted, or the opposite. Examining the changes in these narratives as they are translated in multiple directions is a novel contribution to the field of translation studies in relation to the digital media environment.

## **Dedication**

*To all honourable Iraqis who gave their lives fighting 'IS'. To those who have endured the calamities of 'IS', terrorism, and corruption. You are my inspiration.*

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## Transliteration system

This study has adopted the transliteration system approved by the Library of the Congress and the American Library Association.

### Letters of the Alphabet

Initial	Medial	Final	Alone	Romanization
ا	ا	ا	ا	ā
ب	ب	ب	ب	b
ت	ت	ت	ت	t
ث	ث	ث	ث	th
ج	ج	ج	ج	j
ح	ح	ح	ح	ḥ
خ	خ	خ	خ	kh
د	د	د	د	d
ذ	ذ	ذ	ذ	dh
ر	ر	ر	ر	r
ز	ز	ز	ز	z
س	س	س	س	s
ش	ش	ش	ش	sh
ص	ص	ص	ص	ṣ
ض	ض	ض	ض	ḍ
ط	ط	ط	ط	ṭ
ظ	ظ	ظ	ظ	ẓ
ع	ع	ع	ع	‘ (ayn)
غ	غ	غ	غ	gh
ف	ف	ف	ف	f

ق	ق	ق	ق	q
ك	ك	ك	ك	k
ل	ل	ل	ل	l
م	م	م	م	m
ن	ن	ن	ن	n
ه	ه	ه، هـ	ه، هـ	h
و	و	و	و	w
ي	ي	ي	ي	y

Vowels and Diphthongs

اَ	a	ي	ī
		(long)	
وُ	u	و (long)	ū

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The initial motivation for the present project stemmed from my general interest in studying how narratives are constructed, translated and contested during a period of conflict. By the time the so-called Islamic State ('IS') controlled Mosul, I had completed the first six months of my PhD, studying the narratives of the Syrian conflict. Shocked by 'IS' takeover of Mosul in the north of Iraq in June 2014, I made a bold decision to change the focus of my PhD. I decided to examine 'IS' narratives in the Iraqi context and how they were translated and disseminated in Arabic and English for two important reasons. As an Iraqi who lived in Iraq for over 30 years, I felt I should document 'IS's' atrocities in Iraq. As an academic, I wanted to investigate narratives of these atrocities from the perspective of an Iraqi female researcher. English language studies on Iraqi-related topics and on 'IS' are often written by western male researchers. These studies undoubtedly have tremendous value, but it is also vital to engage with research involving politics in relation to Iraq through the lenses of Iraqi female academics.

Very little research on 'IS' or on Iraqi politics has been undertaken by Iraqi female academics. A notable example is the valuable work produced by Rasha Al-Aqeedi, a native from Mosul and former researcher at the Dubai-Based Al Mesbar Studies and Research Centre. Al-Aqeedi has mostly written on identity politics, extremism, and the socio-political factors that led to 'IS's' capture of Mosul (see for example, Al-Aqeedi, 2015; Al-Aqeedi, 2017). Focusing on conflict and Iraqi women, Professor Nadje Al-Ali has extensively written about the impact of wars on women in Iraq from a feminist perspective (See for example, Al-Ali, 2007; 2011; 2016). However, no single in-depth study on 'IS' in relation to the Iraqi context has so far been undertaken by an Iraqi female researcher. Despite the fact that I am not using an explicit feminist framework, I want

to open the space for other Iraqi female researchers to have their voices heard by contributing to any field of study in relation to the Iraqi context.

As Stern and Berger (2015) stress, narration is at the centre of 'IS's' strategy. 'IS's' narratives are deeply rooted in religious texts and interpretations that it selectively uses, twists, and manipulates to achieve its aims. For a full exposure, 'IS' most often visualizes these narratives in still and moving images. By narrating its atrocities, 'IS' was constructing a reality that excluded others, feeding hatred, extremism, divisions, and sectarianism in areas under its control and in people's minds. More crucially, 'IS' was establishing a religious and political legitimacy and a homogenous identity.

It is not enough just to study 'IS's' narratives. It is extremely significant to examine the translations of these narratives in various media discourses to see how media agencies understood 'IS', and the manner in which they responded to its narratives. It is also important to see how other actors, including survivors and religious foes, challenged 'IS's' narratives.

Rather than a focus on just one case, I chose to examine four distinct case studies pertaining to four atrocities committed by the group. These atrocities are: the mass killing of hundreds of Iraqi Shia Muslim young cadets known as the Speicher massacre, the captivity and sexual enslavement of Ezidi girls (*sabi*), the executions of a number of western, Arab and Kurd victims, and the destruction of Iraqi cultural heritage.

By examining the four cases, each with distinct circumstances, contexts, actors, languages, audiences, semantic resources and, therefore, narratives, provides the opportunity to review the circumstances leading to these atrocities and the ways media responded to the narratives by 'IS'. Moreover, each of the four cases was catalyst in the shaping of events for both IS and Iraq, as well

as for the region and the world during the first year of 'IS's' ascendancy in the north of Iraq. Each of them has its own characteristics that make them significant objects of inquiry on their own.

Although appalling in nature, we should not refrain from investigating such atrocities in a scholarly manner. As Harding (2009, p.14) points out, 'Research that aims to understand how knowledge about the world is constructed and explore the intricacies of the human condition and human behaviour cannot afford to circumvent certain aspects and actions just because we are horrified and repulsed by them'. The very heinous nature of such atrocities requires the best of our attention.

As such, my study departs from the monolingual literature on IS that either focuses on the political and historical aspects of the group (e.g., Stern and Berger, 2015; Weiss and Hassan, 2015; Gerges, 2016), or on their media strategy (Saltman and Winter, 2014), or even on single cases (Friis, 2015; Friis, 2017; Harmanşah, 2015; Smith et al, 2016).

My study is motivated by the following questions:

1. What are the narratives produced by 'IS' for each of the four atrocities? What do such narratives tell us about 'IS's' motives?
2. How did narratives of the four atrocities first unfold? Were they fragmented or unified? Who were the actors involved? What resources did they use?
3. How did these narratives change later as they were translated into different media discourses? Did their translations vary across these discourses?
4. What was the role that survivors and religious opponents played to challenge 'IS'? More specifically, in what ways did the personal narratives of survivors contest 'IS's' narratives,

especially the sectarian element? How did these narratives transform in the process of news translation?

5. Drawing on a rhetorical approach to genre (Miller, 1984), can we identify execution videos and videos of cultural destruction as emergent or evolving genres? How did this affect the narrative(s) established?

These questions are addressed using a corpus of data consisting of written, spoken, and visual texts produced by 'IS' and disseminated via the internet, especially social media, as well as news articles collected from the websites of a number of western, Arabic, Iranian and—where applicable—Kurdish media. For a full investigation of the data, refer to the methodology chapter.

My study advances an interdisciplinary method as it combines and applies different concepts from the following disciplines: translation, communication, organization studies, and sociology, to the analysis of narratives and their translations. For Seipel (2005, p.3), interdisciplinary research 'requires integration of knowledge from the disciplines being brought to bear on an issue'. Through such integration, concepts become tools for analysis and problem-solving (Klein, 2006). In my thesis, the significance of developing an interdisciplinary approach is two-fold. First, it allows me to develop analytical tools to examine how narratives change over time. Second, it makes it possible to broaden the definition of translation itself in the context of digital media.

A social approach to narrative (Somers, 1992; 1997; Somers and Gibson, 1994; Baker, 2006) is found to be the most relevant in relation to 'IS'. This theory highlights the dynamicity and the multiplicity of narratives, particularly in relation to political conflict and tension. As indicated by Somers and Gibson 'everything we know is the result of numerous crosscutting storylines in which social actors locate themselves' (Somers and Gibson, 1994, p.41). It also recognizes the different genres and modes across which narratives are appropriated (Baker, 2014). It has therefore been

chosen as a conceptual framework into which I seek to intervene. I propose to further develop its concepts to take account of both the fragmentation and transformation of narratives. To this end, I draw on Boje's (2001) notion of antenarrative, and Kress'(2009) three resources of discourse, genre, and mode. Boje's (2001) notion of antenarrative is used to refer to a fragment of a narrative that lacks one of the three essential narrative features: relationality, temporality, and causal emplotment (Somers, 1994). Generally speaking, fragmentation is a characteristic of abstract and general narratives which lack specific details. The discourse, genre, and/or mode through which narratives are elaborated contribute to their transformation. Translation, understood in this thesis in both its narrow and broad senses, can be crucial for legitimizing, delegitimizing, or re-negotiating narratives, fragmenting or fusing together their already scattered elements.

Examining how this takes place and how it affects narration and narratives in the context of IS and media discourses in both English and Arabic is a novel contribution to the field of translation studies. On the one hand, it contributes to previous research on news and translation that sees translation as a process of 'negotiation' that involves multiple actors, including journalists, translators, and editors, and that relies on multiple sources and target texts (Bielsa and Bassnett, 2008). On the other hand, it more importantly contributes to emergent debates on the extent to which translation requires a re-conceptualization in the new media environment (Littau, 2011; 2017). Moreover, my study contributes to fields of inquiry beyond translation and media studies, including political science, sociology, cultural studies and religious studies.

In what follows, I first tackle some issues related to terminology, discussing the reasons I choose to use Islamic State (IS) over Islamic State of Iraq and Asham (ISIS), Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), or Daesh to refer to the terrorist group. Then, I give a background of 'IS's' capture of Mosul back in June 2014, its online reporting in western and Arabic media discourses,

and the narratives constructed by the group itself in relation to locals of the city. The last section outlines the structure of the thesis.

## 1. Remarks on the terminology

Following 'IS's' takeover of Mosul, a debate over what to refer to the terrorist group has been encountered and still continues. From a political perspective, the choice of what labels to use to name others has significant implications on the policies or strategies adopted by the State (Litwak, 2001; Siniver and Lucas, 2016). In his critical discourse analysis of the language of the Bush administration in the aftermath of the events of 9/11, Jackson (2005) emphasizes that through words and names, the world is not merely described, but is made or constructed (Jackson, 2005). In their analysis of the Obama administration's use of ISIL rather than ISIS, 'IS', or Daesh, Siniver and Lucas (2016, pp.63) argue that 'By rhetorically detaching ISIL from Syria, where the Islamic State has gained further ground and has established areas of governance, the Obama administration has distanced itself from the imperative of a coherent response to the group in its local setting'.

From a linguistic and narrative perspective, the labels we assign to individuals, groups, places, etc. reflect our own position in life (Baker, 2006). In Arab countries, Daesh has been consistently used by governments and ordinary people to deny the group any legitimacy and to disprove its relation with Islam. Daesh is the Arabic acronym for ISIS disseminated by Khaled al-Haj Salih, a Syrian activist, in 2013 to deny IS as both a state and ideology. In an interview with *Alkhaleeg Online* media agency (Abū al Khair, 2015), Salih stated in Arabic that the main reason for using Daesh was 'تجنيب الناس الاعتياد على تسمية مشروع سلطوي استبدادي بأنه دولة' [to make people avoid getting used to calling authoritarianism and dictatorship a state].<sup>1</sup> The acronym, therefore, quickly acquired a pejorative connotation and has been consistently used by Arabs and Muslims ever since.

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<sup>1</sup> All translations between brackets are my own unless otherwise stated.

As pointed out by Siniver and Lucas, the term ascribes ‘emptiness and a lack of meaning to the ‘Islamic State’, at the same time as the ‘caliphate’ was proclaiming that it was giving political as well as religious significance to people’s lives’ (Siniver and Lucas, 2016, p.65).

Since ‘IS’s’ release of their appalling series of execution videos, many western leaders, including French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius and Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbot, started to use Daesh instead of other labels. In mid-July 2015, some British MPs implored the BBC to refrain from using IS, and to adopt Daesh instead. Initially refusing to do so in order not to risk its impartiality, the *BBC* later made a concession by using ‘the Islamic State group’ and later ‘the so-called Islamic State’ (Siniver and Lucas, 2016, pp.65-66).

In my thesis, I choose to refer to the group with its latest label or construction: the ‘Islamic State’ (‘IS’), but to use it in quotation marks. The significance of this choice is two-fold. First, the reference to the group using their own terminology is essential in helping us to understand ‘IS’s’ narratives and the motives they gave rise to. In a similar manner, in his discussion of the language used by ‘Jihadists’, Bunzel (2017, p.2) explains that ‘it is unfathomable that one would try to make sense of these people and what they do without recourse to their own terms—terms that delineate the contours of their movement’. Furthermore, it is a choice to avoid subscribing to the unfruitful and reductive dichotomy of Islam versus IS that is often triggered by using Daesh, for instance. The latter obscures rather than illuminates our efforts to understand ‘IS’s’ narratives and to identify the gaps in them, and the extent to which media, religious opponents, or other actors, have succeeded or failed to counter these narratives. ‘IS’ has used a plethora of religious texts and interpretations, yet in disconnection with ‘any social and cultural groundings’ (Roy, 2017, p.63). The simplistic view that ‘IS’ does not represent Islam or vice versa is counterproductive. Second, by choosing to use the quotation marks, I disassociate myself from ‘IS’s’ narrative, denying the group the legitimacy it

claims to have. In this regard, Baker (2006, p.127) refers to the decision by *BBC* translators and editors to place the West Bank in squared brackets, disengaging with the Zionist narrative whilst at the same time, staying within their own space as journalists or translators. My choice follows the same logic, while I disconnect myself from 'IS's' narrative, I remain within my space and position as an academic researcher who endeavours to produce a thorough and critical analysis of how 'IS' narrates and frames its atrocities and why it does so.

## **2. Background: June 10 in early online reporting**

On June 10, 2014, the city of Mosul, in northern Iraq, was captured by the Islamic State ('IS'), following the withdrawal of Iraqi army. By no means the first incarnation of 'IS' in Iraq, in general, and in Mosul, in particular, its scale now attested to the negative political atmosphere that had prevailed in Iraq since 2003, posing great challenges ahead (Haddad, 2014). Even now, at the time of writing this thesis, with the liberation of most Iraqi lands, those challenges may linger, especially if the very conditions that gave rise to 'IS' are not reversed in the first place. Obviously, a discussion of these challenges is beyond the scope of the thesis. However, it is important to point out at this stage that the period since 'IS' gained control of Mosul and the three years that followed has been the darkest and most appalling in the history of Iraq, claiming thousands of innocent lives, displacing more than five million Iraqis (BBC News, 2017), and destroying the significant cultural heritage of Iraq in Nineveh province.

'IS's' capture of Mosul came amid a climate of political tension and resentment in Iraq, especially in Sunni provinces which had witnessed a series of anti-government protests in 2012 and 2013 (See for example al-Salhy, 2013). Therefore, the event was surrounded with vagueness and confusion. Iraqis inside Iraq were themselves unsure of what was really happening on the ground. It was not surprising that media reporting would, therefore, include conflicting narratives,

misinterpretations, or even reductions. The question often raised in western media discourse was how it was possible for IS to quickly control the city and to rapidly inflict all this damage. This question, as explained by Weiss and Hassan (2015, p. xiii) was at odds with the fact that ‘the United States has been at war with ISIS for the better part of a decade under its various incarnations, first as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), then the Mujāhidīn Advisory Council, and then the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)’. Focusing on western media discourse, Al-Aqeedi states:

The Western media has not been good at reminding readers that already in 2006 Mosul fell, briefly, to the first incarnation of the Islamic State. Security forces regained control of the city within days, but the main actors remained on the loose... ISIS was waiting, planning, and growing quietly, in my hometown of Mosul, in Raqqa, and elsewhere. And its members were not just threatening people; they were killing them, too (Al-Aqeedi, 2015, pp.1-2).

For Arabic media, the case was not much different. London-based Arabic newspaper, *The New Arab* (Al-Mukhtar, 2014), for instance, reduced the historical context related to ‘IS’s’ emergence in Iraq when it asked: وما يُثِير الاستغراب، هو قدرة "داعش"، التي لا يزيد عديد عناصرها، عن الـ6000 عنصر، موجودين في العراق [What is surprising is the ability of Daesh whose members do not exceed 6000, mostly in Syria, to control large swathes in Iraq]. In these examples, ‘IS’s’ early incarnations in Iraq were diminished.

Moreover, different terms were used to describe the event itself. In his in-depth analysis of Arabic media coverage of the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese war by *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya*, and *Alhurra*, Lahlali (2011, pp.144-145) explains how each of the three media agencies utilized different terminologies to describe the Israeli war on Lebanon. *Al Jazeera*, for instance, sought to maximize the conflict by using ‘aggression’ which was in sharp contrast to *Al Arabiya* and *Al Hurra*, both of which attempted to minimize the conflict by using ‘campaign’ and ‘confrontation’ respectively. The differences in terminology, labels, and names result in different meanings and indicate the ‘political

policy and orientation’ of the media agency in question (Lahlali, 2011, p.148). The terms used and the meanings they give help to conjure up a set of distinct narratives.

For some western and Arabic media, the event was the fall of the city of Mosul or even the whole province of Nineveh. *Al Arabiya*, for instance, pointed: سقطت محافظة نينوى بأكملها في يد مسلحي داعش، الذين سيطروا على كامل مدينة الموصل، [Nineveh province has fully fallen to Daesh’s militants who took control over the whole city of Mosul] (Al Arabiya, 2014e). For others, particularly the Iraqi media, it was ‘احتلال’ occupation (See, for example, Nasiriyah.org, 2014). ‘Fall’ implied defeat, chaos, surrender of the people, and absence of law and discipline. It also placed the blame on the Iraqi army which quickly collapsed and withdrew from the city. ‘Occupation’, on the other hand, implied that Mosul was taken by force by an occupying army. Moreover, ‘occupation’ indicated resistance by both people of the ‘occupied’ city and the Iraqi army.

‘IS’ itself was differently labelled. In *BBC News*, for example, whilst referring to ‘IS’s’ members as ‘Islamist militants’ or ‘Sunni radicals’, it was uncertain whether the group overtaking Mosul was just ‘IS’, implying that more local Sunnis who were against the Nouri al-Maliki Shia-led government could have joined as well (BBC News, 2014d).<sup>2</sup> ‘IS’ who officially split from al-Qaeda in the spring of 2014 was still sometimes misrepresented as al-Qaeda as in *The Telegraph: Al-Qaeda seizes Iraq’s third-largest city as terrified residents flee* (Freeman, 2014). *Aljazeera English* used a more accurate label than *The Telegraph* describing ‘IS’ as an ‘al-Qaeda splinter’ group (Aljazeera English, 2014e).

Some Arabic media, on the other hand, explicitly stated that ‘IS’ was joined by tribal fighters, local factions, or even Baathists. *Al-Quds Alarabi* newspaper described the fall of Mosul as: تمرد سني بقيادة داعش مع صوفية النقشبندية وبعثيين من جيش صدام [Sunni rebellion led by Daesh with Naqshabandi Sufis

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<sup>2</sup> Nouri al-Maliki, former PM of Iraq.

and Baathists of Saddam's army] (Issam, 2014). *Aljazeera Arabic* also described 'IS' as: مجموعات مسلحة مناهضة للحكومة' [anti-government armed groups] (Aljazeera Arabic, 2014g). When 'IS' declared itself a caliphate changing its name from 'Islamic State of Iraq and Asham' to 'Islamic State', *Aljazeera Arabic* has consistently referred to the group as a 'تنظيم الدولة' [State organization], removing in this way the adjective 'Islamic' (e.g Aljazeera Arabic, 2014g). By doing so, *Al Jazeera Arabic* denied 'IS' the religious legitimacy it claimed whilst recognizing its aim to have a state. In Iraqi local media, as well as in Iranian *Al Alam News Channel*, which is part of the State-owned media corporation Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), 'IS' was consistently described as terrorist, using the derogatory term Daesh (Alsumaria News, 2014, Al Alam News Channel, 2014f). By using Sunni rebellion, or anti-government forces, 'IS' was seen as a political movement that represented Iraqi Sunnis who revolted against the government. This was in contrast to the terms 'terrorist' and 'Daesh' which characterized 'IS' as the 'enemy' and delegitimized it.

While various narratives were told by different media agencies, 'IS' which was seeking a caliphate according to the prophetic approach as it claimed, was constructing its own narratives according to the target audience in question. Interviewed by Al-Aqeedi, some local residents of Mosul expressed how deceived they were in the first two weeks of 'IS's' takeover of Mosul when they were told that this was a revolution against the government: 'We saw masked men lifting the concrete from the roads. They asked us not to call them 'ISIS' but call them 'rebels'—and the ones I saw were all Iraqis. They didn't close any shisha cafes or hurt anyone. We thought this was a Sunni rebellion...Yes, we were happy' (Al-Aqeedi, 2015, pp.3-4). 'IS' appealed to the locals who were already experiencing political tension with the government as previously mentioned.

The early period of consent changed into coercion two weeks later when 'IS' released an 'official statement', asking people in Mosul to completely adhere to 'Shari'ah' law or face

repercussion, and tarnishing Shia, Christians, and Ezidis as ‘heretics’. Shortly after, ‘IS’ started to destroy religious shrines, including the tomb of Jonah, revealing its true face: ‘When they issued that decree we knew we had been lied to by those claiming to be rebels. This was the same ISIS that beheads people in Syria’, a local citizen revealed to Al-Aqeedi (2015, p.4).

While ‘IS’ was constructing the narrative of a ‘Sunni rebellion’ in the city of Mosul, at least in the first two weeks, it had already started committing its atrocities against Iraqis elsewhere in Iraq. On 12<sup>th</sup> of June, hundreds of young Shia trainees were massacred after leaving the Speicher military base in Salah al-Din province. And a series of other atrocities followed: from the enslavement of Ezidi girls, to the executions, to the destruction of Iraqi cultural heritage, to name but a few. More importantly, ‘IS’ fully utilized the internet and all sorts of social media platforms to disseminate its narratives on each of these atrocities using a variety of written, spoken, and visual modes according to the target audience it was addressing. ‘IS’s’ exploitation of the internet as a media strategy dates back to 2012 when ‘IS’ released a 4-part video titled *The Clashes of the Swords*. Although the first part was by no means comparable to its later productions in terms of its production and narration, the subsequent parts were of much better quality (Stern and Berger, 2015).

This sophisticated use of technology has made some analysts, such as Atwan (2015, p. ix) claim that ‘Without digital technology, it is highly unlikely that Islamic State would ever have come into existence, let alone been able to survive and expand’. While attributing ‘IS’s’ existence solely to digital technology is an overstatement, ‘IS’s’ savvy in the utilization and command of media tools has been unprecedented and played a significant role in the promotion and spread of its messages. At the same time, ‘IS’ also exploited the mainstream media which inadvertently contributed to gaining ‘IS’ wider dissemination through reproducing most of its online material

(Farwell, 2014). This, however, differed according to the case and the media agency in question as will be investigated later in the analysis chapters.

### 3. Thesis structure

Chapter two of this thesis lays the grounds for the theoretical framework underpinning the analysis of the four case studies. As mentioned, this encompasses and links a social approach to narrative with concepts from a social semiotic multimodal approach to communication studies and an antenarrative approach. I then discuss their implications for the process of translation. The third chapter is the methodology chapter. It builds on the previous one to propose what I call a social (ante) narrative multimodal approach to translation and media studies. The chapter also outlines the corpus of data used and discusses the criteria for its selection.

The subsequent four chapters focus on a case study each. These are chronologically ordered. Each of these chapters examines narratives as they unfold, and then investigates how a variety of factors and actors converge to reshape them. In the first chapter on the Specijer massacre, the atrocity was narrated through Arabic tweets, and images with Arabic captions that created a fragmented narrative. A tweet by an 'IS'-affiliated now-blocked Twitter account, as well as five images with their captions, were analyzed as source texts (STs). Target texts (TTs) were collected from a number of western, Arabic, particularly Iraqi, local media which differently (re) appropriated 'IS's' texts. Personal narratives by survivors that emerged two months later are analyzed in both their STs and TTs.

The second chapter investigates *sabi* in relation to 'IS', media, survivors, and religious opponents. Representing a practice that had discontinued across history, *sabi* unfolded as antenarrative and a loose signifier, giving rise to multiple interpretations and contested narratives. The kidnapping and enslaving of these girls brought to the fore the discontinuous tradition of *sabi*

by meeting the two conditions of a caliph and caliphate as claimed by 'IS', and by labelling Ezidis as 'devil worshippers'. With the exception of a video disseminated in social media by 'IS's' members, 'IS's' narratives on *sabi* were mainly constructed in three written texts: two *Dabiq* English articles, and a pamphlet in Arabic. These four STs are analyzed together with their TTs in media discourses. Furthermore, the personal narrative of Nadia Murad, an Ezidi female survivor and a UN Goodwill Ambassador for the dignity of Ezidi survivors, who was interviewed twice in 2014 by two western media agencies and who testified before the Security Council in 2015, is selected for analysis.

Chapter Six is dedicated to the third case study on the series of 'IS' execution videos. Taking a proactive position, 'IS' manipulated the visual spectacles of violence to carefully choreograph videos with well-structured narratives (Friis, 2015). Nine videos are selected for analysis. Eight of which show the beheadings of western, Arab, and Kurd victims, whereas one video displays the immolation of Jordanian pilot, Muath al-Kasasbeh. Sharing a social action and a 'typified situation' (Miller, 1984), the videos could be identified as an evolving genre. This significantly impacted the narratives constructed by the group which became linear, more coherent, and well-structured. Translations of the execution videos varied across the media agencies, but generally caused 'IS's' narratives to rupture.

Chapter Seven is dedicated to analyzing three videos of the cultural destruction of pre-Islamic artefacts and monuments in Nineveh province and their TTs in media discourses. Although the videos were very similar in their motive and structure, they arguably failed to constitute a genre by lacking a recurrent type. The main narrative constructed in the videos was a religious anti-imagery narrative that was less structured than narratives of the execution videos. More importantly, the narrative was widely contested by Muslims and was therefore devolving.

Chapter Eight summarises the main findings of the analysis chapters, explaining their significance to current research on 'IS' or other terrorist groups and to research on translation studies. It also sets out its limitations that can be taken forward in future studies.

## **CHAPTER TWO THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework which lays the foundation for analyzing the four case studies in this thesis. Drawing on a social approach to narrative (Somers, 1992; Somers; 1994; Somers and Gibson, 1994; Somers, 1997; Baker, 2006), I seek to develop the theory itself by taking account of fragmentation and circulation of narratives in a variety of contexts. I do so by bringing in Boje's (2001) concept of antenarrative which, although it precedes any typology of narrative, interacts with narrative types. In other words, any narrative is prone to fragmentation. This is especially the case in the digital environment which is disruptive to narrative linearity. Following a discussion of the narrative types according to Harding's revised model of the original typology (2009; 2012) presented by Somers (1994) and Somers and Gibson (1994), the chapter moves on to discuss the three resources across which the narratives circulate. These resources are discourse, genre, and mode introduced by Kress' (2009) social semiotic multimodal approach. This approach is seen as the catalyst for examining narratives in circulation and for re-defining the process of translation itself.

### **2. What narrative means: A social approach to narrative**

Narrative is 'like life itself', wrote Barthes in 1966, reflecting the ubiquitous nature of narrative which has been used as an analysis tool in many different fields beyond language and literature for over a century now (Harding, 2009). In each field, the term has been differently defined. A linguistic and literary model of narrative (known as narratological approaches to narrative), for example, treats narrative as a 'representation' of a set of events taking place at a particular time and in a particular location, focusing on the 'internal structure' of oral narratives (Barthes, 1966; Labov

1972; Chatman, 1987; Polkinghorne, 1988; Dickinson and Erben, 1995; Abbott 2002). The bulk of literature on narratives generally treats narrative as a linear sequence of linked events (Labov, 1972; Chatman, 1987; Dickinson and Erben, 1995; Abbott 2002). Abbott (2002, p.3), for example, emphasizes that narrative ‘is the principal way in which our species organize its understanding of time’. Polkinghorne (1988) views narrative as a ‘whole’ of configured events. For him, narrative is ‘the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite’ (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.13). Dickinson and Erben (1995, p.255) similarly argue that ‘the meaningful framework of narrative and its organization of temporality are points so fundamental that they may best be regarded as two aspects of the defining characteristic of a narrative!’.

Rather than defining narrative as a ‘representation’ of events as in linguistic and literary models of narrative, a social approach to narrative defines it as a ‘construction’ of a particular reality (Bruner, 1991; Somers, 1992; Somers and Gibson, 1994). Approaching narrative from a constructivist perspective does not mean that material things, happenings, or events are themselves socially constructed, but rather it is the meaning surrounding them (Harding, 2009). Using the example of a brick wall, Sarbin (1998, p.305 quoted in Harding, 2009) explains this as follows: ‘it would be fatuous, for example, to say that the brick wall is only a social construction... however, the meanings we assign are social constructions: Is the brick wall a form of protection, or is it a prison?’. Each of these different meanings can unfold in different narratives.

A social approach to narrative’s main point of departure is the assertion that ‘narrative is an *ontological condition of social life*’ (Somers and Gibson, 1994, p.38, emphasis in original). This assumption by Somers and Gibson draws on insights from different fields of inquiry beyond literature and linguistics, including ‘medicine, social psychology, anthropology, gender studies, law,

biology, and physics' (*ibid*), as well as education, political science, philosophy, and psychoanalytical theory (Somers, 1997, p.82). According to Somers (1994, p.606 emphasis in original), researchers in these fields:

define narrative and narrativity as concepts of *social epistemology and social ontology*. These concepts posit that it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities. They argue that... all of us come to *be* who we *are* (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of our own making*.

In this thesis, I adopt this conceptualization of narrative, particularly highlighting the fluidity and multiplicity of narratives. Viewing narrative from this perspective puts much emphasis and weight on the 'multiplicity' of stories that according to which, 'There are always many possible truths and realities that can all be viewed as social constructs' (Sermijn, Devlieger, and Loots, 2008, p.6). Using narratives interchangeably with stories, Baker (2006) was the first to apply a social approach to narrative to the field of translation and interpreting studies. According to Baker, narratives are 'public and personal 'stories' that we subscribe to and that guide our behaviour. They are the stories we tell ourselves, not just those we explicitly tell other people, about the world(s) in which we live' (Baker, 2006, p.19). Translation is crucial in circulating these stories among different contexts, reshaping some of their elements in a variety of means.

Agency, be it individual or institutional, plays a pivotal role in changing narratives. In other words, individuals, groups, and institutions act as agencies that do not only make sense of the worlds but rather choose to act in them by engaging with certain narratives rather than others according to who their target audience is (Baker, 2006; Harding, 2009). 'IS' consistently re-constructs its narratives depending on its audience. Winkler et al. (2016, p.15) highlight this when they write, 'Daesh's ['IS's'] approach is not uniform across media products, as the group's

producers purposefully craft their messages to reach intended target audiences'. Winter (2015, p.4) adds, through its narratives, 'IS' wants to 'outrage hostile audiences abroad and gratify their supporters at home'. As a result, there is a discrepancy in the language(s) chosen to disseminate its narratives. In the case of Speicher massacre, for example, 'IS' only used the Arabic language. In the case of execution videos, particularly beheadings of western journalists and aid workers, the main language spoken was English supported with Arabic subtitles to reach to multiple local, regional, and international audiences.

Beyond 'IS', and in the era of social media, individuals can work in decentralized networks establishing a fifth estate (Dutton, 2009). In other words, they act as an agency that creates, selects, and distributes its content via social media platforms, including blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Newman, Dutton, and Blank, 2012). Translators can be seen as part of this 'fifth estate' acting as gate-watchers who decide what to translate and how and/or what not to translate (Harding, 2009). They can, for instance, indulge themselves in the process of circulating knowledge that is otherwise controlled, misrepresented, manipulated, or even prohibited in national educational curricula. The Iraqi Translation Project established since 2013 is one example (Iraqi Translation Project, 2017). This project was established by professional volunteer translators from Iraq and abroad since the year 2013, with the aim of disseminating knowledge in all fields of life that is otherwise monitored, restricted, or even banned in the national curriculum. The project has a website, YouTube channel, Facebook page, and Twitter account. Benefiting from the interactive means of social media, translators on the project engage with their audiences through dialogue and conversation. It has also recently released the first translation-focused magazine that has its own app. Another interesting example is a group of Iraqi and Syrian journalists, activists, graphic designers, and subtitlers who produced an animated satirical show on YouTube and Facebook titled:

*The Bighdaddy Show*. The satirical cartoon aimed to mock 'IS', and to counter its narrative by portraying its members as 'real idiots with guns' (@bighdaddyshow, 2017).

In all approaches to narrative, including a social approach, conflict is at the centre of narratives. As Abbott (2002, p.193) puts it, 'conflict...is so often the life of narrative' that perpetuates its existence. Similarly, Baker (2006) foregrounds the intersection between conflict, narratives, and translation. Harding similarly emphasizes that actors give justifications to legitimize their narratives, 'particularly when these are contested by, or are in direct conflict with, other competing narratives' (Harding, 2009, p.36). However, conflict can also be negotiated or downplayed by narrators (Abbott, 2002). In the first analysis chapter, for instance, we will see how a Speicher massacre survivor attempts to negotiate the sectarian conflict that 'IS' seeks to fuel whilst narrating his personal experience. This can change through translation which plays a significant role in either heightening or suppressing conflict.

Methodologically, a social approach to narrative views it as a 'unit of analysis ... understood as a concrete story of some aspect of the world, complete with characters, settings, outcomes or projected outcomes, and plot' (Baker, 2014, p.159). Narratives should have at least four features or dimensions: relationality, temporality, causal employment, and selective appropriation, and can be divided into various types. These types are: ontological (Bakers calls it personal), public (Harding calls it societal), theoretical (Baker calls it disciplinary, and Harding conceptual), and meta-narratives, to which Harding adds local narratives. In the following section, I start with the features, arguing that if a feature is lacking, we are only dealing with a fragment of a narrative. Therefore, before examining any typology, it is necessary to define what comes before the narrative. I do so by incorporating Boje's (2001) notion of antenarrative, seeing it as interactive with narrative types. In

other words, fragments may precede narratives, but any narrative can later transform to a fragment, an antenarrative, depending on the context.

### 3. Narrative features

Narratives should have at least four main dimensions or features that are characteristic of each narrative:

relationality of parts, causal emplotment, selective appropriation, and temporality, sequence, and place. Together, these dimensions suggest that narratives are constellations of *relationships* (connected parts) embedded in *time and space*, constituted by *causal emplotment* (Somers, 1994, p.616 emphasis in original).

Likewise, Baker (2008, p.18) affirms that narrative is a ‘configured’ set of happenings or events with a beginning, middle and (projected) end’. Configuration, therefore, is at the centre of narrative construction.

Relationality (referred to by Bruner, 1991, p.6 as hermeneutic composability)<sup>3</sup> depicts the connection among parts or pieces of a narrative (Somers, 1992) as well as the relationships among different narratives to invoke a wider one. Episodes in isolation fail to constitute a coherent narrative (Baker, 2006). The introduction chapter demonstrated how the media did not accentuate the connection between ‘IS’s’ takeover of Mosul and its previous incarnations in Iraq and Syria.

Temporality, or as Bruner calls it, ‘diachronicity’ (1991, p.6) means that a narrative is ‘irreducibly durative’, whether in time or space. In other words, the sequence in which a narrative is placed is meaningful in its own (Baker, 2006, pp.5-51). That sequence does not necessarily

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<sup>3</sup> Bruner (1991) examines other features of narrative, such as narrative accrual, particularity, genericness, and normativeness/breach. For a full discussion of these features, refer to Bruner (1991), and Baker (2006).

represent the real sequence of events as they unfold in reality; rather, it represents how these events are linked and organized in the narration process. The sequence can be either temporal or spatial. The way, for instance, visuals are sequenced: left to right, top to bottom or vice versa, differently narrates events.

Despite its importance, temporality alone does not explain how narratives are (re)configured. It is through causal employment that such configuration becomes significant. Causal employment, as Somers (1994, p.616) highlights, mainly accounts for ‘why a narrative has the storyline it does’. Causal employment is about how episodes of an event are (re)configured in a certain narrative (Polkinghorne, 1988). For Baker (2006), it is the weighting of details or events that lead to narratives’ contestation and/or transformation. It is through this feature that the why question is answered and different answers will result in different narratives.

Selective appropriation is about the inclusion and exclusion of certain events, or aspects of narratives according to how they are evaluated by the narrators and the context in which they position themselves (Somers and Gibson, 1994; Baker, 2006; Riessman, 2008). In other words, the change of the setting and/or the target audience can make the narrator re-evaluate what s/he wants to foreground, downplay, suppress, and add in their narration. As Baker (2006, p.72) demonstrates, our narratives may change due to ‘our location in time and space, and our exposure to a particular set of public, conceptual and meta-narratives that shape our sense of significance’. Furthermore, themes and plots can also impact on this selection process. In this respect, Somers (1997, p.83) explains that a particular theme ‘determines how events are processed and what criteria will be used to prioritize events and render meaning to them’.

Together, these features mean that a social approach to narrative, like other approaches, sees narrative and linearity as inseparable. However, Baker (2006, p.4) meanwhile contends, ‘Narrative

theory further allows us to piece together and analyze a narrative that is not fully traceable to any specific stretch of text but has to be constructed from a range of sources, including non-verbal material' (Baker, 2006, p.4). Such an assumption may be seen problematic when interpreted to describe the random process by which researchers weave narratives from scattered bits here and there, overlooking other elements. As criticized by Pym (2016), this means that we may end up dealing with ideologies rather than narratives. However, I think that this statement may have a different interpretation relating to fragmentation in narratives and to the wide range of resources in which they are expressed and disseminated. Rather than delving into such details, Baker adopts what Harding (2009, p.22) describes as a 'broad spectrum approach' to narrative. To render this approach less problematic, I adopt a more specific approach that traces narratives to the texts in which they are elaborated, using particular case studies that I thoroughly investigate. Further, while I do agree with the assumption that narratives can be realized and communicated using different verbal and non-verbal material, I argue that without linearity, we can only talk about fragments of a narrative.

A nuanced analysis of fragmentation in narratives is still lacking in the literature on narrative theories. According to Whitebrook (2001, pp.5-6),

neither narrative theory nor modern narratives offer a direct link between narrative and unity, or order: narrative may exhibit lack of pattern, an absence of closure...Uncertainty, fragmentation, and disunity can be contained in the narrative by way of content and form, what is told and the telling of it.

There is something that comes before the narrative. Meanwhile, narrative itself is subject to fragmentation. Harding (2009) indicates that the richness and complexity of our experiences mean that narratives can be fragmented or incomplete. More significantly, in the digital environment shaped by 'pluri-subjectivity' (Cronin, 2013) of the actors, media, and modes, narratives do not just

compete with other narratives; they can also split and quickly transform. To bridge the gap in the literature on fragmentation in narratives, I bring in Boje's (2001) notion of antenarrative.

#### 4. Before narrative: The antenarrative

Drawing on Bakhtin's (1929/1973, 1981) ideas of the non-ending status of stories, Boje (2001, p.1), working in the field of organization studies, describes stories as 'self-deconstructing, flowing, emerging, and networking, not at all static... Every story excludes...story floats in the chaotic soup of bits and pieces of story fragments. Story is never alone; it lives and breathes its meaning in a web of other stories'. Therefore, in a similar manner to a social approach to narrative, Boje emphasizes the multiplicity and relationality of narratives. However, Boje (2001, p.1) describes his dissatisfaction with previous work on narratives, emphasizing their fragmentation and discontinuity. To this end, he introduces the notion of 'antenarrative' which he defines as 'the fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted and pre-narrative speculation, a bet' (Boje, 2001, p.1).

Etymologically, the noun ante dates back to 1838 and means 'a poker stake usually put up before the deal to build the pot <*The dealer called for a dollar ante.*>' (Merriam Webster Dictionary cited in Boje, 2001, p.1). Thus, ante has two senses: before a coherent narrative, and as 'bet' for future possibilities (*ibid*). Boje initially uses 'antenarrative' to describe what comes before a narrative is told or configured.<sup>4</sup> Later, he expands the meaning of antenarrative to include 'processes *before*-narrative, *between* narrative and counter-narratives, *beneath* them, bets on future, and the *becoming* of care for what can and ought to be' (Boje, 2016, p.10, emphasis in original). An

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<sup>4</sup> I do not follow Boje in his use of antenarrative and story interchangeably. Rather, I follow Baker (2006) and use the latter interchangeably with narrative.

antenarrative, therefore, refers to one element of a narrative that could be a word, a phrase, or an image, capable of triggering a set of narratives that differ according to the situation and the audience. At the same time, an antenarrative describes a narrative that ruptures later into isolated pieces when losing one or more of its defining features. Boje gives an example of ‘Fahrenheit 9/11’ as antenarrative that is detached from Michael Moor’s documentary film in which he criticizes the Bush administration’s ‘war on terror’ narrative. In this way, ‘Fahrenheit 9/11’ competes with the ‘war on terror’ political narrative. When we are told the two antenarratives, we will recall two different storylines (Boje et al, 2004). To complicate things further, if we say Mecca 9/11, another storyline is triggered: the carnage in 2015 when a crane collapsed in Mecca, killing and injuring hundreds of pilgrims (BBC News, 2015a). This example reflects the ongoing tension among narratives and their fluidity (Boje, 2001; 2016, Boje et al, 2004). By opening up a set of possibilities, a story can always be re-appropriated in accordance with the new context. Based on this, I argue that it is both in the narration and reception, circulation, and/or translation processes that narratives are prone to fragmentation.

Generally speaking, the more abstract the narrative is, the more fragmented it tends to be. This is because a story that is detached from its particular details or from the broader context would lack one of its three core features: temporality, causal emplotment, and relationality. According to Bruner (1991, p.43):

A narrative is composed of a unique sequence of events, mental states, happenings involving human beings as characters or actors. These are its constituents. But these constituents do not, as it were, have a life or meaning of their own. Their meaning is given by their place in the overall configuration of the sequence as a whole.

When infused with particular details that are sequenced and configured in a certain text, a pre-story may turn to a fully coherent narrative. Drawing on Bruner (1991), Harding (2012) sees the specific

narratives as crucially contributing elements to the broader narratives characterized as being more abstract, and more general. An antenarrative intrinsically interacts with any of the four narrative types discussed below.

## 5. Narrative Types

Somers (1992, 1997) and Somers and Gibson (1994) distinguish between ontological, public, conceptual, and meta-narratives (See also Baker, 2006). The first are stories used by social actors both to understand their lives and to act in them (1994, p.61). Public narratives are those narratives related to and reflected in the cultural and institutional formations that encompass more than one individual, starting from the family, the workplace, educational and religious institutions, media channels, government, and ending with the nation (*ibid*, p.62). Baker (2006, pp.33-38) expands the types of public narratives proposed by Somers and Gibson (1994) to include literature, and the literary system of a society, cinema, advertising and political activism. Conceptual narratives first proposed by Somers and Gibson (1994) are expanded by Somers (1997, p.85) into sociological and analytical narratives that include ‘the concepts and explanations that we construct as social researchers’. Baker (2006, p.39 emphasis in original) adds ‘*disciplinary* narratives in any field of study’ and re-defines the category as ‘stories and explanations that scholars in any field elaborate for themselves and others about their object of inquiry’ (*ibid*). Meta-narratives are the abstract ‘master stories’ (Somers, 1997, p.86) that evolve from the three previous layers of narratives.

In her work on the narratives of the Beslan terrorist attack that took place in 2004, Harding (2009, 2012) revises this typology by differentiating between personal and shared or collective

narratives (used as a loose term by Baker outside the model) which consist of the other three types in the original model: public (societal), conceptual (theoretical), and meta-narratives. Harding (2009, 2012) adds another category of 'local' narratives which are related to specific actors, times, and events (Harding, 2009, p.36). According to Harding (2009), the revised typology aims to highlight the distinction between ontological (personal) narratives and collective (shared narratives) that is rather overlooked by the original model, or even 'weakened' by other distinctions, such as the one presented by Hinchman and Hinchman (1997, p.121) between 'cultural macro narratives', and 'micro narratives'. This is because, according to Harding (2009, p.37), such concepts fail to capture 'the strong interdependence that operates between personal and shared narratives'. In other words, personal narratives always feed on the shared or collective narratives of a society. At the same time, she stresses the blurring boundaries between these types. In my thesis, I choose to adopt Harding's revised version for its clearer categories and terminology. However, since theoretical narratives are beyond the scope of my study, I do not investigate them in detail here.

Personal narratives are the most specific. They are the stories narrated by individuals on the self, assuming an individual responsibility in this case (Somers and Gibson, 1994; Baker, 2006; Harding, 2009). Individuals make the decisions as to how to narrate their stories, argues Bruner (2001), according to the particular surrounding context: 'we constantly construct and reconstruct ourselves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter' (Bruner, 2001, p.64). Baker (2006, p.28) defines them as 'personal stories that we tell ourselves about our place in the world and our own personal history'. Moreover, personal stories can be about anything shared with the surrounding world. They are, as Somers (1994, p.618) describes, 'social and interpersonal', and can, therefore, only be understood, in the light of the surrounding social context (Whitebrook, 2001). In the practice of news translation, personal narratives are sometimes sacrificed for being minor and not constituting a part of the official accounts (Harding, 2012; Baker, 2014). While the original news

reporting of an event, for instance, includes such personal narratives, the translated reporting may not, or it may include only certain aspects of these narratives (*ibid*).

In response to this, individuals and groups, whether activists, journalists, bloggers, and even translators, started to set up websites and public pages on social media networks to collect and publish the personal stories undermined in the mainstream media reporting. Harding (2009) gives an example of activist groups collecting stories on the Beslan terrorist attack. Similar examples can be found in the conflict in Iraq following 'IS's' takeover of Mosul. An incredible effort is made by young activists to collect, publish, and circulate the personal stories of Iraqis who have been suffering under 'IS'. A Facebook page titled Women of Mosul is dedicated to publishing and documenting the individual experiences of women in Mosul under 'IS' (Women of Mosul, 2017).

But can personal narratives themselves turn into a collective? If so, when? Baker (2006, p.29) suggests that personal narratives can acquire a collective characteristic when similar stories 'are told and retold by numerous members of a society over a long period of time'. The re-narration and circulation of such stories in a society is attributed to the support of political, social, or media institutions, and so on. An interesting example is related to the personal stories of Ezidi female survivors who managed to escape 'IS's' captivity following 'IS's' capture of Sinjar, north of Iraq, in August 2014. These stories have been elaborated, i.e., retold in various contexts as a collective narrative of rape as shall be explored in chapter five. Turning personal stories into more abstract collective ones reduces the particular details of personal experiences (Harding, 2009). In other words, they may lack one of their defining features of relationality, temporality, or causal emplotment. That can be challenging in the process of translation due to the lack of similar shared linguistic and cultural repertoire in the new language or culture (Baker, 2006).

In Harding's model, there are four different levels of shared narratives. The first of these is local narratives: a new category Harding added to the original model. Harding (2009, p.42) sees them as 'raw material' for the subsequent narratives. According to her, they represent 'narratives relating to particular events (and the particular actions of particular actors) in particular places at particular times' (*ibid*). Despite their specific characteristics, local stories may also unfold as fragments when lacking sequence, relationality, and causality. The first case study on the Speicher massacre started as a local fragmented narrative that evolved into wider narratives through translation and circulation in the media.

Societal narratives are those shaped and disseminated by groups or institutions. Such groups can, for example, include terrorist organizations, NGOs, activists, and so on. Using the term public to describe these narratives, Somers and Gibson (1994, p.62) define them as the 'narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual'. Harding's (2009) choice to replace public with societal is significant as it stems from the assumption that not all societal narratives are meant to be public. Additionally, and as Baker herself (2006) acknowledges, any narrative, even the personal, can turn into public once it is disseminated by the media. An interesting example is the personal story of Nadia Murad which became a public narrative when it was circulated through media discourse.

According to Harding (2009, p.45), 'Societal narratives are often simplified, reduced, distilled, or streamlined versions of a selection of local narratives generated by an event or series of events'. This is particularly the case when a societal story of the past is recalled in the present time in an often reductionist, oversimplified and abstract version that is detached from the local and personal stories that constituted them in the first instance. Religious historic narratives which may fall under this category are often referred to by 'IS' which attempts to enforce them in the current

context and situation. As Somers and Gibson (1994, p.44) stress, narratives are ‘history-laden’, meaning that narratives of the past may still be recalled in the current context and in association with current narratives (Baker, 2006).

Meanwhile, during the fight against ‘IS’, religious historical narratives related to the contestation between Sunnis and Shias have been recalled in a variety of means. For example, according to a Shia Iraqi colonel, the war against ‘IS’ ‘has been one continuous battle for 1,400 years’ (Abdul-Ahad, 2016 quoted in Al-Rawi and Jiwani, 2017, p.682)

When a historical narrative is evoked in a contemporary context, it becomes detached from its specific details and characteristics, i.e., it becomes an antenarrative. This has an impact on how it is translated into another language and culture. An example is related to the term *sabi* revived by ‘IS’ following their capture of Sinjar (Mustafa, 2016). *Sabi* is viewed here as an antenarrative that due to its fragmentation, can be susceptible to a number of different translations, including rape and sex trafficking.

The third sub-category is theoretical narratives. Harding replaces conceptual and disciplinary with theoretical to ‘to include any narratives of theory,... [focusing] on the act of theorising that these narratives involve’ (Harding, 2009, p.49). One example Baker (2006) gives to discuss these narratives is Edward Said’s (1994/1978) *Orientalism*, whose influence has gone beyond the confines of academia. Said defines Orientalism as ‘a way of coming to terms with the Orient’ according to ‘an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness’ (1994/1978, p.1,6). Orientalism manifests itself through sets of binary oppositions, according to which the east, or the Orient, is irrational, violent, childish, exotic, and other negative characterizations, as opposed to the rational, mature, and normal west (Said, 1994/1978, p.41-42). The Orientalist narrative continues to have a considerable impact beyond the academic realm: in

international relations, foreign policy, media representation, and so on. During the Gulf war, for example, Iraq was orientalist in both political and media discourses (Tomanić Trivundža, 2004). As Sandikcioglu (1999, p.27) explains, ‘Orientalist metaphors conceptualised the enemy, Iraq, in terms of traditionally rich associations with the Orient, and Islam as an integral part of it, in order to justify the war as a way to protect Western civilization and its way of life’.

The problem with theoretical narratives is the abstraction of their concrete elements (Somers, 1997), i.e, the specific local, personal, and societal narratives that ‘intersect with other social forces and inform the lives of actors’ (Harding, 2009, p.49) into mere theorisation. Only through an in-depth and detailed research, according to Harding (*ibid*), that the particular details can be re-infused into analysis and theory.

The last sub-category of shared narratives is meta-narratives used by Somers and Gibson (1994) and Somers (1997) to describe ‘the master narratives in which we are embedded as contemporary actors in history’ (Somers, 1997; p.86). Meta-narratives are powerful stories that ‘persist over long periods of time and influence the lives of people across a wide range of settings’ Baker (2010, p.351). They, thus, represent ‘the epic dramas of our time: Capitalism vs. Communism, the Individual vs. Society, Barbarism/Nature vs. Civility’ (Somers, 1994, p.605). In other words, these narratives reflect the larger structure of the world, how it operates, and who are the actors involved (Roselle, Miskimmon, and O’Loughlin, 2014). One of the current meta-narratives is the war on terror (Baker, 2006; Harding 2009; Roselle, Miskimmon, and O’Loughlin, 2014) which divides the world into two camps: the good (the west) and the bad (east). Harding (2009) describes the last category as the most abstract, general, and ambiguous layer of all narrative types that has become completely detached from its setting and from the peculiarity of the smaller stories of the actors involved. If not grounded in particular details that inform them, meta-narratives lack linearity and sequence and can be seen as antenarrative, Boje (2001) suggests.

When does a story turn into a meta-narrative? Baker (2006) explains that the persistence and elaboration of a societal narrative across different times and places, influencing a wide variety of people, eventually turns it into a meta-narrative (See also Harding, 2009). Why does a narrative persist? Baker (2006) attributes this to the role of powerful political, economic, and religious elites in promoting that narrative in the first place. Harding (2009) adds another interesting reason related to ‘the power of the story itself’ (Harding, 2009, p.51). In this sense, a meta or master story is similar to Abbott’s (2002) ‘masterplot’ which he defines as ‘stories that we tell over and over in myriad forms and that connect vitally with our deepest values, wishes, and fears’ (Abbott, 2002, p.42).<sup>5</sup>

Meta-narratives may devolve and lose influence over time. When the context changes, a meta-narrative may be challenged and replaced by another one. Therefore, rather than completely rejecting master narratives as Lyotard (1984) does,<sup>6</sup> for example, describing them as incredulous, Boje (2001) argued that when resisted, some meta-narratives may become so fragile that they can break up.

Narratives or fragments of them are in a cyclic constant shifting state as they circulate in various contexts. As Boje (2011, p.24) maintains, stories are ‘travellers, in packs, moving in and among material contexts, morphing situations as they traverse’. In other words, narratives mediate and are mediated by context. However, as Striano (2012) points out, context has not received much attention in academic work on narrative. By context, I refer here to discourses, genres, and modes (Kress, 2009), as well as language and translation. In the digital environment, in particular, narratives are more than ever subject to transformation and/or fragmentation. The digital environment as described by Roselle, Miskimmon, and O’Loughlin (2014, p.80):

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<sup>5</sup> Baker (2006) differentiates between master narratives, and masterplots. However, as Harding (2009) argues, the two can, in fact, be related.

<sup>6</sup> Lyotard (1984) calls them ‘grand’ narratives.

... disrupts the sequential structure of narratives of conflict. We witness not just temporal acceleration, but temporal fragility: the apparently settled meaning of past events can be disrupted by the emergence of new data or images that force a reconsideration of what happened. Those waging wars in the present are aware of the potential of footage for their actions to be captured and used in ways they cannot foresee or that cannot be controlled.

Social media platforms, on the other hand, are fascinatingly changing the storytelling process (Brogan, 2015). To take Twitter as an example, being a news-source rather than just social media network (Kwak et al, 2010), it has become an interactive tool for telling stories when individual tweets are combined together under one thread, for example. Otherwise, due to the limited characters that can be used in single tweets, we are often encountered with fragments of a narrative rather than fully coherent ones.

Therefore, in the last section of this chapter, I highlight the role context plays in shifting/fragmenting narratives by bringing in a social semiotic multimodal approach to meaning-making (Kress, 2009).

## **6. A Social semiotic multimodal approach: Discourse, genre, mode**

The term ‘Multimodality’ was first introduced by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) to replace the use of language as the sole mode for meaning-making with the use of multiple resources: audio-visual, and linguistic. Drawing on Halliday (1978), Kress and Van Leeuwen laid the foundation for a theory of multimodal communication by replacing the word ‘codes’ with ‘resources’ with particular ‘affordances’, i.e., potentials and/or limitations for meaning-making. These affordances can change according to the target audience in question (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; Kress, 2009). They also differ from one society to another; thereby ‘knowledge’ appears differently in different modes’ (Kress, 2011, p. 242). For Kress, such abstract concepts as ‘language’ are insufficient since they do not account for other semiotic resources of meaning (Kress, 2009). Language undoubtedly plays a

crucial role in the process of meaning-making. When language changes, not only words and meanings are changed, but most significantly, people's perceptions of themselves and the world surrounding them (Temple, 2008). However, language is not the only determining factor in such changes. It is as Kress (2011, p.242 emphasis in original) describes:

just one among the resources for making meaning; and that all such resources available in one social group and its cultures at a particular moment ought to be considered as constituting one coherent domain, an integral field of nevertheless distinct resources for *making* meaning; all equal, potentially, in their capacity to contribute meaning to a complex semiotic entity, a text or text-like entity.

Even when linguistic or pragmatic concepts acknowledge the existence of other modes, they assign them to a peripheral position, 'in some sense both linguistics and pragmatics recognize the presence of other modes—in terms such as 'extra-linguistic', 'para-linguistic', 'non-verbal' or in different kinds of acknowledgement to features of 'context' (Kress, 2009, p.59).

A social semiotic multimodal approach further problematizes the notion of meaning-making by showing how the communication of meaning through the three semantic resources of discourse, genre, and mode affects the meaning-making process. These resources 'can create moods and attitudes, convey ideas, create flow across the composition' (Machin, 2007, p.xi). How they do so is dictated by the interests of the social actors involved and in accordance with their various audiences. For instance, how visual signs are used 'is not neutral but is about defining social reality' (Machin, 2007, p.xv). In a similar manner to a social approach to narrative that considers selectivity or selective appropriation as inherent in narratives and their narration, a social semiotic multimodal approach gives weight to 'choice' rather than 'use', emphasizing 'the ceaseless *social (re)making* of a set of cultural resources' (*ibid* emphasis in original). There is, therefore, interaction between the resources, the meanings, and the narration. When a resource shifts, narratives and the meanings they

carry within will ultimately change. Narration through the genre of a documentary substantially differs to narration through a novel, for instance. In the digital world that is characterized by an abundance of these recourses, particularly genres and modes, materiality matters (See for example McLuhan, 1964; Gumbrecht, 2004; Littau, 2011; Littau, 2016). It is not to suggest that it has precedence over language or message as argued by McLuhan (1964), for instance, but to re-emphasize the inseparability and interconnectedness of form and content. As Gumbrecht (2004, pp.11-12) succinctly puts it, ‘We no longer believed that a meaning complex could be separated from its mediality, that is, from the difference appearing on a printed page, on a computer screen, or in a voice mail message’. The new genres and modes mediate the way we understand, interpret, and make sense of the world, as they ‘*set the framework within which something like meaning becomes possible at all*’ (Littau, 2016, p.83 emphasis in original).

## 6.1 Discourse

Following the work of Foucault (1982), Kress (1984/89), Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), and Fairclough (1989, 1993), Kress (2009, p.110) defines discourse as the knowledge produced by institutions, including scientific, medical, legal, educational, and religious. Discourses for Kress, are resources for meaning-making available at a larger level in every society. These resources are encountered in and through multiple semiotic objects such as rituals, buildings, and texts. Discourse, therefore, ‘shapes and *names* the routes through which we (have come to) know the socially shaped world as one kind of knowledge’ (Kress, 2009, p.110 emphasis in original). It answers the questions: ‘What is the world about?’ and ‘How is it organized as knowledge?’ (*ibid*, p.116). In a similar manner, Acevedo, Ordner, and Thompson (2010) explain how discourses are characterized by a set of shared narratives which ‘denote an all-encompassing and authoritative account of some aspect of social reality that is widely accepted and endorsed by the larger society’

(Acevedo, Ordner, and Thompson, 2010, p.125). Such narratives often constrain what to say and how we say it (Mustafa, 2018).

Narratives are (re)-shaped according to the particular conventions and norms of each institutional discourse (Polletta, 2009). For instance, legal institutional discourses are distinct to discourses associated with mass media (Mustafa, 2018). Narratives circulated within legal institutional settings are more formalized than the stories told in the media (Polletta, 2009). By contrast, in the discourses of the latter, they become mediatized (Agha, 2011) to conform to the institutional practices of the media agency in question (Catenaccio et al, 2011).

A discourse does not only include experiences, meanings, stories, actors, etc., but it excludes them as well. In this respect, Purvis and Hunt (1993, p.948) explain ‘...each discourse allows certain things to be said and impeded or prevents other things from being said. Discourses thus provide specific and distinguishable mediums through which communicative action takes place’. In other words, discourse is associated with issues of power and authority whereby knowledge is selectively dominated, structured, and re-disseminated (Foucault, 1981). Stories are one constituent of discourse in addition to ‘meanings, metaphors, representations, images..., statements and so on’ (Burr, 1995, p. 42).

In the case of ‘IS’, its religious discourse derives from religious texts and narratives of what is known as the ‘Jihadi Salafi’ doctrine. According to Bunzel (2015, p.44):

Jihadi-Salafism is a distinct ideological movement in Sunni Islam. It encompasses a global network of scholars, websites, media outlets, and, most recently, countless supporters on social media. The movement is predicated on an extremist and minoritarian reading of Islamic scripture that is also textually rigorous, deeply rooted in a premodern theological tradition, and extensively elaborated by a recognized cadre of religious authorities.

Similarities between ‘IS’ and Salafism, are numerous. According to Roy (2017, pp.58-59 emphasis in original), these include:

strict enforcement of the punishments mandated in Islamic law (*hudud*); return to practices in use during the time of the Prophet; waiting for the apocalypse; refusal to socialize with *Kuffar*, including “People of the Book”; imposition of *dhimmi* status [taxes] on Christians; abomination of Shias, heretics, and apostates.

However, ‘IS’ not only selects those interpretations that serve its interests, despite sometimes lacking a scholarly consensus, but in some cases it manipulates some aspects in this religious discourse. For instance, ‘IS’ justifies suicide attacks as a means for punishment of its enemy, and protection of its *ummah* [community], as well as for a forcible conversion of the world (Roy, 2017). Yet, as explained by Roy (2017, p.60), ‘While death in combat is honored, for the Salafis it should not be a voluntary choice, which amounts to suicide, for that would mean infringing on God’s will’. ‘IS’ justifies such contradictions by resorting to ‘legal rhetoric’ based upon opinions of legal authors without contextualizing them (*ibid*).

## 6.2 Genre

*Genre* is the second resource for meaning. In the light of a social semiotic multimodal approach, genres are viewed as processes rather than mere products, focusing on the participants themselves, their relationships with each other, and how they act and interact (Kress, 2009). According to Kress (2009, p.113), genre is a ‘social action and interaction... genre answers the question: ‘Who is involved as a [*sic*] participants in this world; in what ways; what are the relations between participants in this world?’ (p.116). This definition has been developing since Miller’s (1984) rhetorical approach to genre which defines it as a ‘social action’. The main difference between the two is while Miller looks at genres from a linguistic textual perspective; Kress focuses more on visual or multimodal texts (Kress, 2003; Kress, 2009; Graham and Whalen, 2008). In Miller and

Shepherd's (2004) later work on the web blogs, this focus has expanded to include various types of texts disseminated in the new medium of the internet. For the purpose of this study, I follow Miller's (1984) conceptualization of genre as a 'social action' that has to share an 'exigence' and a recurrent situation (Miller, 1984, p.158). An exigence, according to Miller is a 'social motive... a set of particular social patterns and expectations that provides a socially objectified motive for addressing danger, ignorance, separateness' (*ibid*). A recurrent situation, on the other hand, refers not to '...a material situation (a real, objective, factual event) but [to] our construal of a type' (Miller, 1984, p.157). Our interpretations and reactions to what constitutes as a genre matter here. Genre is, therefore, socially and culturally recognized and perceived (Miller, 2015).

Most importantly, genres are no longer static: they are dynamic and changeable. As Miller (1984, p.153) describes it,

Genre, in this way, becomes more than a formal entity; it becomes pragmatic, fully rhetorical, a point of connection between intention and effect, an aspect of social action... The result is that the set of genres is an open class, with new members evolving, old ones decaying.

In other words, there is instability in the creation of genres, with existing ones shifting and new ones emerging (Lüders, Prøitz, and Rasmussen, 2010). In the new media environment, change and dynamicity are accelerated and are harder to predict or control. The new media, Miller (2015, p.60) illustrates:

... introduces a new arena with less control and regulation than academic disciplines and corporate or government (or educational) organizations. On the internet, we find voluntary activity, user-generated content, emergent communities of use, and much experimentation and play.

As a result, new genres can always emerge or evolve (Miller, 2016; Miller, 2017). Emerging genres are novel, they are ‘recognized as distinct and named as such’ (Crowston and Williams, 2000, p.202). Evolving genres are those that adapt, shift, and transform across time (*ibid*; Miller, 2016; Miller, 2017). Miller (2016, p.11) summarizes the difference between the two in the following way:

What evolution offers us, then, is a model of incremental, continuous change with an emphasis on connectedness, ancestry, and adaptation to circumstance. What emergence seems to offer is a model less concerned with chronological relations and adaptation and more interested in difference, rupture, and novelty.

The relationship between genres and narratives is best explained by Bruner (1991) who demonstrates that the genre dictates the effectiveness and influence of a narrative. In other words, each genre places a narrative within a set of specific conventions and expectations between the producers and the audiences (Lüders, Prøitz, and Rasmussen, 2010). ‘IS’s’ execution videos are a continuation of previous similar practices across history, and specifically of the beheading videos produced by al-Qaeda since 2001. They constitute a set of expectations between their producer, ‘IS’ in this case, and the target audience. In Chapter Six, I will explain in detail why they can be identified as an evolving genre and what this means for the meanings and the narratives involved in the process. Most importantly, I argue that this genre has allowed ‘IS’ to construct well-structured and coherent narratives.

Genres are also influenced by the type of narrative engaged in the process (Harding, 2012). To take personal stories as an example, they always have unique generic signals affecting how a news article, an interview, or a documentary is shaped in a different way (Harding, 2012). Similarly, Baker (2014) argues that individual narratives cannot be explained without identified frameworks of narration so that they become effective and intelligible.

In relation to translation, the open-ended list of genres means that they may not be easily reconfigured in the target culture when there are no equivalent frameworks available for the translator (Baker, 2014).

### 6.3 Mode

The third resource for meaning-making according to Kress is *mode*. Kress defines mode as a socially constructed resource: ‘socially, what counts as a mode is a matter for a community and its social- representational needs.... *Mode* offers meaning-laden means for making the meanings that we wish or need to make material and tangible—‘realizing,’ ‘materializing’ meanings’ (Kress, 2009, pp.113-114 emphasis in original). Mode represents the means, the signs, through which meanings are recognized and materialized. These means are deeply connected with the social, historical, ideological, and cultural ‘orientation of a society’ (*ibid*). Examples are images, videos, gestures, words, euphemisms, typography, colours, etc. (Baker, 2007; Kress, 2009). How each mode is socially chosen is dependent upon its individual potentials for creating meanings. The way images deliver their message is different from music or words (Hull and Nelson, 2005). Although ‘IS’ uses multiple modes in constructing its narratives, the visual mode remains the most significant; the most symbolic. Through visual images, ‘IS’ intimidates its ‘enemies’, appeals to its supporters, projects its power, and boasts of its brutality. More crucially, through the use of visuals, ‘IS’ narrates its atrocities.

For every distinct target audience, ‘IS’ produces different narratives choosing salient visual images. To give an example, one of the central narratives in ‘IS’s’ online magazine, *Dabiq*<sup>7</sup> is that of violence and fear through the publication of ‘about-to-die images’ for some of the victims

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<sup>7</sup> *Dabiq*’s first issue was released in June 2014, and its 14<sup>th</sup> issue was released in April 2016. It is published by IS’s *Al Hayat* media center and represents the group’s official magazine (Winkler, et al, 2016). Its name which is derived from a *hadith* (a prophetic account), refers to a location thought to be in Syria where the final battleground before the Hour is claimed to take place.

beheaded or killed by the group. In contrast, the main narrative in *al-Naba*<sup>8</sup> magazine which is distributed to locals in areas under its control is that of ‘security’, ‘hope’, and ‘martyrdom’ through the particularly framed ‘about-to-die’ images of its own members (Winkler et al, 2016, p.19).

Modes have different sequential or spatial relationships that are never devoid of meaning (Chandler, 2007). Visual modes, for instance, have three core spatial structures: top/bottom, centre/margin, and left/right (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1998). Changing these relationships in the translation process can not only reframe an existing narrative, but establish a different one. When the singular arrangements of modes are combined together, they create sequenced ensembles orchestrated ‘in space... in time, in sequence, in process, in motion to address the particular audience’ (Kress, 2009, p. 162). That said, images are not anti-narrative, as argued by Gabriel (2000), for instance. Rather, they have the potential to invoke a narrative, as well as to create a coherent narrative when they are put together with other images or other modes.

The shift in the use of modes and/or their relationships in the process of translation can ‘open up new and alternative reading positions’ (Pérez-González, 2014, p.125), transforming both the narratives and our own perceptions of them.

## **7. Re-defining translation in the digital age**

It has so far been demonstrated that meaning is created and (re)shaped by the use of the three aforementioned resources. This, in turn, has significant implications for our understanding of the process of translation. This is because as Littau (2016, p.89) manifests, translation ‘is embedded...in a material object, which itself is subject to translation or, we might say,

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<sup>8</sup> *al Naba*’s first issue was released online in late March, 2014. Up until February, 2016, IS had released 18 issues of this magazine. With the exception of issues 2-9 where only a few pages were distributed online on *Telegram*, the remaining issues all appeared online (Winkler, et al, 2016).

transmediation'. Similarly, Cronin stresses that with technological innovation, it is imperative to consider 'things' in translation studies not merely texts or translators (Cronin, 2003, pp.9-10). Moreover, I add that we need to consider how meanings, and consequently narratives, are moved across different resources. Adopting a broader perspective to study the relationship between printing and translation during the Renaissance, Coldiron (2015, p.30) emphasizes 'motion rather than stasis', arguing that:

As in physics and medicine, change of place and change of pace matter, and tracing the paths of moving objects as they change, rather than only looking at the objects in one state or another, allows us to visualize more than one thing happening across more than one event-process (p.29).

Such movement matters the most when looking at translation in the internet-enabled environment characterized by an open-end list of discourses, genres, and modes. As such, translation does not only move in a single direction from a source language and/or culture to target language/culture, but also in multiple non-linear directions across various resources. From a social semiotic multimodal perspective, Kress (2009, p.124) similarly views translation as:

a process in which meaning is moved. It is moved 'across', 'transported'—from mode to mode; from one modal ensemble to another; from one mode in one culture to that 'same' mode in another culture—what has traditionally been regarded as translation from one 'language' to another.

In my thesis, I follow this understanding of translation and adopt it, adding that translation simultaneously means the change in the resource itself. When a video is presented as a still, this will significantly impact the meaning made and the narratives of the ST. Similarly, when a video interview is transformed into a written news article, the meaning and narratives in the source material can be drastically altered in the new genre and mode.

Furthermore, in such movement, we are dealing with multiple texts which are constantly re-appropriated according to the new context in which they are used. As illustrated by Perlmutter (2016, p. 2), in the digital environment where already there is ‘no ‘original’ photo or document’ and where ‘Everyone can be a producer, disseminator, receiver of blogs, podcasts, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Digital Game MODS, etc.’ (*ibid*, p.12), content is always subject to be erased and then (re)produced in new settings. To cite Baudrillard’s (1994) notion of *simulacra*, yet without delving into its details, translation is faced with different versions or replicas resembling the ‘original’. Texts produced and disseminated by ‘IS’ are vivid examples of this. They are always subject to being erased, but with the possibility of being reproduced in different means by new actors, including media agencies, activists, bloggers, and so on. Littau (1997, p.81) likewise describes translation as becoming ‘subject to reconceptualisation as the re-writing of an already pluralized ‘original’... [and] can therefore no longer be conceived as the reproduction of an original’. She, therefore, argues that we have now traces or versions of an original re-appropriated to fit in with the new context and environment (Littau, 1997). In the new media environment, we are not only encountered with multiple source texts, but also multiple target texts.

This multiplicity of texts in the digital media environment blurs the distinction between STs and TTs. To account for such multiplicity of texts, Pym (2014), for example, proposes to replace the term ST with the term ‘start text’ since we are never certain that ‘the text we translate from is not itself made up of translations, reworked fragments of previous texts, all tied up in never-ending translational networks’ (Pym, 2014, p.2). For Pym, texts are multiple and interconnected with each containing ‘traces of other languages and cultures’ (*ibid*). Due to the ‘instability of the ‘*source*’, equivalence is shrouded with uncertainty (Pym, 2014, p.87 emphasis in original).

In my thesis and while I acknowledge the fact the two terms of source and target texts need to be reviewed in future research on translation studies, I still use them to guide my data analysis. Following Baker (2006; 2014), I view translation as a process that looks beyond the examination of accuracy or adequacy of equivalence.

The analysis of the four case studies in this thesis is the first full attempt to reflect upon the above re-conceptualization of translation and its multiple STs and TTs and how this impacts Arabic and English language narratives in the context of 'IS' and in the internet-enabled media environment.

## **8. Conclusions**

This chapter started with defining the concept of narrative from a social theory perspective. The aim of this chapter was to develop the theory itself by focusing on the fragmentation and/or transformation of narratives when they circulate in various discourses, genres, and modes. My main argument was that the conceptualization of narrative as a fully configured sequence of events is inadequate especially in so far as new media is concerned where fragments of narrative are more likely to be encountered. To study such fragmentation that is often overlooked in social or narratological approaches to narrative, the chapter drew on the concept of antenarrative by Boje (2001), assuming that it precedes and at the same time interacts with the narrative types. The more abstract and reductive the narrative is, the more ruptured it is likely to be. This process is never static or ending, it is rather cyclic as narratives spread in various contexts.

To examine this dissemination, a social semiotic multimodal approach to communication, particularly the resources of discourse, genre, and mode (Kress, 2009) were seen as the main means to advance the analysis of narratives. They equally impact meanings and narratives through their special affordances that can differ from one society to another. Drawing on insights from this

approach, it was essential to reconsider translation in the digital media environment. Translation, therefore, was seen as a movement that takes place in a multiplicity of directions, irrespective of the language boundaries, blurring the distinction between source and target texts.

## **CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY**

### **1. Introduction**

This study adopts a multiple case study approach, meaning that each chapter uses a different set of texts. The total number of texts analyzed in the thesis is 205. These are included in a variety of genres, such as news genre, ‘IS’s’ execution videos, personal videos and testimonies, and in a variety of modes: written, spoken, and visual. Twenty-two of these texts are produced by ‘IS’ and are defined as source texts. 136 texts are mostly news articles by mass and independent media websites. There are other written texts by distinct agencies, including the English translation of ‘IS’s’ Arabic pamphlet on the treatment of Ezidi girls disseminated by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI). News articles are seen in the thesis as TTs of ‘IS’s’ texts. The remaining number of texts includes news articles and/or video interviews featuring personal narratives which are examined in the first two case studies: Speicher massacre and *sabi*. Data is qualitatively analyzed by combining the theories discussed in the previous chapter. I call the integrated approach a social (ante)narrative multimodal approach to translation and media studies. After discussing how the data will be analyzed, the current chapter introduces the methodological problems that I encountered whilst collecting the research data. It then explains the criteria for the selection of texts and presents the methods used for collecting, organizing, and analyzing data. The rest of the chapter lists ‘IS’s’ source texts and refers to their TTs (for a full list of these, see the appendix).

### **2. A multiple case-study approach**

To comprehensively analyze how ‘IS’ narrated its atrocities, and how the media translated them, and in order to compare the changes occurring to narratives and their translations, a multiple case

study approach was chosen for its usefulness. Vannoni (2015, p.333) defines a case as ‘a spatially and temporally bounded political and/or social instance and... the spatial and temporal boundaries are determined according to the theory the researcher addresses’. Multiple case studies, on the other hand, are used to investigate ‘multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information’ (Creswell, 2013, p.97). Adopting multiple case study approach means using a variety of sources which vary across the case studies under scrutiny (Saldanha and O’Brien, 2013). A multiple case study approach allows comparing the similarities and the differences among the sources used and across the cases (Yin, 2003; Vannoni, 2015). As highlighted in the introduction chapter, the cases were chosen for their significance in understanding ‘IS’ and the way media responded to it, as well as for their importance to both the global context, in general and the Iraqi context, in particular.

A multiple case study approach consists of ‘multiple embedded cases’ (Yin, 1994, p.51), i.e., having ‘sub-units of analysis’ (Saldanha and O’Brien, 2013, p.212). Both narratives and fragments of them, as well as texts through which they are narrated and disseminated, are examined as units of analysis. Narratives are those pertaining to four atrocities committed by ‘IS’ following their capture of Mosul in Iraq in June 2014. These are chronologically ordered: the Speicher massacre from June to September 2014, *sabi* of Ezidi women from August 2014 to December 2015, the execution videos of western journalists and aid workers, as well as of other Arab and Kurdish victims, from late August 2014 till October 2015, and the destruction of Iraqi artefacts in Mosul Museum, Hatra, and Nimrud cities in February and April, 2015.

The following section discusses the approach used to analyze data in each of the four cases.

### **3. Data analysis: A social (ante) narrative multimodal approach to translation and media studies**

In order to examine how narratives first unfold and how then they transform in time as they are narrated and translated by 'IS', media agencies, survivors, and religious scholars, I need to employ a number of tools. These tools are inspired by Baker's (2006) selective appropriation and labelling, Kress' (2009) orchestration of modes, Boje's (2001) intertextuality, and Abbott's (2002) concept of 'framing narratives'. The latter is viewed in my study not from a narratological perspective, but from a social one as applied by Harding (2009; 2012).

Baker (2006) describes selective appropriation and framing by labelling as framing strategies defining framing from the perspective of social movements and activism (e.g. Cunningham and Browning, 2004), as 'structures of anticipation, strategic moves that are consciously initiated in order to present a narrative in a certain light' (Baker, 2006, p.167). As such, they are used as a deliberate strategy of manipulation or intervention to subvert dominant discourses or larger narratives. Moreover, frames impact the way we understand or interpret events. Drawing on Goffman (1947) who was the first to introduce framing as an academic tool of investigation into the field of sociology, Baker points out that 'the frame surrounds (or refers to) a narrative; at the same time, it undoubtedly plays an important role in defining the boundaries of the image (or narrative) and constrains our understanding or appreciation of it' (Baker, 2008, p.10). Through framing, a narrative is re-presented or reshaped in a variety of means, including, frame ambiguity, frame space, temporal and spatial framing, repositioning of participants, selective appropriation, and framing by labelling (Baker, 2006, pp.105-139). For the purpose of this study, I discuss and use the last two tools, explaining that the selection or de-selection of linguistic and/or visual material and the use of certain labels are not always employed as deliberate strategies to promote or defy narratives. In some cases, different labels are used to re-interpret a notion that is otherwise culturally distinct for a

different target audience. The notion of *sabi* is an example and shall be explored in the second analysis chapter.

By selective appropriation, Baker refers to the textual material that is selectively appropriated through addition and/or omission. These are often made to ‘suppress, accentuate or elaborate particular aspects of a narrative encoded in the source text or utterance, or aspects of the larger narrative(s) in which it is embedded’ (Baker, 2006, p.114). This is similar to the now oft-cited definition of framing by Entman (1993, p.53) as a process of ‘selection and salience’.

Since this material can be linguistic or semantic and visual (Wendland, 2010), this tool can involve still and moving images as well as written or spoken words. Visuals, in particular, are generally very powerful tools in making meaning, impacting on the way we understand and interpret an event (Ojala, Pantti and Kangas, 2017). As explained by Berger (1972), we establish ourselves according to our relation to the things that we see. Equal to written and spoken words, images provide ‘potent resources for constructing narratives’ (Wells, 2007, p.55). Meanwhile, they can put these narratives in a wider context. The textual cues selected to accompany images, including titles and captions, guide their apprehension and interpretation by the audience (Ojala, Pantti and Kangas, 2017).

Baker (2016; 2010) explains how selective appropriation is used by MEMRI to weave a narrative about Arab and Muslims as one homogenous actor that poses a threat to global security. This is done not through inaccurate translation, but rather through the selection of specific content, be it articles, images, videos, etc., that help to elaborate on such narrative. In their study of the visual coverage in certain western newspapers of the Ukrainian conflict, Ojala, Pantti and Kangas demonstrate how the conflict in Ukraine is presented in three contested narratives or ‘frames’ as: ‘national power struggle, as Russian intervention, and as geopolitical conflict’ (Ojala, Pantti and

Kangas, 2017, p.474) through the selective incorporation of certain images into news articles. Each of the three narratives distinctly re-presents events, influencing various interpretations about the conflict (*ibid*).

Labelling, on the other hand, refers to how the same narrative can be reshaped differently by merely choosing different labels (Baker, 2006; 2007).<sup>9</sup> It ‘reflects any discursive process that involves using a lexical item, term or phrase to identify a person, place, group, event or any other key element in a narrative’ (Baker, 2006, p.114). Euphemisms, names, and even counter-naming are all types of labels that can have an impact on how we view a particular narrative (Baker, 2006; 2007). Each label or lexical item is, in essence, a semiotic sign that differs according to the culture and the target audience. ‘IS’ in Iraq, for instance, is often referred to as Daesh. For many, to use Islamic State is to make the group legitimate.

Labelling is widely researched and examined in a number of fields, including the field of media and communication studies. For example, in his comparison of the news narratives of an Iran Air Flight 655 shot down by a U.S. Navy ship in 1988 to that of a Korean Air Lines Flight 007 shot down by a Soviet fighter plane in 1983 in two U.S newspapers, Entman (1991, p.8) reveals how the choice of certain labels frames the two narratives in two distinct categories to ‘either elicit or omit moral evaluation’ (*ibid*). So, while the media coverage on Iran Air adopted a rather technical and more abstract terminology, categorizing the event as an ‘accident’, the KAL coverage resorted to a more concrete vocabulary that reinforced ‘moral judgment’, labelling the event as a ‘criminal evil’ (*ibid*). The most common adjectives and adverbs used in the *Time* and *Newsweek* to describe the KAL incident were, for instance, ‘brutal(ly)’, ‘barbaric/barbarous’, and ‘wanton(ly)’. Contrastively, among the most common adjectives and words used in relation to the Iran incidents were words like, ‘ghastly’, ‘fatal(ly)’, ‘tragic’, and ‘understandable’ (*ibid*, p.19).

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<sup>9</sup> Baker’s framing by labelling echoes the conceptualization of framing as an applicability effect, i.e., how the same information on an issue can be reshaped by a simple rewording or (re)presentation of the same material (Iyengar, 2005).

In research adopting a (critical) discourse analysis approach, lexicalization is used instead of labelling to show the relationship between the media agency and the wider dominant beliefs, values, and ideologies. In his study of the Israel-Lebanese war (see also Chapter One), Lahlali (2011) compares the different labels used by three media agencies in the Arab world: *Al Jazeera*, a State-funded media agency in Qatar, which nevertheless claims to be independent and objective, *Al Arabiya*, a Saudi-sponsored media agency, which also adopts a liberal stance and is anti-fundamentalism, and *Alhurra*, a US-funded media agency that was launched by the Bush administration in 2001 to compete with *Al Jazeera* and to communicate with Arab and Muslim populations in their coverage of the conflict (Lahlali, 2011). One example he gives is related to how Hezbollah, a Lebanon-based Shia political party and armed group, is described by the three agencies. Using ‘Islamic resistance’ to describe Hezbollah, *Al Jazeera* appeared to grant legitimacy to the group. In contrast, *Al Arabiya* used ‘Shiite’ to describe Hezbollah, which can be seen as a tool for undermining the support the group used to receive in the Arab Sunni world. Meanwhile, *Alhurra* merely used ‘Lebanese’ in reference to Hezbollah (Lahlali, 2011, pp.142-143). Although no justification was provided by Lahlali for the latter choice, I think that the use of Lebanese alone here was meant to dissociate the group from Islam and Arabs.

In translation studies, Baker (2007) discusses an example of labelling in her analysis of the English translated subtitle of the Arabic documentary *Jenin Jenin*. In the English subtitle, Vietnam was used in the following sentence, ‘What can I say? Not even Vietnam was as bad as of this’ for the original Arabic: ‘What can I say, by God, by God, our house/home is no longer a house/home’(Baker, 2007, p.164). As Baker argues, the choice of Vietnam is neither a foreignizing nor a domesticating strategy, it is to evoke the narrative of Vietnam which eventually ‘encodes both accommodation to dominance and resistance to it’ (*ibid*, p.165). On one hand, it entails dominance because Vietnam has resonance among the American audience, and on the other hand, it entails

resistance through the simultaneous framing of US as ‘aggressor’, and the implication that the American audience can choose to challenge their government as was the case in Vietnam (*ibid*).

In their study of the English-Farsi translation of news articles in the websites of four State-run media agencies from western news agencies, Shahi and Talebinejad (2014) show that labels are replaced in translation wherever there is a clash of interests between Iranian and Western news agencies. For example, Israel is substituted with ‘the Zionist regime’ or ‘Zionist’ in all the four agencies under analysis, in a way that echoes the political stance of the Iranian authorities (Shahi and Talebinejad, 2014, pp.33-34).

Kress’ (2009) orchestration of modes depicts the way the different modes are organized and juxtaposed together. For Kress, ‘meaning cannot be discussed without a sense of the shape—the organization—of the social environment in which it is produced whether as hierarchy or network’ (Kress, 2009, p.146). Meaning made in one mode will be different to meaning made by multiple modes. The way these modes are organized or orchestrated will shift meanings, and consequently, narratives. Iedema (2001, p.192) maintains that through the organization of various modes ‘meanings are sequenced and integrated into dynamic text’. How meanings are linked together has an impact on what wider narrative is constructed and how we, as the audience, read and interpret it accordingly. Baker’s (2006, 2010) aforementioned analysis of MEMRI and how it organizes the different material it selects for translation shows that this tool can be implemented to narrate the Arab and Muslim world as a dangerous place. In my thesis, this tool is essentially helpful in the analysis of ‘IS’s’ videos of executions and cultural destruction as it guides us to understand how various modes are organized and put together to construct or to foreground certain narrative(s).

The fourth tool is inspired by one of Boje’s eight methods to antenarrative: intertextuality. Intertextuality refers to the interconnected relationship among utterances and texts (Kristeva, 1980; Barthes, 1977; Bakhtin, 1981, Eco, 1986; Fairclough, 1993, Hatim, 1997). The term was first

coined by Kristeva (1980, p.66) who demonstrates that ‘any text is constructed as a mosaic’ that absorbs and transforms another. She emphasizes the relationship between history or society and texts in the sense that all texts make references to texts from the past (1986, p.39). Similarly, Venuti (2009, p.157) sees that ‘every text is fundamentally an intertext bound in relations to other texts which are somehow present in it and from which it draws its meaning, value, and function’. Translating intertextual references is not an easy task. Without prior knowledge of the intertextual relations of a specific reference to other utterances or texts, the translation can be unsuccessful. Hatim and Mason (1990, p. 57) provides an example of an unsuccessful translation of an allusion to a Qur’anic verse used in one of Saddam Hussein’s political speeches. The allusion is the Arabic word *المستضعفون* [*Almustaḍ‘afūn*], which is intertextually related to a Qur’anic verse where the narrative of ‘victimization’ is invoked. In English, the Arabic word was mistranslated as ‘hopeless and helpless’(ibid), completely re-shaping the source narrative.

In terms of antenarratives, Boje (2001, p.74) emphasizes the relationship between intertextuality and antenarrative for its ‘dynamic, unfinished and embedded qualities’. Just like antenarratives, intertextual references are subject to change as they are produced, circulated, and received by a network of different audiences. For Boje, intertextuality ‘is a web of complex inter-relationships ensnaring each story’s historicity and situational context between other stories’ (Boje, 2001, p.91). Therefore, he argues that intertextual references can be seen as instances of antenarratives since each text is characterized as a network of story pieces that are related to other texts and stories (Boje, 2001, p.74). In other words, if a story fragment is taken out of a text and put in another text, in a different context, the meaning will radically change. Its interpretation and perception will, therefore, vary from one person to another according to their position and prior knowledge of such relations.

Drawing on Kristeva's (1980) concept of the 'carnival' in relation to novels, which she defines as '... a spectacle, but without a stage; a game, but also a daily undertaking; a signifier, but also a signified', Boje (2001, p.78) emphasizes the plurality of antenarrative:

Antenarrative is plural in the social identities that get constituted, access to inclusion, the voices that get included, the audiences that stories are designed to be read by, the conventions of style that get incorporated in corporate acts of writing, and the ambivalence of interpretation in multiple sign systems.

The point highlighted by Boje here is the dynamicity of and tension between antenarratives, which lack an origin, and are only temporally finalized. This takes place in three phases: in the production of intertextual references, in their dissemination across space and time, and in their interpretations as 'common sense utterances' and contextualization. To become 'common sense utterances', intertextual references are used in harmony with the wider social and cultural knowledge of the target audience: its beliefs, ideologies, and narratives (*ibid*, pp. 78-79). They can, therefore, be strategically employed by actors when they are certain that the target audience addressed can infer their meanings and relations. Indeed, one reason intertextual references are employed in a text is to confer legitimacy on its author/producer, which is alluring to the audiences who subscribe to the same narrative each intertextual reference may invoke.

'IS' employed many religious intertextual references, sometimes out of their original context, as a means to decriminalize its actions. An example is the title of a beheading video of Peter Kassig, an American aid worker,,: *ولو كره الكافرون* [Although the disbelievers dislike it] which is an intertextual reference to a verse in the Quran: *يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَيَأْبَى اللَّهُ إِلَّا أَنْ يُتِمَّ نُورَهُ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ* [They want to extinguish the light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah will perfect His light, although the disbelievers dislike it] (V61:8 cited in Quran, no date). Taken out of context, this

reference became an antenarrative that 'IS' made use of to frame the beheading act, casting it with a religious legitimacy.

Intertextual references can also be visual. These are re-appropriated from other sources for a variety of reasons (Ivanič, 2015, pp.49-50). For instance, they can be used by actors to construct their identities in relation to certain groups (*ibid*). The logo of 'IS's' flag: لا اله الا الله [There is no God but Allah] is the identification of Islamic religion known as الشهادة [Shahada] first used by Prophet Muhammed. The typographic style in which the logo is written imitates the stamp design of the 7th century, 'very basic, primitive and without any diacritic marks' (Alazaat, 2015). The black colour of 'IS's' flag is another visual intertextual reference employed to privilege 'IS's' identity as Muslims. For 'IS' and Muslims, in general, black is associated with banners thought to be raised by the Prophet in battles and wars with infidels (Euben, 2017). Therefore, the flag is a multimodal intertextual reference used to legitimize 'IS's' as a caliphate. Changes to the intertextual references through translation, however, can transform 'IS's' source narratives as will be shown in the next analysis chapters.

The last tool of analysis follows what Abbott (2002, p.23) calls 'framing narratives' to refer to the 'containing narrative' in which another narrative is embedded. Rather than using this tool through the lenses of narratology as Abbott does, I employ it through the prism of a socio-narrative approach as implemented by Harding (2009; 2012). As such, I use this tool to help me investigate how smaller stories, whether personal or local, are embedded within broader more abstract master narratives, absorbing their particular actors and details (Baker, 2006; Harding, 2012).

Prior to discussing how data is collected and analyzed, it is important to account for some methodological difficulties that I have faced while conducting this research. These are outlined in the following section.

#### 4. Methodological issues

In the process of collecting my data, I encountered a number of problems that need to be acknowledged here. First, collecting data that contains disturbing and graphic content such as the images distributed by 'IS' is emotionally distressing. I had to approach such images with a degree of caution, and a sensible attitude to the heavy emotional impact they can cause. In the case of the execution videos, for example, I avoided watching the actual beheading or execution scene unless it contained details crucial for the analysis. Second, in addition to the emotional aspect, I had to consider whether it would be ethically appropriate and accepted to approach such disturbing images in my analysis. Therefore, I set myself some ethical frameworks for dealing with extremely graphic visuals. The number of disturbing images included in my analysis chapters was kept to a minimum, using them only when it was extremely necessary and useful for the analysis. This was particularly the case with the first case study where they constituted the main STs in the chapter. Moreover, in some cases in the executions and cultural destruction videos chapters, it was not possible to avoid showing some of these images. In this case, the least graphic ones were selected.

Third, dealing with texts which were circulated online by 'IS' but were quickly erased from their source settings meant that, in most cases, I had to resort to alternative websites where 'IS's' texts were reproduced in new copies. This was not an easy task, especially when these copies were edited. I had to make sure that only unedited copies were collected. Last but not least, recognizing what was a source text was not always a straightforward process. An example is related to a Speicher massacre survivor's personal narrative that appeared in both English and Arabic in two news articles by *Reuters*, making it harder to decide which one was used by the translating Iranian and Qatari agencies as their ST. This was primarily because both the two English and Arabic texts were simultaneously published by *Reuters*. However, the selective appropriation of what to include

or to exclude in the two TTs informed me to figure out which text was relied on by the aforementioned two translating media agencies. In particular, the missing information in the Arabic text that obviously did not appear in the two TTs by *Al Alam News Channel* and *Al-Sharq* newspaper suggested that it was the Arabic news article rather than the English which was used as their ST. Based on educated speculation, I chose to treat *Reuters's* Arabic text as the ST in this case.

## 5. Data collection and organization

As stated in the introduction, the total number of texts used in the case study chapters is 205. There are 22 'IS's' source texts, including images with captions, articles by 'IS's' propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*, videos, and other online written texts (See figure 1). TTs of 'IS's' texts, on the other hand, are 136 in total. These were largely news articles from a wide variety of western, Arabic, Iranian and—where applicable—Kurdish media. By western media, I mainly refer to well-known British and American newspapers and other influential western media agencies, including *The Independent* (centre-left), *The Telegraph* (centre-right), *The Guardian* (centre-left), *Mirror* (left-wing newspaper), *Mail Online* (right-wing), *Express* (right-wing), *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* (both known for their liberal political affiliation) *Time* (centre-right American newspaper), as well as The British Broadcasting Corporation *BBC News*, and *BBC Arabic* (known for its impartiality), *Reuters* (a world-leading international media agency), *France24* (a French State-owned international news agency with no biased political affiliation), *RT International* (a Russian State-owned TV channel and media agency known for being pro-Russia, pro-Iran, and pro-Syrian regime), and sometimes the American Cable News Network *CNN* (known for being centre). By Arabic media, on the other hand, I mainly refer to *Al Arabiya* and *Al Arabiya English*, *Aljazeera Arabic*, and *Aljazeera English*<sup>10</sup> (refer to section three), as well as some Arabic newspapers, such Saudi newspaper, *Elaph*, and London-based pan-Arab newspaper, *Alhayat*, which despite being

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<sup>10</sup> For background to *Al Arabiya* and *Al Jazeera*, refer to Lahlali (2011).

known for its west and Saudi bias, provides a platform for a variety of opinions. Arabic media also includes local Iraqi media agencies, such as *Alahadnews*, a Shia media agency owned by the hardline Iranian-backed armed group of ‘Aṣaib ‘ahl al ḥaq’ [League of Righteous People], *Almada Press* (independent media agency established in 2003), *Alsumaria News* ( a very popular independent TV channel established in 2004), *Alqurtasnes* (a digital news agency describing itself as ‘anti-sectarian’, ‘Iraqi-biased’, and ‘open to various opinions’),<sup>11</sup> and *Alghad Press* (a digital media outlet claiming ‘impartiality’ and ‘credibility’ in its coverage,<sup>12</sup> *Almasalah* (a news digital media platform, which describes itself as ‘professional’ and ‘impartial’),<sup>13</sup> which are used particularly in the first and last case studies chapters. By Iranian and Kurdish media, I exclusively refer to the Tehran-based Iranian *Al Alam News Channel* (Arabic page), *Al Alam News Network* (English page), and Iraqi Kurdistan-based *Rudaw Arabic* and *Rudaw English* (known for being pro-Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)).<sup>14</sup>

Based on my re-conceptualization of translation, it was possible to view Arabic texts as target texts even if the ST was in Arabic. There were also translations by other actors, including MEMRI and the Iraqi Translation Project, as well as English subtitles for an ‘IS’s’ video on Ezidi girls (See figure 2). There are other media texts specific to each chapter. These are indicated in the following sections and are listed in full in the appendix.

The selection of all of my sources was dictated by a number of criteria. First, since the internet has been the main medium through which ‘IS’s’ texts and narratives are disseminated, all data: whether ‘IS’s’ texts or media texts are collected from the internet. However, as mentioned earlier, ‘IS’s’ texts, were mostly accessed via a third party republishing ‘IS’s’ material posted by

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.alqurtasnews.com/profile>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.alghadpress.com/About>.

<sup>13</sup> <http://almasalah.com/ar/page/15/من-نحن>

<sup>14</sup> When referring to both, I merely use *Al Alam* and *Rudaw*.

‘IS’-affiliated accounts that were continuously blocked. Therefore, ‘IS’s’ texts were collected from a variety of websites including, Jihadology, YouTube, Justpaste (a Poland-based website that allows all users to publish on the site), LeakSource, and Heavy.com. Second, to examine a multiplicity of narratives in a variety of media sources, every effort has been made to collect multiple TTs and other news articles by various western, Arabic (including local Iraqi media), Iranian, and—where necessary—Kurdish media sources. However, as is the case with any research, limitation in the choice of media agencies is inevitable. Moreover, my main focus is on narratives rather than on media agencies *per se*, meaning that I tend to group similar examples from media agencies that produce similar narratives whilst highlighting the ones which establish totally distinct ones.

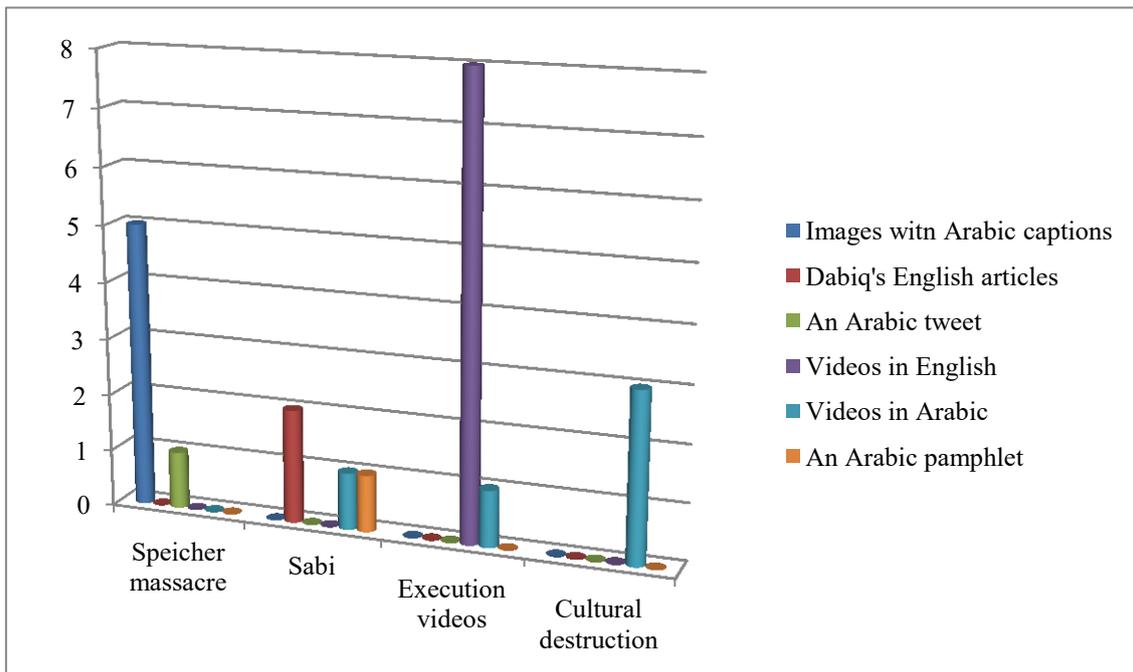
The rationale for collecting data from these sources relates to the importance of studying the re-narration and/or translation of ‘IS’s’ narratives by different media agencies with diverse backgrounds, which are established in countries deeply involved in the conflict with the group. Although it first emerged as a local threat, ‘IS’ soon became a global security issue with regional and international implications. ‘IS’ boasts about being the enemy of everyone who does not support the group or believe in its ideology, and never misses an opportunity to reiterate this fact. Such analysis will allow for a comparison of the the narration and/or translation of ‘IS’s’ narratives or, indeed the lack of them, in the aforementioned media sources and what the ramifications are. It was, for instance, not possible to be consistent in the choice of the above media sources across the four chapters for two main reasons. Firstly, it was not always possible to find TTs of the STs in question each time by the same media agency or newspaper. Very limited media reports exist on the Speicher massacre in contrast to some executions videos. Secondly, some local or independent media websites were sometimes blocked or had otherwise not been available before.

This may explain why there was a higher number of English texts than Arabic texts (See figure 2). Another reason is related to the fact that Arabic, Iranian and Kurdish media also publish in English on the English pages of their websites. The peculiarity of each case study adds another reason to the discrepancy in number between Arabic and English texts. The execution videos, particularly the beheadings of western victims, received wider attention in western media than they did in Arabic or Iraqi media, for instance. The cultural destruction videos, on the other hand, received more attention in the latter.

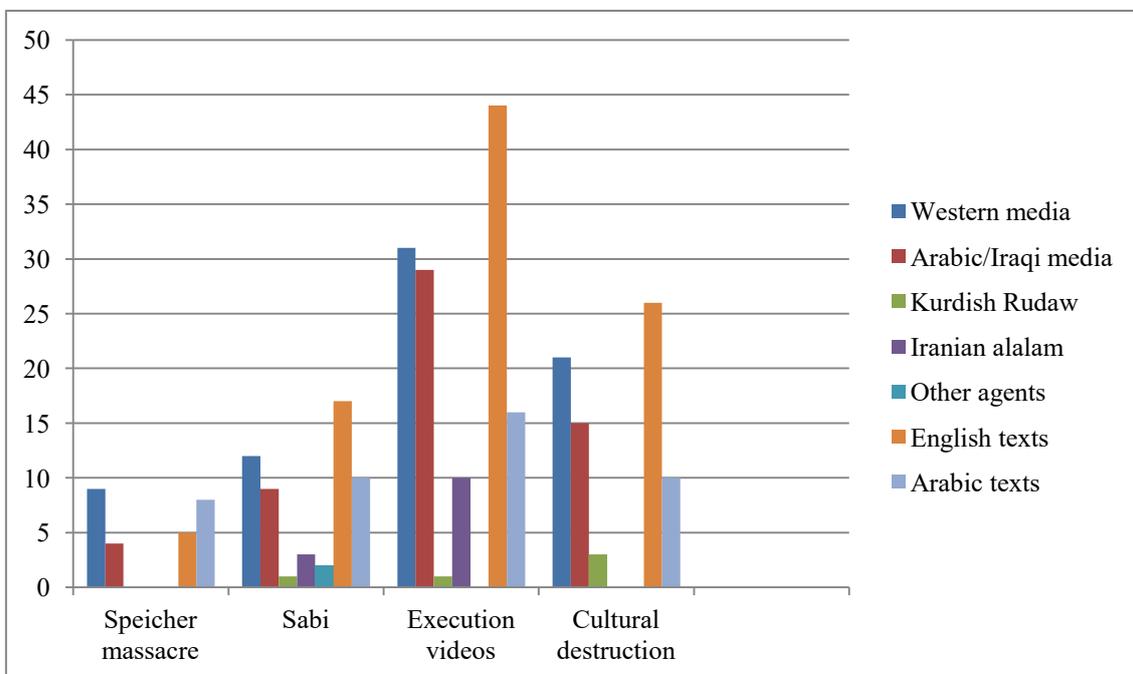
Third, to examine changes in narratives, each case study explores narrative(s) when they first unfold as soon as an event takes place, tracing their development over time. As mentioned earlier, the time frame differs according to the specificity of the case study under analysis. Fourth, the language: English and/or Arabic, was another main criterion that guided my data collection (an exception was Murad's interview with *BBC Persian*).

My methods for collecting these texts were as follows. First, I used the keyword search in the websites of the aforementioned media agencies and newspapers. Second, I also used the Google search engine whilst setting a specific time frame to enable a search for further sources.

**Figure 1: 'IS's' source texts across the four analysis chapters.**



**Figure 2: Number, source, and language of TTs of 'IS's' texts.**



The following sub-section outlines the main data used. A full list of all target texts is offered in the appendix.

### 5.1 First case study: Speicher massacre

The first case study chapter consists of two parts. The first part is devoted to analyzing ‘IS’s’ texts and narratives on the massacre and how these were translated into various news websites. The second part, on the other hand, examines the personal stories of survivors that started to emerge two months following the atrocity. For the first part, the dataset consists of a tweet in Arabic by a now-blocked ‘IS’-affiliated Twitter account, as well as five images out of the 60 images disseminated either through Twitter or Justpaste. Since these accounts were quickly closed, only copies of both the tweet and images could be accessed via other media sites using the Google Images search engine. A version of the tweet could be obtained from *Middle East Eye* (Middle East Eye, 2014). The five images were taken from three different websites: hrwf-ca.org (Humboldt Republican Women, 2014), pri.org (Public Radio International, 2014), and Usdailynewsblog5 (Usdailynewsblog5, 2014).

Two criteria dictated the selection of these texts in particular. First, they were the texts cited or translated the most by the media. Second, as previously mentioned, while still available through Google Images, the majority of ‘IS’s’ 55 images were edited versions of the source images, with no accompanying titles, captions, or logo. I analyzed seven TTs in English published by western media, one Arabic TT published by *BBC Arabic*, and four Arabic TTs published by Iraqi digital media and by pan-Arab newspaper, *Alhayat*. In addition to the set of primary texts, there is a secondary data set of a number of visual and written texts that are helpful in providing a contextual background for the atrocity.

Data for the second part of this chapter consists of three STs where two survivors were interviewed. These texts are a news article with a video interview by *The New York Times* and one Arabic text by *Reuters*. I also examined the English text by *Reuters* to compare it with the Arabic text. Translations for these texts are four Arabic texts by Iraqi *Alqurtasnews*, *Alahednews*, *Al Alam News Channel*, and Qatari newspaper, *Al-Sharq*.

## 5.2 Second case study: The captivity and enslavement of Ezidi girls (*sabi*)

In addition to ‘IS’s’ four STs and their TTs, there are two other data sets that consist of 19 texts representing other narratives competing with ‘IS’s’ texts, written by various actors, including Iraqi Ezidi female MP, Vian Dhakil, and ‘IS’s’ female survivor, Nadia Murad (See the appendix). ‘IS’s’ STs are as follows:

1. An article by *Dabiq* titled *The revival of slavery before the Hour* published in the fourth issue of the propaganda online magazine (‘The revival of slavery before the Hour’, 2014).
2. A video circulated on social media networks by ‘IS’ individuals showing ‘IS’ members mockingly and informally chatting about how they should trade Ezidi women. It was accessed through western mass media, including *The Mirror* (Richards, 2015) and *Mail Online* (Webb and Rahman, 2014), and through YouTube.
3. An online pamphlet in the Arabic language titled *سؤال وجواب في السبي والرقاب* [Questions and answers on *sabi* and slavery] (Justpaste, 2014).
4. Another English article in *Dabiq* published in the ninth issue and titled *Slaves-girls or prostitutes?* (Al-Muhajira, 2015).

I analyzed 27 English and Arabic TTs of the above source texts published by western and Arabic newspapers and media agencies. Other TTs included an English translation by MEMRI of ‘IS’s’ pamphlet and an Arabic translation by the Iraqi Translation Project of an English text by *The New York Times*. Another supporting document used to contextualize the case study was collected from the Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and Human Rights Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights.

### **5.3 Third case study: The execution videos**

The corpus of data for the third case study consists of nine execution videos produced by ‘IS’ which could not be traced to their source settings. Rather, they were collected from alternative sites (see Table 1). The nine videos are viewed as source texts. The number one criterion in this choice is having access to complete versions of the source videos. There are three other criteria for choosing these videos. The first criterion is applicable to the first four videos which were temporally and relationally connected to one another. In other words, these videos were released in successive chronological order, in similar settings, showing the next victim at the end of each video. They were like a series of interdependent and interrelated episodes that needed to be examined altogether to draw logical conclusions. The second criterion, on the other hand, concerns all the chosen videos in general, and the last four, in particular. It is about the multiplicity of the victims and their diverse backgrounds. Contrary to other research primarily focusing on British and American victims (see for example, Friis, 2015; 2017, Eubon, 2017), my study examines videos showing the execution of Japanese journalists, a Jordanian pilot, Egyptian Copts, and Iraqi Kurds (See table 1). The last criterion is about the diversity of the video settings in Syria, Lybia, and Iraq, which mirrors ‘IS’s’ aim to expand its control over new areas.

**Table 1: ‘IS’s’ nine execution videos**

<b>The videos</b>	<b>Titles in English</b>	<b>Date released</b>	<b>Website(s) where videos were reproduced and accessed</b>	<b>Date of publication on the website(s)</b>	<b>New title(s)</b>
1. Beheading of US journalist James Foley	A message to America	August 19, 2014	LeakSource	19/08/2014	(GRAPHIC VIDEO): Islamic State beheads American journalist James Foley (LeakSource, 2014e).
2. Beheading of US journalist Steven Sotloff	Second message to America	September 2, 2014	LeakSource	02/09/2014	(GRAPHIC VIDEO): Islamic State beheads American journalist Steven Soloff (LeakSource, 2014d).
3. Beheading of British aid worker David Haines	A Message to allies of America	September 13, 2014	LeakSource	13/09/2014	(GRAPHIC VIDEO): Islamic State Beheads British Aid Worker David Haines (LeakSource, 2014c).
4. Beheading of British aid worker Alan Henning	Another message to America and its	October 10, 2014	LeakSource	10/03/2014	(GRAPHIC VIDEO) Islamic State Beheads British Aid Worker Alan Henning (LeakSource,

	allies				2014b).
5. Beheading of US hospital worker Peter Kassig	Although the disbelievers dislike it	November 6, 2014	LeakSource.	16/11/2014	(GRAPHIC VIDEO) Islamic State Claims Beheading of Former U.S. Army Ranger/Aid Worker Peter Kassig (LeakSource, 2014a).
6. Beheading of Japanese Journalist, Kenji Goto	A message to the government of Japan	January 31, 2015	LeakSource	31/01/2015	(GRAPHIC VIDEO) Islamic State beheads Japanese journalist Kenji Goto (LeakSource, 2015b).
7. Immolation of Jordanian pilot Mouath al-Kasaesbeh	Healing the believers' chests	February 3, 2015	LeakSource	03/02/2015	Jordanian pilot Kaseasbeh burned alive by Islamic State; Jordan executes 'IS' requested prisoner Rishawi in response (LeakSource, 2015a).
8. Beheading of 21 Coptic Egyptians	A message signed with blood to the nation of the Cross	February 15, 2015	Shoebat.com	February 15, 2015	WATCH THE VIDEO: ISIS Savages Beheading 21 Coptic Christians (Shoebat, 2015).
9. Beheading of Peshmerga fighters	The reality of the US raid	October 30, 2015	Heavy.com	30/10/2015	WATCH: ISIS Beheads 4 Peshmerga Fighters (Prince, 2015).

The total number of TTs of the nine videos is 60 (44 in English and 16 in Arabic) collected from a variety of western, Arabic (mainly the English and Arabic pages of *Aljazeera* and *Al Arabiya*, Iranian *Al Alam* in both English and Arabic, and one text from *Rudaw English* (See figure 2). 14 news articles (7 in English and 6 in Arabic) were collected from media agencies under analysis to see how narratives changed in the following day's reporting. Like the previous case studies, there is an additional contextual dataset collected from *Dabiq* magazine, as well as a number of news articles by these media agencies. (See the appendix).

#### 5.4 Fourth case study chapter: Cultural destruction in Iraq

The data set for the last case study chapter consists of three 'IS' videos on the cultural destruction of artefacts in Iraq. The first video was released in February 2015. The last two videos, on the other hand, were released in April 2015. All the three videos were collected from *The Internet Archive* (see table 2). The three videos were selected since they were the only moving visual releases by the group on the destruction of artefacts and antiquities in Iraq.

**Table 2: Timeline for the cultural destruction videos**

Title of video In Arabic	Translation	Date released	Setting
الامرون بالمعروف والناهون عن المنكر (1)	Promoters of virtue and preventers of vice (1)	February 26, 2014	The Internet Archive
تحطيم الاوثان	Destruction of Idols	April 4, 2015	The Internet Archive
الامرون بالمعروف والناهون عن المنكر (3)	Promoters of virtue and preventers of vice (3)	April 11, 2015	The Internet Archive

I have examined 36 TTs of the above three videos (26 in English and 10 in Arabic) collected from western, Arabic (particularly Iraqi), and Iranian media (Refer to Figure 2 and the appendix).

Moreover, another set of four news articles (three in Arabic and one in English) were collected from the next day's reporting by *The New Arab*, *Al Alam News Channel*, *Al Arabiya*, and *Rudaw*. The secondary set of data for this chapter is: (1) 'IS's' *Dabiq*, (2) Another 'IS' video considered by the group as the second in the series of cultural destruction. However, rather than cultural destruction, it was about the prohibition of cigarettes. The video was collected from *The Internet Archive*.

## **6. Conclusions**

The chapter has addressed the specific approaches and methods adopted to analyze data. It has also discussed the methodological difficulties encountered during the process of collecting my research data. Using a multiple case-study approach, I chose four case studies for their significance in understanding 'IS', as well as for being catalyst for both Iraqi and global contexts. They are chronologically ordered and qualitatively analyzed using an (ante) narrative multimodal approach inspired by the three theories discussed in the previous chapter. I particularly seek to find out how narratives, whether fragmented or complete, transform as they are translated across the three resources of discourses, genres, and modes. To examine such transformation, a number of tools are employed drawing on Boje (2001), Baker (2006), Kress (2009), Abbott (2002) and Harding (2009). The tools are: selective appropriation, labelling, orchestration of modes, intertextuality, and framing narratives.

A number of criteria have dictated the selection of the 205 texts that vary across the four chapters, including their setting (internet), the time and the language in which they are released. Viewing translation as a movement of meaning across the three semantic resources irrespective of the language boundaries, the study has been distinct from other research in the field of translation studies in both the multiplicity of data used and the way they are organized.

In addition to 'IS's' texts and their TTs by the media, in both the first and second cases, I also investigate personal and other counter-narratives to 'IS' in their STs and TTs. Moreover, I examine other related news articles in all the analysis chapters. Additionally, each chapter has another set of secondary data to provide a contextual background for each case study. Studying the context in which narratives evolve impacts both the multiplicity and transformation of narratives and further contributes to academic work on narratives.

## CHAPTER FOUR SPEICHER MASSACRE

### 1. Introduction

This chapter investigates the first case study of the thesis related to the atrocity committed by ‘IS’ against hundreds of Iraqi Shia Muslim newly-recruited soldiers on June 12, 2014. Although ‘IS’ used multimodal texts: images supported with captions and headlines, and tweets, it failed to establish a fully coherent narrative. I argue that there are two interpretations for such a failure. First, ‘IS’s’ reliance on Twitter as the main medium to disseminate the images of the mass killing primarily resulted in a fragmented story. This is particularly because the ‘IS’-affiliated Twitter account through which the images were released was rapidly blocked, shattering the sequence of the images released. Second, unlike subsequent atrocities where detailed articles were published via *Dabiq* to elaborate more on the particular event in question, ‘IS’ did not publish any such article on Speicher. This, in turn, indicates that ‘IS’ may not have yet possessed the necessary tools for a well-coordinated media machine. Although a full narrative was not presented by ‘IS’, the images and their captions helped to produce individual elements of a narrative: religious, ethnic and political.

The fragmentation in ‘IS’s’ story left a vacuum for the mass media to fill through the process of translation both in the broad and narrow senses of the word. To what extent did translation contribute to transforming ‘IS’s’ antenarrative into a complete coherent narrative or to conjuring up a variety of narratives? Did translation contribute to supporting, challenging or perhaps misinterpreting ‘IS’s’ elements of its antenarrative? And did this vary among western, Iraqi and/or Arabic media resulting in conflicting narratives instead? These are the core questions addressed in the first part of this chapter.

The second part of this chapter, on the other hand, is devoted to the personal narratives of the massacre's survivors which emerged two months following the atrocity. The main questions addressed in this part are the following. In what ways did translation cause a personal narrative to fragment? How did this eventually hurdle the acceptance and dominance of one narrative over the other, meaning that no single narrative would eventually prevail? To answer these questions, two competing personal narratives of two survivors are examined in both their STs in *The New York Times* and *Reuters*; respectively (Arango, 2014; Salman, 2014a; 2014b), and in their TTs in a number of Iraqi, Arabic and Iranian news websites (Alqurtasnews, 2014; Almada Newspaper, 2014; Al Alam News Channel, 2014e; Al-Sharq, 2014).

## 2. Background: A timeline for the narrative

According to an initial report released by Human Rights Watch on June 22, 2014, 160-190 men were killed by the Islamic State on June 12, 2014. Analyzing photographs and satellite imagery, the report identified two locations near the Water Palace (formerly Saddam Hussein's palace) in Tikrit, north of Baghdad. A now-blocked 'IS'-affiliated Twitter account called Wilayat Salah al-din first tweeted on the mass killing in the Arabic language on June 12 (Human Rights Watch, 2014c). The tweet claimed that 'IS' had executed 1,700 Shia army soldiers out of 2500, promising to report on the remaining soldiers in following tweets (see Figure three). It was claimed in some news articles published by Iraqi media and by *France 24* that there was another tweet revealing that the rest were Sunnis who were set free by 'IS's' leader, Abū Baker al-Baghdadi, when they repented for their work with the Iraqi government. On the Arabic page of *France 24* (France24, 2014), for instance, it was claimed that the tweet read as follows: تمت تصفية 1700 عنصر رافضي في الجيش من اصل 2500 اما [1700] الباقي فقد تم العفو عنهم بناء على أوامر (زعيم داعش) أمير المؤمنين ابي بكر البغدادي بالعفو عن مرتدي اهل السنة، Rafidhi soldiers were liquidated out of 2500. The rest were released following the orders of Daesh's leader, *Amir al Muaminin* (Emir of believers) Abū Bakr al-Baghdadi, to forgive the Sunni apostates.

On the same day, a short video was uploaded to several ‘IS’ supporters’ YouTube accounts. In one of these accounts, it was titled *افراد الجيش الصفوي الذين كانوا في قاعدة سبايكر تكريت بيد الدولة الاسلامية* [The Safavid army members who were inside Speicher military base were captured by Islamic State] (Abū Uof, 2014). The video which showed the victims being marched off on one of the main roads of Tikrit seemed to be filmed by a local passer-by, commenting in Iraqi dialect while filming: ‘هذولة قاعدة سبايكر... اكبر عملية اسر في التاريخ...يمكن رح يرجعوهم لاهلهم ببغداد’ [These are from Speicher military base... It’s the biggest act of captivity...But they might return them to their families in Baghdad] (*ibid*).

On June 14, 60 images of the atrocity supported with titles and captions were disseminated through the same Twitter account in addition to the website, JustPaste. In some of these images, masked ‘IS’ members appeared to load the captured victims in their civilian clothes onto trucks, before shooting them in a field near Saddam Hussein’s old palaces, as local eyewitnesses revealed at that time. According to Iraqi officials and Human Rights Watch’s officers, the images could not be immediately verified. Some officials in the Iraqi government even denied the incident altogether at the time these images were released (Radhi, 2014). In mid-July 2015, ‘IS’ released a video titled: *Upon the Prophetic Methodology* which was mostly around the declaration of the caliphate and what religious methodology was to be implemented. The last part of the video showed further images from the massacre, emphasizing that those people were killed since they were ‘apostates’ targeting the Sunnis (Loveluck, 2015a). In an updated report by Human Rights Watch released in September 2014, the mass killing was confirmed. The report analyzed satellite imagery and the video released by ‘IS’ and interviewed a survivor of the massacre. It concluded that the death toll rose to 560-770, identifying three additional locations in Tikrit where people were killed (Human Rights Watch, 2014b).

Despite its ghastly details on both humanitarian and socio-political levels, the Speicher massacre never received the required attention especially as far as online reporting was concerned with limited coverage in both size and content, notably during the first days that followed the mass killing. Some Arabic news websites did not report on the incident until the first Human Rights Watch report was released. It was not until August 2014 when survivors started to talk to local media about their horrible experience that both Arabic and international media began to pay attention to their stories.

The atrocity and its narratives then almost disappeared from media reporting until the excavation processes of the mass graves of survivors took place in the spring of the following year (Mustafa, 2014). The narrative eventually reappeared in international mass media following 'IS's' first detailed video released in July 2015 which revealed new footage of the atrocity (Loveluck, 2015a). The new video was released at the end of the holy month of Ramadan nearer the Muslimcelebration of Eid which also marked the anniversary of the first official video released by the group. It also came amid military defeats, especially in Tikrit where the young soldiers were executed. The video featured a speaker narrating the story of the massacre and linking it with recent claimed military 'achievements'. This was integrated with new images and new horrific scenes of the atrocity that were not shown before. Most significantly, the narrator emphasized that the massacre was not committed for ethnic or sectarian reasons as some claimed, but as a 'religious duty'against '*kufars*' [infidels]. This was further highlighted in a couple of scenes depicting 'IS' militants showing no mercy to some soldiers who swore to 'convert' to its sect, simply because they were '*kufars*' who were not allowed a second chance. Re-narrating the source narrative by 'IS' a year after the massacre amid continuing battles on the ground with Iraqi forces and Shia paramilitary units could be interpreted as a way to challenge and to re-write 'IS's' recent past. It should be noted that the video could be accessed through a number of Iraqi and Arabic media

websites which republished it in full at the time it was released (See Albayan, 2015, for instance) before YouTube deleted it together with the associated accounts that posted it online. How did the narrative first unfold in 2014? The answer is in the following section.

### **3. A fragmented narrative**

Although the 60 images released by 'IS' were ordered in a particular sequence, which could be interpreted as an attempt to produce a full narrative of what had happened to the Iraqi trainees, the sequence of the images was broken when the account releasing those images was promptly blocked. As a result, we were left with pieces of a narrative randomly 'floating' on the internet. The pieces turned into antenarratives. I recall how people in Iraq reacted to these antenarratives on social media with shock, uncertainty, and confusion. They were asking who those in the stills were, where and when they were killed and what the reasons were. In other words, they were speculating on the storylines for each image.

Contrary to later atrocities where detailed interpretations or justifications were published by the group via *Dabiq* as the following chapters will reveal, no similar detailed account appeared on Speicher, surrounding the carnage with more vagueness. This could mean that 'IS' did not think of establishing a coherent narrative in the initial days following the atrocity. However, it is important to mention here that in *Dabiq*, 'IS' used derogatory labels to refer to Shia Muslims, such as 'filthy Safawis' ('The return of the Khalifa', 2014, p.46). In the same issue, it was made clear that only those who followed 'IS' were in 'the camp of Islam and faith', whereas others were in 'the camp of disbelief and hypocrisy' (*ibid*, p.5). Despite the fact that such references were not directly related to the Speicher case, they still reflected 'IS's' narrative of opposing and attacking any different 'other' or anyone who did not support the group. This was proven later when 'IS' executed Sunni tribes

and civilians in a number of places including, al Alam, Tikrit and al Dur, among many others (Human Rights Watch, 2015a).

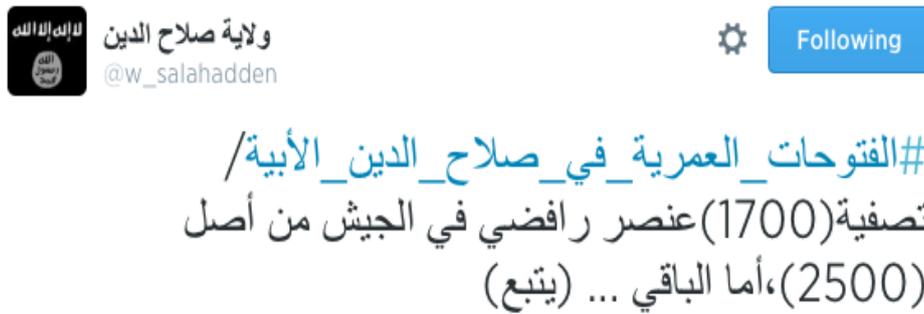
Choosing visual texts to capture the killing of the young soldiers, 'IS' did not just want to intimidate and provoke, but also for the atrocity itself to be remembered—at least by its 'enemy': Shias. In her compelling book on the relationship between pain and photography, Susan Sontag (2004, p.67) writes, 'Photographs lay down routes of reference, and serve as totems of causes: sentiment is more likely to crystallize around a photograph than around a verbal slogan... To remember is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture' (Sontag, 2004, pp.76-70). The tweet, images, and captions still produced elements of a narrative. These elements can be explored using the analysis tools discussed in the previous chapter. First, there was the religious element activated by the use of certain labels and phrases of intertextual relations to religious texts, particularly *hadith* (a saying of the Prophet Muhammed). 'IS' never used Shia to describe Shia Muslims in any of its releases. Instead, it used either 'Safavids' or 'Persians' (see figure 4) and/or '*rafitha/rawifith*' (See figures 3 and 6). *Rawafith* or *rafitha*<sup>15</sup>, literally meaning rejecters, is an anti-shiism religiously-laden label that has been increasingly used not just by 'IS', but also by some Sunni and/or Salafi extremists since 2003 as a frame for a 'sectarian dogma', excluding Shia from Muslims (Haddad, 2013; Haddad, 2014, p. 13)<sup>16</sup>. Inspired by the founder of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abū Musab Al Zarqawi, the anti-shiism sentiment was both ideologically and politically-driven (Bunzel, 2015).

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15 Likewise, there are other derogatory terms in Shia discourse used to label Sunnis, including the term '*nasibi*' (defamers of the House of the Prophet—i.e. the line of Shi'a Imams) (Haddad, 2011, pp.191-92). In this regard, Siegel (2015, p.6) stresses that 'For Sunnis and Shia alike, derogatory terms elucidate long-standing historical tensions and serve to paint one another as blasphemous infidels'.

16 According to Haddad (2013), the term has started to be used as a 'badge of honour' by some Shia group and activists in an attempt to subvert its pejorative use.

Figure 3: Tweet by an 'IS'-affiliated Twitter account (Middleeast Eye, 2014).



[#Battles of Umer [in reference to the second caliph, Umer Bin al Khattab, in brave Salah al-Din/ the liquidation of (1,700) *rafithi* in the army out of (2,500). As for the rest... to be continued].

Figure 4: Image 1 (Humboldt Republican Women, 2014).



[Hundreds of Safavid army herds running battles in civilian clothes arrested].

According to Siegel (2015, p.5), the term *rawafith* has been one of other derogative terms widely used on social media platforms to disparage Shias at large. It describes 'Twelver Shias, the

largest of the Shia sects, and implies that they have rejected ‘true’ Islam as they allegedly do not recognize Abū Bakr, the first caliph, and his successors as having been legitimate rulers after the death of the Prophet Muhammad’ (Siegel, 2015, p.5).

The religious element was also encapsulated in the term in the word *Ghazwa* [battle or attack] used in the title. *Ghazwa* is deeply connected with battles led by Prophet Muhammed, and therefore, was employed to show that ‘IS’s’ act was legitimate. Another significant example of the religious element was found in the following phrase: ‘الجزاء من جنس العمل’ [The reward is dictated by one’s deeds] (see Figure 5). The phrase is a vivid example of intertextuality. It refers to what has come to be known as a religious principle inferred from religious texts and interpretations, including a quote by the Salafist scholar Ibn Qayyim (Al-Baghdadi, 2012; Islamweb, 2007). Similar to the use of *Ghazwa*, the quote is used here to paint the atrocity with legitimacy, implying that the cadets deserved to be killed as a punishment for the Iraqi government’s deeds.

**Figure 5: Image 2 (Usdailynewsblog5, 2015).**



[The reward is dictated by one’s deed].

The second element was an ethnic one clearly revealed by the use of the term Safavid, i.e., Persians as an anti-Shiism notion based on ethnic and national grounds, Haddad (2011) argues. Safavid or *safawi* mainly ‘recalls the Safavid dynasty that ruled Persia from 1501 to 1736 [and] is used to depict Shia ties to Iran’ (Siegel, 2015, p.5).

The last element was a political one. It was reflected in a number of examples. It was first indicated in the reference made to Abdul-Rahman al Bilawi, ‘IS’s’ leader’s chief of staff, killed by an Iraqi force raid in May 2014 (Knights, 2013), indicating that by killing its army member, ‘IS’ was trying to get revenge on the Iraqi government. Without knowing this contextual information, it was hard to identify the causal employment feature in the captions. Other similar examples that reflected a politically anti-Shia sentiment could be found in a number of captions (see Figures 3, 4, and 6). However, unless a link is made to previous episodes of past events and narratives, the picture remains blurred. In 2012, for instance, ‘IS’s’ speaker Abū Muhammad al‘Adnani made reference to Zarqawi’s lectures on how to treat Shias, urging Iraqi Sunnis to fight the Shia government it described as ‘*rafithi*’ and ‘Safavid’ (Bunzel, 2015).

**Figure 6: Image 3 (Public Radio International, 2014).**



[This is the destiny of *rawafith* whom Noori pushed to fight the Sunni (Noori is a reference to former Iraqi Prime Minister Noori al-Maliki)].

The last political element was conjured up by portraying the victims in the images as really defenceless, powerless and at the mercy of ‘IS’s’ men whilst describing them in the captions as ‘فارين’ [escapees] (See figure 4), ‘نعام’ [ostriches] (See figure 7) and ‘قطعان’ [herds] (See figure 4). Such ‘orchestration’ of the two modes (images and their captions) invokes a narrative of ‘cowardice’ and ‘surrender’. Beyond the different semantic connotations such dehumanizing labels manifest, they are ideologically-laden as Steuter and Wills (2009) point out. In their words, ‘Classification, symbolization, and dehumanization are followed by organization, polarization, identification, extermination and finally denial of the genocidal act’ (Steuter and Wills, 2009, p.19). ‘IS’ was classifying its enemy as inferior to humans to validate its act.

**Figure 7: Images 4 and 5 (Humboldt Republican Women, 2014).**



[Apostates going to their death hole] [Lions with the weak and ostriches in wars].

The fact that the narrative on this atrocity unfolded as a scattered and unstructured story had left a space for the mass and other local or independent media to fill in the attempt to produce a coherent narrative. In so doing, however, they either highlighted or challenged the above elements or otherwise misrepresented others, triggering instead a number of new (ante) narratives as investigated in the following section.

#### **4. Translating ‘IS’s’ antenarrative**

The early online reporting on the Speicher massacre began on mid-June, a day after ‘IS’s’ images were posted on one of its Twitter accounts. Some media agencies such as *France 24* (France24, 2014) and Iraqi media (e.g., *Alhurra*, 2014) reported the following day when the US denounced the mass killing. However, as stated earlier, the online reporting was very limited, especially in comparison to later atrocities committed by the group.

The movement of ‘IS’s’ local antenarrative from social media to mass media significantly transformed it in a variety of ways. Stories, whether complete or fragmented, disseminated through social media completely differ from narratives disseminated through mass media platforms for the unique generic features each of these possess (Lomborg, 2011; Lomborg, 2014). The former is characterized as being more personal, intimate, and local. The latter, on the other hand, is more general, public, and subject to the broader ideologies of the translating agency or institution. Unlike social media, stories circulated by the mass media are widely recontextualized as they are mediated to conform to the institutional practices of the media (Couldry, 2008; Agha, 2011; Catenaccio et al, 2011). Mediation describes the wider context in which stories are situated (Agha, 2011, p.165). For instance, relying on statements by some Iraqi officials who were sceptical that the mass killing had actually taken place, *The New York Times*, used ‘claim’ in its news article title in reference to ‘IS’

(Norland and Rubinjune, 2014). *Alhayat* newspaper, on the other hand, directly indicated in its title that officials doubted the mass killing (Alhayat, 2014).

Therefore, once the local antenarrative moved from social media to wider national media agencies, significant shifts occurred. First, there was variation among the media websites under analysis as to whether to foreground or suppress 'IS's' images. *Time* and *Sky News*, for instance, though they did not use any of the images in the body of the texts; showed some in a video report highlighted on top of their articles just below the headline (Baker, 2014; Kiley, 2014). With the exception of *France24*, others including *BBC News*, *The New York Times*, *The Telegraph* and *Express* (BBC News, 2014c; Norland and Rubinjune, 2014; Spencer, 2014c; Engineer, 2014) displayed one or two images whilst removing their title, logo, and captions. The latter were instead replaced with informative captions perhaps in an attempt not to amplify the group propaganda machine (See Figure 8). In both cases, however, it could be argued that western media did not have a strategy to challenge 'IS's' visuality at this early stage. Even when the visuals were flagged as 'propaganda' as in *The New York Times* (Norland and Rubinjune, 2014) and *The Independent* (Cockburn, 2014) as a means to counter 'IS', that was arguably insufficient. The selected images themselves were not blurred; capturing the victims at their death moment in many instances. They were put either on top of news articles or at their centres. That was in contrast to later images, particularly those related to the execution videos (Williams, 2016). In this respect, Williams argues, 'Unwittingly, the Western media has become an accomplice to Islamic State's aims, [yet] as the threat from Islamic State has evolved, so have media practices in dealing with the group' (Williams, 2016, pp.6-7).

With respect to the three Iraqi media websites, as well as *Alhayat* newspaper, they similarly varied in their response to the graphic visuals. *Alhurra* chose to suppress all the images (*Alhurra*,

2014). In a similar manner, independent Iraqi agency, *Almasalah*, undermined them by selecting one edited resized image, placing it on the left side of the article (*Almasalah*, 2014). Contrastively, Shia Iraqi website, *Alahednews*, reproduced the slideshow of the images from *Euronews*, putting it in a central position in the article (*Alahednews*, 2014). For *Alahednews* which represents the ‘enemy’ ‘IS’ targeted, the visual projection of ‘IS’s’ crime could have been a political tool for igniting a response to ‘IS’. *Alhayat*, although it refrained from republishing the massacre images, chose a leading image where ‘IS’ militants were holding their black flag and boasting of their strength (See Figure 9). The use of such an image was problematic as it helped to portray ‘IS’ as a winning force.

Second, ‘IS’ was differently characterized. While western media used either ‘Islamic State for Iraq and Sham’ as in *The New York Times*, *The Telegraph*, and *Time* (Nordland and Rubin 2014; Spencer, 2014c; Baker, 2014) or ‘Islamic State for the Levant’ as in *BBC News* and *Express* (*BBC News*, 2014c; Engineer, 2014).<sup>17</sup> The use of Levant, in particular, denotes a larger geographical area than merely Syria, compromising Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Palestine (Siniver and Lucas, 2016). Iraqi media continued to use the acronym ‘Daesh’, adding ‘ارهابي’ [terrorist] to highlight ‘IS’ as the ‘enemy’ that had to be confronted, fought, and defeated (*Alahednews*, 2014; *Almaslah*, 2014).

In western media, ‘IS’ was also described as ‘Al-Qaeda-linked’ in *Express* or as ‘al-Qaeda-inspired’ as in *The Telegraph* (Engineer, 2014; Spencer, 2014c). The two, especially the former, were not accurate descriptions. As Bunzel (2015) states, at the time the group was founded, al-Qaeda was not consulted and relations between the two remained stressed until they officially separated in February 2014 when al-Qaeda released a statement asserting that ‘it was “not responsible for [the Islamic State’s] actions’ (Bunzel, 2015, p.65). The reason, however, according

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<sup>17</sup> Both *BBC News* and *Express* used ISIS as an acronym for the Islamic State for Iraq and the Levant.

to Bunzel (2015), as to why the two groups were often merged together was due to the lack of attention paid to 'IS' prior to its capture of Mosul in June 2014.

Furthermore, two rather controversial terms were sometimes used to describe 'IS's' militants. These were: 'jihadists' and 'rebels' as in *The Telegraph* and *Express*; respectively. The former persisted in western and some Arabic media agencies as well. Although 'jihadists' has come to be associated with Salafism as both a religious and political movement often connected with the use of arms (Bunzel, 2015), its meaning is not restricted to violence. Rather, it may signify a spiritual struggle. In this respect, Heck (2004, p.4) argues, 'The term in its various forms signifies a divine test (Q 47:31) to distinguish the lukewarm believers (Q 4:95; 9:81, 86) from those who desire God's satisfaction (Q 60:1) and strive body and soul in His way (Q 9:41, 88)'. Calling 'IS's' militants 'rebels', on the other hand, placed the group within a purely political context as an anti-government movement. Thus, unlike terrorists, 'rebel' has positive connotations that confer legitimacy to 'IS'.

Third, there was uncertainty about who the victims were. For instance, they were described as 'volunteers from Shia militia or from the government's elite Golden Brigade' as in *BBC News*, *BBC Arabic* and *Alhayat* (BBC News, 2014c; BBC Arabic, 2014b, Alhayat, 2014) or as 'army deserters' as in *The Telegraph* (Spencer, 2014c). Each of these labels evoked different narratives as shall be investigated. *France24* as well as Iraqi media, on the other hand, characterized the victims as 'طلاب' 'القوة الجوية' [air force cadets] (France24, 2014, Alhurra, 2014). It would be later revealed by survivors that they were particularly newly recruited members in the army who had not yet been trained to carry or use weapons. Beyond the shifts in the visuals and in the labels used to identify both 'IS' and the victims, the previous three elements activated by 'IS's' antenarrative were either boosted or undermined in media discourses, sometimes uncritically, merging with a multiplicity of narratives as analyzed below.

**Figure 8: An edited still of one of ‘IS’s’ 60 images posted on *The New York Times* website.**



‘An image posted by militants from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria appears to show insurgents leading away captured Iraqi soldiers. The militants’ claims of mass execution could not be independently verified’ (Nordland and Rubin, 2014).

**Figure 9: The leading image of *Alhayat*’s article (*Alhayat*, 2014).**



#### **4.1 The sectarian vs. the non-sectarian narrative**

Most, if not all, of western mass media, invoked a societal narrative of sectarianism that was too abstract, depriving ‘IS’s’ story of its more local details. In other words, the religious element

represented by the term *rawafith* explained earlier has never been translated in any of the TTs under analysis. Even when a caption which included these words was chosen to be translated into English, it was replaced by ‘Shia’ as in *The Telegraph*: ‘This is the fate that awaits the Shia sent by Nouri to fight the Sunnis,’ one says, a reference to Iraq’s Shia prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki’ (Spencer, 2014c) which was the target translation for the caption in figure 6. The cultural specificity of the term *rawafith* that would not resonate with a western target audience may explain the choice to replace it with ‘Shia’. The same can be said about the label, صفوي *safawi* [Safavid], which was absent in most of the news articles with the exception of *Time* and *Sky News* (Baker, 2014; Kiley, 2014). In the case of *Time*, the term was translated into Safavid with an added explanation: ‘liquidation of the herds of the Safavid army, a reference to Iranian dynasty, and by extension, Shi’ites’ (Baker, 2014). In *Sky News*, on the other hand, the term ‘Persian’ was used instead to refer to the victims (Kiley, 2014).

The religiously, ethnically, and politically-driven sectarian elements were embedded within the framework of the more abstract narrative of sectarianism either in the title as in *The Independent: Iraq Crisis: ISIS Forces Kill Dozens of Soldiers in ‘mass Execution’ as Country Slides Towards Sectarian War* (Cockburn, 2014), or in the body of the text. In the latter case, phrases such as ‘sectarian slaughter’ by *The New York Times* (Nordland and Rubin, 2014), or ‘Iraq’s war of sectarian vengeance’ by *The Telegraph* (Spencer, 2014c) were used to describe the mass killing. Although it is fair to say that reducing particular incidents to these terms especially in the media context can most often be inevitable, it can still be misleading (Haddad, 2010). To use Haddad’s words, ‘Without taking into account contextual factors and the salience of sectarian identity at a given time, terms such as ‘sectarianism’, ‘sectarian identity’ and ‘sectarian’ lose meaning’ (Haddad, 2010, p.6). This was furthered by the use of the labels ‘Shia’ and ‘Sunnis’ which are in themselves

such broad terms that they leave the plurality in the two sects unnoticed (*ibid*). This was more evident in the use of Sunni to describe ‘IS’ which can trigger a largely sectarian sentiment.

A different way of conjuring up a narrative of sectarianism was done by situating ‘IS’s’ fragmented story within the context of the 2006-07 sectarian violence in Iraq, foreseeing a similar future following this atrocity: ‘Iraq is on the brink of a civil war’, maintained *Express* (Engineer, 2014). Though the evolving context for both incidents was different, the former targeted a religious shrine for venerated Imams for Shia, while the latter targeted Shia soldiers, both can equally represent ‘traumas’—to use Volkan’s (1998) notion—of a sectarian tragedy, which eventually heightened the larger narrative of sectarianism. When reactivated, a ‘chosen trauma’ serves to ‘describe the collective memory of a calamity [that] once befell a group, indicating that their grief and lamentation are endless (Volkan, 1998, pp.36-48).

In addition to the religious and ethnic elements of sectarianism, the political element of the sectarian narrative was intensified by describing the victims as ‘volunteers from Shia militia or from the government’s elite Golden Brigade’ as in *BBC News* (BBC News, 2014c). In other words, it was implied that the tension between Sunnis and Shias was politically-driven more than anything else. Similarly, whilst suppressing the visual texts, captions, and tweets, *Alhayat* in what seemed to be a literal translation of the *BBC News* article, foregrounded the political element of the sectarian narrative by mentioning that those who were killed were Shia militia militants; whereas army members were released (Alhayat, 2014):

أكدت مصادر من الجماعات المسلحة في شمال العراق... ان مقاتلي "داعش" قسموا المعتقلين من داخل القاعدة الى قسمين الاول هو الجنود النظاميين وهؤلاء صدر العفو عنهم من قيادات التنظيم, بينما تم اعدام القسم الاخر والذي ضم المتطوعين من الميليشيات الشيعية وعناصر الفرقة الذهبية للقوات الخاصة.

[Sources from militant groups in Northern Iraq stress that... “Daesh” fighters had divided the prisoners into two groups. The first included the regular army members who were released by the group leaders. The second included those

executed. They were volunteers from Shia militias and Golden Brigade members].

It is worth noting here that while *Alhayat* cited *The New York Times* as the main source of information, the translated paragraph suggests that it also translated from *BBC News* without acknowledging it.

In a striking contrast to western mass media, Iraqi media invoked a non-sectarian narrative. Media in Iraq generally took a cautious approach in their reporting on the massacre. The situation was already alarming when a security vacuum was caused by the withdrawal of the Iraqi army from 'IS'-controlled territories. To bring in a sectarian narrative in media reporting would traumatize and intimidate Iraqis who still recalled the tragedy of the 2006-07 sectarian conflict. Shia media *Alahednews*<sup>18</sup> never referred to the victims as Shia in its online reporting except in the allegedly literal quote of one of the images captions that used the word *rawafith*. Instead, it used '1700 عراقي' [1700 Iraqis] in the title and 'العراقيين الشبان العزل' [unarmed Iraqi young men] in the body of the text. Similarly, 'Sunni' was not used except as it appeared in 'IS's' tweet. This was emphasized by using Daesh to refer to 'IS'. By reducing the sectarian narrative, *Alahednews* was attempting to associate the massacre with the notion of humanitarianism by using phrases such as: 'جرائم ضد الأنسانية' [crimes against humanity] or 'ضد الشعب العراقي' [against the Iraqi people] and 'ابادة جماعية ضد الانسانية' [genocide against humanity] (Alahednews, 2014). Humanitarianism is seen here as a notion rather than a narrative for its abstractedness, lacking the four defining features of a narrative. In other words, there was no storyline that humanitarianism could invoke, especially at this stage before the emergence of the personal stories of the survivors. It is worth mentioning here that the label 'طائفي' [sectarian] was only used once in the last sentence of the article which was a translation of a

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<sup>18</sup> *Alahednews* mentioned a long quote, claiming that it was one of the image captions. Since it was not possible to verify the authenticity of this caption, it was not cited here in full.

statement by the UN, calling the world to intervene to prevent a sectarian fight 'اقتتال طائفي', according to *Alahednews* (Alahednews, 2014). By doing so, *Alahednews* was maximizing the size of the conflict beyond the locality of the sectarian narrative to draw the attention of the world to the threat posed by 'IS'.

Iraqi independent digital media website, *Almasalah*, likewise attempted to challenge the sectarian element in 'IS's' antenarrative using the notion of humanitarianism, yet in a slightly different way. In particular, it used the term to describe the Iraqi army as opposed to the more 'bloody' terrorist group 'IS'. This was clear in its title: *مجزرة طلاب الكلية الجوية: دموية "داعش" وانسانية* [Massacre of air force cadets: The bloodiness of 'Daesh' and the humanity of the army] (Almasalah, 2014). Moreover, it attempted to reveal that the most terrorist and Takfiri members of 'IS' were Saudis, describing them as: 'دواعش سعوديون' [Saudi *Daeshis*]. Although *Almasalah* referred to the sectarian sentiment in 'IS's' antenarrative in the body of its text, it tried to subvert it by maintaining that 'Daesh' targets all Iraqis (*ibid*): *ولا يفرق التنظيم الارهابي في القتل بين الطوائف والمذاهب*, [The terrorist group kills people of any religious or ethnic background. While it justifies killing 'Shias' for being 'infidels', it sees killing 'Sunnis'-proven to be 'apostates'- as also justifiable]. *Almasalah*, which describes itself as 'independent, objective, and professional', was aiming to frame 'IS' as an outsider group, rather than a local one, which threatened Iraqis alike.

#### **4.2 The political narratives of revenge, fall of Speicher military base to 'IS', rebellion, and surrender**

The fragmented political elements in 'IS's' tweet, images, and captions were configured together to establish the causal emplotment feature of the narrative on one hand, or to construct a new narrative, on the other. An example of the first instance was related to the title of the images, which

was vaguely named after an ‘IS’s’ top commander killed in an Iraqi raid prior to the fall of Mosul in June 2014. *The Independent*, for instance, described the purpose of the massacre as ‘revenge for the loss of one of its commanders’ (Cockburn, 2014). This was also repeated in a target caption attached to one of the 60 images, ‘the massacre was in revenge for the death of an ISIS commander, Abdul-Rahman al-Bilawy’ (Cockburn, 2014). *The Telegraph* did the same whilst also translating another caption that appeared to support that political narrative of revenge: ‘This is the fate that awaits the Shia sent by Nori to fight the Sunnis’ (Spencer, 2014c).

The ambiguity surrounding the incident as well as the gap left by not exposing the location of the mass killing made the various media agencies rely on personal accounts of eyewitness and the videos made by locals mentioned earlier in the chapter to suggest that the victims were executed at Speicher base, as in *The Telegraph*, for instance (Spencer, 2014c). Based on these accounts, a narrative of ‘IS’s’ capture of the military base itself was invoked in *The Telegraph*, *Express*, *France24*, *Alhayat*, *Alahadnews*, and *Alhurra*.

In *The Telegraph*, for instance, it was claimed that ‘according to a local farmer, Speicher base is controlled by ISIS from which the men seem to have been transported to Saddam Hussein’s old palace’ (Spencer, 2014c). Similarly, *Express* maintained, ‘The disturbing images were posted online by ISIS and were allegedly taken after the Sunni extremist group took control of an army base in Tikrit’ (Engineer, 2014). In *Alhurra* (Alhurra, 2014), the same narrative was repeated: ‘... أعلن تنظيم داعش... أنه قام بتصفية 1700 شيعي عراقي من طلبة كلية القوة الجوية في قاعدة سبايكر في تكريت بعدما وقعت هذه القاعدة ...’ [‘...Daesh group announced that...it had liquidated 1700 Shia Iraqi air force cadets at Speicher military base in Tikrit following its fall together with most of the city to the group].

It is also worth mentioning here that by calling the base a ‘former US military base’ as in *The Telegraph* and *The New York Times* (Spencer, 2014c; Nordland and Rubin, 2014), past political

narratives related to the 2003-US invasion of Iraq and its aftermath were recalled: '[Speicher military base] was handed over to the Iraqi military and now, thanks to the army's peremptory flight last week, it is in the hands of the jihadists and their Baathist allies, whom the Americans once fought' (Spencer, 2014c). Both newspapers blamed the US for the course of events post-2003.

Moreover, due to scepticism over who 'IS's' militants were, *BBC News* and *BBC Arabic*, as well as *Alhayat*, claimed that the group included militants, previous members of Baath party, and some Sunni tribesmen who joined 'IS'. On its Arabic page, for example, *BBC Arabic* mentioned: 'وانضم إلى التنظيم ضباط سابقون من حزب البعث كانوا موالين لصدام بالاضافة إلى جماعات مسلحة ساخطة، وقبائل تريد أن تنطرح بالمالكي' [The group was joined by ex-officers of the Baath Party who were pro-Saddam Hussein, as well as resentful militant groups and tribes who aim to overthrow al-Maliki] (BBC Arabic, 2014b). By doing so, a political narrative of rebellion or revolution against the Iraqi government was activated. This narrative was also visually intensified by incorporating a video into the top and the centre of the text where a masked Iraqi man claiming to be part of a rebel group not connected to 'IS' was speaking (*ibid*): 'هذه الثورة ليست ثورة داعش هذه الثورة هي ثورة الشعب العراقي' [This revolution is not Daesh's, it is the Iraqi people's revolution].

Emphasizing the captions where labels such as 'fled', 'surrender', 'ostriches' and 'herds' were used contributed to activating a narrative of cowardice that would later be either defied or supported by the personal stories of the survivors. Examples could be found in *Time*, *The New York Times*, and *Sky News*: 'trying to flee the battles in civilian clothing... Liquidation of the herds of the Safavid army... They are lions with the weak, but in wars, they are ostriches' (Baker, 2014); 'The liquidation of the Shiites who ran away from their military bases' (Nordland and Rubin, 2014); 'These are Persian sheep ready for slaughter' (Kiley, 2014). *The Telegraph*, on the other hand, used similar labels in the subheading of its article, referring to the victims as 'army deserters' 'herded' by

‘IS’: ‘The shocking pictures show ISIS herding purported army deserters and members of Shia groups together in Tikrit before being shot’ (Spencer, 2014c). *BBC News* reiterated that the victims had ‘surrendered’ to ‘IS’ whilst referring to one of the early videos shot by local residents: ‘Video footage, apparently filmed earlier, shows many hundreds of men being marched off, with the voice on tape saying they had surrendered at the Speicher base’ (BBC News, 2014b). The same could be found in *BBC Arabic*.

Having discussed how ‘IS’s’ fragmented elements fused with different narratives through the process of translation by the media, I now investigate how these narratives changed when survivors related their personal narratives two months later.

## **5. Personal stories of the survivors**

Two months following the atrocity, survivors were interviewed by local Iraqi media, and then by western media. Most importantly, through these stories, it became clear that the victims were trainees who just joined the army shortly before Mosul fell to ‘IS’ (Arango, 2014). Like any type of narrative, personal stories do not just simply represent a sequence of events; but most significantly, they construct them (Somers and Gibson 1994; Baker, 2006). As Baker (2006, p.39) explains, individuals not only tell their stories but they choose to ‘act in them, implying that individuals can also represent powerful agents who choose to ‘reframe’ their stories whenever the setting changes, including the agency, the audience, the time and the location, etc’.

However, personal stories are far from being unmediated. According to Bal (2009, p.9), ‘the narrator does not relate continually...[s/he] temporarily transfers this function to one of the actors’. In this process, these stories can be shaped differently according to the various discourses, genres, and modes through which they are configured. Similar to any type of narrative, a personal story is not necessarily a coherently configured one. Personal stories can be fragmented, not fully coherent,

incomprehensive, narrated and communicated in varying degrees, which mirrors the richness of both our individual experiences and the events that we go through (Harding, 2009). In other words, while mediated, these stories are ‘co-authored’ to conform to larger shared narratives (*ibid*).

Translation has the power to instil coherence to a fragmented story or adversely fragment an already coherent one. Whilst in the case of the latter, a loss of meaning becomes inevitable, resulting in a reductionist version of the source story, in the former, the fragmented story acquires meaningfulness and unity, albeit in an artificial manner. In their study on transcripts of testimonies given before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, Boc and Mpolweni-Zantsi (2006) describe how some information was removed from or added to the original testimonies to transform these into transcripts for the TRC website. To make similar stories meaningful, Andrews (2014) suggests, we are urged by the desire to inject them with a ‘wholeness’ that they do not originally have. But such ‘coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life’, in White’s words, is nothing but ‘imaginary’ (White, 1987, p.24). Sirmijn, Devlieger, and Loots (2008) likewise contend that individuals will always attempt to link their ideas in a coherent structure, but such structure will remain ‘artificial’, and the idea of a whole narrative is, therefore, a mere ‘illusion’ (Sermijn, Devlieger, and Loots, 2008, p.7).

In what follows, an investigation of how the personal stories of the Speicher massacre survivors changed in news translations by Iraqi, Iranian, and Qatari media is presented. In this respect, two personal narratives of two survivors are selected for analysis. There are two reasons for this selection. First, the two stories interestingly conflicted in some of their details, i.e., they represented two competing narratives. Second, each survivor was interviewed by the following western media agency: *The New York Times* (Arango, 2014) and *Reuters* (Salman, 2014a; Salman, 2014b); respectively. These two source texts were both translated by a number of media agencies.

The first narrative was picked up for translation by two Iraqi news websites: *Almada Newspaper* and *Alqurtasnews* (Almada Newspaper, 2014; *Alqurtasnews*, 2014). The second narrative was translated by Iranian *Al Alam News Channel* and Qatari newspaper, *Al-Sharq* (Al Alam News Channel, 2014e; Al-Sharq, 2014).

### **5.1 First survivor's narrative**

The first personal narrative was told by Ali Hussein Kadhim interviewed and reported on by *The New York Times* on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2014. Kadhim told his story in a video combined with the written text of a news article on *The New York Times* website. Kadhim also narrated his story to Human Rights Watch and therefore his story appeared in the second report by the organization released in September 2014 (Human Rights Watch, 2014b).

In an over eight-minute-long video, Kadhim described his experience as one of the newly-recruited soldiers arrested by 'IS'. He narrated how by pretending to be dead he was able to flee 'IS', with some Sunni locals in al Alam district near Tikrit helping him to escape to Erbil, north of Iraq, before finally reaching his hometown in Diwaniya, south of Iraq (Arango, 2014). The video, however, was not just an interview, but rather represented a sort of short documentary film where Kadhim's narration was integrated with still and moving images from the atrocity, as well as from his life with his family in the south. Moreover, the narration was related not only by Kadhim, but also by a female commentator, and was then translated into English subtitles. The main motive of the video was emotive, eliciting sympathy with the survivor who was accordingly labelled as 'the only known survivor' (Arango, 2014) despite the fact that a number of other survivors were simultaneously telling their stories to international media agencies. The emotive message was highlighted in a number of instances in the video. For example, when Kadhim recalled how he thought about his children the moment he was caught (See Figure 10), or when he started talking

about a man called Abbas he met at the river bank just after escaping 'IS'. Severely injured, the man was too vulnerable to escape with Kadhim, and only asked for his story to be told to the people (Arango, 2014).

Speaking in an Iraqi southern dialect, Kadhim appeared to comment on images released by 'IS' or on videos posted earlier by 'IS's' supporters providing an explanation on what was exactly going on. Kadhim evoked a narrative of victimhood not just of 'IS' but of the whole political and economic system in Iraq when he said: 'اني متزوج وعندي طفلين ماعدنا اي شي لايعمل لا عنده راتب لاعدنا ارض [ I am married and I have two children. We don't have anything. No work, no salary, no land. So where could I go? So I joined the army] (Arango, 2014).

Interestingly, Kadhim did not use an explicit reference to 'IS' in a number of instances in the video. Instead, he referred to 'IS' using the pronoun 'they'. For example, he explained how the soldiers were tricked by 'them':

جوناهمة الدور بيهم حوالي مية شخص. هم كالولنا مالنا علاقة بيكم وهاي ورح نوصلكم لاهلكم. قشمرونا كلولنا مالنا علاقة بيكم الى ان فرقونا بسيارات وسيطرو علينا الدور بعد محد يكدر يسوي شي.

About 100 people approached us. They said: "We're not here for you. We'll take you to your families." But they tricked us. They separated us into cars and took control. Nobody could do anything (Arango, 2014).

By doing so, it can be argued that Kadhim was trying to avoid explicitly saying who the perpetrators were. This became more specific in the written text. Kadhim was also trying to undermine the sectarian element in 'IS's' fragmented story when later in the video, he described the Sunni residents who eventually helped him to escape saying: 'السنة ناس شرفاء' [Sunnis are honourable people]. This, however, was undermined in the English subtitles when the general reference made

to the Sunnis was turned into a more specific reference describing those who helped him, in particular: ‘They [Sunni residents] were honourable Sunnis’ (*ibid*).<sup>19</sup>

Most significantly, by describing how the soldiers in the base decided to leave it wearing civilian clothes, a point which was amplified by the commentator saying: ‘the soldiers tried to flee’, a narrative of ‘cowardice and fear’ was activated: *توقعنا راح يجون. كلها المعنويات صفر محد عنده معنويات... [We expected them to come for us. Our morale was very low. We changed into civilian clothes before leaving the base] (ibid)*

**Figure 10: A still from the video showing Kadhim with his children in his home in Diwaniya, south of Iraq (Arango, 2014).**



In the written text of the news article characterized by different affordances that allowed for a longer and more detailed description, more information was provided. For instance, the text highlighted how ‘IS’ separated the recruits according to sects, killing only the Shias: ‘The militants,

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<sup>19</sup> They here referred to Sunni residents since it followed the commentator’s phrase: ‘Alone and starving, he had no choice but to beg the Sunni residents for help’ (Arango, 2014).

with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, separated the men by sect. The Sunnis were allowed to repent for their service to the government. The Shiites were marked for death and lined up in groups' (Arango, 2014). Unlike in the video where 'IS' was replaced by 'they' in most instances by Kadhim, it was mentioned in the written text that the perpetrators included 'IS's' militants as well as other Sunnis from Saddam Hussein's tribes: 'Mr. Kadhim and some other witnesses say that Sunni Arabs in Tikrit, including some from Mr. Hussein's tribe, assisted the militants in the mass killing, a charge that the families of the victims have made in the local news media' (*ibid*). The religious motive behind killing the soldiers was stressed when Kadhim maintained that the militants described the soldiers as 'infidel Shia' while shooting them: 'A few moments later, Mr. Kadhim said, one of the killers walked among the bodies and saw that one man who had been shot was still breathing. "Just let him suffer," another militant said. "He's an infidel Shia. Let him suffer. Let him bleed' (Arango, 2014).

In the article, it also became apparent that the trainees only decided to flee the base following their commanders' escape: 'The American-trained army officers fled, as they had in Mosul, Mr. Kadhim said. "We were alone," he said. "So we decided to flee because there were no officers' (Arango, 2014). Labelling the Iraqi officers as 'American-trained' was a means to hold the Americans accountable for the current chaos in Iraq and to highlight both its failure and the defeat of the Iraqi army. This was more emphasized when the Iraqi army, in general, was referred to as a 'force created and trained by the United States at a cost of billions of dollars' (Arango, 2014).

More details were also provided on who helped Kadhim to escape:

His next stop on the journey was the town of Al Alam, at the home of a Sunni tribal sheikh, Khamis al-Jubouri, who had been operating an underground railroad-like system for Shiite soldiers on the run from ISIS... Mr. Kadhim stayed with the sheikh for almost two weeks before they judged it safe enough to try to travel to Erbil, in the autonomous Kurdish region, a trip in

which they passed through several ISIS checkpoints, Mr. Kadhim said (Arango, 2014).

Moving Kadhim's story from a short video to the written text also meant that his story became embedded within local socio-political narratives. It was, for instance, embedded within the local narratives of 1991's intifada against Saddam Hussein when Shias from the south were largely oppressed by the former president. It was also framed within the local narrative of sectarian violence of 2006-2007, among other societal or political narratives. The latter was even more privileged as the help Kadhim received from local Sunnis was labelled as 'unexpected kindnesses'. Moreover, labelling the tension between the Sunnis and Shias in Iraq as part of a 'culture of revenge', implying that this would be an ongoing conflict difficult to be resolved helped to elaborate on the narrative of sectarian violence that would not come to an end at least in the near future (Arango, 2014). Therefore, although Kadhim attempted to negotiate the sectarian tension in his narrative, this tension was heightened by the mediation of the media.

### **5.1.1 Translating Kadhim's narrative**

As was previously mentioned, Kadhim's narrative was translated into two news articles by Iraqi *Almada Newspaper* and *Alqurtasnews*. Interestingly, the two media agencies varied in their choice of whether to translate from the video or the news article as their ST or from both. While *Almada Newspaper* used the written text as its ST, *Alqurtasnews* mainly relied on the video but also translated a few points from the news article (Almada Newspaper, 2014; Alqurtasnews, 2014).

Though its translation was a very literal rendering of the source news article, *Almada Newspaper* deleted the last section titled: 'culture of revenge'- which, as previously discussed, talked about the difficulty to overcome the sectarian barrier in the Iraqi communities. Being an independent Iraqi media agency that has endeavoured since its foundation in 2003 to bridge the

sectarian and ethnic gaps by highlighting the Iraqi national identity, *Almada Newspaper* seemed reluctant to foreground the sectarian narrative and therefore sought to undermine it in the translation.

The other independent Iraqi news digital publication, *Alqurtasnews*, also literally translated Kadhim's personal story as was narrated in the video into a written news text, transforming Kadhim's local Iraqi dialect into standard Arabic, and partially translating and/or misrepresenting the source text in some instances. One example was when Kadhim was looking at a scene from 'IS's' video showing the recruits cursing former Iraqi prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, and commenting: 'طلبوا منهم يشتمون الحكومة, هذولة خطية يكولولهم احجوا كولو المالكي ورطكم' [They made them curse the government. Poor they! They are being told to say [prime minister] Maliki is responsible for this]. While Kadhim was explaining how the victims were actually coerced into saying this, the translation reframed this by removing 'طلبوا منهم' [They [militants] asked the victims], and 'يكولولهم' [they were are being told], presenting the soldiers as the ones who seemed to be willingly cursing the government: 'مضيفا ان الجنود لم يتوقفوا عن شتم الحكومة ورئيس الوزراء نوري المالكي' [Kadhim added that the soldiers kept cursing the government and prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki]. Although the phrase 'لم يكن لهم ذنب' [It was not their fault] was added at the end of the sentence, it was still very unclear that the victims were forced by the militants to curse the government and the former Iraqi PM.

Moreover, by trying to paraphrase some information mentioned in both the video and the text, Kadhim's narrative was significantly reduced in the translation. A significant instance was when *Alqurtasnews* undermined Kadhim's narration on the help he received from the Sheikh of a Sunni tribe in al Alam district by labelling those who helped him as 'some strangers' as the following excerpt shows (Alqurtasnews, 2014):

وأضاف انه تنقل بمساعدة غرباء عبر اربع مواقع. وبعد ثلاثة اسابيع من المذبحة, تمكن أخيرا من الوصول الى عائلته, و"حين رأنتي بدأت بالبكاء وهربت مني".

[He added that he moved to four different locations with the help of some strangers. Three weeks following the slaughter, he finally reached his family. "Upon seeing me, my daughter burst into tears and ran away"].

The excerpt is a paraphrase of what was mentioned in both the video and the article. In neither of which was the label 'strangers' used. As a result, Kadhim's attempt to ease the conflict by undermining the sectarian narrative in his personal narration was made absent in the translation.

## 5.2 Second survivor's narrative

Mohamed Hamoud, 24, was another Iraqi newly recruited soldier who survived the massacre. He spoke to *Reuters* telling his personal story on September 6, 2014. His narrative separately appeared in a short video interview and in a news article on both the English and Arabic pages of *Reuters'* website. Since the video was very short with a voice-over translation that made it difficult to clearly understand Hamoud's words, it is excluded from the analysis.<sup>20</sup>

The English and Arabic news articles were almost identical. However, there were still a number of differences worthy of mention because these differences guided me to speculate that it was the Arabic rather than the English text that was used as a source by both *Al Alam News Channel* and *Al-Sharq* as was discussed in chapter three. The first was related to labelling Islamic State members as 'متشددو' [extremist] in the title of the Arabic text: *قصة ناج من مذبحة ارتكبتها متشددو الدولة*: *الإسلامية* [A story of a survivor of a massacre committed by extremists of Islamic State], which was

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth mentioning that the setting of the interview was meaningful in itself. Depicting Hamoud sitting among his family and relatives in his house in the south whilst his mother sat next to him with tears filling her eyes and his relatives talked to each other about the involvement of some of the military commanders in the unfortunate fate of the soldiers was not just meant to elicit sympathy with the survivor but also to highlight an important political narrative. That narrative was related to the commanders' betrayal of the soldiers as would become clearer in the written text (Reuters, 2014).

absent in the English title: *The story of an Islamic State massacre survivor* (Salman, 2014a; Salman, 2014b). Second, although Hamoud's reference to the involvement of Sunni tribes in the massacre was maintained in both texts, unlike the Arabic text, the English one described in detail how a local woman approached 'IS' militants, encouraging them to kill the 'Shia dogs': 'She told a tribesman 'I know you are a good man, good Muslim and courageous. I ask you not to leave all these Shi'ite dogs alive. Kill them all' and she kissed his head' (Salman, 2014b). In contrast, the Arabic text omitted this quotation altogether and summarized it into the following sentence:

راى حمود امرأة تقترب وكان يامل ان توبخ المسلحين الذين يحرسونهم لكنها شجعتهم وامتدحتهم  
وطلبت منهم الا يتركوا ايا منهم على قيد الحياة.

[Hamoud saw a woman approaching. He hoped that she would scorn the militants. But instead, she encouraged and praised them, asking them not to leave anyone alive].

Although the Arabic text is the source text here, I will still use excerpts from the English text that were identical to the Arabic version when elaborating on some points in my analysis.

The core element in Hamoud's narrative was that of betrayal of army officials who, according to the survivor, ordered the soldiers to leave the base. Similar narratives were told by other survivors, including Thaer Abdul Karim, who told the lawmakers at a special parliament session held in early September that the soldiers in the base were ordered by a military commander to abandon the camp on June 12 and hand over their arms (Heine, 2014). In the same session, the soldiers' families accused the government of selling their sons, accordingly (*ibid*).

Below are two excerpts of Hamoud's narrative in both the Arabic and English texts:

ويتحدث حمود بصعوبة بسبب الضرب الذي تعرض له ويكشف النقاب عن الخيانة التي تعرض لها  
من قاداته في قاعدة سبايكر الذين وعدوا المجندين امثاله بخروج امن بعد استيلاء تنظيم الدولة  
الاسلامية على تكريت ولكن اقتادوهم الى حتفهم.

وقال حمود "باعونا وخدعونا" مضيفا انه وزملاءه لم يكن معهم بنادق او مسدسات وانهم وجدوا مخزن الاسلحة بمعسكر سبايكر خاويا.

Having trouble breathing from his beatings, Hamoud spoke of betrayal by his own commanders at Speicher, who he said had promised recruits like himself safe passage out when Islamic State took Tikrit yet allowed them to be led to their deaths.

“We were sold and deceived,” Hamoud said. Hamoud and his comrades had no rifles or pistols and found that the armory at Speicher was empty (Salman, 2014a; Salman, 2014b).

Although Hamoud was also helped by a Sunni resident, he could escape ‘IS’ in the first place by pretending to be a Sunni Bedouin:

وحيث جاء دوره ليوقف ويقتاد إلى حتفه تحدث بلهجة بدوية وطلب ان يشرب. وحين سئل عن مسقط رأسه كذب وادعى انه ينتمي لقبيلة شمر الكبيرة التي تضم سنة وشيعة وقال انه من بلدة بيجي وهي بلدة سنية في الشمال. حينئذ اخرج من الصف بينما اصطحب اخوه واقاربه للخارج حيث تجري عمليات الاعدام.

When it was Hamoud’s turn to stand up and be taken for execution, he spoke in a Bedouin accent. He said: “Can you spare a drink of water.” They asked where he was from. He lied and told them he belonged to the Shummar, a large tribe with both Sunnis and Shi’ites, and came from Baiji, a Sunni town to the north. They removed him from the line as his brother and cousins were taken outside where other soldiers had been executed (Salman, 2014a; Salman, 2014b).

Hamoud also revealed that one of those who interrogated him was Saudi:

وبدا رجل يتحدث بلهجة سعودية التحقيق مع حمود والآخرين للتأكد من انهم سنة بالفعل. وادعى حمود أن اسمه بندر لاختفاء حقيقة انه شيعي.

A man with a Saudi accent began to interrogate Hamoud and the others to determine if they were really Sunni Muslims. Hamoud had invented a fake name for himself, Bandar, to hide from them that he was a Shi’ite (*ibid*).

In both the English and Arabic texts, Hamoud's narrative was also framed with the master socio-political narrative of Sunni marginalization by a mainly Shia-led government: 'Hatred for the Shi'ite-led government and the army had grown in neglected Sunni majority cities like Tikrit' (Salman, 2014b). The narrative of 'Sunni marginalization' often prevails in both political debates and media discourses in relation to the Iraqi context. However, as Al-Aqeedi describes, it is 'misleading; Sunnis have full representation in the Iraqi parliament and government based on a functional, if non-ideal, democracy that did not deny Sunnis their voting rights'. This narrative rather implies that Sunnis were isolated in Iraq due to 'an underlying lack of a coherent Sunni political identity' (Al-Aqeedi, 2017).

### **5.2.1 Translating Hamoud's narrative**

The two media agencies that translated Hamoud's narrative were *Al Alam News Channel* and *Al-Sharq* newspaper. Interestingly, although *Reuters*' texts did not combine any images, both media agencies used two distinct leading images for their news articles. While Iranian *Al Alam News Channel* used an edited version of one of 'IS's' 60 images of the massacre, blurring the victims' faces, Qatari *Al-Sharq* used a completely unrelated image (See figure 11). Using Google Images, it was found out that this image was (re)produced by a variety of Iraqi and Arabic news websites reporting on 'IS'. However, the image was also used in relation to another totally different story. In particular, it was related to a number of Shia followers of a Shia cleric called Mahmmod Al-Hasani Al-Sarkhi arrested by the Iraqi government following clashes between them and the Iraqi security forces in the holy city of Karbala in the south (Alghadeer, 2014). Obviously, it is difficult to tell what the 'source' image represented or what its 'source' setting was where it was first published.

*Al Alam News Channel* and *Al-Sharq* newspaper represent two distinct agencies shaped by completely different ethnic, religious, and national ideologies and are therefore very distinct to one

another. The Iranian *Al Alam News Channel* represents a Shia non-Arab agency. *Al-Sharq*, on the other hand, represents a Sunni Arab agency. This has resulted in significant shifts in their TTs. As noted by Lahlali (2011, p.154) ideologies of media agencies ‘are often projected into the texts through the careful selection of lexis and representation of discourses’.

A long history of hostility between Iran and Saudi Arabia, for instance, might justify highlighting the Saudi identity of one of ‘IS’s’ militants in the title of *Al Alam News Channel*’s text and in the main image caption. As such, a narrative of a Saudi involvement with ‘IS’ was invoked: *ناجى من مجزرة سبايكر: المحقق مع الضحايا كانت لهجته سعودية* [A Speicher survivor: A member with a Saudi dialect interrogates victims]. Furthermore, *Al Alam News Channel* used the label *اتباع* ‘اهل البيت’ [Mohammed’s household followers] to describe the victims (Al Alam News Channel, 2014e):

لجأ جندي عراقي للحيلة لينجو من رصاص تنظيم "داعش" الارهابي التي أودت بحياة نحو 800 من زملائه في مذبحه جماعية، وأكد أن رجلا يتحدث بلهجة سعودية كان يحقق مع الجنود لتمييز اتباع أهل البيت من أبناء السنة.

[An Iraqi soldier resorted to a trick to survive the bullets of the terrorist “Daesh” group, who killed 800 of his colleagues in a mass massacre. He stressed that a man with a Saudi dialect was interrogating the soldiers to distinguish between the Sunnis and Mohammed’s household followers].

*Ahul al Bayt* (People of the House) is central in Shia Islam. According to the Malaysian scholar, Ahmed Ibrahim,

The Shia do not admit the genuineness of any tradition not received from the Ahl al Bayt (the People of the House) consisting of the Prophet’s son-in-law Ali, the Prophet’s daughter and Ali’s wife, Fatimah, and their descendants, and repudiate entirely the validity of all decisions not approved by their own spiritual Imams (Ibrahim, 1965, p.53 cited in Musa, 2013, p.1).

*Al Alam News Channel* was, therefore, challenging 'IS's' label, *rawafith*, by establishing a counter-narrative of Shia's religious legitimacy.

It should also be noted that the part that talked about the Saudi interrogator was introduced at a later stage in *Reuters*' text (Salman, 2014a). By reorganizing the text in this way, the temporality feature of the narrative itself as it was told in the 'source' text was (re)appropriated in *Al Alam News Channel*'s text (Al Alam News Channel, 2014e). Another example of reorganizing the text was found in the first paragraph which privileged Hamoud's accusation that the military commanders had betrayed the soldiers: 'الجندي اتهم قاداته العسكريين بالخيانة وعدم تأمين خروج آمن للمجندين وتركوهم يواجهون: [The soldier accused his military commanders of betrayal and of not providing safe routes for the recruits, leaving them to face their destiny, according to the story by Reuters].

The socio-political narrative on the marginalization of Sunnis was interestingly absent in *Al Alam News Channel*'s text. *Al Alam* which is pro-Iran and pro-Shia-led government in Iraq was undermining the local narrative of political tension between the Shia government and the Sunni community in Iraq.

In a striking contrast, the Qatari *Al-Sharq*, though it literally translated most of the article, deleted Hamoud's claim that one of the interrogators was Saudi. Meanwhile, it also deleted the last part in which Hamoud explained in detail how he managed to escape 'IS' with the help of a Sunni farmer. Below is an excerpt from the section removed in *Al-Sharq*'s media text:

كانوا يعرفونه باسم بندر ويعتقد انهم كانوا يتساءلون عن سبب امتناعه عن الاتصال بذويه. وسمع حمود صاحب المزرعة يتحدث عنه مع الآخرين قائلا "اعتقد ان بندر شيعي وليس سنيا ولكن ساحميه



## 6. Conclusions

It was revealed in this chapter that the story on the mass killing of Iraqi military trainees was first fragmented as 'IS' relied on mainly visual texts supported with captions to narrate the atrocity. These were widely circulated through an individual 'IS'-affiliated Twitter account. The use of Twitter as the main medium through which the images were posted further shattered the narrative into pieces when the 'IS'-affiliated Twitter account that released these images was immediately closed. In this way, the images, tweets, and videos posted by 'IS's' supporters or sympathizers on YouTube were antenarratives and unmatched puzzle pieces that needed to be put together to make sense. Although they were largely designed to shock and intimidate, the multimodal texts reflected some individual religious, ethnic, and political elements of a story, and yet failed to amount to a coherent narrative.

Moving from the social media platform to mass media, a number of significant shifts occurred in the process of news translation. Media agencies varied in the way they translated the visuals and also in their characterizations of 'IS' and the victims. Unlike western media, Iraqi Shia media opted to visually highlight the massacre to trigger an action against the group. As for the terminology used to refer to 'IS', it seemed that Iraqi media was more consistent than western media in translating 'IS' into Daesh as a strategy for defiance. However, this was not unproblematic for the term Daesh itself represents an abstraction that overlooks the political and religious motives of the group. The victims, on the other hand, were generally identified as soldiers with other variations across the media agencies as in *BBC News*, *BBC Arabic*, *The Telegraph*, *France 24*, *Alhayat* and in the Iraqi media. This was expected, though, taking into account the vagueness that surrounded what happened on the ground.

More importantly, beyond these shifts, the fact that 'IS's' account on the massacre was fragmented had left a gap for different media agencies to fill in an attempt to knit together a coherent narrative from the scattered bits. It was shown that through the process of translation, 'IS's' antenarrative entered into new relationships. As such, through translation, the three elements emanated from 'IS's' antenarrative were either privileged or subverted, and a multiplicity of narratives were blended into the western media discourse. For instance, the religious, ethnic or political elements of a sectarian narrative were highlighted by a number of western media agencies which embedded these within the societal narrative of sectarianism. The lack of the location where the newly recruits were executed in 'IS's' antenarrative made a number of western as well as Iraqi media reveal that the Speicher military base had fallen to 'IS'. Referring to Speicher as 'a former US military base', for example, *The New York Times* and *The Telegraph* recalled the narrative of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq and its aftermath, implicitly framing the events of 2014 as a continuation of the chaos of a decade earlier. And by depicting the victims as soldiers who 'fled' or 'surrendered', as, in *BBC News*, *The New York Times*, *Alhayat*, and *Alahednews*, the blame for the deaths began to fall both on the 'cowardice' of troops and the Iraqi political leadership. Iraqi media, on the other hand, generally amplified a non-sectarian narrative, stressing that 'IS' was targeting Iraqis and humanity at large and not just Shias.

The second part of the chapter was dedicated to examining the personal narratives of survivors which unfolded two months following the atrocity. To this end, two competing narratives were analyzed and compared in both their STs and TTs by different media agencies. The first triggered a narrative of cowardice not just on the part of the recruited trainees, but also on the part of their military commanders. The other narrative, on the other hand, explicitly accused the commanders of betraying the victims when they ordered them to leave the base. Through translation, the personal narrative can be reorganized in a way that fits in with the discourse and

ideology of the media agency in question, and its target audience. Arguably, this also meant that it was not possible for a single narrative to finally dominate.

Contrary to the previous case where translation had a significant role in bringing together the different strands of 'IS's' antenarrative, translation here was prevalent in fragmenting what seemed to be a complete personal account. This was specifically performed in two ways. First, by reducing the peculiar details in each personal story to more abstract and generalized narratives. Secondly, and conversely, by highlighting particular details while excluding others. Moreover, in the case of the first personal narrative, the multimodal text itself was ruptured in translation with one media agency focusing on the video, and the other on the written text.

## CHAPTER FIVE TRANSLATING SABI

### 1. Introduction

This chapter examines the second case study related to narratives on one of the most heinous atrocities committed by ‘IS’ against the Ezidi population in Iraq. When ‘IS’ invaded the northern town of Sinjar on August 3, 2014, they took Ezidi girls as ‘سبايا’ [*sabaya*, female captives of war] in what is known in Arabic as ‘سبي’ [*sabi*, the captivity of women in wars], sexually abusing and torturing them. Reasons for this, according to ‘IS’, were religious. Ezidis were defined by the group as infidels whose women should be taken as *sabaya* according to theological reasons. Moreover, ‘IS’ was seeking to re-define *sabi* as an institution that was a prerequisite for the final battle ahead of judgment day. In addition, I believe that ‘IS’ had another equally important motive: to empty areas under its control of any heterogeneity that would threaten the caliphate project.

Contrary to the previous case study, narratives about *sabi* were not unfolded by ‘IS’ initially, but by eyewitnesses and survivors through the mediation of human rights organization and Ezidi female MP, Vian Dakhil. At first, those stories were also fragmented. Although sexual violence is often associated with wars and conflicts as a strategy to control and has taken various forms across history, including sexual slavery, and rape (Wood, 2006; Wood, 2014), *sabi* has a unique religious dimension. *Sabi* represented a tradition that predated Islam and continued to be practised in the early period of Islam. *Sabi* was incorporated into religious practices, yet, whether it was institutionalized or not remains contested among scholars of Islam (See Freamon, 2015; Callimachi, 2015). In either case, *sabi* had discontinued across history (Ali, 2016).<sup>21</sup> As such, I argue that *sabi* emerged as an antenarrative in the sense that it was detached from its original historical context.

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<sup>21</sup> In addition to ‘IS’, *sabi* was also practised by Islamic extremist groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria (Freamon, 2015) but this did not garner the same media attention ‘IS’ received, and was largely reduced to ‘kidnapping’ (Blair, 2015).

*Sabi* became a loose signifier with different signifieds and translations. Each of these translations contributed to establishing disparate contested narratives.

Therefore, the antenarrative of *sabi* initially allowed for multiple narratives to emerge once the practice it is associated with was revived. First, there were initial reports by Iraqi Red Crescent Society, an independent humanitarian society established in Iraq in 1932 to help people during all times,<sup>22</sup> and the famous plea by the Iraqi female Ezidi MP, Vian Dakhil, before the Iraqi parliament on August 5, only two days following ‘IS’s’ capture of Sinjar. Second, there were individual tweets by the now-blocked ‘IS’-affiliated Twitter accounts claiming that they were getting ready to take Ezidi girls as ‘concubines’, and expressing their anger against condemnations by some Muslims and others (Hall, 2015). Third, there were personal narratives of female survivors which themselves changed in accordance with the changes in time, discourse, genre, and mode in which they were told. Fourth, there was the religious narrative by ‘IS’s’ opponents established in an online open letter to ‘IS’s’ leader, Abū Bakr al-Baghdadi, signed by 120 Sunni Muslim scholars and figures around the world in September 2014. Last, there was ‘IS’s’ official narrative which first appeared in an English article on *Dabiq* in October 2014 and then in a pamphlet in Arabic in December, and later in another *Dabiq* article in May 2015. In other words, ‘IS’ took a reactive position, responding to the previous narratives on *sabi*, and more significantly, distinctly translating *sabi* in each of these texts. In addition to these three written texts officially released by ‘IS’, there was a video released on social media by an ‘IS’ member depicting some ‘IS’ men in an informal setting mockingly chatting about trading the Ezidi girls.

All of these narratives were further contested in the process of translation not just by mass media but by other actors, including research institutes and individuals. How did these narratives

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/>

change in translation and which one was able to prevail and why are the main questions addressed in this chapter.

## **2. *Sabi*: a loose signifier and an antenarrative**

*Sabi* is an archaic word. Based on my conversation with some Muslim friends and relatives back in August 2014, I found out that they were not entirely sure of what *sabi* entailed. As Ali (2016, p.3) points out, *sabi* represents an example of a tradition that is not just distant but also reflects ‘the feel of something archaic, primitive, and horrible, especially when it merges violence and sex’. Tradition as argued by Grewal (2013, p.200) ‘moves over time not as a simple preservation of a closed set of past elements but as a mediation process that is reflexive and selective’.

A significant question is who decides what elements are mediated and how? Grewal (2013) suggests that it is the ‘custodians’ who make such decision when they promote or otherwise deemphasize specific elements. Ali argues that both ‘IS’ and its opponents view themselves as the custodians of such tradition, differently mediating it by highlighting, adding, or even deleting some of its elements. Therefore, *sabi* was contested by ‘IS’ in three written texts and by its Sunni opponents through an open letter to ‘IS’s’ self-proclaimed leader, al-Baghdadi, to question ‘IS’s’ version of Islam. In addition to the formal contestations of *sabi*, it was also contested less formally in a video circulated online by ‘IS’ individuals. Even beyond ‘IS’ and its religious opponents, *sabi* was contested in personal narratives of survivors with the mediation of mass media and Security Council, among other actors, including human rights organizations. These narratives themselves shifted a number of times due to a number of factors that shall be investigated later. Moreover, translation played a significant role in this contestation as certain narratives or elements of narratives were reduced, privileged, or challenged through translation.

Linguistically, *sabi* in Arabic is derived from the verb ‘سبى’ *saba* which has two meanings: general and specific. The general meaning means capturing an enemy in a war in general (Almaany Dictionary, no date). The specific meaning, on the other hand, refers to capturing women of an enemy in a war as captives and marrying them (*ibid*). The specific meaning which entails two simultaneous acts: capturing women and marrying them seems to be the most widely used. Some religious interpretations, however, exclude the second sense of the word related to marriage, in this case (Al-Waily, 1991). Some, on the other hand, highlight this sense by defining *sabi* as the end of the marriage of a captured woman to her original husband (Al-Waily, 1991). It is worth mentioning here that the term *sabi* itself has never been mentioned in the Qur’an. Rather, it has always been associated in Islamic Fiqh with ‘ملك يمين’ *malak yamin* (what the right hand possesses), a phrase mentioned in various ways in the Qur’an (For example, ‘And [also prohibited to you are all] married women except those your right hands possess’) (Qur’an 4:24, no date). This phrase has been interpreted by Muslim scholars as female prisoners of war and/or concubines (See for example, General Iftaa’s Department, 2012).

Historically, it is agreed that the practice of *sabi* existed prior to Islam and continued to exist during the early period of Islam (Al-Waily, 1991). As indicated by Cronin (2016, p.955), ‘The rise of Islam in the seventh century provided a new legal framework but the actual practice of slavery continued to be heavily influenced by pre-existing patterns’. Although there is a consensus by Muslim scholars that slavery has been regulated and constrained in Islamic texts, encouraging slaves’ emancipation, there is no such consensus on *sabi* (Freamon, 2015). If abolition is absent, then, Freamon (2015, p.296) explains, ‘soldiers who capture war booty, which would include human beings, are permitted to buy and sell these human beings in an open market’, identical to what ‘IS’ was doing. In the Salafi discourse, in particular, slavery including *sabi*, is seen through the lenses of the early period of Islam, overlooking centuries that followed (*ibid*). In this regard,

Cronin (2016) maintains that slavery in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries survived only as ‘a relic of declining force’ (p.954). This is due to the fact that in the modern world, slavery, including *sabi* started to gradually be abolished in Muslim countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, probably under pressure by western colonial powers (Clarence-Smith, 2013).

In some places in the Middle East and North Africa, slavery persisted until very recently. Cronin (2016, p.954), for example, notes that ‘legal slavery continued to exist on the margins of the region until very recently. Even in Iran formal abolition took place only in 1928, while slavery continued its legal existence in Saudi Arabia until 1962, in Oman until 1970 and in Mauretania until 1981’. Therefore, as noted by Ali (2016), in *Dabiq* as well as in the open letter, it was acknowledged that *sabi* was discontinuous. The religious ‘custodians’, as Grewal (2013) describes, seek to ‘define their authority in the present as a recurrence, but not a continuation, of the raw potential of Islam’s foundation’ (Grewal, 2013, p.213). In *Dabiq*, the ‘raw potential’ for redeeming slavery was emphasized, whilst in the open letter, it was the ‘raw potential’ for abolition that has finally been actualized’, Ali (2016, p.8) argues. This selective process was not unproblematic as shall be found out in section six.

‘IS’ attempted to revive and to institutionalize the practice of *sabi* following its takeover of Sinjar and facing the Ezidi population by claiming to meet the two religious conditions of *Imama* (caliphate) and *Imam* (caliph) when ‘IS’s’ leader Abū Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed himself the Muslims’ caliph in a video released in July 2014. This eventually allowed the group to define Ezidis as infidels and heretics in *Dabiq* (‘The revival of slavery before the Hour’, 2014). In other words, ‘IS’ could not have defined Ezidi as such unless both conditions were first met. But why did ‘IS’ define Ezidis as infidels? Ezidis follow Ezidism, a very old distinct monotheistic religion: Ezidi, Ezidi, or Yazidi, originates from a Kurdish-Persian linguistic root: ‘(Ye zdai) which means the

Creator in Kurdish, and (Ezwan - Ezdan) meaning God in Farsi' (Sallum, 2013, p.66). However, there have been two misinterpretations about Ezidis and their religion that predate 'IS'. First, the oral and conservative nature of the religion as Sallum (2014) describes allowed others to associate it with other religions, particularly Zoroastrianism, Islam, and Christianity. Second, Ezidism was often described as ditheistic, on the account of the sacred character they worship known as Peacock Angel (Tawusî Melek) (Schapiro, 2014). Although TawusiMelek is a force symbolizing good, it was wrongly interpreted by many Muslims and Arabs as 'the Quranic rendering of Shaytan—the devil' (Schapiro, 2014). Thus, they were mistakenly described as 'devil worshippers'. Such misinterpretation was even highlighted by some Arab authors. An example is an op-ed article published in *Al Arabiya* in the year 2012 titled: *عراقيون يعبدون الشيطان؟* [Iraqis worshipping Satan?] in which Ezidis were labelled as 'devil worshippers' (Abdul Karim, 2012). In its two *Dabiq* releases, 'IS' used the same label to describe Ezidis. In my opinion, the exotic nature of Ezidism as a religion and of Ezidi people was a threat to the homogenous caliphate 'IS' was seeking to re-establish. It was, therefore, crucial for 'IS' to take action through the revival of *sabi*.

Bringing *sabi* into existence has, nevertheless, shifted its signifier and signified. This is mainly because *sabi* as a practice originated in a different historical context: the context of the pre-Islamic era and onto the early period of Islam as previously mentioned. Drawing on Foucault's (1970) notion of episteme, the practice belongs to a totally different episteme, with distinct rules and conditions. As Foucault (1970, p.168) explains, 'in any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that denotes the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice'. Bringing *sabi* to the current episteme and the current context created confusion as to what it originally meant.

In other words, detaching a signifier from its historical context will enter it into a movement or play of meanings as Derrida (1982) describes it (See also Davis, 2001). So, instead of one signifier, we have a variety of traces of the original signifier used to translate *sabi* differently. Each translation helps to invoke a distinct narrative that may conform to both the particular discourse in which it is configured and the expectations of the target audience. As shall be found out later, *sabi* was translated differently into ‘rape’, ‘slavery’, ‘sex slavery’, ‘sex trafficking’, ‘human trafficking’, and so on. Each of these terms evoked different narratives. The same thing applies to the word *sabaya* which originally means ‘female captives of war’. Detaching it from its episteme, *sabaya* came to be translated differently into ‘concubines’, ‘spoils of war’, and ‘sexual slaves’ among other translations.

When each trace presents itself, it is erased in a state of tension (Derrida 1982, Kruger 2004), a process Derrida (1982, p.15) refers to as ‘a play of traces’. To explain this state of tension, Derrida (1982, p.3) uses the French term ‘différance’ which has two meanings in English: to differ and to defer. Each different meaning is deferred by a new meaning to bridge the gap between the signifier and the signified (*ibid*). This is particularly interesting as it explains the different labels used by ‘IS’ and by media discourses to reshape *sabi* differently according to the target audience. As Davis (2001, p.49) states, ‘the plethora of gaps and traces in source and target texts as well as source and target languages and cultures’ have to be taken account of in the process of translation. *Sabi*, eventually, will not resonate with a western audience as sex slavery does, for instance. Beyond these traces, it could be argued that choosing to translate *sabi* into other signifiers such as sex slavery, rape, sex trafficking, or human trafficking as western media and the Ezidi female survivors themselves did helped to delegitimize ‘IS’s’ narrative. ‘IS’s’ responses in October 2014 and later in May 2015 prove this point.

### **3. Contextual background**

On August 3, 2014, 'IS' attacked the Sinjar region, north-west of Iraq, where a population of the Iraqi Ezidi community lived. Just one day following this, accounts of the enslavement of Ezidi girls was first transmitted locally by officials from the Iraqi Red Crescent Society and Human Rights Ministry (Williams et al, 2014), and by Iraqi Ezidi MP, Vian Dakhil, who made a public plea before Iraqi MPs on August 5 to save the Ezidis. The plea was shortly followed by first-hand accounts of eyewitnesses and victims who managed to escape. According to these and to initial reports by the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, hundreds of Ezidi men were forced to convert to Islam or otherwise they were killed. To subvert these accounts, 'IS' published a propaganda video on August 20, showing hundreds of Ezidi men willingly converting to Islam with a claim that they were now living in good conditions and prosperity (The Telegraph, 2014).

The local first-hand accounts were first embedded within an official report jointly published by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Office (OHCHR), covering a reporting period from 6 July to 10 September 2014. According to the report, various acts of violence during this period, including violence not only against Ezidi women, but also Shia Shaback, Turkmen, and Christians were documented. The report also interestingly showed that the kidnapping of women started as early as August 3:

On 3 August, ISIL herded approximately 450–500 women and girls to the citadel of Tal Afar in Ninewa where, two days later, 150 unmarried girls and women, predominantly from the Ezidi and Christian communities, were reportedly transported to Syria, either to be given to ISIL fighters as a reward or to be sold as sex slaves ('malakyamiin'). Victims reported being transferred to Badouch Prison or transferred to Syria (United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and Human Rights Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2014).

In another detailed report by Amnesty International, it was revealed that women and in particular younger girls, as young as 12, were kept apart from their husbands and parents and taken as captives who were either ‘sold, given as gifts or forced to marry ‘IS’ fighters and supporters’ (Amnesty International, 2014b, p.4). Both the accounts and the reports spoke of cases of rape, and sexual violence after likely being forced to convert to Islam.

Personal stories of survivors appeared in a variety of news articles and reports by human rights organizations, particularly Human Rights Watch. ‘IS’s’ official response did not appear until two months following its capture of Sinjar when it published an article on *Dabiq* titled: ‘The revival of slavery before the Hour.’ In the article, ‘IS’ provided a detailed religious justification for *sabi*. One month later, in November, a video apparently posted by an ‘IS’ militant through social media networks featured some ‘IS’ figures mockingly boasting of enslaving Ezidi women. And in December, an Arabic language pamphlet was circulated on the internet showing a list of rules for ‘IS’ men to deal with the Ezidi captives according to their religious interpretations. It was only in May 2015 that ‘IS’ officially responded for the second time in a *Dabiq* article titled: *Slave-girls or prostitutes?* (Al-Muhajira, 2015).

Throughout the following months, survivors’ stories kept pouring into mass media revealing more details about the sexual violence, abuse and torture Ezidi girls encountered during their period of captivity under ‘IS’. In December 2015, Nadia Murad delivered her first detailed testimony before the Security Council in which she not only narrated her personal experience but demanded justice. This, however, was not the first appearance by Murad who, in fact, was among the first survivors to tell their stories to the media. Up until this moment, the fate of many Ezidi girls and women is still unknown in what appears to be one of the most horrific and tragic atrocities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### 4. Early online reporting on *sabi*: different translations, different narratives

As briefly mentioned, the narrative of *sabi* first came through a plea by the Ezidi Iraqi MP, Dakhil, before the Iraqi parliament only two days following 'IS's' capture of Sinjar. In her plea, Dakhil used the labels: 'سبي' (*sabi*, captivity), 'سبايا' (*sabaya*, female captives), and 'سوق الرق' (*sooq al riq*, slaves market) for the first time, warning that a genocide was being committed by 'IS' against the Ezidi community, in general (Zen, 2014).

Addressing the president of the Iraqi parliament, she said: 'سيدي الرئيس: نساؤنا تسبى وتباع في سوق الرق... الان هناك حملة ابادة جماعية على المكون اليزيدي' (Mr. President, our [Ezidi] women are being enslaved and sold in slave markets...There is now a genocide campaign waged against the Yazidi community) (Zen, 2014). Dakhil's very emotionality was able to draw the world's attention to the trauma of Ezidis, and Ezidi women, in particular. Her plea was, therefore, rapidly translated into English subtitles and was widely disseminated in the mainstream media and social media networks (see for example Zen, 2014). *Sabi* and other associated terms were differently translated by western media. *CNN*, for instance, translated these terms into slavery in general which was a reductive translation overlooking the act of sexual coercion: 'women...sold into slavery' (Smith-Spark, 2014). In *The Washington Post*, *sabi* was partially rendered into English when Ezidi girls were described as 'sexual slaves' (McCoy, 2014). In both *Express* and *The Telegraph*, on the other hand, the notions of *sabi* and *sabaya* were never translated in the first place (Harris, 2014; Spencer, 2014b). Their translations focused instead on 'IS's' threat against the Ezidi community as a whole and against its religion. In *The Telegraph*, the translated quotation was as follows: 'We are being slaughtered. Our entire religion is being wiped off the face of the Earth. I am begging you, in the name of humanity,' a Yazidi MP, Vian Dakhil, was quoted as saying in parliament, as she broke down in tears' (Spencer, 2014b). *Express* similarly translated Dakhil's call for other MPs to save the Ezidi, 'We are being slaughtered. We are being exterminated. An entire religion is being

exterminated from the face of the Earth. In the name of humanity, save us' (Harris, 2014). Contrary to western media, in its translation of Dakhil's plea, *Aljazeera English* partially reclaimed the original sense of *sabi* by translating *sabi* and *sabaya* into: 'Their women were enslaved as 'war booty', she said' (Aljazeera English, 2014d).

Following Dakhil's plea, reports on the enslavement of Ezidi women by 'IS' garnered huge media attention. This was in contrast to the previous case of Speicher massacre. Ali (2016) asks: What were the reasons behind such attention? Isn't enslavement and sexual violence a common phenomenon in times of war and conflict? Different countries in the world where conflict erupted at different time periods including, Rwanda, Bosnia and China, to name a few, witnessed similar atrocities. What made this event particularly interesting for the mass media worldwide? According to Gilchrist (2010, p.374), 'newsworthy events are those considered to be dramatic, unusual, or fit with a continuing news theme'. As Ali (2016, p.3) puts it, 'No Orientalist trope is as powerful as that of the oppression of Muslim women or the oppression of women by Muslims. Sex and violence make an irresistible combination'. In addition to this combination, I argue that the exotic nature of the Ezidi religion which is also a reflection of the orientalist discourse was very appealing to western media. Furthermore, these stories were part of a larger conflict that was not only limited to its local context but most importantly had an international impact, especially with 'IS's' anti-west narrative that started to unfold as early as July 2014. In a quote by Abū Musa'b al Zaraqawi, published on the front page of the first issue of *Dabiq* magazine and subsequent issues, this narrative was highlighted: 'The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify... until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq' ('The return of the Khalifa', 2014, p.2). As Sontag (2003, p.29) points out, 'for a war to break out of its immediate constituency and become a subject of international attention, it must be regarded as something of an exception, as wars go, and

represent more than the clashing interests of the belligerents themselves'. The war against 'IS' has been one of those exceptions.

During the period between August and October 2014, stories of survivors and eyewitnesses started to unfold with the mediation of western and Arabic media agencies that used various terms or 'traces' to translate *sabi* into. For instance, 'kidnapping' or 'abduction' were used by *Mirror* (Dorman, 2014), and *The Guardian* (Chulov, 2014). When used alone, such words were insufficient as they could not capture that the girls were taken and abused by 'IS' as *sabaya*. As Blair (2015), notes, they were equally used in the media reporting on the enslavement of women in Nigeria by Boko Haram, blurring the 'real fate...that they have been enslaved' (Blair, 2015). Meanwhile, the use of 'forced marriage' by both *The Washington Post* (Sly, 2014), and *Al Arabiya English* (Al Arabiya English, 2014d) might seem to retain one of the original senses of *sabi*. Yet, it was another inadequate euphemism for slavery and sexual abuses, especially when it was accompanied by 'wives of fighters' in reference to *sabaya* (Sly, 2014). The latter was particularly problematic as it seemingly evoked a narrative of a lawful legitimate practise. In contrast, *BBC News* translated *sabi* into 'sex trafficking' and *sabaya* into 'spoils of war' (Knell, 2014). Sex trafficking denotes a narrative of a western approach that is distinct to *sabi*. *Sabi* has a religious peculiarity and is more centred around coercion. Trafficking, on the other hand, indicates a western approach that is centred around exploitation, rather than coercion (Schauer and Wheaton, 2006, p. 149; Freamon, 2015). The use of 'spoils of war' still helped to restore that religious element. Nonetheless, it could be argued that the use of sex trafficking was meant to address the western audience and at the same time to defer 'IS's' legitimacy.

## 5. Personal narratives of female survivors: The case of Nadia Murad

Rape carries a deep social, cultural, and religious stigma in the Iraqi culture in general, and in that of the Ezidis, in particular. As Schapiro (2014) puts it, Ezidis are part of an ‘insular culture’ where marriage to people of other faiths is prohibited. According to Al-Ali, they are also part of a community where rape is associated with shame and stigma, ‘within the Ezidi community there is still a very strong stigma around rape’. Nevertheless, shortly after ‘IS’s’ capture of Sinjar, Ezidi survivors still talked about rape-albeit briefly. Most importantly, those who spoke described themselves as witnesses of other girls who were raped or sexually abused by ‘IS’. An example is the case of Nadia Murad Basee Taha, commonly known as Nadai Murad, who was among the first survivors to tell their suffering under ‘IS’ to different media agencies. She appeared in two interviews with the British Broadcasting Company’s (BBC) Persian language service, *BBC Persian*, and the German newspaper *Spiegel Online* in September and October 2014 respectively (Mustafa, 2018).<sup>23</sup>

In her first interview with *BBC Persian* which was uploaded by a YouTube account in late September 2014, Murad told her story in her Kurdish language which was translated into Persian using a voice-over technique (Al-Dababir, 2014). Similar to other similar early accounts, Murad briefly elaborated on the sexual abuses the detainees suffered, saying although she was beaten, was not raped herself. She witnessed others, including her niece being raped: *‘به من نه ولی به دختر برادرم [My niece was raped; I was only beaten]’* (Mustafa, 2018).

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<sup>23</sup> In *Al Arabiya’s* early reporting, a video of an Ezidi female survivor who looked like Nadia Murad was published, citing a local Kurdish news agency as the source (Al-Hatab, 2014). In the video, the girl who was speaking in Kurdish language about her experience during IS’s captivity gave similar details to Murad’s subsequent interview with *BBC Persian* and *Spiegel Online*. In particular, she said that she remained under IS for nine days. During which, she witnessed cases of rape, describing how the enslaved girls were used as property as they were sold in slave markets for cheap prices (Al-Hatab, 2014). However, since neither the identity of Murad nor the name of the media agency was revealed in the video, it was not possible to verify it and, therefore, it was excluded from the analysis.

Murad's brief narration at this point can be attributed to the particular affordances offered by both the genre and mode to the narration process (Kress, 2009; Mustafa, 2018). Both the genre of the broadcasting video interview and the spoken mode in which Murad's narrative was configured might not have allowed for a longer and more detailed account of her suffering. However, the brief account in this instance can also be attributed to the survivor herself finding it hard to give further details in her narrative at such an early stage (Skjelsbæk, 2006). As they develop over time, narratives of traumatic events can vary both in form and in content (Tuval-Mashiach et al, 2004). At an early stage, they tend to be vague and partial, especially in relation to the events that had really taken place. Moreover, the narration process is differently (re)-shaped due to the mediation of psychological, cultural, and institutional factors at different points in time (*ibid*). As research on narratives of rape show, during the early period that follows a sexual abuse, it is not possible for the survivors to establish coherently meaningful narratives (Skjelsbæk, 2006; Mustafa, 2018). Ezidi families, for example, who were interviewed by Kurdish activists and by Amnesty International, might be able to talk about 'systematic rape', but they still denied 'any of their female relatives were affected' (Al-Ali, 2016, p.24).

This later changed in Murad's second interview with the German journal, *Spiegel Online* in a written article titled: *Nine days under the Caliphate: A Yazidi woman's ordeal as an Islamic State captive* (Hoppe, 2014). The interview was conducted with Murad mid-October 2014 almost at the same time when 'IS' released its first article on *sabi* via *Dabiq*. The genre of a news article and the mode of the written text made it hard to know what language Murad used to tell her story. Moreover, unlike the first instance, she gave more details on her ordeal. Significantly, she admitted that she was raped, yet without further elaborating on this (Mustafa, 2018). This was framed within the societal narrative of shame and stigma as the following excerpt shows:

Nadia doesn't give a literal account of these rapes. It is virtually impossible for her to talk about them, and it contravenes the conventions of her culture. She merely says: "We were taken individually to another room, to one of the men." Then she lowers her head, in silence, awash with shame (Hoppe, 2014).

In this article, Murad's reluctance to elaborate on the sexual abuses she faced was interpreted as part of the fear associated with the narrative of stigma and shame prevalent in the Iraqi and Ezidi culture (Mustafa, 2018).

In addition to personal narratives of survivors and media reports, Sunni scholars aimed to deny 'IS's' legitimacy and interpretation of Islam, including *sabi* through an online open letter signed by 120 Sunni figures around the world. The following section discusses this letter specifically in as far as *sabi* is concerned.

## **6. 'IS's' opponents' religious narrative: Open Letter to al-Baghdadi**

The 'Open Letter to al-Baghdadi' presented at a press conference and published online in September 2014 was jointly released by the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the Fiqh Council of North America (Ali, 2016, p.5). It was signed by 120 male religious scholars and leaders from the Sunni sect with the aim of creating a dialogue with 'IS's' leader, refuting his interpretations of Islam.<sup>24</sup> It was published in Arabic and English languages. Although it was presented professionally, in order to be accessible by the media, it did not receive much attention in the mainstream media (Ali, 2016). Addressing the western target audience, the letter had a two-page summary in the English version (Ali, 2016; LettertoBaghdadi.com, 2014). The letter, in general, was aiming to contest 'IS's' narratives on what is permissible and what is forbidden in Islam, redeeming authority and legitimacy over 'IS'. Its summary, thus, starts with the following, 'It is

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<sup>24</sup> According to Ali (2016, p.17), 'As of February 15, 2015... forty-nine additional people had signed, including a handful of women'.

forbidden in Islam to issue fatwas without all the necessary learning requirements' (LettertoBaghdadi.com, 2014, p.1). Arguably, the letter did not succeed in establishing a strong narrative that was able to compete with 'IS's' for a number of reasons discussed below.

With regards to slavery and *sabi*, it focused on slavery rather than specifically on *sabi*, without directly challenging the sexual abuses Ezidi women had suffered. As previously mentioned, the letter recognized the historical rupture in slavery. Therefore, in its summary, the letter stated that slavery is not permitted in the recent time: 'The re-introduction of slavery is forbidden in Islam. It was abolished by universal consensus' (LettertoBaghdadi.com, 2014, p.1). Later, it devoted two paragraphs to arguing why this was the case. Its claim was that slavery was abolished by Islam: 'No scholar of Islam disputes that one of Islam's aims is to abolish slavery' (LettertoBaghdadi.com, 2014, p.12). However, as Ali (2016) points out, although in Islamic tradition the practice of emancipation has been encouraged, it 'does not presume abolition' (See also Freamon, 2015). Rather, it was created to regulate slavery (Ali, 2016; Al-Waily, 1991).

The letter further argued that 'For over a century, Muslims, and indeed the entire world, have been united in the prohibition and criminalization of slavery, which was a milestone in human history when it was finally achieved' (LettertoBaghdadi.com, 2014, p.12). Again, such a claim is not accurate. As mentioned before, abolishing slavery was a gradual process that took place in various periods of time across Muslim countries in the Middle East. Moreover, as noted by Ali (2016), although the letter made reference to humanity, it mainly focused on Islam. This became evident as the letter concluded by addressing al-Baghdadi, 'You bear the responsibility of this great crime and all the reactions which this may lead to against all Muslims' (LettertoBaghdadi.com, 2014, p.12). According to Ali (2016, p.6), 'The "Open Letter" appeals not to truth or falsehood but

to a desire to preserve Muslim life, well-being, and reputation from the depredations of unspecified actors'. In other words, it was aimed through the letter to show that 'IS' did not represent Islam.

As far as Ezidi people and religion were concerned, the letter made some misrepresentations by describing Ezidis as people of scripture, particularly Magus, relying on a verse from the Quran (LettertoBaghdadi.com, 2014, p.11). Magus and Ezidism belong to two distinct religions (Sallum, 2014).

### **7. Islamic State's response: *Dabiq*'s first article**

In October 2014, 'IS' finally intervened to justify in detail why they enslaved Ezidis women in particular. So, 'IS' took a reactive position to respond to the personal stories of *sabi* circulated primarily by mass media, and to the open letter by Sunni Muslim figures. Its channel for such intervention was its online *Dabiq* magazine. In its fourth issue, a detailed article on *sabi* was therefore published. The article entitled: 'The revival of slavery before the Hour' was embedded within a narrative of religious legitimacy established by this issue as a whole which was titled: 'A Failed Crusade' ('A Failed Crusade', 2014). In other words, the fourth issue was specifically set to emphasize the legitimacy of the group after the announcement of the caliphate, and of the caliph, which gave 'IS' the authority to define the peoples of the areas its terrorists invaded and controlled and to treat them accordingly.

Written in English by an anonymous writer, the article translated *sabi* into slavery, which refers to the overall institution of 'رق' *riq* of which *sabi* forms one category. Therefore, 'IS' was aiming to institutionalize *sabi* according to Shari'ah law. In this way, *sabi* was not just reclaimed by 'IS' as a practice, but most importantly, as a strategy and as an institution. With this respect, Wood (2014, p.473) notes in reference to 'IS', 'Forced marriage and sexual slavery are clearly strategic: they are strongly institutionalized within the group, which has issued rules for their

implementation'. According to the article, slavery ceased to exist prior to 'IS' with the exception of a few places such as Nigeria but was now revived when the two conditions of Imama (caliphate), and Imam (caliph) were met. Thus, the article boasted that 'This large-scale enslavement of mushrik [polytheist] families is probably the first since the abandonment of this Sharī'ah law', recognizing some examples of "much smaller" enslavement of Christian women and children in the Philippines and Nigeria by the mujāhidīn there' ('The revival of slavery before the Hour', 2014, p. 15). In Ali's (2016, p.7) words, 'Imagining Muslim history through a reductive, distorted lens, 'IS' deems the "revival" of this authentic early practice as a sign of its own efficacy and legitimacy'.

From the very first paragraph, the article argued that Ezidis needed to be religiously defined by the group upon their entrance to Sinjar in order to decide how they should be treated: 'Prior to the taking of Sinjar, Sharī'ah students in the Islamic State were tasked to research the Yazidis to determine if they should be treated as an originally mushrik [polytheist] group or one that originated as Muslims and then apostatized' ('The revival of slavery before the Hour', 2014, p.14). Describing Ezidis as 'devil worshippers' who were allegedly defined as such even by Christians as 'is recorded in accounts of Westerners and Orientals who encountered them or studied them' (*ibid*, p.15), the group decided that they should be treated as polytheists:

Accordingly, the Islamic State dealt with this group as the majority of fuqahā' have indicated how mushrikīn should be dealt with. Unlike the Jews and Christians, there was no room for jizyah payment. Also, their women could be enslaved unlike female apostates who the majority of the fuqahā' say cannot be enslaved and can only be given an ultimatum to repent or face the sword (*ibid*, p.15).

The article then described how the women were enslaved:

...The Yazidi women and children were then divided according to Sharī'ah law amongst the fighters of the Islamic State who participated in the Sinjar operations, after one fifth of the slaves were transferred to the Islamic State's

authority to be divided as khums... The enslaved Yazidi families are now sold by the Islamic State soldiers as the mushrikīn were sold by the companions (radiyallāhu ‘anhum) before (*ibid*, pp.15-16).

In this excerpt, it became clear that ‘IS’ was legitimizing *sabi* of Ezidi girls by recalling how *sabi* was practiced before by the Prophet’s companions. Moreover, using *khums* (one fifth share) was another legitimizing tool to treat women as property, spoils of war, labelling them as ‘concubines’ who were allegedly happy with their destiny (*ibid*, p.16). The late well-known professor of Islamic law and Middle Eastern studies, Majid Khadduri, unravelled the meaning of spoil, in his 1955 book: *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* when he wrote: ‘The term spoil (ghanima) is applied specifically to property acquired by force from non-Muslims. It includes, however, not only property (movable and immovable) but also persons, whether in the capacity of asra (prisoners of war) or *sabi* (women and children)’ (Khadduri, 1955, p.119). Moreover, he added that for this to happen, both the ‘Imam’s permission’ and ‘the element of force’ have to be present (*ibid*). According to Islamic Fiqh, this property is then divided among those who participated in a battle. The one fifth share is divinely legislated: ‘...when you have taken any booty, one fifth belongs to Allah and to the Apostle, and to the near kin, and to orphans, and to the poor, and to the wayfarer’ (Q, VIII, 24 cited in Khadduri, 1955, p.121).

The rest of the article was dedicated to explaining in full detail the necessity of re-establishing slavery for two reasons. Firstly, slavery was necessary to decrease adultery: ‘the desertion of slavery had led to an increase in *fāhishah* (adultery, fornication, etc.) because the *shar’ī* alternative to marriage is not available’ (‘The revival of slavery before the Hour’, 2014, p.17). Secondly, and most importantly, slavery was in its essence a sign of the closeness of the great battle between Muslims and crusaders near *Dabiq* in Syria. The article, therefore, established an apocalyptic narrative wherein the revival of slavery was a prerequisite before the judgment day. In fact, the

apocalyptic narrative is at the centre of 'IS's' beliefs and distinguishes the group from other extremists or jihadists. As Wood (2014, pp.21-22 ) maintains, 'The Islamic State differs from nearly every other current jihadist movement in believing that it is written into God's script as a central character...[that views] the End of Days [as] a leitmotif of its propaganda'.

In the article, the apocalyptic narrative was well-supported with religious texts from a number of references, including but not limited to, AbūHurayrah, Sahīh al-Bukhārī, Ibn Rajab al-Hanbalī, An-Nawawī. For example, it cited the *hadith* narrated by 'al-Bukhārī and Muslim on the authority of Abū Hurayrah and by Muslim on the authority of Umar [that] the slave girl gives birth to her master', concluding that 'slavery has been mentioned as one of the signs of the Hour as well as one of the causes behind al-Malhamah al-Kubrā [the great battle]' ('The revival of slavery before the Hour', 2014, p.15).

This narrative also echoed in the first article of this issue by Abu Muhammed Al-Adnani, 'IS's' official speaker, affirming that 'We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of Allah, the Exalted' ('The final crusade', 2014, p.8).

To conclude, in this article, 'IS' acknowledged that *sabi* witnessed discontinuity. Referring to *sabi* as slavery, 'IS' was trying to reinstitute *sabi* according to their selective religious texts, using it not just as a military and war strategy but, equally significant, as a strategy for religious legitimacy.

Shortly after this article was released by 'IS', it was widely translated into the discourse of the mass media, primarily focusing on the religious justifications provided by 'IS', whilst framing the act itself as 'brutal' (Mackey, 2014). Western media, however, mostly translated slavery into 'sexual enslavement', and *sabaya* into 'sex slaves'. Both *The New York Times* and *The Independent*, a centre-left-wing British newspaper, used 'sexual enslavement' in their article titles: *Islamic State propagandists boast of sexual enslavement of women and girls* (Mackey, 2014); *ISIS justify capture*

and sexual enslavement of thousands of Yazidi women and girls (Buchanan, 2014). *The Telegraph*, a centre-right-wing British newspaper, on the other hand, used ‘sexual slaves’ to describe Ezidi girls and women under ‘IS’ captivity: *Thousands of Yazidi women sold as sex slaves ‘for theological reasons’, says ISIL* (Spencer, 2014a). *The Telegraph* which used ‘sex slaves’ in the headline to refer to the Ezidi women was careful to clarify in the body of the text that the source article did not say that they were to be treated as ‘sex slaves’, but used the term ‘concubines’ as an equivalent (Spencer, 2014a). The use of ‘sex slaves’ and ‘sexual enslavement’ meets the expectations of a western audience. Although their use in the English language undermines ‘IS’s’ narrative of *sabi* as a legitimate practice, they did not capture ‘IS’s’ motive to institute *sabi*. This was specifically the case when the apocalyptic narrative was generally either dismissed, as in *The Telegraph* and *The New York Times* or simply reduced to al-Adnani’s aforementioned quote in *The Independent*. *France24* (Nasir, 2014), on the other hand, was the exception as it fully indicated and explained ‘IS’s’ motive on its Arabic page as follows:

أتى مؤشر لتأكيد خطف النساء الأيزيديات كـ"سابايا" على لسان أبو محمد العدنانى وبجملته وحيدة لم تستوقف الكثيرين... تأتي هذه الخطوة، كما الإقرار بها و"تفسيرها شرعياً"، مؤكدة لسياسة وإستراتيجية التنظيم، التي تتبع منطقاً ومنهجاً خاصاً يأتي في سياق التحضير لـ"المعركة الأخيرة".

[The reference to abducting Ezidi women as “*sabaya*” was made by Abu Muhammed al Adnanni using one sentence that was left unnoticed by many...This religiously admitted and justified step stressed the group’s policy and strategy which follows a special worldview and agenda that fall into the context of preparing for the “final battle”].

Meanwhile, in an attempt to perhaps manipulate ‘IS’s’ narrative, western mass media also shed light on the personal stories of survivors as did *The Independent*, *The Telegraph* and *The New York Times* (Buchanan, 2014; Spencer, 2014a; Mackey, 2014). In the latter, for instance, one survivor’s account was cited: ‘They were hitting us and slapping us to make us submit to them,’

recalled a 17-year-old girl who managed to escape after being taken to the city of Falluja, west of Baghdad...Everything they did, they did by force' (Mackey, 2014).

Arabic, as well as Iranian *Al Alam* and Kurdish *Rudaw*, varied in the way they translated the article. Generally speaking, and in contrast to western media, slavery was translated into its original sense: *sabi*, especially when the language used was Arabic. Examples can be found in Iraqi *Alsumaria News* and *Rudaw Arabic* which used the following headlines: "داعش" يقر باقدامه على سبي نساء ايزيديات وتوزيعهن واولادهن على مسلحيه [“Daesh” admits *sabi* of Ezidi women, distributing them with their children among its militants], [Daesh admits *sabi* of Ezidi women in Iraq] (Shafiq, 2014; Rudaw Arabic, 2014).

Unlike *Rudaw Arabic*, however, which almost translated several passages from *Dabiq*'s article, *Alsumaria News* only summarized 'IS's' text and narrative relying not on *Dabiq*'s article but on *France24*'s translation. Moreover, *Alsumaria News* highlighted the ethnic identity of Ezidis as Kurds and did not attempt to challenge 'IS's' narrative of legitimacy (Shafiq, 2014). *Rudaw Arabic*, on the other hand, did so by introducing two counter-narratives. The first was the condemnation of Religion Scholars Union in Kurdistan of *sabi* and its denial of the existence of concrete evidence in Islam that justifies women's kidnapping and trafficking (Rudaw Arabic, 2014). The second was the emphasis that Ezidism is a monotheistic religion and that Ezidis worship Allah:

ويأتي هذا الاعتراف بعد أن أدان اتحاد علماء الدين في كردستان، ونفى الاتحاد بان يكون هناك دليل في الدين الاسلامي يبرر خطف النساء والمتاجرة بهن... يذكر ان الديانة الازيدية تدعو الى وحدانية الرب حسب مفسرين في هذه الديانة، وانهم يعبدون الله.

[This admission by 'IS' came following resentment by the Religious Scholars Union in Kurdistan which denied that there is any evidence in the Islamic religion that justifies the abduction and trafficking of women... Ezidism is a monolithic religion according to its interpreters. Ezidis worship God].

In this statement, *sabi*, as practised by 'IS', was seen as 'خطف'[abduction] and 'متاجرة' [trafficking] and was therefore denied and refuted.

Another significant point that needs to be made about *Rudaw*, which is a pro-Kurdistan State media agency, is the way it labelled Sinjar as a Kurdistan territory: 'وتقطن هذه الطائفة مناطق سنجار التابعة: لاقليم كردستان' [This sect [Ezidis] lives in Sinjar areas which are part of Kurdistan]. Sinjar is one of 27 areas claimed by both Baghdad and the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government in Erbil and labelled as 'disputed' in the 2005 constitution (Mustafa, 2017a). Kurdish forces exploited the security vacuum in the aftermath of June's event, fully controlling Sinjar (Dagher and Kesling, 2015). Sinjar and other 'disputed' territories were reclaimed by Baghdad in 2017 (Mustafa, 2017a).

Similar to *Alsumaria News*, the Arab Dubai-based media agency, *Al Aan*, only briefly referred to 'IS's' religious justifications without explaining what these interpretations were (Al Aan News, 2014). Meanwhile, in a similar manner to *Alsumaria News*, the Saudi online newspaper *Elaph* mainly translated from a news report by *The Guardian* interviewing an Ezidi survivor. However, *Elaph* highlighted 'IS's' religious justifications for *sabi* as shown in its title (Al-Majali, 2014): 'بيعن في سوق النخاسة ويجبرن على زواج قسري هكذا يعامل (داعش) سباياهم الايزيديات "شرعا"! [Sold in slaves market, forced to marry. This is how (Daesh) treats its Ezidi slaves according to Shari'ah!]. In the body of its article, it also translated a few paragraphs from *Dabiq's* article. This translation was not literal as the following excerpt reveals:

**Source:**

one should remember that enslaving the families of the *kuffār* and taking their women as concubines is a firmly established aspect of the Shari'ah that if one were to deny or mock, he would be denying or mocking the verses of the Qur'ān and the narrations of the Prophet..., and thereby apostatizing from Islam ('The revival of slavery before the Hour', 2014, p.17).

### Target:

ويعتبر تنظيم "الدولة الإسلامية" ان استعباد الاعداء واجبار نساءهم على الزواج من مقاتليهم انما هو تطبيق لاحكام الشريعة... وذكر البيان الذي نشره التنظيم ان "من يشكك باحكام الشريعة فهو بذلك ينكر ويستهزيء بالآيات القرآنية وروايات النبي".

Back translation: ["Islamic State" organization considers that enslaving the enemy and forcing its women to marry its fighters is an implementation of Shari'ah law...The statement published by the organization added, "whoever questions or mocks the Shari'ah rulings, would be questioning and mocking the Quranic verses and the prophets' narratives"].

The significance of the above translation is that it attempted to restore the original meaning (the original signified) of *sabi* discussed earlier in this chapter (see Section Three) by replacing 'Kuffar and their families' with 'the enemy' and 'taken their women as concubines' for 'forcing them into marriage' (Al-Majali, 2014). In this context, I think that these choices were opted for by *Elaph* to avoid referring to Ezidis as infidels and at the same time to highlight the fact that they were forced, coerced, and abused by 'IS'. 'Concubines' grants Ezidi women a lower status and suggests that they surrendered to 'IS'.

*Al Arabiya* never translated the article on its Arabic page. Instead, it reported on it in the English page where it accentuated the religious justifications by using visuals from *Dabiq*'s fourth issue as well as screenshots from a number of articles in the same issue. In its article, it clearly maintained that 'ISIS has restored an aspect of Shari'ah (Islamic law) to its original meaning' (Al Arabiya English, 2014b). Even when trying to define Ezidis, it did not seem to contradict with 'IS's' own definition of the Ezidis as 'devil worshippers' when it was mentioned that 'The Yazidi faith is a unique blend of beliefs that draws from several religions and includes the worship of a devil figure they refer to as the Peacock Angel' (*ibid*).

*Aljazeera*, on the other hand, reported on the article in *Aljazeera America* and *Aljazeera Arabic*. Addressing two different audiences, the two TTs were distinct to one another. In its English

text on the former, ‘rape’, ‘sexual assault’, and ‘forced marriage’ were used, citing the latest report by Human Rights Watch and only summarized the article by ‘IS’ (Aljazeera America, 2014). Its Arabic article, on the other hand, never used such terms. Rather, it shed light on ‘IS’s’ religious justifications and interpretations. In its opening paragraph (Aljazeera Arabic, 2014b), it pointed out the following: ‘أشاد تنظيم الدولة الإسلامية باستعباده نساء وأطفالا من طائفة الأقلية الإيزيدية بشمالي العراق. وقال إن ذلك يتفق مع تعاليم الدين الإسلامي’ [Islamic State organization praised enslaving women and children of the minority sect of Ezidis in the north of Iraq. It stated that this was in accord with the Islamic rules]. In its concluding paragraph (*ibid*), it highlighted ‘IS’s’ threat against the west by trying to interpret the picture on the cover of *Dabiq* magazine in the following way: ‘ويظهر على غلاف المجلة صورة لكنيسة القديس بطرس بالعاصمة الإيطالية روما مع علم التنظيم الأسود مطبوعا على مكان الصليب الذي يعلو الكنيسة’ [An image of Saint Petrus church in the Italian capital Rome appears on the magazine cover together with the black flag of the organization replacing the cross on the church].

In a brief and abstract note, the article attempted to resist ‘IS’s’ narrative of religious legitimacy by indicating that ‘IS’s’ practices are not accepted by Muslim scholars (*ibid*): ‘وأعلنت الجماعة زعيمها أبو بكر البغدادي خليفة على العالم الإسلامي، لكنها تواجه بانتقادات كثيرة من علماء مسلمين ويقولون إن [The group declared its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi a caliph for the Islamic world. However, it faces fierce criticisms by Muslim scholars who say that its practices are not legitimate].

## 8. ‘IS’s’ video on *sabi*: Early November 2014

A month following the release of *Dabiq*’s article, a video was posted online by apparently an ‘IS’ member showing a group of men informally chatting and joking about enslaving Ezidi women. The 5-minute long video seemed to be filmed individually using a smartphone, and featuring a group of men speaking Saudi dialect in what believed to be the city of Mosul. They were gathered in a room,

laughingly describing how they would distribute Ezidi women, and sell them for just a few hundred dollars or for just a gun. Contrary to the formally centralized distribution of the first article and similar publications, the dissemination of this video was online via ‘IS’-affiliated Twitter accounts (Richards, 2014).

As far as the video content is concerned, two points need to be examined here. First, the use of the Quranic verse ‘ما ملكت ايمانكم’ *ma malakat ayamunkom* [What your right hands possess] by one of ‘IS’ men who appeared in the video. The phrase was used to describe the distribution day when each ‘IS’ man would be eligible to obtain his share of the Ezidi girls. Second, the use of the term ‘سبية’ *sabiya* (singular of *sabaya*) to refer to the enslaved women (*ibid*).

According to western mass media (see for example *Mail Online*, a British right-wing newspaper, Webb and Rahman, 2014; *BBC News*, Wood, 2014, and *Mirror*, Richards, 2014), the video was translated into English subtitles by Arabic TV, *Al Aan*. Meanwhile, other different English subtitles were imposed on the video and were circulated on a number of YouTube accounts. For example, English subtitles were added to the video by an Ezidi activist who also put an introductory message warning that ‘This video is not for shock but rather to document crimes and human rights violations of ISIL militants in Syria and Iraq’ (Burjus, 2014). By so doing, the purpose of the video itself was changed into documentary evidence disseminated by an activist who also acted as an eyewitness. As Burke (2001, p.13) stresses, visuals are an ‘important form of historic evidence. They record acts of eyewitnessing’. ‘IS’s’ narrative in the video was itself transformed into a narrative of eyewitnessing.

The two translations by *Al Aan*, and by the Ezidi activist disparately translated *ma malakat ayamunkom* and *sabiya* or *sabaya*. The first translation by *Al Aan* translated them as follows:

**Source:**

اليوم سوق السبايا. اليوم سوق وما ملكت ايمانكم

**Back translation:**

[Today is the *sabaya*'s market. Today is what your hands possess market].

**Target:**

Today is the slave market day. Today is the day where this verse applies:  
“Except with their wives and the (captives) whom their right hands possess,-  
for (then) they are not to be blamed” (Richards, 2014).

This example shows that the phrase *ma malakat ayamunkom* was translated into the full Quranic verse in which it was originally used, adding (where this verse applies), and stressing the intertextual relation between the two. As for *sabiya*, it was translated into a female slave or just slave as was the case with ‘سوق السبايا’ [slave market]. This translation poses the question of whether the subtitles did not merely explain this intertextual relationship, but rather appeared to foreground ‘IS’s’ religious legitimacy.

Contrary to *Al Aan*'s translation, the second literally translated *ma malakat ayamuinkom* into ‘Today is what your hands possess’ (Burjus, 2014). However, it was circled with quotation marks indicating that the phrase was cited from elsewhere. The second instance, on the other hand, was translated into: ‘sex slaves’. The use of ‘sex slaves’ here by the Ezidi activist can be seen as a mobilizing tool, addressing a western audience, in particular.

## **9. The pamphlet: December 2014**

In early December 2014, ‘IS’ released a pamphlet that consisted of 31 questions: 10 of which were dedicated to defining *sabi* and how to treat *sabaya*; whereas 11 questions were devoted to

discussing slavery and *ammāt* (enslaved girls).<sup>25</sup> As mentioned in the pamphlet, it was written between October and November. It was attributed to ‘IS’s’ Research and Fatwa Department and was circulated online through the Twitter accounts of ‘IS’s’ members and/or supporters. It was like a code of conduct in the Arabic language this time not only addressing its members but also Muslims more generally, who may lack any previous legal and theological knowledge of *sabi* and slavery (Ali, 2016). Contrary to *Dabiq*’s first article, the pamphlet did not talk about any controversy among Muslims over slavery and *sabi*, presenting it as a continuous practice that did not witness any rupture ‘even as its texts make clear just how distant and unfamiliar that past is’ (Ali, 2016, p.8).

The manual attempted to legally as well as religiously frame *sabi* and slavery. As Ali (2016, p.9) explains, ‘In this new context, the anecdotes portray enslavement as a central practice of the pious forbears (*salaf*) who constitute the movement’s central exemplars’. Titled: *سؤال وجواب في السبي والرقاب* [Questions and answers about *sabi* and slavery], it clearly differentiated between the two, using the labels *amma* [female slave] as opposed to *sabiya* [female captive]. It fully defined *sabi* as ‘ما اخذه المسلمون من نساء اهل الحرب’ [women of those involved in war captured by Muslims] (Justpaste, 2014). In the second question, it specified that these women had to be first identified as infidels. This also included polytheists or women from religions other than Islam such as Christians or Jews. As for the apostates, the guide claimed that the majority of their scholars say they do not fall into the category of infidels, and thus could not be enslaved. The subsequent question showed that the enslaved women had to convert to Islam and practise its rituals.

In its fourth question, the guide presented the Quranic verse where the phrase *ma malakat ayamunkom* was used to refer to both the female captives (*sabaya*) and the female slaves (*ammāt*).

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<sup>25</sup> Another longer manual titled: ‘The Captive (*sabī*): Rulings and Questions’ was released earlier in 2014. According to Ali (2016, p.8), ‘It situates practical rules within a more fleshed-out legal and theological frame’.

Labelling the Ezidi enslaved women as property, the guide moved on to explain in details how Ezidi women, any captive slaves (*sabaya*), or slaves (*ammāt*) should be treated according to certain religious interpretations. Treating *sabaya* was different to treating *ammāt*. As far as the former was concerned, the pamphlet, for example, showed that an ‘IS’ member could immediately have (sexual intercourse) with a virgin enslaved girl. It also reconfirmed that enslaved Ezidi women could be bought, sold, or exchanged as gifts among members of the group: إذ يجوز بيع وشراء وهبة السبايا والأماء, إنهن محض مال’ [It is permitted to sell, buy, and give as a gift female slaves and captives for they are mere property]. They could also be beaten but not in a severe way, as the guide described. A *sabiya* is eligible to inherit from her husband after his death and to be free.

The pamphlet then moved from a discussion on *sabi* and *sabaya* to discussing *riqab* [slavery] and the rights and commitments of the *ammāt* [female slaves]. For example, an enslaved woman can buy herself from her husband through a transaction called ‘المكاتبة’ *al- Mukataba*. Described as property, she is at the same time committed to remain with him while he is alive and not to try to escape. If she did, it would be a great sin for which she should be punished. The text cited examples from *hadith* and other religious texts to support these claims (*ibid*).

The distinction between *sabi* and *riqab* in the pamphlet allowed ‘IS’ to reflect upon the emancipatory approach to slavery which was overlooked in *Dabiq*. This was made explicit in the last five queries which encouraged others to free the enslaved women, citing verses from the Quran whilst showing concern for appropriately clothing and feeding them. It seems that ‘IS’s’ distinction between the two was misinterpreted by Ali (2016, p.10) when he argued, ‘These documents disconcertingly juxtapose the stark and sometimes brutal claims of owners over slaves ‘bodies with pious concern for the enslaved people’s human needs for food, clothing, and sex’. Ali was referring

to *sabi* and *riqab* as one in contrast to 'IS', which was clearly distinguishing between the two following theological texts and interpretations.

Who first translated the pamphlet? Not the mass media. Rather, it was translated by MEMRI. A number of scholars including Baker (2006) have been critical of MEMRI for contributing to producing a one-sided vision of the Islamic and Arabic world by selectively translating content that would draw such picture. The quality of its translated texts has been generally accurate and faithful to the source texts, though (Baker, 2006; Ali, 2016). With regards to the pamphlet, MEMRI's translation was, as expected, very faithful to the ST to the extent that it transliterated some of the particular religious or archaic terms in the text and explained what they meant between brackets. Examples are *ahl al-harb* [the people of war], *kitabiyat* [women from among the People of the Book, i.e. Jews and Christians], *kufir asli* [original unbelief] and so on (Middle East Media Research Institute, 2014).

However, it was not a full translation of all the questions that appeared in the pamphlet as briefly mentioned in the introduction to the English version without clarifying which questions were not translated. MEMRI translated 25 questions out of the source 31. In particular, questions number 23 and 26 and questions 28-31 which were dealing with *riqab* and *ammat* rather than *sabi* and *sabaya* were absent in MEMRI's translation. These questions emphasized the sexual satisfaction of the slave and the permission to buy herself from her owner as previously mentioned. Furthermore, questions pertaining to freeing slaves by their owners for their oaths to be fulfilled or for their wrongdoings to be redressed according to the Quranic verses provided were similarly removed. The questions selected for translation, on the other hand, focused on *sabi* and attested to the two points highlighted in the introduction: 'that it is permissible to have sexual intercourse with non-Muslim slaves, including young girls, and that it is also permitted to beat them and trade in them' (Middle

East Media Research Institute, 2014, p.1). The translated version, then, concluded with question 27 concerned with *ammāt* rather than *sabāya* and was itself partially translated. Its query was in particular about ‘أجر عتق الأمة’ [the reward for freeing the *amma* (enslaved girl)], the answer to which was a protection from hellfire (Ali, 2016). Including this question without other questions on *ammāt* appeared to contradict the previously translated questions (*ibid*).

Many western media agencies and a handful of Arabic ones reported on the pamphlet after it was translated by MEMRI. Ironically, citing MEMRI’s translation, they indicated that the pamphlet consisted of 27 questions which were fully translated by MEMRI. For instance, in its title, *The Independent* maintained that ‘ISIS releases ‘abhorrent’ sex slaves pamphlet with 27 tips for militants on taking, punishing and raping female captives’. In the body of its text, it further added that the pamphlet ‘has been translated in detail by the Washington, DC-based Middle East Media Research Institute’ (Withnall, 2014). Similarly, *Mail Online* explicitly stated that the manual was translated ‘in full detail’ by MEMRI (Hall, 2014).

Unlike MEMRI’s literal translation of *sabi* and other associated terms, western media largely translated *sabi* into ‘sex slavery’ or ‘rape’, and the female slaves into ‘sex slaves’ as did *The Independent* (Withnall, 2014), *RT International* (RT International, 2014a), *CNN* (Botelho, 2014), *Mail Online* (Hall, 2014), and *Dailystar* (Lawton, 2014). In so doing, ‘IS’s’ narrative of *sabi* and *riqab* as legitimate practices was transformed into a ‘sexualized, embodied and female’ narrative of slavery (Ali, 2016, p.11).

In contrast to western media which highlighted the pamphlet in their early online reporting, Arabic media generally did not. There were later analyses or commentaries on the guide by individual journalists, but even this was scarce. The Egyptian digital media website *Elwatannews* was an exception. Interestingly, *Elwatannews* cited *The Independent* as its ST. However, the

translation was very brief, summarizing the article in *The Independent* into one single paragraph (Yasin, 2014). Rather than translating the questions and answers that appeared in *The Independent*'s text, for instance, these were paraphrased into the following (*ibid*):

"دليل نكاح الأسيرات" .. كتيبًا أصدره تنظيم "داعش" الإرهابي، ليشرح خلاله طرق الحصول على الأسيرات والسبايا، وإمكانية أن يصبحن ملك يمين... ووفقًا لصحيفة "الأندبندنت" البريطانية، فإن التنظيم أصدر كتيبًا يشتمل على 27 جوابًا على الأسئلة التي يمكن أن يقدمها المقاتلون بخصوص نكاح النساء الأسرى... ويوضح الكتيب كيفية شراء الأسيرات وامتلاكهن ونكاحهن، وكيفية بيعهن ومنحنهن كهدايا للآخرين... كما يشرح بالتفصيل ما تتطوي عليه هذه العلاقة الجنسية...

["A guide for having intercourse with the female captives"... A pamphlet released by the terrorist group 'Daesh' in which it explains how to capture the captives and *sabaya*, and how they can turn into *malak yamin*. According to the British newspaper The "Independent", the group released a guide consisting of 27 answers to the questions asked by the group's fighters on how to have intercourse with the female captives...It explained how to buy, own, and have intercourse with the captives, and how to sell them or give them as gifts to others...It also elaborates on what this sexual relationship should look like].

The use of 'prisoners' to refer to Ezidi girls failed to capture the act of sexual enslavement by 'IS'. However, the use of '*sabaya*' corresponded to the expectations of an Arab audience. 'Sex slave' describes a negative practice and is not commonly used in Arabic. News articles, says Lahlali (2011, p. 127), '[are] interpreted against the cultural backdrop of the reader or listener'. Arabs and Muslims understand and interpret news items according to specific 'cultural cues' immersed in their culture and religion (*ibid*).

Although *The Independent* linked the pamphlet to the abduction of Ezidi women and their enslavement by 'IS', this link never appeared in *Elwatannews*'s translation. Moreover, while *The Independent* used 'rape' to describe 'IS's' treatment of the Ezidi women: 'Among the most shocking are that it is 'permissible' to rape a female slave 'immediately after taking possession of her' (Withnall, 2014), such a label was not used by *Elwatannews*. Rather, it used the word 'نكاح' [intercourse] (Yasin, 2014) which again did not capture 'IS's' sexual abuses. However, it was

retained here to reflect its original use by ‘IS’ in the pamphlet. *Elwatannews* also concluded that the pamphlet was a result of ‘IS’s’ *fatwas*. The use of *fatwa* which represents a non-binding ‘legal opinion issued by Islamic scholars’ (Chiroma et al, 2014, p.324) could be an attempt to challenge ‘IS’. According to Agrama (2010, p.4), ‘People do not have to obey the fatwas they receive. There are no institutionalized mechanisms for them’.

*The Independent*’s article was also partially translated by *Al Alam News Channel* which used the same labels found in *Elwatannews*’s translation: ‘نكاح’[intercourse], and ‘أسيرات’[female captives]. In contrast to *Elwatannews*, though, *Al Alam News Channel* explicitly indicated the Ezidi women, selectively translating a number of the pamphlet’s questions and answers that appeared on *The Independent* (Al Alam News Channel, 2014a). The pamphlet was also foregrounded in *Al Alam News Network* which cited both MEMRI as well as *CNN* as the main sources for its text. In a similar manner to western media, *Al Aalam News Network* attempted to manipulate ‘IS’s’ legitimacy by referring to *sabi* as ‘sexual abuse’. Unlike *Elwatannews*, and its Arabic article, *Al Alam News Network* clearly maintained that ‘IS’s’ narrative on *sabi* drew on the Quran: ‘Much of the pamphlet talks about ISIS’ policy on having sexual intercourse with a female slave, something that the group cites the Quran to justify’ (Al Alam News Network, 2014). Furthermore, *Al Alam News Network* republished some of MEMRI’s translated answers such as, ‘If she [female captive] is a virgin, (her slave owner) can have intercourse with her immediately,’ ISIS explains, according to the MEMRI translation. However, if she isn’t, her uterus must be purified’ (*ibid*). It also drew a connection between the pamphlet and the Ezidi women enslaved by ‘IS’, ‘More than 2,500 Yazidi women have been captured by the hardline terrorist group, according to work carried out by a team of researchers from Bristol University’s Gender and Violence Research Centre’ (*ibid*). *Al Alam* is often more explicit and detailed than Arabic media in its reporting on ‘IS’ to mobilize the world

against its enemy. Moreover, by shedding light on 'IS's' religious ideology, *Al Alam* appeared to indirectly justify to the world its involvement in the war in Syria backing the Assad regime.

#### **10. 'IS's' second *Dabiq* article on *sabi***

Since the release of the pamphlet, stories of Ezidi survivors kept flowing into the media. Generally, the majority of survivors spoke of other cases of rape, or when admitting that they were raped, they were reluctant to give details. This, however, started to change from April 2015 onwards, with the release of Human Rights Watch's second report. In this report where 20 Ezidi girls were interviewed in Duhok, north Iraq, in January and February 2015, escapees were now able to admit that they were raped. However, they could only generally and briefly describe some forms of sexual violence they faced under 'IS's' captivity, including repeated, and sometimes collective rape, beating, selling in slave markets, and forced marriage (Human Rights Watch, 2015b). They could also reveal that they were forced to convert to Islam. Based on these accounts, the report concluded that 'rape', 'sexual slavery', and 'sexual assault', among other similar abuses, amounted to a 'war crime' or 'crimes against humanity' (*ibid*).

In May 2015, 'IS' responded by publishing its second article on *sabi* in the English language in the ninth issue of *Dabiq*. Titled: 'Slave-girls or prostitutes', this article was now written by a female writer under the pseudonym: Um Sumayah Al- Muhajira (Al-Muhajira, 2015, p.44). The article was set to reclaim *sabi* for the second time by challenging all the personal stories and the competing narrative of rape and sexual violence circulating through various media agencies. It was, therefore, seeking to falsify the narrative of rape by mockingly asking if 'taking a slave girl as a concubine turned it into rape and *sabi* into 'fornication' (Al-Muhajira, 2015, p.45). In particular, though, the article was addressing the resentful Muslims and even supporters who also seemed critical of *sabi*:

If only we'd heard these falsehoods from the kuffār who are ignorant of our religion. Instead we hear it from those associated with our Ummah, those whose names are Muhammad, Ibrāhīm, and 'Alī!.. But what really alarmed me was that some of the Islamic State supporters...rushed to defend the Islamic State... after the kāfir [infidel] media touched upon the State's capture of the Yazīdī women. So the supporters started denying the matter as if the soldiers of the Khilāfah had committed a mistake or evil (Al-Muhajira, 2015, p.45).

Unlike the first article, this one attempted to retain the Arabic term *sabi* (written as *saby* in the article). Moreover, it defined it as 'taking slaves through war' (Al-Muhajira, 2015, p.44). It, then, associated *sabi* with *malak al-yamin* by citing some verses from the Quran where it was mentioned in various contexts and confirmed its meaning as 'female captives':

The right hand's possessions (mulk al-yamin) are the female captives who were separated from their husbands by enslavement. They became lawful for the one who ends up possessing them even without pronouncement of divorce by their harbi [enemy] husbands (Al-Muhajira, 2015, p.44).

By describing this practice as 'lawful', the article continued to support this claim by giving examples from particular texts and historical narrations on enslaving women in the early period of Islam. Then, it admitted that this practice was buried in historic books, but thanks to 'IS', it was now revived. So, in contrast to the pamphlet, this article once again recognized the discontinuity in the practice of *sabi*.

In response to Muslim scholars and figures who condemned *sabi* and whom the article labelled 'wicked scholars', it was necessary to introduce a counter-narrative that would stand for the 'truth', according to the article. That counter-narrative legitimized *sabi*, describing it as a 'prophetic Sunnah' associated with the power of 'sword' which was a prerequisite to reviving *sabi* and re-establishing the caliphate system (*ibid*, p.45). It proudly boasted of driving the enslaved 'like sheep

by the edge of sword'. However, in the article, it was denied that *sabi* was done for 'pleasure', as the enslaved had 'turned into hard-working, diligent seekers of knowledge' and were treated kindly with their freedom encouraged (*ibid*, p.47).

The article then concluded by drawing upon its title: *Slaves-girls or prostitutes* and making a comparison between the western women labelled as 'prostitutes', and the Ezidi women enslaved according to Shari'ah. The last paragraph in the article aimed to address the United States by mentioning Barack Obama and his wife Michelle Obama, mockingly implying that she could be enslaved one day and sold for a very cheap price: 'Surely the slave markets will be established against the will of the politically "correct"! And who knows, maybe Michelle Obama's price won't even exceed a third of a dīnār, and a third of a dīnār is too much for her!' (*ibid*, p.49).

In contrast to the first *Dabiq* article, the second did not garner much attention in mass media. However, it was much more present in western media outlets than in Arabic or Kurdish ones. It was also translated in much detail into Arabic by *Al Alam News Channel*.

In western media, the focus was on the last paragraph about Michelle Obama, on the one hand, and on the theological and religious justifications to 'rape' the enslaved girls, on the other. Examples can be found in *Express*, a British right-wing newspaper (Culbertson, 2015), and *Mirror* (Shammas, 2015). The title of *Express* is very telling: 'ISIS calls Michelle Obama a PROSTITUTE and justifies raping slave girls with the KORAN' (Culbertson, 2015). Therefore, notions such as 'rape' continued to prevail in western media discourses. Even when the term *sabi* was sometimes used in, for example, *The Independent*, this was in combination with the use of 'rape' or 'forced sex' (Dearden, 2015a).

Furthermore, such media outlets highlighted the female agency of the author using the label 'jihad bride' which is often employed in western mass media to refer to women joining 'IS'. As

Strømme, (2017, p.2) puts it, ‘Women who join Da’esh [‘IS’] are often not referred to as female foreign fighters, rather they have been assigned their own term – “jihadi brides”, linking their choice to join Da’esh inherently to men’. The use of this label rather than the use of female fighters, for instance, triggered a narrative that is gendered, sensualised and victimized (*ibid*). It depicted women as victims whose choices were determined by ‘IS’s’ men and were, therefore, less threatening and less accountable.

A keyword search for this article in Arabic mass media, including *Al Arabiya*, and *Aljazeera* returned no results. A Google keyword search, though, showed that a number of fringe Arabic websites reported on the article. Interestingly, the main source for these websites was a Tunisian newspaper called *Assabahnews* which seemed to be one of a very few Arabic online newspapers to translate *Dabiq*’s article in its early online reporting. *Assabahnews*, in an obvious contrast to western mass media, downplayed any reference to Michelle Obama. *Assabahnews* provided a summarized translation of *Dabiq*’s article in two short paragraphs. In the first one, it aimed to undermine ‘IS’s’ narrative by describing their interpretations of Islam as ‘مشوهة’ [distorted] and ‘مقززة’ [disgusting] (*Assabahnews*, 2015). In the second paragraph, on the other hand, it summarized the article’s main point into few lines:

ففي مقال بعنوان "سبايا ام عاهرات؟"، زعمت ام سمية الداغشية ان النساء اللواتي تعرضن للسبي على يد عناصر التنظيم دخل عدد منهن الاسلام بارادتهن وبعضهن اصبحن حوامل، معتبرة ان السبايا افضل من العاهرات الموجودات في الدول الغربية، "دول الكفار" بحسب تعبيرها.

[In an article titled: “*Sabaya* or prostitutes?”, Daeshi Um Sumaya claimed that some of the women who were enslaved by ‘IS’ members willingly converted to Islam. Some of whom also became pregnant. She considered that *sabaya* are better than prostitutes in western countries, “infidel countries”, as she described].

Contrary to western media, *Assabahnews* used ‘*Daeshia*’ to describe the female writer. *Daeshia* is the female adjective for *Daeshi*. Both of which are derived from Daesh and are often used to denounce ‘IS’s’ male and female members. Similarly, *Al Alam News Channel* used the same label in its rather more detailed translation that translated some quotes from *Dabiq*’s article into Arabic in an article entitled: *داعشية: سبي النساء سنة نبوية عظيمة وسنعيد سوق النخاسة؟! [Daeshia: Sabi of women is great Sunnah [way of life] and we will revive slaves market?!]* (Al Alam News Channel, 2015a).

The use of both the question and exclamation marks in the title might be intended to question ‘IS’s’ claim. In the body of its text, that claim was challenged by citing a Sunni Muslim scholar of the Islamic Research Assembly interviewed by the Egyptian online newspaper *yum7* who pointed out that ‘IS’s’ practices were a distortion of Islam (*ibid*) : *ان ما تقوله داعش هو تحريف لاحكام الشريعة* [What Daesh says is a distortion of Sharia’h rules]. Why would *Al Alam News Channel* which is a Shia media agency resort to a Sunni scholar’s interpretations to refute ‘IS’? *Al Alam News Channel* was trying to address the Sunni Muslims whom ‘IS’ claimed to represent. In so doing, its counter-narrative would be more convincing for Sunni Muslims.

## **11. Personal stories of Ezidi female survivors challenging ‘IS’s’ narrative: Mass media and Security Council**

Personal stories of Ezidi survivors similar to the stories disseminated by the second report of Human Rights Watch were (re) circulated by western mass media, in particular, challenging ‘IS’s’ aforementioned narrative, and subverting it. The first media outlet through which such stories were narrated was a detailed news article published by *The New York Times* mid-August 2015 and titled:

*ISIS enshrines a theology of rape* (Callimachi, 2015). The article interviewed very young Ezidi survivors whose age ranged 11-25 in refugee camps in Duhok in Iraqi Kurdistan. The personal narratives similarly revealed for the first time how Ezidi girls were raped by 'IS' along religious grounds. One survivor was quoted, 'He said that by raping me, he is drawing closer to God' (*ibid*). Some of these stories revealed the horrendous nature of other sexually violent practices undergone by very young girls, as one survivor described. While telling their stories, the victims chose not to expose their identities by using initials for their names, with their photos hiding most of their faces. The girls provided detailed accounts of their experiences from the moment of their captivity until their escape.

*Sabi* was, thus, referred to as 'systematic rape', and 'sex slavery trade' that became a 'recruiting tool': 'the practice has become an established recruiting tool to lure men from deeply conservative Muslim societies, where casual sex is taboo and dating is forbidden' (Callimachi, 2015). Based on the survivors' narratives, the article explained how a 'bureaucracy' was developed by 'IS' when contracts were issued at courts run by the group to organize the selling of the enslaved girls. Some sections of the article interviewed academics to discuss their opinions on how slavery is treated in Islam. Ali (2016, p.3) was critical of the article seeing it as conforming to 'a familiar narrative of Muslim barbarism'. While the article could fit in a narrative of barbarity, this was specific to 'IS', not to Muslims at large. I, therefore, argue that the article aimed to draw a clearer picture of *sabi* as it was practised by 'IS' on religious grounds. Meanwhile, it denied the legitimacy of 'IS's' narrative by indicating that it was rape and a sex slave trade that helped to establish an infrastructure for the group.

Looking for TTs of *The New York Times*' article, I was able to find two. The first was by the Saudi newspaper, *Elaph*, while the second was by Iraqi Translation Project, an independent website

of volunteer Iraqi translators. *Elaph*'s translation was partial, removing about half of the source article, yet without acknowledging it. Some of the removed sections talked about how Ezidis were considered infidels by 'IS' and why; whereas other sections were dedicated to explaining the different scholarly opinions on whether *sabi* represented a tradition or a religious institution (Abu Jalala, 2015). There were other deletions within some of the translated paragraphs as well. An example was in the aforementioned quote that explained how 'IS' was using slavery to attract men from conservative societies.

By translating *The New York Times*'s title into: *التنظيم ابتدع خطة مفصلة للرق الجنسي: مقاتلو داعش* [The group invented a detailed plan for sex slavery: Daesh fighters pray before and after raping minor females], *Elaph* was trying to defy 'IS's' interpretation of *sabi* as an established religious institution. This became clearer in the introduction:

امتدادا لسلسلة الجرائم البشعة التي يقترفها أفراد تنظيم داعش بحق الإسلام والإنسانية جمعاء، ها هم يوثقون لفظاعة تبرز مدى تخلفهم ووحشيتهم، باعتدائهم جنسياً على فتيات صغيرات تبدأ أعمارهن من سن الثانية عشرة عاماً.

صحيفة النيويورك تايمز الأميركية تسرد في تقرير مطول لها تلك الجريمة الشنعاء التي يحاول أفراد التنظيم الإرهابي تبريرها بموجب تفسيرات للقرآن والشريعة الإسلامية.

[To continue with the horrific crimes series committed by Daesh group members against Islam and the humanity as a whole, they are documenting another horrible atrocity that reveals the extent of their backwardness and brutality. This is as they sexually abuse girls as young as 12 years old.

In a lengthy report, *The New York Times* narrates this heinous atrocity which the terrorist group members try to justify according to interpretations of Quran and Islamic Shari'ah].

In its introduction, *Elaph* seemed to undermine the religious narrative in the ST by the use of words such as, 'brutality', 'crimes', etc, and also by describing such crimes as anti-Islamic and against Islam. Meanwhile, using 'interpretations' to refer to 'IS's' justification of such atrocities implied

that ‘IS’ was selective in its reading of Islam. In other words, unlike *The New York Times*, Elaph’s TT invoked the narrative of a dichotomy between ‘IS’ and Islam.

The Iraqi Translation Project, on the other hand, translated *The New York Times’* article in full without deletions or significant shifts except in the title: *داعش تقديس الاغتصاب وتجعله شريعة الهيئة!* (Hamoud, 2015) [Daesh enshrines rape and makes it a Godly Shari‘ah!]. The shift here highlighted how rape was justified according to ‘IS’s’ religious tenets which seemed to be questioned by using an exclamation mark.

In response to these media texts, ‘IS’s’ supporters kept tweeting about the legitimacy of *sabi*, insisting it was not rape until late August 2015 (Hall, 2015). However, ‘IS’ have never officially responded since May 2015.

In December 2015, there was a turning point for the personal narratives of Ezidi survivors. That was when Murad testified about her suffering and the suffering of her community before a special session of the UNSC focusing on *Trafficking of persons in situations of conflict* (United Nations Security Council, 2015). It is significant to note here that a month earlier, Murad gave a brief testimony in the Kurdish language before the UN in a forum on minorities following an invitation by Kurdish journalist and activist, Nareen Shammo (Shammo, 2015). According to the English translation, and unlike her previous interview with *Spiegel Online*, Murad stated that she remained captive for three months: ‘I have been enslaved and sold dozens of times...for more than three months’ (Shammo, 2015). In this testimony, she maintained that she witnessed cases of rape, without directly stating that she was raped. The testimony, however, was not highlighted by the media.

Murad’s testimony to the Security Council was supported by Yazda, a US-based Ezidi NGO that has been supportive of Murad ever since (Mustafa, 2018). The narration of Murad’s narrative in

the institutional discourse of the UNSC and in the genre of testimony, with the mediation of the activist NGO, significantly transformed Murad's narrative. Rather than a mere personal narrative, Murad framed 'IS's' atrocities against the Ezidis within the narrative of genocide, calling for action and seeking justice:

نطالب ان يتم تعريف ما حدث من القتل والاستعباد الجماعي والاتجار بالبشر على انها ابادة جماعية. التمس منكم اليوم ان تجدوا الحلول لفتح ملف الابدانة الجماعية امام المحكمة الدولية....أفتحوا ابواب بلدناكم لمجتمعنا فنحن ضحايا.

[We demand that the incidents that took place, including the murders, collective slavery and human trafficking be defined as genocide. I am asking the Council today to find solutions to the issue of genocide before the International Criminal Court. We ask that members open up their countries to my community. We are victims...]. (Rashid, 2015; United Nations Security Council, 2015, p.7).

She then demanded that the world should now demolish 'IS', whilst also making reference to similar experiences undergone by women around the world, and not just in Iraq:

'والرجاء منكم انهاء داعش نهاية ابدية يجب ان يتم جلب جميع مرتكبي جرائم الاتجار بالبشر والابادة الى العدالة حتى تعيش المرأة والطفل بامان في العراق وسوريا ونيجريا وصوماليا وكل مكان في العالم.'

[We ask the Council, please, to put an end to Daesh once and for all. All those who commit the crimes of human trafficking and genocide must be brought to justice so that women and children can live in peace – in Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Somalia and everywhere else in the world (United Nations Security Council, 2015, p.7).

As can be seen, Murad spoke in the collective. Testimony which is identified as a resource of evidence with moral significance (Jones, 2017) entails that the narrative is collective rather than personal. As Roy (2007, p.10 cited in Andrews, 2010, p.150) stresses, testimony 'draws its meaning from a collective, plural 'us' rather than the 'I' who is in pain'. In her opening paragraph, Murad spoke about the suffering of her community at large, using the pronoun 'our':

انا هنا اليوم لاتحدث عن ممارسات ما يسمى بالدولة الاسلامية ضدنا من الاتجار بالبشر, استخدام نساءنا للاستعباد الجنسي وتجنيد اطفالنا للحرب والتشرد وارتكاب جريمة الابادة الجماعية بحقنا. انا هنا لاخبركم عما حدث لي وعما حدث لمجمعي الذي فقد الامل بالحياة وصار يتجه للمجهول.

I am here to talk about the practices by what is called the Islamic State/Daesh- trafficking in persons, sexual enslavement of women, recruitment of children in war, displacement and the genocide of our society. I am here to tell the Council my story, of what happened to my society, which has lost hope for life and is now moving into unknown territory (United Nations Security Council, 2015, p.6).

More significantly, and contrary to her early appearance (see Section Five), Murad elaborated in detail on the sexual abuses she suffered during three-month period under 'IS' as shown in the following excerpt:

عنصر من عناصرهم إقترب مني وقال يريد أن يأخذني كنت أنظر الى الأرض وكنت في حالة رعي. وعندما رفعت رأسي وجدت رجلا ضخما جدا كان بالفعل كوحش مفترس صرخت وبكيت كثيرا وقلت له أنني صغيرة لك وأنت ضخم جدا فقام بركلي وضربي. بعدها بلحظات قدم عنصر اخر وكنت لا أزال أنظر الى الأرض فرأيت حجم أقدامه أصغر فتوسلت الى الشخص حتى يأخذني لنفسه كنت خائفة من الرجل الضخم الأول...

مرت أيام قليلة وأجبرني أن ألبس له وأضع له المكياج على وجهي وفي تلك الليلة السوداء فعلها.... أجبرني أن أرتدي من لا يحفظ جسدي قررت أن أهرب ولكن أحد الحراس كان هناك ومسكني. في تلك الليلة قام بضربي وطلب مني أن اتخلي عن ملابسي ووضعني في الغرفة مع الحراس واستمرو بارتكاب جرائمهم بجسدي حتى فقدت الوعي. بعد ثلاثة اشهر من الخطف تمكنت من الهروب.

One of the men came up to me. He wanted to take me. I looked down at the floor. I was absolutely terrified. When I looked up, I saw a huge man. He was like a monster. I cried out that I was too young and he was huge. He kicked and beat me. A few minutes later, another man came up to me. I was still looking at the floor. I saw that he was a little smaller. I begged for him to take me. I was terribly afraid of the first man....A few days later, this man forced me to get dressed and put on my makeup. Then, on that terrible night, he did it.... He forced me to wear clothes that barely covered my body. I was not able to take any more rape and torture. I decided to flee, but one of the guards stopped me. That night he beat me. He asked me to take my clothes off. He put me in a room with guards, who proceeded to commit their crime until I fainted (United Nations Security Council, 2015, pp.6-7).

Revealing the sexual abuses she suffered, Murad mostly used either 'الإتجار بالبشر' [human trafficking], 'إغتصاب' [rape] or 'إستعباد جنسي' [sexual enslavement], similar to western media translations discussed in the previous sections. *Sabi*, on the other hand, was used once in her text. As noted before, *sabi* has a religious element absent in human or sex trafficking. Instead of highlighting this element, Murad made reference to it in two instances. First, when she mentioned that Ezidi women were enslaved because they were defined by 'IS' as infidels, mainly to put an end to their existence: 'كانت غايتهم إنهاء الوجود الأيزيدي برمته بالإستناد الى تفسيرهم أننا كفار' [Their aim was to eliminate all Yazidi existence under the pretext that—according to them—we were infidels]; and second, when she described how an 'IS' member asked for her hand in what 'they called 'marriage': 'الذي قام بأخذي طلب أن أغير ديني ولكنني رفضت وبعدها أتى في يوم وطلب منى مايسمونه الزواج' [The man who took me asked me to change my religion. I refused. One day, he came and asked for my hand in what they called 'marriage'] (Rashid, 2015; United Nations Security Council, 2015, p.6). Arguably, Murad was simultaneously trying to make two points for two different audiences. Therefore, she was using 'human trafficking' to address the western audience whilst at the same time using '*sabi*', albeit much less, to address the Muslim one.

Since her testimony, Murad with the help of Yazda started campaigning for the Ezidi cause. Murad who has become the privileged narrator for the mass media was appointed as UN Goodwill ambassador for the dignity of Ezidi survivors a year later. Meanwhile, 'IS' has never responded, apparently failing to control its 'legitimate' narrative of *sabi* and slavery in favour of the narrative of illegitimacy, rape, and genocide.

## 12. Conclusions

The chapter analyzed how *sabi* was first narrated following 'IS's' takeover of the Iraqi northern town of Sinjar in August 2014 and how this narration shifted over a 14-month period. As the

practice of *sabi* ruptured over history, it was argued that *sabi* first emerged as an antenarrative in the sense that it was a loose signifier as it detached from its original context. This, in turn, resulted in a number of different translations of the term. Antenarratives, however, are always subject to enter into new relationships in new contexts, establishing new competing narratives. In the case of *sabi*, it was contested by 'IS', female survivors, Sunni Muslim scholars, and media agencies. Translation had a key role in shifting the interpretations of *sabi*, and in invoking new narratives. For a period of two months (August-October), the practice of *sabi* was differently translated by a number of actors. Apart from individual tweets by 'IS's' supporters, 'IS' did not officially respond until October 2014. First, there was the female Ezidi MP who retained the religious and cultural elements of the practice using *sabi* and *sabaya*. However, these elements were partially retained in media translations. Second, there were personal narratives of Ezidi female survivors talking about sexualized slavery or rape through the media discourses. These personal narratives themselves changed several times due to a number of factors. Taking the case of Nadia Murad as an example, it was shown that it could be perhaps difficult for her to challenge the societal narratives of shame and stigma that are linked with rape in Ezidi culture. Therefore, in her early appearance, Murad did not admit that she was raped herself, but witnessed others who were. That shifted a month later when Murad revealed that she was raped, albeit in a brief manner. It was argued that the change in the discourse, genre, and mode equally contributed to the changes that occurred in her narratives. This became more apparent in her testimony before the Security Council a year later.

Third, there was the religious narrative by 'IS's' opponents who signed an online letter addressing al-Baghdadi in September 2014, and challenging 'IS's' version of Islam. As far as *sabi* was concerned, the letter stated that this practice could no longer be (re)introduced since slavery in general had been abolished globally. However, this response did not amount to an effective narrative that was able to compete with 'IS' for lacking accuracy.

In October 2014, 'IS' officially responded in the English language through *Dabiq*. Translating *sabi* into slavery, 'IS' was defining *sabi* as a religious institution. Acknowledging the discontinuity in *sabi*, 'IS' sought the revival of the practice following its proclamation of religious legitimacy as a caliphate. Slavery was put within the framework of an apocalyptic narrative that identified it as a prerequisite for the Hour. The article was widely received by western, local, and Arabic media alike, but with different translations. In western media which similarly highlighted 'IS's' religious justifications, *sabi* was translated into sex slavery which although it was a partial rendering of the word, it helped to delegitimize 'IS's' acts and narrative. When using English language, *Aljazeera* did the same to conform to the expectations of its western audience. Iraqi and Arabic media, on the other hand, while retaining *sabi* as a signifier, differently translated the article. Some such as *Alsumaria News* and *Al Aan* provided a brief summarized translation of the article. Others, such as *Al Arabiya*, chose to report on it using the English language alone.

It was also observed that the main focus in Arabic media was to show that 'IS's' ideology was incompatible with Islam, yet, without succeeding to establish a concrete counter-narrative. Generally speaking, and with the exception of *France24*, 'IS's' motive was not highlighted in all media TTs examined in the chapter.

In November, a video was posted online by an 'IS' member depicting a group of 'IS' perpetrators discussing their trade of Ezidi women. Notwithstanding the fact that this video was not an official response by the group, its significance was in the way it reflected the decentralized network of 'IS', sometimes working individually without a central control. Two distinct translations, particularly for *ma malakat aymanukom* [what your right hands possess], and *sabaya* [female captives] appeared into different subtitles. The first was by *Al Aan* which translated the first phrase into the full Quranic verse in which it was originally used. The second, on the other hand,

was by an Ezidi activist who transformed ‘IS’s’ narrative in the video into a narrative of eyewitnessing by adding introductory subtitles to show that the video was republished to document rather than to shock. As opposed to the first translation, the second was a literal translation of *ma malakat aymanukom*, yet with the use of quotation marks, possibly to imply that it was quoted. *Sabaya*, on the other hand, was translated into ‘female slaves’ by *Al Aan* and into ‘sex slaves’ by the Ezidi activist. The latter could have been intended to address the western audience.

In December 2014, ‘IS’ released another official publication. This time, it was a pamphlet in Arabic language addressing ‘IS’s’ members. The manual consisted of 31 questions and answers on *sabi* and slavery. Retaining *sabi* as a signifier and distinguishing it from slavery, ‘IS’ defined *sabi* both religiously and legally in the pamphlet. The very basic information provided in the guide suggested that some ‘IS’s’ members did not have the background knowledge about *sabi* and slavery. This further supports my main argument in this chapter that *sabi* unfolded as an antenarrative. Unlike *Dabiq*’s article, however, the pamphlet did not directly acknowledge the discontinuity in *sabi*. In contrast to most of the 31 questions that legalized the sexual abuse of female captives, treating them as properties according to religious interpretations, few queries focused on *ammat* (enslaved girls). These queries showed care about the humanitarian situation of the latter, urging their owners to free them as a fulfillment of their oaths.

In the translation provided by MEMRI this time, questions on *ammat* were removed with the exception of one query that encouraged the emancipation of female slaves in order to survive hell. Out of the 31 questions, 25 were literally translated. However, since the last question translated was number 27, western media which relied on MEMRI’s translated version, wrongly stated that the pamphlet consisted of 27 questions. Reporting on the pamphlet, western media continued to translate *sabi* into ‘sex slavery’ and ‘rape’. In Arabic media, on the other hand, the pamphlet was

not highlighted with the exception of Egyptian *Elwatannews*. Interestingly, it was shown that *Elwatannews* translated from *The Independent* and not from the pamphlet itself, without using labels such as rape and sex slaves that were used by *The Independent*. Meanwhile, though its translation was very summarized and compressed, it attempted to indirectly challenge 'IS' by describing *sabi* as the outcome of an 'IS's' *fatwa* that was not religiously binding. Although the pamphlet did not garner the attention of Arabic news websites, it did receive the attention of *Al Alam News Channel* and *Al Alam News Network*. Contrary to *Elwatannews*, *Al Alam News Network* made it clear that 'IS' drew on the Quran in their interpretations, citing a number of translated quotes whilst also using sex slavery to refer to *sabi*. Framing 'IS' as terrorist whilst highlighting its religious ideology is a political means to legitimize Iran's action in Syria.

In May 2015, 'IS' responded one final time through *Dabiq*. In an article claimed to be written by a female writer, it lashed out against Muslims, 'IS's' supporters as well as mass media and 'IS's' survivors. In the article, 'IS's' legitimacy in reclaiming *sabi* was re-emphasized denying that *sabi* was equal to rape or sexual abuse. The article concluded by threatening the west, and hinting that Michelle Obama might become a female slave one day. It was this part that got highlighted by western media which continued to translate *sabi* into sexual slavery. The article was never highlighted by Arabic media as was suggested by my keyword search in a number of well-known Arabic news websites. A summarized and reductive translation was still found in a Tunisian newspaper. Although the translation briefly paraphrased the main points in *Dabiq's* article, it aimed to undermine its narrative of legitimacy by describing 'IS's' interpretations as corrupted. This was yet another mediocre attempt to suggest that 'IS' was at odds with Islam. *Dabiq's* article received the attention of *Al Alam News Channel* as well. Contrary to the former, *Al Alam News Channel's* TT was more detailed. To combat 'IS's' legitimacy, *Al Alam News Channel* cited a Sunni religious scholar who questioned 'IS', maintaining that 'IS' did not represent Islam.

Brief and less detailed, personal narratives of survivors occupied various media outlets and reports. In August, however, these dramatically changed into very detailed descriptions of how ‘IS’s’ perpetrators sexually abused Ezidi girls on religious grounds. The detailed stories appeared in a lengthy report by *The New York Times* which framed these within a collective narrative of theological rape. The article was differently translated by the Saudi newspaper, *Elaph*, and by the Iraqi Translation Project. The former was a partial translation that omitted the different opinions on the religious roots of *sabi*, but tried to challenge ‘IS’ in its introduction describing its atrocities as anti-Islamic in the first place. The latter, on the other hand, was a full literal translation. The only significant shift was in its title which replaced theology with Shari‘ah, thus, stressing that ‘IS’s’ interpretations stemmed from Islamic texts. The use of an exclamation mark at the end of the title appeared to question those interpretations.

In December 2015, Murad, who was now supported by an Ezidi NGO, testified about her ordeal before the Security Council. Narrated through the genre of testimony, Murad’s narrative transformed from a mere personal narration into a quest for justice, petitioning others to take action. As Murad elaborated on the sexual abuse she encountered, she used human trafficking, sex trafficking, sex slavery, and rape to refer to *sabi*. *Sabi* was used much less whilst stressing ‘IS’s’ wrong identifications of the Ezidis as infidels, and highlighting ‘IS’s’ motive to eradicate their existence. The use of these terms could be interpreted as an attempt to address two audiences at the same time: the western audience, especially those listening to her testimony in the Council, but also the Muslim audience. Most importantly, Murad framed her personal narrative of rape within the meta-narrative of genocide. Since then, ‘IS’s’ atrocities against Ezidis in general, and against Ezidi girls in particular, have been referred to as ‘IS’s’ genocide of the Ezidis (See for example *Aljazeera English* and *The Independent*, Shackle, 2017; Dearden, 2017).

Although 'IS' attempted to redeem its narrative of *sabi* a number of times in 2014 and 2015, it eventually failed to compete with the personal narratives of Ezidi survivors which were more prevailing and controlling.

## CHAPTER SIX

# 'IS'S' EXECUTIONS VIDEOS: AN EVOLVING GENRE, COHERENT NARRATIVES

### 1. Introduction

Since August 2014, 'IS' has implemented a new strategy in the portrayal of its atrocities, heavily relying on moving visuals as a tool for establishing political legitimacy and bolstering its narratives. Instead of images and articles as in the previous case studies, a series of execution videos have been released since that date and up to early 2018.<sup>26</sup> While the majority of the videos were shot in Syria or Iraq, a few others were filmed elsewhere, in places such as Libya. Therefore, unlike the previous two cases which started as fragments of a narrative, execution videos represented a drastically different case. 'IS' was in an active position, strategically constructing well-structured narratives that it aimed to control. Such narratives were mainly shaped using visual significations highly loaded with a number of possible interpretations.

I argue that this was due to the evolving genre of execution videos which allowed 'IS' to consolidate its narratives. Execution videos share similar motives, functions, and structure. Significantly, they share a type, which Miller (1984, p.157) describes as, 'formed from typifications already on hand when they are not adequate to determine a new situation. If a new typification proves continually useful for mastering states of affairs, it enters the stock of knowledge and its application becomes routine'. In other words, types are 'socially created' and always evolve (*ibid*).

The first execution video released through the internet dates back to 2001 when al-Qaeda disseminated its beheading of a US citizen. With 'IS' releasing its first beheading video it was therefore continuing an old practice and transforming it to new levels of global publicity thanks to

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<sup>26</sup> See for example Morris (2018).

the sophisticated technologies of media and visual communications. Most importantly, and although the videos were censored by western media following decisions by political authorities, they still reached a wider audience as they were shared, copied, and redistributed through the internet.

The core questions addressed in the chapter are the following. First, what happened to this genre and the narratives it helped to elaborate in the practice of news translation? How did the censorship imposed on the videos' reproduction in western media impact these narratives? Second, did this differ in Arabic, Iranian or Kurdish media? Third, what narratives were highlighted or undermined in TTs by the various media agencies under analysis? Last, were there any counter-narratives to 'IS'?

## **2. Execution videos: An evolving genre**

'IS's' execution videos seem to fulfill the two main conditions set by a social rhetorical approach to genre (Miller, 1984): the repetitiveness of a social situation and a social exigence. Genres make use of shared social and cultural references to produce a social function: 'Genres are social processes, and part of wider discursive ones, which indicate some shared frame of reference, including ways to act on them' (Luders, Prøitz and Rasmussen, 2010, p.4). I, therefore, disagree with the argument put by Bennett (2010, p.215) that 'IS's' execution videos constitute 'micro-genres' of documentaries. In fact, public execution predates 'IS' by centuries. Execution, including beheading, is not only a political practice, but also a cultural and symbolic one that evolves over history and across cultures (Janes, 2005). Friis (2017, p.7) rightly denotes that to execute is not just to kill, but to punish. Through execution, power is projected and enhanced, and audiences are deterred (Foucault, 1975; Friis, 2017; Euben, 2017). Stern and Berger (2015) note that execution, particularly beheading, is as old as Christianity. In Islam, especially in the early Umayyad period, executions were widely

practised and were described as ‘pre-classical’, continuing an ‘inherited tradition’ (Hawting, 2009, p.37; Marsham, 2011, p.103).

Execution has been practised by the State, as well as by non-State actors. Beheadings, for instance, were practised across the world at different times: from the Romans to the Greeks, to the French revolution, to WWII, heads were cut off for various reasons (Zech and Kelly, 2015, p.84). In the middle ages in both England and France, executions in various forms were re-adopted by the State to consolidate its power and sovereignty through ‘visible manifestations’ (Foucault, 1975, p.57; Friis, 2017; Euben, 2017). And although executions were later abolished in favour of new economies and technologies of power that became ‘the essential *raison d’être* of penal reform in the eighteenth century’ (Foucault, 1975, p.89), they are still currently practised in Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran (Stern and Berger, 2015; Amnesty International, 2015; Friis, 2017).

Executions also share a significant visual component that spans centuries. Friis (2015, p.728) describes ‘the history of war’...[as] a history of visual technologies’. Discussing decapitations, Janes (2005, p.3), similarly states that ‘decapitation... flourishes with culture, dependent on technological advances’. For instance, the practice had been portrayed through war photography as a tool that manifested and communicated violence during the history of conflict and war. The visual imagery of beheading was prevalent in western culture through literature, and history, before being associated with fundamentalist Islamic groups or organizations (Friis, 2015).

The visual display of executions can be traced back to the Chechnyan and Bosnian wars in the 1990s when militants in both countries depicted a variety of mutilations and staged killings in videotapes (Stern and Berger, 2015; Friis, 2017). However, it was the beheading videos released post-9/11 by al-Qaeda that drew the world’s attention. The first of such videos was released by al-Qaeda in 2002, one month following the abduction of Wall Street Journal correspondent, Daniel

Pearl, in Pakistan in 2002, and was very immature with no coherent narrative (Friis, 2017). In 2004, another video was released by al-Qaeda showing the American Nick Berg in an orange jumpsuit being beheaded by Abu Musaab al Zarqawi in Baghdad (Siboni, Cohen and Koren, 2015). Shortly following this, beheadings started to decline when Abu Musaab al Zarqawi, the then al-Qaeda's leader in Iraq, received a letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri, current leader of al-Qaeda, suggesting the counterproductivity of the videos to the group long-term strategy (Friis, 2015, p.729).

With the release of 'IS's' first beheading video on August 19, 2014, which showed the beheading of the American journalist, James Foley, 'IS' distinctively continued a social situation that recurred across history. This indicates an 'evolution' rather than discontinuity from past practices (Saltman and Winter, 2014, p.31). Similarly, Siboni, Cohen, and Koren (2015, p.127) stress the 'historical significance' between the 2004 beheading video released by al-Qaeda and the current one released by 'IS', highlighting the main differences between the two. First, the fluent English language of the militant who beheaded Foley, and second, the wide dissemination of 'IS's' well-edited video.

By releasing the beheading of James Foley and the subsequent execution videos, 'IS' did not only aim to display the horror of violence but, more effectively, it aimed to strategically transform 'an image into a 'weapon' for agents engaged in warfare' (Friis, 2015, p.729). Therefore, although 'IS' was not the first to use and to visually display executions, it has been distinct in how it has transformed the way 'spectacles of violence unfold on the global stage, including who controls when, where and how violence is seen' (Friis, 2017, p.11) thanks to the advance of internet technologies (Friis, 2015; Friis, 2017; Euben, 2017).

This transformation is significant in three aspects. First, it shows how 'IS' made use of the new technologies to produce execution videos of high quality and to spread them virally to the

whole world. Since videos are circulated on the internet, what Euben (2017, p.1011, emphasis in original) refers to as the '*digital time*', they are uncontrollably re-disseminated in multiple copies by multiple actors at an accelerating rate. In Euben's words, 'digital time has accelerated cycles of reception and reaction to unprecedented speeds, heightened the intensities of online engagements with them, and steadily attenuated those ordinary moments of pause necessary for even a small measure of distance' (*ibid*). Online engagement does not only entail a multiplicity of movements of the videos in a multiplicity of directions but equally significant, it refers to how people emotionally respond to this circulation (*ibid*). According to a rhetorical approach to genre, people's perception of a situation as culturally significant is a condition for identifying something as a genre (Miller, 1984).

Second, 'IS's' executions are structured in a similar way, based on the same pattern, following the same sequence of events. This does not mean that there are no differences among the videos. Although what constitutes a genre are the similarities in the functions, situations, and structure, they can still differ. In this light, Devitt (2015, p.11) emphasizes, 'Philosophically, rhetorically, and linguistically, no two instances of a genre can be identical, but they can still share a genre'. In the case of 'IS's' executions, they vary in accordance with the target audience addressed. Contrary to Rogers' (2014) affirmation that the execution videos are only produced for a western target audience, a significant number of 'IS' executions are produced for other audiences, including Arabs, Muslims, Christians, and Kurds. These were not highlighted enough by western media (Zech and Kelly, 2015). Whoever the victim is, the target audience is key to 'IS'. This is evident in the choice of the languages, the visual signs, and the narratives elaborated on.

Third, through the videos, violence is not just disseminated but is also performed (Euben, 2017) to establish a narrative or a set of narratives. 'IS' strategically constructs and performs a

politically violent narrative that maximizes the implementation of how death and suffering are visualized for its target audience (Friis, 2017). ‘IS’ underpinned its execution videos with one master narrative related to its political and religious legitimacy as a caliphate and a de facto state. However, other more specific narratives varied across the videos as investigated in the following section.

### 3. Analysis of the videos and narratives<sup>27</sup>

While western media were busy covering the first beheading of Foley, ‘IS’ released another beheading ten days later, and hours after the dissemination of images of mass execution of 300 Syrian army soldiers. The video was titled *A message with blood to leaders of the American-Kurdish coalition*. With the Great Mosque of Mosul appearing in the background, it seemed that the setting of this video was in Mosul. It showed the beheading of a Kurdish fighter as he was sitting amid three back-clad ‘IS’ militants who were threatening to behead other 15 fighters shown at the beginning of the video if the US kept supporting the Kurds (Mamoun, 2014). The languages used were Arabic and Kurdish. However, the video went mostly unnoticed by western and Arabic media which reported on later executions.

As far as Foley’s beheading was concerned, the choice of the English language made it clear that ‘IS’ was mainly targeting the west. Arabic subtitles were also provided at the bottom of the screen, suggesting that ‘IS’ was simultaneously addressing an Arabic audience. However, as soon as the 4-minutes and 40-seconds long video opened up, this language supremacy changed when the Arabic phrase that starts the Quran, *al-Basmala*: ‘بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ’ [In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate] was introduced to endorse what would follow (Euben, 2017). Immediately after the Arabic phrase, the black screen was full with the following introductory

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<sup>27</sup> The nine videos under scrutiny were released by the group to two central media arms: *al Furqan* and *al Hayat* (Whiteside, 2016).

statement in Arabic, with English subtitles at its bottom: 'اوباما يأمر بعمليات عسكرية ضد الدولة الاسلامية لتتلقى أمريكا عملياً نحو جبهة حرب جديدة ضد المسلمين' [Obama authorizes military operations against the Islamic State effectively placing America upon a slippery slope towards a new war front against Muslims] (LeakSource, 2014e). This shift in language superiority also reversed power relationships between 'IS' and the US: both were now equal.

The silence was then broken by an electric buzz (*ibid*, Carr, 2014) showing US President Barak Obama launching the military campaign against 'IS'. Another electronic buzz effect then followed to give the impression that the broadcast was interrupted to display the title of the video: *A message to America* in the English language this time (*ibid*). The written message introduced earlier in Arabic and English was now communicated in visuals as satellite imagery was used to show the airstrikes targeting 'IS' locations, with the label 'aggression' appearing (LeakSource, 2014e). By orchestrating the modes in this way, 'IS' was establishing a narrative of retaliation, as well as enhancing its narrative of legitimacy. As Friis (2017, p.16, emphasis in original) argues, 'the Islamic State's staged violence is as much a way of *founding* a state and *enforcing* an alternative political order through the visual display of strength and authority'.

The main scene then opened in a desert under the sunshine, with the black-swathed and masked militant, later identified as Mohammed Enwazi, standing next to the victim who was kneeling in an orange jumpsuit (Friis, 2015; Zech and Kelly, 2015). A black flag was waving on the left side of the screen.

The choice of colours is significantly meaningful here, since these, as well as other signs and symbols, are connected in one way or another with the viewers' knowledge and interpreted accordingly. According to Berger (1972, p.9), how we see things is influenced by our knowledge or beliefs: 'We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and

ourselves. Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are'. The sunshine, for instance, reminded Carr (2014) of the 9/11 terrorist attack: 'I thought more than once of the brutally clear morning of Sept. 11, 2001' (Carr, 2014, p.2). The use of 'IS's' black flag on the left side of the screen was symbolically significant in affirming 'IS's' religious identity. The choice of the black outfit of the executioner supported this symbolic signification. For a western audience, however, this outfit meanwhile invoked a Ninja character (Carr, 2014; Euben, 2017).

By choosing the orange jumpsuit, 'IS' was constructing two distinct relationships with two distinct audiences at once. First, for a western audience, the orange colour recalled the images of Guantanamo's prisoners, reversing in this way the relationships of power between 'IS' and the US. Second, for a Sunni Muslim audience, the colour echoed images of Abu Gharib prison's detainees sexually abused and tortured by US soldiers in Baghdad in 2003. In both instances, 'IS' was aiming to reverse not just the superior status of the US, but also the status of those humiliated (Euben, 2017). But the orange colour was also used in videos showing other victims, including the Coptic Egyptians, the Jordanian pilot, and the Kurdish Peshmerga, meaning that 'IS' was addressing different audiences to whom the above explanations might not necessarily apply. Was 'IS' choosing the colour for its general connotations of blood, violence, and revenge? What about other victims, then, who were killed without wearing the orange jumpsuits? These included the Syrian soldiers beheaded in the fifth video under analysis, and the two Iraqi soldiers, Mustafa al Athary, and Abu Bakr al Samaraie, executed in 2015 and 2017; respectively. In the case of the former, they were wearing dark blue uniforms. In the case of the latter, they were left with their military uniforms on. While providing a definite answer for these questions is beyond the focus of my study, the point I want to make here is that the choice of each colour, sign, and symbol is open to multiple interpretations. In the case of the execution of the two Iraqi soldiers, it might be the case that 'IS'

was sending a humiliation message to the Iraqi government, but this fascinatingly backfired on ‘IS’ when both soldiers: a Shia, and a Sunni Muslim, became icons for heroism and a cross-sectarian unity and identity (Shafaqna, 2017).

The main scene in Foley’s beheading opened with Foley reading a pre-prepared statement:

I call on my friends, family, and loved ones to rise up against my real killers: the U.S. government. For what will happen to me is only a result of their complacency and criminality... I call on my brother John, who is a member of the U.S. Air Force: Think about what you are doing. Think about the lives you destroy, including those of your own family. I call on you John, think about who made the decision to bomb Iraq recently and kill those people, whoever they may have been. Think John, who did they really kill? Did they think about me, you, or our family when they made that decision? I died that day, John. When your colleagues dropped that bomb on those people, they signed my death certificate. I wish I had more time. I wish I could have the hope of freedom and seeing my family once again. But that ship has sailed. I guess all in all, I wish I wasn’t American (LeakSource, 2014e).

The confessional element is loaded with political and symbolic implications since it attempts to ‘control the narrative’ and cast legitimacy over the atrocity by projecting it as an execution of a guilty person (Friis, 2017). In this regard, Zech and Kelly (2015, p.87) indicate that execution is unlike murder, ‘which implies an illegitimate, criminal act. Executions suggest a judicially sanctioned punishment, albeit aimed at a collective perpetrator – the West, Shiite opposition, or apostate regimes’. Forcing the victims to confess serves to achieve two objectives. First, it portrays the victims as actively engaging in the act, and second, it manifests a power relation between a ‘superior perpetrator’ and an inferior victim and identity (Friis, 2017, p.7). This public ‘right to punish’, argues Friis (2017, p.7) ‘requires the victim’s active participation’. Such active participation distorts the victim’s voice by projecting his consent to his perpetrator and by laying the blame on the victim’s government (Friis, 2017).

Enwazi, then, re-affirmed 'IS's' religious and political status as a state acknowledged by Muslims in his verbal statement: 'You are no longer fighting an insurgency, we are an Islamic army and a state that has been accepted by a large number of Muslims worldwide' (LeakSource, 2014e).

Not only what was selected and highlighted to be seen matters, but also what was not selected to be seen. One pertinent example is the actual beheading which was not shown in the video. Rather, the video displayed only the beginning of the scene when the militant put his knife to the victim's throat and started blatantly and brutally moving it. This was interrupted by 'a fade to black' followed by a picture depicting the bloody head of the victim carefully put on victims' bodies (Carr, 2014, p.3). Not showing the actual beheading can be seen as a deliberate method to highlight the amount of violence associated with the act (Patruss, 2016). In this respect, Janes (2005, p.xii) describes beheading as a practice that is willingly and uneasily performed rather than being naturally occurring. Similarly, the documentary filmmaker, Alex Gibney, argues that choosing not to display the act of beheading is 'an interesting aesthetic choice...it makes it all the more chilling, that it was so carefully stage-managed and edited to achieve the maximum impact' (Carr, 2014, p.3).

Although the actual beheading was not fully displayed, each video showed the placing of the decapitated head next to the victim's body. Zech and Kelly (2015, p.87) consider this to be a symbolic ritual with political implications, focusing 'attention on the gore and difficulty of manual decapitation'. However, there is a far more important reason related to the target audience, a point that is also highlighted by Euben (2017). In other videos showing executions of non-western victims, the brutal execution was disturbingly shown in full as will be discussed later. Euben (2017, p.1019) argues that 'IS' could be meeting the expectations of the target audience. For a western audience, these expectations conform to media representations of war referred to as 'grammar of

killing' in which American operations appear 'precise, administrative, and clean' (*ibid*). An Arabic audience is contrastively accustomed to footages of violent content. Different groups fighting on the ground whether in Syria, Libya, or Iraq compete by sharing graphic images and videos which are often redistributed through mainstream and social media.

The final scene then showed the next victim, American journalist, Steven Sotloff, sending another threatening message to the United States.

The subsequent three videos displaying the beheadings of an American journalist, Steven Sotloff, and two British aid workers, David Haines and Alan Henning were disseminated on September 2, September 13, and October 10; respectively. All of these three videos were almost identical to the first video in both their form and content with the exception of a few minor differences. For example, they were shorter in length, reorganizing *al-Basmala* after the visual excerpts of either US President Barack Obama, or UK Prime Minister David Cameron in the case of the last two videos (LeakSource, 2014d; 2014c; 2014b).

In *Dabiq*, references to the videos were made by a variety of means. For instance, in the foreword of its third issue, maps, images of the airstrikes, and a still image from the beheading video of James Foley were juxtaposed to establish evidence against crimes committed by the west in the eyes of 'IS'. 'IS' then verbally explained that the beheading was not only a reaction to the airstrikes, but also to the 'indifference' of the US, in general, and President Obama, in particular, to release its 'Muslim prisoners as an exchange for Foley' ('Forward', 2014, p.4). This narrative was then re-established in a detailed article in the same issue titled *Foley's blood in Obama's hands*. Furthermore, public consent given through the confessions appeared in letters claimed to be written by some victims before their beheading. An allegedly written message by Foley before his murder blaming the US government was published in the third issue: 'I call on my friends, family and loved

ones to rise up against my real killers, the US government, for what will happen to me is only a result of their complacency and criminality' ('Foley's blood in Obama's hands', 2014, p.40). In the message, Foley also called on his brother John, a US air force soldier, to reconsider his career: 'I died on that day John. When your colleagues dropped those bombs, they signed my death certificate!' (*ibid*).

Similar to the case of Foley, the fourth issue of *Dabiq* repeated its justification for beheading the second US journalist Sotloff as a revenge for the airstrikes in an article entitled *A message from Sotloff to his mother days before his execution* ('A message from Sotloff to his mother days before his execution', 2014, p.47). However, unlike Foley, the message this time was claimed to show Sotloff begging his family, particularly his mother to put pressure on the US government to stop the airstrikes and release him: 'Mom, please don't let Obama kill me. Do not let him get away with murder again. What doesn't our government understand? Don't get involved in the Islamic State's internal and external affairs. Leave them to fight their own war' (*ibid*, p.48).

Interestingly, and unlike the video itself, Sotloff's religion and nationality as an Israeli Jew were highlighted in the article in the written text and in an image of his Israeli national identity card that was combined with the text (*ibid*).

On November 16, 'IS' released another 16-minute-long video which took its title from the Quranic verse *Although the disbelievers will dislike it* (ولو كره الكافرون). This title was intensified by displaying it at four different points in the video using words and soundtrack (a voice reciting the verse) (LeakSource, 2014a). The video was about the beheading of Peter Kassig, the American aid worker who appeared in the last video of Alan Henning (LeakSource, 2014b). Kassig, who was kidnapped by 'IS' in 2013, was thought to have been converted to Islam, changing his name to Abdul-Rahman (Callimachi, 2014a). Significantly, the video was distinct to previous beheadings in

a number of ways. First, the video was not just about Kassig, it also showed the beheading of 18 Syrian army soldiers. Accordingly, two narratives were at play: the retaliation narrative and the anti-Syrian regime narrative shaped along religious sectarian grounds using the derogatory labels, ‘*rafithi*’, in reference to Shia, in general, and ‘*Nusayri*’, in reference to Ibn Nusayr, the Alawite founder. A speaker other than Enwazi now used these labels (LeakSource, 2014a). Lots of moving pictures from Iraq and Syria were used in tandem with the verbal rhetoric to enhance the sectarian narrative of Sunnis vs. Shias in Iraq or Nusayris vs. Sunnis in Syria. An example used images from the Speicher massacre. In a similar manner, clips of the Ghouta chemical attack were used to denounce Syrian President Bashar Assad and his regime. Clips of ‘IS’ leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s first and only public speech announcing the caliphate were displayed to consolidate the sectarian narrative (*ibid*).

Second, the first part of the video of Kassig’s beheading was brief and of a lower quality, missing in particular the introductory scene and the confession element that dominated the previous videos. The other part showing the mass beheading of the Syrian soldiers, on the other hand, was more professional, making use of multiple camera positions, soundtrack, slow motion and the sounds of hearts beating and fast breathing before beheading the soldiers, obviously to dramatize the act. Third, although the black-clad militant appeared in both parts, he was accompanied by more militants in the part featuring the Syrian troop’s beheading. Unlike Enwazi, they did not cover their faces, and wore Khaki military outfits, a sign of a disciplined and orderly army.

Fourth, the place of Kassig’s beheading was now known to be in Dabiq, invoking the religious apocalyptic narrative of the final battle. Last, in contrast to previous videos and to the part with Kassig’s beheading, the beheading act of the Syrian troops was projected in the most brutal and gruesome way, raising the question of the reasons behind this shift in ‘IS’s’ portrayal of its

brutality. As discussed earlier, one reason could be related to the target audiences and their expectations. For an Arab audience, scenes of violence disseminated by 'IS' and other groups are shared widely on the internet with no censorship or control. In addition to this reason, Friis (2017) argues that 'IS' has been continuously altering its tactics of how its violence is portrayed to attract a wider audience and to control its narrative. Another possible argument could be that 'IS' was retaliating against violence committed by the Syrian regime in Syria.

On 31 January 2015, 'IS' released an approximately one-minute-long video showing the beheading of the Japanese journalist, Kenji Goto, and titled *A message to the government of Japan* (LeakSource, 2015b). The context surrounding the beheading of Goto was different to all previous videos as it was preceded by a negotiation process involving the Japanese government, and, to a lesser extent, the Jordanian government. First, 'IS' released a short video in which Enwazi stood between Goto and his colleague, Yukawa, who were both dressed in orange jumpsuits, threatening to behead them if a ransom of 200 million dollars was not paid by the Japanese government. Second, 'IS' released further footage showing a still image of Goto holding a picture of the beheaded body of Yukawa. In this footage, 'IS' offered to release Goto in exchange for Sajida al Rishawi, an Iraqi woman imprisoned in Jordan since 2005 for attempting to carry out a suicide bombing in Amman during that year (McCurry, 2015). Two days later, precisely on 27 January, more footage showing Goto holding a picture of 'IS's' next victim: the Jordanian pilot, Mu'ath al-Kasasbeh was released (LeakSource, 2015b). The footage titled *The second public message of 'Kenji Goto Jogo' to his family and the government of Japan*, had an audio message in which Goto warned that he had only '24 hours to live', and reiterated that Sajida al-Rashawi should be freed in exchange for him and al-Kasasbeh (ibid). In other words, the driving motives for Goto's beheading were not just ideological or political, but also economic: 'IS' was seeking a different source of funding.

The video itself was different to previous videos in three aspects. First, being a brief video less than one minute in length, it lacked the introduction in which the execution was usually justified. Second, the setting itself was different, a hill and not a desert. Third, the confession element was absent too. The political and religious narrative of a caliphate was emphasized once more by Enwazi, ‘You, like your foolish allies in the satanic coalition, have yet to understand that we by Allah’s grace are Islamic caliphate with authority and power. An entire army thirsty for your blood’ (LeakSource, 2015b).

In February 2015, there was a dramatic twist in IS’s’ series of executions when a new video was released. Instead of the white western victims who were either journalists or aid workers, the victim was now Mu’tih al-Kasasbeh, a Jordanian Muslim and a pilot in the US-led coalition fighting ‘IS’<sup>28</sup>. Rather than decapitation, immolation was employed as the method of killing. Unlike previous videos, this one was longer and more detailed, mainly in the Arabic language and lacking English subtitles, meaning that it was primarily addressing an Arabic audience. The video titled, *شفاء الصدور* [Healing the believers’ chest] (LeakSource, 2015a) was of high production quality incorporating cinematography, elements of a documentary film, special effects with the use of graphics, soundtrack, cross-editing, and multiple camera angles (Friis, 2017). It is important to comment here on ‘IS’s’ translation of the Arabic *شفاء الصدور* [healing chests], which is an intertextual reference to the Qur’an as a source of healing for the believers in this case. Therefore, a literal translation could not have captured the full meaning of the Arabic phrase. The choice of this title to frame the execution means that ‘IS’ was specifically addressing Muslims.

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<sup>28</sup> Al-Kasabeh was captured by ‘IS’ when his fighter jet crashed near the city of Raqqa in Syria in December 2014. In a similar, though more complicated manner to the Japanese journalist case, ‘IS’ tried to negotiate his destiny with the Jordanian government. This started with the second audio footage of Goto with the latter shown in a still image holding al Kasasbeh’s photo, and warning that he might even have less time than himself. Although some ‘IS’ members tweeted that Al-Rashawi was released, the Jordanian government was quick to deny that and instead requested proof of al Kasasbeh’s life. At the end of January 2015, an IS twitter account announced that the pilot head had been decapitated after the deadline passed (LeakSource, 2015a).

The shift in the killing method did not just capture 'IS's' attempt to attract new audiences and supporters, but most significantly it reflected an underlying religious narrative that 'IS' sought to defend prior to and following the release of the video. For example, some 'IS'-affiliated Twitter accounts shared an Arabic hashtag, asking 'IS's' supporters how they thought al-Kasasbeh should be executed (LeakSource, 2015a). Following the release of the video, 'IS's' affiliated Twitter accounts debated the religious concept of 'قصاص' [*Qisas*, 'equal retribution for crimes'] as a justification for immolation (McCoy and Taylor, 2015). The reason 'IS' justified the method of execution was the wide condemnation by many Muslim scholars who argued that immolation was 'prohibited by Islam' (*ibid*). Similarly, 'IS' dedicated a detailed article on *Dabiq* titled *The burning of the Murtad pilot* in which it attempted to challenge Muslims who opposed the immolation by labelling them as 'hizbiyyīn' (party members) ('The burning of the Murtad pilot', 2015, p.8). To prove its claim, 'IS' loosely cited some verses from the Quran: '{So whoever has assaulted you, then assault him in the same way that he has assaulted you} [Al-Baqarah: 194]' (*ibid*).

This underlying theological narrative was interwoven with the political narrative of revenge for the airstrikes against 'IS's' positions in Syria and Iraq in which al-Kasasbeh and his government were involved. The two narratives were framed by an image of fire in the video. For instance, after the introductory scene showing news excerpts on the involvement of the Jordanian government in the US-led coalition against 'IS', a computer-produced image of a coalition jet firing missiles was displayed (McCoy and Taylor, 2015). Right before the final scene where the pilot was set on fire in a cage, images of the aftermath of coalition airstrikes with civilians buried under debris were set alight. This footage was cross-edited with scenes showing al-Kasasbeh slowly wandering amid buildings apparently destroyed by airstrikes targeting 'IS' locations (LeakSource, 2015a).

The video also showed an interview section with the pilot which was later published in the sixth issue of *Dabiq* in which he gave details about himself and his mission ('The capture of a crusader pilot', 2015). In the interview, the pilot appeared to be uneasily talking about his military mission and his capture by 'IS', describing the Jordanian government as the 'agent of the Zionists' (LeakSource, 2015a). To authenticate his statements, these were combined with the use of digital data, including the numbers and flags of the countries involved in the coalition (Friis, 2017). Similarly, in *Dabiq*, al-Kasasbeh was asked about his role and his government's involvement in the coalition against 'IS' and their relationship with the US, describing him as a 'crusader pilot', and a '*murtad*' [apostate] ('The capture of a crusader pilot', 2015, p.34). Al-Kasasbeh was finally asked if he knew what 'IS' would do with him, and he asserted that they would kill him (ibid). Unlike previous videos showing a black-clad main executioner, the pilot was now surrounded by a long line of masked Beige-clad Islamic State militants, holding rifles. This visual manifestation was used again to support the image of 'IS' as a state with a systematic army.

In mid-February 2015, less than two weeks following the release of the footage of al-Kasasbeh's immolation, a new video was posted online by the group. Five minutes in length, the new video titled *A message signed with blood to the nation of the cross*, revealed the beheading of 21 Coptic Egyptians kidnapped in December 2014 in the Libyan city Sirate.<sup>29</sup> The video opened with a totally different setting to previous ones: a coastal beach in Libya. This was identified from the very beginning of the video when the following subtitle appeared: *The Coast of Wilayat Tarabulus by the Mediterranean Sea* (Shoebat, 2015). The new location significantly came to highlight 'IS's' narrative of entrenching its caliphate in new places around the world. The montage imagery of the Libyan coast with 'IS's' masked, black-clothed militants leading their smaller victims was aimed to reinforce 'IS's' narrative of authority and superiority.

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<sup>29</sup> Unlike previous videos which were produced by *al Furqan* central media arm, this one was produced by *al Hayat*, another central media arm dedicated to publications in languages other than Arabic (Whiteside, 2016).

Primarily addressing an Arabic audience, the video marked the second mass beheading displayed in full without the confession element. A few days before the video was released, a report was published in the seventh issue of *Dabiq* and was titled *Revenge for the Muslimat persecuted by the Coptic crusaders of Egypt* ('Revenge for the Muslimat persecuted by the Coptic crusaders of Egypt', 2015). In the report, 'IS' fully justified the beheading by also claiming its responsibility for a suicidal operation targeting Al Najat church in Baghdad in 2010. According to the report, being distant from Egypt at that time, that operation was 'in revenge for Kamilia Shehata, Wafa Constantine, and other sisters who were tortured and murdered by the Coptic Church of Egypt' ('Revenge for the Muslimat persecuted by the Coptic crusaders of Egypt', 2015, p.30). By labelling Christians as the 'nation of the cross' in the title, and 'people of the cross, followers of the hostile Egyptian church' in the subtitle, the motive was not just political but also religious. In addition to the narratives of expansion and vengeance visually framed with imagery of bloodiness, the video constructed a set of mainly religiously ideological narratives. The first of these narratives identified Islam as a violent religion; a religion of the 'sword', when the main executioner distinctly dressed in Beige military costume first stated that Prophet Muhammad was 'sent by the sword as a mercy to all the world' (Shoebat, 2015). This narrative was also simultaneously introduced in the seventh issue of *Dabiq* in an article titled *Islam is the religion of the sword not pacifism* ('Islam is the religion of the sword not pacifism', 2015, p.20). The second was the apocalyptic narrative based on a prophecy of Jesus descending to Earth as a final mark of approaching the Hour. This was fulfilled by making reference to Rome and the Crusaders (Mauro, 2015). The reference to Rome was repeated at the end of the video too as the main executor pointed his knife at the sky and pledged to conquer Rome (Mauro, 2015; Shoebat, 2015). The consistent reference to the crusaders (Europeans, Americans, and Christians in general), and the conquering of Rome was meant to relate to previous

narratives of the past when early Muslims invaded parts of Europe and Rome. According to Mauro (2015), this reference was a tool for appealing to 'IS's' supporters to recapture these lands.

The last narrative was revenge for the death of Osama bin Laden whilst referring to the sea where his body was buried, promising to mix it with the blood of the 'crusaders'. Thus, 'IS' was sending the message that the group is the successor of Osama bin Laden, not Ayman al-Zawahiri (*ibid*). This message was visually delivered through an image of the sea filled with blood following the brutal beheading that was displayed in full (Shoebat, 2015). The narrative of 'IS' being the successor of Osama bin Laden was reemphasized in the eighth issue of *Dabiq*. In an article titled *Responding to the doubts*, 'IS' explained the tension between Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri: 'Thus, adh-Dhawāhirī had abandoned the pure heritage left by Shaykh Usāmah ... for the Muslim Ummah when he was martyred' ('Responding to the doubts', 2015, p.24).

On October 30, 2015, another beheading video was released by 'IS' displaying the decapitation of four Peshmerga fighters. The 15-minute-long video titled *The truth of the American raid* was allegedly filmed in Kirkuk, north of Iraq, and was released by Wilayat Kirkuk media branch (Prince, 2016). The significance of this video lies in the fact that it was released only a few months following claims that al-Baghdadi had ordered his group to stop viewing execution scenes because they were upsetting to the feelings of Muslims. The claim made it to news headlines following the release of a beheading video showing the murder of a Syrian officer by a teenage boy in the Syrian city of Palmyra. It was very interesting to track the source of this claim. This is because unlike previous narratives or texts circulated by 'IS' itself, no text or document could be found. Rather, the claim was first circulated by the Arabic London-based newspaper, *Al-Quds Alaraby*, in an article quoting an 'IS' source as saying, 'taking into account the feelings of Muslims

in general, in addition to children who may view the scenes as gruesome, a letter was issued by the group leadership to all its media channels to stop displaying the beheading scenes' (Issam, 2015).

Despite this claim, the last video under analysis contained the most brutal and gruesome beheading scene so far. Taking place in Kirkuk according to 'IS', the video constructed a narrative of revenge for airstrikes in Iraq through a combination of visuals showing the destruction caused by the airstrikes and personal stories of eyewitnesses. Furthermore, it challenged the claim of a successful US special forces raid on an 'IS' prison in the village of Hawija in Kirkuk, north of Iraq. In other words, 'IS' was weaving a counter-narrative that the raid was unsuccessful. This narrative was constructed by the way the video was represented and orchestrated. An example is the title itself which was repeatedly shown in the video. The label 'failed' was also consistently used in the video to describe the American raid. An 'IS' white-clad narrator then emphasized this by telling the viewers that the prisoners released were suspects and not Peshmerga militants as the US had thought. Eyewitnesses were also used to support 'IS's' narrative that the raid failed to achieve its goals when the troops ran away and started to target civilians instead of the prisoners. In the beheading scene itself, two executioners speaking American English and Kurdish addressed Obama and Kurdistan president Masoud Barzani. Both re-stressed that the raid was a failure, and that the four Peshmerga prisoners labelled 'apostates' were the ones whom they could not free (Prince, 2015). Addressing Obama and labelling him as a 'crusader', the black-clad militant said, 'Obama, you have learned a new lesson. Six of the soldiers of the caliphate faced 400 of your children. They killed and injured them by Allah's grace. You are probably surprised by this... Obama - you wage war against Allah, he supports us against you' (Prince, 2015). Therefore, the US was accused of waging war not just against 'IS', but against God, amplifying the religious legitimacy of the group. To further challenge 'IS's' 'enemies', an Arabic subtitle appeared on screen as the three Peshmerga

fighters were being murdered: ‘هؤلاء الجنود الأكراد الذين نزل الأمريكان لإنقاذهم’ [These are the Kurdish fighters whom the Americans came down to rescue] (*ibid*).

The video was organized in a somewhat similar way to previous videos. The main difference was the addition of a new documentary part where an ‘IS’ narrator and eyewitnesses told their accounts. No next victim was shown at the end, but a pledge to conquer Erbil now, not Rome, was made by the Kurdish-speaking executioner. Moreover, in a more brutal and violent manner to other footage, the three victims were forced to watch the first victim being beheaded before their heads were decapitated by the three militants (Prince, 2015). Therefore, ‘IS’ was maximizing the visuality of its brutality as a tactic to keep the group under the spotlight, and/or to meet the expectations of the Kurdish audience which are similar to those of Arab Muslim audiences.

#### **4. Translating the videos into the media**

Following the release of ‘IS’s’ first beheading video, it was widely censored by both western media agencies and social media platforms in accordance with decisions by government authorities (Friis, 2015). Twitter, for instance, quickly suspended many accounts that circulated the beheading footage. However, the case was different with Arabic and Iranian media which still republished the beheadings, at least partially. Moreover, given the nature of the internet-enabled media, distribution of content could not be fully controlled. Most of ‘IS’s’ execution videos were fully reproduced by LeakSource, for example. Individuals and viewers could also contribute to re-disseminating them under different titles that aimed to alter their original function. In this regard, Friis (2017, p.10) writes, ‘despite intensified content moderation on social media platforms and new forms of censorship from governmental authorities, the Islamic State’s ability to creep into the collective consciousness of multiple publics across national and linguistic borders has proven remarkably persistent’.

The release of the first beheading video of James Foley and the subsequent three videos took the western media by storm. While a number of western newspapers and media agencies were rather assertive that the beheading took place using the verb ‘says’ as in *The New York Times*’ title: *ISIS Says It Killed Steven Sotloff After U.S. Strikes in Northern Iraq* (Landler and Schmitt, 2014), a number of other newspapers cast doubt on the act by using ‘claims’, ‘purports’, and ‘purportedly’. Examples can be found in *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent* describing the beheadings of James Foley, Alan Henning, Egyptian Copts, and Kenji Goto; respectively (DeYoung and Goldman, 2014; Ackerman, 2014, McCurry, 2014; Osley, 2014; Black, 2014). Using ‘claim’ and other similar words, as opposed to ‘say’ or ‘show’, not only surrounds the act with uncertainty but also helps to ‘undermine both the statement and the person making this statement’ (Lahlali, 2011, p.130).

Most western media agencies refrained from republishing the executions. An example of the first western media website that refrained from broadcasting the beheading videos was *CNN*. In its TT of Foley’s beheading video, it was stated, ‘CNN is not airing the video’ (Carter, 2014). However, others, such as *BBC News*, still showed restricted scenes of Foley’s beheading within another news report video incorporated into its TT, warning in a subtitle that the video contained ‘disturbing images’ (BBC News, 2014a). Generally, as argued by Friis (2015), the executions highlighted by western media as ‘staged’ were not fully shown in online reporting. Rather, they were partially made visible through still images as in *The Washington Post* (DeYoung and Goldman, 2014), *The New York Times* (Callimachi, 2014b), *The Telegraph* (Lockhart, 2014), and *BBC News* (BBC News, 2014a). These stills were as described by Friis as ‘carefully cropped..., frame-grabbed from the videos, showing the hostages and ‘Jihadi John’ in the desert, but nothing

more' (Friis, 2015, p.740)<sup>30</sup>. The label 'Jihadi John' was used by western media in reference to the black-masked militant, Muhammed Enwazi, highlighting in this way his British accent.

The visuality of 'IS's' executions became less salient in the TTs of subsequent videos. In the case of Kassig's beheading, for instance, most western media agencies, including *The Washington Post*, *Time*, *The Telegraph*, and *The Independent*, never used any still images of the video (Goldman, 2014; Thompson, 2014; Farmer, 2014; Usborne, 2014). Apparently, there was a reason for suppressing these still images. According to *The Telegraph*, 'The family respectfully asks that the news media avoid playing into the hostage-takers' hands and refrain from publishing or broadcasting photographs or video distributed by the hostage-takers' (Spencer, et al, 2014). In the written text, different quotes by either Jihadi John or the victims were cited, focusing in principle on the British accent of Enwazi, the orange outfit of the victim which was described as echoing the outfit of Guantanamo Bay detainees (e.g., *The Washington Post*, DeYoung and Goldman, 2014), as well as the political narrative of retaliation for the airstrikes.

The exception was *RT International* (RT International, 2014b) which republished a still showing Kassig kneeling with Arabic subtitles highlighting 'IS's' accusation of US's bombing: 'اوباما أنت بدأت القصف الجوي على الشام الذي لازال يستهدف أهلنا فيها' [Obama, you started airstrikes against our people in Syria and are still bombing them]. The Russian government-funded media agency's choice to foreground this subtitle is telling. By doing so, it aimed to divert the world's attention from Russian airstrikes in Syria to airstrikes by the US.

The significance of this partial translation of the videos into stills is two-fold. First, the fragmented stills highlighting the black-clad murderer and his orange-clad victims have become 'iconic' images (Friis, 2015, p.733) within the framework of the 'war on terror' meta-narrative. As

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<sup>30</sup> The term 'Jihadi John' first appeared in a blog on the *Spectator*, describing British jihadists before being used by other media outlets to refer to Enwazi (Murray, 2014).

noted by Hansen (2015), in order to gain such iconic status, the visuals dialectically interact with the discourse in which they circulate (Hansen, 2015; Patruss, 2016). Framed with this abstract narrative, the fragmented stills were used as evidence in the security discourse against 'IS' (Friis, 2015). According to Hansen (2015, p.256), iconic images can act as influential 'visual nodal points'. In other words, because iconic images are widely shared and (re)circulated, they never fade from memory (Hansen, 2015). As such, iconic images can actively (re)define meaning and political identities (Patruss, 2016, p.70). Second, and as a result, this partial translation has contributed to causing rupture to 'IS's' carefully structured narrative. In particular, the causal employment feature of its narrative that the executions were in retaliation for the airstrikes was not made visible. Rather, this narrative was highlighted to a greater or lesser degree in the written texts of some of the media reports. *BBC News*, for instance, wrote, 'The jihadist militant group said the killing was revenge for US air strikes against its fighters in Iraq' (BBC News, 2014b). This changed later when the narrative of revenge was subsumed into a brief summary or was completely silenced as in *BBC News*' TT of Henning's beheading (BBC News, 2014b).

The meta-narrative of the 'war on terror' was invoked by labels such as, 'brutal', and 'evil' used in political statements by world leaders and officials. An example is in *The Guardian* reporting on the beheading of James Foley and quoting Caitlin Hayden, the Spokesman for the National Security Council, 'If genuine, we are appalled by the brutal murder of an innocent American journalist and we express our deepest condolences to his family and friends' (Ackerman, 2014). With the release of the second beheading video of Steven Sottloff, another narrative was established in western media discourses: a narrative of global security threat, calling for urgent military intervention (Friis, 2015). The American media demanded that US former president Barack Obama take urgent action. An example is in *The New York Times*: '...the harrowing images of Americans

with knives to their throats have given the threat from ISIS an emotional resonance and stoked calls on Capitol Hill and elsewhere for Mr. Obama to act more boldly' (Landler and Schmitt, 2014).

With the release of subsequent videos, especially the beheadings of western hostages, the narrative of a global security threat by 'IS' was further reinforced by focusing attention on worldwide condemnation which involved using words that immediately activated that narrative. An example is privileging Obama's labelling of Kassig's beheading as 'pure evil' as did *The New York Times* (Callimachi, 2014a) and *RT International* (RT International, 2014b). Moreover, in the case of Kassig, emphasizing his conversion to Islam that still did not prevent 'IS' from killing him as *Time* did (Thompson, 2014) amplified that narrative. Another example is Japan's outrage over Goto's beheading as in *BBC News*, *RT International*, and *The Telegraph* (BBC News, 2015d; RT International, 2015d; Crilly, Millward and Harley, 2015). In its TT of Goto's beheading, *The Telegraph* (Crilly, Millward and Harely, 2015) maintained, 'World leaders condemn barbaric killing of Japanese hostage after Islamic militants release video purporting to show hostage's beheading'.

'Barbaric', which was not widely used before when the victims were local, depicts 'IS' as a group that thrives on the destruction of civilization. In Foucault's (2003, p.195) phrasing, 'There can be no barbarian without a pre-existing history: the history of the civilization he sets ablaze'. This binary opposition of the barbaric 'IS' and the civilized west was embedded in the Bush administration's 'war on terror' meta-narrative, framing the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001, and shaping the US foreign policies with the world (Jackson, 2005, p.40). This abstract narrative was employed to legitimize American military interventions in other countries. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 is one significant example.

This meta-narrative was similarly evoked by labelling ‘IS’ as ‘terrorist’ as *RT International* did (RT International, 2014c) in its TT of Sotloff’s beheading, *The Telegraph* in its TT of Henning’s (Duffin and Ross, 2014) and *The Guardian* in its TT of Kassig’s (Smith, 2014). In the case of the two British newspapers, ‘terrorist’ was used for the first time, replacing previous labels they both used: ‘jihadists’ by *The Telegraph* and ‘militants’ by *The Guardian*. The use of these labels was not consistent though and kept changing a number of times in accordance with changes in the videos, or in ‘IS’s’ acts in general.

In *The Guardian*’s reporting of al-Kasasbeh’s immolation, denouncing statements by Jordanian government and world leaders’ calling for pursuing the fight against ‘IS’ were included: ‘David Cameron condemned the pilot’s murder as “sickening” and said it would “strengthen our resolve” to defeat ISIS’ (Chulov and Malik, 2014). Similarly, the response by the Jordanian government that it would not step back from its participation in the US-led coalition against ‘IS’ was highlighted in subsequent reporting by *The New York Times*, ‘The video appeared to be an attempt to cow the Arab nations and other countries that have agreed to battle the militants in Syria. So far, it appeared to have had the opposite effect in Jordan, which suggested its resolve had been stiffened’ (Nordland and Kadri, 2015).

Following the release of the immolation video of the Jordanian pilot, western media shed light on the widespread condemnation by Muslim scholars and institutions, including the prestigious Al-Azhar seat for religious learning based in Cairo. *Reuters*, for instance, foregrounded the contested religious narratives among ‘IS’ supporters and opponents, highlighting in a news article’s title that the latter denounced the immolation as ‘un-Islamic’ (Aboudi and Al-Khalidi, 2015). *The Independent*, on the other hand, despite noting ‘IS’s’ involvement of the target audience in making the decision as to how to execute the pilot, did not give any reasons for this: ‘At one point, Twitter

accounts known to belong to ISIS operatives invited followers to suggest ways in which the pilot should be killed' (Dawber, Broughton and O' Connor, 2015).

Moreover, western media attempted to curb 'IS's' propaganda by highlighting the heroism and kindness of the western victims, generating a personal humane narrative by engaging with individual accounts of the victims' families and relatives. Examples can be found in *The Telegraph's* TT of Haines' beheading (Duffin and Ross, 2014), in *BBC News'* and *The Independent's* TTs of Henning's beheading, showing outrage by Muslims in Britain over his killing for his voluntary work with Syrian people. In *The Independent*, for instance, it was mentioned:

Earlier this week Mr Henning's distraught wife, Barbara, made a desperate plea to ISIS to release him after he was shown in the video revealing Mr Hain's death. She said: "Some say wrong time, wrong place. Alan was volunteering with his Muslim friends to help the people of Syria. He was in the right place doing the right thing" (Smith, 2014).

Similarly, personal images of Kassig were used describing him as 'courageous' or attributing the lack of confession in his video to his 'powerful silent courage' (Spencer, et al, 2014; Thompson, 2014). *The Telegraph* similarly maintained in its subtitle, 'The lack of a propaganda statement in a video apparently showing the death of Peter Kassig may mean he defied his murderers to the end' (Farmer, 2014). Moreover, Kassig's past statements in which he explained the challenges facing him as a ranger or letters he wrote to his parents prior to his death were also quoted in *The New York Times* (Callimachi, 2014a). In so doing, the political narrative of retaliation was challenged by a narrative of individual courage and goodness.

Similarly, Goto's images in an orange suit were replaced by his personal photos. Examples were found in the *BBC News* (BBC News, 2015d), *The Independent* (Boren, 2015), *The Telegraph* (Crilly, Millward and Harekly, 2015), and *The Guardian* (McCurry, 2015). Moreover, *BBC News*

(BBC News, 2015d) attempted to engage the public in condemning his killing by referring to a campaign launched on social media using the hashtag: ‘I am Kenji’ motivated by the ‘Je Suis Charlie’ [I am Charlie] slogan, first posted on Twitter by Joachim Roncin, an art director of a French magazine on January 7, 2015 in response to shootings at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, a weekly satirical newspaper. The slogan quickly became the ‘biggest hashtag of solidarity in history’ (Devichand, 2016).

The same can be said about al-Kasasbeh’s immolation when personal images of the Jordanian pilot in his military uniform were sometimes combined with images depicting Jordanians’ outrage. Examples can be found in *The New York Times* (Nordland and Kadri, 2015), and *The Telegraph* (Marszal and Spencer, 2015). In the written text, the final scene of the immolation was fully described by most western media agencies, highlighting the shift in the execution method used (Dawber, Broughton, and O’Connor, 2015).

In the case of the beheading of the 21 Coptic Egyptians, stills were used once again to stress the narrative of ‘IS’s’ expansion beyond Iraq and Syria. *The Guardian* focused in its title on this narrative of expansion: *ISIS claim of beheading Egyptian Copts in Libya shows group’s spread* (Black, 2015). As shown by *The New York Times*, the new setting demonstrated the close relationship and communication between the local group of militants in Libya and the main organization of ‘IS’, anticipating at the same time an authorization of ‘operations in unexpected territories in Libya’ (Kirkpatrick ad Callimachi, 2015). Similarly, *The Independent* highlighted the new setting of the beheading, triggering a narrative of expansion as appeared in its news article title: *ISIS beheading of Coptic Christians on Libyan beach brings Islamists to the doorstep of Europe* (Dearden, 2015b). Both *The New York Times*, which explicitly described the video in its written text, citing the main executioner’s statements, and *The Guardian* referred to the local ‘sectarian’

narrative between Copts and Muslims in Egypt: ‘The language directed at these Arab Christians is as hateful and sectarian as that employed against Shia Muslims and the western journalists and aid workers whose murder by ISIS has so far attracted most attention internationally’ (Black, 2015).

Notwithstanding the similarities among western media in what was highlighted or challenged in their TTs of the previous videos, there were remarkable differences in some other cases. The mass beheading of the Syrian soldiers shown within Kassig’s beheading video was either amplified in the written text or briefly reduced into a short paragraph or even suppressed altogether (e.g. *Time* Thompson, 2014). *BBC Arabic* (BBC Arabic, 2014a) reduced the beheading into the following short sentences: ويظهر في الفيديو أيضا قطع رؤوس 18 سوريا عرف أنهم طيارون وضباط في الجيش السوري. وأنهم . [The video also shows the beheading of 18 Syrian air officers and officials in the Syrian army who were arrested in Tabqa air base in August]. Others, such as *The Guardian*, accentuated the mass beheading, quoting the main militant as saying: ‘To Obama, the dog of Rome, today we are slaughtering the soldiers of Bashar and tomorrow we’ll be slaughtering your soldiers. With Allah’s permission we will break this final and last crusade...’ (Malik, 2015).

Similarly, *RT International* did not just mention the militant’s statements but also orchestrated a tweet displaying stills of the soldiers before the beheading scene (RT International, 2014b). More interestingly, *RT International* used ‘victims’ to describe the soldiers, and ‘extremist’ to describe ‘IS’. It is not surprising that *RT International* would victimize the soldiers of the Syrian regime, a Russian ally. The use of ‘extremists’ instead of ‘terrorists’ in relation to this video is revealing. It seems to me that *RT International* wanted to highlight the ideological differences between the executed soldiers who were Shia Alwaite and ‘IS’s’ militants, polarizing them into the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’. Furthermore, *RT International* made reference to the religious narrative of the final battle

between 'IS' and the west: 'The video was allegedly made in the Syrian town of Dabiq, in the country's Aleppo province. The town holds propaganda value for 'IS', as Dabiq is mentioned as a place where some events are expected to unfold during the Malahim or Armageddon' (RT International, 2014b).

Three months before the release of the ninth video under scrutiny in which four Peshmerga fighters were beheaded; western media spread the narrative that al-Baghdadi had ordered the banning of the release of the execution videos, mistranslating claims of al-Baghdadi's orders to stop viewing the execution scenes, rather than the videos. Examples could be found in the titles of the following news articles: *Mail Online: ISIS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi BANS extremist group from releasing any more graphic execution videos to 'spare the feelings of fellow Muslims and their children'* (Drury, 2015), *Mirror: ISIS bans beheading videos-because they're bad for murderous terror group image* (Rockett, 2015), and *RT International: ISIS leader al-Baghdadi 'bans' slaughter videos* (RT International, 2015a).

Although the last video of the Peshmerga fighters' beheading came to disprove this claim, it received little attention in western media, which was in sharp contrast to previous videos. Among the very few media agencies that translated the video were *Mail Online* (Gillman, 2015) and *CNN*. *CNN*, for instance, mainly focused on the new black-clad militant who looked like Enwazi, reproducing stills from the beheading within a news report video at the head of its news article (Almasy, 2015): 'The masked man in the video does not appear to be 'Jihadi John', who has appeared in ISIS videos where other captives have been beheaded'. In the written text and in a similar manner to earlier news articles on previous beheadings, 'IS's' political narrative of a failed US raid was brought to attention this time (Almasy, 2015).

In Arabic and Iranian media discourses, the political narrative of retaliation was visually more salient than it was in western media. Although coming from two different ideological stances, both Arabic and Iranian media utilized this visual manifestation as a political tool for reminding people of American involvement in the conflict in the Middle East. *Al Arabiya* was consistent in republishing parts of the execution videos, focusing attention on the militant's and/or the victim's statements. Examples are its TTs of Foley's beheading, al-Kasasbeh's immolation, and the mass beheading of the Egyptian Copts (Al Arabiya, 2014d, Al Arabiya, 2015d, Al Arabiya, 2015c). In the case of Foley's beheading, it republished Foley's confession scene accompanied by stills from the video that highlighted Foley's statement, justifying the beheading as an act of revenge (See Figure 12).

**Figure 12: A still from Foley's beheading where Foley was addressing his brother John, a member of the US air force.**



The Arabic subtitle translates into, 'I call on you, John, think about who made the decision to bomb Iraq recently and to kill those people whoever they may have been' (Al Arabiya, 2014d).

In its written text, both Foley and Enwazi's statements were cited. As opposed to *Al Arabiya*, *Al Arabiya English* refrained from republishing the execution videos. Nevertheless, it did not refrain from showing the stills with Arabic subtitles in which the narrative of retaliation was made clear (Al Arabiya English, 2014e). In the written text, full quotes of Enwazi's and Foley's statements which intensified that narrative were provided:

“Today, your military air force is attacking us daily in Iraq, your strikes have caused casualties amongst the Muslims,” the man, speaking in what sounded like a British accent, said. “You [the United States] are no longer fighting an insurgency, we are an Islamic army and a state that has been accepted by a large number of Muslims worldwide (*ibid*)

Translating Foley's beheading, *Aljazeera Arabic* embedded some scenes from the video within a video report put on top of its TT, visually highlighting the narrative of retaliation (Aljazeera Arabic, 2014f). In another news article reporting on Foley's beheading, *Aljazeera Arabic* fragmented the video into one still that, similar to the previous example of *Al Arabiya*, heightened the Arabic subtitles which triggered 'IS's' narrative of revenge (Aljazeera Arabic, 2014e). Unlike *Al Arabiya*, though, this changed later when *Aljazeera Arabic* started to only display stills from the execution videos. Translating Sotloff's beheading, for example, *Al Jazeera Arabic* undermined the video into one still that reiterated 'IS's' narrative of revenge through Arabic subtitles (Aljazeera Arabic, 2014d). In the written texts, *Aljazeera Arabic* often reinforced 'IS's' narrative of revenge whilst briefly indicating the lamentation of western countries (Aljazeera Arabic, 2014d; Aljazeera Arabic, 2014c). In later news articles, condemnation by western countries was amplified. In the opening paragraph of a news article reporting on Foley's beheading, for example, it was written, 'نددت دول عربية بإعدام تنظيم الدولة الإسلامية الصحفي الأميركي جيمس فولي الذي حُطِف في سوريا انتقاماً للضربات الجوية' [western states condemned Islamic State organization's execution in Iraq]

of the American journalist, James Foley, who was kidnapped in Syria, in retaliation for the US airstrike against the organization's fighters in Iraq] (Aljazeera Arabic, 2014e).

*Aljazeera English*, on the other hand, largely suppressed the visuality of 'IS's' executions, translating them into written texts only whilst highlighting the narrative of condemnation by world leaders, governments and people (e.g Aljazeera English, 2014b; Aljazeera English, 2014c). In the written text, *Aljazeera English* also indicated the narrative of retaliation as in the case of Foley's beheading: 'Islamic State group says it acted in revenge for the US strikes against it and threatens to kill another US journalist'(Aljazeera English, 2014c).

Similar to *Al Arabiya*, Iranian *Al Alam*, tended to visually highlight 'IS's' political narrative by either reposting the partial or full execution videos as with the immolation video of al-Kasasbeh or the mass beheading of the Coptic Egyptians (*Al Alam News Channel*, 2015d, *Al Alam News Network*, 2015d) and/or by choosing stills with subtitles accentuating this narrative of retaliation. An example was in a still from Kassig's beheading showing him kneeling with the Arabic subtitles: *لذا سنستمر في ضرب رقاب اهلك* (Thus, we will continue beheading your folk) (*Al Alam News Channel*, 2014c). *Al Alam News Network* did the same in its TT of Goto's beheading, "Because of your reckless decision to take part in an unwinnable war, this knife will not only slaughter Kenji but will also carry on and cause carnage wherever your people are found. So let the nightmare for Japan begin' (*Al Alam News Network*, 2015c).

Although *Aljazeera Arabic* and *Al Arabiya* opted for 'قتل'[killing] and as 'ذبح' [slaughter] to label the beheadings at first, their use was not consistent and shifted a number of times. *Al Jazeera Arabic*, for instance, used these two terms describing the beheading of Foley and Sotloff. But this changed later to 'إعدام'[execution] which portrayed the beheading act as a punishment. *Al Arabiya* similarly used both slaughter and execution but used the former more frequently. The liberal and

anti-Islamic fundamentalism stance of *Al Arabiya* (Lahlali, 2011) may explain its preference for using such labels.

When al-Kasasbeh's immolation video was released, *Al Arabiya* indicated doubt about the act by using 'claim' (Al Arabiya, 2015d). Ironically, in a previous article, *Al Arabiya English* harshly criticized *Al Jazeera* for using similar terminology in describing Foley's and Sotloff's beheadings, which was deliberate ignorance of the victims' families' feelings, according to *Al Arabiya English* (Al Arabiya English, 2014c). This was in the context of the Qatari crisis with the Gulf countries when they withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar in 2014. This is a clear example of how the changes in the political stances of Arab countries hugely impact media reporting.<sup>31</sup>

For both *Al Jazeera Arabic* and *Al Arabiya*, their reporting drastically changed when Arab leaders and religious figures collectively condemned the immolation of the Jordanian pilot, calling for action against 'IS'. Chief among them was Ahmed Al Tayeb, head of Al-Azhar. In a statement he released, Al Tayeb made an intertextual reference to a Quranic verse, demanding 'that the militants deserved the Quranic punishment of death, crucifixion or chopping off their arms for being enemies of God and the Prophet Muhammad' (The Guardian, 2015).

In fact, al-Kasasbeh's immolation was a turning point in the Arab world which completely exposed the barbarity of the group, and urged political and religious figures to react. This, in turn, was widely reflected in media reporting, causing significant shifts in the labels used to identify and describe 'IS'. *Al Arabiya*, for instance, which largely labelled 'IS' as 'extremist' in its TTs of beheadings of western hostages, started to opt for 'terrorist' in its TT of the mass beheading of Egyptian Copts. In the same news article, *Al Arabiya* used 'وحشي'[brutal] and 'مروع'[horrific] to describe the video, highlighting a statement by Al-Azhar that the beheading was 'بربري'[barbaric]

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<sup>31</sup> Since its launch in 2003, *Al Arabiya* has been competing with *Al Jazeera* which is very critical of Saudi Arabia (Lahlali, 2011).

and 'غير إسلامي' [un-Islamic] (Al Arabiya, 2015c). The same statement was cited in *Al Arabiya English* (Al Arabiya English, 2015d).

*Al Jazeera Arabic*, on the other hand, devoted a number of articles and news reports to the religious counter-argument. In one report, for instance, it attempted to defy 'IS' by maintaining that immolation is not approved in Islam (Alnajjar, 2015):

’ وبرز ممن أنكر فعل تنظيم الدولة من الناحية الشرعية الشيخ سلمان العودة الذي كتب "التحريق جريمة نكراء يرفضها الشرع أيا تكن أسبابها، وهو مرفوض سواء وقع على فرد أو جماعة أو شعب، لا يعذب بالنار إلا رب النار“.

[Sheikh Salman al Uda was one of the prominent figures who denied the state organization's act according to Shari'ah when he wrote: immolation is a heinous atrocity denounced by Shari'ah whatever its reason was. It is refused whether it targeted an individual, group, or population. Only God of fire can torture by fire].

Still, in the same text, *Aljazeera Arabic* equally demonstrated the religious justification by 'IS' supporters on social media, that immolation is permitted according to the concept of *Qisas* explained in the previous section (*ibid*). This could be indicative of the agency's policy to express all the different arguments and opinions (Lahlali, 2011). In another article that followed the mass beheading of the Egyptians Copts, the religious counter-narrative persisted, describing the beheading as 'الأكثر قسوة ورعبا' [most graphic and horrific] (Alsabaey, 2015).

The same statement by Al-Azhar appeared in a TT by *Aljazeera English* (2015b) which generally used the same labels found in western media to frame beheading acts since the release of Foley's beheading, citing condemning statements of western leaders (*Aljazeera English*, 2014c). In the case of Kassig, for example, his religious identity as a Muslim that did not help to spare his life and his humanitarian work were both highlighted whilst quoting Obama's condemnation of his

beheading as ‘pure evil’ (*Aljazeera English*, 2014b). This is another example that points to the differences within the same media agency according to the language used. A different language means a different culture and a distinct target audience.

Similar to Arabic media, *Rudaw* could not overlook the wide condemnation by religious figures following the immolation video. On its English page, it published an article that talked about ‘IS’s’ outrage over those who opposed the immolation act on religious grounds, killing a number of local people in areas under its control in response (*Rudaw English*, 2015c).

*Al Alam News Channel* foregrounded the brutality of ‘IS’ in most of its TTs of the execution videos by citing statements of western officials and leaders as in Foley’s video, ‘إعتبر البيت الأبيض’ [White House considered the slaughter of an American journalist by Daesh group a dreadful and brutal atrocity] (*Al Alam News Channel*, 2014d). In relation to the same video, *Al Alam News Network* framed the beheading within a narrative of terrorism whilst highlighting ‘IS’s’ Salafist roots: ‘Radical terrorists with the ISIL Takfiri group has posted a video purporting to show them beheading missing American photojournalist James Foley in what could be an escalation of the terrorist group’s activities targeting the US’ (*Al Alam News Network*, 2014b). Takfirism is associated with the Salafist doctrine and has been particularly used by Ayman al-Zawahiri since the 1980s (Weiss and Hassan, 2015). It denotes a concept, write Weiss and Hassan (2015, p. 5) that indicates ‘the excommunication of fellow Muslims on the basis of their supposed heresy, and an injunction that almost always carried with it a death sentence’. Iran’s indirect involvement in fighting ‘IS’ in Iraq which, in turn, tarnishes all Shias as ‘infidels’ and as ‘Safavids’ who ought to be killed explains *Al Alam*’s use of the above labels to describe ‘IS’. In other words, *Al Alam* was aiming to mobilize the world, especially the

west, to fight 'IS'. It also aimed to demonstrate the ideological differences between the Salafist and Shia discourses.

Similarly to Arabic media, *Al Alam News Channel* reported on Al Tayeb's statement, interviewing another scholar from Al-Azhar who stressed that both 'IS' and whoever was funding it should be punished according to the aforementioned Quranic verse (*Al Alam News Channel*, 2015c). Addressing the western audience, *Al Alam News Network* mainly focused on the reaction of political leaders worldwide, but firstly of Iranian officials. In its article, 'IS's' immolation act was denounced as 'savage', and 'barbaric' (*Al Alam News Network*, 2015b).

Contrary to western media, the mass beheading of the Syrian soldiers in Kassig's beheading video while escaping the attention of *Rudaw*, was made visually more salient in separate articles by *Al Arabiya* and *Al Alam News Channel*. On their Arabic pages, both *Al Arabiya* and *Al Alam News Channel* (*Al Arabiya*, 2014a; *Al Alam News Channel*, 2014b) republished the beheading section excluding the actual beheading scenes. Both used a number of stills from the video, sometimes showing Arabic subtitles: 'اليوم نذبح جنود بشار' [Today, we slaughter Bashar's [Assad] soldiers] (*Al Arabiya*, 2014a). Each of the two news articles labelled the soldiers differently, which could reflect their political positions on the Syrian regime and the conflict in Syria. *Al Arabiya* opted for 'men' who were thought to be 'Alawite officers'. In contrast, *Al Alam News Channel* used 'prisoners' to demonstrate that the soldiers were at war with 'IS'.

Although *Aljazeera Arabic* did not dedicate a single article to the mass beheading of the Syrian soldiers, it still made reference to it in its TT of Kassig's beheading, visually highlighting a still of the soldiers as a leading image (*Al Jazeera Arabic*, 2014a).

In a similar manner to western media, the last video under analysis did not garner wide attention by Arabic or Iranian media. Even when it was translated as in *Al Arabiya English*, the text

was very brief in comparison to earlier videos, overlooking the heinous nature of the beheading and how it was brutally portrayed. Instead, the political narrative of a failed raid was heightened whether in the captions of the leading image used or in the body of the text (*Al Arabiya English*, 2015a). In the leading image caption, for instance, it was maintained, ‘The video sought to portray a joint raid with American Special Forces against the militants as a failure’ (*ibid*).

The TT was even more reduced in *Al Alam News Network* to a few short paragraphs that completely suppressed ‘IS’s’ narrative that the US-Kurdish raid had failed, implying instead that it was successful: ‘On the rescue operation carried out this month 70 people were rescued from an ISIS Jail and 20 terrorists were killed’ (*Al Alam News Network*, 2015a). This could either be a misinterpretation of the source video, or a deliberate attempt by *Al Alam* to highlight the defeat of its enemy.

Unsurprisingly, Kurdish *Rudaw English* reported on the video, describing it as ‘gruesome’ and labelling the murderer a ‘terrorist’. Declining to publish it, it emphasized, ‘*Rudaw* doesn’t publish ISIS’ footage which contains gruesome scenes aimed at propaganda for the Islamic State (ISIS)’ (*Rudaw English*, 2015a). Although *Rudaw English* did not describe the raid as a failure, it supported ‘IS’s’ claim that there were no Peshmerga prisoners in the prison by quoting Kurdistan president Masoud Barazani addressing the freed hostages as saying, ‘unfortunately there were none of the Peshmerga left who were there before’ (*ibid*).

## **5. Conclusions**

‘IS’ did not respond to others to stage, produce, and disseminate the executions. It took an active position, attempting to control its multimodal narratives and its audiences. Using social media platforms, ‘IS’ took advantage of the blurred relationship between the producers and the audience.

The genre of 'IS's' execution helped to strengthen the narratives constructed. However, this was challenged in media translation.

Translating the videos into the discourse of western media fragmented them into stills that were often edited and cropped to focus on the black-clad militant and his orange-clad victims. The stills were widely used as evidence to show the brutality and evilness of 'IS' not just at a local level, but at a wider global level: a master narrative that consistently framed the videos. This narrative was merged with the 'war on terror' meta-narrative evoked by using labels or including denouncing statements by world leaders. In so doing, 'IS's' well-structured narrative primarily elaborated via the visual mode was shattered. Retaliation, in particular, was no longer made visible. However, this narrative was expressed in the written mode instead. Although fragmenting the videos in translation was meant to curb 'IS's' visibility and propaganda, it might be argued that ironically, it worked in 'IS's' favour as stills became difficult to erase from memory.

That said, the partial translation of the beheadings was not consistent in all the videos' TTs. Sometimes, they just disappeared, giving way to the personal photos of the victims. In so doing, a personal counter-narrative of bravery and goodness was woven. This was particularly clear in the TTs of Kassig's beheading where the lack of the confession element was interpreted as defiance and resistance. Western media also relied on personal accounts of victims' families and friends to add an emotional impact to the produced narrative. Stills from the videos widely reappeared to highlight certain narratives as was the case with the mass beheading of the 21 Coptic Egyptians, emphasizing 'IS's' expansion beyond Iraq and Syria. The same happened with the last videos of Peshmerga fighter's beheading. However, contrary to the huge attention beheadings of western hostages received, videos of local actors, such as the Peshmerga in the ninth video, did not make it to

headlines as often. This also applied to later videos showing heinous methods of killing civilians, both Sunni and Shia, in Iraq and Syria.

In Arabic and Iranian media, executions were less censored than in western media. *Al Arabiya*, for instance, consistently, yet partially, re-disseminated the videos on its Arabic page, unlike its English page which followed western media in undermining the videos into stills. Iranian *Al Alam News Channel* and *Al Alam News Network* similarly reposted the videos, sometimes in full. Furthermore, in a striking contrast to western media, the stills chosen showed their Arabic subtitles which highlighted the retaliation narrative. This narrative of revenge was further privileged in the headlines or the opening paragraphs of their texts.

A religious counter-narrative to 'IS' was accentuated in Arabic media especially following the outrage among Arab leaders and religious figures over al-Kasasbeh's immolation, resulting in changes in the labels used to describe 'IS'. The same narrative appeared in Iranian *Al Alam* which generally placed 'IS's' executions within a narrative of global security threat, especially on its English page. This was in order to mobilize the west against its enemy.

While the executions of the Jordanian pilot and the 21 Coptic Egyptians were widely reported by *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*, the beheading of the Kurdish Peshmerga militants received less attention but was highlighted by Kurdish *Rudaw English*.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### TRANSLATING VIDEOS OF CULTURAL DESTRUCTION IN IRAQ

#### 1. Introduction

The last case study in this thesis is dedicated to the destruction of cultural artefacts and historic sites in Nineveh province in Iraq represented in three successive videos released by 'IS' in February and April 2015. The videos showed the physical destruction in Mosul's museum and at one of Nineveh's Gates, the proposed UNESCO world heritage site of Nimrud, and the world heritage site of Hatra. Cultural destruction is by no means new in history and is often carried out along religious or political grounds. In the case of 'IS', the justifications were both religious and political intertwined together in similarly-structured and narrated videos. 'IS' was looking for projecting and imposing a legitimacy that is at once religious, social, and political. Although 'IS' attempted to highlight the religious motive in the three videos and in *Dabiq*, I believe that the political motive was more crucial here. By attacking Christians, Ezidi, and Islamic shrines revered by both Shias and Sunnis alike, 'IS' was attacking the Iraqi cultural identity itself. By identity, I refer to the fundamental, static, and continuous shared identity that goes beyond any other differences and peculiarities. Hall (1990, p.223) defines this identity as a 'shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common'. It is entrenched in the old relationship hold between Iraqi people and the history of the Mesopotamia which they identify as the cradle of civilization.

The similar narratives constructed in the three videos, their similar structure, and the sole use of Arabic language raises the question of whether the three videos shared a genre like 'IS's' executions. My contention is that although the videos share a social exigence, they lack a type, i.e.,

a 'recurrent typified situation' (Miller, 1984, p.157) which is a core element in genre constitution. Contrary to the execution videos which are recurrent across history as a type, videos of cultural destruction are not. Moreover, 'IS' has never followed up with more videos of cultural ransack. Even with the case of Palmyra in Syria, its destruction was documented in stills published in *Dabiq* ('Erasing the Legacy of a Ruined Nation', 2015). As a result, they cannot be characterized as an evolving genre.

Moreover, the master religious iconoclastic narrative elaborated in the three videos was widely contested among Muslims, meaning that it was a devolving narrative that 'IS' failed to control. How the videos and the narratives they constructed were translated into western media discourses, as opposed to the discourses of Arabic, especially Iraqi, and Iranian media is the main question addressed in the chapter.

## **2. Background**

Cultural destruction of Iraqi heritage carried out by 'IS' predated the release of the three videos under examination. In fact, a series of destruction acts targeting religious shrines, in particular, started shortly following 'IS's' takeover of Mosul in June 2014, including the tomb of Jonah in Nineveh, in addition to Shia shrines, and churches in Northern Iraq. These acts were characterized by the mere visual projection of the demolition scene, lacking any supportive linguistic elements, or a broader narrative. Taking the tomb of Jonah as an example, the video was less than one-minute-long, remotely shooting the explosion at the tomb (Euronews (in English), 2014). It seemed that footage was shot using a mobile device, without any script, staging, or direction. Even in *Dabiq*, they were only visually highlighted in a photo report displaying images of destroying a number of Shia, and Sunni shrines. Religious shrines were labelled in the report title as '*shirk*' (polytheism),

with a leading image displaying an ‘IS’s’ member talking to people about ‘the obligation to demolish the tombs’ (‘A Photo Report: On the destruction of shirk in wilayat Ninawa’, 2014, p.14).

In February 2015, however, this dramatically shifted when ‘IS’ released its first video, displaying the smashing of artefacts and sculptures at Mosul Museum, and the giant winged bulls of Nergal Gate, an entry to Nineveh. Therefore, rather than targeting religious sites as in the previous case, ‘IS’ now attacked mainly pre-Islamic historic monuments, antiquities, and cultural sites. These attacks were represented in three videos, two of which were part of an interconnected three-video series with one numbered title: *الأمرور بالمعروف والناهون عن المنكر* [Promoters of virtue and preventers of vice]<sup>32</sup>, as well as another video titled: *تحطيم الأوثان* [False gods’ destruction] (Nineveh Media Office, 2015; Al-Iraqi, 2015a; Al-Iraqi, 2015b). In the three-video series, the cultural destruction was undertaken by the religious police called: *Al Hasbah* which was highlighted at the beginning of each video.

In contrast to earlier acts of destroying religious sites, acts of cultural destruction were scripted, staged, and directed using a soundtrack and *nasheed* (a religious song usually without the use of musical instruments) in the background. The religious iconoclastic narrative was at the heart of the three videos.

Unlike the execution videos which were released by central media channels of either *Al Hayat* or *Al Furqan*, the videos on cultural destruction were disseminated by the local media offices of *Nineveh* and *Dijla* (Tigris) provinces.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The second video in the series posted in March departed from cultural destruction as it was focused on a religious approach to smoking and how it should be banned in areas under IS’s control (Al-Iraqi, 2015c). Structured in a very similar manner to the other two videos, the second video on cigarettes showed men of religious police *Al Hasbah* dealing with cigarettes and what the view of Shari’ah law was on smoking or the cigarette trade.

<sup>33</sup> The three videos were archived on IS’s main digital platform for visual releases, the San Francisco-based Internet Archive, using multiple IS-affiliated accounts.

The first video was released late February 2015 showing ‘IS’ militants breaking down artefacts in Mosul Museum and the two gigantic human-headed winged bulls at the Nergal Gate in Nineveh, once the capital of the Assyrian empire, using sledgehammers and drills (Nineveh Media Office, 2015). Zainab Bahrani, Iraqi Edith Porada, Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Art and Archaeology at Columbia University who worked as a consultant for UNESCO and the Iraqi ministry of culture in 2004, describes the museum as one of the largest and well-known museums in the Middle East. The museum contains ‘a remarkable collection of finds that date back to the Neolithic era and continue into the Islamic period, so covering thousands of years, going back to about 8,000 B.C.’ (Bahrani, 2015b). The video came out shortly after ‘IS’ ransacked the Library of Mosul burning around 100,000 rare valuable books and manuscripts. Interestingly, prior to the release of the video, an ambiguous ‘IS’ source circulated false news that Nineveh’s walls were being blown up (Harmanşah, 2015). This news was rapidly widely disseminated in social media before it was disproved by Iraqi officials and archaeologists. This could be another example of ‘IS’s’ strategic use of media to create maximum impact. It also shows, argues (Harmanşah, 2015, pp.175-176) that media representation preceded the actual destruction which, in turn, ‘demonstrates the powerful role of new media technologies on the physical acts of destruction itself’.

In early April 2015, the video titled: *تحطيم الأوثان* [False gods’ destruction] was released. It manifested the destruction of the ancient city of Hatra—a UNESCO world heritage site—near Mosul using sledgehammers and Kalashnikov assault rifles (Al-Iraqi, 2015b). Hatra was home to a variety of ancient civilizations, including Greek, Roman, and Arab. The third video portrayed the demolition of another significant proposed UNESCO-cultural site: the Assyrian Iraqi city of Nimrud (Al-Iraqi, 2015a). The attack was carried out using explosives this time. Nimrud was ‘the

capital city of the Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) and boasted a series of richly decorated palaces and temples’ (Curtis, et al, 2008, p.xv).<sup>34</sup>

### 3. Iconoclasm before and by ‘IS’

*‘Symbols are what unite and divide people. Symbols give us identity... Symbols in turn determine the kinds of stories we tell; and the stories we tell determine the kind of history we make and remake’.* (Mary Robinson, Inauguration speech as President of Ireland, December 3, 1990, cited in Smith, 2015, p.28)

Destroying cultural artefacts, images, monuments, and sites represents an iconoclastic act that is of a universal nature. Such an act has a religious, political, ideological, cultural, and economic motive, or an integration of all these (May, 2012). May (2012, p.3) writes, ‘It is the motivation and the objective behind the act of destruction that makes an act iconoclastic, be this objective political, religious, magical, economic, or an interlacing of all these’. Traditionally, the focus has been on religious iconoclasm which is linked to the three Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In religious iconoclasm, ‘iconography (material representations of the natural or supernatural world), idolatry (the worship of false idols) and polytheism (the worship of more than one God) are considered grave sins’ (Isakhan and Zarandona, 2017, p.3).

The most known example of religious iconoclasm that is mentioned in both the Bible and the Quran is related to the story of Abraham, destroying the wooden idols his father made for people to worship (Genesis Rabba 38:13; Qur’an 21:51–67 cited in Isakhan and Zarandona, 2017, p.3). In Islam, there are a number of texts that ‘IS’ relied on and knitted together to produce a religious narrative. Examples are the following two *hadiths* that oppose both idolatry and imagery: ‘None has the right to be worshipped but Allah’; ‘the makers of these pictures will be punished on the Day of

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<sup>34</sup> An assessment of damage carried out by Iraqi archaeologists, including Layla Salih, following the liberation of Nineveh, showed that despite the great scale of the destruction, some monuments still survived, such as the Nimrud Palace. For a full discussion of this assessment, see (Jeber and Salih, 2017 and Hammer, 2017).

Resurrection' (Bukhari 8:387; 7:110, quoted in Isakhan and Zarandona, 2017, p.3). Various examples of religious iconoclastic acts can be traced across history. There are, for instance, the erosion of Akhenaton and his religion by later Pharaohs and the destruction of the Carthage by Rome (Kastenberg, 1997, p.277, cited in Smith, 2015, p.27). Prior to 'IS', Taliban destroyed the Buddhas. However, statues destroyed by Taliban, including the Buddha, were still worshipped by some people around the world; whereas those destroyed by 'IS' were no longer worshipped.

Political iconoclasm, on the other hand, has far-reaching effects since it is associated with issues of identity and legitimacy. In other words, by attacking the cultural heritage of people, their shared cultural identity is also attacked with the aim of imposing an alternative identity. Throughout history, a war waged against culture went hand-in-hand with the war waged against the peoples of a nation. In fact, a conflict cannot succeed if it is not intertwined with cultural destruction (Bevan, 2006). With political iconoclasm, the aim is not the destruction of the monument in itself, but what it represents. As such, historic artefacts or sites become 'markers' signifying the identity associated with them (Meskell, 2005, p.129). These markers enable populations to establish what Anderson (2006) describes as an 'imagined community' where 'individuals inculcate a sense of collective identity' (Isakhan and Zarandona, 2017, p.4). Noyes (2013, p.1) goes further to link political iconoclasm with 'the political construction of the modern state'. As such, the main motive of iconoclasm, according to Isakhan and Zarandona (2017, p.4), is 'to cleanse the world of a complex and cosmopolitan past and to eradicate alternative identities towards the creation of a politically homogenous state'.

An example of this type of iconoclasm is the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict in the 1990s, which resulted, in addition to human casualties, in a systematic cultural cleansing that attempted to eradicate anything that various people once shared in Bosnia (Riedlmayer, 2002, p.9). In the Iraqi

context, in particular, a more recent example pertains to post-US-led invasion of Iraq when a number of historic sites, including well-known Babylon to the south of the country, were damaged when used as military bases, which was ‘a breach of the Hague Convention’ (Bahrani, 2008, p.169).

In addition to religious and political motives, the motive of iconoclasm may be economic. Throughout history, there is a wide range of instances where artefacts and statues are looted during war times. Looting artefacts can be traced back to Roman and Greek times (Steen, 2008). As Steen (2008, p.2) points out, ‘The Romans’ calling card in warfare was to level entire cities and collect their art as fruits of victory’. Another more recent example is linked to the World War II when both Hitler and Stalin indulged themselves in ‘looting, plundering, and destroying each other’s cultural property from private and public collections’ (Steen, 2008, p.16). Following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, museums, including the National Museum in Baghdad, Mosul Museum, and libraries were looted to the ignorance of the coalition forces (Bahrani, 2008).

Not only that the destruction of artefacts and historic sites in Nineveh undertaken by ‘IS’ was at a much larger scale, but it had a variety of motives: religious, political, historical, and economic. Starting with the religious motive, it was emphasized in a *Dabiq* article published following the release of the first video and titled: *Erasing the legacy of a ruined nation*:

The soldiers of the Khilāfah, with sledgehammers in hand, revived the Sunnah of their father Ibrāhīm (‘alayhis-salām) when they laid waste to the shirkī [polytheist] legacy of a nation that had long passed from the face of the Earth... (‘Erasing the legacy of a ruined nation’, 2015, p.22).

To further justify the destruction, it was claimed that the restoration of historical antiquities by putting them on public display had detached them from their original purpose as a witness to God’s punishment of previous polytheistic nations: ‘...we are meant to take a lesson from those

disbelieving nations that came before us and avoid what led to their destruction, as opposed to unearthing and preserving their statues and putting them on display for people to admire' (ibid, p.23).

'IS', however, did not just demolish the pre-Islamic heritage, but also religious shrines, including Islamic ones as mentioned in the background section. By Islamic, I do not just refer to Shia or Sufi shrines, but also those representatives of Sunnis (Bahrani, 2015b). Therefore, I found Isakhan and Zarandona's (2017, p.6) argument that 'IS's' religious iconoclasm reflected a 'symbolic sectarianism' somehow misleading. For example, mentioned in the Bible and the Quran, the tomb of Jonah represented a revered shrine for all Iraqis regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or sect. Its demolition which escaped the attention of western media for being an Islamic site (Bahrani, 2015b) was therefore intended to erase its representation of a sense of belonging for all Iraqis. As Turku (2017, p.70) rightly describes, 'Sadly, the tomb of Jonah was not just a sacred place for people of different faiths but also a symbol of tolerance and shared tradition'.

Although 'IS' justified the destruction of these Islamic sites through the lens of religion as mentioned in the previous section, the symbolic significance these sites holds for Iraqi people suggests that 'IS' had a political motive that was more crucial than the religious one. In particular, I argue that by attacking the cultural heritage representative of a diverse population in Nineveh, 'IS' was trying to pave the way for itself to construct a distinct reality of a pure singularity. Moreover, 'IS' would not succeed to impose its legitimacy if and when threatened by the existence of a concrete past of heterogeneousness (Bahrani, 2015a). Eradicating people's sense of belonging would allow 'IS' to re-write their history (Bahrani, 2015b). For Bahrani, the destruction was, therefore, not just cultural, but also 'ethnic':

Mesopotamia has always been a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multilingual and multireligious community, the entirety of the country. And what's happening now is that diversity is being wiped out. So when you wipe out people's monuments and heritage, you erase any record of their ever having been there. And it's a way of creating... a kind of an empty land that you can conquer and then claim that there was nothing there before. So it's a general erasure and rewriting of history of Mesopotamia (Bahrani, 2015b).

Targeting such diversity for the purpose of imposing an alternative legitimacy and identity was explicitly stated in an interview with Abul-Mughirah al-Qahtani, the leader of 'IS's' branch in Libya, featured in issue 11 of *Dabiq*: 'It ['IS'] knows that the establishment of the religion and implementation of Sharī'ah cannot be properly achieved with the presence of deviant and divided groups ... And so it works to rid the lands of this menace while implementing the Sharī'ah' (Al-Qahtani, 2015, p.62). In the context of Iraq, in particular, and in the aforementioned *Dabiq* article, 'IS' did not shy away from revealing that it was opposing this heritage and its association with Iraqi identity and nation, for being a 'Western construct' ('Erasing the legacy of a ruined nation', 2015, p.22). In the article, it was mentioned, 'The kuffār [infidels] had unearthed these statues and ruins in recent generations and attempted to portray them as part of a cultural heritage and identity that the Muslims of Iraq should embrace and be proud of' (*ibid*).

This last quote adds another historic dimension to 'IS's' iconoclasm. Framing the cultural heritage of Iraq as a 'Western construct' was simultaneously a political means to justify 'IS's' acts. However, as explained by Bahrani (2008, p.168), there is a very old relationship between Iraqis and these monuments. Such a relationship may reflect a shared identity that Hall (1990, p.223) describes as encompassing 'stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history'. Likewise, some Iraqi academics describe this identity in the notion: 'Iraqiness', defining Iraqis as the direct descendants of Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, and Arab peoples. They argue that 'Iraqi identity is not an invented

phenomenon but has evolved naturally, as any national identity does, in the heart of every Iraqi. All one need do is simply try to revive it' (Kirmanc, 2013, p.11).

Furthermore, the above article challenged a nationalist narrative for opposing the unity of Muslims: '...a nationalist agenda...severely dilutes the walā' [loyalty] that is required of the Muslims towards their Lord' ('Erasing the legacy of a ruined nation', 2015, pp.22-23). Similarly, in al-Baghdadi's public speech in July 2014 which was translated in the first issue of *Dabiq*, both 'nation' and 'democracy' were rallied against: 'The Muslims today have a loud, thundering statement, and possess heavy boots... boots that will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy, and uncover its deviant nature' ('The Flood', 2014, p.8). This politically-laden narrative, explain Isakhan and Zarandona (2017, p.6), was visually manifested in images showing 'IS' members 'tearing down Iraqi flags' in the same issue of *Dabiq*.

Finally, given the global value that cultural heritage shares (Harmanşah, 2015), it can also be argued that another layer of 'IS's' political motive lies in its challenge of the world, particularly the west. As the preamble of the Hague (1954, cited in Hausler, 2015, p.118) stresses, '[...] damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all humankind since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world'. Lamentation by world organizations following news that the relics had been destroyed was indicative of this, pushing 'IS' to respond whether in *Dabiq* or in the videos themselves. In the article that followed the first video of cultural destruction, 'IS's' response was as follows: 'This caused an outcry from the enemies of the Islamic State, who were furious at losing a "treasured heritage" '( 'Erasing the legacy of a ruined nation', 2015, p.22).

As for the economic motive, it was unsurprisingly never admitted by 'IS', but was exposed through media reports which confirmed that 'IS' had looted many priceless antiquities in both Syria

and Iraq as the main funding source (See Hammer, 2017). These reports triggered ‘IS’ to respond in its first video as shall be discussed in the following section.

#### **4. Analysis of the three videos and narratives of cultural destruction in Iraq**

In all the three videos, a religious iconoclastic narrative underpinned acts of destruction in Iraq. To start with, the title of the three-video series was an intertextual reference to a prophetic *hadith* that was used to frame the act of destruction as a religious duty that needed to be fulfilled. The video displaying Hatra destruction had a different title that still evoked this religious narrative: *تخطيم الأوثان* [destruction of false gods]. Both of the first two videos in this series opened up with a verse from the Quran to highlight the anti-imagery religious narrative. In the first video that displayed the obliteration of statues and artefacts at Mosul Museum and at a Nineveh’s Gate, for instance, the verse translated into: ‘and as he [Abraham] told his father, and his people, what are these statues that you are worshipping. They said “we don’t know. We found our ancestors worshipping them’. He [Abraham] said ‘You and your ancestors were in total darkness’ (Smith et al, 2016, p.176). In the video showing the destruction of Nimrud, a verse used to make a connection to Nimrud, the biblical character that rebelled against God and, thus, it was ‘IS’s’ religious obligation to demolish any cultural trace related to this character (Al-Iraqi, 2015a).

The video displaying the obliteration of Hatra, on the other hand, lacked the opening Quranic verse. It seems to me that ‘IS’ failed to draw a theological link in the case of Hatra, simply because of the history of the city itself. Being a UNESCO world heritage site, Hatra enjoyed a rich mosaic of different cultures and civilizations: from the Greek to the Parthian, to the Roman, and to the Arab (See Figure 13). More importantly, Hatra was the capital of the earliest Arab kingdom in history (Singer, 2015, p.12). In other words, Hatra was a reflection of the multicultural Iraqi identity, with a distinguished ‘legacy of tolerance’ (Singer, 2015, p.12). Attacking Hatra, therefore, was an attack

on that identity itself and the diversity it represented. In other words, the destruction of Hatra attested to the political motive of 'IS's' iconoclasm. This, however, did not prevent 'IS' from reiterating the religious anti-imagery narrative throughout the video. Multiple narrators in the video repeatedly mentioned that idols are not permitted in Islam and they should be destroyed according to Shari'ah. However, the narrative was less coherent and convincing than in the previous two videos (Al-Iraqi, 2015b).

**Figure 13: Image showing Hatra in Nineveh province, north of Iraq (UNESCO, 2003).**



The theological link could be easily drawn in the case of the other two videos. In the first video, the narrator explained that the artefacts and relics on screen were 'أصنام وأوثان' [idols and false gods]:

'أيها المسلمون, إن هذه الأثار التي ورائي إنما هي أصنام وأوثان لأقوام في القرون السابقة كانت تعبد من دون الله... فإن ما يسمى بالآشوريين والأكديين وغيرهم كانوا يتخذون آلهة للمطر وآلهة للزرع وآلهة للحرب يشركون بالله...ويتقربون إليها بشتى أنواع القرابين' (Nineveh Media Office, 2015).

[Oh Muslims, these artefacts behind me are idols worshipped by peoples in previous centuries...The so-called Assyrians and Acadians and others were worshipping gods for rain, agriculture, and war, making sacrifices to conciliate them].

While both terms: *aṣṇām* [idols] and *awthān* [false gods] refer to what is worshipped instead of God, there is an important linguistic difference between the two that was missed in news translations. While *aṣṇām* (plural of *ṣanam*) refers mainly to anything that has an engraved shape or an image, e.g. statues, that were specifically designed to be worshipped as gods in the pre-Islamic era, *awthān* (plural of *wathan*) refers to anything made out of stone with no image (Islamweb, 2006). *Wathan* could also sometimes refer to any other animate or inanimate creatures or even symbols worshipped as gods (ibid).

The narrator in the video then stressed that Prophet Muhammad and his companions smashed what they considered as ‘idols’ in the past: ‘The Prophet Muhammad commanded us to shatter and destroy statues... This is what his companions did later on when they conquered lands’ (Mendoza, 2015).

In the second video on Nimrud, the narrator appeared to re-emphasize the connection between Nimrud and the biblical figure: *النمرود ذلك الملك الجبار الذي حكم الأرض في فترة من الفترات بظلم وجبروت وطغيان* (Al-Iraqi, 2015a) [Nimrud, the tyrant king who ruled the Earth once with injustice and tyranny and claimed to be a god and he was happy to be worshipped as a god].

It is worth noting that all the narrators in the three videos spoke classic Arabic with a distinct Gulf accent, which is another indication of ‘IS’s’ political narrative of anti-Iraqi nationalism. However, there is another interpretation unfolding. The absence of an Iraqi narrator could arguably mean that ‘IS’ was losing its influence among the locals who had already started to show a sense of

defiance and signs of disapproval of acts of destructions since 'IS's' demolition of the religious sites in early 2014 (Hawramy, 2014).

Moreover, the narrators and some of the militants appeared to be devout members with beards, wearing short garments with pants underneath; the type of clothing that would appeal to their supporters. Using 'primitive gestures' and shouting 'الله اكبر' [*Allah Akbar*, God is the greatest], the militants were mainly relying on 'the force of their bodies to topple the statuary, using sledgehammers and pickaxes to crumble them to pieces' (Harmanşah, 2015, p.173) (See Figure 14). This was possible to do with statues and artefacts at the Mosul Museum. However, when it came to larger statues, historic gates, or whole sites, 'IS' had to use different methods, including electronic drills, Kalashnikovs, and dynamite. In both cases, 'IS' was aiming to re-present a constructed image of the destruction of idols in the Ka'aba back in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, albeit with 'varying degrees of success' (Harmanşah, 2015, p.173).

In the section of the bodily attack on the statues at Mosul Museum, 'IS' succeeded in producing a kind of performance that was 'atavistic' and was meant to re-invoke 'the legacy of a medieval heritage [appropriating] it as religious genealogy to serve the very enrichment of ISIS's ultra-modern imagery-machine' (Harmanşah, 2015, p.173). For me, the scene of destruction in the video recalled its representation in one of the 1976's *Message* movie scenes, projecting Prophet Muhammad's destruction of statues in the Ka'aba<sup>35</sup> (See Figure 15).

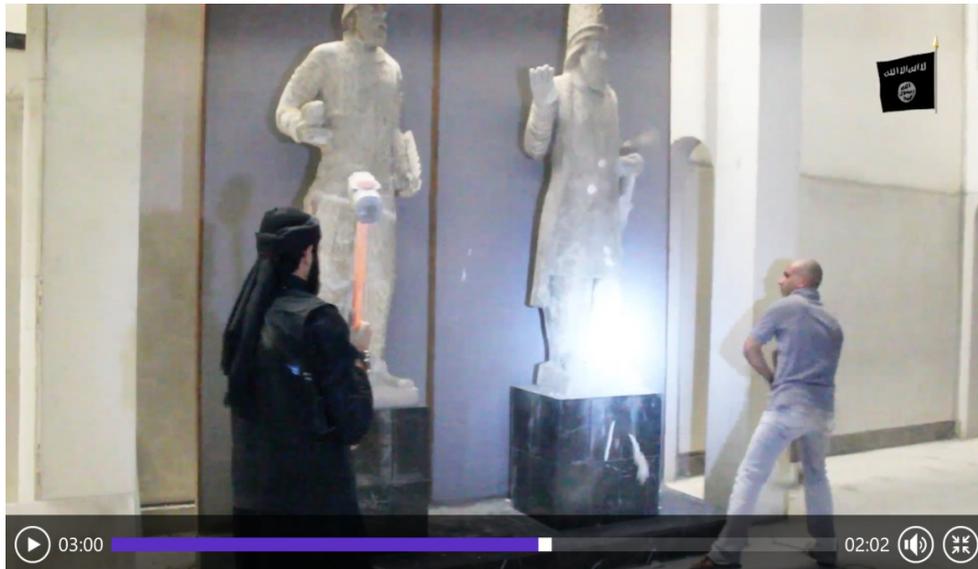
When it came to other huge stone figures, such as 'the giant guardians of the Assyrians gate' that could not be destroyed, 'IS' was less successful. Still, as pointed out by Harmanşah, its militants made a deliberate choice to destroy the monuments that perfectly fitted with this historic

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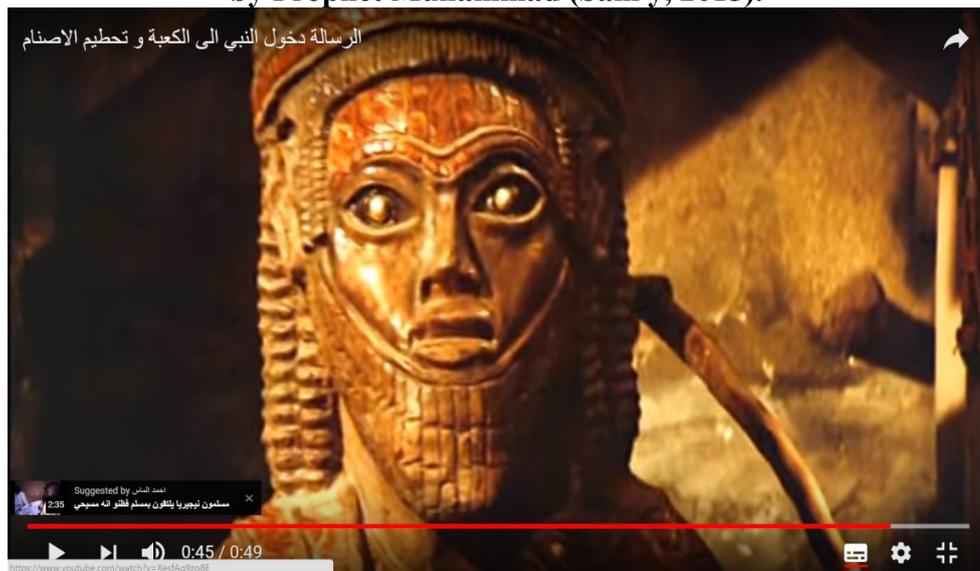
<sup>35</sup> *The Message* or *Al-Risala* movie was produced in 1976, with its English version released in 1977. The film was an epic drama on the history of Prophet Muhammad's life and the early Islam period and was directed by Mustafa Akkad (Greene, 2017).

performance: those with ‘a human face, bull’s or lion’s body, and eagle’s wings, and their immense, superhuman scale’ (ibid).

**Figure 14: A screenshot from Mosul Museum video (Al-Iraqi, 2015b).**



**Figure 15: A snapshot from the Message film showing the destruction of statues in the Ka’aba by Prophet Muhammad (Sam y, 2015).**



Furthermore, the acts of destruction were accompanied by *nasheed* intended ‘to worship God, express true religious feeling, or call others to Islam’ (Frishkopf, 2000, p.168, cited in Gråtrud, 2016, p. 1050). *Nasheed* has an emotional function that works for the hearts and minds (Gråtrud, 2016). Its use in the videos of cultural heritage destruction had the objective of intensifying religious obligation to destroy idols, appealing to other Muslims, especially the younger generation. In the first video, for example, the *nasheed* lyrics started with: ‘الله اكبر حطم حطم دولة الصنم’ [Allah Akbar destroy, destroy the idol’s state] (Nineveh Media Office, 2015). In the video on Hatra’s destruction (Al-Iraqi, 2015b), the *nasheed* opened with: ‘اليوم يومك يافتى عزما كما عزم الجنود عزما كعزيمة حمزة وأسامه وإبن الوليد’ [Today is your day, boy. Be as persistent as the soldiers, like Hamza [Prophet’s uncle], Usama and Ibn al Waleed [Prophet’s companions]].

In addition to the narrative of theological intolerance towards imagery, there was at once a historic and political anti-western narrative invoked in the Mosul Museum video. Labelling western archaeologists who started the excavations in Nineveh as ‘عبدة الشياطين’ [devil worshippers] in Arabic subtitles in the final scene of the video was meant to remind the audience that these statues were not present during Prophet Muhammad’s or his companions’ time. Rather, they were excavated later by western archaeologists (See Figure 16). This narrative was also emphasized in *Dabiq* as explained in the previous section.

Figure 16: Screenshot from the Mosul Museum video



‘بل استخرجها عباد الشياطين’ [They [statues] were excavated by devil worshippers] (Nineveh Media Office, 2015).

Furthermore, ‘IS’ responded to media reports in which it was revealed that the group had abused artefacts as a funding source. In the first video, ‘IS’ undermined the significance of artefacts worth millions of dollars for the group as long as they were ordered by God to destroy them. According to the narrator in the video: ‘Since Allah commanded us to shatter and destroy these statues, idols and remains, it is easy for us to obey... even if this costs billions of dollars’ (Mendoza, 2015).

‘IS’ also responded to statements of condemnation received about the acts of destruction. In Hatra’s video, narrators furiously reacted, labelling human organizations as ‘*takfiri*’, and threatening to invade western countries and demolish their monuments. Additionally, they pledged to further obliterate other Shia and Christian shrines, promising to destroy the White House, ironically labelled by a narrator in the video as the ‘Black House’ (Al-Iraqi, 2015b):

كلنا قد راي الهيجان والميجان والإنكار اللادع من قبل وسائل الاعلام ضد ما فعله عباد الله من هدم للأباطيل...بل أن كثيرا ممن ينتسبون الى الإسلام وأهله قد سائه ما فعل بالأنداد والأصنام التي عبدت من دون الله وتناسوا قول الله تعالى وإجتنبوا الرجس من الأوثان... فكلما تمكنا من بقعة أرض أزلنا معالم الشرك منها ونشرنا التوحيد في ربوع هذه الأرض ووالله لنزلين معالم الشرك حتى نهدم قبور وأضرحة الرافضة في قعر ديارهم ولنكسرن الصلبان ولنهدمن البيت الأسود في عقر دار الكفر أمريكا... وسوف تحكم الدولة الاسلامية أرضكم وأثاركم سوف نكسرها.

[All of us have seen the fury and condemnation by media agencies against God's worshippers' acts of falsehood extraction...Many of those who consider themselves to be Muslims disliked what we did to foes and idols worshipped other than Allah, forgetting Allah's orders to avoid the dirty false gods. Whenever we take over a land, we would erase *shirk* signs and spread *tawhid* (monotheistic worship) all around. By Allah, we shall erase all *shirk* signs until we destroy all the *Rafitha*'s graves and shrines in their homelands. We shall break the crosses, and destroy the Black House in the *Kuffr*'s land of America... Islamic State shall rule over your land and shall destroy your relics].

The following section examines translations and reporting of these videos in a variety of media discourses.

## 5. Translating the videos in the media

In the previous chapter, it was found out that the executions were largely censored by western media. This censorship did not control their wide distribution by different websites or social media networks, though. The case with the three videos of cultural destructions was notably different. Contrary to the executions, no censorship was imposed on their re-publication. They were, thus, either partially or fully reproduced by western media. Examples could be found in *The Telegraph* (Spencer, 2015b), *The Guardian* (Shaheen, 2015b), *Time* (Rhodan, 2015), *The Independent* (Gander, 2015), *The Washington Post* (Tharoor, 2015b), and *RT International* (2015b). The first video, in particular, garnered wide attention not just by mainstream media, but also by alternative media. As noted by (Harmanşah, 2015, p.171), it was reproduced in millions of copies via various platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs.

The motives for reproducing the videos varied. Harmanşah (2015) argues, ‘It seemed acceptable to re-post the destruction of ancient artefacts. Not only that, but it also gained popularity as a virtual act of resistance against ISIS’s inhumanity’. Although bloggers and social media users might have been trying to defy ‘IS’ by reposting the videos, they had the unintended effect of promoting the videos among a wider global audience.

Similarly, the first video was reposted by Arabic media, including *Al Arabiya* (*Al Arabiya*, 2015b), *Aljazeera Arabic* (*Aljazeera Arabic*, 2015a), Saudi newspaper, *Elaph* (*Dabara*, 2015), and London-based Arabic media agency, *The New Arab* (*The New Arab*, 2015a), as well as by *Rudaw Arabic* (Mahmoud, 2015). Contrastively, ‘IS’s’ first video was reduced to a single still image in Iraqi media as in *Alghad Press* (*Alghad Press*, 2015), and *Almada Press* (HH, 2015).

The subsequent videos, on the other hand, received less attention by western, Arabic media, and also Iranian media. Western media generally fragmented the videos into stills, or never used any images from these videos as in *The Guardian*, displaying instead an old image of Nimrud before its destruction. Iraqi news websites, such as *Almada Press* (BS and HAA, 2015), and *Rudaw Arabic* (Haris, 2015) adopted a similar strategy. For instance, *Almada Press* (BS and HAA, 2015) included an image showing some antiquities in an Iraqi museum in its reporting on the attack on Nimrud. Other Iraqi media agencies still published the full videos before they were removed from YouTube (e.g. *Almasalah*, 2015). When stills and videos were used, they represented evidence to prove prior reports that ‘IS’ had actually destroyed cultural relics and sites.

In general, Harmanşah (2015) writes, the videos were viewed as ‘objective documentary evidence... Little discussion seems to have appeared in the public media about the authorship of the video, and few questions have been raised about its staged, theatrical, spectacle-like character’ (p.172). In all western, Iraqi/and or Arabic media reporting, the two attacks on Nimrud and Hatra

were initially identified as evidence supporting earlier statements by Iraqi officials that they had reports indicating the obliteration of both sites by ‘IS’ (see, for example, *The Washington Post*) (Tharoor, 2015a). In response to these reports, cultural organizations, including UNESCO, denounced the attacks as ‘war crimes’, which was widely cited in media reporting in March 2015, a month before the release of the last two videos (e.g. *The Independent* Saul and Austin, 2015). This may explain why the two videos received less attention in the media than the first one.

In general, the three videos were widely lamented and condemned by cultural institutions, particularly UNESCO, and by individuals, including academics, archaeologists and activists whose statements prevailed in western and Arabic media, highlighting the historic significance of the destroyed relics and sites to human heritage. Examples could be found in the titles of articles produced by some western media agencies whilst translating the first video on Mosul Museum. *Mirror*, for instance, put the title *Destroying humanity’s history: ISIS smash priceless 2,000-year-old archaeological artefacts at Iraq museum* (Webb, 2015).<sup>36</sup> In a similar manner, *Time* used the following title: *Global art community condemns ISIS destruction of artefacts at Mosul Museum* (Rhodan, 2015). Tweets showing outraged reactions by western academics or journalists were embedded within some of the articles, as in *The Washington Post* (Tharoor, 2015b).

Three main narratives were highlighted in western media discourses translating the first video of Mosul Museum. These are: the religious iconoclastic narrative, the narrative of ethnic cleansing of Christians, and the narrative of looting and smuggling. Did the same narratives prevail in Arabic, and Iraqi media, as well as in *Al Alam* and *Rudaw*? Did these narratives change in the TTs of the subsequent two videos? The answer is in the following section.

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<sup>36</sup> It is worth noting here that despite the different titles in both *Mirror* and *Reuters*, the rest of the written text was identical.

## 5.1 The religious iconoclastic narrative

The iconoclastic narrative dominated western media TTs of the Mosul Museum video and was framed as intrinsically Islamic. ‘IS’s’ religious justifications were cited as the main incentive (causal emplotment) of the act. Both in the captions and the subtitles of ‘IS’s’ video partially reposted by *The New York Times*, ‘IS’s’ religious justification was foregrounded as the main reason for the attack: the statues represent ‘symbols of idolatry’ to ‘IS’ (Barnard, 2015). Similarly, the reason given by *The Guardian* was to ‘crush un-Islamic Ideas’ (Shaheen, 2015b). Drawing links between ‘IS’s’ current attack and what the Taliban did more than a decade ago was another way to reiterate the iconoclastic narrative. *The Telegraph*, for instance, compared ‘IS’s’ ransacking of the museum to ‘the destruction of the celebrated standing Buddha of Bamiyan by the Taliban in 2001’ (Spencer, 2015). *The Washington Post* drew similar links with that past narrative by describing the act as ‘akin to the Afghan Taliban’s 2001 demolition of massive statues of the Buddha in Bamiyan province’ (Tharoor, 2015b). But the two instances compared here are not identical. In the case of the statue of Buddha, it signifies a god that is still worshipped by some people in the world. Statues destroyed by ‘IS’ in Iraq, on the other hand, do not represent gods worshipped in the present time. They used to be worshipped in old times, but not anymore.

‘IS’s’ religious narrative and ideology were intensified by the use of the following labels to describe ‘IS’ or its militants: ‘purist Sunni branch’, ‘ultra-radical Islamists’, ‘Jihadist thugs’ with ‘fundamentalist Islamic views’ or ‘strict Sunni school of Islam’ (Coles and Hameed, 2015; Webb, 2015; RT International, 2015b; RT International, 2015c). Moreover, quotes from the video stressing this narrative were selectively appropriated by western media. Examples could be found in the written text of *The Independent*, ‘Oh Muslims, these artefacts that are behind me were idols and gods worshipped by people who lived centuries ago instead of Allah’ (Gander, 2015). The two

terms: *aṣṇām* and *awthān* were translated into ‘idols’ and ‘gods’; respectively, which was close to their original sense in Arabic. In other media, however, such as *The New York Times*, they were translated into ‘statues’ and ‘idols’ which could not capture the linguistic differences between the two (Barnard, 2015). *BBC News*, on the other hand, used one label to refer to both terms as ‘false idols’ (BBC News, 2015c).

The Acadians and Assyrian people described by the bearded narrator in the video as people who ‘worshipped other gods instead of Allah’ were differently translated too. *Time* (Rhodan, 2016), for instance, translated them into ‘irreligious people’; whereas in the *The Guardian* (Shaheen, 2015b), they were translated into ‘polytheists’, which was more accurate than the previous translation.

The religious narrative by ‘IS’ was briefly retained in *Rudaw Arabic*, *Rudaw English* (Mahmoud, 2015; Al-Zarari, 2015; *Rudaw English*, 2015b), *Aljazeera Arabic* (*Aljazeera Arabic*, 2015a), and *Al Arabiya* (Al Arabiya, 2015b). In the target text of the London-based Arabic news website, *The New Arab*, ‘IS’s’ religious narrative was promoted when it was made clear that ‘IS’ destroyed ‘ancient artefacts that included idols, which are prohibited by the Muslim faith’ (*The New Arab*, 2015c). In another English article, however, which was an ‘edited translation’ of the agency’s Arabic TT of the video (*The New Arab*, 2015b), such a link was undermined in one instance, but supported in another as the following two examples show:

**Arabic source (The New Arab, 2015b):**

وتذكر الواقعة بقرار حركة ‘طالبان’ الأفغانية مطلع عام 2001، تدمير كل تماثيل بوذا في أفغانستان لأن الدين الإسلامي يمنع أتباعه من عبادة الأصنام.

**Back translation:**

The incident reminds us of the decision made by the Afghani ‘Taliban’ in early 2001 to destroy all Buddha’s statues in Afghanistan because Islamic religion prevents its followers from worshipping idols.

**English edition (The New Arab, 2015a):**

The destruction of these artefacts is reminiscent of the Taliban’s destruction of the Buddha of Bamiyan in Afghanistan in 2001.

**Arabic source (The New Arab, 2015b):**

مبيناً أن ‘داعش’ ادعى أنه سيدمر التماثيل فقط.<sup>37</sup>

**Back translation:**

clarifying [head of Iraqi Antiquities body, Ahmed Al Obaidi] that ‘Daesh’ claimed it would smash the statues only.

**English edition (The New Arab, 2015a):**

According to Al Obaidi, the group said it would only destroy the statues because they were idols being worshipped instead of Allah.

Meanwhile, in their second day’s reporting on the video, both *Al Alam News Channel* and *Al Arabiya* tried to counter the religious legitimacy of ‘IS’s’ act by denying its relation to Islam. *Al Arabiya*, for example, published another article on the religious stance of *Al-Azhar* in Egypt towards the attack: *الإفتاء المصرية: تدمير داعش للآثار مخالف للشرع* [Egyptian Dar al Iftaa: ‘IS’s’ destruction of relics is against the Shari’ah] (Al Arabiya, 2015a). Similarly, *Al Alam News Channel* attempted to subvert ‘IS’s’ narrative in an article titled: *الإفتاء المصرية: الصحابة لم يهدموا الآثار كما يفعل "داعش"* [Egyptian Dar al Iftaa: The companions of the Prophet did not demolish relics like ‘Daesh’ did] (*Al*

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<sup>37</sup> In reference to Ahmed Al Obaidi, head of Iraqi Antiquities body.

*Alam News Channel*, 2015b). In both articles, Al-Azhar said that ‘IS’s’ ransack lacked any religious evidence and that relics remained intact during Islamic conquests (*ibid*).

Saudi newspaper *Elaph* highlighted some of the quotes by the narrator in the video that justified the act of destruction along religious grounds. However, it attempted to undermine this by labelling ‘IS’ as a terrorist organization, using the acronym Daesh, and by indicating that its interpretation represented an ‘extremist’ view of Islam (Dabara, 2015).

In contrast to the above, ‘IS’s’ religious narrative was largely suppressed in the discourse of Iraqi media excluding any reference to any of the previous quotes accentuated by western media in their TTs. Examples were found in *Alsumaria News* (Alsumaria News, 2015b), *Alghad Press* (Alghad Press, 2015), and *Almada Press* (BS and HAA, 2015). As discussed earlier in the chapter, historic and cultural relics are deeply connected with the identity of Iraqi people who do not look at them through the prism of religion. When ‘IS’ destroyed the 12-century Grand al Nouri mosque of Mosul and its minaret, known as *al-Hadba* [the Hunchback], Iraqis mourned ‘the minaret as a historic landmark that embodied the history of Iraq in general – and Mosul in particular’ (Mustafa, 2017b). Even PM Haider Al-Abadi commented on the attack saying: ‘the destruction of the mosque is an attack on Iraqi history and heritage, not religion per se’ (*ibid*). ‘IS’s’ religious narrative was irrelevant in this context. In my opinion, this could be the reason why Iraqi media overlooked that narrative.

Translating the subsequent two videos which generally did not spark the attention of western and Arabic media as the first video did, some western media still made the religious iconoclastic narrative salient. For example, in *The Guardian* (Shaheen, 2015a), it was maintained, ‘The militants cite the examples of the prophets Abraham, who destroyed idols to demonstrate that only God should be worshipped, and Muhammad, who did likewise’. Other western media, including *The*

*Independent* (Sabin, 2015; Tuftt, 2015) and *The Telegraph* (Loveluck, 2015b) started to gradually downplay 'IS's' religious narrative in translating both videos. In the case of *The Telegraph*, the religious narrative was briefly mentioned in the written text on Hatra (Loveluck, 2015b), and disappeared in the case of Nimrud (*The Telegraph*, 2015).

Quotations by the narrators were undermined as in *The Independent* when they were summarized in one sentence: sculptures were destroyed because they were idols 'worshipped instead of God', interestingly emphasizing the Arabic Gulf accent of the speaker in 'IS's' video of Hatra's obliteration (Sabin, 2015). Moreover, the religious iconoclastic narrative was linked to other religions, not just Islam; by explaining that the artefacts were destroyed by 'IS' as they represented 'manifestations of idolatry – which is forbidden in many Abrahamic religions' (Sabin, 2015). Similarly, quotations were paraphrased in *BBC News* into, 'IS has attacked Nimrud and other ancient sites in Iraq as part of what it sees as a war against 'false idols' ' (BBC News, 2015b).

In Iraqi/Kurdish media and the very few Arabic media outlets that translated the two videos on Nimrud and Hatra, the religious justifications were largely undermined if not totally suppressed. In *Al Arabiya English*, whilst translating the video on Hatra, for example, it was merely noted that 'one of the militants, who spoke Arabic with a distinct Gulf accent on the video, declared they destroyed the site because it is "worshipped instead of God"' (Al Arabiya English, 2015c). On its Arabic page, *Rudaw* did not breathe any words on that narrative in the first place (Haris, 2015), and neither did *Al Arabiya* on its Arabic page, reporting on Nimrud video (Kharfati, 2015). The same thing can be said about Iraqi *Almada Press*, *Alsumarai News* (BS and HAA, 2015; Alsumaria News, 2015a). Instead, a narrative of barbarism was invoked citing the Security Council's appellation of the attack as 'barbaric' (BS and HAA, 2015). 'IS' was repeating the same religious justifications that were condemned, denied, and questioned by

the majority of Muslim figures, ordinary people, as well as by cultural, academic, and political institutions.

## 5.2 The narrative of ethnic cleansing of Christians

In some western media, the act of destruction at Mosul Museum was specifically condemned as an ethnic cleansing against Christians. This is because most of the artefacts and sites destroyed represented the Assyrian empire. Another more important reason was the fact that ‘IS’ had already targeted the various communities in Nineveh, including Christians. Furthermore, the timing of the first video coincided with claims that ‘IS’ had kidnapped hundreds of Christians in Syria, destroying their villages. Many western media agencies linked the two events in Syria and Iraq to foreground an ethnic cleansing narrative. For example, *The New York Times* emphasized in its title: *ISIS onslaught engulfs Assyrian Christians as Militants Destroy Ancient Art*, explaining in the body of the text that ‘The latest to face the militants’ onslaught are the Assyrian Christians of northeastern Syria, one of the world’s oldest Christian communities, some speaking a modern version of Aramaic, the language of Jesus’ (Barnard, 2015). ‘The language of Jesus’ was employed as a religious and cultural cue to elicit the sympathy of a western audience. Similarly, in *The Washington Post*, it was maintained that

...the area surrounding what was once Nineveh is home to its diverse descendants, including the Yazidis and some of the oldest communities of Assyrian Christians. But the ravages of the Islamic State have forced tens of thousands to flee and seen the unraveling of Iraq and Syria’s social fabric (Tharoor, 2015b).

Citing an Assyrian writer and a member of A Demand for Action, an organization defending the rights of Assyrians and other minorities in Iraq and Syria, *The Guardian* invoked the narrative of ethnic cleansing:

Isaac said: “While the Islamic State is ethnically cleansing the contemporary Assyrian populations of Iraq and Syria, they are also conducting a simultaneous war on their ancient history and the right of future generations of all ethnicities and religions to the material memory of their ancestors.” The destruction of the priceless treasures comes days after ISIS kidnapped 220 Assyrian Christian villagers in north-eastern Syria (Shaheen, 2015b).

By placing the attack on Mosul within the wider context of fighting going on between ‘IS’ and Christian militia in Syria as *The Telegraph* did, the narrative of ethnic cleansing was similarly amplified: ‘The attack on the greatest symbol of Assyrian history may be connected to the fight between ISIL and a Christian militia, the MFS, which has joined forces with the Kurdish YPG to fight the jihadists in nearby parts of Syria’ (Spencer, 2015). Another example of triggering this narrative was by quoting UNESCO head Irina Bokova’s statement in which she described the attack as ‘far more than a cultural tragedy. This is also a security issue as it fuels sectarianism, violent extremism and conflict in Iraq’ (e.g. BBC News, 2015c).

In the English TT of *The New Arab*, the narrative of ethnic cleansing was similarly heightened by labelling the destroyed artefacts as ‘Assyrian’, and by referring to the atrocities committed against Christians in Syria and Iraq: ‘Iraq’s Assyrians are now a Christian minority who consider themselves to be the region’s indigenous people...Several Assyrian villages were seized by ‘IS’ fighters in neighbouring Syria in recent days and at least 220 Assyrians kidnapped in the process’ (The New Arab, 2015c). This narrative was downplayed in later reporting by *The New Arab* when the focus was more on statements of lamentation. In an edited translation of Arabic article by *The New Arab*, the title, تنظيم الدولة يدمر متحف "نينوى" العراقي (فيديو) [The State organization destroys ‘Nineveh’s Iraqi museum (video)] was translated into: *IS militants condemned for Mosul Museum*

*destruction* (The New Arab, 2015a). The first paragraph in the Arabic edition was also differently translated in English to heighten global condemnation:

**ST (The New Arab, 2015b):**

أعلن مسؤولون في دائرة الآثار العراقية الخميس، قيام تنظيم الدولة الإسلامية "داعش" بتدمير متحف الموصل التاريخي الذي يعد واحدا من أهم متاحف المنطقة العربية من حيث قيمة محتوياته الأثرية.

**Back translation:**

[Officials in the Iraqi Antiquities Body Thursday announced that Islamic State organization “Daesh” has destroyed the historic Mosul Museum, one of the most important museums in the Arab region containing valuable artefacts].

**TT (The New Arab, 2015a):**

Islamic State group militants have been condemned for destroying priceless ancient artefacts in the Nineveh museum in Mosul, saying they were idols.

As can be seen in the Arabic article, and unlike its earlier English text, Mosul Museum was now described as an Arabic heritage site.

In general, the narrative of ethnic cleansing was not triggered in Arabic media. *Aljazeera Arabic*, for instance, partially translated the aforementioned statement by UNESCO, overlooking in this way the emphasis in the source statement that the attack could provoke sectarian tension among Iraqis (Aljazeera Arabic, 2015a). *Aljazeera English*, on the other hand, included the statement in full, but at the same time, it foregrounded Iraqis’ outrage in a video report incorporated into its TT (Aljazeera English, 2015a). In the video, one citizen, for instance, said: ‘It is not about the statue...It is about what the statue represents. Any citizen will consider this statue as ancestor’ (*ibid*) (See figure 17). Ancestor was repeated twice in the voice-over translation to reiterate the interconnection between Iraqis and the statues ‘IS’ smashed (*ibid*).

Labelling the attack on the artefacts in Mosul Museum as 'جريمة العصر' [crime of the age] in both its title and written text, *Elaph* described the relics as 'Iraqi', stressing the relationship between them and Iraqi identity by maintaining that:

نفيذ تنظيم "داعش" الإرهابي جريمة جديدة في حق العراق، اهتز لها العالم. وهذه المرة لم يذبح الإرهابيون ولم يحرقوا بشراً، بل إنهم ألغوا بمعاولهم على آثار العراق العريقة.

[Terrorist 'Daesh' group committed yet another atrocity against Iraq for which the world has shaken. This time, the terrorists did not slaughter or immolate humans, but attacked with their hammers the great relics of Iraq].

By doing so, *Elaph* equated the magnitude of cultural destruction with other atrocities, including beheadings and immolations.

For Iraqi media which reported on the videos before the UNESCO statement came out, the focus was generally on the significance of the destroyed artefacts to Iraqi heritage and identity. In both *Alsumaria News* and *Alghad Press*, the attack was linked to a larger campaign by 'IS' to attack Iraqi peoples' heritage and history (*Alsumaria News*, 2015b; *Alghad Press*, 2015). *Alsumaria News* (*Alsumaria News*, 2015b), for example, considered the destruction as just the latest in a series of a systematic campaign against Iraqi religious and cultural heritage:

هذا الفيديو... يظهر حملة منظمة لتدمير أبرز الشواهد الأثرية، ومن بينها الثور المجنح، رمز الحضارة الآشورية التي ازدهرت في العراق... متحف الموصل يضاف إلى قائمة عشرات المواقع التاريخية التي دمرها داعش في نينوى، بما في ذلك مساجد الأنبياء.

[This video... shows an organized campaign to destroy the main relics, including the winged bull, symbol of the Assyrian civilization which flourished in Iraq... Mosul Museum is the latest in a list of dozens of historic sites demolished by Daesh in Nineveh, including prophets' shrines].

Moreover, *Alsumeria News* interestingly highlighted the fact that Mosul Museum was home to pre-Islamic antiquities, as well as Islamic ones (*ibid*). Similarly, *Almada Press* labelled the destroyed sculptures as symbols of the Mesopotamian civilizations which grew in Iraq (HH, 2015). Such a link was not heightened in *Rudaw* which described the destroyed artefacts as ‘Assyrian’ (Al-Zarari, 2015).

**Figure 17: A screenshot from an *Aljazeera English* video report portraying the reaction of Iraqi people towards ‘IS’s’ destruction of artefacts in the Mosul Museum (Aljazeera English, 2015a).**



In the TTs of the last two videos, the narrative of ethnic cleansing started to diminish but was still evoked when the Assyrian Christian identity of Nimrud was highlighted as in *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* (*Agence France-Presse*, 2015; *The Telegraph*, 2015). *The Telegraph* also mentioned the name ‘Kalhu’, maintaining that the city was only later given the name of ‘Nimrud’ by Arabs (*The Telegraph*, 2015). Mail Online similarly made reference to the

old name, stressing that it was mentioned in the book of Genesis (Malm, 2015). Naming the city in this way helped to recall its religious identity.

The case was different in Arabic and Iraqi media when Nimrud was described as an ‘Iraqi’ city regardless of its Assyrian roots as in *Al Arabiya English* (*Al Arabiya English*, 2015b), or when it was described as both. An example is the use of ‘الحضارة العراقية الأثرورية’ [The Assyrian Iraqi civilization] by *Almasalah* which interestingly regarded Nimrud as part of the Arab heritage, reinforcing in this way the Arab identity of the city (*Almasalah*, 2015).

In the case of Hatra, it was interesting to see two different labels by *The Washington Post* and *Al Arabiya English*. In the latter, it was described as ‘capital of the first Arab kingdom [which] have [sic] withstood invasions by the Romans in A.D. 116 and A.D. 198’ (*Al Arabiya English*, 2015c). In the former, on the other hand, it was defined as ‘town for the Seleucid Empire, one of the quasi-Greek kingdoms,...[bearing] the traces of a series of ancient cultures, including Roman influence as well as a succession of Persian empires’ (Tharoor, 2015a). Each label was a selective choice to privilege one identity that was closer to the identity of the target audience. Labels, explains Baker (2006; 2007), can activate distinct narratives that are ‘embedded in the consciousness and alignments’ of the target audience (Baker, 2007, p.157).

### **5.3 The narrative of looting and smuggling**

The last narrative was particularly made salient following the release of the first video. However, Target texts in western media did not fully elaborate on this narrative. This started to happen in later reporting when it was thoroughly related as did *The Washington Post* in an article titled *Islamic State isn’t just destroying ancient artefacts — it’s selling them* (Morris, 2015). In the TTs, however, the narrative of artefacts being abused to fund the group was briefly triggered by a variety of means. First, by either partially or fully translating ‘IS’s’ phrase that the artefacts were worthless to the

group even if they were worth billions of dollars. An example of the former was in the subtitles of *Time*'s video: 'ISIS: if God has ordered their removal [the artefacts], they become worthless to us' (Rhodan, 2015). An example of the latter was in the body of the written text by *The Washington Post*, 'These statues, these idols, and these antiquities, when Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, ordered to destroy and remove them, it was an easy matter.... We do not care even if it costs billions of dollars' (Tharoor, 2015b).

Second, by focusing on what was destroyed by 'IS' in the three videos, describing them as 'replicas' (See for example *The Telegraph*, Loveluck, 2015b). Third, by referring to the looting that took place in Iraq post-2003. In the case of Nimrud, damage caused to the city by 'IS' was linked to damage caused to antiquities in Baghdad in the aftermath of the US-led invasion of 2003 as reported by *The Independent* (Tuftt, 2015), and *The Telegraph* (*The Telegraph*, 2015).

In its TT of Hatra's video, *RT International* directly stated, 'Authorities believe some of the smaller statues and relics have been sold by the so-called Islamic State on the black market to help fund their campaign' (*RT International*, 2015b).

The narrative of looting and smuggling was more reinforced in Iraqi and other Arabic media, attributing 'IS's' destruction of cultural artefacts to its failure to abuse them as *Al Arabiya* did (Kharafati, 2015): '... يمضي متطرفو تنظيم داعش في تدمير ممنهج لمناطق أثرية عدة في العراق، خصوصا عندما يفشل: (Kharafati, 2015). [Extremists from the Daesh organization continue to systematically destroy many archaeological sites in Iraq, especially when they fail to smuggle and sell the artefacts as a funding source, according to experts]. Similarly, *Alsumaria News* (*Alsumarai News*, 2015b) mentioned, 'وحسب خبراء الآثار، فإن تنظيم "داعش" يعتمد على تهريب الآثار وبيعها، [According to relics' experts, "Daesh" كأحد مصادر تمويله، ويقوم بتدمير الآثار الثقيلة، التي لا يستطيع نقلها.'

organization relied on artefacts smuggling as a funding source, whilst destroying the heavy statues which cannot be transported].

In Saudi *Elaph*, this was done by repeatedly indicating that the attack on Mosul Museum took place a couple of weeks following a decision by the Security Council to cut off funding for the group, including funds coming from artefacts smuggling (Dabara, 2015):

ويبدو أنّ قرار الهدم الذي اتخذ حديثاً، يأتي حسب بعض القراءات ردّاً على قرار أممي يقضي بمنع داعش ومن على شاكلته من المتاجرة بالأثار لكسب المال. والآثار التي تم تدميرها الخميس، هي بالفعل ما لا يقدر "جهاديو" داعش على نقلها أو بيعها.

Seemingly, the decision which was recently taken was, according to some interpretations, in response to an international resolution stating that artefacts trading by Daesh and its like to gain funds should be stopped. The antiquities destroyed on Thursday represent, indeed, what cannot be transferred or sold by Daesh “jihadists”].

Kurdish *Rudaw* (Mahmoud, 2015) supported this narrative in another news article by combining a video interviewing Athil Al Nujaiifi, former governor of Mosul, who claimed that seven pieces were missing in ‘IS’s’ video. He added that most of the pieces destroyed were replicas with the exception of two heavy ones, including the winged bull (*ibid*).

In addition to these three narratives that were differently appropriated by the various media agencies, a few western media agencies highlighted ‘IS’s’ historic narrative invoked by the term ‘devil worshipper’ translated by *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, for instance. In the former, it was translated into ‘Satanists’: ‘A message flashing on the screen read: ‘Those statues and idols weren’t there at the time of the Prophet nor his companions. They have been excavated by Satanists’ (Barnard, 2015). In *The Guardian*, on the other hand, it was literally translated, adding a phrase explaining its reference to Ezidis: ‘A caption says the artefacts did not exist in the time of the Prophet and were put on display by “devil worshippers”, a term the militant group has used in the past to describe members of the Yazidi minority’ (Shaheen, 2015b). Neither *The New York Times*

nor *The Guardian*, however, drew a link between this term and the western archaeologists who excavated the sculptures, nor did they elaborate on the wider anti-western narrative that such link reflected. In the case of Nimrud, this narrative was made explicit by pointing out how the city was excavated by western archaeologists, as *The Telegraph* (The Telegraph, 2015), and *Mirror* stated (Sleigh, 2015).

Furthermore, 'IS's' ransack was sometimes placed within a wider political context. In the case of Hatra, its destruction was sometimes contextualized with other events to conjure up certain narratives. First, the attack on the site was situated within the liberation of Tikrit that coincided with its release, as *The Telegraph* (Loveluck, 2015b), and *Al Arabiya English* stated (Al Arabiya English, 2015c), hinting that the attack could be a reaction to 'IS's' defeat on the ground. Second, the attack was also related to other atrocities, including the Speicher massacre as *The Telegraph* reported (Loveluck, 2015b), or *sabi of Ezidis* and the displacement of Christians as *The Guardian* highlighted (Shaheen, 2015a), implying that 'IS' has been threatening coexistence in Iraq. Third, *The Telegraph* (Loveluck, 2015b) pointed out that Saddam Hussein had in the past ordered a partial reconstruction of the city of Hatra, engraving his name on its bricks. By doing so, it framed the latter as protective of the historical sites and monuments in Iraq as opposed to the subsequent Iraqi governments of post-2003.

## **6. Conclusions**

Cultural destruction by 'IS' in Iraq was not unprecedented throughout history. It is an act of iconoclasm that has theological, political, historic, and economic dimensions. In the case of 'IS', all of these motives were at play whilst destroying cultural heritage in Iraq. Such destruction was systematic and occurred as early as 'IS's' capture of Mosul in June 2014, starting with religious shrines, including Islamic ones. In 2015, 'IS' targeted mainly pre-Islamic heritage in Nineveh

inhabited by a diverse population. The representation of these acts was different in the two instances. In 2014, footage released was very brief and not choreographed, lacking any linguistic elements or narratives. Conversely, in 2015, they were structured, staged, performed and narrated using multiple modes. However, the theological narrative 'IS' constructed in the videos was not well-structured or well-scripted. 'IS' was merely repeating the same ideas over and over again whilst reacting in furious statements to the wide condemnation of the world generally, and of Muslims, specifically.

'IS', in fact, used the religious iconoclastic narrative to conceal its political motive which was more vivid in *Dabiq*. 'IS' opposed not just the diversity of people in Iraq and elsewhere, but also the narrative of nationalism. This may explain why the religious narrative which was largely heightened in western media in the TTs of the first video started to fade away in the TTs of the last two videos. In western media, the attack on Mosul Museum was framed within the narrative of ethnic cleansing of Assyrian Christians, eliciting the sympathy of a western audience. Although reduced in the case of the subsequent two videos, it was still triggered by the labels and names used to describe Nimrud and Hatra. In Arabic media, especially in Iraqi media, the three attacks were framed within a historical and cultural narrative related to the significance of the destroyed relics to the identity of Iraqi people, and also to Arabs. The focus was more often on the *Iraqiness* of the destroyed artefacts as opposed to their *Assyrianess* accentuated by western media and by *Rudaw*.

Another important difference between Arabic and western media was the way the narrative of looting was clearly manifested in Iraqi and Arabic media. In western media, on the other hand, and though it was invoked in a number of ways, it was still less highlighted than it was in Arabic and Iraqi media.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSIONS

On August 31, 2017, Iraqi PM, Haider Al-Abadi declared Nineveh province ‘fully liberated’ from ‘IS’s’ grip (Aldroubi, 2017), meaning that the majority of Iraqi lands were reclaimed by the Iraqi government. In the wake of this liberation, and at the time of writing this final chapter, draft amendments to the Personal Status Law in Iraq<sup>38</sup> were proposed by ruling Islamic parties. These amendments allowed Iraqi court to ‘follow rulings of religious scholars for Sunni or Shiite sects depending on the husband’s faith’ (Sattar, 2017). This draft law was seen as a less extreme version of the 2014 Jaafari Shia Personal Status Law proposed by the minister of justice (Abbas, 2014), and was promptly withdrawn due to the huge outcry it received from Iraqi civil society (Sattar, 2017). The new draft law significantly undermined women’s role and rights and imposed religious authority over the legal authority of courts. In particular, as Habib (2017) explains, ‘The proposed new Personal Status Law would refer issues of marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance to the religious endowment authorities – these are the bodies tasked with running...Shiite or Sunni mosques...and they are very important institutions within their own sectarian communities’ (Habib, 2017). As such, women, for example, would not inherit land, and underage marriage of nine or twelve-year-old girls would be legalized according to Shia or Sunni interpretations (*ibid*).

The proposed draft law and this latter article, in particular, caused huge outrage among many Iraqis. In response, protests were organized by women in Baghdad, calling for reclaiming women’s dignity and rights. Interestingly, one of the slogans raised by the female protestors was, ‘أنا لست سبية’ [I am not *sabiya* (enslaved captive)]. Similarly, one of the protestors stated, ‘اليوم يريدون تشريع زواج القاصرات العراقيات وغدا ربما يقرون قانون السبي’ [Today, they [in reference to Iraqi parliament] want to

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<sup>38</sup> The original law was issued in 1959 and considered ‘one of the most liberal laws in the Arab world with respect to women’s rights’ (Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2014).

legalize underage marriage for Iraqi girls, and tomorrow, they may legalize a law for *sabi*] (brothersirq, 2017; alarab, 2017).

On social media, the outcry was reflected in tweets and Facebook posts using the hashtag, *كلا\_لقانون\_الأحوال\_الجديد* [No to the new Personal Status Law] (brothersirq, 2017). Blending child marriage with *sabi* or even rape was prevalent in many tweets. For instance, one tweet read (Sddn, 2017), *قانون لشرعة إغتصاب الطفولة. طفلة لازالت تبكي من أجل دميتها تتزوج؟؟! إذن ما مشكلتكم مع داعش. تتسابقون*, [A law to legalize childhood rape. A female child who would still cry for her doll can marry? What is your problem with Daesh ('IS'). You are competing with filth].

In other words, an analogy was drawn between the practices of 'IS' and the Iraqi parliament. More interestingly, the narrative of *sabi* was re-invoked by Iraqi female activists this time. While the same terms were used by both 'IS' and Iraqi women, the narratives completely differed. By using the signifier *sabi*, 'IS' attempted to reclaim a tradition and to re-establish the institution of slavery, in general. In contrast, Iraqi female protestors' use of *sabi* was to deny the Proposed Status Law, particularly underage marriage.

This example highlights my original theoretical contribution to research on narrative: the fragmentation that every narrative is subject to in the process of narration circulation, and translation. One aspect of such fragmentation is when a narrative detaches from its original context and loses its personal and local details, and one of its three defining features: temporality, relationality, and causal emplotment. An antenarrative can be utilized strategically by an agent. In the case of the aforementioned example, the antenarrative of *sabi* was strategically used by Iraqi women to counter the Proposed Status Law and underage marriage.

My project has offered insights into how antenarratives in 'IS' contexts transform to fuller narratives or vice versa, and how the two merge together in the process of translation which

contributes to changing and driving the (ante) narratives as shall be discussed in the following section. My study also makes an original contribution to research on the Iraqi context from the point of view a female Iraqi researcher.

### **1. Revisiting research questions**

The study began by asking the following two groups of questions: **First, What are the narratives produced by ‘IS’ for each of the four atrocities? What do such narratives tell us about ‘IS’s’ motives? Second, how did narratives of the four atrocities first unfold? Were they fragmented or unified? Who were the actors involved? What resources did they use?** Investigating the four case studies demonstrated that ‘IS’ always had two intertwined motives: religious and political. ‘IS’ was aiming to establish and reinforce its homogenous caliphate project based on a single interpretation of Islam by attacking whoever and whatever did not fit with that interpretation.

By killing hundreds of Shia cadets, ‘IS’ not only aimed to revenge the killing of one of its leaders, but also to send a religiously, ethnically, and politically-loaded sectarian message to both the Iraqi government and Iraqi people. It did so by referring to the soldiers as *rawafith*, a derogatory religious term that tarnishes Shias as non-Muslims, and as Safavid, a reference to an Iranian dynasty, suggesting that Iraqi Shias are not Arabs. The images and the Arabic captions accompanying them tried to humiliate as well as intimidate the Shia-led government and Shia Muslims in Iraq. ‘IS’ exploited the sectarian narrative in Iraq by trying to deepen the gap between Sunnis and Shias, recalling the trauma of the 2006-2007 civil war that claimed hundreds of lives of both Sunni and Shia Muslims.

Using Twitter as the main medium to disseminate the images and their captions, ‘IS’ failed to construct a coherently structured narrative. There were only scattered elements of a narrative that did not possess the four narrative features, particularly temporality. Furthermore, the resources:

tweets, images, and Arabic captions through which these elements were elaborated, were quickly shattered with the closure of the 'IS'-affiliated Twitter account which released them. Therefore, I argued in this chapter that the atrocity unfolded as a fragmented narrative that remained as such until its pieces (antenarratives) were brought together in media TTs.

In the second case study, 'IS's' religious motive was made more salient than the political one through reviving the practice of *sabi*, and re-configuring its narratives in three texts, addressing different audiences. This was, however, preceded by narratives of survivors and eyewitnesses that appeared first in reports by human rights organizations and media reporting, and narratives by a female Ezidi MP and religious scholars. Detached from its original context, *sabi* was a loose signifier and an antenarrative that was differently translated by all these actors.

The third case of the execution videos was strikingly different to the previous two cases. Being in a proactive position this time, 'IS' started releasing a series of beheading and other execution videos with the motives of establishing authority, reversing the power relationship between 'IS' and the west, and deterring audiences. Moreover, 'IS' aimed to transform execution acts to global spectacles of violence (Friis, 2015; Friis, 2017). The videos were orchestrated to construct a master narrative of a political and religious authority of the caliphate. Other narratives varied in accordance with the victim and the audience in question. In case of beheadings of western victims, the narrative was a retaliation against US-led airstrikes. In the case of mass beheadings of the 21 Coptic Egyptians, 'IS' constructed a narrative of expansion reflected in the setting of the video: the coastal beach in Libya. Narratives of revenge on the Christian church in Egypt over the killing of two female Egyptians after converting to Islam and for the killing of Osama bin Laden were also established in the video.

Although 'IS' seemed to be the main actor involved in weaving the narratives related to the nine videos under analysis, this was not always the case. In the video of the Japanese journalist's beheading and the immolation video of the Jordanian pilot, 'IS' released footage placing demands and asking for ransoms, involving in this case both the Japanese and the Jordanian governments who were responding to the group. Sunni Muslim scholars were also largely involved following the release of the immolation video.

In the last case of the destruction of cultural heritage in Iraq, religious, political, and social motives drove 'IS' to carry out the destruction of cultural artefacts and sites in Nineveh province in Iraq. Although 'IS' provided religious justifications for acts of destruction, I argued that the political and social motives were far more evident. In particular, without completely changing the heterogeneous identity of this land, 'IS' would not have been able to claim a religious and political legitimacy. The political motive was not reflected in the narratives presented in the three videos examined, but could be found in various articles in *Dabiq*. Instead, the main narrative underpinning the videos was a religious iconoclastic narrative according to which statues and relics were described as idols that had to be destroyed according to Islamic Shari'ah. Being contested among Muslims, this narrative was devolving and failed to perpetuate or to convince the majority of Muslims, notably Iraqis. In addition to these motives, it was revealed that 'IS' had an economic motive to abuse artefacts as a funding source as indicated by media reports.

In a similar manner to the executions case, videos were the primary resources 'IS' used to narrate and to justify the destruction of pre-Islamic cultural artefacts. The three videos were similar to the executions in their manifestation of a global spectacle of violence. Yet, the use of the Arabic language alone suggested that 'IS' was mainly addressing an Arabic audience. Moreover, the videos were less well-scripted and less well-orchestrated than execution videos. In addition to 'IS', other

actors, especially media agencies, as well as Iraqi officials and archaeologists who disproved a claim disseminated by an 'IS'-affiliated account that Nineveh walls were destroyed, were also involved in circulating the narrative of cultural destruction.

The third question listed in the introduction chapter turned to issues of translation, both in its narrow and broad senses, by the various media agencies. The question was the following: **How did these narratives change later as they were translated into different media discourses? Did their translations vary across these discourses?** The analysis undertaken in the four case studies chapters showed that the role played by translation in changing (ante)narratives was pivotal. To start with, the scattered pieces of 'IS's' narrative of the mass killing of Iraqi Shia trainees created a vacuum for the media agencies to fill. Western media did so by framing 'IS's' fragmented story within wider religious and political narratives. Chief among them was the societal narrative of sectarianism which was contrastively undermined in Iraqi media, depicting 'IS' as a perpetrator of crimes against Iraqis and humanity as a whole. The use of 'IS's' images in Iraqi Shia media was a political tool for provoking others to intervene. Due to the lack of the temporality feature in 'IS's' antenarrative, particularly as far as the location where the mass killing had taken place, some western and Iraqi media indicated that the military base fell to 'IS', which was not true. It was also established that the Speicher massacre received the least attention by western media in comparison to subsequent atrocities. With the exception of Iraqi media, it was almost absent in Arabic media. The initial denial of political leaders that the images were authentic may have contributed to the poor media coverage.

Moving to the case of *sabi*, the term was differently translated by 'IS' and in media discourses. Being a loose signifier detached from its signifieds, *sabi* was initially distinctly, yet partially, translated by the media into slavery, abduction, forced marriage, *sabi*, sex trafficking, and

rape. Each of these terms invoked a distinct narrative. 'IS', on the other hand, translated *sabi* into slavery in its first *Dabiq* article to institutionalize the practice. This changed later into *sabi* in the Arabic pamphlet and in its second *Dabiq* article. In western media, as well as in the English pages of some Arabic media and of *Al Alam*, *sabi* was translated into sex slavery, what can be considered the modern day English use of *sabi*. Despite being another partial rendering, sex slavery helped to delegitimize 'IS'.

The execution videos were generally partially translated and fragmented into edited stills in the discourse of western media following a political decision to censor and curb their distribution. By so doing, the narrative of retaliation was undermined visually, but was still mentioned in the written texts. The identity of the victims as western who were also either journalists or aid workers meant that they were closer to a western audience. This, therefore, caused a dramatic transformation in the labels chosen in western media discourses to describe 'IS' and the beheading acts. By using the abstract notions of brutality and evilness, western media placed the videos and the retaliation narrative within the meta-narrative of the 'war on terror'. More crucially, this meta-narrative coalesced with a narrative of a global security threat to incite action against the group which now became the world's 'enemy'.

Stills started to gradually disappear from western media's TTs and later online reporting to be replaced with the victims' personal photos in an attempt to trigger a personal counter-narrative of goodness and bravery. A noticeable example was in Kassig' beheading which lacked the confession part, and was, therefore, framed by a personal narrative of challenge and resistance. One exception was *RT International* which still visually highlighted 'IS's' retaliation narrative for US airstrikes in what could be interpreted as an attempt to divert the attention away from Russian military intervention in the war in Syria and its continued aerial bombardment.

Not all the execution videos received the same amount of attention by western media. This was especially the case with the last video of the Peshmerga fighters but also happened with the mass beheading of the Syrian soldiers. This suggests that executions of local victims, however appalling, appeared to be of less significance to western media discourses.

No censorship was imposed on the dissemination of execution videos in Arabic or Iranian media. That is why both *Al Arabiya* and *Al Alam* republished the videos. The main difference between the two was that while *Al Arabiya* only reposted the videos on its Arabic page, removing the execution scenes, *Al Alam* tended to re-publish some of the videos fully, regardless of the language of the article. Whether execution videos were republished or not, stills showing Arabic subtitles and answering why 'IS' was carrying out the executions were also used. As such, the narrative of retaliation became visually amplified. For Arabic media, especially *Aljazeera*, this could be another political tool of showing that the US has also been an accomplice in the conflict in both Syria and Iraq.

A religious counter-narrative to 'IS' was generally brought to the fore following the unprecedented collective condemnation by Muslim leaders and figures in response to the immolation of the Jordanian pilot. This, in turn, altered Arabic media translations and/or reporting of 'IS' texts. Labels such as, 'barbaric', 'brutal', 'gruesome', 'terrorist', and so on came to be more frequently used. *Al Alam* was more consistent than Arabic media in using these labels after Foley's beheading. Iran which was involved in the fight against 'IS' aimed to rally the world against the 'enemy'. Similar to western media, the beheading of the Peshmerga fighters went almost unnoticed by Arabic media but was expectedly highlighted by Kurdish media.

Translation in the last case related to the three videos of cultural destruction played a significant role in either reinforcing or undermining three narratives: the iconoclastic religious

narrative, the narrative of ethnic cleansing of Assyrian Christians, and the narrative of looting and smuggling of the artefacts. The first of the three videos pertaining to the destruction of Mosul Museum and the huge winged bull statues received wide attention by western media in comparison to the subsequent two videos showing the destruction of the historical sites of Nimrud and Hatra. The iconoclastic religious narrative was largely stressed in western media, but started to be reduced or suppressed in the TTs of the subsequent two videos.

The iconoclastic religious narrative also disappeared from Iraqi media (with the exception of Kurdish *Rudaw*) which focused instead on the narrative of looting and smuggling. Furthermore, Iraqi media by and large tried to resuscitate the shared Iraqi identity associated with the artefacts destroyed by emphasizing the political motive of 'IS' to wipe out the diverse history of the Iraqi population in and around Nineveh. *Aljazeera English* and *Elaph* similarly endeavoured to bolster this connection between the relics and Iraqi people. *Rudaw* was less concerned about showing this link given the fact that *Rudaw* shares the aspirations of the Kurdistan regional government and Kurds to establish an independent Kurdish state. There were attempts by *Al Arabiya* and *Al Alam News Channel* to show that 'IS's' religious interpretation was contested among Muslims. A statement or a Fatwa by the top religious authority of Al-Azhar was incorporated into their news articles to deny the act of destruction.

The fourth question was concerned with the role of survivors and, to a lesser extent, 'IS's' religious opponents, in challenging 'IS', and how this changed in translation. The question was, therefore, as follows: **What was the role that survivors and religious opponents played in challenging 'IS'? More specifically, in what ways did the personal narratives of survivors contest 'IS's' narratives, especially the sectarian element? How did these narratives transform in the process of news translation?**

This question was particularly addressed in the first two analysis chapters related to the Speicher massacre and *sabi*. Both chapters establish how stories of survivors can alter ‘IS’s’ and/or media narratives, but they themselves are subject to further changes or fragmentation in the process of translation across new discourses, genres, or modes. In the case of Speicher, as opposed to *sabi*, survivors’ stories came two months following ‘IS’s’ dissemination of the images and tweets. Although these personal narratives shared a number of similarities, they differed in the reasons that led to the mass killing, i.e., in their causal emplotment feature. Such difference caused two narratives: a narrative of cowardice by blaming the trainees and their military commanders for not fighting ‘IS’, and a narrative of betrayal by directly accusing their top military commanders of deceiving the cadets when they ordered them to leave the military base. In both of these narratives, though, the survivors aimed to challenge ‘IS’ and to negotiate the sectarian conflict in Iraq. Although the first survivor’s story explicitly mentioned the role of some local Sunni Arab tribes in collaborating with ‘IS’, he tried to downplay the sectarian element by revealing how his life was saved by other Sunni locals, differentiating between Sunnis in general and ‘IS’s’ supporters. The second survivor also mentioned the help offered by a Sunni local resident after fleeing ‘IS’.

Significant shifts took place in the process of translation into the discourses of Iraqi, Arabic, and Iranian media. In general, both stories and the modes in which they were disseminated were ruptured in the translation as certain elements were promoted whilst others were undermined. The first narrative, for instance, was narrated through a multimodal text: a short documentary and a written text by *The New York Times*. In translation, Iraqi media focused on either of the modes at the expense of the other. Deletion and/or re-organization of the STs in which the two narratives were told, and replacing some labels in the TTs by Iraqi, Iranian, and Qatari media, transformed the source narratives. The conclusion of *Al-Sharq*’s TT suggested that the cadets arrested by ‘IS’ were released later by the group.

In the second analysis chapter, survivors' stories predated 'IS's' narratives as previously mentioned. At first, they were themselves fragmented until some survivors were interviewed by a number of western media agencies. Examining the personal narrative of the Ezidi survivor, Nadia Murad, I found out that it changed a number of times. In her early interviews with western media, Murad narrated her personal experience, without first admitting that she was raped. That shifted a month later during her interview with the German journal, *Spiegel Online*, when she revealed that she was raped, albeit still very briefly. In this interview, Murad showed that she remained for nine days under captivity. In her testimony a year later before the Security Council when she was supported by the activist US-based Ezidi NGO, *Yazda*, Murad not only elaborated in detail on the sexual abuses she went through during her captivity, but also became a voice calling for justice and a safe haven for her Ezidi community. In particular, she framed her personal story within the meta-narrative of genocide which has continued to be associated with 'IS's' atrocities against the Ezidis up until this moment. The timing of her captivity under 'IS' has also changed to three months ever since.

In addition to Murad's narrative, I examined other similar stories of Ezidi survivors that were mediated by a *New York Times*' article. Released in August 2015, the article remarked on a dramatic shift in the way 'IS's' female survivors narrated their ordeal. Rather than brief and compacted stories that unfolded at an earlier stage, survivors were now able to give detailed information on the sexual abuses they faced which were justified along religious grounds. In the article, the stories were, thus, put within a collective narrative of theological rape. The article was differently translated by the Saudi newspaper, *Elaph*, and by Iraqi Translation Project. The discourses of the two platforms are distinct to each other: the former is a mainstream newspaper, whilst the latter is a grassroots organization established and run by Iraqi volunteers. This difference may explain the discrepancy between the two translations. Unlike the largely literal and full

translation by the Iraqi Translation Project, *Elaph* provided a partial translation that deleted any statement in the ST in which the religious roots of *sabi* were discussed. At the same time, it added a sentence in its introduction that was not mentioned in the source article, slamming ‘IS’s’ acts as anti-Islamic.

‘IS’s’ religious opponents tried to undermine ‘IS’s’ narratives at different points in time. In the Ezidi case, it was discussed how Sunni scholars around the world attempted to challenge ‘IS’s’ interpretations of Islam, including their interpretations of *sabi*, in an online letter addressing Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Their counter-argument was that *sabi* cannot be revived because the institution of slavery had come to an end globally. In particular, they stated that *sabi* was abolished by Islam and that there was a consensus among Muslim countries to eliminate this practice. This argument was still problematic as it ignored the historical context in which *sabi* started to be gradually abolished during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Following ‘IS’s’ immolation of al-Kasasbeh, many religious scholars and institutions, including Al-Azhar, harshly denounced ‘IS’ and denied its religious legitimacy. Al-Azhar responded again following ‘IS’s’ video of the destruction of artefacts in Mosul Museum. Their responses were, therefore, channeled by Arabic media or by *Al Alam News Channel* as a tool for subverting ‘IS’s’ version of Islam. Their argument was briefly represented in these media discourses, relying solely on statements and/or Fatwas. In my personal opinion, and despite their effectiveness, Fatwas still needed to be incorporated into religious texts that could pose a real challenge to ‘IS’.

The last question addressed in this thesis was related to issues of genre, particularly in the last two case studies: **Drawing on a rhetorical approach to genre, can we identify execution videos and videos of cultural destruction as emergent or evolving genres? How did this affect the**

**narrative(s) established?** In chapter six, I contended that it was possible to identify the execution videos as a genre that has evolved throughout history. Public executions represent a very old practice that has recurred in different places at different times. They share the same social exigence: execution is a punishment and deterrence, as well as a projection and consolidation of power. Filming executions in videos started with al-Qaeda back in 2002, and has evolved with ‘IS’ exploiting the innovated technology of the internet and other visual and communication tools. In addition to their shared social action, repetition, and typified situation, the videos appeared to be perceived as a culturally significant category by the audience. For instance, the political decision in the west to censor them in the media, and the subsequent somehow consistent strategy by western media to fragment them in translation attested to such an assumption. More importantly, and despite this decision and strategy, the videos re-distribution in various websites and social media platforms failed to be stopped or controlled. This genre of execution significantly impacted the narratives created. Unlike the previous two cases, narratives were now injected with coherence, linearity, and structure.

In contrast, despite their shared social action and structure, the three videos of cultural destruction in Iraq could not be identified as yet another new genre mainly for lacking a typified situation. The religious narrative underpinning these videos relied on religious texts and interpretations widely debated among Muslims, and thus, failed to control or to convince ordinary Muslims, especially in Iraq.

## **2. Avenues for future inquiry**

There are a number of research questions and areas worthy of being investigated in future work on ‘IS’, on one hand, and on translation studies on the other. As far as ‘IS’ itself is concerned, the following research questions are especially important. First, how does the group deal with its defeat,

and to what extent is this reflected in the texts that it produces? Studying changes in the group's narratives following its decline as a self-proclaimed caliphate would be as interesting, as would studying its narratives as a pseudo-state. While the defeat has eradicated the self-proclaimed caliphate, the group is most likely to pursue as an insurgency as is widely anticipated by experts and analysts (Staniland, 2017; Cage, Berger and Amarasingam, 2017). However, as indicated by Cage, Berger, and Amarasingam (2017), it is crucial that we do not subscribe to the group's narrative by downplaying the significance of the defeats and losses it has so far endured. For them, the loss of territorial control is also a loss of the group's appeal that is centred on their collective identity (*ibid*).

Such losses have significantly impacted 'IS's' media production. A recent study conducted by *BBC Monitoring* has shown a decrease in 'IS's' media production which started to take place with the loss of Mosul but has sharply dropped following the loss of Raqqa in Syria (BBC Monitoring, 2017). Beyond statistics, it is crucial to study changes in the narratives produced by the group. This is a research area that merits our attention and investigation. As pointed out by Staniland (2017, p.30), 'We do not...have substantial research on the question of how insurgents deal with decline specifically'. Therefore, using a narrative approach to analyze 'IS's' texts after the defeat will be an essential means to understanding their post-caliphate strategies. Without investigating the ways that such texts and narratives are translated into media discourse, among other discourses, I believe that we will only have a partial picture. Examining any material 'IS' produces should go hand in hand with its translations in a variety of discourses, genres, and modes.

Second, how can we counter 'IS's' narratives of issues related to governance, administration, and education? My project has focused on 'IS's' narratives of its atrocities and how these were primarily translated by the media. Other future projects should focus on grassroots local movements

that have emerged in Iraq and Syria to challenge the group through texts, narratives, and translation. In chapter two, it was mentioned that a group of Iraqi and Syrian activists produced a series of satirical cartoons to undermine and ridicule 'IS'. In order for the group to reach a wider international audience, all of the series were translated into English subtitles. Another example of local resistance took another form and was centred on reclaiming the Iraqi shared cultural identity, particularly in the aftermath of videos of cultural destruction. This time, resistance was manifested in caricatures and drawings by Iraqi artists (see Figure 18). Through this genre, not only was 'IS' resisted but so were corrupt Iraqi politicians, and their corrupted decisions and bargains.

Local resistance unfolded in a number of other ways that were not just against 'IS' per se, but against social and political practices that threatened the freedom of individuals in one way or another. One example was related to resistance to the draft Personal Status Law discussed earlier in this chapter. Interestingly, to compare between 'IS' and such practices, the term *دايشينغ* [Daeshing, turning into Daesh] was coined by Iraqi activists and started to be widely used in social media. The term shows that some traces of 'IS's' ideology are more or less still inherent in a variety of ways in society. Using data from social media accounts and pages of activists and/or bloggers and combining different methodological tools including narrative and ethnographic approaches to analyze such data would be a very important area of research for two main reasons. First, such research will shape our understanding of whether there has been a transformation in Iraqi society towards political and social issues. Crucial among these is the sectarian narrative and the meta-narrative of us vs. them that was at the centre of 'IS's' discourse. Second, this area of research will make a significant contribution to emerging research on the relation between social media, activism, change, debate, and negotiation (See, for example, Gerbaudo, 2012; Cammaerts, 2015).

In addition to local resistance at a grassroots level, it is equally significant to explore how 'IS's' narratives can be countered at an institutional level. In a recent statement by Iraqi PM, Haider Al-Abadi, following the defeat of 'IS', the meta-narrative of us versus them was manipulated into us and them (Haider Al-Abadi, 2017): (أنا والآخر) '...إن النجاح يتحقق باحترامنا للاختلافات فيما بيننا وتحقيق شعار (أنا والآخر)'. ' [...Success is achieved when we respect our differences and activate the slogan (I and the other)]. This is an important rhetoric that triggers a counter-narrative to 'IS's' master narrative of us versus them, but it needs to be implemented in different governmental and societal institutions to be effective. One institution that I am particularly interested in examining is the educational institution in Iraq. Are the terms used by 'IS' and the narratives they invoke being contested in the national curriculum, particularly the religious curriculum? Is the meta-narrative of us versus them being subverted in ways that reflect the diversity of the different Iraqi communities? If not, what can be done to reverse 'IS's' terms and narratives? This is an area of inquiry that, despite its importance for present and future generations, remains so far underresearched.

Not only should we focus our attention on 'IS', but most importantly, we should pay particular attention to people who lived under 'IS's' rule whether in Iraq or in Syria. Personal narratives of those abused by 'IS' or those who were simply living under 'IS's' control can be investigated by combining a variety of methodological tools. For instance, combining a narrative approach with ethnographic methods will help to explore how children were recruited, and exploited by 'IS', a topic of utmost importance that is yet to be studied. A recent report by the Quilliam Foundation in partnership with The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative maintains that the use of children by 'IS' is one of the gravest challenges encountered by the world today, putting forward the need to establish 'a holistic approach, a willingness to be open to innovative solutions as well as harsh critiques of our failures to date' (Whitman, 2016, p.6). Such solutions cannot be reached unless we deconstruct the narratives 'IS' used to manipulate children in order for

us to suggest alternative counter-narratives to de-radicalize those children and re-engage them with the society. As a recent study on 'IS's' influence on the children in Syria has shown, 'IS' has been successful in winning the hearts and minds of many Syrian young people, laying 'the groundwork for its resurgence' (Qaddour, 2018).

With regards to translation studies, there are two avenues to explore. The first is related to the way translation before, during, and post-'IS' has been employed as a tool for the circulation of knowledge in Iraqi society where education has started to be influenced and crippled by religious discourse. A particular case is that of the Iraqi Translation Project mentioned in Chapter Two. This case is a fascinating contribution to the conversation about translation in the internet age, and the role it plays in educating people. Studying the role of volunteer translators in the new media environment has so far been limited to amateur translators (See for example O'Hagan, 2009; Pérez-González, 2012; Pérez-González, 2014; Izwaini, 2012), overlooking the role played by professional translators. Such research, therefore, would immensely contribute to enriching this field.

The second area is related to the conceptualization of translation in the digital environment, particularly its two concepts of source and target texts. As shown in Chapter Two, Pym (2014), for example, proposes to replace 'source text' with the notion of 'start text'. These two terms need to be further examined, exploring possible alternative terminologies. Finally, the social (ante)narrative multimodal approach adopted in this study can be readily applied to examine other violent narratives and conflicts, be it by 'IS' or other state or non-state actors, or to study how breaking news develops into news stories. However, it can still benefit from further developing its concepts and tools.

**Figure 18: Photo by Iraqi artist Ahmed Falah (Ahmed Falah, 2016)**



## Appendix

### A full list of TTs of 'IS's' STs, other STs, TTs, and news articles analyzed in the four case studies

#### - Speicher Massacre

##### - Media TTs of 'IS's' images and tweet

1. An article by *BBC Arabic* titled "العراق: "داعش" تنشر صوراً لاعدامات جماعية [Iraq: "Daesh" publishes images of summary executions] (*BBC Arabic*, 2014b).
2. An article by *The Telegraph* titled: *Iraq crisis: ISIS jihadists execute dozens of captives* (Spencer, 2014c).
3. An article by *Sky News* titled *Iraq: ISIS murder photos 'designed to enrage'* (Kiley, 2014).
4. An article by *Time* titled *ISIS Claims Massacre of 1,700 Iraqi Soldiers* (Baker, 2014).
5. An article by *The New York Times* titled *Massacre claims shakes Iraq* (Norland and Rubin, 2014).
6. An article by *BBC News* titled *Iraq conflict: Images purport to show 'massacre' by militants* (BBC News, 2014c).
7. An article by *The Independent* titled *Iraq crisis: ISIS forces kill dozens of soldiers in 'mass Execution' as country slides towards sectarian war* (Cockburn, 2014).
8. An article by *Express* titled *Warning graphic content: Iraqi 'massacre' as up to 1,000 feared dead* (Engineer, 2014).
9. An Arabic article by *France24* titled *داعش تتبنى تصفية 1700 جندي شيعي في تكريت والولايات المتحدة تدين* [Daesh admits liquidation of 1700 Shia soldiers in Tikrit while the US condemns] (France 24, 2014).
10. An article by US-funded *Alhurra* titled *واشنطن تدين تصفية داعش لـ 1700 عسكري في تكريت* [Washington condemns Daesh's liquidation of 1700 militants in Tikrit] (Alhurra, 2014).

11. An Arabic article by Iraqi independent media, *Almasalah*, titled مجزرة طلاب الكلية الجوية [Massacre of air force cadets: the bloodiness of “Daesh” and the humanity of army] (Almasalah, 2014).
12. An Arabic article by Iraqi Shia media agency, *Alahednews*, titled داعش ترتكب مجزرة رهيبة ضحيتها 1700 عراقي [Daesh commits dreadful massacre killing 1700 Iraqi victims] (Alahednews, 2014).
13. An Arabic article by the Pan-Arab newspaper, *Alhayat*, titled داعش يعلن اعدام 1700 جندي عراقي...وحقوقيون يشككون [Daesh declares execution of 1700 Iraqis...legal officials doubt] (Alhayat, 2014).

- STs and TTs of survivors’ personal narratives

1. An article by *The New York Times* titled *Escaping death in Northern Iraq* (Arango, 2014).
2. An article by *Reuters English* titled *The story of an Islamic State massacre survivor* (Salman, 2014a).
3. An Arabic article by *Reuters* titled قصة ناج من مذبحه ارتكبتها متشدوو الدولة الاسلامية [A story of ‘IS’ extremists’ slaughter’s survivor] (Salman, 2014b).
4. An Arabic article by Iraqi independent media, *Alqurtasnews*, titled الناجي الوحيد من "سبايكر" يروي تفاصيل المجزرة الداعشية [“Speicher” only survivor narrates Daeshi massacre details] (Alqurtasnews, 2014).
5. An article by Iraqi independent newspaper, *Almada Newspaper*, titled النجاة من مذبحه داعش [Surviving Daesh massacre] (Almada Newspaper, 2014).
6. An article by *Al Alam News Channel* titled ناجي من مجزرة سبايكر: المحقق مع الضحايا كانت لهجته سعودية [Speicher massacre’s survivor: the interrogator had a Saudi accent] (Al Alam News Channel, 2014b).
7. An Arabic article by Qatari newspaper, *Al-Sharq*, titled مأساة جندي عراقي فر من جحيم داعش [Tragedy of Iraqi soldier fleeing Daesh’s hell] (Al-Sharq, 2014).

- Secondary set of data

- Two reports by Human Rights Watch. The first report titled *Iraq: ISIS execution site located* (Human Rights Watch, 2014c). The second report titled *Iraq: Islamic State executions in Tikrit* (Human Rights Watch, 2014b).
- A video published by an 'IS'-affiliated YouTube account titled *افراد الجيش الصفوي الذين كانوا في قاعدة سبايكر تكريت بيد الدولة الاسلامية* [The Safavid army members who were inside Speicher military base were captured by Islamic State] (Abu Uof, 2014).
- 'IS's' video on the massacre released one year later and titled *Upon the Prophetic Methodology* (Liveleak.com, 2015).
- An article by Emirati newspaper, *Albayan*, titled: *بالفيديو.. داعش ينشر مشاهد جديدة لمجزرة سبايكر* [Video: Deash releases new footages of Speicher massacre] (*Albayan*, 2015).
- An article by *The Telegraph* titled *ISIL releases new video of 2014 Speicher massacre of Shia army recruits* (Loveluck, 2015a).

- **Sabi**

- The first list of data set: The political institution and early online reporting on *sabi* by the media

1. A YouTube video showing Ezidi MP, Vian Dakhil, making a plea before the Iraqi parliament (Zen, 2014).
2. An article by *Aljazeera English* titled *Politician begs world to help Iraq's Yazidis* (*Aljazeera English*, 2014d).
3. An article by *The Telegraph* titled *40,000 Iraqis stranded on Sinjar Mountain after Islamic State death threats* (Spencer, 2014b).
4. An article by *The Washington Post* titled *The Islamic State's bloody campaign to exterminate minorities: 'Even Genghis Khan didn't do this'* (McCoy, 2014).
5. An article by *CNN* titled: *Iraqi Yazidi lawmaker 'Hundreds of my people are being slaughtered'* (Smith-Spark, 2014).
6. An article by *Express* titled *Who are the Yazidis? A look at the religious minority trapped by ISIS militants* (Harris, 2014).

7. An article by *The Guardian* titled *Yazidis Tormented by Fears for Women and Girls Kidnapped by ISIS Jihadis* (Chulov, 2014).
  8. An article by *The Washington Post* titled *In Iraq, captured Yazidi women fear the Islamic State will force them to wed* (Sly, 2014).
  9. An article by *Mirror* titled *Islamic State Fanatics Kidnap More Than 3,000 Women and Girls in 2 Week Rampage* (Dorman, 2014).
  10. An article by *Al Arabiya English* titled *Dozens of Yazidi women 'sold into marriage' by ISIS* (*Al Arabiya English*, 2014d).
  11. A short video report by *BBC News* titled *Iraq conflict: ISIS Trafficking Yazidi Women for Sex* (Knell, 2014).
- The Second list of data set: Personal narratives of Ezidi survivors and 'IS's' opponents' religious counter-narrative
1. A short video collected from YouTube featuring an interview with Murad by *BBC Persian* (Al-Dababir, 2014).
  2. English and Arabic versions of an open letter signed by 120 Sunni Muslim scholars and figures around the world addressing 'IS's' self-proclaimed caliph, al-Baghdadi (LettertoBaghdadi.com, 2014).
  3. An article in English by the German journal, *Spiegel Online*, interviewing Murad titled *Nine days under the caliphate: A Yazidi woman's ordeal as an Islamic State captive* (Hoppe, 2014).
  4. An article by *The New York Times* titled *ISIS enshrines a theology of rape* (Callimachi, 2015).
  5. TT of the above article by Saudi newspaper, *Elaph* titled *التنظيم ابتدع خطة مفصلة للرق مقاتلو داعش يصلون قبل وبعد اغتصاب القاصرات الجنسي: مقاتلو داعش يصلون قبل وبعد اغتصاب القاصرات* [The group invented a detailed plan of sex slavery: Daesh fighters pray before and after raping minor females] (Abu Jalala, 2015).
  6. TT of the above article by Iraqi Translation Project titled *داعش تقديس الاغتصاب وتجعله شريعة الهية!* [Daesh enshrines rape and makes it a Godly Shari'ah!] (Hamoud, 2015).
  7. A recorded video of Murad's testimony before the Security Council in December 2015 (Rashid, 2015).

8. A written translated text of Murad's full testimony before the United Nation Security Council was obtained from its session minutes available on the institution's website (United Nation Security Council, 2015).

- TTs of *Dabiq's* first article

1. An article by *The Independent* titled *ISIS justify capture and sexual enslavement of thousands of Yazidi women and girls* (Buchanan, 2014).
2. An article by *The Telegraph* titled *Thousands of Yazidi women sold for 'theological reasons', Says ISIL* (Spencer, 2014a).
3. An article by *France24 Arabic* titled *تنظيم "الدولة الاسلامية" يقر لأول مرة بسبي نساء أيزيديات في العراق* ["Islamic State" organization admits for the first time *sabi* of Ezidi women in Iraq] (Nasr, 2014).
4. An article by *The New York Times* titled *Islamic State propagandists boast of sexual enslavement of women and girls* (Makey, 2014).
5. An Arabic article by Iraqi independent media, *Alsumaria News*, titled *داعش " يقر باقدامه على سبي نساء ايزيديات وتوزيعهن واولادهن على مسلحيه* ["Daesh" admits *sabi* of Ezidi women, distributing them with their children among its militants] (Shafiq, 2014).
6. An article by *Al Arabiya English* titled *ISIS Jihadists boast of enslaving Yazidi women* (*Al Arabiya English*, 2014b).
7. An article by *Aljazeera America* titled *ISIL fighters rape Yazidi women, kidnap children, rights group told* (*Aljazeera America*, 2014).
8. An Arabic article by the Dubai-based Pan-Arab media agency, *Al Aan News*, titled *داعش " يتباهى بسبي الفتيات الايزيديات وبيعهن كالجواري* ["Daesh" boasts of Yazidi girls' *sabi* and selling them as concubines] (*Al Aan News*, 2014).
9. An article by *Aljazeera Arabic* titled *تنظيم الدولة يبرر سبي الايزيديات* [The State organization justifies *sabi* of Ezidi women] (*Aljazeera Arabic*, 2014b).
10. An article by *Rudaw Arabic* titled *داعش يقر بسبي نساء ايزيديات في العراق* [Daesh admits *sabi* of Ezidi women in Iraq] (*Rudaw Arabic*, 2014).
11. An Arabic article by *Elaph* titled *بيعن في سوق النخاسة ويجبرن على زواج قسري هكذا يعامل داعش* [Sold in slaves market, forced to marry, This is how (Daesh) treats its Ezidi *sabaya* according to Shari'ah!] (Al-Majali, 2014).

- English subtitles of the video

1. English subtitles provided by *Al Aan* and were obtained from a number of western mass media websites, including *Mirror* (Richards, 2014), *Mail Online* (Webb and Rahman, 2014), and *BBC News* (Wood, 2014).
2. The second subtitles, on the other hand, were collected from an Ezidi activist's YouTube account (Burjus, 2014).

- Target texts of the Pamphlet

1. An English version of the pamphlet translated by Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI). The TT titled *Islamic State (ISIS) Releases Pamphlet On Female Slaves* (Middle East Media Research Institute, 2014).
2. An article by *Mail Online* titled *IS'IS's 'Slavery for Dummies': Jihadists compile chilling checklist of how to treat thousands of kidnapped sex slaves* (Hall, 2014).
3. An article by *Dailystar* titled *IS release sick jihadi guide to raping child slaves* (Lawton, 2014).
4. An article by *The Independent* titled *ISIS releases 'abhorrent' sex slaves pamphlet with 27 tips for militants on taking, punishing and raping female captives* (Withnall, 2014).
5. An article by *RT International* titled *ISIS releases horrifying sex slave pamphlet, justifies child rape* (RT International, 2014a).
6. An article by *CNN* titled *ISIS: Enslaving, having sex with 'unbelieving' women, girls is OK* (Botelho, 2014).
7. An Arabic article by Egyptian *Elwatannew* titled *بالصور/ دليل نكاح الأسيرات "آخر إصدارات داعش" للحصول على السبايا* [Photos: "Female captive guide": "Daesh" latest publications for taking *Sabaya*] (Yasin, 2014).
8. An article by *Al Alam News Channel* titled *بالصور: دليل نكاح الأسيرات الذي وزعه داعش على مقاتليه* [Photos: Female captives guide distributed by Daesh among its fighters] (*Al Alam News Channel*, 2014a).
9. An article by *Al Alam News Network* titled *ISIS pamphlet advocates enslavement and sexual abuse* (*Al Alam News Network*, 2014a).

- TTs of *Dabiq's* second article

1. An article by *Mirror* titled *ISIS call Michelle Obama 'a prostitute' in bizarre propaganda magazine that DEFENDS child rape* (Shammas, 2015).
2. An article by *Express* titled *ISIS calls Michelle Obama a PROSTITUTE and justifies raping slave girls with the KORAN* (Culbertson, 2015).
3. An article by *The Independent* titled *ISIS 'Jihadi Bride' claims forced sex with Yazidi girls is never rape because Koran condones it* (Dearden, 2015).
4. An Arabic article by the Tunisian online newspaper, *Assabahnews*, titled *سبايا داعش افضل من "عاهرات اوروپا"* [Daeshia: Deash's *sabaya* better than "Europe's prostitutes"] (*Assabahnews*, 2015).
5. An article by *Al Alam News Channel* titled *داعشية: سبي النساء سنة نبوية عظيمة وسنعيد سوق النخاسة!* [Daeshia: *Sabi* of women is great Sunnah [way of life] and we will revive slaves market?!] (*Al Alam News Channel*, 2015a).

- Secondary material

- A report by Human Rights Watch titled *Iraq: Forced marriage, conversion for Ezidis* (Human Rights Watch, 2014a).
- A report by Human Rights Watch titled *Iraq: ISIS escapees describe systematic rape* (Human Rights Watch, 2015).
- A report by UNITED NATIONS Assistance Mission for Iraq and HUMAN RIGHTS Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights titled *Report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Iraq: 6 July-10 September 2014* (UNITED NATIONS Assistance Mission for Iraq and HUMAN RIGHTS Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2014).
- A report by Amnesty International titled *Escape from hell: Torture and sexual slavery in Islamic State captivity in Iraq* (Amnesty International, 2014).

- Execution videos

TTs of the nine videos are grouped into two groups: TTs by western media and TTs by Arabic, Iranian, and Kurdish media as listed below:

- TTs by western media:

1. An article by *The New York Times* titled *Militant group says it killed American journalist in Syria* (Callimachi, 2014b).

2. An article by *CNN* titled *Video shows ISIS beheading U.S. journalist James Foley* (Carter, 2014).
3. An article by *The Washington Post* titled *Islamic State claims it executed American photojournalist James Foley* (DeYoung and Goldman, 2014).
4. An article by *BBC News* titled *James Foley: Islamic State militants 'behead reporter'* (*BBC News*, 2014a).
5. An article by *The Telegraph* titled *'British' Islamic State jihadi threatens more 'bloodshed' before beheading James Foley* (Lockhart, 2014).
6. An article by *The Guardian* titled *Islamic State militants claim to have killed US journalist James Foley* (Ackerman, 2014).
7. An article by *The New York Times* titled *ISIS Says It Killed Steven Sotloff After U.S. Strikes in Northern Iraq* (Landler and Schmitt, 2014).
8. An article by *RT International* titled *Second American journalist beheaded by ISIS terrorists* (*RT International*, 2014c).
9. An article by *The Telegraph* titled *British hostage David Haines beheaded by Islamic State terrorists* (Duffin and Ross).
10. An article by *The Independent* titled *British hostage Alan Henning killed in latest ISIS video* (Smith, 2014).
11. An article by *BBC News* titled *Alan Henning 'killed by Islamic State'* (*BBC News*, 2014b).
12. An article by *The Washington Post* titled *Islamic State beheads Kassig; Obama condemns 'act of pure evil'* (Goldman, 2014).
13. An article by *The Telegraph* titled *Peter Kassig may have defied captors over beheading video statement* (Farmer, 2014).
14. An article by *The Independent* titled *Peter Kassig beheading: A new ISIS video, but a different ending. What could it mean?* (Usborne, 2014).
15. An article by *Time* titled *Peter Kassig's powerful silence before ISIS beheaded him* (Thompson, 2014).

16. An article by *BBC Arabic* titled *تنظيم "الدولة" يبيث فيديو "لقتل" الرهينة الامريكي كاسيغ* [The "State" organization releases a video on "killing" the American hostage, Kassig] (*BBC Arabic*, 2014a).
17. An article by *RT International* titled *ISIS video shows beheading of US hostage Peter Kassig* (*RT International*, 2014b).
18. An article by *The New York Times* titled *Obama calls Islamic State's killing of Peter Kassig killing 'pure evil'* (Callimachi, 2014a).
19. An article by *The Guardian* titled *ISIS video appears to show hostage Peter Kassig has been killed* (Malik, 2014).
20. An article by *The Guardian* titled *ISIS video purports to show beheading of Japanese hostage Kenji Goto* (McCurry, 2015).
21. An article by *The Independent* titled *ISIS video of Japanese hostage Kenji Goto purportedly shows journalist being beheaded by militant* (Osley, 2014).
22. An article by *The Telegraph* titled *ISIL murder Japanese hostage Kenji Goto* (Crilly, Millward and Harely, 2015).
23. An article by *RT International* titled *'Inhumane & contemptible': ISIS beheads Japanese hostage Goto* (*RT International*, 2015d).
24. An article by *The Telegraph* titled *Jordanian pilot 'burned alive' in new ISIL video* (Marszal and Spencer, 2015).
25. An article by *The Independent* titled *ISIS video shows death of Jordanian hostage Muath al-Kasaesbeh* (Dawber, Broughton and O'Connor, 2015).
26. An article by *The Guardian* titled *ISIS video shows Jordanian hostage being burned to death* (Chulov and Malik, 2015).
27. An article by *The Guardian* titled *ISIS claim of beheading Egyptian Copts in Libya shows group's spread* (Black, 2015).
28. An article by *The Independent* titled *ISIS beheading of Coptic Christians on Libyan beach brings Islamists to the doorstep of Europe* (Dearden, 2015).
29. An article by *The New York Times* titled *Islamic State video shows beheadings of Egyptian Christians in Libya* (Kirkpatrick and Callimachi, 2015).
30. An article by *Mail Online* titled *ISIS jihadi with American accent addresses Obama in 'revenge' video for US special forces raid which rescued 70 Iraqi hostages as four Peshmerga fighters are beheaded* (Gillman, 2015).

31. An article by CNN titled *ISIS video purportedly shows beheadings of Kurdish fighters in Iraq* (Almasy, 2015).

- TTs by Arabic, Iranian, and Kurdish media

1. An article by *Al Arabiya English* titled *ISIS says it beheads U.S. journalist* (*Al Arabiya English*, 2014e).
2. An Arabic article by *Al Arabiya* titled *داعش يذبح صحافيا امريكيا في سوريا* [Video..Daesh slaughter American journalist in Syria], (*Al Arabiya*, 2014d).
3. An article by *Aljazeera English* titled *IS group claims beheading US journalist* (*Aljazeera English*, 2014c).
4. An article by *Aljazeera Arabic* titled *تنظيم الدولة بيث تسجيلا يظهر مقتل صحفي أميركي* [State group release video of U.S journalist's killing] (*Aljazeera Arabic*, 2014d).
5. An article by *Al Alam News Channel* titled *داعش تذبح صحافيا امريكيا وتهدد بذبح صورة وفيديو: داعش تذبح صحافيا امريكيا وتهدد بذبح اخر في العراق* [Image and video: Daesh slaughter American journalist, threatens to behead another in Iraq] (*Al Alam News Channel*, 2014d).
6. An article by *Al Alam News Network* titled *ISIL video shows beheading of American photojournalist* (*Al Alam News Network*, 2014b).
7. An article by *Al Arabiya* titled *داعش تقطع رأس الرهينة البريطاني ديفيد هينز* [Daesh behead British hostage David Haines] (*Al Arabiya*, 2014c).
8. An article by *Al Arabiya* titled *فيديو جديد لداعش..ذبح علني للامريكي بيتر كاسينغ* [A new video by Daesh..A public slaughter of the American Peter Kassig] (*Al Arabiya*, 2014b).
9. An article by *Al Arabiya* titled *فيديو استعراض وحشي.. داعش يذبح 15 رجلاً* [Brutal propaganda video..Daesh slaughters 15 men] (*Al Arabiya*, 2014a).
10. An article by *Aljazeera Arabic* titled *تنظيم الدولة يعلن اعدام امريكي وتحقيق بواشنطن* [The State organization declares execution of an American; Washington investigates] (*Aljazeera Arabic*, 2014f).
11. An article by *Al Arabiya English* titled *Obama confirm 'evil' murder of US aid worker Kassig* (*Al Arabiya English*, 2014a).
12. An article by *Al Jazeera English* titled *ISIL beheads Syria troops and US aid worker* (*Aljazeera English*, 2014a).

13. An article by *Al Alam News Channel* titled *داعش تذبح الرهينة الامريكي بيتر كاسنيغ* [Daesh slaughter US hostage Peter Kassig] (*Al Alam News Channel*, 2014c).
14. An article by *Al Alam News Channel* titled *فيديو وصور، "داعش" تقوم بعملية ذبح جماعي لأسرى سوريين* [Video and photos, Mass killing of Syrian prisoners by Daesh] (*Al Alam News Channel*, 2014b).
15. An article by *Al Alam News Network* titled *Second Japanese hostage beheaded by ISIL+Video* (*Al Alam News Network*, 2015c).
16. An article by *Aljazeera Arabic* titled *تنظيم الدولة يعلن إعدام الطيار الأردني حرقا* [The state group announces immolation of Jordanian pilot] (*Aljazeera Arabic*, 2015c).
17. An article by *Aljazeera English* titled *ISIL video purports to show Jordanian pilot's killing* (*Aljazeera English*, 2015c).
18. An article by *Al Arabiya English* titled *ISIS video claims burning Jordanian pilot alive* (*Al Arabiya English*, 2015e).
19. An article by *Al Arabiya* titled *داعش يعدم الطيار الاردني بحرقه حيا* [Daesh execute Jordanian pilot by burning him alive] (*Al Arabiya*, 2015d).
20. An article by *Al Alam News Channel* titled *بالفيديو..تنظيم "داعش" يحرق الطيار الاردني الكساسبة حيا* [Video..Daesh group burns alive Jordanian pilot al-Kassassiba] (*Al Alam News Channel*, 2015e).
21. An article by *Al Arabiya* titled *داعش ليبيا يبيث فيديو ذبح الأقباط المصريين* [Daesh of Libya releases a beheading video of Coptic Egyptians] (*Al Arabiya*, 2015c).
22. An article by *Aljazeera Arabic* titled *تسجيل يظهر إعدام تنظيم الدولة 21 قبطيا مصريا بلبييا* [Video shows State organization beheads 21 Egyptians in Libya] (*Aljazeera Arabic*, 2015b).
23. An article by *Aljazeera English* titled *ISIL video shows Christian Egyptians beheaded in Libya* (*Aljazeera English*, 2015b).
24. An article by *Al Alam News Channel* titled *بالفيديو والصور؛ "داعش" يعدم 21 قبطيا مصريا في ليبيا ذبحا* [Video and photos; "Daesh" executes 21 Coptic Egyptians in Libya by slaughter] (*Al Alam News Channel*, 2015d).
25. An article by *Al Alam News Network* titled *Daesh (ISIS) releases video of beheading 21 kidnapped Egyptians + video* (*Al Alam News Network*, 2015d).
26. An article by *Al Alam News Network* titled *UPDATE - ISIS Barbarically Burns Jordanian Pilot to Death in a Cage + video* (*Al Alam News Network*, 2015c).

27. An article by *Al Arabiya English* titled *ISIS beheads four Iraqi Kurds in 'revenge' video* (*Al Arabiya English*, 2015a).
28. An article by *Rudaw English* titled *ISIS releases video allegedly showing beheading of Peshmerga at site of US-Kurdish raid* (*Rudaw English*, 2015a).
29. An article by *Al Alam News Network* titled *ISIS Beheaded 4 Kurds After US-Kurds Hostage Rescue Mission* (*Al Alam News Network*, 2015a).

- Other news articles reporting on the executions

1. An article by *The Independent* titled *Kenji Goto beheading video: Wife says she is 'extremely proud' as a nation mourns hero killed by ISIS* (Boren, 2015).
2. An article by *BBC News* titled *Japan outraged at ISIS 'beheading' of hostage Kenji Goto* (*BBC News*, 2015d).
3. An article by *The New York Time* titled *Jordanian pilot's death, shown in ISIS Video, spurs Jordan to execute prisoners* (Nordland and Kadri, 2015).
4. An article by *The Telegraph* titled *Peter Kassig's family call for restraint after beheading video* (Spencer, et al, 2014).
5. An article by *Reuters* titled *Clerics denounce burning alive of pilot as un-Islamic* (Aboudi and Al-Khalidi, 2015).
6. An article by *Aljazeera Arabic* titled *تنديد غربي باعدام تنظيم الدولة صحفيا امريكيا* [Western condemnation against the State organization's beheading of an American journalist] (*Aljazeera Arabic*, 2014e).
7. An article by *Aljazeera Arabic* titled *غضب امريكي من اعدام تنظيم الدولة سوتلوف* [US outrage over State's organization's beheading of Sotloff] (*Aljazeera Arabic*, 2014c).
8. An article by *Aljazeera Arabic* titled *أعدامات جديدة لتنظيم الدولة وتنديد بقتل كاسغ* [New executions by the State organization, Kassig's killing condemned] (*Aljazeera Arabic*, 2014a).
9. An article by *Aljazeera English* titled *Obama calls ISIL's beheading 'act of pure evil'* (*Aljazeera English*, 2014b).
10. An article by *Al Alam News Network* titled *Iran and world condemn savage murder of Jordanian Pilot* (*Al Alam News Network*, 2015b).

11. An article by *Aljazeera Arabic* titled *حراق الكساسبة يشعل مواقع التواصل* [Al-Kasasbeh's immolation keep social media buzzing] (Al-Najar, 2015).
12. An article by *Aljazeera Arabic* titled *فيديو اعدام المصريين..الاكثر قسوة ورعبا* [Video of Egyptians' beheading...most graphic and horrific] (Alsabaey, 2015).
13. An article by *Rudaw English* titled *ISIS executes clerics, civilians for condemning pilot's burning* (*Rudaw English*, 2015c).
14. An article by *Al Alam News Channel* titled *الازهر: يجب صلب و قطع ايدي وارجل ارهابي داعش ومن يمولها* [Al-Azhar: Daesh's terrorists and their funders must be crucified, and their hands and legs chopped off] (*Al Alam News Channel*, 2015c).

- Secondary data

- 'IS's' online magazine (*Dabiq*).
- An article by *The Guardian* titled *Muslim clerics denounce 'savage' ISIS murder of Jordanian pilot* (*The Guardian*, 2015).
- An article by *Mail Online* titled *ISIS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi BANS extremist group from releasing anymore graphic execution videos to 'spare the feelings of fellow Muslims and their children* (Drury, 2015).
- An article by *Mirror* titled *ISIS bans beheading videos-because they're bad for murderous terror group image* (Rockett, 2015).
- An article by *RT International* titled *ISIS leader al-Baghdadi 'bans' slaughter videos, yet Jihadists demonstrate beheading by kid* (*RT International*, 2015a).

- **Videos of cultural destruction**

- TTs of the first video

1. An article by *The Guardian* titled *ISIS fighters destroy ancient artifacts at Mosul Museum* (Shaheen, 2015b).
2. An article by *The Telegraph* titled *Islamic State video shows militants smashing priceless Iraq treasures* (Spencer, 2015).
3. An article by *The Independent* titled *ISIS in Iraq: Video footage shows militants 'destroying ancient artifacts' in Mosul* (Gander, 2015).
4. An article by *BBC News* titled *Islamic State 'destroys ancient Iraq statues in Mosul'* (BBC News, 2015c).

5. An article by *The New York Times* titled *ISIS onslaught engulfs Assyrian Christians as militants destroy ancient art* (Barnard, 2015).
6. An article by *The Washington Post* titled *Watch: Islamic State militants smash ancient, irreplaceable artifacts with sledgehammers* (Tharoor, 2015b).
7. An article by *Mirror* titled *Destroying humanity's history: ISIS smash priceless 2,000 year-old archaeological artifacts at Iraq museum* (Webb, 2015).
8. An article by *Reuters* titled *With sledgehammer, Islamic State smashes Iraqi history* (Coles and Hameed, 2015).
9. An article by *RT International* titled *ISIS militants destroy ancient statues, relics in Iraq (VIDEO)* (*RT International*, 2015c).
10. An article by *Time* titled *Global art community condemns ISIS destruction of artifacts at Mosul Museum* (Rhodan, 2015).
11. An Arabic article by *The New Arab*, titled [State group destroys Iraqi museum of "Ninevah" (video)] (*The New Arab*, 2015a).
12. An English article by *The New Arab* titled *Islamic State group destroys priceless Assyrian artefacts* (*The New Arab*, 2015c).
13. An Arabic article by *Elaph* titled *جريمة العصر "تهز العالم معاول "داعش" تهوي على آثار العراق* ["Crime of age" shakes the world: "Daesh" hammers smash Iraq's artefacts] (Dabara, 2015).
14. An article by *Al Arabiya* titled *Daesh destroys priceless artefacts in Mosul* [*Daesh destroys priceless artefacts in Mosul*] (*Al Arabiya*, 2015b).
15. An Arabic article by Iraqi independent news agency, *Alghad Press*, titled: *داعش يدمر اثار* [Daesh destroys artefacts of Mosul Museum] (*Alghad Press*, 2015).
16. An Arabic article by *Almada Press* titled *داعش) بيث مقطع فيديو يظهر تدمير آثار متحف الموصل* [(Daesh) releases video showing destruction of Mosul Museum artefacts] (HH, 2015).
17. An Arabic article by *Alsumaria News* titled *ما هي الآثار والتماثيل التي دمرها داعش في متحف الموصل؟* [What are the artefacts and statues destroyed by Daesh in Mosul Museum?] (*Alsumaria News*, 2015).
18. An article by *Aljazeera Arabic* titled *اليونسكو تدعو لانعقاد مجلس الأمن بعد تدمير متحف الموصل* [UNESCO calls for Security Council to meet after Mosul Museum's destruction] (*Aljazeera Arabic*, 2015a).
19. An article by *Aljazeera English* titled *ISIL video shows destruction of Mosul artefacts* (*Aljazeera English*, 2015a).
20. An article by *Rudaw English* titled *ISIS destroys Mosul Museum, smashing ancient statues* (*Rudaw English*, 2015b).

21. An article by *Rudaw Arabic* titled *اليونسكو تدعو لانعقاد مجلس الأمن بعد تدمير داعش لمتحف الموصل* [UNESCO calls for Security Council to meet following Daesh's destruction of Mosul Museum] (Al-Zarari, 2015).

- Other news reports

1. An English article by *The New Arab* titled *IS militants condemned for Mosul Museum destruction* (*The New Arab*, 2015a).
2. An article by *Al Arabiya* titled *الإفتاء المصرية: تدمير داعش للآثار مخالف للشرع* [Egyptian Foundation of Dar al-Ifta: Daesh destruction of artefacts is anti-Shari'ah] (*Al Arabiya*, 2015a).
3. An article by *Rudaw Arabic* titled *مدير آثار نينوى لرووداو: داعش دمر حضارة عمرها الاف السنين* [Nineveh artefacts Chief to Rudaw: Daesh destroys a thousand years civilization] (Mahmoud, 2015).
4. An article by *Al Alam News Channel* titled *الإفتاء المصرية: الصحابة لم يهدموا الآثار كما يفعل داعش* [Egyptian Foundation of Dar al-Ifta: Companions did not destroy artefacts like Daesh] (*Al Alam News Channel*, 2015b).

- TTs of the second and third videos of cultural destruction in Iraq

1. An article by *The Guardian* titled *ISIS video confirms destruction at UNESCO world heritage site in Hatra* (Shaheen, 2015a).
2. An article by *The Independent* titled *ISIS destroys monuments with sledgehammers and Kalashnikovs in ancient city of Hatra in Iraq* (Sabin, 2015).
3. An article by *The Telegraph* titled *Islamic State continues depraved destruction of historical sites and churches* (Loveluck, 2015a).
4. An article by *The Washington Post* titled *Watch: New video shows how the Islamic State destroyed an ancient city* (Tharoor, 2015a).
5. An article by *The Guardian* titled *ISIS video shows destruction of ancient Assyrian city in Iraq* (Agence France-Presse, 2015).
6. An article by *The Independent* titled *ISIS video shows complete destruction of ancient city of Nimrud in Iraq* (Tufft, 2015).
7. An article by *The Telegraph* titled *Islamic State releases video showing 'destruction of Nimrud'* (*The Telegraph*, 2015).
8. An article by *Mirror* titled *Nimrud: Watch moment ISIS blow up ancient city in campaign of destruction* (Sleigh, 2015).

9. An article by *BBC News* titled *Islamic State video 'shows destruction of Nimrud'* (*BBC News*, 2015b).
10. An article by *Mail Online* titled *Shock new video shows ISIS thugs smashing historic Iraqi city of Nimrud with barrel bombs, bulldozers and jackhammers in orgy of destruction slammed as a war crime by the United Nations* (Malm, 2015).
11. An article by *RT International* titled *Jihadists smash Iraq's 2,000-year-old statues to dust in new ISIS video* (*RT International*, 2015b).
12. An Arabic article by *Almada Press* titled *داعش يدمر اثار الحضرة جنوب الموصل* [(Daesh) destroys Hatra relics south of Mosul] (BS and HAA, 2015).
13. An article by *Al Arabiya English* titled *Video shows ISIS destroying ancient city in Iraq* (*Al Arabiya English*, 2015c).
14. An article by *Rudaw Arabic* titled *داعش يجرف الحضرة الاثرية* [Daesh bulldozes the archaeological city of Hatra] (Haris, 2015).
15. An Arabic article by *Alsumaria News* titled *بالصور.. داعش يدمر مدينة نمرود الآشورية بالمطارق والآلات قبل تفجيرها بالكامل* [Photos. Daesh destroys Assyrian city of Nimrud with sledghammers and bulldozers before fully blowing it up], (*Alsumaria News*, 2015a).
16. An article by *Al Arabiya* titled *بالفيديو-داعش يدمر مدينة نمرود الاثرية* [Daesh releases video of destruction of ancient city of Nimrud] (Kharfati, 2015).
17. An article by *Al Arabiya English* titled *Video shows ISIS group destroy ancient ruins of Nimrud* (*Al Arabiya English*, 2015b).
18. An article by *Almasalah* titled *بالفيديو.. داعش الأرهابي يدمر أثار نمرود* [Video.. Terrorist Daesh destroys Nimrud's relics] (*Almasalah*, 2015).

- Secondary data

- *Dabiq* magazine
- An article by *The Washington Post* titled *ISIS is not just destroying ancient artefacts— It's selling them* (Morris, 2015).

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