# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction of the study which is divided into seven parts: background of the research, research questions, purposes of the research, scope of the research, the significance of the research, the research's clarification of terms, and the organisation of the paper.

## 1.1. Background of Research

The Islamic State (IS), also known by other names such as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), ISIL (Islamic State of Syria and Levant), and DAESH (*Daulat al-Islam fi al-Iraq wa ash-Shams*) is a fundamentalist-extremist-radical group which was commanded by the self-proclaimed Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi until his demise as a result of the waves of attacks launched by a US-led coalition (Tharoor, 2014; Rubin, 2014; VICE News, 2014; VICE News, 2019a; VICE News, 2019b). In this research, the group is mainly referred to as ISIS for clarity. ISIS stemmed from the adherents of Muhammad ibn 'Abdil Wahhab whose teaching is known as Salafism or Wahabism. His teaching revolves around Islamic purism; to decontaminate Islam from mysticism and innovations known as *shirk* (polytheism) and *bid'ah* (innovation) and to fight the *thawaghit* (Singular: *thaghut*). *Thaghut* can translated as Idols or anything that is obeyed besides Allah in which according to ISIS the term encompasses modern political ideas such as democracy (Bunzel, 2015; Crooke, 2017).

Other than their harsh military campaigns towards the *kuffar* (disbelievers), *munafiqun* (hypocrites), *murtadun* (apostates), and *anshar al-thagut* (supporters of idolatry) ISIS are also known for their slick propaganda through social media and their self-issued magazines, Dabiq and Rumiyah, which were released in English, Arabic, German, and French. Dabiq was named after the once was captured northern Syrian town. The city is said to play an important role in the Islamic Armageddon representing their claim of Muhammad's prophecy as 'the black flag

of Khorasan' or the junud al-Mahdi ('Soldiers of the Mahdi' in reference to an Islamic apocalyptical figure contemporary of Jesus in his second coming) (Wood, 2015).

The first issue of Dabiq titled "The Return of Khilafah" promotes the oneness of God, truth-seeking, migration to the Caliphate, holy war, and the unity of the Islamic community *(tawhid*, *manhaj*, *hijrah*, *jihad*, and *jama'ah*) (Barton, 2019). Their last issue of the magazine, the 15th, titled "Break the Cross" contains one of the most criticised articles in its publishing history gaining responses from many critics of religion on YouTube such as Black Watch (2016), Sam Harris (2019), Ryan M. (2016), Secular Talk (2016), and Politico (2018). The article is titled "Why We Hate You & Why We Fight You" which begins by justifying the lone wolf terrorist attack in a gay club carried by Omar Mateen; stating that "Muslims have been commanded to terrorize the disbelieving enemies of Allah" (Al-Hayat Media Center, 2016b, p. 30) in reference to the Quran 3:151 and the Quran 2:191. Then the article continues with mentioning the reasons why ISIS's enemies are being fought. It stresses that Muslims have been commanded by God to seize kuffar's lands, to either convert, kill, or subdue and humiliate them with jizya (tax imposed by a Muslim authority on non-Muslim subjects) (Loveluck, 2019; Smith, 2014; Withnall, 2014).

After the successful liberation of Dabiq by the US backed Iraqi government, ISIS stopped the distribution of Dabiq and issued their second flagship periodical, Rumiyah, which is the Arabic rendering of Rome in which Muhammad prophesied the city to be subdued under Muslims' rule (Barton, 2019). Both of the magazines were published for the first times through the deep web, which then spread through their vast networks of jihadists and anshar al-Daulah (supporters of the State). Rumiyah is less theological than Dabiq and is set to create instant Jihadists through 'open source Jihad' (Barton, 2019; Stempień, 2019)

While studies on Islamic Jihad and its representation along with the representation of Muslims in western media are to be found easily, studies in regards to social actors' representation in Islamic media, regardless of the school of thought, are scarce; rendering this research worthy of being conducted. Saeed's

(2007) study on racism and Islamophobia is among the examples of study in regards to how Islam and Muslims are represented in the United Kingdom media. He examined how both are treated as un-British and as deviances from Britain's Christian Identity.

Several studies on ISIS as well as on their magazines have been attempted. Barton (2019) explained that there are several key themes essential to ISIS' magazines especially Dabiq. The themes he found are (1) justice, (2) goodness, (3) sense of belonging, (4) caliphate, (5) migration in the path of God, (6) redemption, (7) sin, (8) judgment, and (9) jihad. He argued that although the themes are inherently dark and evil in essence, they are covered with positive messaging. He also compared Dabiq to its successor, Rumiyah, although he did not put a thorough discussion. Dabiq and Rumiyah differ in the sense that while Dabiq puts its emphasis on migration-in the-path-of-God, Rumiyah can be seen to focus more on carrying-attack-towards the-disbelievers; set to inspire lone wolves.

Baele, Bettiza, Boyd, and Coan (2019) conducted a linguistic and visual analysis focusing on the portrayal of "the West". They found that the Western hemisphere of the world tends to be represented as a homogeneous evil political entity by ISIS in their propaganda. ISIS also use overlapping labels to name their enemies while simultaneously contrast themselves from the West through dichotomisations such as 'believers vs. disbelievers.' However, they also depict that a number of enemies coexist at the same times which include labels like but not limited to 'Crusaders,' 'apostate regimes,' 'evil scholars,' the Shia, and the United States.

Slåttelid (2017) concludes that ISIS' occidentalist and masculinist narratives in their propaganda are appealing towards the readers' masculinity where ISIS are depicted as the elite and ideal men of God while the West is seen as the land of the lesser breeds in their discourse. This notion of ideal manliness can be connected to ISIS' hyper-masculine behaviour where humiliation and sexualisation of the enemies (female prisoners of war being sold as sex slaves) are among their primary goals. Her study also shown, that ISIS are capable of alternating common sense through creating a comprehensive system of meaning in their propaganda.

Christien (2017) conducted a qualitative content analysis towards the representation of youth in Dabiq. She found that the representation is not constant, rather it grows more and more violent throughout the series. From the eighth issue onwards, the sons of the Caliphate are represented as carriers and initiators of violence. However, their representations as goods (enemies' children are sold as salves) and tools of victimisation (the children of the Muslims are depicted to be suffering from the West's attack) remain. ISIS also use children to threaten their enemies by promising that the sons of the disbelievers are to be enslaved. In the case of the girls, the daughters of ISIS are seen as properties while those of the enemies' are to be enslaved.

It is argued that despite the fact ISIS have been declared to be defeated, studies towards their communiqués would still be beneficial both due to the fact the group still shows signs of activities and for the future of counterterrorism in general (Wozniak, Woods, & Lee, 2020). Other studies that have been done on ISIS also focus more on how they recruit, indoctrinate and train their fighters (Munk, 2018). None of the studies found on ISIS analyse the social actors represented in any form of their propaganda within the framework of van Leeuwen's (2008) Sociosemantic approach in analysing the representations of social actors (hereinafter referred to as van Leeuwen's Social Actor Representation). This study, thus, is an attempt to fill the gaps using the said framework which lies within the scope of Critical Discourse Analysis (Wozniak et al., 2020). It is hoped that this research may give a critical insight of how ISIS represent themselves as social actors within their discourse.

## 1.2.    Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:
1. How do ISIS represent themselves as social actors in their own magazines?
2. What do the representations signify?

## 1.3.    Purposes of Research

This research intended to investigate the representations of ISIS as social actors in their magazines, *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, using van Leeweun's (2008) Sociosemantic approach. Specifically, the study was an attempt to examine (1) the way ISIS and

ISIS related social actors are represented in their magazines and (2) the signification of the representations. Van Leeuwen's (2008) Social Actor Representation was implemented as the main framework to achieve the said purposes.

## 1.4. Scope of Research

This study examined the magazines which were released by ISIS namely *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*. This study focuses on how ISIS represent themselves and several other related agents as social actors within its own discourse in which the signification of the representations is to be drawn. Three articles from *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* are the subject of this research. As this research utilized van Leeuwen's (2008) Social Actor Representation as its main frameworks, images from the articles were not included in the analyses.

## 1.5. Significance of Research

This research was conducted in the hope of providing the significances as listed:

1. To enrich the literature on ISIS and their communiqués
2. To be used as references on countering narratives produced by ISIS and by terrorist groups in general.
3. To provide references for future studies on ISIS and their products using van Leeuwen's (2008) Social Actor Representation.

## 1.6. Clarification of Main Terms

Several terms that are important to the study and are subject to confusion are explained below in order to avoid misunderstandings.

### Representation

According to van Leeuwen (2008) representation is the recontextualisation of social actions and/or social actors within while according to Fairclough (2003), it is the depiction of events, individuals, and/or situations.

**Social Actor**

Social actor is the term borrowed by van Leeuwen (2008) from the discipline of sociology in the place of linguistic terms such as 'noun' and 'nominal group' to express individuals or groups of individuals that engage in social actions and is a subject of representation.

**Social Action**

Social action is the term borrowed by van Leeuwen (2008) from the discipline of sociology in the place of linguistic terms such as 'verb' and 'adjective' to express activities in which social actors engage in and is a subject of representation.

**Social Actor Representation**

Van Leeuwen (2008) describes Social Actor Representation as the recontextualisation of social actors in relation to social actions they engage in through several strategies he proposed. He describes the difference between the actual events and individuals compared to their representations as 'doing it' and 'talking about it.'

## 1.7.    Organisation of the Paper

This research paper is composed of five main chapters. The first chapter is the introduction of the paper which includes (1) the background of the research, (2) the purpose of the research, (3) the scope of the research, and (4) the significance of the research. The second chapter is the literature review in which representation, Critical Discourse Analysis, van Leeuwen's (2008) Sociosemantic Approach and Social Actor Representation, and previous studies are discussed. The third chapter is the methodology of the research which covers the (1) research design, (2) data source, (3) data collection, and (4) data analysis. The fourth chapter is the findings and discussion in which the result of the analysis can be found. The conclusion of the research and suggestions for future studies can be found in the last chapter.