

Chapter 75

ISIS Rhetoric for the Creation of the Ummah

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ABSTRACT

I intend to examine the linguistic strategy used by ISIS as a means through which it creates the concept of the Muslim Ummah, which seeks to emphasize the unity of an international Muslim community based off the power of Islam. I apply a Critical Discourse Analysis for the study of Baghdadi's sermon on 4 July 2014 where he declared the establishment of the Caliphate and himself as the Caliph. Baghdadi's discourse creates a new communal identity from a Muslim populace who may have felt marginalized due to their religion in their countries of residence. It is through this discourse that he structures the Ummah loyal to the Caliphate in two ways: a) by summoning Islam to create a singular global Muslim body and the establishment of a Caliphate; and b) the structuring of an indiscriminate opponent, one that conflicts with the "camp of Islam". The method of convincing and generating consent – of institutionalizing jihad - goes beyond propaganda; it necessitates the formation of an entirely novel lexicon, a narrative that fosters support while concurrently quashing any singular qualms.

INTRODUCTION

Discourse molds and shapes itself to construct and reflect our social world. Therefore, language cannot be considered neutral (Wijsen, 2012, p. 77). We use language to construct our world. Not only does it define, normalize and reinforce our understanding of the world, but language also sets out the actions available for us to take, while rejecting and delegitimizing other worldviews (Wijsen, 2012, p. 71). In this respect discourse serves as a mechanism of influence and control often used by groups striving for power to produce and preserve hegemonic regimes (Fairclough, 1992). According to Jackson (2005, p. 191), discourse is:

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...constructed and employed for specific purposes most importantly, the creation, maintenance, and extension of power. Discourses are an exercise of power; that is they try to become dominant or hegemonic by discrediting alternative or rival discourses, by promoting themselves as the full and final truth and by drowning out the sound of any other discourse.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the linguistic strategy employed by ISIS as a means through which it creates the concept of the Muslim *Ummah* (Muslim community), which seeks to emphasize the unity of an international Muslim community based off the power of Islam. A Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) is applied for the study of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi's sermon on 4 July 2014 through which he formally declared the establishment of the Caliphate (Islamic State) and himself as the self-proclaimed Caliph (successor of the prophet Muhammad and politico-religious leader of the *Ummah*). Using CDA theory of Fairclough, Wodak, van Dijk and others, my argument is that the discourse utilized by Al-Baghdadi creates a new communal identity from a worldwide Muslim population who may have felt marginalized, stereotyped or depersonalized due to their religious beliefs and ethnic origins, in their countries of residence. It is through this discourse that he structures the concept of an *Ummah* loyal to a new state, the Caliphate, in two ways: primarily, by summoning Islam to create a singular global Muslim body while speaking of broad Quranic calls to *jihad* and the establishment of an Islamic State; and then, via the structuring of an indiscriminate opponent, one that conflicts with the "camp of Islam" – "the camp of *kuf*r." Al-Baghdadi structures his rhetoric so that "the camp of *kuf*r" is held responsible for worldwide Muslim alienation. He offers a narrative that is all-embracing and simplistic towards Muslims, making note of particular problems and conditions they may face and a sole solution: loyalty to the ISIS Caliphate - a utopia for all those who subscribe to ISIS's version of faith. By redefining the meaning of "terrorism" and the actions a truthful Muslim, one that is loyal to ISIS's dogmatic political program, ought to take, Al-Baghdadi creates the confines by which ISIS deems one to be a proper member of the *Ummah* – the brother or sister that is willing to show indifference to the laws of their country of residence and be castigated as a "terrorist." He preaches within his discourse of the responsibility one has to migrate to IS-established territory and join the fight. The rationale behind this discourse is clear: Al-Baghdadi formulates his sermon in a manner interpretive of religious discourse in order to link it to his plans for a Caliphate by inviting all dissatisfied Muslims to perform *hijrah* and to partake in *jihad* from around the world and to recognize themselves as its *Ummah*.

Terrorist groups whose movements have been founded on religious values have credibility and legitimacy conferred upon them and are therefore able to validate force via their power. In all three Abrahamic monotheistic faiths (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism), "there is language that has been interpreted not only to permit killing, but where killing in the name of God becomes a sacred obligation" (Post, 2007, p.160). That said, Islam stresses "that the main spiritual goal is one of nonviolence and peace" (Juergensmeyer, 2000, p. 79). The Quran instructs its followers to "slay not the life that God has made sacred" (Holy Quran, 6:152). However, force and violent acts are for example on occasion justified as resolutions of penance and are at times considered essential for "defending the faith" (Juergensmeyer, 2000, p. 79). "In such a context, maintaining the purity of religious existence is thought to be a matter of *jihad*, a word that literally means 'striving' and is often translated as 'holy war'" (Juergensmeyer, M. 2000, p.79). The method of convincing and generating consent – of institutionalizing *jihad* - goes beyond propaganda; in fact, it necessitates the formation of an entirely novel lexicon, a narrative that fosters support while concurrently quashing any singular qualms. In this case, language serves as the instrument by which brutality is driven.

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