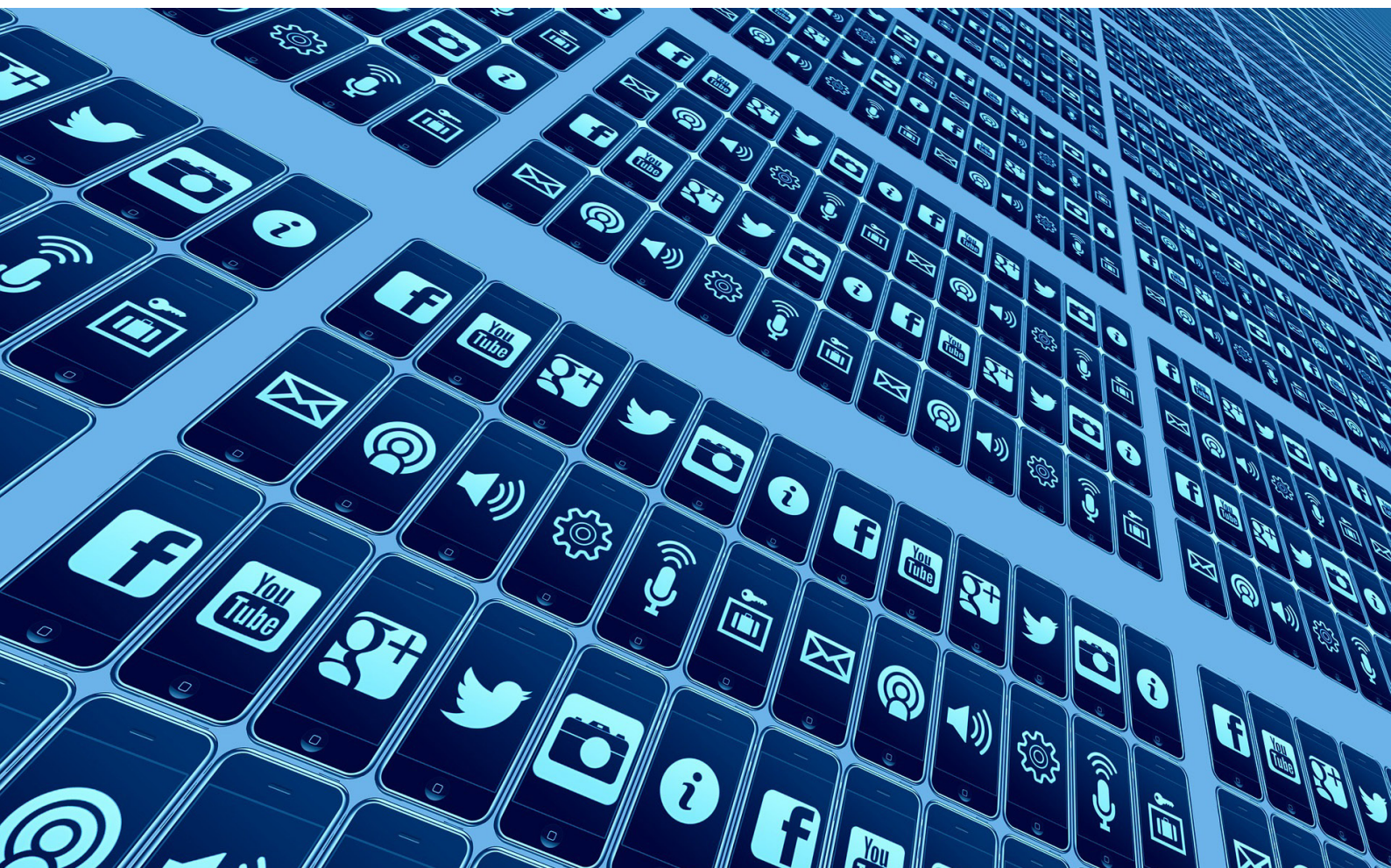





Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Netherlands



# FROM BLADES TO BRAINS: A New Battleground



West Asia-North Africa Institute, December 2017



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## Executive Summary

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With the recent military defeat of Daesh, the group has lost grip on its Caliphate. What remains, however, is the ideological appeal of joining its cause. In this vein, P/CVE efforts must be reassessed and restructured to address needs related to countering the ideology and discourse of violent extremist groups and promoting a new alternative narrative.

This paper centres on these emerging needs with a focus on counter and alternative narratives. It seeks to move away from the current tradition of typifying counter- or alternative narratives towards a thorough analysis of actual media messages produced in the West Asia - North Africa (WANA) region. It follows through a critique and analysis of this media content, produced locally and in the region, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing attempts of managing radicalisation in Jordan.

This work may be of relevance to P/CVE stakeholders, the private sector, and academia by achieving three goals. First, the paper highlights best practices and shortcomings of existing counter-narratives in order to guide future media P/CVE efforts. Second, it analyses this media content based on P/CVE needs in forms and content to draw the attention of practitioners to how media content can legitimise desired alternative narratives. Third, it also informs international P/CVE stakeholders on work on counter-narratives already produced in the region.

The media sample of counter-narratives analysed here, was broadcasted during Ramadan 2017. During this month, high viewership is recorded and a large audience can be targeted. Four media categories were selected to account for the diversity in form and content produced locally and regionally: caricatures, an advertisement, a comedic episode, and a TV series. In undertaking this exercise, the paper uses Frame Analysis to understand the purpose of media frames in relation to countering radicalisation. A media frame seeks to offer **a problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.**

In addition to the critical literary and media analysis of the media sample, four focus group discussions were conducted with 41 participants: two with a general, although geographically diverse, youth sample, one with a youth group active in creating and disseminating alternative narratives, and one with media practitioners.

The analysis of the ‘grand-narratives’ of each of the sampled genres reveals one key area of strength: **introducing dynamic and complex characters that highlight the contextual factors leading individuals to join violent extremist groups.** This complexity is marginalised, however, by **the heavy emphasis on criticising and dismissing the radical narrative without offering the audience positive worldviews and alternatives that encourage P/CVE efforts and challenge the dichotomous worldview of radicals.**

Upon analysing the media frames against the purposes they achieved to counter radicalisation, three key takeaways can be highlighted:

- **Counter-narratives are not as effective as alternative narratives:** Counter-narratives offer little to the local audience who already has poor perceptions of violent extremist

groups. What serves a greater purpose, are alternative narratives which offer the audience new worldviews that users can carry into their everyday lives and aid P/CVE efforts.

- **Focus on moral denunciation:** The media sample placed heavy emphasis on moral denunciation of the actions of violent extremist groups. This threatens the efficiency of P/CVE efforts as it reinforces existing sentiment, adds little to public conversations surrounding the matter, and fails to logically delegitimise the radical narrative.
- **A crucial need for well-developed treatment recommendations:** The media sample lacked treatment recommendations that might guide audiences towards effective P/CVE responses. This presents a major challenge since the battle with violent extremist groups is predominately ideological. As such, without offering treatment recommendations, there remains a high risk of ineffectiveness on long-term P/CVE goals.

Any media analysis faces a number of limitations. As three researchers undertook the initial examination of the media sample – varied readings were present. In addition, as analysis of cultural products is largely subjective, it is likely that there are a number of different readings not mentioned here. While both traditional and non-traditional media have been sampled, the selection of the studied work relied heavily on popularity. Finally, in the focus group discussions, only a limited sample of the media was shared with participants who may have not fully understood the context of different scenes.

The paper concludes with policy recommendations targeting different stakeholders including P/CVE practitioners, media practitioners, as well as public and private sector bodies. The recommendations offered, pertain to **the overall design of media narratives, the content and dissemination of media narratives, and interactive methods**. Future research should build upon this work to investigate audience reception, and how perceptions of the credibility of the messenger can impact trust in media P/CVE content.

## 1. Introduction

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As a response to the expansive reach that violent extremist groups have garnered through innovative uses of media (social, traditional, and non-traditional), there has been a significant effort invested into so-called ‘counter-narratives’. Such efforts have included state-sponsored strategic communication as well as outreach and sensitisation programmes by international and non-governmental organisations. Recently, however, some research studies have called into question the impact and reach of these approaches, resulting in a shift towards what is known as alternative narratives.

Such a transition should be welcomed. While the military defeat of Daesh and geopolitical changes on the ground may signal success, defeating an ideology requires generating and disseminating a compelling alternate worldview that destabilises the ideological foundations and discourse of radical groups. The production of a broad and comprehensive evidence base from which to create such messages is imperative.

An ample amount of literature on counter-narratives was produced throughout 2015 and 2016.<sup>1</sup> In an effort to avoid repetition, this paper aims to add a new perspective on how best to manage radicalisation in Jordan. It moves away from traditional classifications of content to provide a thorough literary and critical analysis of the media content.

The research presents both a theoretical and practical argument. First, it highlights that alternative narratives which offer new worldviews, in contrast to dichotomous radical narratives, are more effective at influencing neutral audiences or those who are hesitant to support radical ideologies. Second, by examining select counter-narratives in traditional and non-traditional media, we conclude that counter-narratives place more emphasis on the moral denunciation of extremist groups, rather than offering an alternate, more positive, and solution-oriented narrative. By doing so, they use, and reinforce, the same black-and-white worldview of radicals.

These arguments are based on the use of Frame Analysis,<sup>2</sup> — a methodology that facilitates the examination of media frames, in which certain aspects of reality are selected to influence a particular interpretation of events. Four genres of regional and local counter-narratives released in Ramadan 2017 were analysed: they include caricatures, a comedy show ‘Watan ‘a Watar’, the drama series ‘Black Crows’ (which is made up of 20 episodes, each 40 minutes long), and an advertisement from the telecom company Zain.

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<sup>1</sup> For example see, The Samir Kassir Foundation, *Reception and Perception of Radical Messages: Pilot Study*. (Beirut, The Samir Kassir Foundation, 2016); Logan Macnair and Richard Frank, “Voices Against Extremism: A Case Study of a Community-Based CVE Counter-Narrative Campaign”, *Journal for Deradicalisation*, no. 10, 2017; Alex Schmid, “Challenging the narrative of the ‘Islamic State’”, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2015, available at <https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ICCT-Schmid-Challenging-the-Narrative-of-the-Islamic-State-June2015.pdf>; and “Developing Effective Counter-Narrative Frameworks For Countering Violent Extremism”, *Hedayah And International Centre For Counter-Terrorism*, 2014, [https://www.icct.nl/download/file/Developing%20Effective%20CN%20Frameworks\\_Hedayah\\_ICCT\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.icct.nl/download/file/Developing%20Effective%20CN%20Frameworks_Hedayah_ICCT_Report_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Jim Kuypers, “Framing Analysis from a Rhetorical Perspective,” *Doing News Framing Analysis*. Paul D’Angelo and Jim A. Kuypers, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 286-311 and Jörg Matthes, “What’s In A Frame? A Content Analysis of Media Framing Studies In The World’s Leading Communication Journals, 1990-2005”, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86, no. 2 (2009): 349-367, doi:10.1177/107769900908600206.

Frame Analysis facilitates the examination of media against the general cultural and political context. Media frames<sup>3</sup> traditionally serve one or more of four purposes: **offering a problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.**<sup>4</sup> The discussion that follows examines how successfully the selected counter-narratives served such purposes, including how carefully crafted the messages were, and where they might prove problematic or counter-productive to their original purposes. There was no scope to consider the credibility of the sender or impact on a wider audience, although these remain important areas for future research.

The analysis presented was informed by four Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs), two with a generic youth sample, one with youth involved in the production of alternative narratives in Jordan, and one with media practitioners.

Through this frame analysis, the paper guides P/CVE stakeholders, policy-makers, youth activists, and media practitioners on areas of successful P/CVE intervention and opportunities for improvement in media counter-narrative efforts. It also draws the attention of donors and practitioners to the required shift in P/CVE programming, towards alternative narratives and public discourse as a tool in managing radicalisation.

There are inevitable limitations when examining cultural production. Although the analysis was conducted by three researchers independently, subjectivity cannot be eliminated. The sample also could not cover all counter-narratives circulating during the specified time-frame, and as a result, the selection was based on popularity. Finally, because evaluating the sample was time-intensive, only two scenes from Black Crows, one scene from Watan 'a Watar, the Zain advertisement, and the caricatures were shared in each FGD.

This paper begins by explaining the methodology. Section three briefly discusses the different categories of P/CVE narratives in use. Section four discusses the grand narratives in the selected media sample and their four main characteristics, and explores how they offer a dichotomous worldview similar to that of extremist groups. Section five examines the extent to which the media frames serve their four objectives, i.e. defining radicalisation, establishing causal relations, offering moral evaluations, and recommending treatment options. Section six offers policy recommendations for P/CVE stakeholders on how to invest in alternative narratives that might more effectively manage radicalism in Jordan and beyond, and section seven presents the conclusions.

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<sup>3</sup> On media frames and framing as a concept, see Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51-58.; Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Framing Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (2007): 103-126; Zhongdang Pan and Gerald M. Kosicki, "Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse," *Political Communication* 10 (1993): 55-75.

<sup>4</sup> Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification Of A Fractured Paradigm", *Journal Of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51-58, doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x.



## 2. Methodology

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Four genres of traditional and non-traditional media were selected for analysis. This accounts for the breadth of opinion on the relevance, reach, and impact of traditional tools such as television and radio vis-à-vis non-traditional media such as audio-visual content on social media. The selection criteria sought to recognise how both categories complement each other in the dissemination of counter-narratives.

The four genres — caricature, a comedy show, a drama series, and an advertisement by the telecom company Zain — were released between late May and early June 2017. This timeframe was selected because media production and viewership tends to peak during Ramadan. Contextually, highest quality productions and advertising are showcased at this time, attesting to the elevated reach of media products, particularly for traditional media outlets, during the period.

Each category required a different sampling method. The **caricatures** selected were originally published in the two most widely circulated newspapers in Jordan, *al-Ghad* and *al-Ra'i*. Both are circulated daily in hardcopy and online. In recognition of social media circulation of this content, we also selected caricatures published in the same time period by two well-known Jordanian artists, Emad Hajjaj and Nasser al-Ja'fari. Choice was limited to caricatures that addressed radicalisation, violent extremism, and/or terrorism. The final sample included 10 caricatures, 9 by Emad Hajjaj (see Annex I).

Watan 'a Watar is a **comedy show** that aired on *Ro'ya TV*, a private Jordanian channel. The show comprised of 20-minute episodes, each addressing a different topic. The episode selected for analysis was the only one which aired during Ramadan that discussed Daesh. The fact that the episodes were uploaded to YouTube, allowing for audience reactions to be noted in the comments section, enabled more thorough analysis. At the time of writing, the video had been viewed 1,140,881 times.<sup>5</sup>

The **drama series** 'Black Crows', which aired on the regional channel MBC, is perhaps the most well-known recent counter-narrative effort in the region. It directly tackles life under Daesh, with a focus on its organisational structure, including the use of child soldiers and women fighters. The show aired 20 episodes, averaging between 30 to 40 minutes in length, and there is speculation that the show was cut short due to a generally negative public perception.<sup>6</sup> Using random sampling, six episodes (1, 4, 9, 12, 17, 20) were analysed.

Finally, the regional telecom company Zain produced a 3:11-minute long advertisement that aired on a number of regional channels during Ramadan. The advertisement was shared on the Zain YouTube channel 11,970,089 million times,<sup>7</sup> and on the lead singer Hussain al-Jasmi's

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<sup>5</sup> Watan 'a Watar, Abu Qatadah Quits Daesh, 10 June 2017, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8GFOvBEp\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8GFOvBEp_w)

<sup>6</sup> For example, see Samar Kadi, "Ramadan TV Drama On Islamic State Stirs Mixed Reactions", *UPI*, 2017, available at [https://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/World-News/2017/06/12/Ramadan-TV-drama-on-Islamic-State-stirs-mixed-reactions/8091497270064/](https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2017/06/12/Ramadan-TV-drama-on-Islamic-State-stirs-mixed-reactions/8091497270064/). For more see, Fadi Sandasi, "Series Black Crows. Around Daesh We Dispute (In Arabic)", *RT Arabic*, 2017, available at <https://arabic.rt.com/culture/882203-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84-%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B4-%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%84/>.

<sup>7</sup> Zain Advertisement, Ramadan 2017, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U49nOBFv508>.

YouTube channel 3,835,479 times.<sup>8</sup> The advertisement relies on a number of counter-narrative tools, and showcases survivors of extremist attacks from across the region. The advertisement received different reactions from the public,<sup>9</sup> both locally<sup>10</sup> and internationally.<sup>11</sup> It was selected as an example of non-traditional media and of private sector engagement.

The media sample targeted both Jordanians and a regional audience. In many instances, this meant that the media producers assumed a certain amount of general knowledge amongst their audience pertaining to religion and culture. One impact was that many religious and cultural details were implied rather than stated, potentially limiting engagement by foreign viewers (particularly in terms of contextualising analysis).

By using Frame Analysis, three researchers examined the four purposes that a media frame might have: a particular problem definition, a causal interpretation (an implied explanation for why certain events have occurred), a moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendations.<sup>12</sup> This enabled us to unpack the wealth of coded media messages in the sample, to examine their limitations, and to illustrate their success in serving the purposes of a counter-narrative.

Results were reassessed following input from three categories of general and critical audiences. Such insights were gathered by way of four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), which comprised of 41 participants. Two were organised with general youth audiences (students at the University of Jordan), with attention paid to geographic and socio-economic diversity. One FGD was organised with geographically dispersed youth already engaged in initiatives that produce alternate narratives as part of a local organisation, I-Dare for Sustainable Development. The last FGD solicited input from media practitioners. In all FGDs, scenes were shown to participants, followed by a general discussion on good practices (see Annex II).

Supplementing this, interviews were conducted in June and July 2016, with eight imams and Sharia experts in which radical narratives and required counter-narratives were discussed (see Annex III). Finally, a draft of this report was discussed at an expert meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2017 with key regional and local experts and practitioners, whose feedback has since been incorporated.

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<sup>8</sup> Zain Advertisement, With Love We Sing – Hussain Al Jassmi, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U49nOBFv508>

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly the comments section on the sampled video highlight the differing public opinion. There are several examples of sympathisers of violent extremist groups expressing their positions and other members of the audience attempt to counter or change such skewed world views.

<sup>10</sup> "Anti-Extremist Ramadan Advert Goes Viral", *Jordan Times*, 2017, available at <http://jordantimes.com/news/region/anti-extremist-ramadan-advert-goes-viral>.

<sup>11</sup> For example, see Kareem Shaheen, "Bomb Violence With Mercy: Anti-Terror Ad Goes Viral In Middle East", *The Guardian*, 2017, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/29/bomb-violence-mercy-anti-terror-ad-goes-viral-middle-east>. See also Ben Hubbard, "Zain'S Ramadan Ad, With Images Of Terrorism, Divides Twitter", *The New York Times*, 2017, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/30/world/middleeast/zain-ad-ramadan-terrorism.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification Of A Fractured Paradigm", *Journal Of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51-58, doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x.

### 3. Narratives, Counter-Narratives, and Alternative Narratives

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Narratives refer to the messages or ideologies which, when spread through different media forms, are used to present an experience or agenda in a convincing way. Put simply, a narrative is “a simple, unifying, easily-expressed story or explanation that organises people’s experience and provides a framework for understanding events.”<sup>13</sup> Narratives can be very powerful and are thus an informative unit of analysis because they offer a culturally-salient rationality that allows an individual to make sense of events and encourages a desired type of behaviour.<sup>14</sup>

Studies that examine narratives of violent groups highlight the differences between meta-narratives or master-narratives,<sup>15</sup> and ‘mono-myths’.<sup>16</sup> Other studies have examined the traits of narratives used by extremist groups.<sup>17</sup> One such study argues that the narrative threads used by extremists include: defining a problem as an injustice, offering moral justifications for violence, dehumanising survivors, diffusing responsibility, and downplaying harmful effects.<sup>18</sup>

In media theory, narratives can be likened to media frames. Frames allow for a detailed examination of the language, semiotics, and symbolism used in a media segment. Frames rely on a process of selection and salience: how certain elements are selected to direct the attention of an

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<sup>13</sup> David Kilcullen, ““Twenty-Eight Articles”: Fundamentals Of Company-Level Counterinsurgency”, *Australian Army*, 2006, 106, available at: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/kilcullen.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> For example, see “Developing Effective Counter-Narrative Frameworks For Countering Violent Extremism”, *Hedayah And International Centre For Counter-Terrorism*, 2014, available at [https://www.icct.nl/download/file/Developing%20Effective%20CN%20Frameworks\\_Hedayah\\_ICCT\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.icct.nl/download/file/Developing%20Effective%20CN%20Frameworks_Hedayah_ICCT_Report_FINAL.pdf); Alex P. Schmid, “Al-Qaeda’s “Single Narrative” And Attempts To Develop Counternarratives: The State Of Knowledge”, *International Centre For Counter-Terror*, 2014, available at <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/Schmid-Al-Qaeda%27s-Single-Narrative-and-Attempts-to-Develop-Counter-Narratives-January-2014.pdf>; Steven R. Corman, “Understanding the Role of Narrative in Extremist Strategic Communication.” In Laurie Fenstermacher and S. Canna (Eds.), *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Methods and Strategies* (Dayton, OH: Air Force Research Laboratory, 2011), 42.

<sup>15</sup> Dina Al Raffie, “Whose Hearts And Minds? Narratives And Counter-Narratives Of Salafi Jihadism”, *Journal of Terrorism Research*, 2012, <https://jtr.st-andrews.ac.uk/articles/10.15664/jtr.304/>.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Glazzard, “Losing The Plot: Narrative, Counter-Narrative And Violent Extremism”, *Terrorism And Counter-Terrorism Studies*, 2017, doi:10.19165/2017.1.08.

<sup>17</sup> For example, see Alejandro Beutel et al., “Guiding Principles for Countering And Displacing Extremist Narratives”, *Journal Of Terrorism Research*, 2016, available at <https://jtr.st-andrews.ac.uk/articles/1220/print/>. and Henry Tuck and Tanya Silverman, “The Counter-Narrative Handbook”, *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, 2016, available at [http://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Counter-narrative-Handbook\\_1.pdf](http://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Counter-narrative-Handbook_1.pdf). See also, Jordan Isham and Lorand Bodo, “Countering The Narrative: Understanding Terrorist’s Influence and Tactics, Analyzing Opportunities For Intervention, And Delegitimizing The Attraction To Extremism”, *Small Wars Journal*, 2016, available at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/countering-the-narrative-understanding-terrorist%E2%80%99s-influence-and-tactics-analyzing-opportun>.

<sup>18</sup> Alex P. Schmid, “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion And Literature Review”, *International Centre For Counter-Terror*, 2013, 28-9, available at <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf>.

Alex P. Schmid, “Al-Qaeda’s “Single Narrative” And Attempts to Develop Counternarratives”, *International Centre For Counter-Terror*, 2014, available at <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/Schmid-Al-Qaeda%27s-Single-Narrative-and-Attempts-to-Develop-Counter-Narratives-January-2014.pdf>.

audience to certain conclusions, and how emphasis is placed on elements that culturally and politically resonate with that audience.<sup>19</sup> More specifically, framing operates by:

“selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.”<sup>20</sup>

Regardless of the tools used to analyse them, the role played by narratives has been highlighted in a number of studies, policy documents, and state initiatives. Several programmes have been designed by state institutions and disseminated to ‘vulnerable’ audiences in the hope of containing radicalisation and/or dissuading potential violent extremists<sup>21</sup>.

Counter-narratives refer to efforts by P/CVE stakeholders to discredit and/or delegitimise the narratives put forward by radical groups. One criticism of such counter-narratives is that by negating the frame offered by extremists, counter-narratives tend to reinforce the original radical narrative,<sup>22</sup> echoing the well-known rule in frame analysis that “negating a frame, activate[s] that frame.”<sup>23</sup> One academic provides another, more critical, assessment: “At times, ‘counter-narrative’ seems barely more than a euphemism for state-propaganda – communications designed to further a state’s objectives [..].”<sup>24</sup> This is not to preclude that well-designed counter-narrative efforts may influence those on the “sharp edge” of radicalisation, more so than a neutral audience.<sup>25</sup>

Counter-narratives utilise a range of tools. One audit highlighted satire and theological discussion as the two main strategies used in Arabic counter-narratives.<sup>26</sup> Hedayah and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism list six counter-narrative types: positive/alternative narratives,

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<sup>19</sup> For a review on the concept, see Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51-58.; Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Framing Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (2007): 103-126; Zhongdang Pan and Gerald M. Kosicki, "Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse," *Political Communication* 10 (1993): 55-75.

<sup>20</sup> Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification Of A Fractured Paradigm", *Journal Of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51-58, doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x.

<sup>21</sup> See for example: “France: Extremism and Counter-Extremism”, Counter Extremism Project, 2016, 9-10, available at [https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/france\\_counterextremism.pdf](https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/france_counterextremism.pdf); Hafiz Nur Adeen Nor Ahmad, “Malaysian Foreign Fighters From Past To Present: Different Pathways to Terror”, Middle East Institute, 2016, available at [http://www.mei.edu/content/map/malaysian-foreign-fighters-past-present-different-pathways-terror#\\_ftn4](http://www.mei.edu/content/map/malaysian-foreign-fighters-past-present-different-pathways-terror#_ftn4); Imran Awan, “Cyber-Extremism: ISIS And The Power Of Social Media”, *Soceity* 54, no. 2 (2017): 138-149, doi: 10.1007/s12115-017-0114-0; Extreme Dialogue, 2017, available at <http://extremedialogue.org/>; and Ferguson, K., Countering violent extremism through media and communication strategies, Partnership for Conflict, Crime & Security Research, 1 March 2016, at <http://www.paccsresearch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Countering-Violent-Extremism-Through-Media-and-Communication-Strategies-.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> For example, see Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Framing Theory", *Annual Review Of Political Science* 10, no. 1 (2007): 103-126, doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054.

<sup>23</sup> George Lakoff, *The All New Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2014), xii.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Glazzard, "Losing The Plot: Narrative, Counter-Narrative and Violent Extremism", *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies*, 2017, doi:10.19165/2017.1.08.

<sup>25</sup> Zahed Amanullah, Head of Networks and Outreach, The Institute of Strategic Dialogue, Expert Meeting for the Research on Counter and Alternative Narratives, 26 November 2017, Amman.

<sup>26</sup> "EU Strategic Communications with A View To Counteracting Propaganda", *European Parliament*, 2016, 23-5, available at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578008/EXPO\\_IDA\(2016\)578008\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578008/EXPO_IDA(2016)578008_EN.pdf).

strategic counter-narratives, ethical counter-narratives, ideological and religious counter-narratives, tactical counter-narratives, and humour and sarcasm.<sup>27</sup>

Glazzard highlights the importance of understanding narrative structures through a literary lens. He argues that those developing counter-narratives are often policy-makers with little knowledge of the nuance involved in effective narrative construction. Unsophisticated and non-contextualised efforts are unlikely to be impactful and can waste scarce resources.<sup>28</sup> He argues instead, that the form and content of narrative messages deserve more in-depth study, inferring a consideration of the social and political contexts, much like the notion of Frame Analysis.

A swath of similar criticism has resulted in the rise of the term ‘alternative narratives’ — narratives that amplify credible, local voices and offer positive avenues for change.<sup>29</sup> Alternative narratives come in many forms as they are developed by grass roots activists, faith communities, interested youth, artists, etc.<sup>30</sup> They seek to reconfirm or amplify what a community, group, or citizenry stand for, rather than simply dismiss or discredit what an extremist group does or propagates.<sup>31</sup> This echoes UN Security Council Resolution 2354 which calls for “positive and credible alternatives to [be provided to] audiences vulnerable to extremist messages.”<sup>32</sup>

The next section uses Frame Analysis as a tool to examine the literary form and content of selected media counter-narratives publicised during Ramadan 2017. Our conclusion is that counter-narratives that negate and dismiss radicals, without offering a positive and alternate world view that viewers can embrace, constitute missed opportunities and in some cases may have detrimental impacts.

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<sup>27</sup> See "Developing Effective Counter-Narrative Frameworks for Countering Violent Extremism", *Hedayah and International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, 2014, 2, [https://www.icct.nl/download/file/Developing%20Effective%20CN%20Frameworks\\_Hedayah\\_ICCT\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.icct.nl/download/file/Developing%20Effective%20CN%20Frameworks_Hedayah_ICCT_Report_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Glazzard, "Losing The Plot: Narrative, Counter-Narrative and Violent Extremism", *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies*, 2017, 1, available at doi:10.19165/2017.1.08.

<sup>29</sup> Search for Common Ground, *Transforming Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilder's Guide*. (SFCG, 2017), 29, available at <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Transforming-Violent-Extremism-V2-August-2017.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Rachel Briggs and Sebastien Feve, *Review of Programs to Counter Narratives of Violent Extremism: What Works and What Are the Implications for Government?* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2013), 18, available at <https://www.counterextremism.org/resources/details/id/444/review-of-programs-to-counter-narratives-of-violent-extremism-what-works-and-what-are-the-implications-for-government>

<sup>31</sup> Alex P. Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation", *International Centre For Counter-Terror*, 2013, 31, available at <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> "Security Council Unanimously Adopts Resolution On Countering Terrorist Narratives", *United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee*, 2017, <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/blog/2017/05/25/security-council-unanimously-adopts-resolution-on-countering-terrorist-narratives/>.

## 4. The Grand Narrative: The Brutal, Immoral, and Un-Islamic Daesh

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Grand narratives refer to the broader world view and reading of reality that a media product, or literary text, offers.<sup>33</sup> In this section, we explore the grand narratives constructed in the selected media samples, and the broader schemata against which counter-narratives seek to prevent radicalisation among viewers. We offer a general reading, discuss the key takeaways common to each of the grand narratives, and provide a descriptive account of each grand narrative in the selected genres. This aims to enable the reader to understand the over-arching message in which the individual frames operate.

The grand narrative principally criticises extremists, and Daesh fighters in particular, as brutal, hypocritical, and immoral. These media samples rely on strategies such as dehumanising and denouncing fighters, often by drawing attention to their immoral and criminal behaviours including paedophilia, torture, and theft. Alongside this is a parallel argument that the behaviour of extremists is antithetical to Islam. Examples include their disrespect for human life, incitement of sectarianism, objectification of women and young girls, and their manipulation of media. This is achieved either by juxtaposing religious values with the inhumane practices of extremists, or by referencing religious texts.

The media content fails to put forward an evidenced argument on a preferred or advisable way of responding to extremism. Scattered references are made: curriculum reform is noted in the comedy episode, promoting dialogue, tolerance and critical thinking is referenced in the advertisement, and one argument is presented on countering radicalisation with resonant discourse to that put forward by extremists. The drama series and the caricatures, however, advocate the military solution, which, as repeatedly stressed by research participants, cannot deter an ideology.<sup>34</sup>

Four points characterise the grand narrative of the media samples. First, **each can be classified as a counter-narrative rather than offering a positive alternative narrative to radicalisation.** They mainly dismiss the narrative of extremist groups, but reproduce the same grand narrative of a ‘Good versus Evil’, or ‘Us versus Them’, dichotomy. Consequently, the notion of ‘countering’ the narrative of these groups is relatively one-dimensional. It was common for existing Daesh frames to be presented and then subsequently negated. The scholarship holds that this approach is ineffective and does more to reinforce the original frame than to counter it. For example:

Isis talks of eliminating the grey zone – in other words, forcing people to choose between supporting it through violence or being counted as the enemy. In the

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<sup>33</sup> Dina Al Raffie, "Whose Hearts And Minds?", 2, *Journal of Terrorism Research*, 2012, <https://jtr.st-andrews.ac.uk/articles/10.15664/jtr.304/>.

<sup>34</sup> Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, i-Dare for Sustainable Development, 8 November 2017, Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, Youth Group 1 from University of Jordan, Amman, 9 November 2017, Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, Youth Group 2 from University of Jordan, Amman, 9 November 2017.

minds of its ideologues there is no middle ground, and nothing to debate or negotiate: they are fulfilling a prophecy.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, by reproducing the same dichotomous world view offered by extremists, counter-narratives risk further shrinking the space for debate and exploration. This reduces the efficacy of the counter-narratives to offer different world views.

Second, **none of the media sampled addressed the radicalisation process itself**, which is a nuanced phenomenon comprising multiple, simultaneous transitions.<sup>36</sup> The phenomenon is again presented as black-and-white, whereas in reality radicalisation is a collection of complex variables.<sup>37</sup>

Third, while the broader grand narratives constitute simple counter-narratives, the media sample includes more complex and well-developed story lines for individual characters. Thus, **an interesting dichotomy exists in which the producers present the audience with complex prototypes of radical individuals while continuing to perpetrate the overarching narratives of a dichotomous good versus evil**. For example, the Emir in *Black Crows*, although brutal and ruthless like other Daesh members, is also presented as a devoted lover. As the series progresses, the audience builds a sense of empathy towards him.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the Emir in the comic episode displays noble qualities. He sends back young women who are brought as slaves because they are 16 years old,<sup>39</sup> and later enters a monologue criticising Daesh attacks on mosques, churches, and bars.<sup>40</sup> However, more broadly, the message of both media samples primarily attempts to discredit Daesh by highlighting its faults as opposed to providing valid alternatives to its rhetoric and practices.

Finally, **the media almost exclusively equates terrorism and/or violent extremism to Daesh**. While this reflects the emphasis in 2016 and early 2017 on denouncing Daesh and its brand of extremism, the sample overlooks the need for counter-narratives to tackle radicalisation and violent extremism as a wider phenomenon that has manifested in different forms in recent years.

## 4.1 The Grand Narratives of Each Media Genre

As the grand narrative presented in each media genre differs, it is prudent to assess them separately. This section highlights the over-arching messages each genre relayed to its audience, and investigates which purposes of Frame Analysis they achieved.

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Barrett, "Britain Can Deal With Its Isis Returnees. But Not By Killing Them", *The Guardian*, 2017, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/30/britain-isis-returnees-killingislamic-state>.

<sup>36</sup> Neven Bondokji, Kim Wilkinson and Leen Aghabi, *Understanding Radicalisation: A Literature Review Of Models And Drivers* (Amman: WANA Institute, 2016), available at <http://wanainstitute.org/en/publication/understanding-radicalisation-literature-review-models-and-drivers>.

<sup>37</sup> One exception is the opening scene of the drama series which highlights the contextual factors that led a group of women to move to the so-called caliphate. *Black Crows*, Episode 1, 16'39-22'47, MBC, 28 May 2017, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRNHwyHBKn01>

<sup>38</sup> Many FGD participants (who have watched the series) highlighted the appeal of the Emir. They added that they empathised with him at multiple points in addition to commenting on his physical attractiveness.

<sup>39</sup> Watan 'a Water, Abu Qatadah Quits Daesh, 2'20-3', 10 June 2017, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8GFOvBEp\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8GFOvBEp_w)

<sup>40</sup> Watan 'a Water, Abu Qatadah Quits Daesh, 9'15-9'20, 10 June 2017, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8GFOvBEp\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8GFOvBEp_w)

### 4.1.1 Caricatures

The media frame in caricatures consists of a single image, limiting its ability to serve more than one of the four purposes articulated in frame analysis. Generally, each caricature is inherently limited and presents either a problem definition, *or* a causal interpretation, *or* a moral evaluation, *or* a treatment recommendation.

**The grand narrative within the caricatures does not distinguish between Daesh<sup>41</sup> and terrorism,<sup>42</sup> but predominantly denounces both as evil, un-Islamic, and immoral agents of destruction.** They often use imagery to commemorate terrorist acts, including an attack on a church in Egypt,<sup>43</sup> the attack on Finsbury Park mosque,<sup>44</sup> and the destruction in Mosul.<sup>45</sup>

This approach is further emphasised by spotlighting terrorists' inhumane conduct, such as the use of human shields,<sup>46</sup> the destabilisation of countries,<sup>47</sup> and the appropriation of historic Islamic legacies.<sup>48</sup> One caricature portrays terrorism as an infestation of cockroaches that should be exterminated, implying that a violent solution is the appropriate one.

A clear limitation of the caricatures was illustrated by those research participants who lacked a contextual understanding of the news events that inspired the work, and did not understand their references and purpose as a result.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> For example, The Defeat of ISIS (in Arabic), Emad Hajjaj, 10 June 2017, available at <https://abumahjoobnews.com/2017/06/10/%D8%A5%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B4/> and Human Shields (in Arabic), Emad Hajjaj, 17 June 2017, available at <https://abumahjoobnews.com/2017/06/17/%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/>. See also, The Kidnapped Country (in Arabic), Emad Hajjaj, 24th of June 2017, available at <https://abumahjoobnews.com/2017/06/24/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%81/>

<sup>42</sup> For example, TV show of Terror/Series of Terror (in Arabic), Emad Hajjaj, 1 June 2017, available at <https://abumahjoobnews.com/2017/06/01/%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8/> and Terror in the Month of Mercy (in Arabic), Emad Hajjaj, 4th of June 2017, available at <https://abumahjoobnews.com/2017/06/04/%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A9/>. See also, TV show of Terror/Series of Terror (in Arabic), Emad Hajjaj, 1 June 2017, <https://abumahjoobnews.com/2017/06/01/%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8/>

<sup>43</sup> Ruth Michaelson, "Egypt: Isis Claims Responsibility For Coptic Church Bombings", *The Guardian*, 2017, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/09/egypt-coptic-church-bombing-death-toll-rises-tanta-cairo>.

<sup>44</sup> Katie Forster, "Darren Osborne Charged With Terrorist-Related Murder After Finsbury Park Attack On Muslims", *The Independent*, 2017, available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/finsbury-park-mosque-attack-darren-osborne-charged-terrorism-murder-latest-news-a7804396.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Igor Kosssov, "'Mosul Is Completely Destroyed'", *The Atlantic*, 2017, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/mosul-iraq-abadi-isis-corruption/533067/>.

<sup>46</sup> Human Shields (in Arabic), Emad Hajjaj, 17 June 2017, available at <https://abumahjoobnews.com/2017/06/17/%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/>.

<sup>47</sup> The Kidnapped Country (in Arabic), Emad Hajjaj, 24 June 2017, available at <https://abumahjoobnews.com/2017/06/24/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%81/>

<sup>48</sup> Blowing up the Hanging Minaret (in Arabic), Emad Hajjaj, 22 June 2017, available at <https://abumahjoobnews.com/2017/06/22/%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A1/>

<sup>49</sup> For example, one participant did not connect the church and crescent moon with the attack in Egypt. Another, was unaware of the Finsbury attack and as such did not comprehend the associated caricature. Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, i-Dare for Sustainable Development, 8 November 2017, Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, Youth Group 1 from University of Jordan, Amman, 9 November 2017.



### 4.1.2 Comedic Episode

This episode **capitalised on certain cultural narratives to reinforce an existing hatred of Daesh.**<sup>50</sup> This is problematic because it fails to challenge the mainstream perception and oversimplifies the dynamics of violent extremism. For example, the episode promotes the commonly-held conspiracy narrative that Daesh was created and is maintained through Israeli and American support, thus reiterating a commonly-held Arab view.<sup>51</sup> While this allows a message to be communicated to a sizable segment of the mainstream population, it has little added value as it does not highlight to the viewer the other socio-political factors that led to the rise of such groups.

The grand narrative also highlights the hypocrisy of the group. It portrays fighters as ignorant, sexist, and sex-obsessed individuals, and their leaders as hypocrites, driven by self-interests, and operating without a clear structure. Frequent references are made to women as sexual rewards, and in early scenes three young girls are presented as ‘goods’ or commodities. Once again, the key purpose served by the grand narrative is **moral denunciation.**

In multiple instances, Daesh frames are directly presented and then negated, most often with the use of mockery.

### 4.1.3 Advertisement

The advertisement offers a unique grand narrative which combines both a counter-narrative and an alternative narrative in the differing styles of the first and second halves of the clip.<sup>52</sup> In the first half, extremism is portrayed as destruction and death, contrasting it with religious values such as forgiveness, forbearance, and value for human life. Extremists are presented as having a rigid and shallow understanding of religious texts, and as actively imposing their worldview and moral evaluations through violence. The second half presents a sung (rather than spoken) positive alternative narrative. The aim is to encourage two sets of distinctive emotions in the audience, and the **treatment recommendations** in the second half instil a positive agency with suggested recommendations.

The advertisement also deconstructs the extremist narrative, which uses religious statements and verses by restoring these phrases to their original context. For instance, the *shahadatain* (the Islamic declaration of faith) and “Allah w Akbar,”<sup>53</sup> are used by the suicide bomber. Early in the advertisement, the extremist says “I bear witness that there is no God but Allah”, and a victim challenges him, “you who comes in the name of death. He [God] is the creator of life.” The

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<sup>50</sup> This brings to light a populist approach that is not based on educating the public but rather fuelling an existing sentiment. For example, see “Majority Of Jordanians Believe Country Is Going In The Right Direction — Poll”, Jordan Times, 2015, available at <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/majority-jordanians-believe-country-going-right-direction-%E2%80%94-poll>. For a more recent study citing an 89% majority citing Daesh as a terrorist organisation see, “Survey Of Jordanian Public Opinion 15”, *International Republican Institute*, 2017, available at [http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2017-7-12\\_jordan\\_poll\\_slides.pdf](http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2017-7-12_jordan_poll_slides.pdf).

<sup>51</sup> Watan ‘a Water, Abu Qatadah Quits Daesh, 8’-8’45, 10 June 2017, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8GFOvBEp\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8GFOvBEp_w); Jueun Choi, “Most Arabs Believe Foreign Intervention Gave Rise To ISIS, Survey Finds”, *USA TODAY*, 2017, available at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/04/14/most-arabs-believe-foreign-intervention-gave-rise-isis-survey-finds/100378796/>.

<sup>52</sup> Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, i-Dare for Sustainable Development, 8 November, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> ‘God is the greatest’

extremist continues, “I bear witness that Mohammed is the messenger of God”, before a child replies, “The forgiving and forbearing who did not hurt those who hurt him.”<sup>54</sup>

While this is a clear attempt to reclaim religious rhetoric from extremists, **some FGD participants highlighted that this further associated the *shahadatain* with terrorism.**<sup>55</sup> In addition, it was noted that the features of the terrorists were classically Middle Eastern, thus overlooking Western foreign fighters, and reinforcing an existing stereotype.<sup>56</sup>

The second half of the advertisement proposes love, understanding, and dialogue as the modality for countering extremism. It also encourages victims and survivors to acknowledge their loss. This is evident when an Iraqi father, a real-life survivor, holds up a written message to his dead son. This acknowledgment that pain and the right to mourn are first steps towards reconciliation efforts is highlighted by academics and practitioners.<sup>57</sup> The confrontation scenes between groups of people and the extremist hint at reconciliation, and ultimately the singer extends his hand to the extremist.

#### 4.1.4 Black Crows

The grand narrative of the series is premised on religious grounds with Daesh at the heart of the narrative as the ultimate villain. The group members are referred to as “the enemies of God”<sup>58</sup> and “the servants of Satan [the devil]”<sup>59</sup> in the opening sequence, and throughout the series Daesh is associated with hypocrisy, indecency, brutality, and inhumanity. The series’ core position is that the utopian image that Daesh promotes of its state does not exist. Instead, life under Daesh is filled with horror and danger, thus expressing a negative **moral evaluation** of Daesh.

The series depicts events based on real life accounts of happenings within Daesh camps in Syria and Iraq. It examines an array of issues related to how the ‘Islamic Caliphate’ conducts its ‘business’, including: sexual-jihad, slavery, suicide attacks, paedophilia, human trafficking, execution of innocent civilians and prisoners, brainwashing young children and women, politicising religion, and brutality.

The series also conveys a depth of understanding about the topic by presenting a complex mix of male and female fighter prototypes (from indoctrinated ideological fighters to opportunistic

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<sup>54</sup> For example, see Zain Advertisement, With Love We Sing – Hussain Al Jassmi, 0’50-1’53, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U49nOBFv508>. The researchers notice that the English translation in the advertisement makes this sentence about God, but the Arabic is about the Prophet Mohammed.

<sup>55</sup> Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, i-Dare for Sustainable Development, 8 November 2017, Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, Youth Group 1 from University of Jordan, Amman, 9 November 2017, Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, Youth Group 2 from University of Jordan, Amman, 9 November 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, i-Dare for Sustainable Development, 8 November 2017,

<sup>57</sup> See for example Vamik D. Volkan work on societal mourning and reconciliation: Vamik D. Volkan, *Immigrants and Refugees: Trauma, Perennial Mourning, and Border Psychology*, London: Karnac, 2017 and Vamik D. Volkan, “What some monuments tell us about mourning and forgiveness.” In *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation*, eds. E. Barkan & A. Karn, pp. 115–131. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006.

<sup>58</sup> The Arabic text declares this clearly. غرابيب سود وسود جباه – خصوم لرب علا في علاه.

<sup>59</sup> أعوان إبليس في مبتغاه

ones).<sup>60</sup> A significant limitation of the series is that such real world references, particularly the killing of Jordanian pilot Mua'ath Kassasbeh may have 'hit too close to home' for viewers and, in some cases, been perceived as offensive.<sup>61</sup> In sum, given its entertainment format, the content of the series may have been too negative and heavy to be watched recreationally and thus, defeated its initial purpose of encouraging people to confront the topic.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Religious leaders are represented as greedy manipulative and power-hungry individuals using their authority to meet individual financial and sexual needs. It acknowledges the complexity of the make-up of its male and female fighters by offering a number of accounts of women who ended up with Daesh against their will and then become one of its most astounded fighters. The character of the Amir is one that presents a brutal indoctrinated actor, but who also is a lover.

<sup>61</sup> For example, see "Al-Kasasbeh Family Criticize Garabib Soud Soap Opera", *Egypt Today*, 2017, available at <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/4/7837/Al-Kasasbeh-family-criticize-Garabib-Soud-Soap-Opera>. This was also echoed by Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, Youth Group 2 from University of Jordan, Amman, 9 November 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, i-Dare for Sustainable Development, 8 November 2017, Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, Youth Group 1 from University of Jordan, Amman, 9 November 2017.

## 5. Understanding the Media Frames

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Using Frame Analysis, the media sample was analysed to examine how the four purposes of media frames (**problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation**) were served.<sup>63</sup> This critical (literary and media) analysis offers P/CVE practitioners with lessons that might serve as good practices when designing media initiatives, including alternative narratives, in the future.

### 5.1 Extremists as Antithetical to Islam

Put simply, a **problem definition** explores the way radicalisation and violent extremism are explained and defined in the media product. **The media sample defines radicalisation and violent extremism as antithetical to Islam. On these grounds, radicalisation is problematised, and accused of manipulating Islam, moral corruption, and brutality.** Many would argue that this is widely understood in the region, and thus a redundant and previously understood message. Yet the media frames sought to reinforce this understanding. Several examples clarify this.

Firstly, in the opening statement of *Black Crows*, Abu Omar, the Sharia teacher and the token voice of wisdom in the series, speaks to the camera:

“Previously, I was concerned about our kids [youth] from those who forsake religion, today I am afraid of those who have taken the religion like a free bird [hijacked it], to use it to lure the youth who have left their nests and never came back.”<sup>64</sup>

This establishes the series’ core problem as the **manipulation of Islam**, and acknowledges the central role a misappropriated ideology has played in the success of Daesh. Abu Omar highlights that youth have long been disconnected from the heart of religion and its teachings. Daesh and similar groups are presented as another manifestation of this misinterpretation. However, in a FGD with youth working on alternative narratives, participants highlighted that the series’ high levels of violence distracted the audience from this central message, and in many cases dissuaded them from watching it in its entirety.<sup>65</sup> One woman noted that if this was the main argument, then the series should have been launched at the peak of Daesh recruitment.<sup>66</sup> At the Expert Meeting convened to assess this research, one media PVE practitioner reiterated that the

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<sup>63</sup> Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification Of A Fractured Paradigm", *Journal Of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51-58, doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x.

<sup>64</sup> Translated from Arabic. *Black Crows*, Episode 1, 2’12-2’27, MBC, 28 May 2017, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRNHwyHBKn01>

<sup>65</sup> Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, i-Dare for Sustainable Development, 8 November 2017.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. A research participant commented that at the peak of Daesh recruitment a number of her classmates at the Hashemite University joined because of misinformation. She adds that it would have been a more appropriate time to launch counter-narrative attempts. Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, i-Dare for Sustainable Development, 8 November 2017.

production time for this type of content must be reduced to achieve maximum impact in a time frame that corresponds to reality on the ground.<sup>67</sup>

Daesh's presentation of **'heaven' as a tool** is a further example of their religious manipulation and moral corruption. Daesh not only promises heaven, but offers a quick, pragmatic way of reaching it: suicide. In the first episode of the series, the leader of the children's unit, al-Miqdad, is asked by one of the child soldiers "how can we get to heaven? By plane? By ship? By car?" He answers, "No, it is faster than that; by an explosive belt."<sup>68</sup>

When discussing radical narratives, a Sharia expert noted that radicals portray "blood and killing as the only path to heaven ... the ultimate goal of any Muslim." She elaborated that in doing so, these groups ignore a crucial point: first, one must live according to Islamic principles العيش في الله سبيل الموت في سبيل الله.<sup>69</sup> **In this logic lies an important alternative narrative that should be developed in future media initiatives.**

A third example can be found in the advertisement, with the central message that extremism is antithetical to Islam. Early in the advertisement, the voice of a young child declares "I will tell God everything,"<sup>70</sup> a clear statement that the actions of this group abrogate the will of God and thus contradict the teachings of Islam. This contradiction in the interpretation of how to act in an Islamic way is reinforced by the juxtaposition of an image of Muslims praying in a mosque, immediately followed by a still image from an extremist attack on a mosque in Kuwait.<sup>71</sup>

A number of the caricatures invoked symbols and icons associated with Ramadan. For example, one caricature invoked the cannon, which is traditionally used to signal the start and breaking of the fasting period, shrouded in the black cloth worn by Daesh fighters, and written on the cannon, in Arabic, is 'terrorism.'<sup>72</sup> This is perhaps inferring that the traditional ritual of Ramadan itself has been hijacked by extremist groups.

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<sup>67</sup> Zahed Amanullah, Head of Networks and Outreach, The Institute of Strategic Dialogue, Expert Meeting for the Research on Counter and Alternative Narratives, 26 November 2017, Amman.

<sup>68</sup> Black Crows, Episode 1, 7'30-8'25, MBC, 28 May 2017, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRNHwyHBKn01>

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Dr Nama' al-Banna, Sharia Professor, University of Jordan, Amman, 15 June 2016.

<sup>70</sup> Zain Advertisement, With Love We Sing – Hussain Al Jassmi, 0'10, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U49nOBFv508>

<sup>71</sup> Zain Advertisement, With Love We Sing – Hussain Al Jassmi, 1'35, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U49nOBFv508>

<sup>72</sup> Ramadan's Fasting Canon in Iraq (in Arabic), Emad Hajjaj, 9 June 2017, available at <https://abumahjoobnews.com/2017/06/09/%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%B9-%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82/>

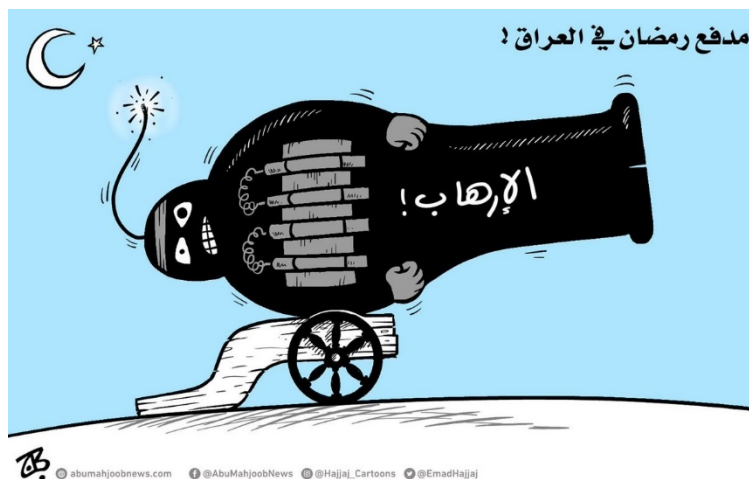


Figure 1: Ramadan’s Canon in Iraq, Emad Hajjaj, 9 June 2017

While the manipulation of Islam is effectively inferred, it proves problematic for two reasons. First, it adds little value to the public conversation because the target audience is well-aware of this. Second, it reinforces the notion that all Muslims must be apologetic for the actions of these groups.

The media sample also establishes how un-Islamic Daesh is through scenes which highlight **moral corruption**. For example, one caricature addressed Daesh’s use of human shields. It depicts a fighter armed with an automatic weapon, wearing a wooden vest over an explosive belt. The front of the shield has the words “Children of Mosul”, and the back, “Women of Mosul”, and in the background is a scene of destruction.<sup>73</sup> The phrasing suggests that Mosul is only one of many places where Daesh has mistreated women and children, highlighting Daesh’s deep disrespect for human life, even for those usually considered the most innocent.



Figure 2: Human Shields, Emad Hajjaj, 17 June 2017

<sup>73</sup>Human Shields (in Arabic), Emad Hajjaj, 17 June 2017, available at <https://abumahjoobnews.com/2017/06/17/%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/>

Inherent to ideas of Daesh's moral corruption, is its use of **severe violence and brutality**. However, as highlighted by one research participant, Daesh has committed such severe real-life violence and has incited so much fear that repeating this in a fictionalised manner may have little impact and does not stimulate or enrich the debate on extremism.<sup>74</sup>

Another clear example of brutality appears in the ninth episode of *Black Crows*, when a woman who is selling fish is not wearing the gloves that all women are mandated to wear in the 'Islamic State'. The all-female 'Khansa Brigade'<sup>75</sup> approaches her to insist that she wears the gloves. While she protests, a kinder woman advises her to just obey. She continues to refuse arguing that she is selling fish and as such needs to use her hands. The woman is then shot in front of her young child by the military head 'Abu Musab'.<sup>76</sup> This occurs despite the fact that the covering of hands is not a requirement in Islam with the exception of certain traditional Salafist interpretations. Most importantly in this context is the portrayed lack of compromise and inhumane brutality that Daesh uses.

## 5.2 Questionable Religious Authorities

Causal interpretations in this context refer to what is suggested or stated in the media sample as the causes of radicalisation or violent extremism, i.e. what/who is responsible for the situation at hand. Both implied and overtly stated cues inform the viewer of what may be causing radicalisation. The media frames offer one prominent explanation on how and why violent extremist groups came to exist: questionable religious authority.

Often the media sample inferred that skewed religious teachings were a main driver of radicalisation. For example, halfway through the comedic episode, Emir Abu Qatada attacks the baseless *fatwas* issued by radical imams. He provides the example of a woman being unable to sit on a chair because in Arabic a chair is linguistically male.<sup>77</sup> While clearly a comedic exaggeration of a baseless *fatwa* issued by Daesh in 2014,<sup>78</sup> this highlights a predicament currently facing the Islamic world, i.e. how to control the content of the religious guidance released by clerics.<sup>79</sup> Since Daesh skews religious teachings and uses unqualified preachers to reinforce their violent ideologies, it is understandable why such references are used in the media frames.<sup>80</sup> This attempt proves useful to P/CVE efforts as it raises awareness, through humour, of the absurdity of some religious declarations and, thus, encourages the viewer to think more critically.

The Zain advertisement offers similar examples. The extremist says "*Allahu Akbar*" (God is greater) and the response comes: "than those who hide what they don't show" – implying that extremists are hypocrites. To another chant of "God is greater," the response (this time from a

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<sup>74</sup> Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, i-Dare for Sustainable Development, 8 November 2017.

<sup>75</sup> The al-Khansa Brigade is an all-female arm of Daesh. For more see "Al-Khansaa Brigade (Islamic State / IS - Female Unit / ISISF) | Terrorist Groups | TRAC", *Tracking Terrorism*, 2017, <https://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/al-khansaa-brigade>.

<sup>76</sup> *Black Crows*, Episode 9, 7'35-9'30, MBC, 6 June 2017, available at <http://www.lroza.com/video/watch.php?vid=c66441dea>.

<sup>77</sup> Watan 'a Watar, Abu Qatadah Quits Daesh, 9'43-9'51, 10 June 2017, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8GFOvBEp\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8GFOvBEp_w)

<sup>78</sup> Meira Svirsky, "Syria: Islamists Forbid Women to Sit in Chairs", *The Clarion Project*, 14 January 2014, available at <https://clarionproject.org/syria-islamists-forbid-women-sitting-chairs-4/>

<sup>79</sup> For more on this, see Caner Dagli, "The Phony Islam Of ISIS", *The Atlantic*, 2015, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/what-muslims-really-want-isis-atlantic/386156/>.

<sup>80</sup> Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, i-Dare for Sustainable Development, 8 November 2017.

schoolgirl) is “than those who obey without contemplation.”<sup>81</sup> The suggestion here is that extremists follow orders from unqualified imams without critically examining their religious basis, again urging the target audience to think critically about the religious discourse they come across from questionable figures.



Figure 3: Image from Zain Ramadan 2017 Advertisement

### 5.3 Extremists as Corrupt, Hypocrite, and Sexual Criminals

**Moral evaluation** of extremists stands out as the most prominent purpose which the media sample sought to achieve; this includes denouncing extremists as corrupt and hypocritical actors, and as sexual criminals. But this approach proves counterproductive for P/CVE efforts in two ways.

First, P/CVE media initiatives should focus on offering the audience an alternative that they can carry through to their daily lives. Second, this moral evaluation appeals to emotion over rationale, whereas the narrative styles offered by radicals predominantly appeal to their own reason before emotion.<sup>82</sup> As such, these narratives can elicit anger at Daesh’s actions, sadness for the survivors of their attacks, and an offense which reinforces the audience’s pre-existing condemnation of the group. Emotional responses fail at offering the legitimacy individuals need to justify new forms of behaviour that counter radicalisation. Moreover, a rational argument that questions their religious knowledge and explains the un-Islamic nature of their behaviour might delegitimise the group more effectively.

Despite these limitations, it is helpful to clarify some examples of how moral denunciation is achieved in the media sample. In the advertisement, **emotive denunciation of extremism** is achieved by acknowledging the survivors and presenting elements of their stories. It highlights how extremism has affected real people and destroyed their lives, and appeals to an assumed

<sup>81</sup> A more accurate translation is: from those who memorise without understanding. Zain Advertisement, With Love We Sing – Hussain Al Jassmi, 1’16-1’26, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U49nOBFv508>

<sup>82</sup> Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, Youth Group 2 from University of Jordan, Amman, 9 November 2017. For more, see Haroro Ingram, "What Analysis Of The Islamic State’S Messaging Keeps Missing", *VOX - Pol*, 2016, available at <http://www.voxpol.eu/what-analysis-of-the-islamic-states-messaging-keeps-missing/>. See also, David Berreby, "Why Are So Many Terrorists Engineers?", *The New York Times*, 2010, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/12/magazine/12FOB-IdeaLab-t.html>.



empathy of the audience. At the same time, this technique is an act of moral re-engagement by establishing connections between those affected and the audience, and sending a message of hope that they have survived and emerged stronger than the extremist, perhaps arguing that winning the fight against extremism is possible.<sup>83</sup>

**Hypocrisy** is another central theme repeated throughout the media sample. The advertisement refers to extremists as those who have the safety to betray, in reference to extremists among us.<sup>84</sup> In this way, the advertisement first acknowledges that extremists hide among the mainstream and more importantly, suggests they are willing to betray their own communities. This refers to an Arab and Muslim cultural norm where betrayal is considered as a central form of hypocrisy.<sup>85</sup>

The media frames in the drama series enjoy more space compared to the shorter media products, and thus elaborate further on running themes such as hypocrisy. These arguably could have been connected to treatment recommendations. For example, a scene in the fourth episode presents how the group preaches one thing and executes the opposite. The Emir stops his posse and demands they show mercy by not stepping on an ant hill; concurrently, they are going to pray in the mosque amid piled corpses of humans they themselves have killed. This shows a clear disrespect for human and Islamic values that urge the sanctity of human life regardless of religion.<sup>86</sup> Al-Miqdad, the leader of the child soldiers unit, is likewise walking to prayer immediately after having slit the throat of a young child.<sup>87</sup>



Figure 4: Image from Black Crows TV Series

<sup>83</sup> Zain Advertisement, With Love We Sing – Hussain Al Jassmi, 1’36-3’11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U49nOBFv508>

<sup>84</sup> Zain Advertisement, With Love We Sing – Hussain Al Jassmi, 1’30-1’33, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U49nOBFv508>; من من أمن حتى يغدر

<sup>85</sup> As narrated by Abu Huraira: Allah’s Apostle said: the signs of hypocrites are three: when he speaks he lies, when he promises he breaks his promise, and when he is entrusted he betrays. Found in Sahih Bukhari Chapter No: 50, Hadith Number 860, available at: <http://ahadith.co.uk/chapter.php?cid=136&page=1&rows=100>

<sup>86</sup> The Quran 17:70 reads “And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference.” The verse refers to all humans, not Muslims. Also Also the Hadith 1250 in Şahih al-Bukhari and 961 in Sahih Muslim state: “Qais ibn Sa’d reported: A funeral passed by the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, and he stood up. It was said to him, “It is a Jew.” The Prophet said, “Was he not a soul?””

<sup>87</sup> Black Crows, Episode 4, 14’02-15’08, MBC, 6 June 2017, available at <http://www.lroza.com/video/watch.php?vid=db8d114e7>. See also, Black Crows, Episode 4, 30’08-32’54 MBC, 6<sup>th</sup> of June 2017, available at <http://www.lroza.com/video/watch.php?vid=db8d114e7>. The Emir preaches to the kids while they were shooting and killing live-human-targets (a minority group – the Yazidi to “be gentle [quite] not to frighten the birds.”

The series also offers an additional reading of the hypocrisy behind Daesh's media propaganda. One scene captures the director filming and re-filming multiple times to ensure that a perfect image of peace, security, and normality is presented to the world, while the reality behind the filming is chaos and destruction. By taking the viewer behind the scenes of Daesh's powerful videos – the end product intended for consumers – the series hopes to debunk their power.<sup>88</sup>



Figure 5: Image from Black Crows TV Series

Several frames portray Daesh members as **corrupt** manipulators of vulnerable groups. One scene in Black Crows shows a heated discussion between two leaders concerning fixed salaries for child soldiers. The Emir interjects, arguing that by giving salaries to the children's parents, they will then invest in the shops in the Daesh-held territory. He says: "This way, we give with the right hand and take again with the left."<sup>89</sup> Another scene sets out how the justice of the 'Caliphate' is nothing but a façade of personal interests and financial manipulations,<sup>90</sup> cutting through the prominent Daesh narrative about their just and egalitarian system.<sup>91</sup>

Violence and abuse of children is repeatedly inferred, most notably with references to **paedophilia** being perpetrated within Daesh. One scene implies that the leader of the child soldiers unit sexually abuses a child.<sup>92</sup> This appeals to viewers strongly as a universally rejected behaviour regardless of political orientation or religious affiliation. The implied suspect also murders his victim to prevent him revealing the secret to another boy,<sup>93</sup> suggesting that even within the organisation, the crime is shameful. Future P/CVE attempts might focus on similar examples that harness agreement from a diverse religious or ideological audience.

Overall, what these media samples seem to overlook is that Jordanians and wider Arab communities already strongly agree that Daesh and its likes are criminals. This begs the question

<sup>88</sup> Black Crows, Episode 9, 6'09-7'31, MBC, 6 June 2017, available at <http://www.lroza.com/video/watch.php?vid=c66441dea>.

<sup>89</sup> Black Crows, Episode 1, 36'18-36'40, MBC, 28 May 2017, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRNHwyHBKn01>.

<sup>90</sup> Black Crows, Episode 4, 2'07-4'07, MBC, 6 June 2017, available at <http://www.lroza.com/video/watch.php?vid=db8d114e7>. See also, Black Crows, Episode 4, 24'-24'57 MBC, 6<sup>th</sup> of June 2017, available at <http://www.lroza.com/video/watch.php?vid=db8d114e7>.

<sup>91</sup> "The Big Spin: Corruption And The Growth Of Violent Extremism - Transparency International Defence & Security", *Transparency International Defence & Security*, 2017, 2-13, available at <http://ti-defence.org/publications/the-big-spin/>.

<sup>92</sup> Black Crows, Episode 4, 4'40-4'49, MBC, 6 June 2017, available at <http://www.lroza.com/video/watch.php?vid=db8d114e7>.

<sup>93</sup> Black Crows, Episode 4, 14'40-15'14, MBC, 6 June 2017, available at <http://www.lroza.com/video/watch.php?vid=db8d114e7>.

of efficiency and the value gained by the audience from these frames. Future P/CVE initiatives might be well served to minimise moral denunciation and focus instead on offering complex and well-studied treatment recommendations.

## 5.4 Proposed Solutions: Extermination, Tolerant Religious Principles, and High Culture

The media frames examined, offer shallow and under-developed recommendations on how to prevent or manage radicalisation. They are generally brief or made in passing. Within the P/CVE context, this should perhaps be the most important point made to a mass audience, as it serves as an opportunity to offer compelling, interactive, and educational alternatives to the audience.

Three types of recommendations are offered: **extermination**, **promoting tolerant religious behaviour**, and **moving towards high culture**. However, it is important to note that while these messages were present, they were not developed or investigated to their fullest extent.

Of all the caricatures, only one offered a concrete recommendation: **extermination**, using the metaphor of a dead cockroach, with detached limbs, in a dust bucket wearing an explosive belt. However, the belt is intact and the handle of the bucket is reminiscent of a head stone. Some FGD participants observed that it is reductive of the calamity that Daesh is responsible for as the caricature does not reflect the damage Daesh has caused at local and international levels.<sup>94</sup>



Figure 6: The Defeat of ISIS, Emad Hajjaj, 10 June 2017

Participants in FGDs also noted that the military defeat of Daesh does not implicate its death, as fundamentally, you cannot kill an ideology.<sup>95</sup> In the current P/CVE context, this is a very pertinent point and reiterates the importance of investing in alternative narratives that present more positive worldviews and ideologies.

<sup>94</sup> Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, Youth Group 1 from University of Jordan, Amman, 9 November 2017.

<sup>95</sup> Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, i-Dare for Sustainable Development, 8 November 2017, Participant in a Focus Group Discussion, Youth Group 2 from University of Jordan, Amman, 9 November 2017.

The advertisement, by contrast, **promoted tolerant religious principles**. Its lyrics: “worship your God with love not with fear,”<sup>96</sup> and “be tender in your faith, tender not harsh,”<sup>97</sup> juxtaposes Daesh’s religious rigidity with an alternative approach.<sup>98</sup> It continues, “confront your enemy with peace not war,”<sup>99</sup> with the singer extending his hand to the extremist. He continues, “Persuade others with leniency not by force,”<sup>100</sup> and in the background the Quran verse “let there be no compulsion in religion.”<sup>101</sup> Thus, religious discourse is being used to promote the counter-message.<sup>102</sup> The extension of a hand to the extremist could also imply a message about reintegration; these are important messages that should be evaluated, included, and discussed in future messaging to prepare for the upcoming stages of P/CVE efforts.<sup>103</sup>

A final recommendation pertains to **high culture**. The closing scene of the advertisement shows the sentence: “We will counter their attacks of hatred with songs of love.”<sup>104</sup> Similarly, a powerful metaphor is offered in the ninth episode by a trusted character, who throughout the episodes has built a positive rapport with the viewer. Abu Omar narrates:

“An old Afghani friend of mine, a gardener, ... once told me based on the abundance of weeds [implicitly referencing extremism] plaguing Afghanistan, a golden rule in gardening is this: don’t waste your time, effort, and resources in trying to uproot the weeds ... or burn it because it is a satanic, malicious plant that can grow again in any other place. The sustainable remedy is to sow plants with stronger roots, and the new plants shall suck up all the water from the weeds, and prevent the sunrays from reaching it, and it will also give you fruits!”<sup>105</sup>

He concludes by stating: “Fight, what you consider baseless (low) art, with high art.”<sup>106</sup>

However, when this scene was played to the FGD participants, their understanding was limited. Most interpreted it as isolated and out of context. Other participants, who watched the series when it was aired in Ramadan, noted that this message might have been reinforced throughout, rather than in limited and isolated scenes. Another point is that whereas the drama series had the most ‘space’ to discuss solutions to prevent radicalisation, little was said on treatment recommendations, signalling a potential missed opportunity.

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<sup>96</sup> اعد ربك حياً لا لا خوفاً

<sup>97</sup> كن في دينك سهلاً لا لا صعباً

<sup>98</sup> For example, see Ali al-Harby, “Perceptions of Saudi Youth Towards Ideological Extremism: A Sociological Study on a Sample of Students at Al-Qaseem University (in Arabic)” (Master’s thesis, University of Jordan, 2011).

<sup>99</sup> خالف نذك سلماً لا لا حرباً

<sup>100</sup> اقتنع غيرك لينا لا لا غصباً

<sup>101</sup> The Quran 2:256.

<sup>102</sup> Zain Advertisement, With Love We Sing – Hussain Al Jassmi, 1’52-2’12, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U49nOBFv508>

<sup>103</sup> Zain Advertisement, With Love We Sing – Hussain Al Jassmi, 2’04-2’06, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U49nOBFv508>

<sup>104</sup> كلما يفجرون كرها سنغني حياً. But this fails to recognise that extremists and a large number of mainstream Muslims consider songs and singing to be *haram*. This comment was echoed in a FGD with youth on 9 November 2017 who suggested that this message would not engage many Muslims. A more effective effort might involve the more accepted Nasheed (Islamic cappella). For more on Nasheed, Alex Marshall, “How Isis Got Its Anthem”, *The Guardian*, 2014, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/nov/09/nasheed-how-isis-got-its-anthem>.

<sup>105</sup> Black Crows, Episode 9, 13’17-14’06, MBC, 6 June 2017, available at

<http://www.lroza.com/video/watch.php?vid=c66441dea>.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

The comedic episode offered an underdeveloped recommendation, but one that addresses important points on P/CVE measures. The main character, Abu Qatada, playing the Emir, declares in a short monologue at the end of the episode that defeating Daesh is possible, but everyone in society should take part in this effort; it should not be left only to soldiers. It is a collective effort, and he highlights school curricula reform as one example.<sup>107</sup>

In conclusion, despite these various attempts at offering a treatment recommendation to viewers, the sampled media frames add very little to the necessary public debate about how best to counter/prevent/manage radicalisation and violent extremism. Given that different media genres have varying scope for serving this purpose, there is ample room for improvement in engaging the public on potential P/CVE measures.

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<sup>107</sup> Watan 'a Watar, Abu Qatadah Quits Daesh, 9'57-10'06, 10 June 2017, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8GFOvBEp\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8GFOvBEp_w)

## 6. Policy Recommendations

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The following recommendations should act as guiding principles for stakeholders seeking to engage with or create counter and alternative narratives to that of violent extremist groups. Some target specific bodies who could play an important role in such activities. These recommendations have been guided by the analysis of media frames, as well as input from FGD participants.

### **On the overall design of media narratives:**

- Previous emphasis on counter-narratives has had a limited impact and instead reinforced the dichotomous and counter-productive ‘Us-versus-Them’ worldview of radicals. P/CVE stakeholders should engage more systematically in the development and dissemination of alternative narratives. Influencing radicalisation requires compelling, positive, and empowering worldviews that can inspire audiences.
- Alternative narratives should also combat different issues such as hate speech, rather than solely focusing on issues of radicalisation and violent extremism.<sup>108</sup> This is important because hate speech can be considered as an early stage that facilitates the dehumanising and dichotomous discourse of radical groups.
- In order to battle Daesh’s ideology, efforts to simply delegitimise violent extremist groups must be coupled with efforts to ‘de-glamorise’ said groups.<sup>109</sup>
- Non-traditional stakeholders should be engaged in designing alternative narratives, such as theatre practitioners, artists, novelists, and other experts in arts and culture.
- Engage with local experts on radicalisation and violent extremism prior to designing a counter- or alternative narrative. This will allow for the media production team to be more nuanced in their understanding of the target audience – those vulnerable to radicalism – as they design the narrative.
- Illustrate how the radicalisation process is a social phenomenon and not only a religious one. It can serve well to show how different groups have been labelled as radical throughout history, including those that have had no religious affiliations.
- Considering that religion is a central part of society, P/CVE stakeholders can strategically utilise religious principles to promote alternative narratives.<sup>110</sup> However, this should not be an isolated exercise; promoting universal concepts of tolerance should be the foundation upon which narratives are premised.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Dina Matar, Associate Head of Department Centre for Global Media and Communications, SOAS, Expert Meeting for the Research on Counter and Alternative Narratives, 26 November 2017, Amman.

<sup>109</sup> Muhannad Arabiyat, President, Generations for Peace Jordan, Expert Meeting for the Research on Counter and Alternative Narratives, 26 November 2017, Amman.

<sup>110</sup> An Imam in Salt argued that counter-narratives should promote the tolerant and humane behaviour of Prophet Mohammed to counter the brutality and exclusiveness of radical narratives. Interview with Anonymous Imam A, Salt, 29 June 2016.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Dr Amer al-Hafi, Sharia Expert, Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, Amman, 26 June 2016.

- Overall design of counter- or alternative narratives must seek to challenge attitudes, rather than just behaviours.<sup>112</sup>

#### **On interactive methods:**

- The Ministry of Youth and Ministry of Education, with other organisations, can assist to create counter- and alternative narratives that target younger groups with age-sensitive subject matter, i.e. without directly referencing some of the immoral practices of violent extremist groups. This could be done through performances at schools that include the children in the production process.<sup>113</sup>
- Create interactive tools for audiences to engage with counter- and alternative narratives and encourage their participation through social media.<sup>114</sup> This might involve raising a question at the end of the episode and using a hashtag, for example, to garner responses from the audience. Alternatively, audience discussions could be held after broadcasting an episode, series, or play to facilitate and promote public discussion.
- Considering the large number of unemployed youth in Jordan, there is ample opportunity to solicit direct feedback on media impact. Such engagement might provide an opportunity for youth to feel empowered and part of a larger project. Youth are also likely to bring fresh insights and nuanced understandings from their own experiences.

#### **On the content and dissemination of media narratives:**

- Media practitioners should engage with bodies such as the Ministry of Culture, radicalisation researchers, and other stakeholders to create compelling alternative narratives; these might centre around Jordanian history, Arab culture, or Islamic culture. The content of such counter- or alternative narratives can use *Nasheed*,<sup>115</sup> for example, rather than music to target Muslim conservative groups in addition to the general audience.
- For specific audiences, engage with local musicians, rap artists, graffiti artists, and others to create compelling lyrics and capitalise on the relationship these artists have with the young community, as attempted in Lebanon.<sup>116</sup>
- Disseminate counter- and alternative narratives during all times of the year – targeting Ramadan or other significant times of the year alone will not serve the larger purpose.
- Metrics must be considered throughout all stages of content dissemination. This can include recording viewership, duration spent on webpages, etc. This is needed to measure the efficiency and reach of the counter-/alternative narrative effort.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Iman Badwan, Communications Officer, Hedayah Centre, Expert Meeting for the Research on Counter and Alternative Narratives, 26 November 2017, Amman.

<sup>113</sup> Ashraf Zeitoon noted that in many cases government involvement in media efforts delegitimise these P/CVE efforts, and thus become ineffective. He argues that community-based organisations, marketing companies, and media practitioners are better positioned for these efforts. Ashraf Zeitoon, Managing Partner and Chief Ideation Officer, Diplomacy Labs, Expert Meeting for the Research on Counter and Alternative Narratives, 26 November 2017, Amman.

<sup>114</sup> Ashraf Zeitoon highlights the need for a call-to-action for the audience to engage with media content. Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Dr Mohammad Majali stressed how successfully Daesh has used nasheed to mobilise youth and trigger emotional responses. Interview with Dr Mohammad Majali, Sharia Professor, University of Jordan, Amman, 3 July 2016.

<sup>116</sup> "Can Hip-Hop Help Combat Religious Extremism?", *Noisey*, 2017, available at [https://noisey.vice.com/en\\_us/article/wnkje9/noisey-lebanon-documentary-full-hip-hop-beirut](https://noisey.vice.com/en_us/article/wnkje9/noisey-lebanon-documentary-full-hip-hop-beirut).

**On the responsibilities of different stakeholders:**

- Donors and the government should provide financial and technical support for existing initiatives working on alternative messaging. Currently, such efforts are spearheaded principally by local and international NGOs.
- Think tanks and other P/CVE stakeholders should engage in research and evaluation studies to generate knowledge on good practices and lessons learned.
- Media practitioners and producers should better inform themselves on radicalisation research and seek to meet their social-cultural responsibility by addressing these concerns through media and art productions.
- P/CVE stakeholders should invest in educating vulnerable groups on media literacy, for example the repercussions of sharing content, and discerning fake news, amongst other critical skills.<sup>118</sup>
- P/CVE stakeholders might encourage the private sector to direct their social corporate responsibility efforts to media initiatives that counter radicalisation. This should be carefully studied and designed so as not to harm the business interests of the private sector, but also engage them in critical areas of support for P/CVE efforts.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Zahed Amanullah, Head of Networks and Outreach, The Institute of Strategic Dialogue, Expert Meeting for the Research on Counter and Alternative Narratives, 26 November 2017, Amman.

<sup>118</sup> Dina Matar, Associate Head of Department Centre for Global Media and Communications, SOAS, Expert Meeting for the Research on Counter and Alternative Narratives, 26 November 2017, Amman.

<sup>119</sup> Ashraf Zeitoon, Managing Partner and Chief Ideation Officer, Diplomacy Labs, Expert Meeting for the Research on Counter and Alternative Narratives, 26 November 2017, Amman.



## 7. Conclusion

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This analysis aims to guide P/CVE practitioners, donors, and policy-makers with lessons from previous counter-narrative efforts which targeted wide audiences. The research focused on the content and form of a selection of messages from four media genres, rather than the producer or medium. The sample was entirely produced during Ramadan 2017 and included: the drama series *Black Crows*, one episode from the comedy show *Watan 'a Watar*, 10 caricatures, and an advertisement by telecom company *Zain*. Frame Analysis was used to examine how these media frames sought to offer a problem definition, causal interpretations, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendations when addressing radicalisation and violent extremism. The analysis also benefited from input by 41 youth and media practitioners who participated in four FGDs, as well as local, regional, and international attendees at an expert meeting held in Amman in November 2017.

The paper argues that the media sample attempts to represent narrow counter-narratives that are limited to presenting radical narratives and then negating them. Compelling alternate and positive worldviews, which are known as alternative narratives in P/CVE research, are not offered. Instead, the media frames offer a grand narrative of 'Us-versus-Them', without presenting any new information or generating a discussion on the radicalisation process itself. They also equate Daesh almost exclusively with violent extremism without referring to the wider phenomenon. Despite the shallow grand narrative, it must be acknowledged that the series and the comic episode offered complex and intriguing characters that could have allowed for developing a compelling counter-narrative.

The dominant purpose of the media frames is a moral denunciation of Daesh and other extremists, portraying them as hypocritical and morally corrupt individuals. As such, moral evaluation is the most dominant purpose the frames achieved. For example, definitions of violent extremism in the sample rely mostly on how groups like Daesh use brutal and manipulative practices that are antithetical to Islam, whereas the causal interpretation focuses on the questionable religious authority of these groups and on how certain geo-political power vacuums allowed for the rise of extremist groups. The treatment recommendations, arguably the most important purpose of media frames that target a wide audience, are weak and underdeveloped. They urge military solutions, encourage tolerant religious practices, and/or promote high culture.

A focus on narratives is urgent at this current historical juncture. Defeating an ideology requires promoting alternate worldviews, which should be evidence-based, thoughtfully designed, and attuned to target audiences. This research is a humble step in this regard. We conclude that future narrative development would do well to consider the following:



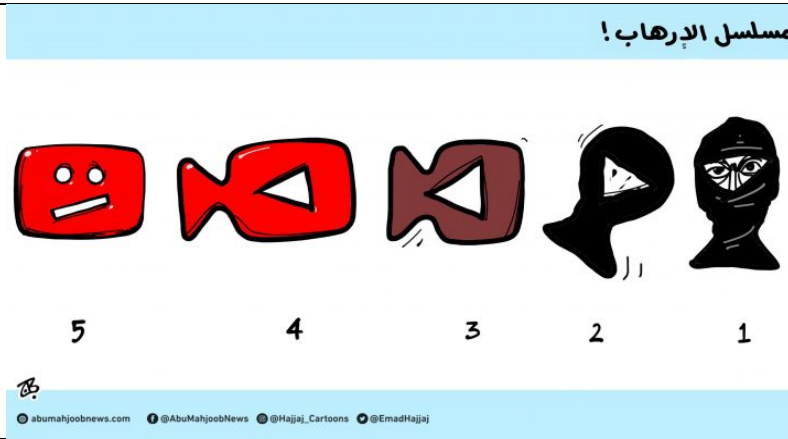
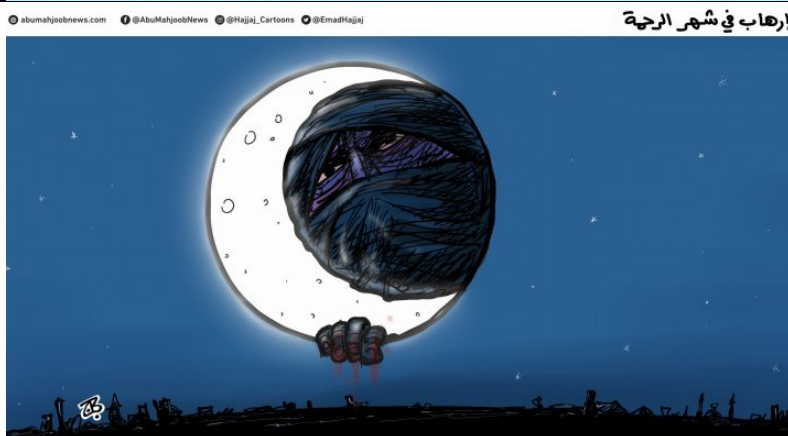
- Shift away from the existing tradition of negating violent extremist frames and move towards offering positive alternative narratives that offer novel and constructive information to the audience;
- Include diverse areas of expertise when designing a counter- or alternative narrative, including P/CVE practitioners working alongside experts in cultural production;

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- Support existing initiatives driven by local communities that have already engaged youth and capitalise on existing social currency and expertise; and
- Engage younger audiences in a manner which is comprehensible and interactive such as through theatre, poetry, and the arts.

## Annex I: Caricatures

Below are the caricatures that are not used in the text above.

Caricature	Title and Artist	Publishing Date
	<p>“The Search for the Crescent of Ramadan,” Naser Al Ja’afari</p>	<p>25 May 2017</p>
	<p>“Massacre of the Copts,” Emad Hajjaj</p>	<p>28 May 2017</p>
<p>مسلسل الإرهاب!</p> 	<p>“TV show of Terror/Series of Terror,” Emad Hajjaj</p>	<p>1 June 2017</p>
	<p>“Terror in the Month of Mercy,” Emad Hajjaj</p>	<p>4 June 2017</p>

<p>دهس المصلين المساجد في لندن</p> <p>abumahjoubnews.com @AbuMahjoubNews @Hajaj_Cartoons @EmadHajaj</p>	<p>“The Running-over of Muslims During Prayer in London,” Emad Hajjaj</p>	<p>19 June 2017</p>
<p>المهارة الدباء في الموصل ..</p> <p>2017 هدمها ظلام الدين! داعش الشعب</p> <p>1172 بناها نور الدين</p>	<p>“Blowing up the Hanging Minaret,” Emad Hajjaj</p>	<p>22 June 2017</p>
<p>البلد المختطف!</p>	<p>“The Kidnapped Country,” Emad Hajjaj</p>	<p>24 June 2017</p>

## Annex II: Details on Focus Group Discussions

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Category	Gender		Number of Participants	Date
	Females	Males		
i-Dare Youth Activists	9	3	12	8 November 2017
Students, University of Jordan	4	6	10	9 November 2017
Students, University of Jordan	2	13	15	9 November 2017
Media Practitioners	1	3	4	14 November 2017
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>41</b>	

## Annex III: Interviews with Imams and Sharia Experts on Counter-Narratives

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Category	Name	Date	Location/ Affiliation
Sharia Expert	Dr. Amer El Hafi	26 June 2016	Amman
Sharia Expert	Dr. Bassam Al Omoush	27 June 2016	Amman
Imam	Anonymous	29 June 2016	Salt
Imam	Anonymous	29 June 2016	Salt
Imam	Anonymous	30 June 2016	Rusayfeh
Imam	Anonymous	30 June 2016	Rusayfeh
Sharia Expert	Dr. Nama'a Al Banna	3 July 2016	Amman
Sharia Expert	Dr. Mohammad Majali	3 July 2016	Amman



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