Digital Jihad

Propaganda from the Islamic State

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Sammanfattning

Denna rapports syfte är att öka kunskapen om hur den så kallade Islamiska staten (IS) använder digital propaganda för att nå anhängare i väst. Även om IS har lidit betydande territoriella förluster är den digitala striden långt ifrån över. De stora sociala medieplattformarna är numera effektiva när det gäller att ta bort propaganda men trots detta hittar IS hela tiden nya sätt att producera och sprida sina budskap. IS förmåga att anpassa sig till ett ständigt föränderligt digitalt landskap kommer sannolikt att hålla organisationen vid liv genom att möjliggöra kommunikation mellan supportrar över hela världen. Den här rapporten ger en introduktion till IS-propaganda ur olika perspektiv: det specifika språk som används av IS, varumärket IS, de tidskrifter som produceras av IS och kvinnors roll i IS.

Rapporten har skrivits inom ramen för det uppdrag som regeringen har tilldelat Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut (Ku2016/01373/D – *Uppdrag till Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut (FOI) att göra kartläggningar och analyser av våldsbejakande extremistisk propaganda*).

Nyckelord: våldsbejakande religiös extremism, Islamiska staten, IS, propaganda

Summary

The purpose of this report is to increase the knowledge about how the so-called Islamic State (IS) use online propaganda to gain followers in the West. Even though IS have suffered significant territorial losses, the digital battle continues. Although large social media companies are effective in taking down IS propaganda, IS have proven to be remarkably industrious in finding ways to produce and disseminate their messages. Their ability to adapt to an ever-changing digital landscape will likely keep the organisation alive by facilitating communication between supporters all over the world. This report gives a brief introduction to IS propaganda from different perspectives: the language used by IS, the branding of IS, the glossy magazines produced by IS and the role of women in IS propaganda.

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Keywords: violent religious extremism, Islamic State, IS, propaganda

Content

1 About

This report is part of an assignment that the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) received from the Swedish Government. The assignment is to perform mapping and analyses of violent extremism (Ku2016/01373/D - *Uppdrag till Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut (FOI) att göra kartläggningar och analyser av våldsbejakande extremistisk propaganda* [Assignment to the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) to perform mapping and analyses of violent extremist propaganda]).

1.1 Contributions

The report is written by Katie Cohen and Lisa Kaati. Other researchers that have contributed to the work are:

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The report has been reviewed by Anders Strindberg.

1.2 Ethical issues

Since this project aims to examine general and structural aspects of propaganda, we study propaganda communication on a group level. Hence, in our work there is no element of registering the opinions of individuals. In an open democratic society, everybody should be free to sympathise with any ideology. In order not to compromise this stance, we have taken measures to protect individual integrity. Our analyses have been limited to open source data, meaning all data used in this study is collected from sources that are accessible to anyone, No data has been gathered from password-protected sites, closed Facebook pages, or other types of websites or social media where posted material is kept accessible only to a closed audience. This leaves out for instance IS propaganda that is disseminated via closed channels such as the message service Telegram. More

information about the ethical aspects of the data analysis is available in the first report published within the frame of this assignment.[1]

1.3 Executive Summary

Even after the fall of the caliphate, the Islamic State (IS) remains the most tangible terrorist threat in the Western world. During the time of the caliphate, it managed to attract followers from all over the world, whereof more than 40,000 travelled to the caliphate.

IS's successes in recruiting, as well as inspiring, followers can be largely contributed to their skills in producing and disseminating online propaganda. IS have produced a great quantity of propaganda material for different target groups and effectively exploited various digital communication channels for broadcasting their message. They have also taken advantage of the participatory possibilities of digital media, having supporters all over the word spread their message and create a sort of swarmcast that effectively bypasses efforts to shut them down.

IS propaganda can serve as a gateway into radicalisation as well as a support factor of an on-going radicalisation process. It also serves to intimidate the enemy, and to inspire supporters to commit lone actor attacks. The emotional content of IS propaganda is skilfully conveyed using a combination of strong imagery, slogans and symbols. Religious sources are used to legitimise IS's actions, but also to romanticise and provide an aura of spirituality to the organisation.

The glossy magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* are two of IS's many propaganda products, aimed specifically at the West. Available in a number of different languages, they are made to reach out to a wide audience. A thematic analysis of the textual content of the magazines shows that the main focus is on war. A significant portion of the content also circles around glorification of the caliphate. The brutality –mass killings, decapitations and torture- that IS are known for only comprises a small part of the content. Dabiq and Rumiyah contain several references to the Quran, not of any specific verse, but rather a scattering of different verses from different suras. The most quoted sura, at-Tawba, deals with IS core matters like fighting unbelievers, trials during wartime and loyalty and obedience.

A kind of subculture has evolved among IS followers, that includes certain aesthetics, memes, symbols and jargon. A part of the IS subculture is the network of so-called media mujahidin, individuals who create and disseminate their own

[1] *Hatbudskap och våldsbejakande extremism i digitala miljöer* (2017) [Hate messages and violent extremism in digital environments]. FOI-R--4392--SE, FOI, Sweden.

IS propaganda. A certain style, sometimes referred to as *jihadi cool* uses elements from Western youth culture, such as computer game-estethics, funny Internet cats and popular brands of food and mixes them with references to jihad.

IS promotes a highly masculine culture, where women are usually placed in the background. When mentioned, the women of IS are described as the reason for pursuing jihad, as needing protection from the enemy. Women from other groups are described in negative terms, and sexual enslavement of certain groups of women is encouraged. Propaganda directed at female potential followers offers belonging, sisterhood, romance and adventure. In a somewhat contradictory manner, women are also told their duties and restrictions.

After the territorial losses in 2017, some of the surviving followers remain in the Middle East region, while others have returned to their departure countries equipped with new experience, knowledge and capacity for violence. Some of the foreign fighters are currently detained in prisons in the Middle East region waiting to be transferred to their home countries, where the legal framework is often insufficient to determine how they should be handled.[2]

IS produce less propaganda now than before. Several key propagandists have been killed, and also many of the larger social media companies have become better at removing IS propaganda from their platforms, even though it is impossible to remove all IS propaganda from the Internet. Instead, IS are pushed towards using other forms of social media, such as private messaging services. IS have proven to be agile enough in their adaptation to changing circumstances to say that in the foreseeable future, their propaganda will continue to circulate in digital environments.

[2] Savage, C (2018) As ISIS Fighters Fill Prisons in Syria, Their Home Nations Look Away. The New York Times, July 18.

2 Introduction

This report is focused on propaganda produced by the Islamic State (herein referred to as IS). Propaganda can be defined as messages deliberately formulated for the purpose of influencing the recipient's views, opinions and behaviour in a particular direction.[3] As a communications strategy, propaganda has often had a crucial role in the military/political strategies of violent extra-parliamentary political movements.[4] Their often-insufficient financial and technological resources are compensated by communication, strategically designed to frighten enemies and win the emotional support of potential followers.

Even though IS have suffered significant territorial losses, they have not lost the digital battle. Although social media platforms keep shutting down IS content, they have proven to be remarkably industrious in finding ways to produce and disseminate propaganda content. Their ability to adapt to an ever-changing digital landscape will likely keep the organisation alive by facilitating communication between supporters all over the world.

A substantial part of all existing IS propaganda falls outside the scope of our study. Firstly, since the focus is on propaganda aimed at potential Western recruits, we have studied only English-language propaganda, leaving out the multitude of languages, mainly Arabic, that IS propaganda is produced in. Secondly, for ethical and legal reasons (see Section 1.2) we have studied only propaganda in open online channels, i.e., material that is readily available to anyone with Internet access, and that does not require any login. However, this limitation of available material suits the purpose of this report, which is to increase the knowledge about how IS use online propaganda to gain new followers in the West.

2.1 IS from a Swedish perspective

During recent years, the problem of so-called returnees has attracted much attention in Sweden. By the end of 2015, it was estimated that approximately 300 persons had travelled from Sweden to conflict areas in Syria and Iraq to fight for

[3] Milton, D. (2016). Communication Breakdown: Unraveling the Islamic State's Media Efforts, *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.*
[3] Garth J.S. & O'Donnell, V. (2014). *Propaganda & persuasion*. Sage.
[4] Ingram, H.J. (2016). *Deciphering the Siren Call of Militant Islamist Propaganda*. The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 7, no. 9.

IS.[5] In a European perspective, Sweden has a relatively high percentage of IS travellers per capita¸ only Belgium and Austria have more. Primarily young men between 18 and 30 have travelled from Europe to the caliphate (17 % of the European travellers are women).[6] A study from 2017 that included 267 travellers from Sweden to jihadi terrorist groups between June 2012 and September 2016 showed that 80% of the travellers were associated with IS, 76% were male, 75% were Swedish citizens, and 34% were born in Sweden. It is estimated that 49 out of the 267 travellers died in battle.[7]

As of 9 January 2017, approximately 150 returnees from IS resided in Sweden.[8] Returnees have usually accumulated new knowledge and new contacts, lowered their violence threshold, and sometimes become status figures or role models for other violent extremists. While away, some of them have received military training, or carried out terrorist offences. According to the Swedish Security Service, it is likely that many of these individuals will continue to operate in Sweden, in support activities or radicalisation.[9] Even if the returnees are capable of conducting terror attacks, it is estimated that only a small number of them have an intention to commit a terrorist act in Sweden. Among those individuals who do constitute a terror threat in Sweden are not only returnees, but also individuals who have been radicalised without ever having left the country.

2.2 IS and propaganda

The perhaps most striking feature of IS propaganda is the extreme, and at times deliberately choreographed, use of violence. Starting with the videotaped decapitation of James Foley in 2014 IS followed up with many more decapitation videos during 2014 and 2015. Although decapitation videos had been distributed by IS's predecessors in Iraq and was not a new phenomenon as such, IS's videos differed greatly from the grainy DVDs that had previously been seen. Slick productions with professionally filmed synchronised mass beheadings were soon all over the Internet, and made the terrorist group world-famous.[10]

However, extreme violence is not the most common theme in IS propaganda. A study by Daniel Milton shows that only approximately 9% of IS media releases

[5] The Soufan Group (2015). *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*.
[6] van Ginkel, B. & Entenmann, E. (Eds.) (2016) *The foreign fighters phenomenon in the European Union: profiles, threats & policies*. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.
[7] Gustafsson, L. & Ranstorp, M. (2017) *Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: An Analysis of open-source intelligence and statistical data*. Stockholm: Försvarshögskolan (FHS).
[8] Karlsson, P. (2017). Säpo-chefen: Över 150 jihadister har återvänt till Sverige [Security Service Chief: Over 150 jihadis have returned to Sweden]. *Aftonbladet*, 9 January, 2017.
[9] *Swedish Security Service annual report 2016*, 2016.
[10] Stern, J. and Berger, JM.(2015). *ISIS: the state of terror*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

show executions or killings.[11] In fact, there is a diversity of themes in IS propaganda messages, which is a likely explanation for IS's ability to attract such a diverse group of supporters.[12] Since the early days of the caliphate there have been daily radio messages, photographs, videos, and texts on various social media that show everything from executions to scenes from daily life in the caliphate, military operations, and religious practice. Besides the IS-produced propaganda, there is an abundance of privately produced material, in the form of videos, poems, songs, photos, and texts promoting IS.

Propaganda messages are usually not the only grounds for radicalisation or recruitment to violent extremist ideologies. Those people who have joined terrorist groups such as IS, and actually travelled to the caliphate, have usually done so after having interacted with others, online or offline.[13] Online propaganda messages serve as facilitators of the radicalization process, by capturing and retaining the individual's interest, and by constituting "proof" for radical beliefs. Well-designed propaganda may incline individuals to actively seek out people who can further introduce them into the ideology, thus making extremist organisations less dependent on an individual recruiter's abilities to use rhetoric and charisma as tools of recruitment.[14] Propaganda can be a gateway into a radicalisation process, and it can also serve as a sustaining factor in an on-going radicalisation process. There is also the matter of lone actors, individuals who commit terror attacks without any prior reciprocal contact with a terrorist group. For these individuals, propaganda is essential for the development of extreme beliefs, and also an inspiration for violent actions.

To summarise, the functions of IS propaganda are:
1) a gateway into radicalisation,
2) a facilitating aspect in an on-going radicalisation process,
3) intimidation of the enemy, and
4) inspiration for lone actor terrorists.

2.3 IS and terror attacks

On 7 April 2017, Sweden was struck by a terror attack, when a stolen delivery truck was driven into crowds of shoppers along one of Stockholm's most popular pedestrian malls, a method clearly inspired by the modus operandi of IS. The attack in Stockholm followed a trend in acts of terror in Europe during 2016,

[11] Milton, D. (2016). *Communication Breakdown: Unraveling the Islamic State's Media Efforts*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.
[12] Milton, D. (2016). *Communication Breakdown: Unraveling the Islamic State's Media Efforts*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.
[13] See, for example, Dunleavy, P. The Myth of Self-Radicalization. *IPT News*, 4 April 2012.
[14] Winter, C. (2015) *The virtual 'caliphate': Understanding Islamic state's propaganda strategy.* London: Quilliam foundation.

with attacks in Nice, Berlin, London, Brussels and Barcelona generating the most headlines.[15] In all of these cases, the perpetrators expressed sympathy for IS. Using open source information and a Wikipedia list of terrorist attacks linked to IS, we have found that terrorist attacks that can be linked to IS between January 2013 and September 2018 have killed at least 6,305 and injured 11,800.[16] Suicide bombs were used in almost half of the attacks. Firearms are the second most commonly used tactic. The number of attacks divided after tactics are shown in Table 2.1. Note that in some cases, several tactics have been used in the same attack.

Table 2.1. 132 attacks using different tactics between 2013 and 2018.

Firearms	Bombs	Suicide bombs	Vehicle bombs	Vehicle	Melee
42	20	62	14	12	16

In early 2013, the most common tactics were bombs and firearms. By the end of 2014, two new tactics emerged: vehicles and melee, or close-combat weapons. Since vehicles and knives are relatively easy to obtain, these tactics were considered suitable for lone offenders, and duly encouraged in IS propaganda. An example of IS propaganda explaining the basics of a truck attack is shown in Figure 2.2.

[15] Turkey has also been afflicted, as have countries outside Europe, e.g. Pakistan, Iraq, and Egypt.
[16] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_terrorist_incidents_linked_to_ISIL

Figure 2.2. A detailed instruction for vehicle attacks found in one of IS's magazines.

3 A (very) brief introduction to IS

3.1 2004–2014: leaving al Qaida

In 2004, ten years before the declaration of "the caliphate", Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, founder of Jihadist network *Jama' at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* (JTJ, 'Monotheism and Jihad'), swore an oath of loyalty to al-Qaida.[17] At this point he also changed the name of his organisation to *al-Qaida in Iraq* (AQI).[18] Through a series of events, AQI eventually developed into IS.

Basically, Zarqawi shared al-Qaida's violent ideology and desire to restore the caliphate, the Islamic empire from the medieval times. However, in order to achieve this end, Zarqawi advocated a more extreme use of violence against civilian as well as military targets[19], and occasionally chose to act independently of al-Qaida's directives.[20] Usama Bin Ladin, the al-Qaida leader at the time, held that the Muslim population should be persuaded with the help of ideology rather than force, and that armed struggle should only be aimed at the West.[21] He recommended that the killing of Muslims should be avoided as far as possible. Zarqawi had a different view on the matter. By invoking the concept of *takfir*[22], Zarqawi led some brutal attacks against Iraqi Shiites after the fall of Saddam Hussein, without approval from al-Qaida's central leadership.[23] In the end, the brutal actions of AQI and Zarqawi tarnished central al-Qaida's reputation, which led to a dramatic decline in al-Qaida's popularity within jihadist circles between 2004 and 2006. Al-Qaida's leaders, Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri, were strongly criticized for the brutal and indiscriminate violence that Zarqawi executed in the name of al-Qaida.[24]

In 2006, Zarqawi was killed in an American aerial attack, and AQI changed its name to the Islamic State in Iraq, ISI. This was the beginning of several years of serious setbacks. Offended by their indiscriminate violence against Sunni as well as Shia Muslims, certain Sunni tribes, with support from the United States, took

[17] Can also be spelled *al-Qaeda* or *al-Qa'ida*.
[18] Holmquist, E. (2015) *ISIS and Hezbollah Conduits of Instability*, Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), FOI-R, 1650-1942; 4058.
[19] Stern J. & Berger J.M. (2015). *ISIS: the state of terror*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
[20] McCants, W. (2015) *The ISIS Apocalypse*, St. Martin's Press.
[21] Ibid.
[22] The notion that a 'true Muslim' may judge other Muslims as apostates, which in turn legitimizes killing them. For a more detailed discussion of this reasoning, see Chapter 5.
[23] McCants, W. (2015) *The ISIS Apocalypse*, St. Martin's Press.
[24] Drennan, S. (2008). *Constructing takfir from 'Abdullah 'Azzam to Djamel Zitouni*, CTC Sentinel, volume 1, issue 7.

up arms against ISI. In 2010, ISI was forced underground.[25] The same year, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi took over leadership of the now heavily weakened organisation. When the civil war in Syria flared up in 2010, Baghdadi took the strategically important decision to establish a presence in Syria (the Syrian branch of al-Qaida was henceforth known as *Jabhat al-Nusra*). Thanks to Jabhat al-Nusra's military successes, arms and money eventually flooded across the border to the Islamic State in Iraq. By 2013, the schism with central al-Qaida had deepened to such an extent that Baghdadi chose to break their cooperation. Taking al-Qaida's side, Jabhat al-Nusra in turn broke loose from Baghdadi. Since then, IS and Jabhat al-Nusra have been at war against each other in Syria.[26]

At the same time as Baghdadi waged war in Syria, he could capitalize on the Sunni discontent that the US-supported Shia-dominated Iraqi government had caused. When in 2012 the Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki struck down peaceful country-wide Sunni demonstrations, several members of the Sunni minority in Iraq saw a need for change.[27] This opened the opportunity for ISI to recruit in Iraq. With the help of soldiers from Saddam Hussein's former army, ISI gained the capacity to conquer new territory. In 2013, ISI advanced into Syria and thus changed its name to ISIS (the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria).[28] In February 2014, Al-Qaida finally disavowed IS, due to its extreme brutality even against other militant Islamist groups in Syria. IS is known for using extreme violence against everyone who stands in their path. They have also effectively developed terror tactics into military tactics, for example by driving armoured trucks, fully-loaded with explosives, into military targets. This way, they were able to dominate many other groups with which they had initially shared territories.

IS's successes at this point in time were dependent on several factors: the Sunni dissatisfaction in both Iraq and Syria, the unsuccessful reconciliation after the Iraq war, the flow of international donations to IS, and the world's shift in focus from Iraq to the conflict in Syria. Together, these factors culminated in IS proclaiming the caliphate in 2014.[29]

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[25] Holmquist, E. (2015) *ISIS and Hezbollah Conduits of Instability*, Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), FOI-R, 1650-1942; 4058.
[26] Holmquist, E., *What's in a name? Jabhat al-Nusra's reasons for 'disassociating' from al-Qaeda.* FOI Memo 5802, 2016.
[27] Svensson, J. (2016) Det kidnappade Ickevåldet: En omvärldsanalys [Non-violence kidnapped: A global analysis]. In *Ickevåldets vägar: Fred i terrorns tid* [The paths of non-violence: Peace in the time of terror].
[28] The acronym ISIS has been used interchangeably with ISIL, (the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant). The Levant comprises an area including Syria, parts of Jordan, Israel, Lebanon and Turkey.
[29] Phillips, A. (2014) The Islamic State's challenge to international order. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*. 68 (5); Cockburn, P. (2015) *The Rise of the Islamic State and the new Sunni Revolution.* Updated edition. London: Verso.

3.2 2014–2017: establishing a proto-state

The explicit goal which IS strives toward, is the expansion of what they call "the caliphate". In Islamic historical writing, the *khilafa,* or caliphate, is a political entity that unifies all Muslims. In he Salafi Islamic tradition, Muhammad's time and the rule of the first four *khalifas*, called "the rightly-guided," between 632 and 661, is considered a golden age and a model for authentic Islam.[30] By restoring this mythical caliphate IS sought to recreate this mythological time in present-day reality, concerning such matters as faith, law, and religious practice.

By June 2014, IS had gained enough territory to make this a reality. The caliphate was claimed, with al-Baghdadi as its caliph, and Raqqah as its capital. ISIS became IS, now dropping their geographical limits to suit their ambition to expand. During the preceding months, IS had been translating much of their Arabic propaganda into English. They started to produce magazines in English, French and German. A massive propaganda campaign directed at the West was issued, wherein Muslims of all trades - doctors, engineers, bureaucrats- were encouraged to come and live in the caliphate. One of the most distinguishing features of IS is the geographical diversity of their members. It is estimated that more than 40,000 citizens from 80 different countries travelled to Syria and Iraq to join IS.[31]

Figure 3.1. Destroyed passports of people who joined the caliphate.

[30] Gibb, Hamilton A. R. (1962) Some Considerations on the Sunni Theory of the Caliphate. In *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, Stanford J. Shaw & William R. Polk (ed.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
[31] Cook, J., & Vale, G. (2018). From Daesh to "Diaspora": Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State. *London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College*.

During 2015, several attacks against IS resulted in territorial losses. Internationally, there was a simultaneous increase in IS-related terror attacks. According to analyst Matthew Henman, head of IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, these attacks served to distract from the on-the-ground losses, and to maintain an image of strength.[32] By the end of the year IS's focus started to shift from state-building to war-mongering.

In 2016, IS's international terror attacks continued to increase. The calls to *hijra*[33] were gradually replaced with calls for lone actor attacks at the places sympathisers happened to reside. In 2016 and 2017 the IS magasine Rumiyah featured several explicit guides for prospective lone-actor terrorists. Locally, they continued to lose territory and fighters. By the spring of 2017, IS was under severe pressure, but still managed to carry out attacks against Christians in Egypt. Later the same year IS suffered several defeats against Iraqi and Kurdish troops, together with Western airstrikes. By March 2018, IS had lost 98% of the territories they controlled three years earlier.[34]

3.3 2017 and beyond: post-caliphate IS

After losing their capitals Mosul and Raqqa (in July and October 2017 respectively), IS can no longer by any means be considered a state. The people of the caliphate have mostly been killed, detained, deported or dispersed. Of the latter group, some have become so called returnees. A recent report showed that while 41,490 IS affiliates remain in Iraq and Syria, there are 7,366 returnees to their countries of departure.[35] Though slower than expected, the flow of returnees still poses a challenge for the receiving countries.[36]

A UN report from August 2018 estimates that more than 20,000 members remain in Syria and Iraq. In eastern Syria, IS has been able to hold on to territory in a few small towns and villages. However, most IS members are dispersed and embedded in different locations in the area. Certain IS facilities, such as Amaq news agency, continues to function. The prognosis offered by the UN is that what remains of IS is likely to survive due to complex stabilization challenges in the area. Insecure environments are safe spaces for terrorists and IS can easily obtain

[32] Stack, L. (2015) How ISIS expanded its threat. *The New York Times*, 14 November, 2015.
[33] See section 5.2.
[34] BBC News (2018) *Islamic State and the crisis in Iraq and Syria in maps*. 28 March, 2018.
[35] Cook, J., & Vale, G. (2018) *From Daesh to "Diaspora": Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State.* London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College.
[36] Seventh report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat. *United Nations*, August 2018.

arms and materiel in areas with weak governance. It excels in the manufacture of improvised explosive devices and in the weaponization of drones.[37]

However, many foreign IS fighters have relocated to other countries, mainly to Afghanistan, but also to Libya where between 3,000 and 4,000 IS members are estimated to reside. There are also small IS-affiliated cells in South-East Asia, West Africa, Sinai, Yemen, Somalia and the Sahel. On 18 February 2018, the *Islamic State West Africa Province* (ISWAP) kidnapped 111 schoolgirls from the Nigerian town of Dapchi and released them three days later in exchange for a large ransom payment. In May 2018, Indonesia was afflicted with a wave of deadly attacks executed by IS-linked local network *Jamaah Ansharut Daulah*. During two days, three families including children as young as eight years, independenty of one another carried out, or tried to carry out, bombings against churches and a police office. IS claimed responsibility for the successful attacks through its Amaq news outlet. The events in Indonesia have given rise to a concern that IS may be adopting a new modus operandi of using families, including women and children, as suicide bombers.[38]

The threat from IS in its current form is diverse and hard to predict. When former IS fighters relocate, so does their expertise in military tactics and their skills in handling weaponry and explosive devices. An ICSR report from February 2018 states that while the return of foreign fighters will not likely lead to an increase of terrorist plots, it will increase the complexity of such plots. So far, less than a fifth of all known jihadist plots in Europe have been planned by returnees. Most have been untrained lone offenders using crude methods, such as knives or vehicles. With the advent of IS-trained jihadists, there is a fear of a professionalization of worldwide Jihadi terrorism. The coordinated attacks in Paris in November 2015[39] and in Brussels March 2016[40] were planned and executed by returnees, while the simpler knife-and-vehicle plots have been executed by individuals without training or expertise. In early 2018, authorities in Europe remained concerned about this more advanced terrorist threat.[41]

In the final three months of 2017, IS's official online strategic communication capabilities were decimated, leading to a notable decline of propaganda

[37] Seventh report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat. *United Nations*, August 2018.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Neumann, P. (2018*) ISIS and terrorism in Europe: What next?* ICSR, February 16, 2018.
[40] Renard, T. and Coolsaet, R. (2018) *How Belgium overcame the threat from returning terrorist fighters*. Royal United Services Institute, March 22, 2018.
[41] Neumann, P. (2018*) ISIS and terrorism in Europe: What next?* ICSR, February 16, 2018.

distribution.[42] While it slightly recovered during the first months of 2018, it reached an all time low by June 2018. However, some IS propaganda bureaus outside of Iraq and Syria have increased their production in 2018.[43] IS continues to use social media to urge its supporters in Europe to execute attacks in their country of residence. The 2018 FIFA World Cup became a focus for propaganda urging lone individuals or small cells to carry out attacks. IS continues to disseminate various attack methodologies, as well as instructions for creating bombs and explosive vests. The recent trend has been away from directed and enabled attacks towards inspired attacks.[44]

Figure 3.2. A threat from IS bearing the Al-Hayat logo (see Chapter 4).

[42] Winter, C. & Ingram, H. (2018) *Terror, online and off. Recent trends in Islamic State propaganda operations*. Texas national security network, University of Texas.
[43] Milton, D. (2018) *Down, but Not Out: An Updated examination of the Islamic State's Visual Propaganda*. Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point.
[44] UN (2018). *Seventh report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat*. United Nations, August 2018.

4 IS and propaganda in the Internet age

IS has been effective in both inspiring and attracting followers from around the world, and in striking fear into its enemies. They have reached a far wider global audience than any other terrorist organization.[45] Their success in reaching out is in large part due to their agility and understanding of how digital channels can be used for maximum impact. The ability to learn and adapt is critical to IS's success.

4.1 IS's propaganda apparatus

IS has a multi-faceted, but relatively closed, media organisation with restricted access; in addition, it is difficult to map since it seems to undergo continual change.[46] Since the focus of this report is on the content and spread of IS propaganda, the official propaganda apparatus is merely touched upon in this section.[47]

The foundation of IS's media organisation was laid in 2006, when ISI established the *al-Furqan* Institute for Media Production. A report from political scientist and terror researcher Daniel Milton at CTC West Point recounts some of the contents of declassified documents from AQI/ISI regarding media organisation. From these documents, it becomes apparent that a significant amount of time and resources have been invested in the organisation's media operations. The documents also reveal a very rigid and hierarchical organisational structure, where the central organisation controlled the local agencies. Within the media offices there were specific branches for audio, video and print, arranged in a manner rivalling that of a multinational corporation or government agency.[48]

Besides *Al-Furqan*, which produces brochures, films, posters, and material for the Internet and official statements, IS's centrally-organised media centres include *Al-Hayat*, which publishes inside the caliphate-videos, and the radio network *al-Bayan*. There is also the *Ajnad* foundation, which mostly publishes

[45] Cook, J. & Vale, G. (2018). *From Daesh to "Diaspora": Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State.* London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College.
[46] Milton, D. (2016). *Communication Breakdown: Unraveling the Islamic State's Media Efforts.* Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.
[47] For a more comprehensive view on IS media see *ISIS's Media Network in the Era After the Fall of the Islamic State,* The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. 25 January, 2018.
[48] Milton, D. (2016) *Communication Breakdown: Unraveling the Islamic State's Media Efforts.* Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.

nasheeds, i.e., traditional Arabic a capella songs. IS write and produce their own nasheeds, for use as revolutionary songs. Their lyrics deal with such topics as jihad, the caliphate, or allegiance to al-Baghdadi. They are not only played on the radio, but are also used for setting IS film material to music, among other things.[49] Most of the material analysed in this report is produced by Al-Hayat, founded in 2014, and specialized in producing material in different languages, such as English, German, French, and Russian. Al-Hayat's production includes the magazines *Dabiq*, *Dar al-Islam*, and *Rumiyah*, intended for an international Muslim audience.[50]

Figure 4.1. The logotype of Al-Hayat media centre is similar to Al-Jazeeras logotype with its teardrop-shaped logo of Arabic script.

Over time, IS's media production has become increasingly decentralized. In 2016 approximately three-quarters of the production came from one of the over thirty official regional bureaus.[51] Besides the officially sanctioned propaganda, a large amount of IS propaganda is created by individual followers, or groups of followers. Propaganda from individuals is beyond the control of the organisation itself. Yet, by keeping copious quantities of raw material available, IS makes it easier for individuals to create their own propaganda, to mutual benefit.[52]

[49] Schatz B., Inside the world of Isis propaganda music. *Mother Jones*, 9 February 2015.
[50] Milton, D. (2016) *Communication Breakdown: Unraveling the Islamic State's Media Efforts*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.
[51] Zelin, A. (2015) Picture or it didn't happen: A snapshot of the Islamic State's official media output. *Perspectives on Terror*. 9.
[52] Winter, C. (2015) *The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy*. Quilliam.

4.2 Online dissemination channels

IS have efficiently used different communication channels to disseminate its messages on social media. A common practice is that the same message is disseminated simultaneously via different channels; for example, a blog post can be shared on Twitter and Facebook, or a link to a magazine can be published in a discussion forum. The channels used for dissemination also vary over time.[53]

For some time around 2015, Twitter was the favoured channel among IS's followers. In August 2016, The Guardian reported that during the previous six months, Twitter had shut down 235,000 IS-friendly accounts that transgressed the company's guidelines concerning dissemination of terrorism and violent threats.[54] To get around this, users started hashtagging the material, making it possible for followers to search hashtags instead of following specific accounts. Common hashtags associated with IS propaganda were *#IS, #Islamicstate, #khilafah,* and *#ISIS,* but sometimes completely unrelated hashtags were used to attract new followers. In January 2016, for example, the hashtag *#justinbieber* was used to attract some of Justin Bieber's approximately 74 million followers to an account that showed IS videos.[55] Also the hashtag *#blacklivesmatter* was used by IS as a means of reaching out to African-American Muslims.[56]

Since 2016, Twitter has more or less been replaced by the messaging service *Telegram*[57] which still seems to be the main communication platform for IS's sympathizers.[58] Facebook and ask.fm[59] have also been frequently used to spread IS propaganda, but IS-friendly accounts have been shut down on a daily basis, since the material violates the administrators' rules. Another way to disseminate propaganda is via blogs, especially Tumblr, which is a blog format that focuses on image content. Tumblr is mainly used anonymously by young people to distribute entertaining photos. In 2015, jihadism researcher Linda Dayan wrote that it was easier for IS propaganda to pass via Tumblr than through bigger

[53] Fisher, A. (2015) How jihadist networks maintain a persistent online presence. *Perspectives on terrorism* 9.3.
[54] Woolf, N., Twitter suspends 235,000 accounts in six months for promoting terrorism. *The Guardian,* 18 August 2016.
[55] Islamic State hijack Justin Bieber hashtag to try and spread graphic video about the terror group. *News.com.au,* 22 January 2016.
[56] Vidino, L. & Hughes, S. (2015) *From Retweet to Raqqa, Program on Extremism*. The George Washington University.
[57] Telegram is a closed channel, so will therefore not be analysed within the frame of this project.
[58] Prucha, N. (2016) IS and the Jihadist Information Highway – Projecting Influence and Religious Identity via Telegram. *Perspectives on Terrorism,* 10(6); Russon, M.A., & Murdock, J., Welcome to the bizarre and frightening world of Islamic State channels on Telegram. *International Business Times,* 23 May 2016
[59] A social network where users create profiles and ask questions of other users.

platforms,[60] since Tumblr has fewer resources, with only 318 employees to moderate more than 200 million blogs.[61]

Posts on anonymous file-sharing sites and Twitter accounts are removed quicker now than they were before. However, the agility of IS's media operatives will allow them to evolve their strategies and find new channels to continue their activities in. Various digital venues provide a low-cost, high-impact method for extremists to publish their messages. The ever-changing digital landscape makes it near impossible to prevent them from evading bans and shut-downs by moving from platform to platform.

4.3 The success factors of IS propaganda

4.3.1 Construct a simple and appealing narrative

According to Haroro Ingram, all IS propaganda messages do in a way or another, treat some aspect of the interaction between three factors: *identity*, *crisis*, and *solution*.[62] The primary objective of conveying the impression that some kind of a crisis or threat is imminent, is to make the receiver feel stressed. Individuals under stress have more difficulty remaining rational in the face of factual matters, becoming more inclined to seek fast, absolute solutions, a tendency that favours totalitarian organizations such as IS. The crisis that IS tries to impart involves the dilution of true Islam, attacks or discrimination against Muslims, threatened traditions, and a decadent, meaningless, existence in the West.[63] Crisis entails the need for a *solution*, which the propaganda must also present. Devotion and solidarity to one's own group are, according to Ingram, the solution that IS offers. By joining those who fight for "true" Islam, individuals seek to find a way out of the meaningless and degrading existence they have purportedly been forced to live.

The intent of the *identity*-building messages is to convince the reader that the world can be organised according to "we" and "them". Creating a group identity requires another group to serve as a contrast to one's own. We learn who we are by developing an understanding of what we are not. Derogation of other groups is a way to strengthen positive social identity. It can also be a way to seek

[60] Dayan, L. (2015). ISIS Social Media and the Case of Tumblr. *BeeHive. Middle East Social Media.*
[61] On 25 April 2017, Tumblr had almost 345 million bloggers and 404 employees; it is unclear how many of them work with controlling content. See https://www.tumblr.com/about
[62] Ingram, H.J. (2016) *Deciphering the Siren Call of Militant Islamist Propaganda*. The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 7, no. 9.
[63] Ibid.

acceptance from other group members.[64] For IS, everyone who is not ready to adopt their ideology are defamed using invectives such as *"filthy kuffar," murtadin,* or *rafida* (An explanation of these concepts is given in chapter 5).[65] Some studies suggest that a perceived threat from another group draws one more closely to one's own group, and also fosters generalization and prejudice.[66] The perception of threat also seems to make individuals more inclined to favour violent and drastic solutions.[67] A crisis-enforcing message is thus also identity-enforcing, while making recipients more susceptible to radical solution-enforcing messages.

Figure 4.2 Identity messages in IS propaganda.

Constructions of crisis, solution, and identity cross-fertilize each other in the production of a propaganda narrative. According to Ingram, if someone accepts one of the messages, they often accept the others also; taken together, the different messages create a comprehensive worldview. The stronger the value messages about the groups, the stronger the experience of conflict and the desire for a solution, which in turn creates ever larger intergroup differences.[68] A drastically simplified worldview emerges, offering an escape from an

[64] Noel, J. G., Wann, D. L., & Branscombe, N. R. (1995) Peripheral ingroup membership status and public negativity toward outgroups. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *68*(1), 127.
[65] Ingram, H.J. (2016) Deciphering the Siren Call of Militant Islamist Propaganda. The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 7, no. 9.
[66] See. for example, Tajfel, H. (1982). Social psychology of intergroup relations. *Annual review of psychology*, *33*(1); and Brewer, M. B.(1999) The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love and outgroup hate? *Journal of Social Issues*, *55*.
[67] Hogg, M. A., Meehan, C., & Farquharson, J. (2010). The solace of radicalism: Self-uncertainty and group identification in the face of threat. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *46*(6).
[68] Ingram, H. J. (2016) *Deciphering the Siren Call of Militant Islamist Propaganda*. The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 7, no. 9.

increasingly complex, ambiguous, ambivalent, and unpredictable world. IS propaganda can thus permeate many different aspects of an individual's life, and create an effective influence.

4.3.2 Reach out to diverse groups

Generally speaking, there is no one-size-fits-all in propaganda messages. Even within well-defined demographic groups, there may be individual differences that require strategies adapted for different receivers. Therefore, adapting to the target audience is a requirement for a successful propaganda strategy. Mainly, the two target groups are potential followers, who are subject to persuasion, and potential or actual opponents, who are subject to threat and provocation.[69]

Since there seem to be several pathways into radicalisation, each with its own set of driving forces and motives, a large individual variation can be assumed regarding the extent to which IS followers are motivated by such factors as religion, ideology, or politics. [70] This variation is catered to in the propaganda, which contains a diversity of themes –such as community, adventure, moral duty, or security and tradition– adapted to the variation in background, personality and demographic status of the prospective recipients. Furthermore, the propaganda messages are delivered through a variety of outlets in several languages, all in order to reach out as widely as possible. Some of the different themes used in IS propaganda are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Propaganda is not only aimed toward followers, but also toward enemies, as a way of intimidation, or a testament of strength. The part of IS propaganda that targets enemies usually takes the form of extremely violent films, with titles such as *A message to David Cameron*, or *A message to America*. Often, IS's most spectacularly violent videos are translated into English before being published, which indicates that they are intended to reach a large international audience. Besides showing strength and potential for violence, this part of the propaganda ultimately aims to sustain a war against IS, by provoking receivers to actively choose sides and pressure their governments to become engaged against IS.[71] Within these displays of violence, there is also a message to potential followers. Films showing executions are often framed within a listing of crimes that the victims have participated in, or facilitated. Through this framing, the executions are presented as an administration of justice. In such a narrative, the Islamic State is depicted as a strong and potent protector of the Sunni Muslim community. A

[69] *Säkerhetspolisens årsbok 2015* [Swedish Security Service 2015].
[70] McCauley, C. & Moskalenko, S. (2018) Mechanisms of political radicalization: Pathways towards terrorism, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20:3.
[71] Winter, C, How the Islamic State makes sure you pay attention to it, *War on the Rocks*, 12 February 2015; Berger, J.M., Can we win the war against ISIS by focusing on social media? *Huffington Post,* 24 February 2015.

state's capacity for violence indicates a capacity to protect its citizens. Another function of using violence in propaganda is to attract violent individuals.[72]

4.3.3 Be everywhere, all the time

Since IS, besides being the most geographically wide-spread terrorist organisation, is the first terrorist organisation that has fully taken advantage of digital channels to spread their messages, a relevant question is: How does going online affect the efficacy of propaganda? If anything, when classical theories of propaganda are applied to the Internet age, it seems the possibilities of interaction and multimodal messages make propaganda more powerful. Digital channels often do not function according to the traditional sender-message-receiver model of mass communication. Instead, the receiver can partake actively, by liking, sharing, or commenting material. It is this engagement in propaganda that makes possible so-called online-radicalization.

In 1965, philosopher and sociologist Jacques Ellul published the book *Propaganda: the formation of men's attitudes*[73] wherein he presents a theory about what makes propaganda effective. Fifty years later, it is possible to see how digital environments have created what Ellul considered the perfect conditions for the optimal functioning of propaganda.

Firstly, according to Ellul, propaganda is not about implanting new ideas in the receiver, but about cultivating and developing ideas that already exist. Later psychological research shows that individuals often tend to more readily accept information that confirms their own beliefs. This tendency, called *confirmation bias*, means that individuals will themselves search for, and choose to believe, messages that confirm opinions they already have.[74] If the propaganda succeeds in retaining and developing the individual's interest in a certain type of ideas, this can lead to a successive narrowing of their sphere of interests, where alternative sources of information are increasingly dismissed. The individual gradually becomes alienated from groups with other views. The resultant isolation leads to prejudice against other groups, and also a normalisation of ideas and actions that the receiver might earlier have considered extreme. Above all, it ties the individual more strongly to the ideology in question. On the Internet, it is easy to reject sources of information that contradict one's own views, resulting in exposure to only those arguments that support one's existing views, which

[72] McCants, W. (2015) *The ISIS Apocalypse*, Picadore.
[73] Ellul, J. (1965) *Propaganda: the formation of men's attitudes*. Knopf.
[74] Nickerson, R. (1998) Confirmation bias: A ubiquitous phenomenon in many guises. *Review of General Psychology* 2(2).

eventually reinforces them.[75] In this way, the cultivation of views becomes self-generating.

Second, Ellul considers that for propaganda to function optimally, it should be directed at all spheres of the individual's life, both private and public, so that it entirely surrounds the person. Our innate tendency towards confirmation bias, together with a vast selection of material on the Internet will aid in creating this enclosing effect. Ellul reasons that quantity is important, since it is the repetition, or rather the constant stream of a certain type of message, which in the long run can shape the individual's views. This applies very well to IS's online propaganda. As described further on in this chapter, every day an enormous amount of IS propaganda is produced, reproduced, and distributed to a substantial number of platforms.

Third, an important aim of propaganda is to construct a symbiosis between the sender and the receiver. The interactivity of social media has partially blurred the boundaries between the receiver and the sender, which reinforces this symbiosis.[76] Empirical studies show that individuals who have argued actively for a particular view tend to develop a stronger opinion than do persons who remain passive in discussions.[77] Active participation in the reproduction of propaganda can, in other words, strengthen the notion that its message is correct.

4.4 Media mujahidin

What above all makes IS's media strategy effective is the rapid and far-reaching dissemination of propaganda. IS propaganda is spread to a great extent by a number of self-appointed media activists, people without a formal connection to IS who consider themselves as pursuing jihad via the Internet. Beyond disseminating IS-produced material, these activists often search out the latest news items, in order to distribute re-written, IS-adapted, versions of them.[78] These self-designated missionaries are key components of IS's propaganda strategy. IS's jihad is not only about armed struggle, but also about supporting the caliphate through journalistic deeds.[79]

[75] Sunstein, C. R. (1999). The law of group polarization. *University of Chicago Law School, John M. Olin Law & Economics* (91).
[76] Winter, C. (2015) The Virtual 'Caliphate': *Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy*. London: Quilliam.
[77] Brauer, M., Judd, C. M., & Gliner, M. D (2014) The effects of repeated expressions on attitude polarization during group discussions. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *68*(6).
[78] Winter, C. (2015) *The virtual 'Caliphate': understanding Islamic State's propaganda strategy.* London: Quilliam.
[79] I'lāmī ('media man'), you are a mujāhid too, *Salahuddin Province Media Office*, 19 May 2015.

This means that an individual can identify him- or herself as a mujahed simply by sitting in front of a computer screen and circulating propaganda. The feeling of being part of something bigger than oneself, along with encouragement from followers on social media, is a sufficiently motivating factor to make many feel that it is worth their while to spend time creating and disseminating propaganda, even when their own religious or ideological convictions are not especially strong.[80] IS activism on the Internet has developed into something of a sub-culture, where participation in the consumption and distribution of propaganda material is a way to cultivate and fortify group solidarity. When a message is spread within a social network, its credibility is strengthened, since the people involved in the network share a sense of solidarity and trust.[81]Creating a participatory culture around IS propaganda is an effective strategy for psychologically tying supporters closer to the organisation. Besides strengthening the sense of belonging, the active repetition of a certain message tends to increase the conviction that this message is true.[82]

Individual interactions between sympathisers evolve into large network structures and collective behaviour that facilitates the continuous sharing of material. The members of the network often have several accounts, on different platforms, which seem to be constantly changing.[83] This is an essentially different way of communicating from the type of mass communication that characterizes for instance radio and TV media, especially in there not being a clear distinction between sender and receiver, nor a producer with control of how the material is distributed. The one who secures the accessibility of the material is not the producer, but the network of media mujahidin.

Despite efforts by governments and administrators of social media platforms to shut down channels for distribution of propaganda, IS continues to make available both new and old material. Ali Fisher compares the network of media mujahidin to a swarm of bees that can disperse and regroup as needed.[84] This distributed network form is more resistant to shutdowns and obstructions compared to a network where the content is disseminated via only a few official accounts. While a centralized network can disintegrate when its central node is shut down, a distributed network can survive even if several of its nodes are blocked. The latter type of network is actually capable of evading disruption by

[80] Abdul-Rehman, M. (2015) *Understanding and combatting terrorist propaganda under the broad CVE agenda*, Australia's Regional Summit to Counter Violent Extremism, Sydney, 11 June 2015.
[81] Ingram, H.J., *Deciphering the Siren Call of Militant Islamist Propaganda*. The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 7, no. 9.
[82] Wojcieszak, M. (2010). 'Don't talk to me': effects of ideologically homogeneous online groups and politically dissimilar offline ties on extremism. *New Media & Society*, *12*(4), 637-655.
[83] Carter, JA., Maher, S. and Neumann, PR. (2014) *# Greenbirds: Measuring Importance and Influence in Syrian Foreign Fighter Networks*. ICSR, 2014.
[84] Fisher, A. (2015) How jihadist networks maintain a persistent online presence. *Perspectives on terrorism* 9.3.

switching to the right platform at the right time. This makes it more difficult for authorities to locate the material on the new platform in time to contact its owner or administrator. The longer this takes, the more time the media mujahidin have to download and continue spreading the material.

Before the material is removed from the Internet, enough users have managed to download and disseminate it, to make it possible for the material to survive efforts to have it removed. A video is the most vulnerable before it is published on Internet, when it is being stored in only a few locations. Once it has been distributed in an efficient way and downloaded by a number of media mujahidin, it continues to live on even when removed from the platforms on which it was originally published. The most effective strategy, in this respect, is to post the material on major channels that reach the general public. The authorities and platform owners usually manage to remove the material rather quickly, but by then the material has often been downloaded onto thousands of computers, and can be shared upon request at any time. A Twitter user can request a specific film for instance. If another user has it, he or she may post it on YouTube, where it will be available for a short time, and answer the request with a link to the video.[85]

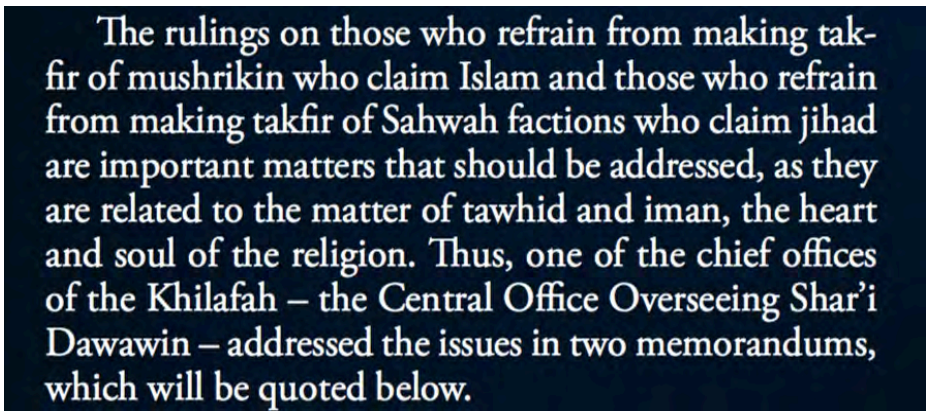
An example of this mechanism was the release of the video *Salil al-sawarim* (SAS4), by al-Furqan.[86] The video was published on the Twitter account of the *al-I'tasimus* media division as well as on a number of jihadist forums at lunchtime on Saturday, 17 May 2014. Within 24 hours, the video had been viewed 56,998 times on YouTube. When the video was removed from YouTube the following Monday morning, the film had had more than 150,000 viewings. Between the time the video was published and removed, its Arabic name had been mentioned in 32,313 tweets (more than 800 per hour), written by 6,428 users.[87] These tweets contained links to different platforms, where more users had posted the film, but also to *justpaste.it* and *archive.org.* On *justpaste.it* there were additional links to other platforms where the video could be downloaded, such as *archive.org* and *gulfup.com.*[88] The ability of IS propaganda to evade removal has been compared to the Hydra, the many-headed monster in Greek mythology, which grew two new heads every time one of its heads was chopped off.[89]

[85] Fisher, A. (2015) How jihadist networks maintain a persistent online presence. *Perspectives on terrorism* 9.3.
[86] The one-hour-long film, which in English is called "Clanging of the Swords," shows IS operations in Iraq and executions of its enemies, mixed with accounts of how a citizen of the Caliphate should behave.
[87] Prucha, N. (2014) Is this the most successful release of a jihadist video ever? *jihadica.com.*
[88] Fisher, A. (2015) How jihadist networks maintain a persistent online presence. *Perspectives on terrorism* 9.3.
[89] Picart, CJS. (2015) "Jihad Cool/Jihad Chic": The Roles of the Internet and Imagined Relations in the Self-Radicalization of Colleen LaRose (Jihad Jane). *Societies* 5.2:354-383.

5 The language of IS

5.1 Interpreting IS jargon

When reading through an English-language IS propaganda product, one repeatedly encounters words unfamiliar to the English language. Below is a quote from the second issue of Rumiyah:



While this quote is difficult enough to read even for a person familiar with Islamic concepts, it is all the more unsuitable for being subject to a computerised analysis using an English dictionary. The English-language IS propaganda is usually studded with Arabic words, as well as references, allusions, and quotes from religious texts. Yet, most of the world's Muslims do not have Arabic as their mother tongue and many of them can neither write, read, nor speak it. The literal content of the propaganda would likely be more available to the target group were they expressed in plain English, but IS's cumbersome linguistic style has at least two advantages: 1) it serves to strengthen the recipient's identity as part of a Muslim minority, and 2) it lends religious authority to IS's ideology.

Within a group, a common linguistic style is often adopted for two purposes. Firstly, it is a way of facilitating communication. Secondly, it is a way for the group's members to strengthen their sense of belonging, and also increase cohesiveness of the group as a whole.[90] A group linguistic style, what we call a jargon, can also be used as a way to mark distance from the establishment. This can be observed for instance in certain youth cultures. The incitement for using a special kind of IS-jargon is thus to instil in its members and sympathisers the feeling of initiation, of being part of an exclusive group.

[90] Gonzales, A.L., Hancock, J.T, & Pennebaker, J.W. (2009). Language style matching as a predictor of social dynamics in small groups. *Communication Research*.

Jargon words are well understood by those in the group, but not always for those outside it. Sometimes words are made up. Other times regular words are given a special context-dependent significance. They can, for instance, be used ironically or metaphorically. Within bilingual ethnic minority groups, it is not uncommon to use a mix of the two languages. When a group is in strong opposition, or conflict, with another group, it seems that they are especially innovative when it comes to describing the conflicting group in derogatory terms. These words are not merely descriptive, but serve to convey a feeling or attitude, such as disgust, contempt or aggression. As will be observed later in this chapter, this applies to IS as well.

Being a Jihadist organisation IS mostly use jargon that builds upon a certain interpretation of Islam. In this chapter, we will examine how IS use religious terms, that for most Muslims are usually laden with emotion and value, and impose their own interpretations onto them. Since, among Muslims, Arabic holds a position as a sacred language, the Arabic words that appear so frequently in IS propaganda are usually there to lend an aura of 'sacredness' to the text, to provide the messages with an assurance of religious legitimacy. The ideological tradition of Salafism, to which IS belongs, strongly emphasizes the authority of the Quran and the *ahadith*.[91] In Salafist argumentation, consequently, quotes from these sources reinforce argumentation and lend the text an aura of religious legitimacy, sacredness, and authenticity. This is something that IS exploits by frequently using these emotionally laden concepts, and tweaking their meaning to fit their purposes.

The analyses presented in this report are mostly dictionary-based. What this means will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 7. In short, it entails counting the frequencies with which certain words occur in a text. Frequent occurrences of certain words indicate that a certain topic is being discussed. Other words can serve as markers for certain attitudes or sentiments. These 'words-as-markers' are usually highly context-dependent, meaning that a thorough knowledge of the domain in which the word occurs is necessary in order to interpret it properly. To complicate the matter, the way IS interpret and use certain concepts from traditional Islamic sources differs from how they are used in other Islamic traditions. [92] Arabic terms in IS propaganda can be considered as key factors in understanding what message the sender wishes to convey, or to predict the effect the message will have on the recipient. Hence, it is important that these terms are not only included in our analytic tools, but also that their literal and symbolic

[91] For an anthology that provides an excellent introduction to Salafism, see Meijer, Roel (ed)**.** *Global Salafism: Islam's new religious movement*. Columbia University Press, 2009.

[92] To complicate the matter, there is no consensus regarding how words of Arabic origin should be spelled in the Latin alphabet. There have been attempts at standardization, but they have not proven generally acceptable. See, for example, Stenberg, Leif *The Islamization of science.* Almqvist & Wiksell 1996, page. 177–180.

meanings are correctly understood. While words of Arabic origin, such as *jihad* and *mujahed,* are easy to identify in a text, it is more difficult with words that - although Arabic in origin- have been translated to corresponding words in the target language, where they in turn may convey different associations and values depending on the reader's familiarity with Islamic tradition.

In this chapter, we will give examples of how certain interpretations of Arabic or Islamic words are used to mark important concepts in the IS narrative.

5.2 Expressions of community and conflict

5.2.1 IS's enemies – Apostates, hypocrites and rejecters

Frequent addressing of the *umma,* a community or fellowship that unites all Muslims, serves as a reminder of belonging. The word *umma* originates in the Quran and is strongly associated with positive values. Few Muslims would object to the notion of an umma, even if most object to how it is specifically conceptualized in IS's propaganda. The term is used as a strategic means for creating a Muslim "we," as opposed to a non-Muslim "them". Since the inner, spiritual fellowship in umma is thought to rest on shared religious ideas and practices, the people who do not share these ideas and practices are construed as "others".

IS are unique in the respect that they have a very narrow definition of who belongs to the umma. Consequently, one who calls for an armed conflict against other Muslims must first label them as renegades or apostates.[93] This "labelling" is called *takfir* (also mentioned in Chapter 3). In the academic literature, IS and similar groups are occasionally called *Takfiri Salafists*. The word *takfir,* which can be translated approximately as "labelling someone as *kafir* (disbeliever), is generally applicable when people who define themselves as Muslims are accused by other Muslims of being non-Muslim. According to classical Islamic law, war cannot be waged against other Muslims. Labelling Muslim enemies as *kuffar*[94], separates them from the Muslim community, and war against them becomes legitimate, even required. According to IS, there is no middle ground. Either you are in, or you are the enemy. And if you are in, it is your duty to obliterate the enemy.

[93] See Firestone, Reuven, *Jihād: the origin of holy war in Islam*, Oxford Univ. Press, New York, N.Y., 1999.
[94] Plural of kafir.

The enemies mentioned in IS propaganda cover a broad spectrum: the Shiites,[95] al-Qaida and its Syrian branch (formerly *Jabhat al-Nusra*, now *Jabhat Fatah al-Sham*), the Syrian regime, the government of Iraq, the Iraqi Peshmerga, representatives of Western governments and armed forces, representatives of governments in the rest of the Middle East, and many more. Yet, IS do not view the enemy as a uniform group, but applies an elaborate categorisation with frequent descriptions in their propaganda.

An apostate (*murtad*) – namely, someone who was Muslim but has now abandoned their loyalty – is a person whose punishment in classical Islamic jurisprudence is death. Many Muslim groups interpret "apostates" as deserters who were punished because they betrayed their own group during conflicts with external enemies. According to this interpretation, merely leaving Islam is not an offence. IS use the term in a narrower sense, especially given their self-image as the resurrected primordial caliphate. According to IS, violence against apostates is a pious act, following the example of the first caliph, who in 632 had to fight those who no longer felt obliged to maintain their loyalty to Medina's rulers.[96]

Hypocrite (*munafiq*) literally means a person who says one thing, but thinks and does another. In historical writing, the term was used about a group of people in Medina who outwardly claimed to be Muslims, but clandestinely conspired against Muhammad. By adding this dimension to the word, which IS does, it comes to mean more than merely pretending to be Muslim, but pretending to be Muslim and in addition actively opposing Islam. "Hypocrite" and "apostate" are words that can be used to depict enemies who either claim to belong to one's own group, but actually do not, or who have belonged to it, but strayed. Rhetorically, the use of these terms is part of the justification of the struggle against other Sunni Muslims. *Rejecters (rafida),* is an insult with a long history, usually referring to Shiites. This alludes to how Shia Muslims reject the first three caliphs.[97] Since IS's foremost mythological reference point and ideal is precisely this early caliphate, *rafida* is a particularly useful term.

[95] *Dabiq*, issue 13.
[96] Heffening, W., "Murtadd," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs.
[97] Kohlberg, E., "al-Rāfiḍa," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs; Olsson, Susanne, "Shia as Internal Others: A Salafi Rejection of the 'Rejecters,'" in *Islam and Christian Muslim relations*, 2017.

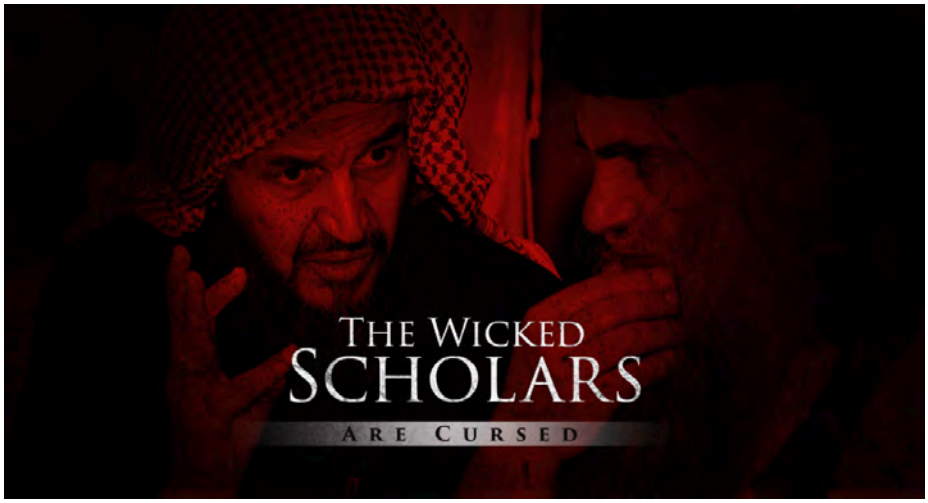


Figure 5.1. The evil scholars are preachers of misguidance according to IS.

Crusader is a recurring term for non-Muslim enemies of IS. Even if this reference may seem obvious, it may be relevant to note its emotional dimensions and fields of association. Crusade (*salabiya*) is the symbol, in Muslim religious language, of an unjust war, a war of conquest, which in contrast to *jihad* is not regulated by law, and is therefore "uncivilized." This designation, like *jihad,* also conjures up the image of a motive – conquest based on the wrong religious conviction. The use of words such as "crusade" and "crusader" thus function indirectly as a legitimization of one's own warfare, in terms of defensive war and individual duty. In the propaganda, Muslims are depicted as victims of religiously motivated aggression. The use of terms such as jihad and crusade also raises the conflict to the cosmological level; rather than a struggle for such worldly things as territory, power, or money, it becomes a struggle about ultimate matters, one between good and evil, between God's followers and God's enemies.

Disbeliever (*kafir,* plural *kuffar*) is a general category that comprises all the above groups, including "crusaders" and other non-Muslims. The word is prominent in the Quran, where it is used primarily as a designation for Muhammad's enemies in Mecca. The word is associated with someone who is aware of the religion's teachings, but nevertheless actively repudiates it and thereby demonstrates thanklessness towards God.

5.2.2 A duty to kill – Jihad and martyrdom

A particular idea can be endowed with a religious aura by tying it to a word with a special pattern of associations. The way IS use the word *jihad* is a suitable example of this. *Jihad*, directly translated as "striving on the path of God," is considered a meritorious action and, according to some interpretations, a religious duty. The positive connotation of *jihad* makes the word useful in creating an emotional aura around actions, of righteously striving on God's path. In certain contexts, *jihad* is associated with personal piety and the individual's struggle in pious acts (prayer, asceticism, fasting). The term *jihad* is also used in many other ways. For example, one finds references to *gender-jihad*, regarding the struggle to establish equality between women and men, and to *queer-jihad*, referring to the fight for HBTQ rights, while *green-jihad* alludes to ecologically-oriented interpretations.[98]

The dominant interpretation in Islamic tradition though, is that *jihad* involves armed struggle against Islam's enemies.[99] Traditional Muslim interpretations include two forms of *jihad* as armed struggle. The first involves defensive war, when Muslim areas are attacked. In such instances, *jihad* becomes an individual duty that is obligatory for all (male) Muslims. The other form is a *jihad* that can be delegated to a part of the community (an army) and is proclaimed by a legitimate leader – in classical tradition, the *caliph*. The latter form continues eternally, according to traditional Islamic law, until the entire world is under the formal control of the ruler. Neither form of *jihad*, according to traditional Islamic interpretation, can be fought against other Muslims. Consequently, one who defines an armed conflict against other Muslims as jihad must first make *takfir* of the enemy, that is, to label them as kuffar.[100]

[98] Svensson, Jonas "Trender i muslimsk feminism [Trends in Muslim feminism], in Hanna Stenström, (ed.) *Att tolka Bibeln och Koranen* [Translating the Bible and the Koran]. Studentlitteratur, 2009; Denny, Frederick M. "Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust Inviting Balanced Stewardship." *Earth Ethics* 10.1, 1998;

[99] See, for example, Halldén, Philip "Jihad-salafitisk koranutläggning och tillämpning," [Jihadi-Salafi Koran exposition and application], in Leif Stenberg and Jonas Otterbeck (ed.). *Islamologi. Studiet av en religion.* [Islamology. The study of a religion]. Carlssons, 2012.

[100] See Firestone, Reuven, *Jihād: the origin of holy war in Islam*, Oxford Univ. Press, New York, N.Y., 1999.

Figure 5.2. "The kafir's blood is halal for you, so shed it" means you are entitled to kill disbelievers.

Istishadi operations or attacks are frequently mentioned in IS propaganda outlets, such as Dabiq and Rumiyah. What this refers to is suicide attacks. IS uses the concept of martyrdom, or rather the specific concept *istishad*, "to (actively) seek martyrdom," to denote violent attacks. Martyrdom, in the Islamic history of ideas, has come to include a lengthy list of causes of death, of which death in the struggle for the community, and for one's faith, is only one, albeit one generally accepted among the religion's scholars. An individual's intentions nevertheless do play a role. Actively seeking martyrdom – that is, to perform an action that one knows in all certainty will lead to death – is controversial, since this is in practice suicide, which is considered forbidden. This objection also reappears in religious quarters where IS's methods are criticised.[101]

5.2.3 Religiously justifying the caliphate

In the latter half of 2014, *hijra* was a recurring term in IS propaganda. Historically, it refers to the emigration of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in year 622 (year 1 in the Islamic calendar). This was a turning point, the establishment of a new social order, with Muhammad as leader and

[101] See, for example, the open letter to IS leader al-Baghdadi, signed by more than 100 Muslim theologians and representatives: http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com (accessed 2017-04-26); another example can be found in Al-Yaqoubi, Shaykh Muhammed, *Refuting ISIS: A Rebuttal of its Religious and Ideological Foundations*. Herdon, Sacred Knowledge, 2015.

Islam as its organising principle. In IS terminology, the *hijra* is not considered to be a separate event, but an on-going process. In this context, the word is conceptualized as a movement from *jahiliya*[102] to *Islam*. The notion of *hijra* also contains associations to struggle and reconquering. Hijra is the answer of to how to stay pious in an impious world, part of the solution, as presented in Ingram's model described in Chapter 4. IS gives an extra dimension to this word by tying it to the concept of jihad. Hijra, in the IS sense, is migration for the purpose of jihad. [103]

Figure 5.3. People making hijra to the caliphate.

[102] *Jahiliya*, "ignorance", it is a term with strong negative connotations of chaos, oppression, abuse, injustice, and moral decay. The juxtaposition between *jahilya* and Islam makes the concept useful for propaganda purposes. Thus, the word "ignorance" refers more to impiety than to a lack of knowledge.

[103] Gould, R. (2015). Hijra before ISIS. *The Montreal Review*.

One of the central elements of IS's ideal society is that *sharia* is followed, fully. *Sharia* is yet another term that has positive connotations for most Muslims, although with diffuse and contested meanings. Most, if not all, Muslims agree that sharia is synonymous with God's will, an eternal law, instituted by God,[104] which people must follow in their everyday lives. For some, sharia is considered a value system of the individual, a matter of daily religious practice and a code of conduct. For others, sharia is considered the law of society, a responsibility for societal institutions and authorities. These two attitudes reflect different understandings of what the ideal functional area of sharia should be. IS clearly follows the latter tradition.

Another disputed issue is what the content of sharia might be. Even if the word "law" is used as a translation for sharia, its field of associations is different than it is in relation to law in a secular sense. Individual sharia rules are derived from interpretations of the original religious sources, and depending on the nature of the interpretations, different legal traditions have developed in Islamic jurisprudence. The variety of interpretive traditions leads to diverging understandings of what sharia involves, in terms of the actual regulations that should be followed. Though commonly accepted by religious scholars, IS dismiss this diversity and renounce the legitimacy of the varying traditions. IS's interpretation of sharia leaves no room for variation.[105] When IS propaganda highlights how sharia is applied in the caliphate, it is the most conspicuous examples that are shown: corporal punishment, control of relations between the sexes, moral police patrols, clothing, and other external symbols.

[104] It can be understood as natural law just as easily as common law.
[105] See, for example, Hjärpe, Jan, *Sharī'a: gudomlig lag i en värld av förändring* [Sharī'a: Divine law in a world of change], Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2014.

6 The branding of IS

6.1 Emotional aspects of IS propaganda

Many of the individuals who are attracted to IS's English-language propaganda have only limited knowledge of the religious traditions of Islam.[106] It is reasonable to consider that the ideational content, with its references to verses from the Quran and allusions to "primordial" Islam, is too obscure for many recipients. This is where the emotional aspect enters. Even though IS-propaganda is laden with concepts that are difficult to grasp intellectually, they still have an emotional appeal to many people who, even though they identify with Islamic tradition, possess limited knowledge of it. It is not so much about what is actually said, as it is all about the packaging. As long as the messages *sound* good, and are presented along with suitable imagery, many recipients will accept them as true. And IS propaganda makes good use of this fact.

No other terrorist group has used visual communication as elaborately and professionally as IS. Multimodality - the interplay between text, pictures and sound - changes the semiotic effect of a message by placing words in a new context. By building a context to it, the picture serves as an explanation of the textual message. Images are an extremely powerful form of expression, which in many cases affect us emotionally, and thus can make us more receptive to the messages they communicate. Strong imagery with catchy slogans has proven to be efficient in marketing, as well as in propaganda. Pictures have the benefit of engaging our emotions and bypassing critical thinking in way that words rarely do.[107] IS propaganda is filled with images that utilize a visual language that alludes to emotions in the same way as successful advertising. They use symbols, memes and imagery with which Western youth are familiar, and mix them up with their own brand of Islam.

Just as a shared linguistic style favours group cohesiveness, visual markers that show belonging to the group are equally important.[108] Such markers could for example be a specific garment, a uniform or a symbol. In this chapter, we will discuss how visual markers are used to build and market the IS brand.

[106] See, for example, Batrawy, A. (2016). Leaked Isis documents reveal recruits have poor grasp of Islamic faith. *The Independent* 16 August 2016.
[107] Speckhard, A. (2016) *The Hypnotic Power of ISIS Imagery in Recruiting Western Youth*. International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism.
[108] Keblusek, L., Giles, H., & Maass, A. (2017). Communication and intergroup life: How language and symbols shape intergroup relations. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 20.

6.2 IS as a youth movement

IS propaganda is mainly directed towards and spread by young people, a demographic generally more inclined than others to seek out extreme ideologies. Various theoreticians have pointed out that the receptiveness of youth is due to developmental, biological, or social factors. The teen years are a period when the formation of identity occupies much of a person's life.[109] It is often a period of openness for, and experimentation with, different ways of thinking, and trying on different ways of expressing oneself. According to Thomas Ziehe, young people in a modern, secularized society are released from old traditions, resulting in freedom, but also disorientation. For those young individuals who, for cultural or socio-economic reasons, find it more difficult than others to take advantage of the freedom offered, an often anxiety-creating confusion remains, sometimes exacerbated by rootlessness and a sense of living between two cultures. This can create a longing for authority and control.[110] If criminality and discrimination are perceived as the alternative, organizations like IS offer a vision of a better, more meaningful life, or, for that matter, a more meaningful death.

Figure 6.1. IS propaganda targeting discriminated and criminal youth.

[109] Erikson, E. H., & Erikson, J. M. (1998) *The life cycle completed (extended version)*. WW Norton & Company.
[110] Ziehe, T. (1989) *Kulturanalyser: Ungdom, utbildning och modernitet* [Cultural analysis: youth, education and modernity]. Stockholm/Stehag: Symposion.

Searching for identity and meaning are fundamental human needs that if not otherwise fulfilled, may be sought in violent extremist organisations. However, a lust for adventure or the aspiration for status and coolness should not be underestimated as important factors driving young people into violent extremism.[111] As Oliver Roy points out, contemporary Jihadism is mainly a youth culture, which is overall more similar to other youth subcultures than to traditional religious cults.[112] [113]

The expression *Jihadi cool*[114] (sometimes *Jihad cool*), was first used in media around 2014 to describe the phenomenon whereby young IS followers seemed to be forming their own subculture, with a distinct style in fashion (see Figure 6.2), music, and other cultural manifestations. Despite the prohibition of musical instruments in IS's interpretation of Islam, there is a music genre called *jihadi rap*, a form of gangsta rap with texts that glorify violence.[115] Nasheeds that praise jihad are also popular within the subculture, and are used as background music to various video productions praising IS.[116]

The Jihadi Cool subculture was created mainly by American converts to Islam. One of them, Omar Hammami, was born in Alabama, but became an *al-Shabab* leader in Somalia, where he made a rap video that was used for recruiting.[117] His proximity to Western popular culture helped him understand how to create a mix between rap and militant Islamism that seemed credible to his audience. An important part of the Jihadi cool culture is that it presents role models to whom young people can relate. IS warriors are commonly depicted along with well-known brands such as Nutella or Skittles.[118] There is for example a photo gallery on Tumblr, depicting IS warriors petting, kissing, or napping with cats. Using the hash tag *#catsofjihad*, many IS-friendly accounts, as a variation on the popular Internet phenomenon of "funny cat pictures," have posted images of cats holding weapons, with captions such as "little mujahed."[119]

[111] See, for example Bartlett, J.; Miller, C. (2012). The edge of violence: Towards telling the difference between violent and non-violent radicalization. *Terror. Polit. Violence* 2012, 24.
[112] Roy, O. (2017) *Jihad and death: the global appeal of Islamic State.* Oxford University Press.
[113]For an example of similar youth movements, see Cohen, D. (2017). How London's knife culture is being fuelled by jargon, social media and music. *The Evening Standard*, 4 July, 2017.
[114] The expression was originally coined by terror researcher, Marc Sageman, to explain al-Qaeda's popularity on the Internet.
[115] Smirke, R. (2014). Jihadi rap. Understanding the subculture. *Billboard* 10 October 2014.
[116] Hegghammer, T. (2015). The soft power of Militant Jihad. *Sunday Review*, 18 December 2015.
[117] Picart, C.J.S. (2015) "Jihad Cool/Jihad Chic": The Roles of the Internet and Imagined Relations in the Self-Radicalization of Colleen LaRose (Jihad Jane). *Societies* 5.2. 2015.
[118] Behn, S. (2014) Isis Militants Use "Jihadi Cool" to Recruit Globally. *The Voice of America* (VOA), 5 September 2014.
[119] al-Arabiya News (2014). Cat got your gun? Iraq, Syria jihadist pictures go viral. 22 June 2014.

Figure 6.2. Black sweatshirt, baggy trousers, and sneakers are used by IS suicide bombers, in execution videos, and in parades.

The contradiction in how IS attract members using elements from precisely the culture that they want to destroy does not seem to bother its followers. To those who are attracted to Jihadi cool propaganda, lifestyle takes precedence over ideology, making this contradiction unimportant. A study by Olivier Roy shows that many young IS followers live ordinary teenage lives; partying, smoking, drinking, having temporary relationships, and infrequently visiting the mosque. Approximately half of them have earlier faced criminal charges for drug trafficking, violence, or driving under the influence.[120] According to Roy, what drives these individuals is not religious conviction, but nihilism and destructiveness. Since nihilism and destructiveness stifle negotiation and attempts to resolve conflicts, they are great assets for an organisation that sustains itself on constant war and apocalyptic ideation.

[120] Roy, O. (2017) *Jihad and death: the global appeal of Islamic State*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Figure 6.3. IS alluding to popular computer game Call of duty. To respawn means to come alive again after being killed in a computer game. Jannah is the Islamic paradise.

Fundamentally speaking, Jihadi cool is not only about a romanticisation of revolt and repudiation of society, but also about masculinity. According to Alyas Karmani, imam and director of *the STREET project* (an anti-radicalisation project in Brixton, England), Jihadi cool is part of a larger culture among marginalized young men, a kind of macho culture that Karmani calls "the Grand Theft Auto culture," referring to the violent computer game, where respect is achieved by those who can reproduce masculinity in the form of fearless ruthlessness.[121] Actually, in 2014, a video with an IS-version of Grand Theft Auto was released, with the words "We do the things you do in games, in real life on the battlefield". IS do not accept entertainment such as video games, yet this does not stop their supporters from using them as a means to attract more followers.[122]

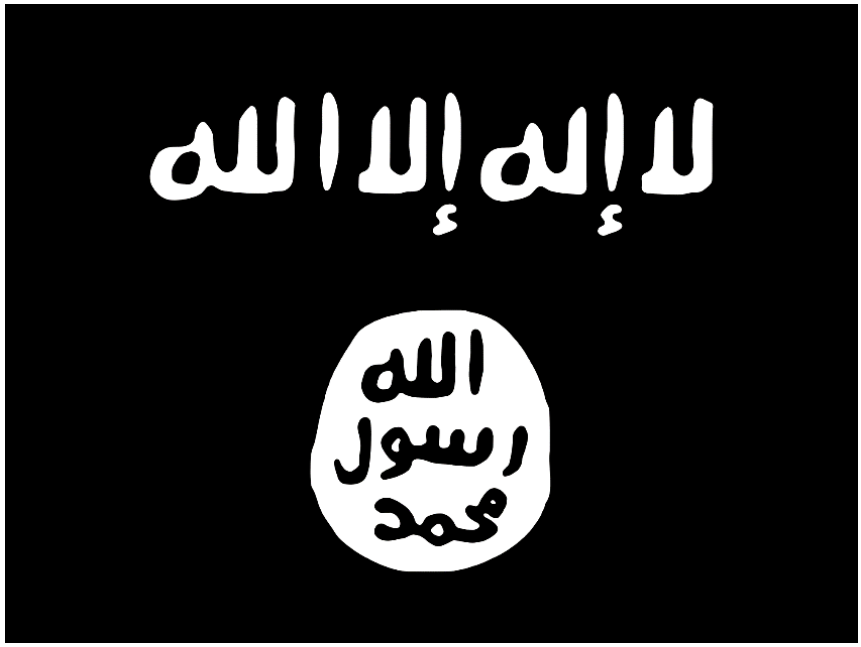
[121] Cited in: Pearson, E. Macho Cool: The Appeal of Violent Jihad. Available online: http://www.connectjustice.org/blog.php?d=3
[122] Al-Rawi, A. (2018) Video games, terrorism, and ISIS's Jihad 3.0, Terrorism and Political Violence, 30:4,740-760.

6.3 Symbols

The use of symbols is a simple way for members of a group to show both the group and the rest of the world where they belong. For the group as a whole, besides creating a sense of unity, symbols announce the group's identity and purpose. By their ubiquity they are an extremely efficient means of communication, a way of telling a story by a simple sign or gesture. Below is a list of some of the symbols commonly used in IS propaganda.

6.3.1 Symbols of tawhid

Being a key component of Islam, *tawhid* is the concept of monotheism, the oneness of God. IS have their own fundamentalist interpretation of tawhid that not only rejects all other views, but also demands their extinction. IS have effectively appropriated age-old Muslim symbols of tawhid, to the point that for most people they are now associated exclusively with IS.



The flag used by IS is a variation of the so-called Black Standard or Black Banner. The text at the top reads "There is no god but God." The white circle symbolizes the Prophet's seal, and the text within reads "Muhammad is the Messenger of God." The black banner as such holds relevance for all Muslims, and is not unique for IS, or even jihadism at all. Yet, it has become so closely associated with IS that it is banned in some countries, like Germany and the UK.

IS use the Black Banner to brand the organization, facilitated by supporters who produce merchandise where the symbols adorn a number of different products, including clothing, cars and mobile backgrounds.

IS fighters are often depicted with a single raised index finger. The raised index finger refers to the oneness of God, but in jihadi contexts it also stands for a renouncement of all governments not under sharia law. Although used by other jihadists, IS members tend to use it on several occasions, such as weddings and executions. The index finger salute has been likened to both a gang sign and the Nazi salute. Note the branded headband on the baby.

6.3.2 Symbols of jihad

Glorification of martyrdom is often found in IS propaganda, where the martyr's rewards in the afterlife are heavily emphasized. Battlefield images of dead martyrs with smiling faces occur frequently. However, at the moment of death, all muscles in the body relax, making it impossible for a dead person to smile naturally. These images are presumably staged in order to make the prospect of death on the battlefield more appealing.

Weapons seem to occur in almost all IS-related images. Often it is people holding weapons, but pictures of just weapons on their own are not uncommon either. They are there to display capacity and strength, but the way they are presented sometimes also alludes to sub-cultural expressions of gangsta style and computer-game aesthetics. The depictions of weapons also resemble images circulating among proponents of the so-called gun culture in the US.

IS are famous for producing brutal imagery of beheadings. Although the standard method of execution in pre-modern Islamic law, only a small part of IS's captives are killed in this manner. The choreography usually features captives in Guantanamo-inspired orange jumpsuits, whose heads are severed by men in black.

6.3.3 Animals

Arabian horses are commonly featured in IS propaganda. The Arabian horse played an important part in Islamic history, where it was used in war. It is said that Muhammad, when asked about the best jihad replied that "The best jihad is the one in which your horse is slain and your blood is spilled." IS's depictions of horses tend to have a nostalgic, almost fairy tale-like, aura to them.

Cats are depicted in many an IS-supporter's social media accounts. In Islamic tradition, cats hold a special position among animals. They are said to have been greatly loved by Muhammad, and they are also admired for their cleanliness. They have a special status as they are allowed to enter homes as well as mosques. Thus, IS's depictions of cats unite a popular Internet phenomenon with Islamic tradition.

In Islamic art and culture, the lion evokes qualities of bravery and strength. The lion has also become a common motif in jihadist propaganda where it can be seen as a symbol of honour for both jihadi leaders and for low-ranking militants. The lion may also be used to suggest martyrdom or designate a martyr-to-be. Children of the Islamic state are often referred to as "lion cubs".

In Islam, there is a belief that the souls of martyrs are alive in the bodies of green birds. The green bird that hosts a soul is called a *paradise bird* (or *bird of Jannah*). The green birds are mentioned in IS propaganda to motivate potential martyrs.

7 Glossy Magazines of Terror

7.1 Dabiq and Rumiyah

IS regularly publishes online magazines for propaganda and recruitment. Two of the magazines are called *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*. The first issue of Dabiq was published in July 2014, immediately after IS captured Mosul. The issue was called "The Return of Khilafah" and carried the date "Ramadan 1435". According to the magazine, the name Dabiq is taken from the town of Dabiq in northern Syria, which is mentioned in a hadith[123] about Armageddon. In the hadith, it is said that one of the greatest battles between the West and the forces of Islam will occur in Dabiq.

A total of fifteen issues of Dabiq were published between July 2014 and July 2016. In September 2016, the magazine changed its name to Rumiyah (Rome). The name Rumiyah is a reference to another hadith in which Muhammad said that Muslims would conquer both Constantinople and Rome in that order. Between September 2016 and September 2017, a total of 13 issues of Rumiyah were released. Both magazines are produced by Al-Hayat Media Center. To attract members from all over the world, both Dabiq and Rumiyah are published in a number of different languages. Rumiyah, for example, is released in eleven different languages - English, Bahasa, Bosnian, French, German, Kurdish, Pashto, Russian, Turkish Urdu and Uyghur.[124] Each issue is sub-divided thematically, and includes a segment on latest news updates from the battlefields. Each issue of Rumiyah is around 40 pages, while the predecessor Dabiq was nearly twice that length.[125] Dabiq and Rumiyah target three broad groups of readers: 1) IS fighters, supporters and sympathisers, 2) potential recruits from across the world, and 3) IS's enemies.

7.2 Themes in propaganda

Propaganda messages can be studied by categorizing messages into different themes. By studying the different themes that occur in the propaganda, it is possible to hypothesize about how IS wants to be perceived, as well as how they themselves perceive their enemies and potential followers. It is also possible to

[123] Hadith (in plural ahadith) is the record of the words, actions and traditions of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, se Chapter 5.
[124] Mahlouly, D. & Winter, C. (2018) *A tale of two caliphates. Comparing the Islamic state's internal and external messaging priorities*. VOX Pol, 2018.
[125] Mhazam, R. (2017) *Rumiyah*: Jihadist Propaganda and Information Warfare in Cyberspace Volume 9, Issue 3 of Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS).

get an understanding of how IS react to change and crises. Studying how the different themes relate quantitatively to one another, makes it easier to understand the importance that IS attach to the different aspects of their propaganda.

In October 2015, Charlie Winter published a report comprising a thematic analysis of 892 propaganda events (of which 72% comprised of visual material) published by IS between 17 July and 15 August 2015.[126] The themes he studied were *mercy, belonging, brutality, victimhood, war,* and *utopia*. The most prominent theme was found to be utopia (52.7% of the material), closely followed by war (37.2%). The other themes ranged from between 0.5% and 6.8% of the material. The same themes were also studied in a data set from 2017.[127] A comparison with the 2015 data shows clear differences in the distribution of themes. The theme utopia has decreased markedly compared to 2015 (from 53% to 14%), while the theme war has increased from 39% to 80%.

Another thematic study by Aaron Zelin deals with the contents of all IS propaganda produced during one week. Zelin categorized the content according to eleven different themes, of which six were identified as particularly important, namely: *military affairs, governance, preaching (da'wa), moral policing according to Islamic principles (hisba), promotion of the caliphate,* and *enemy attack.* Almost half of the propaganda Zelin studied involved descriptions of military operations.[128]

7.3 War, brutality, victimhood and utopia

The themes war, brutality, victimhood and utopia describe different aspects of IS propaganda. Below, the different themes are described in more detail.

7.3.1 War

The theme *war,* which is the second most common in Winter's 2015 analysis, and the most common in the 2017 follow-up, mainly consists of accounts of various battles. The results of IS attacks are often described and complemented with images of the Brussels airport, downed military aircraft, fallen enemies, and members of IS who have carried out attacks. Dabiq has recurring feature articles with names such as *"Islamic State Reports,"* or *"A selection of military operations across the Islamic State,"* which depict not only successes from

[126] Winter, C. (2015) *Documenting the virtual 'caliphate.'* London: Quilliam.
[127] Winter, Charlie. ICSR Insight: The ISIS Propaganda Decline. 2017.
[128] Zelin, A. (2015) Picture or it didn't happen: A snapshot of the Islamic State's official media output. *Perspectives on Terror.*9.

IS *wilayats,*[129] but from other countries such as Egypt and Lebanon as well as France, Tunisia, Belgium, USA, Bangladesh and Somalia.

The purpose of war-themed propaganda events is to portray IS as winners - which is apparent in how the offensive aspects of IS's warfare are depicted much more frequently than the defensive ones - but also to prepare recruits for the use of violence. IS largely derives its raison d'être from identifying other people or groups as their enemies and it is the existence of an enemy that justifies political acts of violence. Hence, portraits of the enemy are an important part of IS propaganda. The enemies are alternately portrayed as threatening and oppressive, or weak and defeated. The latter is seen in the execution videos that have become the trademark of IS.

In Dabiq and Rumiyah, IS praise acts of terror conducted outside IS's core territory; this also reinforces the notion of IS as a global movement. The magazines carry specific pictorials of the terror attacks in, for example, Paris and Nice, London, Tunis, Brussels, and Orlando, showing victims, damage to property, and in some cases the bodies of the perpetrators. Persons who conduct acts of terror outside the caliphate, persons who have already conducted or are going to conduct suicide attacks, or persons who have achieved martyrdom in some other way are occasionally portrayed in propaganda as heroes. The underlying intention of such portrayals is to signal that "ordinary" people can carry out important tasks in the service of the caliphate and then be hailed as heroes. In IS propaganda it is also common to show pictures of martyrs both before and after their deaths as well as the aftermath of a suicide attack. In IS propaganda it is also common to show pictures of martyrs both before and after their deaths, as well as the aftermath of a suicide attack. The images of dead martyrs usually show young dead men who are cleaned and arranged in a position with a smiling face and a raised index finger (the symbolic meaning of this is explained in Chapter 6).

[129] IS separates territory into different wilayats or provinces.

Figure 7.1. Rumiyah proudly announces the results of the Barcelona attacks in August 2017.

7.3.2 Brutality and victimhood

A part of IS propaganda that has attracted a lot of attention is the extremely graphic depictions of how IS treats its enemies. Depicting IS's exercise of brutality is a powerful way to arouse fear, disgust, and rage in the enemy and to fuel an ongoing conflict with IS. It is also a way to polarise opinion and create stigmatisation of Muslims in Western societies. Besides weakening the internal cohesion of Western societies, this might lead to discrimination of Muslims that makes them more likely to join or sympathize with IS.

The theme victimhood comprises descriptions of losses, including bombed IS cities, or children having been killed in enemy attacks. The purpose of victim-narratives is to justify IS's actions and agitate IS's followers to join the struggle. Victimhood propaganda serves to reinforce the message of a worldwide crisis that motivates IS's entire struggle and existence. Paired with victimhood, IS's brutality can be packaged as revenge. IS execution videos often begin with the prisoners' (clad in orange prison overalls presumably to remind the viewers of how Muslims were treated in USA's Guantanamo Bay) reciting a message directed at their country's leaders, for example Barack Obama, or David Cameron, where they are reminded of their wrongs, the wrongs that are about to result in the prisoner's death. Victimhood without ensuing revenge exerts no attraction; no one wishes to fight on the losing side. At the same time, victimhood provides brutality with moral legitimacy.

7.3.3 Utopia – the Caliphate as a functioning state

A theme in IS propaganda that is directed towards sympathisers is the one about the utopian Caliphate. This theme aims to convince the reader that the caliphate is the answer to all problems and injustices. The caliphate is often pictured as a beautiful place to live in with beautiful green environments, with playgrounds, swimming pools and coffee shops.

Figure 7.2. Familiar snacks and heart-eyed emojis make the caliphate seem harmless, even comforting.

In Dabiq and Rumiyah several articles are focused on showing the community and welfare that the caliphate can offer and how IS are capable of governing the caliphate and implementing its version of Islamic law. The dream of the caliphate comprises not only a community of the like-minded, but also a functioning state that can offer welfare to its citizens. Propaganda about utopia therefore describes various critical societal functions, such as food distribution, sanitation, education, and health care.

7.4 Themes in Dabiq and Rumiyah

To find out to what extent each of the themes occur in Dabiq and Rumiyah we have created lists of keywords (dictionaries) such that each dictionary represents a theme. By counting the occurrences of the keywords in the text of all issues of Dabiq and Rumiyah, we can get an understanding of how much (or how little) that is being written about the theme represented by the dictionary. One of the difficulties with keyword-based analysis is to come up with all the relevant keywords. If a number of human experts are asked to extract keywords from a text, their choices will probably not agree to any great extent. When analysing text on the Internet, and especially in social media, this problem becomes especially severe, since this type of text is usually informal, with much greater variation in vocabulary than what is found in standardised language such as news text. The problem of vocabulary variation stems not only from the broad diversity of the vocabulary, but also from how the choice of words is clearly

domain-specific, which requires deep knowledge of the domain. This is often the case with religious extremism, which tends to use domain-specific terminology.

One way to deal with terminological variation (i.e., differences in the choice of words) is to use a so-called *semantic memory*, a program that creates a text-dependent and domain-specific dictionary based on related words in a data set. By using a semantic memory, the original dictionary of keywords can be expanded. In this way, the arbitrariness that stems from human experts choosing keywords can be reduced, and domain-specific terminology captured with higher accuracy. It is often well advised to let a human expert judge the proposals that the semantic memory generates, which also has been done in our analyses.

By comparing the frequency of words from the various dictionaries, we obtain an estimation of the extent to which the different themes appear in the magazines and how it changes over time. It should be noted that it is *our interpretation* of Winter's themes that is used here. The dictionaries we created to represent each theme might not correspond with the original intention. Another important difference is that in the material Winter studied, 78% is comprised of images, and only 11% is written text. Our analysis is only based on the written content in the magazines Dabiq and Rumiyah, a total of 1 193897 words.

Table 7.3 presents the themes we studied, with a few examples of words from every theme. More information about the methods we used for our analyses can be found in the report *Computer support to analyze IS propaganda*[130].

Table 7.3. The themes and a few examples of words from each theme.

Theme	Example words
Brutality	beheaded, execute, punish, warning, admonish
Belonging	brotherhood, friendship, eid, collective, together, uniting
Victimhood	losses, survival, victim, victimhood, innocent, civilian
War	battlefield, operation, sniper, infiltration, survival, target
Utopia	culture, harvest, plenty, industry, agriculture, health care

[130] Kaati, L., Sahlgren, M., Isbister, T., Toghiani-Rizi B. and Cohen, K. (2017). *Computer support to analyze IS propaganda*. ECTC Advisory Group on Online Terrorist Propaganda, Europol Publication.

Figure 7.4 shows how the occurrences of the different themes change over time. As can be seen the two most prominent themes in the magazines are war and utopia. War increases while utopia decreases slightly.

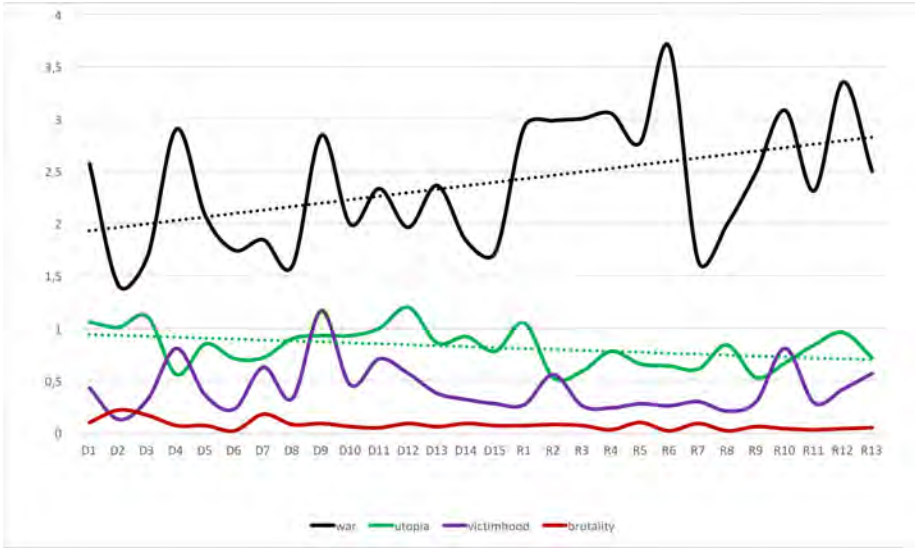


Figure 7.4. The occurrence of the different themes in Dabiq and Rumiyah. D1 represents Dabiq issue 1, D2 Dabiq issue 2, R1 Rumiyah issue 2 etc.

According to our analysis, only a small portion of the magazines dealt with brutality - despite the attention paid to the brutality of IS propaganda in the media. The most extreme violent propaganda is primarily produced as visual content, which would explain why our analysis of textual material did not cover it. Yet, even in Winter's analysis, which was mostly based on images, the presence of brutality was minimal. One can conclude that the attention given to this kind of material is not proportional to how large a portion of the propaganda it actually comprises.

We have also studied the occurrence of four different themes that can be regarded as sub-themes of the war-theme: vehicle, melee, weapons and explosives. These themes are all connected with approaches that have been observed in IS-related terror attacks. The occurrences of the different themes in each magazine are shown in Figure 7.5. There is an increase in mentions of both explosives and vehicles, which is in line with the increased occurrence of the war theme in the magazines. The occurrence of each theme varies in different numbers of the magazines, depending on what kind of articles that are featured. The peak of occurrences of the themes melee and weapons in Rumiyah's second issue can be explained with a feature called "just terror operations" ("just" as in "justified"). The article provides information about what kind of knife that

should be preferred in a terror attack, as well as what part of the body that should be attacked for maximum damage. The same issue also includes a status update on different operations that have been executed by IS.

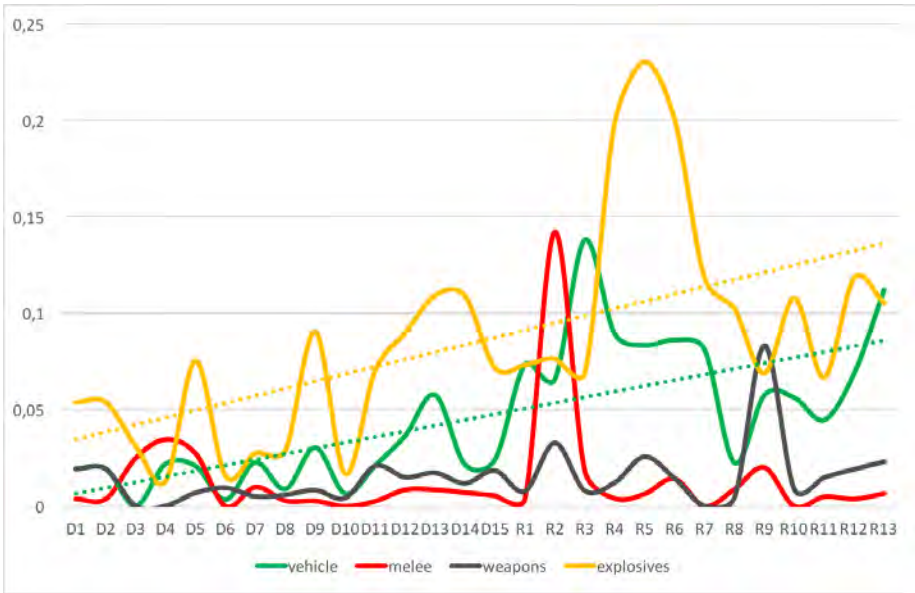


Figure 7.5. Occurrences of the themes related to terror operations. D1 represents Dabiq issue 1, D2 Dabiq issue 2, R1 Rumiyah issue 2 etc.

7.5 To our sisters

Most issues of Dabiq and Rumiyah contain one article directed at women. Topics of the articles include women's role in jihad, polygyny, how to behave when one is widowed, and an interview with the wife of a martyr. The women's articles will be further discussed in Chapter 8.

Analysing the number of references to females and males helps us understand IS's orientation toward either gender. Female references include pronouns (she, her, hers) and nouns (female, woman, girl, etc.), whereas male references include pronouns (he, his, him) and nouns (male, man, boy, etc.). To study gender references in the magazines we have separated the articles directed towards women (called *Sisters*) from the rest of the articles in each magazine. As can be seen in Figure 7.6, the articles directed towards women are relatively gender balanced, with nearly an equal amount of references to female and males, while the rest of the articles have almost 19 times more references to males than to females. This is an indicator that the focus in the magazines is mainly on men. Chapter 8 provides more details about the role of women in IS propaganda.

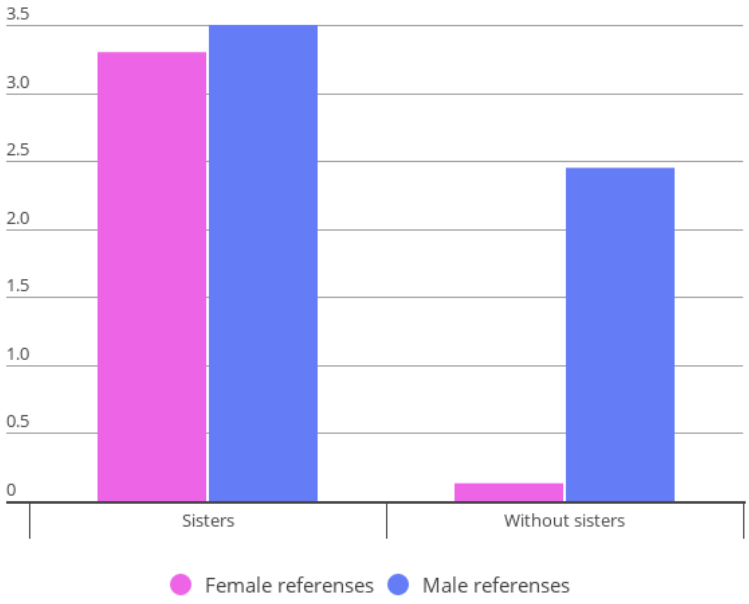


Figure 7.6. Female and male references in articles directed towards females (sisters) and the rest of the articles (without sisters).

We have also studied the occurrences of the different themes (described in the previous section), and to what extent they differ in the articles directed towards women compared to the rest of the articles. The results (occurrence of the themes are given in percentage) are presented in Figure 7.7. The largest differences are found in the themes war and victimhood, which are more common in articles not directed towards women.

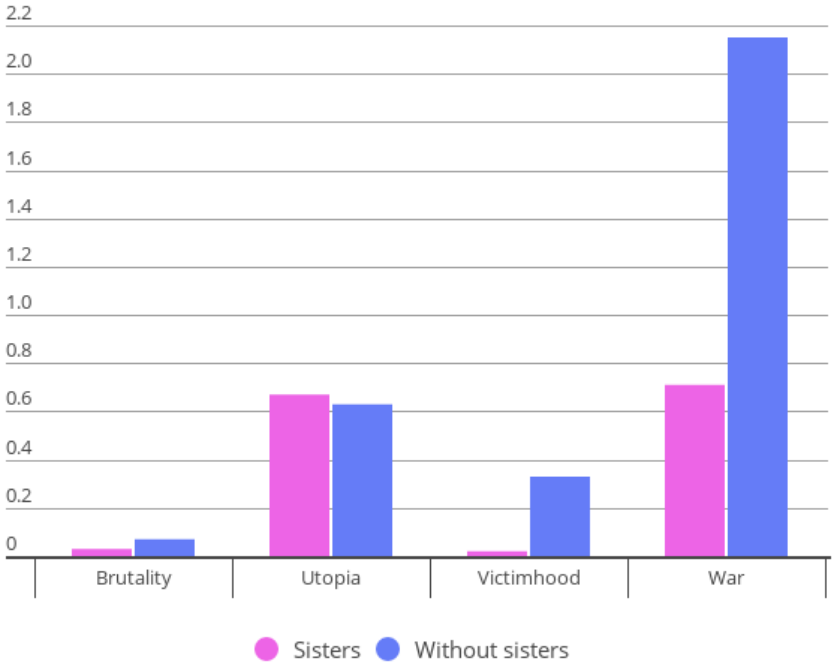


Figure 7.7. The occurrences of the different themes in the articles directed towards female compared to the rest of the articles.

7.6 Religious references

Religious sources such as verses from the Quran and ahadith are frequently cited in IS propaganda. We have examined if there is a pattern to the use of references to the Quran in Dabiq and Rumiyah. All references to suras[131]are extracted from the articles, and the verses identified automatically using a tool designed to find Quran verses in text.[132] Figure 7.8 shows how many times verses from the Quran are mentioned in each magazine. As can be seen, the frequency of references to the Quran peaked in mid-2015, dropped, and peaked again by the end of 2016 before reaching its lowest level in mid-2017.

[131] The Quran is divided into 114 suras (chapters) and further divided into ayat (verses). The suras are of unequal length; the shortest one (Al-Kawthar) has only three verses, while the longest one (Al-Baqara) contains 286 verses.

[132] Finding verses automatically is not always easy for a software program since the quoting can be done in many different ways. We acknowledge that our tool might have missed some unusual ways of quoting.

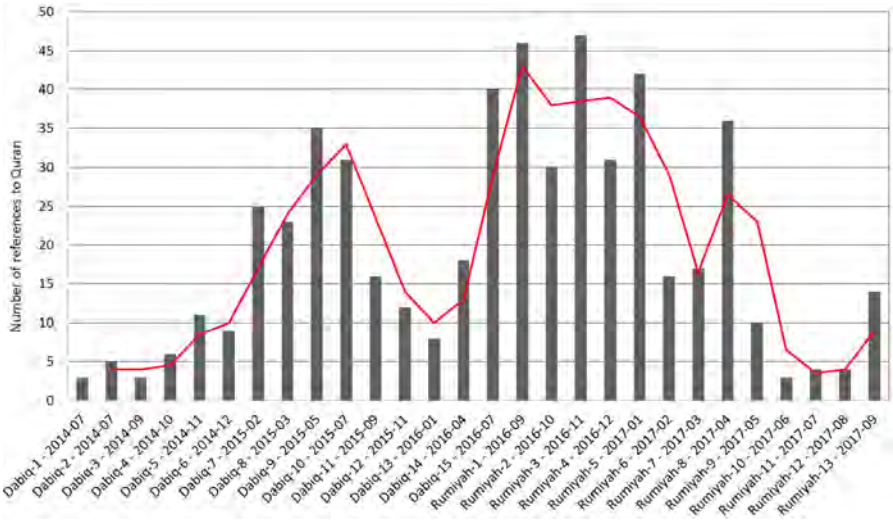


Figure 7.8. Number of references to Quran in Islamic state magazines.

The specifics suras that are mostly referred to in Dabiq and Rumiyah are Al-Baqara, followed by At-Tawba and Al-Imran (see Figure 7.9). Importantly, Al-Baqara, being the longest in the Quran, is a major reference about Islamic law and provides major theoretical themes in Islam. The sura also deals with God's power, disbelievers, and hypocrites.

However, studying only the mentions of suras might be misleading due to their variation in length. For example, the most mentioned sura, Al-Baqara, comprises 286 verses and is the longest sura. When adjusted for length, the most mentioned sura was At-Tawba, followed by Al-Anfal and Al-Ahzab. Notably, At-Tawba deals with matters like fighting unbelievers, trials during wartime, and loyalty and obedience.

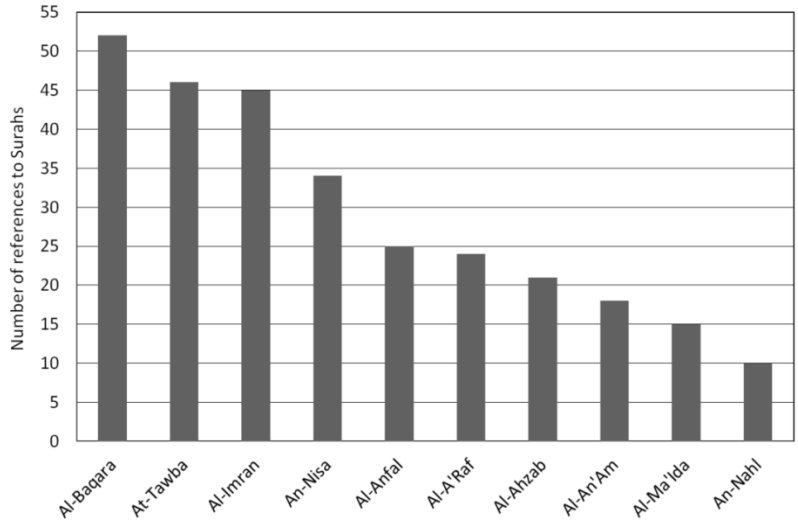


Figure 7.9. Most frequently mentioned suras in Dabiq and Rumiyah.

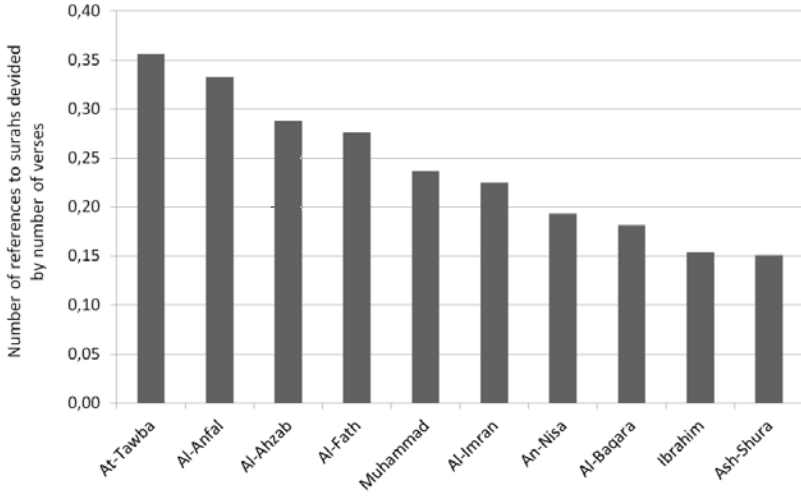


Figure 7.10. Most frequently mentioned suras in Dabiq and Rumiyah after adjusting for sura length.

The most frequent verses used in Dabiq and Rumiah are At-Tawba, verse 14 and Al-Ahzab, verse 10. However, most (513) verses were mentioned once, 13 verses were mentioned twice and 2 verses were mentioned three times. This indicates that the focus of Dabiq and Rumiyah have been on diverse references from Quran rather than one frequently used catchphrase. While the quoting of actual

verses varies, it seems that suras such as At-Tawba that is dealing with IS core matters like fighting unbelievers, trials during wartime and loyalty and obedience is used more frequently than others.

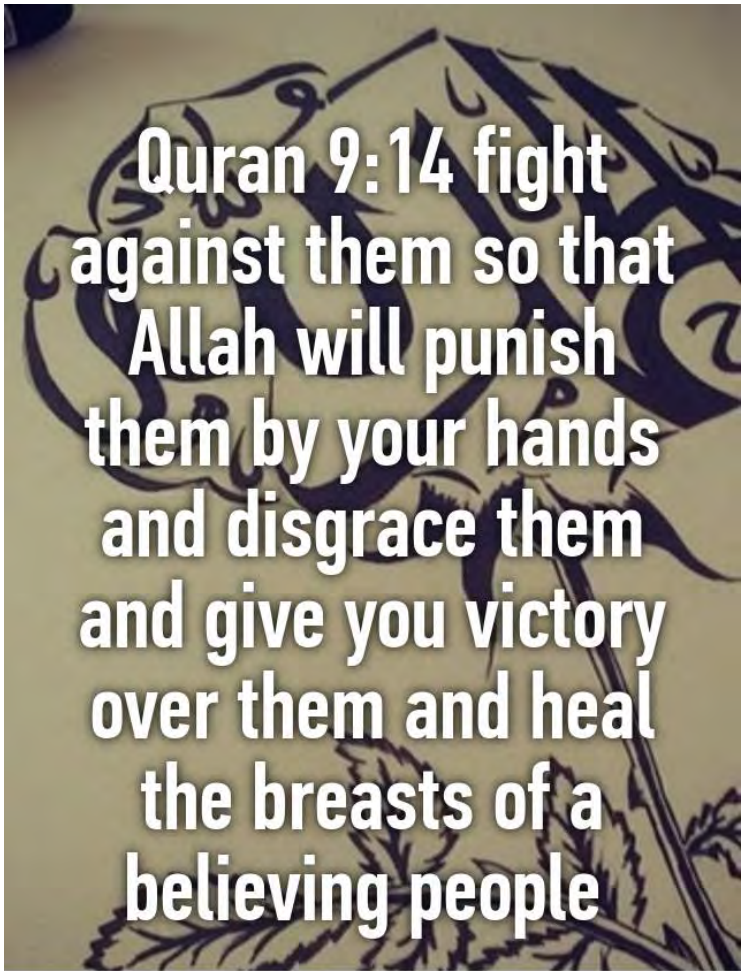


Figure 7.11 At-Tawba, verse 14

8 Women and IS propaganda

8.1 The changing roles of women in IS

Despite the masculinity-oriented culture of IS, women have a vital role in the organisation. Women have been actively recruited through Internet postings, chat rooms and other social media.[133] For the caliphate, women were important to make it easier to recruit men and also to ensure that the next generation of warriors was born.[134] A report from Kings College states that 4,761 (13%) of 41,490 foreign citizens who became affiliated with IS between April 2013 and June 2018 were women.[135]

Besides a sense of sisterhood and belonging that is strongly emphasised by female recruiters[136], the main argument given for women to join IS is the duty to support the organisation by being good wives to fighters, and mothers to the next generation of warriors.[137] To market the role of wife and mother, marriage to IS fighters is heavily romanticised on social media (see Section 8.2). Romantic imagery of weddings between IS fighters and their wives, and tales about married life in the caliphate have attracted numerous women to the caliphate.[138]

Many of the women who have joined IS, have done so because of a wish to participate more actively in IS's cause, by pursuing a trade (unmarried women in the caliphate were allowed to work as teachers or in the medical field), or joining the Khansaa Brigade in Raqqa, an all-female morality police force, designated to enforce behavioural codes for women.[139] Other women travelled to join the fight in the battlefield. While al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) justified the use of female fighters, by referring to Muhammad having had both male and female fighters alongside him, IS did not continue this practice.[140] The most likely scenario

[133] Ahram, A. I. (2015). Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS. *Survival*, *57*(3).
[134] Spencer, A. N. (2016). The Hidden Face of Terrorism: An Analysis of the Women in Islamic State. *Journal of Strategic Security* 9, no. 3.
[135] Cook, J., & Vale, G. (2018). *From Daesh to "Diaspora": Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State.* London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College.
[136] Saltman, E.M, Smith M. (2015) *'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part' Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon*. Institute for Strategic Dialogue.
[137] Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade, Charlie Winter (trans.), Quillam Foundation, February 2015.
[138] Peresin, A. (2015) Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9:3.
[139] Ahram, A. I. (2015). Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS. *Survival*, *57*(3), 57-78.
[140] Winter, C. Margolin, D. (2017). *The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female combatants and the Islamic State.* CTC at West Point, 10:7.

according to Ariel Ahram is that most female recruits were instead paired with male IS fighters, leaving them to rear the next generation of fighters.[141]

Figure 8.1. Sisters in Jihad. Women with weapons and a BMW, published on a Twitter account claimed to belong to Australian Zehra Duman.

Our thematic analysis in section 7.5 showed that the women's columns in Dabiq and Rumiyah are relatively free from discussions about war and victimhood, and more concerned with how to organize one's life in the caliphate. This raises the question about how propaganda specifically aimed at women has changed, or will change, when there is no physical caliphate. In February 2018, the seventh instalment of IS's *Inside the Khilafah* video series was released by al-Hayat media center. The video details women in combat alongside men, fighting the "crusader coalition", as the narrator praises "the chaste *mujahidat* women journeying to her Lord with the garments of purity and faith, seeking revenge for

[141] Ahram, A. I. (2015). Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS. *Survival*, *57*(3), 57-78.

her religion and for the honour of her sisters imprisoned by the apostate Kurds." According to Kiriloi Ingram, the female IS fighters in the video might in fact be men in disguise.[142] Nevertheless, the fact that IS has explicitly portrayed women fighting does point to a shift in, or a broadening of, the roles that female IS supporters are encouraged to take.[143]

8.2 Female propagandists

The role of women in dissemination of IS propaganda is characterized by closely interconnected networks of friends and acquaintances of which some have already travelled to the caliphate. Many female recruiters are active online, where they seek contact with potential recruits.[144] Women who are already in the caliphate thus play an important role besides being good wives and child-bearers, i.e., the role of spreading propaganda and recruiting more women.[145]

Figure 8.2. An IS fighter kissing a cat.

[142] Ingram, K. (2018). *The Islamic State's manipulation of gender in their online information operations*. Voxpol, 22 March, 2018.
[143] Winter, C. (2018*). ISIS, Women and Jihad: Breaking With Convention.* Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 13 September, 2018.
[144] Shackel, S. (2016). The London girls lost to Isis: what became of the "jihadi brides." *New Statesman*, 6 October 2016.
[145] Saltman, E.M, Smith M. (2015). '*Till Martyrdom Do Us Part' Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon*. Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

8.2.1 Bloggers

Several female IS-supporters have expressed their support on social media, blogs and Tumblr. For instance, a female Tumblr profile called Al-Amriki posted fan pictures of good-looking IS fighters cuddling kittens in the caliphate (see an example in Figure 8.2), and memes with captions like “Keep calm and marry a mujahid”.

One of the best-known English-language blogs was written by a then 26-year-old Malaysian doctor who called herself Shams. In her blog, called "Diary of a Muhajirah”, Shams describes her life in the caliphate. The blog is filled with anecdotes from her everyday life as the wife of an IS warrior, as well as sugar-coated stories about the great love she experienced upon meeting her husband for the very first time, their wedding and their happy life together. Shams also describes how her best friend's husband is killed in battle and how his martyrdom is celebrated with an event where everyone is happy. She also writes about her worry that her husband will be killed every time he walks out.

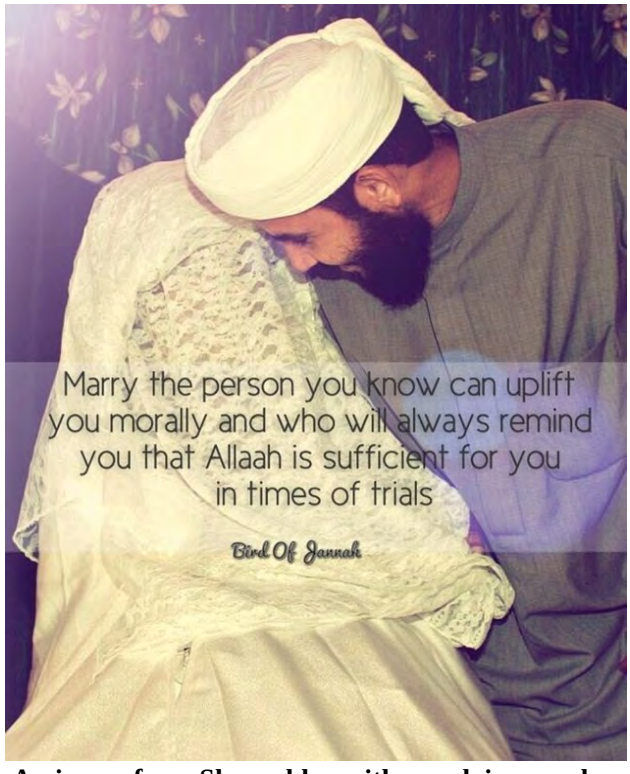


Figure 8.3. An image from Shams blog with an advice on whom to marry.

8.2.2 Female columnists

As mentioned in Chapter 7, Dabiq and Rumiyah have a special column for women. It appears for the first time in Dabiq's seventh issue, and reoccurs regularly with only one exception throughout all issues. Most of these columns, as is the case with most articles in Dabiq and Rumiyah overall, are written by unnamed authors. However, four female names appear among the named authors. Umm Sumayyah al Muhajirah is listed as the author of five moralistic columns in Dabiq, where she for example defends polygyny and slavery and speculates that Michelle Obama would be worth less than a third of a dinar on a slave market. Other authors writes more personal stories: Umm Khalid al-Finlandiyya writes about finding true Islam[146] and Umm Sulaym al-Muhajirah writes about her hijra.[147]

Figure 8.4. How many wives should a man have?

In an article (not part of the sisters column) Umm-Musa al-Finlandiyyah writes about how certain actions, such as voting in elections are "nullifiers of Islam" and make you a *kafir*. According to Finnish news channel Yle, Umm Musa is a young Finnish woman who became an IS-supporter only months after her conversion to Islam and brief marriage with a Muslim man in 2014. At the age of 20, she travelled to Syria and married an IS-fighter who had moved there six months before. Yle obtained this information from a now closed Facebook-

[146] *Dabiq* issue 15
[147] *Rumiyah* issue 13

account and interviews with people who knew her.[148] We have no information about the other women.

Due to the lack of additional information it is difficult to determine whether these columns are genuinely written by women or not. They may have been written by real women and heavily edited afterwards, or not written by women at all. A simple and universal way to get a hint of the gender of an author is to count the relative frequency of pronouns in the text.[149] Women tend to use more pronouns than men.[150] In Figure 8.5 the relative pronoun frequency for two distributions are created from a random set of English blogs with around 2000 texts per gender. We have placed all the female authors' pronoun use on this graph, along with four randomly selected male contributors to Dabiq and Rumiyah. We have also included Shams's blog in this graph.

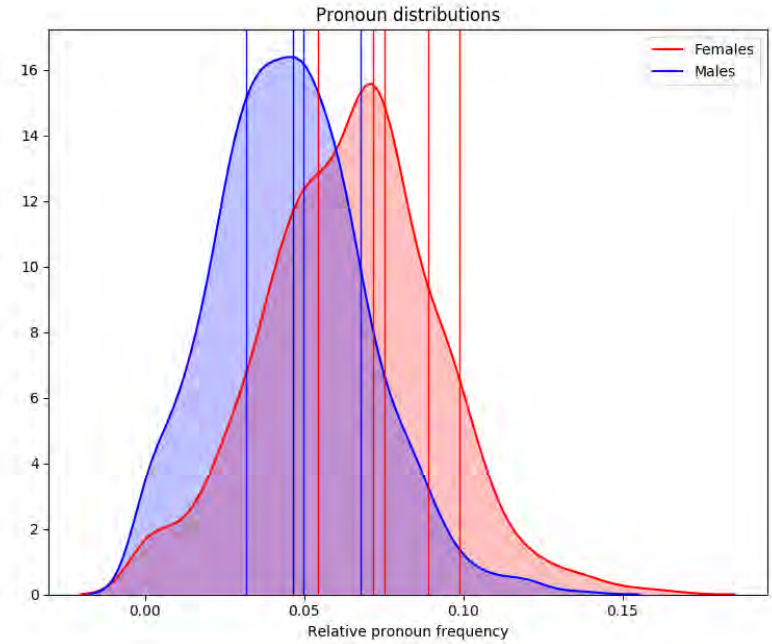


Figure 8.5. From left to right: Cantlie, Abul Harith, Abu Hamza, Umm Musa, Zarqawi, Umm Sumayah, Shams, Umm Sulaym, Umm Khalid.

[148] Ekholm, D. (2017). Finland omnämnt i terrorgruppen IS propaganda. *Yle Nyheter* March 11, 2017.
[149] There are more accurate approaches to detect the gender of an author using machine learning based models with more features than the use of pronouns.
[150] M. L. Newman, C. J. Groom, L. D. Handelman, J. W. Pennebaker, (2008) Gender differences in language use: An analysis of 14 000 text samples, Discourse Processes, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 211-236.

The blue vertical lines in the graph represent a set of male authors, and the red represent the female authors. From the left are: John Cantlie,[151] Abul-Harith ath-Thaghri,[152] Abu Hamza al-Muhajir,[153] Umm Musa al-Finlandiyyah, Abu Musab az-Zarqawi[154], Umm Sumayah al-Muhajirah, Shams, Umm Sulaym al-Muhajirah, and Umm Khalid al-Finlaandiyyah. All male writers except Zarqawi have a distinctively male pattern of pronoun use. The Zarqawi case is not an ideal candidate for pronoun analysis though. Since the text is mainly concerned with Muhammad, the pronouns *he*, *his* and *him* occur in very large proportion.

When it comes to female writers, the one that diverges from the female pattern of pronoun use is Umm Musa, although she is the only one of the women whose existence is confirmed. According to Finnish security forces, however, Umm Musa's text seems heavily edited by a propaganda machinery that streamlines the individual story to fit the general narrative.[155] This may also be the case for the other women. More complex analyses are needed to confirm or deny that their texts are genuine, although the results from the pronoun study point in the direction of them being so.

8.3 The portrayal of women: peers or property?

The changing roles for women are ubiquitously tied to the existence of the caliphate. Many scholars agree that it is a common feature of nationalist movements in general to regard women's bodies as an extension of the nation-state.[156] For pragmatic reasons childbearing is important to secure the future population, but there is also the matter of representation. Women, when properly dressed and behaved, are seen as embodiments of the boundaries of the nation and carriers of its honour.[157] Women and children come to represent the collective, the reason why men go to war. Kiriloi Ingram's analysis of Dabiq's appeal to Western women reveals that in articles not specifically written for women, portrayals of women are dominated by the archetype "victim". This kind of portrayal, according to Ingram, is used to empower a male audience, and motivate them to action by appealing to their moral and religious obligation of

[151] *Dabiq* issue 12. Cantlie is a British journalist who was kidnapped together with James Foley in 2012. He has remained a hostage since, and regularly appears in IS propaganda, where he defends IS against the West.
[152] *Dabiq* issue 15. Abul-Harith ath-Thaghri is an IS fighter who writes about his faith.
[153] *Rumiyah* issue 2. Abu Hamza al-Muhajir was the leader of ISI between 2006 and his death in 2010. In several issues, *Rumiyah* has published parts of his campaign *Paths to victory* from 2008.
[154] *Rumiyah* issue 12. Abu Musab az-Zarqawi was the leader of AQI and predecessor of Abu Hamza al-Muhajir. *His Important advice for the mujahidin* appears in two issues of *Rumiyah*, although its authenticity is not confirmed.
[155] Ekholm, D. (2017). Finland omnämnt i terrorgruppen IS propaganda. *Yle Nyheter* March 11.
[156] Yuval-Davis, N. (2003). Nationalist projects and gender relations. *Narodna umjetnost*, 40(1).
[157] Ibid.

waging jihad to protect women and save the *Umma*.[158] In articles written for women, the victim archetype was not common at all. This is consistent with our analysis presented in Chapter 7.

Another conclusion from Chapter 7 is that IS propaganda depicts a highly male-oriented culture, in which women are rarely mentioned outside of propaganda products specifically aimed at women. And even in the women's columns, the topics are circle around men. They are basically advice columns about how to behave in relation to men, and enumerations of the rights men possess in relationship to women. However, even though rarely mentioned, women are highly important in IS's ideology, not as individuals, but for the sense of community and nation-building efforts.

Though the strict interpretation of sharia prohibits any possibilities of camaraderie or interactions on equal terms between sexes, male recruits are made aware that women will be present if they join IS. In contrast to groups such as Al-Qaida, where male fighters live under primitive conditions as ascetic warriors of Islam, away from their wives and families, IS members are offered the opportunity to marry one or several women within the organization, to raise families, which will render them both status and a slightly more comfortable life.[159] They are also offered the prospect of keeping female slaves that they are allowed to buy, rape, and sell as they please (see Section 8.4). Thus, for a low-status, marginalized, young man, the prospects of sexual gratification might seem to improve if he joins IS.[160]

A way of studying how women are portrayed in IS propaganda is to examine how words that refer to women are used. In this section, we have executed a computerised lexicological study to find the words in Dabiq and Rumiyah that are semantically related to the words *female*, *women*, and *woman*. Such related words are words that may have been used in a similar way (as close synonyms to the search term), or words that often occur in the same context as the search term (that is, they have an *associative* relation to the search term). The words were divided into five different categories, as illustrated in Table 8.6.

[158] Ingram, K. (2017). *More Than"Jihadi Brides" and "Eye Candy": How Dabiq Appeals to Western Women.* ICCT, 12 August, 2016.
[159] Esposito, J. (2015) *Islam and Political Violence*. Washington: Georgetown University.
[160] Callimachi, R. (2015). ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape. *The New York Times*.

Table 8.6. Words related to women in IS propaganda

Category	Word
Marriage	marry, marrying, married, ‘iddah
Family	daughter, husband, sister, children, men
Slavery	slavegirl, enslavement, enslaving, servants, possess, captives, slaves
Prohibition	harām, prohibited, gambling
Characteristics	dedicated, chaste, foolish, flimsy, vile

The analysis shows that women often occur in contexts involving family and marriage, which is not surprising given the role women are presumed to have in IS. Women are also often mentioned in contexts involving slavery. This is because of the magazines include several articles about sexual slavery (see section 8.4). The category prohibition contains associations that are related to things that are prohibited for women, for example wearing perfume when leaving the house.[161] Women are also associated with some, for IS, very positively loaded female characteristics such as *chaste* and *dedicated* as well as more negative characteristic such as *foolish, flimsy* and *vile*. The positive characteristics are mainly associated with the women of IS while the negative characteristics are associated with disbelieving women.[162]

8.4 The “other women” – Sexual slavery in the Islamic State

Sexual violence during war and conflict is not uncommon.[163] Sometimes, it is a component of genocide or ethnic cleansing, sometimes a means of humiliating the enemy, closely connected with the view of women as extensions of the nation-state, mentioned in Section 8.3. According to Zainab Bangura, UN representative on sexual violence, the brutal and systematic sexual slavery practiced by IS stands out in the modern history of wartime sexual violence, and

[161] *Rumiyah* issue 12.
[162] One example is found in *Rumiyah* issue 4, where Kurdish women are described as “… the lewd, atheist, and disbelieving women who are, by Allah, the vile, despicable, absurd, and miserable.“
[163] Wood, E. J. (2006). Variation in sexual violence during war. *Politics & Society*, *34*(3), 307-342.

should be regarded as one of their terror tactics.[164] In August 2014, IS abducted approximately 2,500 women and children from the Sinjar district in Iraq. Most of these were members of the Yazidi community, that IS regard as devil-worshippers.[165] During the fall, representatives of the UN received reports that an office for the sale of abducted women had opened in Mosul. The buyers were said to be mostly youth from local communities, who IS were selling these women to as a means of inducing them to join the ranks.[166] There were also testimonies about women being raped and sold in markets. Since then, several first-hand accounts from survivors have emerged to corroborate the details of IS's engagement in trafficking and slavery.[167]

The practice of taking slaves through war, referred to as *saby* (also *sabi* or *al-saby*) is openly advocated in IS propaganda. With reference to religious sources, it is stated that all disbelieving men must be killed, and that disbelieving women are to be considered concubines and rightful spoils of jihad.[168] The fourth issue of Dabiq, published in October 2014, features an article called "Revival of Slavery before the Hour". The article states that after the Yazidis in Sinjar were captured and the men were killed, women and children were divided according amongst the IS-fighters who had participated in the operations, after one fifth of the slaves had been transferred to IS authorities as tax payment. The article refers to a prophecy that mentions the return of slavery as one of the signs that the Hour (i.e., the day of judgment) is approaching, a prophecy that IS are proud to fulfil. The article also provides some more utilitarian arguments for saby, such as the protection from adultery and fornication that follows from providing unmarried men with sharia alternatives to marriage.[169] IS fighters do not need to marry the sabayah for sexual gratification. They are given to them as a "gift from Allah" to use for their own pleasure.[170]

In the ninth issue of Dabiq, a defence of saby is directed toward women. In the sisters-column, entitled "Slave-girls or prostitutes?" the author scorns those who reject the practice, and expresses her alarm that even some IS supporters seem to believe it is wrong. In a vitriolic message to the West, she compares the practice

[164] Strasser, F. (2016).ISIS Makes Sex Slavery Key Tactic of Terrorism. *United States Institute of Peace*, 6 October 2016.
[165] See for instance *Dabiq* issue 4.
[166] UNHCHR & UNAMI (United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq). 2014. *Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 6 July-10 September 2014*.
[167] See for instance Amnesty International (2014). Escape from hell. Torture and sexual slavery in Islamic State captivity in Iraq. Index: MDE 14/021/2014; Murad, N. (2017).*The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State*.
[168] It should be noted that no kind of slavery is condoned as a religious institution in the Quran, although it is accepted as the widely practiced custom it was during the 600th century.
[169] *Dabiq* issue 4.
[170] Ali, M. (2015). ISIS and propaganda: How ISIS exploits women. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*, 10-11.

of saby to prostitution, which she asserts is accepted in the West. She finds it incomprehensible that prostitutes are allowed to openly "commit sin and sell their honour", while "copulation with slave-girls" is considered rape.[171]

A pamphlet released in Arabic by the Research and Fatwa department of the Islamic State provides guidelines on how to keep female slaves. It is permissible, according to the pamphlet, "to buy, sell, or give as a gift female captives and slaves, for they are merely property, which can be disposed of." Further, it states that sexual intercourse with a female captive is permissible as long as she is not pregnant and "It is permissible to have intercourse with the female slave who has not reached puberty if she is fit for intercourse."[172]

It is also said in the pamphlet that saby will increase the IS community, since the slaves will fall pregnant with children that will be brought up among its fighters.[173] Given that only 13 % of IS-travellers are female, saby may indeed be a way of trying to solve the shortage of women in the Islamic State. The Islamic tradition of patrilineal descent means that any children born to IS fathers will be considered part of the IS community.[174] However, the number of pregnancies of Yazidi rape victims is very low compared both to the normal fertility rate, and to other instances of wartime sexual violence.[175] There are several testimonies about rape victims being subjected to birth control, in oral or injectable form, sometimes both.[176] Given how IS's practice of sexual slavery is presented in the propaganda, it seems to be simultaneously an attempt to entice young men to join the ranks, and yet another of their horrific ways to show dominance by subordinating and degrading the "infidels and apostates".[177] Saby, like all of IS's questionable practices, is justified using idiosyncratic interpretations of religious sources, like the apocalyptic prophecy of "the slave girl giving birth to her master."[178]

[171] *Dabiq* issue 9.
[172] Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) (2014). *Islamic State (ISIS) Releases Pamphlet On Female Slaves*.
[173] Otten C. (2017) Slaves of ISIS: The long walk of the Yazidi women. *The Guardian* 25 July 2017.
[174] Ahram, A. I. (2015). Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS. *Survival*, *57*(3).
[175] Loncar M, Medved V, Jovanović N, Hotujac L. Psychological consequences of rape on women in 1991-1995 war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Croat Med J*. 2006;47(1).
[176] Callimachi, R. (2016). To Maintain Supply of Sex Slaves, ISIS pushes birth control. *The New York Times*, 12 March 2016.
[177] Ahram, A. I. (2015). Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS. *Survival*, *57*(3), 57-78.
[178] *Dabiq* issue 4.

8.5 ”The next generation of warriors” – children in IS propaganda

This section is focused on how young children are portrayed in IS propaganda. Children are usually portrayed in one of three ways: as soldiers or prospective soldiers, as victims, or as happy children having a good time in the caliphate. The Quilliam Foundation has analysed the portrayal of children in IS propaganda in the period between August 2015 and February 2016. The results showed that children are primarily portrayed in relation to actions that normalize violence and as participants in violent acts, such as the executions of prisoners. In addition to this, the analysis showed that children were also presented extensively in relation to the utopic themes surrounding the caliphate, such as functioning education and health care.[179]

Figure 8.7. A child said to be receiving cancer treatment at an IS-controlled hospital holds up the flag of tawhid – the “IS flag”.

At a time when international media reported about children being mistreated and exploited by IS, for example as blood donors to injured soldiers,[180] messages about children being well taken care of in the caliphate were important for

[179] Benotman, N. & Malik, N. (2016). *The Children of the Islamic State*. London: Quilliam.
[180] Stern J. and Berger JM. (2015). ‘Raising tomorrow’s mujahideen’: The horrific world of Isis’s child soldiers. *The Guardian* 10 March 2015.

keeping IS's international supporter base. Even though IS stands for a collectivist culture, where the group is more important than the individual, it is a fact that most parents desire good and secure lives for their children, where health care, school, and basic necessities are available, and where they can grow up in a society with decent values. Images of children have strong sentimental value, which IS exploits, not only by showing happy children in the caliphate, but also by depicting children as victims, dead or wounded after military operations against IS.[181]

Figure 8.8. It is a blessing to raise one's children in the Caliphate.

Protecting even the smallest children from war, death, and weapons does not seem to be a concern among IS supporters. On the contrary, in the same way that young IS followers post Tumblr images of cute kittens with weapons (see Section 6.2), IS productions frequently carry images of children, from the age of one and upwards, bearing weapons. Although the youngest children are portrayed in a playful way with toy weapons, these depictions nevertheless reflect a serious moral conviction that children should be hands-on initiated in

[181] *Dabiq* issue 4.

jihad from a very early age. Teaching children to handle weapons is an important part of child rearing in the caliphate.[182]

Figure 8.9. Cubs of the caliphate.

Children that have received military training within IS are called *cubs of the Caliphate.*[183] In typically well-produced videos, Al- Hayat media center shows how children, dressed in military clothing and wearing Tawhid headbands, undergo military training and participate in the execution of prisoners.[184] In *Dabiq* issue 8, there is a spread showing two prepubescent boys holding pistols. According to the captions, one of the boys has just executed a person and the other is about to do so. The text relates how it is IS's duty to prepare the next generation for struggle against *"the crusaders,"* through institutions where the children can develop their military knowledge and participate in IS's religious schooling.[185] According to Norman Benotman and Nikita Malik of the Quilliam Foundation, children's participation in executions is presented as an honour, and something that makes the children happy. IS propaganda shows, among other things, children running around happily after having executed Syrian prisoners.[186] The fact that children are portrayed in this way serves to emphasize that violence and war are not merely a means to an end for IS, nor a necessary evil, but an end in itself, and the only right way to live.

[182] Stern, J. and Berger, JM. (2015). *ISIS: the state of terror*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
[183] The English word *cub*, is often used in the sense of "a young and inexperienced person," to denote a novice, or apprentice. Cub can also mean a young animal, which in the case of IS implies lion cub, since IS warriors are often called "lions." See, for example, *Dabiq* issue 8 and *Dabiq* issue 20.
[184] NCTV/AIVD (2017). *The Children of ISIS. The indoctrination of children in ISIS-held territory.* A joint publication by the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) and the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), the Hague.
[185] *Dabiq* issue 8, 20*f.*
[186] Benotman, N. & Malik, N. (2016) *The Children of the Islamic State*, London: Quilliam.

Today, some of the children that were raised in the caliphate have returned to their countries of origin. In some of cases the children are separated from their parents upon return and need help to deal with traumatic experiences. Even if a child returnee has not been involved in training or other violent activities, there might be many other aspects that need to be considered when working with reintegration. One example is the case with a three-year old British child returnee described by Nikita Malik.[187] The child did not participate in education or training during his stay with the Islamic State, but he was frequently photographed with an Islamic State logo balaclava and next to an AK47 with the aim to promote violent extremism. Malik states that there is a risk that the child will experience emotional harm when he in a later stage in life becomes aware of the existence of the images and also of his parent's role in their production. The work with reintegration of child returnees will be a challenge.

[187] Malik, N (2018) What Can Be Done About The Children Who Return From Islamic State? Forbes, September 14.

9 Concluding Remarks

The focus of this report has been to increase knowledge about how IS use digital propaganda to gain followers in the West. Their digital prowess has been a crucial part of their successes in gaining a global network of followers.

A decline of IS propaganda distribution was noted during the final three months of 2017, after the great territorial losses during which several key media contributors were also presumably killed. A partial recovery of the propaganda production was noted in early 2018, but by June 2018 it reached an all time low.[188] However, IS propaganda bureaus outside of Iraq and Syria have increased their production in 2018.[189] Meanwhile, the number of IS-related terror attacks have plummeted during 2018. Between 2015 and 2017 IS carried out on average 21 attacks per year, whereas they have only carried out four in 2018 (by September). Yet, the number of averted attacks has remained on a steady level, showing that IS's intention of commiting terror attacks has not waned at all.[190]

In June, an IS-affiliate was caught in Germany with a highly toxic biological agent, something that has not happened before.[191] Just as their media strategies, IS's terror tactics seem to be constantly evolving, which is why security forces need to always stay a step ahead. The recent successes in averting terrorist plots can at least partly be attributed to closer monitoring of social media and surveillance of communication platforms such as Telegram. Since most of the IS-related attacks in 2016 and 2017 were carried out by lone actors or small cells connected to IS only via digital channels,[192] this is clearly the way to go right now. Within a year, another tactic will likely be needed to avert new terror plots.

Even though many experts doubt IS's capability of cyber warfare, i.e., hacking networks and online control systems, it is a possibility that should not be entirely dismissed. In November 2017, a Swedish radio station was hacked and the song, "For the Sake of Allah," was played several times for 30 minutes. The song encourages people to join Islamic State.[193]

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[188] BBC Monitoring Analysis: IS media show signs of recovery after sharp decline. February 23 2018.
[189] Milton, D. (2018) *Down but Not Out: An Updated examination of the Islamic State's Visual Propaganda.* Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point.24 *July, 2018.*
[190] Callimachi, R. (2018). Why a 'Dramatic Dip' in ISIS attacks in the West is Scant Comfort. *The New York Times,* September 12, 2018.
[191] Flade, F (2018) *The June 2018 Cologne Ricin Plot: A New Threshold in Jihadi Bio Terror.* CTC Sentinel, 11:7.
[192] Callimachi, R. (2018). Why a 'Dramatic Dip' in ISIS attacks in the West is Scant Comfort. *The New York Times,* 12 September 2018.
[193] Swedish radio channel 'hijacked by Islamic State propaganda song' BBC News November 10, 2017.

Terror attacks and cyber war aside, it is not unlikely that online IS propaganda will flare up again, although it will probably be different from the caliphate-years. The countermeasures taken so far consist of two kinds of action: Removing the propaganda from online platforms, and formulating counter-messages.

Many of the larger social media companies have put great effort and resources into removing IS propaganda from their platforms. Attempts to aid smaller social media companies in removal of IS propaganda have also been made, for example by the Home Office in the UK.[194] This makes it more difficult for IS supporters to use social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Instead, they are pushed towards using other forms of social media, such as private messaging services. Conway et al. reports that IS and its supporters are significantly disrupted by Twitter suspending their activities. Currently, IS uses Twitter to distributie links to pro-IS content on other platforms with accounts that are so-called throwaway accounts.[195]

In a study of counter terrorism prosecutions in the UK, it was found that in the cases that involved digital channels a number of different sources including encrypted media, Twitter, Google+, Youtube, Instagram and Facebook were used. The variation of social media platforms used by jihadists differs from far right extremists, who used only Facebook and Twitter.[196]

The fact that IS supporters are banned from many of the largest platforms makes it much more difficult to reach out to new supporters. To ensure that propaganda reaches supporters, IS constantly needs to find new ways of disseminating propaganda online. Europol, the EU's law enforcement organisation, indicated that IS has developed its own social media platform to avoid disruptions in their dissemination of propaganda.[197] This is perhaps an attempt to construct a digital caliphate that lives on even when the physical caliphate does not.

The other approach is to try to minimise the negative effects of the IS propaganda that remains online in spite of shutdown efforts. The default method for this seems to be counter-messaging. There are several challenges to this approach. First of all, the subject needs to be directed to the counter-message.

[194] Greenfield, P. (2018). UK security and counter-terrorism Home Office unveils AI program to tackle Isis online propaganda. *The Guardian*, 13 February, 2018.
[195] Conway, M., Khawaja, M., Lakhami, S., Reffin, J., Roberston, A. & Weir, D. (2017). *Disrupting Daesh: Measuring Takedown of Online Terrorist Material and its Impacts*. VOX-Pol Network of Excellence.
[196] Malik, N. (2018) The Fight Against Terrorism Online: Here's The Verdict. Forbes, 20 September.
[197] Holden, M. (2017) *Islamic State militants developing own social media platform*: Europol, Reuters, 3 May 2017.

Google's redirect method is one attempt to interact with young people who are searching for extremist content on YouTube. The idea behind the redirect method is to provide existing counter-narrative videos with the aim of changing the minds of individuals in danger of being radicalized by IS. However, it is not clear how effective counter-narratives actually are when it comes to countering violent extremism.

Because IS propaganda is so complex and diversified, it precludes the formulation of a universal counter-message. By breaking down the propaganda and analysing it in detail, it is possible to gain a sense of how it is constructed to lock on to the recipient's incentives, urges, and desires. Only with this kind of knowledge in hand is it possible to develop a suite of effective counter-strategies. An obstacle to useful analyses of online propaganda is the enormous amount of propaganda material available on numerous different communication channels. Manual analyses do not allow for the kind of large-scale studies of online propaganda that needed to cover the whole spectrum, neither can they readily track changes over time in order to preserve the relevance of the analyses, or to identify connections between propaganda messages and political events. Fully computerised analyses, on the other hand, do not take into consideration the specific contexts in which messages appear, neither are they sensitive to subtexts or symbolism. A manual analysis of propaganda is crucial when designing algorithms as well as in assuring the correctness of the results. A combined approach will provide the most accurate results.

Even though the physical caliphate no longer exists, IS propaganda will continue to exist in digital environments. It is impossible to remove all IS propaganda from the Internet. When propaganda is removed from major platforms, there will always be copies elsewhere that can continue circulating on the Internet. Propaganda that is not violent, and not produced by one of the official IS propaganda outlets (which would make it easier to identify) will be difficult to remove at all. Perhaps it is the propaganda that depicts the caliphate as utopia that will be the most powerful when it comes to attracting young people to IS. A potential future for IS is described by terrorist researcher Thomas Hegghammer "We'll see IS flip into a lost caliphate narrative. They will say we had this amazing society and they came along and broke it again. You'll get caliphate nostalgia just like you get communism nostalgia in Eastern Europe. In five or 10 years' time 17-year-olds will look at pictures of the Islamic State and want to fight against the people who destroyed it."[198] One thing that we do know is that the digital jihad will continue regardless of the future for a physical caliphate.

[198] Andrew, A. (2017) The art of making a jihadist. The Observer Islam, *The Guardian* 23 June.

Figure 9.1. Moonlit scenery from the lost Caliphate.

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