

Jihad, Social Media, and Popular Culture

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This essay suggests that contemporary interpretations of jihad as violence or “fighting” be considered in the context of modern cultural formations central to the formation of modern subjects. Following on the thought of Marshall McLuhan, we observe a connection between the media and the message “because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.” By this, we can observe the ways in which media shapes jihad (and jihadists) in new ways and is in turn used to advance the cause of jihad—how does it structure the discourse of jihad and shape the jihadi imagination? What kinds of content does it insist upon? What kind of audience does it evoke? We find that ISIS propaganda on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube draws on popular culture to, in turn, become popular. Attending to the forces shaping discourses of jihad (and jihadist themselves) is vital if we are to understand not only why jihadism has become popular but also how what is popular has become part of jihad.

Keywords: ISIS, jihad, popular culture, social media.

In June of 2014, the Islamic State announced that the caliphate had been revived. In a video showing abandoned Iraqi military gear and featuring a dozen men identified as former Iraqi military personnel, Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani, a figure who would later become familiar as ISIS’s official spokesman, announced that “the legality of all emirates, groups, states and organisations becomes null...” Speaking to a global Muslim audience, Adnani then commanded to obey him and support the newly found Islamic State. The goal of the state was twofold: to establish a space of ‘pure’ Islam in the revival of the caliphate, and the same time, lay the groundwork for the end of times and hasten the *yam al qiyamah*, or the Day of Judgement. As of this writing, ISIS is no longer a viable political entity. In its short lifespan, however, it created apocalyptic scenes of violence, brutality and death, and, what’s more, showcased its violence for all the world to see.

ISIS’s media productions are stylized to mimic commercial media standards and so appear fictitious. Its violence has become a potent cultural vector in the constitution of jihadi identities. Jihad not only takes the form of violence--war and global terrorist attacks-- but also communication. I want to suggest that the form through which jihadi discourse circulates is central to how we understand “jihad.” Contemporary interpretations of jihad as violence or “fighting” should therefore, I suggest, be considered in the context of modern cultural formations central to the formation of modern subjects. Attending to the forces shaping discourses of jihad (and jihadist themselves) is vital if we are to understand not only why jihadism has become popular but also how what is popular has become part of jihad.

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association and action.”¹ By this, we can observe the ways in which media shapes jihad (and jihadists) in new ways and is in turn used to advance the cause of jihad--how does it structure the discourse of jihad and shape the jihadi imagination? What kinds of content does it insist upon? What kind of audience does it evoke? ISIS propaganda on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube draws on popular culture to, in turn, become popular.

The article proceeds as follows: The following section review the literature on contemporary jihadi culture and situates the argument of this paper in the context of current analysis of the intersections of communication and cultural studies. I then go on to contextualize “jihad” as militantism and define the core concepts the paper draws upon in what follows. I then explore the relationship between technological developments and discourses of jihad and theorize the popularization of “jihadism” among young western recruits by analyzing the shifts in media formations used to disseminate Islamic thought--from cassette tapes to Twitter and Facebook.

Transformations in “Jihad”

As for the current of jihadi salafism, it is the current I consider to have been set down as a method and as a comprehensive plan by sharia and universal laws.

--Abu Bakr al Naji, *author The Management of Savagery*

Jihad is an idea and an ideology. In *Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists* Thomas Hegghammer notes that the aesthetic culture of contemporary jihadists forms a constituent part of militancy. On this view, jihadism is about “more than bombs and doctrines. It is about rituals, customs and dress codes. It is about music, films and story-telling. It is about sports, jokes and food.” Hegghammer thus distinguish between jihadi doctrine and aesthetics, meaning that the culture of jihad is not synonymous with the ideology. For Hegghammer and the text authors, it is sufficient to note that jihadi poetry, film and music serve non-strategic purposes. In this regard, *Jihadi Culture* is preceded by a series of other studies into the culture and discourse of ‘militant’ Islamists, such as Hamas and Hezbollah.² Alagha’s exploration of Hizbullah’s use of “resistance art,” which melds Islamist ideology with politically motivated art forms—dancing, music and literature. In western contexts, Manni Crone’s analysis of Muslim militancy finds a link between aesthetic expressions in jihadi videos and hymns and the process of radicalization in Denmark, a major focal point of ISIS recruitment media. Similarly, Claudia Dantschke’s working paper³ on “Pop-Jihad’: History and the Structure of Salafism in Germany,” set the groundwork for research on the intersections between popular media and culture and salafi thinking. Dantsche finds “a genuine jihad-based youth culture with its own music, clothing styles and iconography, creating what other scholars have since called (in reference to both militant and non-militant Muslim youth, respectively) “Muslim cool.”⁴ This paper contributes to the scholarship by exploring the influence of western media and popular culture on jihadi discourse. Using discourse analysis,

¹Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley California Press, 2013):2.

² See for example Tristan Dunning. *Hamas, Jihad and Popular Legitimacy: Reinterpreting Resistance in Palestine*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016) and Alagha, Joseph Elie. *Hizbullah’s DNA and the Arab Spring*. (Delhi, India: KW Publishers Pvt, 2012).

³ As quoted in Thomas Hegghammer. *Jihad Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Jihadists*. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2017): np.

⁴ See for example Maruta Herding. *Inventing the Muslim Cool: Islamic Youth Culture in Western Europe (Global/Local Islam)*. (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript-verlag, 2014).

I illustrate the ways in which ISIS propaganda appeals to western youth through a complex media strategy that brings together religious instruction, historical allusion, Hollywood-style imagery and the “selfie.”

Upon the death of then leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, senior members of the group issued a eulogy to this effect: “They [the American Armed Forces] think that we fight for money and prestige--and what they do not understand is that our arteries are filled with the ideology of jihad. Even if they managed to reach Zarqawi, praise be to Allah, we have a million more Zarqawis because our *umma* is the *umma* of jihad, and jihad is at the top of our religious hierarchy.”⁵ In this usage, jihad is interpreted to mean “fighting.” Abdallah Azzam, the spiritual leader of the Afghan mujahideen, argued that the specific legal meaning of the word notes *al qital* or fighting. Drawing on the consensus of Islam’s four legal schools, Azzam also argued that “fighting” (rather than the more literal “struggling/to struggle”) is the most appropriate interpretation due to “jihad’s” usage in the Quran where the term is accompanied by the phrase *fi sabil illah* or “in the way of God.”⁶

After the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, jihad’s primary definition meant “armed resistance.” Abdallah Azzam’s fatwa regarding the obligatory nature of jihad became a watershed in this regard. Azzam argued that fighting conquering armies in Muslim lands was an individual and communal obligation of all believing Muslims.⁷ Azzam’s fatwa was also a clarion call to foreign fighters who would become the central actors in the Afghan war against the Soviets and would set the discursive stage on which Al-Qaeda and, later, ISIS would promote militant jihad as *fard ayn* or a personal obligation. It would also be during this campaign that an ideology of a global jihad for a global ummah would gather force, forming the central organizing principle around which discourses of jihad would from then on turn.⁸

Jihad has a long history in the development of Islamic jurisprudence. Shiraz Maher (2016) observes that ‘the idea did not exist during the initial phases of the Islamic revelation when the Prophet Muhammad and his companions resided in Makkah despite facing intense persecution and oppression.’⁹ In its broadest sense, however, it is part of a religious practice of self-discipline. Historically, “jihad” was situated in a dynamic moral project referred to as *jihad al kabir* or “the greater jihad” and involved practices of self-discipline as well as social duties. According to Wael Hallaq this understanding of jihad, what he defines as “striving toward the accomplishment of a moral end”¹⁰ was paradigmatic of an all-encompassing moral dispensation governing Muslim societies. What this means is Muslim communities were governed by an ethical framework at the center of which was a conception of theological order.

⁵ Shiraz Maher. *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea*. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2016) 21.

⁶ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 32.

⁷ Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. (New York, NY: Regan Arts, 2015):16.

⁸ The rise of this strain of thought in Islam, often referred to as *salafiyya jihadia* or salafi jihadism, dates to the 1990s and the end of the Islamist experiment which began in the 1950s and reached its peak in the 1970s and 1980s. Violent formations were particularly evident across North Africa, first with the Algerian Civil War and then with the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria. The Tunisian Ennahda party was also brutally oppressed by the state. At roughly the same time, the Taliban and the burgeoning insurgencies in Bosnia and Chechnya were showing signs of success through violent force. Non-violence was showing itself to be a weak force against the overwhelming power of the state, while the force exhibited by Muslim insurgents suggested that “if Islam was going to be politically empowered, it would also have to assert itself physically and militarily” (Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 17). But it was the 2003 US invasion of Iraq that that solidified jihadi action and doctrine into a coherent worldview.

⁹ Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS*, 31

¹⁰Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS*, 11

Today, the discourse of defensive jihad has been taken up by jihadi groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS to justify offensive acts of violence. The qualifications attached to fighting (proper authorization via a legitimate emir or Islamic leader; clearly delineated goals and, in some readings, the spiritual preparation of the Muslim community involved for the possibilities of an Islamic state, an argument made by Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani) have been removed; in their place has emerged a blanket mandate to fight justified by the jurisprudential principle of balances, or *fiqh al muwazanat* or “choosing between two evils premised on a false dichotomy inattentive to context.

As with the telegraph and the emergence of a discourse out of bound of a coherent conversation, the media formations in which violent calls to jihad would take form would give legitimacy to “context-free information” requiring a content lacking clear definitions or histories or immediate relevance to readers’ lives.¹¹ The discourse of jihad became almost purely inflammatory, invoked to stir up emotions, spur unreasoned action and annihilate both space (injustice endured by Muslims anywhere are regarded as injustices endured everywhere) and time (the past is repeatedly invoked in the call to arms through recollections of the first fitnah). Through emotional appeals, however, this kind of call to action seemingly made context-less, history-less, irrelevant (to the individual) information less remote and abstract and abundantly urgent. Thus making jihad incumbent upon all individuals, even when they have failed to live up to Islam’s other mandates, Azzam argued that Muslims “must choose from two evils. Which is the greater evil: that Russia takes Afghanistan, turns it into a *kafir* (disbeliever) country and forbids Quran and Islam for it, or jihad with a nation with sins and error.”¹² Normative power should be turned on its head: “‘No permission is required from the husband for the wife, the parent for the child, the creditor for the debtor.’ It follows that jihad is therefore licensed with an amir. His absence ‘does not annul the obligation of fighting in the defense of Muslim lands.’”¹³ Both Al Qaeda and ISIS draw on Quranic themes of “justified” (defensive) violence to recruit youth to “fight them wherever you find them.” The modern problem of social and political impotence is, at least in part, resolved.

“Fight Them Wherever You Find Them”

O sheikh of killers Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, continue to follow the straight path with Allah’s help, guided by Allah, Fight together with the monotheists against the idol-worshipers, together with the warriors of jihad against the collaborators, the hypocrites, and the rebellious...show him no mercy!”

--Abd El-Rahman ibn Salem Al-Shamari in 2004 issue of *Voice of Jihad*

In a statement released by ISIS’s Mosul branch in 2013, the group justified a suicide bombing operation against the Iraqi police by citing Qur’anic verse 22:39, stating that “Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought because they have been wronged.” At this stage in ISIS’s formation, the “state” was still in its infancy, but as would become clear in the weeks and months that would follow, the group would develop a sophisticated communication strategy that would appeal to both local and foreign fighters. Central to this strategy was the capacity to draw on Quranic themes of defensive jihad to cast the wars in Iraq and then Syria as not only justified but mandatory.

¹¹Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1985): np, Kindle.

¹²As quoted in Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 36

¹³As quoted in Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 38

ISIS followed the trajectory first set out by Al Qaeda whose discourse of “jihad” referred a global struggle against illegitimate authority. This “jihad” focuses largely on the West and derives from a broad reading of Q: 2:190 where Muslims are enjoined to fight where they are being fought. As with Azzam’s fatwa regarding Afghanistan, jihad against the US was presented as defensive:

We declared jihad against the U.S. government because the U.S. government...has committed acts that are extremely unjust, hideous, and criminal whether directly or through its support of the Israeli occupation of [Palestine]. And we believe the U.S. is directly responsible for those who were killed in Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq. This U.S. government abandoned humanitarian feelings by these hideous crimes. It transgressed all bounds and behaved in a way not witnessed before by any power or any imperialist power in the world.¹⁴

Bin Laden is also very explicit about the meaning of Al Qaeda’s violence and the different standards that are often used to understand it. Situating Al Qaeda’s violence against acts of war, Bin Laden rejects the idea that it is any different from other forms of violence which have become acceptable, telling Bergen that

The U.S. today has set a double standard, calling whoever goes against its injustice a terrorist....It wants to occupy our countries, steal our resources, impose on us agents to rule us...and wants us to agree to all these. If we refuse to do so, it will say, ‘You are terrorists.’ With a simple look at the U.S. behaviors, we find that it judges the behavior of poor Palestinian children whose country was occupied: if they throw stones against the Israeli occupation, it says they are terrorists, whereas when Israeli pilots bombed the United Nations building in Qana, Lebanon, while it was full of children and women, the U.S. stopped any plan to condemn Israel.¹⁵

Later in the interview, Bergen reports Bin Laden’s recollection of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, calling the bombings terrorist attacks that are not identified as such:

Wherever we look, we find the U.S. as the leader of terrorism and crime in the world. The U.S. does not consider it a terrorist act to throw atomic bombs at nations thousands of miles away, when those bombs would hit more than just military targets. Those bombs rather were thrown at entire nations, including women, children, and elderly people, and up to this day the traces of those bombs remain Japan.¹⁶

Implicit in the discourse of defensive jihad produced by Al Qaeda is an idiosyncratic reading of the principle of *qisas*, a form of retributive punishment in Islamic law in which the nearest relatives of a murder victim may seek retribution against the murder in a manner equivalent to the crime. From this vantage point, targeting civilians can be justified by novel interpretations “defense” so that “fighting” and “aggression” against Muslims so that the meaning of these words can be broadened to encompass everything from the presence of military personnel in spaces where they should not be--in his various communiques, Bin Laden often referred to the Israeli occupation the presence of American troops on Saudi soil and as well as with broader US foreign policy of in the

¹⁴As quoted in Bergen, Peter. *Holy War Inc. Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden*. New York, NY: Free Press, 2001): np, Kindle.

¹⁵As quoted in Bergen, Peter. *Holy War Inc. Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden*. New York, NY: Free Press, 2001): np, Kindle.

¹⁶As quoted in Bergen Bergen, Peter. *The Osama Bin Laden I know: An Oral history of Al Qaeda’s leader*. (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006): np, Kindle.

Middle East--to acts of war--Afghanistan, Kashmir, Chechnya, Palestine, etc. The roots of Al Qaeda's discourse are grounded the experiences of Sunni Islam over the last century and a half.¹⁷

Historically, however, the principle of qisas could only be applied by religious authorities in Islamic courts rather than on an individualized basis. It derives from the pre-Islamic practices of tribal Arabs for whom the blood of some was thought to be more valuable than others'. *Qisas*, a word which translates roughly to mean "equality," addressed this problem by establishing the sanctity of all life. As a tool for social regulation, it aimed to protect the lives of the most vulnerable--women and slaves, who, in the social system of the pre-Islamic Arabs, could be killed with impunity. Quran 6:151 aimed to establish a new norm: "Take not life which Allah has made sacred except by way of justice and law. ..."¹⁸ Life itself, apart from social status, takes on a sacred value, producing a paradox in conceptions of justice requiring the taking of life as a response for the intentional killing of another outside of the contexts of war. One way around this paradox was the introduction of *diyat* or payment of blood money. As per Quran 2:178: "... But if any remission is made by the brother of the slain, then grant any reasonable demand, and compensate him with handsome gratitude, this is a concession and a mercy from your Lord. After this whoever exceeds the limits shall be in grave penalty." There are competing imperatives here--equity and mercy; however, the option of *diyat* is offered as an exception so that principle of equity stands out.

The brand of Islamic philosophy Al Qaeda (and then ISIS) would draw on reflects an innovation of traditional scholarship instrumental to practical exigencies. The classical notion that "knowledge should be sought for the sake of practice" (*al 'ilm li'l-'amal*) is turned on its head; religious authority rests not with knowledge, but with religious zeal. The relationship between power and knowledge is undone. This would be reflected in the fact that this generation would produce no theoretical or jurisprudential texts, but rather an avalanche of popular media formations from military handbooks, to online *fatawa* (legal rulings) issued through jihadi websites and forums, to television appearances via the release of video to mainstream media to, finally, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. All of this is reflective of a new understanding of religious authority in the Islamic lexicon. Religious practice takes place "at a distance," outside of the centers of religious authority and follows regimes of consumption, as Salvatore outlines:

Actors within the religious field organize their interests, fulfill their functions, acquire their cultural capital and social prestige and reinvest them in the culture market according to dynamics that increasingly involve stakes of public definition along with skilled crafting and marketing of religious services and products. This is not a "free market" but a highly oligopolistic one, however, as the new religious media star (Mustafa Mahmud or Shaykh Sha'rawi, who migrate through different print and electronic media and are well-established TV celebrities) resembles a media notable who chases after market shares at the same time as having to make show of a personal virtue, of a charismatic energy that is still comparable with the one shaykhs have to use in order to check the loyalty of adepts and clients.¹⁹

Consumers of Islamic media engage with content in novel ways. Responses are isolated and interpretations can become both mirrors of that which the content promotes as well as totally idiosyncratic and driven by local motivations or concerns, such as when "jihad" is declared by lone wolves with grievances unconnected to those proclaimed by those online. The roots of jihad by media comes from the first Islamists who married religious discourses with those of the state.

¹⁷Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 6.

¹⁸Quran: 6:151

¹⁹As quoted in Charles Hirschkind. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. (New York, NY, 2006): 138.

Twenty-first century jihadists in this regard notably take inspiration from the work of Al-Banna and later Sayyid Qutb. These figures took Islamic authority to the “streets.” Al-Banna, Qutb and al-Mawdudi produced their own interpretations of Islamic governance without the benefit of traditional Islamic training. Traditionally, Islamic authority rests on a combination of the public and the private, and individual experience and obligations to the community, as reflected in both discursive and non-discursive expressions of faith. As DeWeese (2010) observes

Islam is written on the bodies, and the bodily movements, of Muslims; it is written on the ‘handiwork’ of Muslims (whether we regard as art or mundane artifacts, whether structures or clothing or amulets or hygienic utensils, produced in furtherance of religious duties or sensibilities); it is written in landscapes shaped by Muslim obligations and aspirations (through modes of agriculture, travel or commerce); it is written institutions, whether the *madrassa* or the shrine; and, according to some, it is inscribed in venues of human consciousness that are both ‘above’ and ‘below’ discursive capacities in which not only written language, but verbal expression, reside.²⁰

However, the work of Al-Banna and Qutb work would be productive of a new genre of Islamic writing premised in the authority of the texts alone, a shift that would, in practice, move authority away from its traditional centers among scholars (consensus or *ijma*) and toward individual interpretations of scripture and Sunna (*itjihad*). The critique of the former would be expressed in the notion of *taqlid*, a term that would be given a pejorative meaning as the blind following of tradition.²¹ The paradox of this shift rests in the findings that much of this popular Islam would itself be reductive of Islamic thought as a whole with its focus on textual essentialism and Salafi praxis. Ironically, “the focus on individual effort has in fact subordinated individual interpretation, no longer to the diffuse traditions of particular schools, but to the interpretive programs and pronouncements of a few leading spokesmen of the Salafist agenda.”²² Nonetheless, recalling McLuhan here we might note the significance of the proliferation of text produced by this juncture, particularly given global communication, as follows: “it is not the increase in numbers of those seeking to learn that creates the crisis.” Rather, the shift in media formations “decentralizes.... This principle applies in the electric age. In politics, it permits Castro to exist as independent nucleus or center.”²³

The trend McLuhan observes was just beginning to reach its peak and only intensified in the years that followed with popularity of television, VHS and the audio cassette. Islamic culture would not be exempt from these developments and would see a reproduction and splintering of religious power via new media. The 1980s and 1990s in particular saw the proliferation of handbooks, pamphlets, and audio cassettes of recorded sermons produced by both trained scholars and imams as well as the “self-educated.” Islamist materials would reflect the full spectrum of ideological positions from the liberal (Amr Khalid) to the moderate (Gamal Al-Badawi) to the conservative Yousef Al-Qaradawi). These cultural formations would largely focus on the dissemination of ideology that would themselves become constitutive of a new populist Islam, one element of which would take shape in violent jihadism as evidenced by the Islamic Jihad in Egypt, and, from there, Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

²⁰ Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape*, 33.

²¹ DeWeese, Devin. “Authority.” *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, Ed. By Jamal Elias. (Oxford, England: One-world Publications, 2010): 43.

²² DeWeese, “Authority,” 44.

²³ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 171

In order to appreciate the impact of media on message and religious experience more broadly, we need to take a brief detour to consider how Islamic thought and practice has been affected by other media formations. Where the internet has, as I have tried to argue, produced an individualized, continuous but emotionally appealing and exaggerated experience on which jihadism has built a highly successful online culture, its dislocation of praxis from traditional centers was preceded by the cassette tape. However, because listening requires a level of introspection and reflection not commonly induced with visual media, the effects of the cassette tape on central elements of Islamic culture have been a bit more paradoxical. This is due, in part, to the tradition's safe foundation in practices of recitation, memorization and listening. We would do well to remember the initial aural/oral character of the Quran and Sunnah. However, the cassette tape would be instrumental in the formation of a lifeworld connecting "Islamic traditions of ethical discipline to practices of deliberation about the common good, the duties of Muslims in their status as national citizens, and the future of the greater Islamic community (the *umma*)."²⁴ Involving a praxis of "ethical listening" commonly elaborated in relation to audition of the Quran, the Islamic sermon cultivates:

One need listen intently [*yunsit*] rather than just hear [*yasma*'], so it is done with intention [*qasd wa niyya*], and directing the senses [*hiss*] to the words in order to understand them, to comprehend their intentions and their meanings. As far as hearing [*Al-sam*'], it is what occurs without intention. Close attention [*Al-insat*] entails a stillness [*sukun*] in order to listen so as not to be distracted by surrounding words...God ordered man to listen to the Quran with attention...[and] listening intently is the means to ponder over [*tadabbar*] the meanings of the Quran...it is a duty on all Muslims to educate themselves, and be guided by the etiquette [*adab*] of Al-Quran.²⁵

Listening has traditionally occupied a "space of *communal* reflexivity and action understood as necessary for perfecting and sustaining the totality of practices upon which Islamic society depends."²⁶ The cassette tape would expand the parameters of the community beyond the confines of the mosque and place them in the home among friends and family, in taxis and minibuses between strangers, in cafes and in the streets.²⁷ Within this space, participants engage in a shared experience of ethical self-reflection through shared imaginings [often of the past] that transports listeners from the frustrations and temptations of present circumstances. As Hirschkind notes, "[i]n contexts where reading the Quran or praying is impractical a sermon tape on the death of the Prophet or the Heavenly Pool of Kawthar that awaits the virtuous in the hereafter delivers diversion with a mild elixir to the right place at the right time."²⁸ A *khatib* (preacher) describes the experience as "*sakina*," the "calm one feels knowing that only God can determine one will die," which he distinguishes from the "oppression" and "seduction" of modern life. With *sakina*, "one can live in this swirl of falsehoods but not follow or be moved by them, remain calm and sure before them."²⁹ Emphasis is placed on sound and the environment created by sound. The *khatib*'s performance is a measure both of content and style. While sermon tapes produced a new "signifying practice" beyond traditional authoritative spaces, its authority as a form of communication and

²⁴Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape*, 59

²⁵Makhluf as quoted in Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape*, 60.

²⁶ Emphasis added, Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape*, 60.

²⁷ Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape*, 60.

²⁸ Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape*, 72.

²⁹ As quoted in Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape*, 72-73.

social discipline stems from its anchoring in these spaces--they are a manifestation and extension of them rather than their replacement.

Intersecting with global neoliberal political frameworks and self-help culture, albeit transformed into a culture of self-radicalization) jihadi discourses are distinct from earlier Salafi discourse (although they share family resemblances). For jihadis of the twenty-first century, “a person who is not zealous lacks religiosity and authority. Here, we see a replacement of values in knowledge and learning with emotion, indicative, perhaps, of a tipping toward the sensation of prevailing popular, commercial culture. Indeed, [Abu Musab] al-Zarqawi’s followers considered his piety as a legitimate and sufficient basis for religious authority. Erudition and scholarship were secondary. In the eyes of al-Zarqawi’s followers, a Muslim’s spiritual level and thus his authoritative position are determined by strict religious practice and not by knowledge.”³⁰ Part of this zealotry is reflected in the willingness to kill and be killed: “We will achieve ideal results through using (the type of) education that is not complete save through battle. Through the atmosphere of battle, they will become ready; nay, rather they will surpass their teachers.”³¹ Progress ensues through destruction. This vision, though highly paradoxical, reflects a modern worldview seeing knowledge as progressively realized oriented around causal regularities and universal standards

Abdallah Azzam took this notion of education through jihad even further when he reflected on the Soviet-Afghan war: “The difference is enormous between those days in which the engineer Habib al-Rahman, the martyr--the secretary general for the movement [of jihadis in Afghanistan in the 1970s]--drew a Kalashnikov on paper and then explained it in the depths of dark rooms to those whom he educated to love jihad and between these days in which children play with the rocket launcher RPG which destroys tanks.”³² While TV, video and the cassette tape were revolutionary developments in Islamic scholarship and culture through the 1980s and 1990s, they were just the beginning of a decentralization of authority that would take off with the development of the World Wide Web after 2003. While jihadis see themselves as necessarily (also) engaged in a battle for the truth, this form of jihad participates in and indeed perpetuates a “post-truth” political economy introduced by the proliferation of new media formations promising the “truth.”

ISIS goes further in its jihadism than even Al-Qaeda. While the rift between the two groups dates to the origin of the former (in its AQI iteration under Al-Zarqawi), the divisions between them would widen over time. Al-Qaeda took an indirect approach to jihad against the state. Its trajectory saw the foundation of Sharia law before holy war; for ISIS it was the reverse. By February 2014, the world witness the “official” split between the two groups, ostensibly over divisions over strategy in Syria, in a public divorce issued by Al-Qaeda’s leader, Ayman Al-Zawahiri. At the heart of these were deep ideological conflicts. According to Alkhouri, “ISIS takes the super-rightest ultra-conservative route. It is legitimate to kill even those who you cannot otherwise repel their aggression [sic]. Jolani [the head of Al Qaeda’s franchise in Syria, Al Nusra Front] is one of those guys. Baghdadi is even rumored to have vowed to kill him. ISIS apostatizes Muslims who didn’t know they committed some offense. So if you insulted the divine using a slang expression, they’ll behead you if you didn’t know you insulted the divine.”³³

³⁰Eli Alschech as quoted in Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 13.

³¹Naji, Abu Bakr. *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass*, Translated by William McCants., (2006): 63. PDF File <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf> (Accessed 2, May 2018).

³² As quoted in Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 63.

³³Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS*, 157.

The aspect of absolutism that would become central to contemporary popular jihadism would have a more recent origin. In *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass*, a military tactics manual, lifestyle guide, (auto)biography, and jihadi manifesto, the text is archetypical of post 9/11 jihadi discourse. Importantly, in this regard, Abu Bakr Al-Naji, the text's author and one of the ideological founders of twenty-first century jihadism, makes the connection between fighting and spiritual jihad, a move vital to the legitimation of violent jihadism and the later proliferation of jihad as a global movement: "The greatest field for education is the field of battle....Active jihad which the first Muslims undertook is connected with spiritual jihad. One is never disconnected from the other for a single moment. Active jihad is the greatest means of educating the Muslims and establishing the heavenly meanings and exalted standards in their souls."³⁴ Fighting unbelievers, which, per Salafist-jihadi interpretations of Islamic doctrine, includes Muslims, is in itself a spiritual act for the fighter and serves the community. Success "will be a bridge to the Islamic state which has been awaited since the fall of the caliphate," while failure, though it will lead to "an increase in savagery," is still preferable to "stability under the order of unbelief [*nizam Al-kufr*] by several degrees."³⁵

Violent jihad also has a spiritual element requiring devotion to military commanders, which in turn is linked to the devotion to God since fighting in the way of God and worship are, in Naji's descriptions, inextricably intertwined. Naji links military leadership to "divine grace." When two or more jihadists show superiority on the battlefield and the military endeavor requires unity of distinct groups, bay'a or allegiance requiring fighters "fight by [the leader's] side and assist him in supporting the laws of the sharia until it goes out for jihad in another land," should be given to the one who commands fighters' "good conscience."³⁶ Recalling the time of the Prophet, Naji connects military success to spiritual purity: "When their way of life spread amongst the ranks of the army--most of them were residents of conquered countries--a new spirit pervaded the ranks by devoting (themselves), in general, to pious deeds and, more specifically, to the pious deed of jihad."³⁷ Fighting is edifying; it purifies the soul--"the steadfastness of human exemplars in the face of the horrors resulting from these events firmly roots ideas in the hearts which could not be taught to people in hundreds of years of peaceful education."³⁸ He who shirks his duty to jihad is "one of those whose hearts are dead and one of those whom God hates."³⁹

Much of Naji's text also seems to be aimed at preparing future recruits for the turmoil of war. The destruction of the body is accompanied by an edification of the soul. Naji cites a number of Quranic verses, ahadith and textual passages to the effect that jihad is good for the soul, purifying of sin, a way to become closer to God. Of course the ultimate sacrifice, martyrdom, is accompanied by references to the afterlife. Recalling the wars of the Prophet, Naji reminds the reader that the "Muslims lived for thirty days during the Battle of the Confederates while the enemy surrounded Medina on all sides. The nights of the Companions were like their days--there was continuous watchfulness and constant vigilance while the Muslims suffered from fear and hunger and the enemy did not suffer. It was in an atmosphere like this, surrounded by absolute terror, that the souls submitted to their Creator and entrusted their affairs to their Lord and the minds becomes aware and resolve awake....In this frightful, humbling atmosphere the meanings of advancing in

³⁴ Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 21-22.

³⁵ Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 4

³⁶ Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 51

³⁷ Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 55.

³⁸ Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 56.

³⁹ Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 56.

the way of God were revealed and the power of faith was multiplied and the hearts were purified.”⁴⁰ Addressing the reader again, Naji brings the horrors of war home while reminding him that spiritual purity is never attained “in situations of comfort, security and calm,” but rather when the fighter sees his “home destroyed,” his “family made homeless” and his “mother and sister torn to pieces.” Appealing to an aspiring masculinity, Naji then notes that “only the most extraordinary men are capable of (bearing) that.”⁴¹ “We must confront those horrors with hardness and strength so that God may permit us to stop them someday,” Naji writes (p. 59). Recalling the words of an Afghan in the war against the Soviets, Naji reminds the reader: “This is war, and you and I will die like them some day (sic).”⁴²

Twitter, Facebook, and Popular Culture

After the collapse of his nation’s army, Iraq’s former national security adviser Mowaffak Al-Rubaei suggested in an Al Jazeera appearance that Twitter and Facebook had caused the nearly thirty-thousand Iraqi Security Forces soldiers to abandon their positions to jihadists. While the minister was overstating the case, the internet has added a new dimension to jihadism. Among security analysts, “cyber-jihad” has been identified as an electronic form of “terrorism” manifesting in a number of different ways-- from electronic “attacks” on physical infrastructures to the dissemination of radical ideologies... When ISIS stormed Iraq Mosul in June of 2014, it prepared the way through Tweets and a movie. As Patrick Kingsley then reported in *The Guardian* “Thousands of [ISIS’s] Twitter followers installed an app--called the Dawn of Glad Tidings--that allows ISIS to use their accounts to centrally written updates. Released simultaneously, the messages swamp social media, giving ISIS a far larger online reach than their own accounts would otherwise allow. The Dawn app pumps out news of ISIS advances, gory images, or frightening videos like *Swords IV*--creating the impression of a rampant and unstoppable force.” Cyber-jihad in this formation consists in managing networks, subjectivities and imaginations and thereby simulating the formation of “real” connections between users ultimately leading to violence.

At the same time, as Gilbert Ramsay observes, it also provides a space for the construction of a militant jihadi self, which is often an exclusively online persona. Jihad in this formation is almost totally phantasmatic yet forms a nodal point around which the virtual and the real meet. By using specific hashtags and search terms to advertise, create a unique argot that brings together classical Arabic, street-slang and unique euphemisms understood only by adepts, online jihadism has been able to hide in plain sight. Jihadists use encryption software like TOR to obscure their locations, but Twitter, because of its ease of use and seamless links to other applications, was the most popular application among ISIS fighters. Across the digital landscape, jihadi communiques appear not only in Arabic, but also in English, French and German. In 2015, ISIS became the apotheosis of this trend, the paradoxes of which were epitomized in a picture of a young jihadi disseminated via Twitter: a young man clad in army camouflage carrying what appears to be an assault rifle holds up a jar of nutella and smiles for the camera.

The convergence of violence and media is not incidental. According to Matthew Olsen of the National Counterterrorism Center, ISIS operates the most sophisticated propaganda machine of

⁴⁰Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 58.

⁴¹ Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 58.

⁴² Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 59.

any terrorist organization.⁴³ This sophistication is reflected in its various media branches, with the Al-Hayat Media center the hub and *Dabiq* its most notorious production. *Dabiq* is paradigmatic of the jihadi worldview. Each issue of the magazine begins with a kind of mission statement: “The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify--by Allah’s permission--until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq”--a reference to a remote area outside of Aleppo, Syria where it is believed the battle of Armageddon (Malahim) will be fought. As an inspirational vehicle and recruitment tool, *Dabiq* would follow *Idarat Al-Tawahhush* or *The Management of Savagery* published online in 2014 as a blueprint for jihadi violence and the subsequent foundation of an Islamic state. Its author, Abu Bakr Naji discussed above, not only gave religious cover for the kind of wanton violence that would become the hallmark of ISIS, but would also redefine jihad as a concept distinct from “Islam” itself: “One who previously engaged in jihad knows that it is naught but violence, crudeness, terrorism, frightening (others), and massacring. I am talking about jihad and fighting, not about Islam and one should not confuse them...[H]e cannot continue to fight and move from one stage to another unless the beginning stage contains a stage of massacring the enemy and making him homeless...”⁴⁴

In addition, ISIS has invested considerable resources in maintaining online jihadi forums and using Web 2.0 platforms to distill jihadist propaganda. Because official accounts are repeatedly blocked, ISIS has gained an unprecedented in/visibility in the virtual world, a world that often blurs into the real. Klausen’s study (2015) of ISIS’s Twitter campaign illustrates the multi-nodal and multimodal approach to electronic jihad:

Website managers in back offices integrate the twitter feeds of frontline fighters with YouTube uploads and disseminate them to wider audiences. These back-office managers are often wives and young female supporters. It makes little difference if they are working from Raqqa or from Nice. It may be that as phone and Internet access deteriorate on the ground, the insurgents are relying on disseminators outside the war zone to spread messages.⁴⁵

Dabiq itself is littered with Islamic symbolism and eschatological references, beginning with its title and mission statements. As a kind of religious handbook, it also provides justification for many of ISIS practices. Sex slavery, something for which ISIS has now become notorious, is justified by the magazine editors through an odd linkage to the end of the world as a sign of “the Hour,” a reference to the Day of Judgement. This is an allusion to hadith reported to suggest that the apocalypse will follow the birth of a master by her slave. Thus *Dabiq* suggests with regard to slavery: “After this, it becomes clear where Al-Adnani gets his inspiration from when saying, ‘and so we promise you [O crusaders] by Allah’s permission that this campaign will be your final campaign. It will be broken and defeated, just as all your previous campaigns were broken and defeated, except that this time we will raid you thereafter, and you will never raid us. We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of Allah, the Exalted. This is His promise to us.’” ISIS sees itself as fulfilling a number of prophecies and so behaves in ways thought to be foretold in these references. Hussam Naji Allami, one of ISIS’s governors, “issued a fatwa ordering the demolition of shrines in Mosul on the premise that a hadith

⁴³As quoted in Fernanda Buriel. “Changing God’s Expectations and Women’s Consequent Behaviors – How ISIS Manipulates ‘Divine Commandments’ to Influence Women’s Role in Jihad.” *Journal of Terrorism Research* 8, no. 3 (2017): 3 DOI: <http://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.1363>. (Accessed 3 May, 2018).

⁴⁴ As quoted in Hassan and Weiss, *ISIS*, 46.

⁴⁵ Jytte Klausen. “Tweeting the *Jihad*: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 42 (2015): 1-2. doi:10.1080/1057610X.2014.974948. (Accessed 3 May, 2018).

had called for it,” telling Al-Sabah, an Iraqi newspaper, that he did so in response to Al-Qaeda criticism that ISIS was not the caliphate foretold by the prophet.⁴⁶

Militant jihad is in many instances almost entirely staged as “the battle” takes place in the interstices of cyberspace. The fight for physical territory is ceded in the battle for “hearts and minds” as the illusion of war is used to recruit new fighters. Though new recruits are forced to give up their cellphones, a “few militants compulsively update their Facebook profiles and Twitter feeds from the battlefield.⁴⁷ Young recruits post ‘selfies’ and other personal updates on social media once in Syria, a self-centeredness that is nurtured by the group when it utilizes this material to further its recruitment endeavors. Much of jihadist propaganda targets youth specifically for their enthusiasm and impressionability. “Their desire for martyrdom indicates a proper condition of faith; all this is required is instructional polishing within the movement. Naturally, most of them will be directed toward jihadi and training [sic] programs (that can) encompass their abilities and their enthusiasm,” Naji writes.⁴⁸ The immaturity and whimsical nature of young recruits is reflected in an anecdote relayed by an Iraqi police commander to Joel Rayburn in *Iraq After America*:

Stepping from his home on Christmas Eve, 2007, he had been astonished to find the young men of his neighborhood setting off fireworks, with their girlfriends, and drinking alcohol--all distinctly “Christian” activities that Al Qaeda had banned. The bemused policeman had teased the youths, “You’re celebrating like Christians, but last year you were all Al Qaeda! The young men had laughed, the police officer later recalled, answering “Al Qaeda? That was last year!”⁴⁹

Naji, who encouraged the recruitment of youth, also anticipated their immature behavior, warning that he “sometimes hear[s] or read[s] statements or essays by some of the youth that contain pride in the actions or haughtiness. That is praiseworthy if it is out of self-esteem in the face of the unbelievers or the people of calumny. But if it is out of mere arrogance, pride or haughtiness, then I pray to God to guard our youth against that.”⁵⁰ Pride itself is not problematic for Naji. Pride in the self is. For Naji, the distinction between a proper self-esteem and “haughtiness” lies in the context and method of its cultivation. Youth who are proud of themselves are to be condemned while those who take pride in their actions as believers are to be elevated. The practicalities of war on the ground, however, often spell fewer opportunities for either moments than many anticipate. Many young recruits complain of boredom and disillusionment once they reach the battlefield and realize that the war had been overly dramatized. Describing this condition, Shiraz Maher explains, “A lot of foreign jihadists get to Syria and after a few days or weeks start to complain about the downtime and boredom.”⁵¹

Throughout ISIS propaganda, the virtual is blurred with the real to foster a sense of adventure, community and purpose, and martyrdom and paradise. One advertisement popular on Instagram and apparently professionally photoshopped by an ISIS supporter from afar promotes jihad martyrdom with the snappy slogan “You only die once. Why not make it martyrdom,” a nod to the Hollywood *Die Hard* franchise. Graphic videos are used to portray the fighting in stark, often apocalyptic terms and to lionize the jihadists engaged in it. Islamic eschatology, drawing largely

⁴⁶Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS*, 164.

⁴⁷Klausen, “Tweeting the Jihad,” 2.

⁴⁸Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 52.

⁴⁹As quoted in Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS*, 81.

⁵⁰Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 61.

⁵¹As quoted in Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS*, 160.

on a hadith about an apocalyptic battle between Muslims and Christians in the city of Dabiq, is used to legitimize ISIS's violence. The end-of-types is evoked throughout ISIS propaganda. In one ISIS propaganda video, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi recites the famous hadith about Dabiq, saying "The spark has been lit here in Iraq and its heat will continue to intensify, by Allah's permission, until it burns the crusader army in Dabiq." ISIS fighters bearing the now famous ISIS black flag march in the background. The group routinely uses critical media coverage to its advantage, making it part of its own narrative of world-wide struggle. ISIS routinely draws on hadith predicting a period of tyrannical rule before the reestablishment of the caliphate. Al-Baghdadi, claiming descent from the Prophet's grandson Hussein, draws on his genealogy to distinguish ISIS from other more gradualist jihadi groups.

After the declaration of the caliphate, ISIS released a number of Hollywood-style videos via Twitter and YouTube showing scenes from the battlefield, beheadings and mass executions as well as images from the everyday: families gatherings, pictures of cats, and jihadi selfies. In a video titled, "There is No Life Without Jihad," western recruits explain their reasoning for joining ISIS--many cite the Quranic injunctions to fight "unbelievers" and to make *hijrah* to Muslim lands in preference to remaining in the "lands of the infidels" while others draw on abstract languages of good and evil, light and darkness, with *al dawla* or the state representing a space of truth in a world filled with evil—"There is no Life Without Jihad" draws on a subtext of (western) decadence in which it is implied that those who do not leave to join (fight and die) ISIS, are living empty, purposeless lives purchased at the expense of oppression and suffering in Muslim lands. By contrast, a life "with jihad" is filled with purpose, meaning and adventure.

At the same time, violent bloodletting is itself used to attract viewers' attention; recruitment videos like *Saleel Al-Sawarim* or *Clanging of the Swords* blur the boundaries between the real and virtual and draw on a mix of Hollywood style images of battle scenes with full on background musical scores, hadith literature and Quranic themes, as discussed above. Throughout the videos, fighters are clearly taking on personas, drawing on a mix of facts on the ground and dramatization to create exaggerated images of themselves. They are jihadists in this sense, but they are also playing jihadists for the screen. In *The Clanging of Swords*, fighters calling themselves Rafidah Hunters (in reference to the Shia who are pejoratively called "rafidah" or the "rejecters [of truth]") appear in makeshift convoys firing their guns at Shia soldiers. An imam announces the Islamic State and warns "the kuffar" (or disbelievers) that they will be hunted. Dead bodies pepper the background of many scenes while ISIS fighters shoot what appear to be civilians on camera. Warnings issued to civilians on the ground to "repent and stop waging war against us [ISIS]" double as warnings to viewers. They are also performative; potential recruits see their idols in action. Former policemen or agents of the Mukhabarat are offered clemency if they turn in their weapons. "You carried your weapons and stood with the *rafida*, fighting your sons," one ISIS fighter tells a mosque congregation. The figures on the screen not only speak in a language of power. They embody it through their actions. The fear they invoke in their subjects is made palpable through close up shots of frightened children and cowering men. The horror invoked here would be unimaginable unless they had been seen in film.⁵²

Throughout the video, ISIS fighters appear in Iraqi Security Forces uniforms and raid civilian and state officials' homes. One Iraqi Awakening commander is captured by ISIS and forced to dig his own grave, at one point turning to the camera to repent his service to the state. "I am now

⁵² This observation was made about the 9/11 attacks by Director Robert Altman as referenced by Jamil Khader. "Repeating Fundamentalism and the Politics of the Commons: The Charlie Hebdo Tragedy and the Contradictions of Global Capitalism." *Islamophobia Studies* 3, no. 1 (2015): 4.

digging my own grave,” the man says. In another scene an official from Samarra is beheaded in his own home after it is discovered that he works for the state. *Clanging of Swords*, one of ISIS’s most popular and most sophisticated videos, appeared just as the ISIS franchise was beginning to gain control in Syria. Posted to YouTube several times and distributed by ISIS “fans” via Twitter and Facebook, the video aims to distinguish ISIS from the other jihadist groups in the area. It also aims to terrorize Shia populations in the region and demoralize state security forces. As a global recruitment tool, it appeals to an audience increasingly inured to images of violence, whether fictional or dramatized. Further, ISIS’s black and white religious ideology and military acumen provide direction, meaning and purpose to many disillusioned by the moral paradoxes of modern life. The battle of “good and evil” ISIS promises means that many, particularly in the West, have a vision of a world without moral complexity on one hand, and filled with adventure and “action” on the other.

This recalls Slavoj Žižek’s observations with regard to the 9/11 attacks: it is not that “the unimaginable impossible happened,” but that “the unthinkable which happened was the object of fantasy, so that, in a way, America got what it fantasized about, and this was the greatest surprise.”⁵³ Of course, American filmic fantasies are global fantasies, its fears the objects of manipulation by both non-state actors, such as jihadis, as well as by the regimes fighting against them in their own “war on terror.” Thus scenes of abject horror are enacted for the cameras. In turn, jihadists on the battlefields of the global war on terror, as well as lone wolves on the streets of Manchester, Paris and New York, recreate what they see online. The habitual viewing of terror under conditions of isolation created by online media consumption creates an experience where it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish reality from virtuality. Jihadi violence intersects with jihadi media to undo the uncoupling of the real and the virtual Baudrillard observed “Our virtual has definitively overtaken the actual and we must be content with this extreme virtuality which, unlike the Aristotelian, deters any passage to action. We are no longer in a logic of the passage from virtual to actual but in a hyperrealist logic of the deterrence of the real by the virtual.”⁵⁴ In actual fact, twenty-first century jihadism has seen the two inextricably intertwined, interacting in a way that the real and the virtual inform, shape and (re)react one another in an expanding loop of jihadi violence and jihadi propaganda projected onto the global scene. The Dutch AVID compared the process of radicalization to “other contemporary mass social phenomena, which ‘through online hype, are able to trigger a rapid mobilisation with an eventual offline impact.’”⁵⁵ Violence figures powerfully in this regard since it is often fed by and in turn feeds into this communal imaginative. Discourses of “the global Muslim ummah” prominent in jihadi discourse (invoked through the “tawhid” or oneness) suggest a trend toward a globalized imagination of the “community.” To help understand the power of this material, we might consider it as a process of imagined communities, a term first developed by Benedict Anderson but which Coolsaet aptly summarizes in his analysis of jihadi culture. In ISIS’s socialization,

group dynamics (kinship and friendship) are more important than ideology...feelings of frustration and inequity first have to be interiorized and then lead to a mental separation from society (which is considered responsible for those feelings). Individuals then reach out to others who share the same feelings, and create an ‘in-group’. Within such a group, personal feelings get politicized

⁵³As quoted in Khader, “Repeating Fundamentalism,” 14.

⁵⁴Jean Baudrillard. *The Iraq War Did Not Take Place*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995): 27.

⁵⁵As quoted in Rik Coolsaet. “What Drives Europeans to Syria and to IS? Insights from the Belgian Case. *Edgmont Paper* 75. (March 2015): 9. PDF file. Retrieved from http://www.giis.ugent.be/media/15007/coolset-edgmont_paper.pdf. (Accessed 3 May 2018).

(what are we going to do about it?) Groupthink gradually solidifies into an unquestioned belief system...ideology help to dehumanize the outside-group and transforms innocents (who bore no responsibility for the original feelings of frustration and inequity) into guilty accomplices. In this process of political radicalisation into extremism, it is not the narrative (i.e. the ideology) that eventually lures an individual into terrorism.⁵⁶

Jihadi culture broadly and ISIS propaganda specifically, however, point less toward a communal imaginative than toward a (popular) culture of “selfie.”

⁵⁶ Coolsaet, “What Drives Europeans,” 6.